Online Personal Branding Best Practices for Nigerian Graduates Seeking Careers in Digital Marketing

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Abstract- Personal branding is becoming a phenomenon among future graduates and professionals alike. Gorbatov et al (2019:1) suggests that it is due to the shift of career responsibility from organisations to employees, career transition, expanding new networks and advancement in AI, among other factors. With the rise in technology and the world becoming a global village, personal branding relies heavily on technology as a vehicle to convey imagery and related storytelling to the target audience (Gorbatov et al, 2019:2).

Indexed Terms- Personal Branding, Marketing, Digital Marketing, Strategy, Systematic Literature Review, Literature Review

I. INTRODUCTION

Personal branding originated in marketing; however, it has made its way into other social sciences such as sociology, communication, psychology, and organisational behaviour (Gorbatov et al, 2018). With the growth of digitalisation and the sharp increase in social media platforms over the last decade (Brems, 2017), online personal branding is beginning to gain ground, with more than 100 scholarly papers written about it (Gorba- tov et al, 2018).

This systematic literature review (SLR) seeks to understand, analyse, and evaluate the best practice online personal branding approaches applicable to digital marketing graduates in Nigeria.

II. RESEARCH SETTING

According to Gorbatov et al (2019:1) personal branding refers to "a strategic process of creating, positioning, and maintaining a positive impression of oneself based on a unique combination of individual characteristics, that signal a promise to a target audience through a differentiated narrative and imagery."

Statista shared that in 2019, over 1.8 million students enrolled in an undergraduate course in Nigeria (Statista, 2019), with over 32.9 million active Nigerians on social media (Statista, 2022) and 7.1 million Nigerians and 60% between the ages of 25-35 years old active of LinkedIn (Statista, 2022).

The data suggests that the number of graduates seeking employability in Nigeria will grow, hence the need to fill the gap of "best practice online personal branding" that will equip Nigerian graduates seeking a career in digital marketing. (Khedher, 2019).

III. INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Online personal branding has become very important and may become the right of passage for aspiring employees and individuals who desire to take their careers to the next level. (Gorbatov et al, 2018:1). The virtual ecosystem is opening. An opportunity has arisen where individuals can showcase their skills and talents and seize those opportunities wherever they are in the world (Gorbatov et al, 2019:1). There is currently a gap in journals that address online personal branding in the context of Nigeria, so a more comprehensive search is needed to address this research problem.

In this paper, online personal branding will be analysed and evaluated using academic journals that address online personal branding best practices on a broader spectrum and geographies that will be applicable in Nigeria, given it is "best practice". This paper will serve as a springboard for Nigerian graduates looking to advance their careers in digital marketing.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW SEARCH METHODOLOGY

Extracting and analysing data is key to any research (Shafril, 2020). A systematic literature review search method was used for this paper, 'it aims to comprehensively locate and **synthesise** related search using organised, transparent, and replicable procedures at each step in the process (Shafril, 2020). Fig 1 below shows the approach used for this paper.

TABLE I

Methodology Ap- proach	Definition	Advantages	Limitations
Systematic Literature Review	SLR uses a comprehensive pre- planned strategy for locating, critically appraising, analysing, and synthesising existing research that is pertinent to a formulated research question (Saunders et al, 2019).	SLR encourages a broader scope of research, transparency, and extensive search method with pre- defined search strings (Shafril, 2020).	It can be subjected to a level of bias and can be flawed and prone to "Garbage in, Garbage out"(Yuhong, 2009).
A thematic approach using NVivo software	NVivo is a software analysis tool introduced by QSR International Australia 30 years ago and used by re- searchers in the qualitative field majorly because of its capacity to hold large amounts of data (Syarifuddin and Dollar, 2017).	It handles large amounts of data, makes it easier to find themes and saves time (Syarifuddin and Dollar, 2017).	NVivo cannot interpret data, and that can take up some time. It is also expensive for individuals (Syarifuddin and Dollar, 2017).

V. INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

This method shows specific keywords used in gathering data, the age of the data, the databases and where the journals were sourced from to show the step-by-step search process. (Table 2)below shows what was included and excluded in the search with adequate justification.

TABLE II

Criteria	Description	Justification
Age of Data	"Personal Branding" "Online personal brand best practice." "Online best practice" "On- line personal branding." "Online presence" "Self-branding" "Employability online branding"	Critique Imputing search words with "Nigeria" and online personal branding resulted in zero journals showing a consider- able gap in online personal branding journals in Nigeria. As highlighted earlier, online personal branding relies heavily on digital and technology; with the

|		
	"Personal branding rules" "Personal brand- ing in Nigeria" Personal branding today relies heavily on tech- nology (Sergey Gorbatov, 2019) as a vehicle and with evolving nature of digital hence important to search up-to-date journals, 2015 -2022, ex- cluding journals written before 2015.	evolving nature of the digital landscape, recent studies will be vi- able, excluding obsolete journals (Sergey Gorbatov, 2019)
Databases /Sources	Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, Frontiers in Psychology ResearchGate Journal of Internet commerce Journal of marketing management Personnel Psychology: Wiley Elsevier Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science Google Scholar	Critique Getting any data from Nigeria in the inclusion period was non-existent. Peer-to-peer and academic sources were cited to give a balanced, evidence-based view making this research work citable and plausible. "Journals form the most com- prehensive data, and authoritative archive of information in a given scholarly field" (Solomon, 2017)

VI. THEMATIC APPROACH
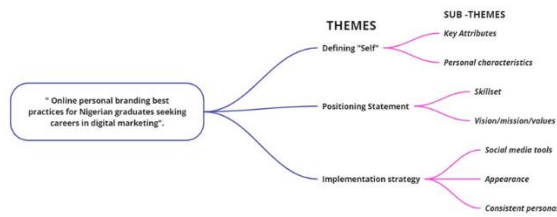
Fig. 1. NVivo thematic analysis on Online personal branding

VII. LITERATURE REVIEW FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This session will critically evaluate the dominant themes identified with the NVivo application.

VIII. MAJOR THEMES ACROSS JOURNALS

• Defining Self
"Defining Self" is one of the dominant themes identified in the literature reviewed. Gorbatov et al, (2019:2) defines it as "characteristics and at- tributes that make an individual different from others. Different studies suggest that it is the first stage of online personal branding" (Gorbatov et al, 2018:9;

Khedher, 2019:106; Ioana, 2018). This section will further analyse the "Defining Self" extensively.

According to Gorbatov et al, (2018:9) and Zabojnik (2018:162), Self-awareness is essential for personal self-discovery, looking inward to understand and identify a combination of self- identity, personal values and beliefs. They posited that "scholars seem to agree that self-awareness is the initial step of the personal branding process" (Gorbatov et al, 2018:9).

Personal characteristics and attributes are not new to personal branding studies, Gorbatov et al, (2018) cited (Arruba, 2003 and Schwabel, 2009) "Extract", which is looking inwards and extracting key identifying attributes that are unique to them. With the rapid changes in the digital clime, the concept of 'Extract' may be viewed as outdated, but more recent studies show that it is relevant and indeed an essential step in online personal branding.

In addition, differentiation and competitive ad- vantage are also vital in personal branding, and that can only come to the fore by defining self, characteristics and attributes that are unique to that individual that sets them apart from the rest and will be attractive to the target audience (Gorbatov et al, 2018:9).

Arguments have been brought forward that de- fine self, self-awareness, and self-discovery in the light that personal branding should be targeted to an audience, hence the need to tailor online personal branding based on a target audience (Gorbatov et al, 2019).

Gorbatov et al, (2018) and Zabojnik (2018) expatiated on defining self, what it is and why it is crucial; however, there needed to be more substantive suggestions on how to define self.

(Ioana, 2018, p. 47) addresses the gap by suggesting some techniques for defining self which are SWOT Analysis, self-test, personality quest enneagram test, self-esteem Rosenberg scale, emotional maturity Friedman test and the cube personality test. Gorbatov et al, (2018:10) also suggests that feedback seeking is vital to discover and defining self.

- Positioning statement

"Positioning Statement" is the second dominant theme among the literature reviewed. It is posited as the next step after "defining Self" is about putting your characteristics and attributes in a concise storytelling way to attract your target audience.

According to Gorbatov et al (2018) Arruda's second phase, "Express", fits into this; "Ex- press means constructing a compelling "personal brand" statement around an attribute set" (Chen, 2013:340). He also posited that brand architecture needs to be constructed and suggested two facets: desired professional image and perceived professional image. A desired professional image is self- perception based on values and attributes targeted at an audience (Gorbatov et al, 2018:10).

A perceived professional image is how others see that individual professionally. Filipov (2020) defined positioning as the "deployment of individual narratives for career and employment purposes that enables individuals to build their professional image to demonstrate their personal brand's competitive benefits to future employers".

In the same vein Johnson (2017:22) posited that a positioning statement is a necessary form of differentiation; it identifies what you do, how you do it, why people should care about it and the uniqueness

of the brand that is called you. The highlight of 10 of the 20 journals reviewed is the importance of authenticity. Khedher (2019:102) posited that authenticity enhances the quality of relationship with others and are generally appreciated positively, which tends to give credibility to the target audience.

Johnson (2017:23) suggested that students should be authentic and reveal their true selves; the paper also elaborated that it Is necessary to optimise one's profile by being authentic. All the journals reviewed showed evidence that positioning statement gives a competitive advantage; however, authenticity is required for the desired professional image to match the perceived professional image. It was only highlighted in one of the journals; however, it is believed this is key when crafting an accurate positioning statement.

Though it was clearly stated in the journals reviewed the definition, importance, and relativity of positioning statement, there still needs to be more as to how. Ioana (2018:47) suggest steps on closing the gaps, such as establishing a vision, mission, values, roles, and personal goals and questions that an individual needs to answer as part of positioning self and suggests making a 2-minute creative and original self-presentation video to be posted on all social media platforms.

1) "What do I want to be? What is the existential goal?"
2) "Which is my vision for my professional, personal and social life, both present, medium and long term."
3) "Which are the values I refer to within the activities I develop in different social gatherings."
4) "Which is my role in the work I do in groups I belong.

- Implementation strategy

"Implementation strategy" is the third dominant theme in the literature reviewed; it simply implements online personal branding.

- Social media Platforms:

It could be multiple platforms with a target audience using social me- dia sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and Pinterest (Delonia et al, 2020:243).

The last phase of Arruda's 3-part personal branding theory, "Exude," speaks about using dif- ferent strategies to promote unique views, skills, and talents (Chen, 2013; Gorbatov et al, 2018).

"Appearance" was mentioned in the journals as fundamental, Johnson (2017:23) explained that one's appearance should be professional and of positive fit to an organisation.

Appearance does not mean physical but emo- tional; vibrant appearance means the words spoken and actions taken; however, suggestions in the words that are "written" also. According to Khedher (2019) appearance represents a visual signal that contributes to a form of first impression; however, stretching the thought further in terms of online platforms, it represents a mental visual signal through writing (perhaps your statement) that contributes to a form of first impression.

Consistent personas across multiple online platforms, both professional and personal, have been highlighted in relevant journals as key to implementing online personal branding strategy (Johnson, 2017:23). arguments highlighted in Johnson (2017) emphasized that unprofessional behaviour or appearance on any social media could be harmful to a person's career, individuals can no longer afford to express different personalities in different social platforms.

Storytelling has also been highlighted as part of the implementation strategy, "the ability to share one's story, knowledge and experiences"(Johnson, 2017:23). Khedher (2019) suggested that "verbal self - presentation" is strategies used to build a specific image and influence a target audience. One of the tactics of displaying qualification is a verbal demonstration of one's skills, competency, and accomplishments. Storytelling should be within the confines of integrity, sincerity, and authenticity to resonate with the target audience (Khedher, 2019:104). Some key mediums for implementation are social media sites LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, and some person-styled blogs. It helps showcase the persona the target audience would like to see; according to (Zhao, 2021), employers increasingly rely on social media platforms like LinkedIn to recruit potential employees.

IX. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This SLR was built on three major themes:
Defining Self: The importance of defining "self" as a premise for online branding and self- presentation (Khedher, 2019). Knowing and defining oneself, skills, attributes, and characteristics is fundamental in the online best practice for personal branding.

Positioning statement: This is putting all that discovery into a compelling statement highlighting key attributes, characteristics, and a positive image of self to the proposed target audience. A key callout worth mentioning is the attributes that need to be in the positioning statement.

Implementation strategy: which is the third central theme, emphasises the medium used to ex- press those essential characteristics and attributes; using social media such as LinkedIn is very important as part of visibility to the target audience. While the themes are independent, studies and arguments have arisen that there is a sequential flow to the themes, as Arruba defined it, "phases"
(Gorbatov et al, 2018).

For an individual to make a compelling positioning statement, that individual needs to understand and define and discover the "Self" that definition of self and individual expertise is then put into a concise positioning statement targeted at a specific audience. The statement is shared on social media platforms for the target audience to view and make an informed decision about the persona.

To this end, a proposed checklist was created based on the findings found below in fig 2;

Fig. 2. Proposed Checklist-Online personal branding

CONCLUSION

This SLR set out to identify "Best practice online personal branding" that will equip Nigerian graduates seeking a career in digital marketing" looking at the broader body of literature that wrote extensively on Online personal branding best practice with a view that it will be relevant to graduates in Nigeria. The research problem identified in section 1 highlighted a gap in journals for online personal branding in Nigeria for future graduates. This study finds that.

Identifying key attributes and characteristics gives an individual a competitive advantage and is the first phase of online personal branding.

Importance of writing concisely those essential characteristics and attributes mixed with skills to a target audience

Social media platforms showcase talents, characteristics and attributes through appearance, style of writing and convincing story- telling which is authentic .

This SLR will be beneficial to 3 key audiences.
1) Nigerian Graduates/Aspiring graduates (Digital marketing or any course of study) as this will springboard to develop their online personal branding.
2) Nigerian Scholars, as there exists a gap in online personal branding works of literature in the context of Nigeria.

3) Digital marketing educators, with many graduates coming out of universities in Nigeria, students must learn about online personal branding.

- Strategic Implication

Table III
Strategic Implication

Findings	Strategic Recommendation
SWOT Analysis/Personality tests/feedback	Future graduates should do a SWOT analysis and personality tests and get feedback from colleagues as part of defining self and self-discovery (Ioana, 2018)
LinkedIn page	It is suggested that aspiring graduates should have a social media page that they can use to showcase, engage and reach their target audience (Zhao, 2021)

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER STUDY

Although no literature specifically looked at online personal branding concerning Nigerians and Nigerian graduates, the SLR had to focus on a broader range of literature to critically analyse what has been written on online branding and see how it can be adapted to the "Nigerian" context. As the world becomes a global village, a digital ecosystem, best practices in other countries are assumed to be best in Nigeria.

To fill the gap, it is necessary to conduct primary research and test the hypothesis on Nigerian or soon-to-be graduates. The hypothesis must be tested on Nigerian or soon-to-be graduates to fill the vast gap.

APPENDICES

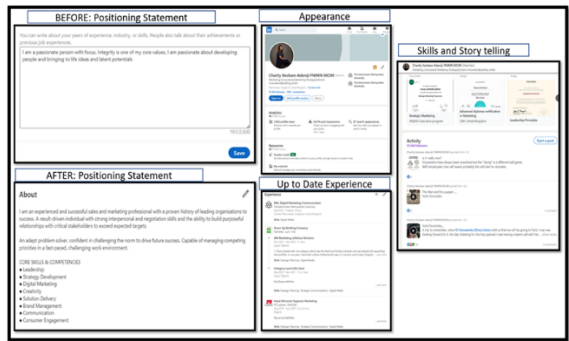Fig. 3. NVivo thematic platform

Fig. 4. Optimised Linkedin page

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