

Personal branding of hotel employees: top management support and guest attitude perspective

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the role of hotel management in supporting hotel employees' branding and how personal branding affects guests' attitudes to the brand. Data were collected from 16 chain hotels located in the Greater Cairo region in Egypt. Two different versions of the surveys were distributed to collect data; one for customers and the other for employees. While 380 valid surveys were collected from employees, a number of 400 surveys were collected from hotel guests. The results demonstrated that employee personal branding is very important to hotels; either employees or customers. The findings also revealed that there is a statistically significant path coefficient between hotel management support and hotel employees' personal branding. In addition, hotel guests had a moderate attitude toward personal branding. This study could help hotel management develop strategies to enhance employee personal branding. The study may also help create new connections between internal and external consumers of organizations and deepen understanding of the personal branding concept in a hotel setting.

Keywords: Personal branding; management support; guest attitude; hotels.

Introduction

The emergence of digital organizations, globalization, the companies' transformation, and the evolution of the tourism and hospitality industry constitute four robust drivers of change, which are modifying business environments worldwide (Veiga *et al.*, 2020). Although the current size of the hotel industry is challenging to quantify, during the last quarter of a century, it demonstrated enormous growth (Jones *et al.*, 2014). The hotel industry has become one of the largest and most competitive industries in the world. Therefore, to cope with globalization, many international hotel chains are managed by adopting global distribution systems and relying on a variety of marketing techniques to access the market (Yu *et al.*, 2014).

According to Khedher (2014), every individual in the organization has his own identity regardless of sex, age, or profession, and can be considered a brand. The image of an organization that is offered to customers and other stakeholders by its people is called the employee brand (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). For hotel organizations to respond to consumer expectations and create loyal consumers for them, they must create brand equity for their businesses.

Today, responding to the changing demands of the market, establishments are in a constant state of reorganization. Personal branding is necessary for professional success (Waller, 2020b). The days of valuing an employee or vendor based on loyalty and seniority are long gone. This, of course, changes how you behave as a worker or employee. As long as you are working with different teams, managers, employees, and organizations, you need to differentiate yourself and build an appeal for your services amongst your target audience. Consequently, personal branding became an inevitable part of organizational success. Personal branding is activities conducted by individuals to market themselves, their careers, and what

they are doing. It's an ongoing process that enables employees to establish, develop and manage their profile or image in the mind of their target markets. In the world of business, it is critical to align the personal and corporate brands together to achieve organizational success and mitigate risks. In other words, personal branding is not just a trend, it is a phenomenon that is increasing over time (Waller, 2020a).

However, many companies were hesitant to encourage personal branding among their employees for concern that doing so would make their employees appealing to their competitors (Arruda, 2014). In literature many disciplines tended to define the concept of personal branding from various research perspectives, as a result, it makes the concept of "personal branding" difficult to operationalize and define. Also, literature is scarce in terms of research that links the concept of personal branding with organizational achievements, particularly the achievements in the area of marketing and brand management (Wojtaszczyk & Maszewski, 2014). Jacobson (2020) also stated that an empirical study on personal branding is still needed.

The concept of personal branding and how it affects guests' attitude to the brand was rarely discussed in the existing literature; therefore, this research will help to fill the gap in the literature that studies the concept of personal branding, particularly in the hotel industry. Thus, the current research aims to shed the light on the concept of personal branding more specifically in the hotel industry, the role of hotel top management in supporting hotel employees' personal branding, and how personal branding affects guests' attitudes toward the brand. This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

Q1: What is the level of hotel employees' personal branding?

Q2: What is the role of hotel management in supporting hotel employees' personal branding?

Q3: Does hotel staff' personal branding affect guests' attitudes to the hotel brand?

Review of Literature

Personal branding

The ongoing process of developing, maintaining, and expressing to others a clear image of who employees are is known as personal branding (Tourky *et al.*, 2021). The term "branding" has long been referred to businesses, but today almost everyone has a personal brand. Personal branding is the exercise of marketing individuals and their jobs as brands. It is a continuing process of building and preserving the reputation and impression of individuals. Personal branding is related to how an audience sees the person or what they anticipate from them. Most definitions of personal branding refer to an opinion of audiences about the individual (Rampersad, 2009; Till *et al.*, 2011). It involves holding and promoting the strengths and uniqueness of individuals to their target audience (Muszyska, 2021). In other, words, it is an aware and planned work to create and influence the public perception of an individual (Wróblewski & Grzesiak, 2020).

One of the main benefits of personal branding is that people can show themselves in the best possible image which allows approval to be authentic. There is adequate evidence that a personal brand aids in gaining the trust of people and building credibility, and this helps in gaining a much higher perceived value (Muszyska, 2021). Personal branding makes an individual the go-to person's areas of expertise for their specific audience. In addition, it helps individuals become leaders in their field. The authentic personal brands similarly distinguish them from the competition and help attract perfect opportunities in personal, professional, and social life. In summary, personal branding will help staff turn their names into a unique product that has desirable advantages associated with it, attract the more profitable type of guests, and

help workers retain more of those top-quality customers even when the corporate environment is slow for everybody else. Personal branding is an incredible technique to create valuable contacts and help employees initiate natural conversations and attract consumers effortlessly. Having a personal brand helps to build trust with the audience and position individuals as authority and thought leaders in their industry (Tourky *et al.*, 2021). In addition, building a personal brand that positions an individual as the go-to expert in a specific industry helps him to attract more ideal clients. When an employee is positioned as an expert, it's also easier for people to refer clients to him.

The importance of personnel branding for organizations

Consumers develop positive attitudes toward a brand as a result of satisfactory repetitive usage over time (SondohJr *et al.*, 2007). Over the years, personal branding has been created to provide management with more information and understanding of the capabilities of employees, giving them greater control in planning and implementing business actions (Speros, 1994). Employees are critical in building relationships with all firms' stakeholders and keeping the values and vision of the business. They form a vital part of a company's brand image. Ultimately, if employees show attention to consumers, are corporative, authorized, reactive, and competent, the company will tend to have a good reputation, and retain existing customers (Aaker, 2004). Personal branding has also received attention (Horvat *et al.*, 2015; Khedher, 2014; Ternès *et al.*, 2014; Zarkada, 2012). Personal branding is a planned process in which people work to market themselves by articulating the distinct promise of value they can provide to their employer or clients (Arruda, 2003). Additionally, personal branding enables staff members to work harder and show greater passion for the company (Arruda, 2014). The things they do to build their brands gradually change how clients, partners, staff members, and other stakeholders view and evaluate the company. The significance of the manager's brand and its visibility is due to the manager's responsibility to promote the company's brand and communicate the company's missions, values, and concepts to internal and external stakeholders (Chen *et al.*, 2013). According to Olanrewaju *et al.* (2020), companies have recently started to recognize the value of developing a personal brand, since it has a significant impact on both market performance and a company's reputation.

Personal Brand Equity (PBE)

Personal branding is a highly individual activity sharing similarities with product branding. However, brands are not built in isolation, but through the complicated set of social relationships established among interrelated stakeholders (Michel, 2017; Von Wallpach *et al.*, 2017). These stakeholders play dynamic parts in branding processes by providing resources (Pera *et al.*, 2016). They may have different expectations when collaborating with a brand (Jones, 2005), changing resources and power (Mäläskä *et al.*, 2011), and varied backgrounds and norms (Hillebrand *et al.*, 2015). Despite the acknowledgment of the role of stakeholders in branding, their probable contribution to personal branding has received little attention.

Personal brand equity (PBE) is conceptualized as the intangible value individuals bring to the company in terms of their capability to impact others by leveraging their experience, expertise, and reputation. It also includes the relationships employees have built and maintained, in addition to the tangible value they bring in terms of their participation in company revenue and growth. Gorbatov *et al.* (2021), extending the theory of marketing brand to personal branding, proposed the following dimensions of personal branding equity:

Brand appeal

The first dimension, "customer response to marketing", measures how favorably consumers respond to a brand in terms of their views, preferences, or behaviors. Thus, resembles the extent to which the features and characteristics of a personal brand are appealing.

Brand differentiation

The second dimension, the differential effect, describes how distinctively the product is from competing goods. The differential impact, as it relates to personal branding, thereby shows how much one's professional worth exceeds that of others.

Brand recognition

The last dimension, brand knowledge, describes the descriptive and critical brand-related knowledge that is retained in memory. Within the context of personal branding, this dimension is akin to being recognized in one's professional field.

Top-Management Support

Another consistent component of the branding process is managing the results of activities made, or monitoring the power of a personal brand (Wojtaszczyk & Maszewski, 2014). An appealing personal brand, particularly that of managers, can draw in talented individuals and trigger investors' interest in their offerings. Given that managers' primary responsibility is to communicate a company's vision, values, and ideas to both internal and external stakeholders, the importance of the manager's brand and its visibility is rising (Chen *et al.*, 2013). For many managers, building their brand is a new quality in their professional functioning and also forces them to review their thinking about themselves (Malhotra *et al.*, 2013). Park *et al.* (2020) emphasized the importance of activity on social media in developing personal branding.

According to Burnes (2008), top management support is the most important success component in every firm. The senior managers might have to acknowledge that their influence is crucial for any project or plan to succeed. The decisions made by top management have an impact on every employee in the organization. In case of any changes, it is the top management's responsibility to inform staff members so they may make any necessary psychological preparations. In addition, it must inform the staff in advance of the significance of the change and any potential effects it may have on them. According to Ngaithe *et al.* (2016), the top management should inspire and motivate its employees toward any change, and the best performers should receive rewards and recognition to inspire the other employees to work even harder.

The significance of organizational support, particularly service firms, was highlighted by Susskind *et al.* (2020). Employers want their employees to be committed and loyal to their job. According to the reciprocity rule, employees are more likely to emotionally commit to their organizations, have a lower chance of leaving, and perform at a high level on the job if their employers provide them with high levels of support (Allen *et al.*, 2013; Hui *et al.*, 2007). Many earlier studies have emphasized how successful top management support is a key factor in the success of firms. However, top management should fund the project and support the use of technology (Faber *et al.*, 2017). Also, top management should involve in the information requirements, decision-making process, and monitoring process (Rajput *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, top management should support human resources, encourage knowledge-sharing, establish effective communication, motivate employee performance, and value the employees' ideas and suggestions (Hsu *et al.*, 2018).

Guests' attitudes to the brand

The consumer attitude towards the brand is defined as the viewpoint a consumer has regarding a brand, in other words, what the consumer has in his/her mind about the brand (Chatzopoulou and Tsogas, 2017; Liu *et al.*, 2017, 2020). As the use of social media has grown, brands have established practices for reaching out to customers and promoting new services. Brands have been leveraging social media marketing to drive consumer engagement and brand awareness" (Malhotra *et al.*, 2013, p. 18). The impacts of personal brands have not been empirically

evaluated, even though effective brand communication tactics are crucial for building brand equity and brand recognition (vanGrinsven and Das, 2016). Self-expansion theory offers compelling theoretical justification for why a brand's integration into a customer's identity is necessary to foster consumer brand love (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). By avoiding negative thoughts about a certain brand, for example, self-brand integration enhances customers' feelings for the brand (Kohli *et al.*, 2014).

When developing their brand, many organizations, including restaurants and hotels, take into account the phenomena of customers' brand repurchase intention or revisiting intention (Kim and Ok, 2009; Mizik, 2014; Namin, 2017). Typically, this is accomplished by examining consumer attitudes toward the brand (Hwang and Ok, 2013). Therefore, brand attitude can influence both words of mouth and revisit intentions through the interaction between brands and consumers (Lee *et al.*, 2018; Rajput and Gahfoor, 2020). Moreover, many supporters of personal branding see the process close to that of product branding (Kaputa, 2005; Schwabel, 2009), which starts with the creation of brand identity and then actively communicates it to the public through brand positioning. However, developing a personal brand comes with certain particular difficulties, many of which are brought on by the complexity of the internet world. Leaders with a strong personal brand will strengthen the bonds between their organizations and their workers, customers, and employees, as well as advance the growth and positioning of their businesses.

Materials and Methods

Sample

According to the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism (2021), 23500 employees work in the 30 five-star hotels located in the Greater Cairo region in Egypt. A random sample of 16 chain hotels located in the Greater Cairo region in Egypt was chosen for investigation. Chain Hotels, due to the power of its financial state, may be able to successfully implement specific tools for brand awareness. Such tools have a key benefit because customers look for brands that can meet their expectations for service quality (Bharadwaj *et al.*, 1993). In addition, chain hotels share resources to pay for expenses in areas of employee support, marketing, and guest loyalty programs (O'Neill and Carlback, 2011). A random sampling technique was adopted. Several 480 surveys were distributed to hotel employees (30 questionnaire forms in each hotel), and 400 were collected representing a response rate of 83.3%. However, only 380 surveys were valid for the final data analysis. In addition, a number of 400 surveys were distributed to hotel guests (25 questionnaire forms in each hotel), and 400 valid surveys were collected.

Survey instrument development

The 12-item scale developed by Gorbатов *et al.* (2021) was used to assess hotel employees' personal brand equity. The scale included three dimensions namely, brand appeal, brand differentiation, and brand recognition. Four items were used to measure brand appeal; for instance, "*I have a professional positive image among others*" and "*I have a positive professional reputation*". Other four statements were used to measure brand differentiation, such as "*I am regarded as a better professional than others*" and "*I am a preferred candidate for projects and tasks*". Another set of four statements, such as "*I am known in my professional field*" and "*I am known outside of my immediate network*" was used to measure brand recognition.

In addition, to assess hotel management support for employee personal branding, a 9-item scale adapted from Rangarajan *et al.* (2017) was used. For instance, "*Your manager frequently asks you about your personal branding*" and "*Your manager believes that the personal brand overshadows the hotel brand*". Furthermore, the five-item scale was adapted from Putrevu and Lord (1994) and Smith (2020) to measure guests' attitudes toward personal brands. For

example, “I have positive human brands with which I interact when staying in hotels” and “A positive perception of hotel staff increases my confidence in the hotel”.

Data collection

To get authorization to visit and hand out the surveys on-site, phone calls were made to the managers of the hotels' human resource departments. Two different surveys were deployed. While the guest relations agents oversaw the distribution of the questionnaires to customers, who were asked to return them to the front desk after completion. The study's principal investigator handled the distribution of the questionnaires to the employees and their returns. On one hand, the employee survey consisted of three parts; the first was developed to collect employee demographic information, the second was developed to assess personal branding equity and assess their perception of management support for personal branding, and the third was developed to ask employees for other personal branding related questions such as digital channels being used in building and communicating personal brand, employees satisfaction with their branding, and employees' opinions towards the importance and difficulty of having personal brand. On the other hand, hotel guest survey consisted on two parts; the first was developed to collect guest's demographic information and the second was developed to assess their attitude to personal branding. All questionnaires were distributed between March and June 2022.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS v. 23) and the SmartPLS 3 trial version were both utilized to analyze data. Means and standard deviations were used as descriptive statistics to describe and summarize the data. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was additionally applied. A p-value of .05 or less was considered significant.

Results and Discussion

For the customers sample, half (n = 200) of the respondents were female (see Table 1).

Table 1: Respondent's Profiles

Customers' profile*			Employees' profile**		
	Classes	Percent		Classes	Percent
Gender	Male	50	Gender	Male	88.4
	Female	50		Female	11.6
Age	21 or younger	2.1	Age	21 or younger	2.3
	22 – 39	77.1		22 – 39	83.7
	40 – 59	20.8		40 – 59	14.0
Education	High school	4.2	Education	High school	32.6
	Bachelor Degree	37.5		Bachelor Degree	62.8
	Master/Ph.D. Degree	58.3		Master/Ph.D. Degree	4.7
Nationality	Egyptian	81.2	Tenure	1 to > 4 year	25.6
	Turkish	2.1		4 to > 10 years	20.9
	American	4.2		10:15 years	23.3
	Greek	2.1		> 15 Years	30.2
	Tunisian	2.1	* Customers' profile (N = 400) ** Employees' profile (N = 380)		
	Indian	2.1			
	Nigerian	2.1			
	Romanian	2.1			
Spanish	2.1				

The majority of guests (77.1%) were belonging to the age group of 22 – 39 years. About two-thirds of guests had postgraduate degrees. Most of the customers (81.2%) were Egyptian, 4.2% were Americans, and Turkish, Greek, Tunisian, Indian, Nigerian, Romanian, in addition to Spanish respondents represented together 14.7% of the sample. In general, guests with high school can earn higher incomes. Research shows that the college wage premium "the higher income that results from a college or post-degree" has grown over time (Economic Research, 2022). As a result, those with better income can engage in tourism.

For the employee sample, majority of the employees were males (88.4%) and belong to the age group of 22 – 39 years (83.7%). About two-thirds of employees had a bachelor's degree (62.8%). Just over a quarter of the employees had 1 to > 4 years of work experience, about one-third had > 15 years work experience, and almost half of respondents had 4 to 15 years of work experience. This explains why employees with more work experience are more interested in developing a strong personal brand because they are more loyal to the hotel than other employees. Hotel managers should encourage and support these employees to have a strong and trustworthy personality and represent their hotels at exhibitions and conferences, this could, in turn, help to retain existing customers and attract more customers.

Descriptive Statistics

Guest Attitude towards employee's personal brand

Table 2: Guest attitude toward the personal brand (N= 400)

	1	2	3	4	5	*Mean ± SD	Category	Cronbach's Alpha
Attitude to personal brand						3.27 ±.95	Moderate	.942
I think relying on a personal brand (for example, a hotel employee you dealt with previously or a hotel employee you follow on social media) is satisfactory when choosing the hotel brand to stay in.	18.8	14.6	16.7	41.7	8.3	3.06 ±.87	Moderate	
I think relying on a personal brand (for example, a hotel employee you dealt with previously or a hotel employee you follow on social media) provides me with many benefits about the hotel brand.	16.7	16.7	14.6	39.6	12.5	3.15 ± .92	Moderate	
I have favorable human brands that I dealt with during my stay in hotels.	12.5	10.4	27.1	45.8	4.2	3.19 ± .89	Moderate	
A good image of the hotel staff enhances	14.6	10.4	20.8	33.3	20.8	3.35 ± .97	Moderate	

my confidence in the hotel.								
The hotel staff's personal brand enhances hotel brand credibility.	8.3	16.7	12.5	33.3	29.2	3.58 ± .89	Moderate	
* mean score; Low: 1.00 to 2.33, Average (Moderate): 2.34 to 3.66, High: 3.67 to 5.00								

According to table (2), guests reported that they rely on personal branding to help them when choosing the hotel brand (3.06±.87) and provide them with many benefits about the hotel brand (3.15±.92). Furthermore, guests also argued that personal branding enhances their confidence in the hotel (3.35±.97) and also the credibility of hotel brand (3.58±.89). Overall, hotel guests had a moderate attitude towards personal branding (3.27±.95). This result corresponds to the study done by the Shome (2020), people will be making their buying and hiring decisions based on the brand of a person behind a product or service. They want to see if the person who supports the product has a reliable personal brand that has authority in the industry.

Digital platforms used to build and communicate employee personal brand

Table 3: Ranking of digital channels used by employees to build and communicate their personal brand (N = 380)

Digital Channel	Little	Often	Rank
LinkedIn	34.85	65.15	1
Twitter	67.45	32.55	5
Facebook	36.05	63.95	2
YouTube	49.9	50.1	3
Instagram	49.95	50.05	4
TikTok	70.95	29.05	7
Pinterest	68.6	31.4	6

The employees used seven digital platforms to develop and communicate their personal brands (see table 3). However, the way that employees use each channel varies. The seven digital platforms were ranked from highest to lowest usage by employees as follows: LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, and TikTok. This finding is consistent with research by McCorkle & McCorkle (2012), Poepelman & Blacksmith (2014), and Schwabel (2009) that indicated LinkedIn as the best professional website for showcasing one's expertise and abilities. How one presents on social media sites like Facebook may be different from how one presents on LinkedIn. Maintaining a consistent and professional appearance is crucial in regard to one's work-life (Labreque *et al.*, 2011; Johnson, 2017).

Having Employees' personal branding and their satisfaction with it

Regarding working on employees' personal branding and their satisfaction, although the majority of employees (74.4%) working on building their personal brand, about two-thirds (65.3%) had low satisfaction with their personal brand and only 11.6% of respondents were highly satisfied. Furthermore, 23.3% had moderate satisfaction with their personal brand. This finding is consistent with research by Soares and Mosquera (2019) that the majority of employees are neither engaged nor fulfilled at work. Globally, only 15% of workers are actively engaged in their work. Efficiency is increased through engagement; happy workers are

12 percent more productive. Supporting your employees' personal brands is an excellent strategy to help your company's workforce be more productive and engaged.

Employee opinion on the value of and challenges associated with developing a personal brand

When asked about the value of personal branding for employees and whether they believe developing it is tough or not, the vast majority of respondents argued that personal branding is important (95.3%). Just over half of the respondents (55.8%) claimed that building a personal brand is a difficult issue. This finding clarifies why many employees lack the knowledge necessary to develop a brand. Rampersad (2008) argued that everyone has a personal brand, but not everyone is aware of it or capable of managing it well. According to Amoako and Okpattah (2018), individuals will be able to perceive, and build the essential personal brands that distinguish them from others in the same sectors if they receive enough desirable training. As a result, training can help people inside a company establish their own distinctive personal brands. For its personnel, the company should create and maintain ongoing training programs. This helps promote employee branding by improving employee commitment and loyalty as well as their abilities and efficiency (Menon, 2014).

Employees' personal brand and their perception of hotel management support

Table 4: Personal Branding Equity and Employees' perception of hotel management support (N= 380)

Construct		Mean	St. Deviation	Category
Brand Appeal (BA)		3.15	.56	Moderate
BA.1	Among others, I have a favorable professional image.	3.21	.63	Moderate
BA.2	I have a good professional reputation.	3.28	.76	Moderate
BA.3	I make a good working partner.	3.09	.68	Moderate
BA.4	My professional strengths in workplace are clear.	3.02	.74	Moderate
Brand Differentiation (BD)		2.94	.66	Moderate
BD.1	I am known for delivering results with great value.	3.07	.74	Moderate
BD.2	Compared to other professionals, I am seen to be a superior one.	2.98	.77	Moderate
BD.3	I am seen as providing greater professional value than others.	2.84	.89	Moderate
BD.4	I am a preferred candidate for assignments and projects.	2.86	.84	Moderate
Brand Recognition (BR)		2.78	.81	Moderate
BR.1	In my professional field, I am well-known.	2.93	.85	Moderate
BR.2	In my professional field, my name is well-known.	2.91	.78	Moderate
BR.3	Outside of my immediate network, I am well-known.	2.51	.98	Moderate
BR.4	Many people frequently refer me to their professional relationships.	2.77	.86	Moderate

Personal Branding Equity (PBE)		2.96	.61	Moderate
Management Support (MS)		2.55	.96	Moderate
MS.1	Your manager often asking you questions regarding your personal branding.	2.26	.89	Moderate
MS.2	Your manager talks with you about the importance of personal branding either to you or to your hotel.	2.51	.84	Moderate
MS.3	Your managers advise you to market both yourself and your services.	2.40	.93	Moderate
MS.4	Your managers frequently help you develop new strengths.	2.79	.92	Moderate
MS.5	Your hotel offers coaching to the realities of aligning personal brand with the hotel brand.	2.70	.86	Moderate
MS.6	In the hotel you are working, your personal brand is often divested by the hotel management.	2.79	.88	Moderate
MS.7	Your manager has an understanding of personal branding.	2.49	.87	Moderate
MS.8	Your manager thinks that the hotel brand is overshadowed by your personal brand.	2.74	.97	Moderate
MS.9	Your manager believes that organizational support strengthens personal branding.	2.26	.89	Low
* mean score; Low: 1.00 to 2.33, Average (Moderate): 2.34 to 3.66, High: 3.67 to 5.00				

According to table (4), employees perceived their personal branding equity ($2.96 \pm .61$) at a moderate level. 3.15, 2.94, and 2.78 for BA, BD, and BR, respectively. Additionally, hotel management support for hotel employees' personal branding was perceived as moderate ($2.58 \pm .96$). These results support the current study's earlier findings that almost two-thirds of the study's hotel participants had low satisfaction with their personal brands and that over half of them said that developing their personal brands was a challenging task. Such findings might be explained by the hotel management's lack of professional support for employees' personal branding. The findings of Arruda (2014), who claimed that organizations were hesitant to encourage personal branding among their employees due to concern that such employees might become more attractive to competitors, can be used to interpret the moderate level of hotel management support for personal branding among hotel employees.

Analysis and model testing of the effect of Management Support (MS) on Employee's Personal Branding Equity (PBE)

Measurement model assessment

The proposed model of the current study, which hypothesizes that hotel management's support of personal branding affects hotel employees' personal branding equity, was evaluated using PLS-SEM. The internal consistency reliability of the two constructs—management support and employees' personal branding equity—was investigated using composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha.

The results in Table (5) show that the items have CR above 0.80 α , which is acceptable according to Nunally and Bernstein (1994). In addition, the discriminant validity and convergent validity (AVE) were tested for each construct. The findings demonstrated that there is no problem with discriminant validity because all values were over 0.50, which is acceptable according to Fornell and Larcker (1981).

Table 5: Convergent Validity

Constructs	items	Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand Appeal (BA)	PB.1	0.847	0.795	0.867	0.621
	PB.2	0.842			
	PB.3	0.719			
	PB.4	0.736			
Brand Differentiation (BD)	PB.5	0.796	0.844	0.895	0.680
	PB.6	0.861			
	PB.7	0.800			
	PB.8	0.838			
Brand Recognition (BR)	PB.9	0.845	0.867	0.909	0.714
	PB.10	0.860			
	PB.11	0.799			
	PB.12	0.875			
Management Support (MS)	MS.1	0.784	0.936	0.947	0.694
	MS.2	0.879			
	MS.3	0.860			
	MS.4	0.793			
	MS.5	0.683			
	MS.7	0.886			
	MS.8	0.868			
	MS.9	0.891			

According to table (6), the square roots of the AVEs (values in bold) are greater in every case than values that reflect the correlation between the respective constructs; this means that the discriminant validity of scales is achieved.

Table 6: Discriminant Validity

	BA	BD	BR	MS
Brand Appeal (BA)	0.788			
Brand Differentiation (BD)	0.783	0.825		
Brand Recognition (BR)	0.636	0.824	0.845	
Management Support (MS)	0.525	0.439	0.471	0.833
The values in the bold are the square roots of AVE				

Additionally, the Predictive Relevance (Q^2) of this model was investigated. The values of Q^2 are greater than zero, as shown in Table (7), supporting the claim that this study model has adequate ability to predict "there is predictive relevance".

Table 7: Construct Cross-Validated Redundancy (Q^2)

	SSO	SSE	$Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)$
Brand Appeal	172.000	143.739	0.164
Brand Differentiation	172.000	151.288	0.120
Brand Recognition	172.000	149.934	0.128

Moreover, the Goodness of Fit of the Model (GoF) was assessed as well. The criteria of GoF to determine whether GoF values are no fit, small, medium, or large to be considered a global valid PLS model have been given by Wetzels et al. (2009) where GoF with less than 0.1 means no fit, GoF between 0.1 and 0.25 means small fit, GoF between 0.25 to 0.36 means medium fit, and GoF with greater than 0.36 means large fit of the model.

Table 8: Goodness of Fit of the Model

	R 2	AVE	GoF
Brand Appeal	0.276	0.621	0.393
Brand Differentiation	0.192	0.680	
Brand Recognition	0.222	0.714	

According to the data in table (8), the value of GoF is 0.393, which means that the GoF model of this study is large to be regarded as having sufficient global validity of the PLS model.

Structural Model Assessment

The results in Table (9) showed that there is a statistically significant path coefficient between MS and brand appeal ($\beta = 0.525$, $p < 0.05$), MS and brand differentiation ($\beta = 0.439$, $p < 0.05$), in addition, a statistically significant path coefficient between MS and brand recognition ($\beta = 0.471$, $p < 0.05$). Coefficient of determination (R^2) was also examined to illustrate the effect size of BA, BD and BR (see table 9). R^2 values are assessed as follows: 0.02 weak, 0.13 moderate, and 0.26 substantial (Cohen, 1988).

Table 9: Path coefficient of research hypotheses

Relationship	Std. Beta	Std. Error	T-Value	P -Values
Management Support -> Brand Appeal	0.525	0.115	4.572	0.000
Management Support -> Brand Differentiation	0.439	0.114	3.851	0.000
Management Support -> Brand Recognition	0.471	0.105	4.471	0.000

Data in the table (10) showed that MS explains 27.6%, 19.2%, and 22.2% of the change in BA, BD, and BR, respectively. This means that MS has a substantial effect size on BA and a moderate effect size on BD or BR (see figure 1).

Table 10: R^2 of endogenous latent variable (management support)

	R^2	Result
Brand Appeal	0.276	substantial
Brand Differentiation	0.192	moderate
Brand Recognition	0.222	moderate

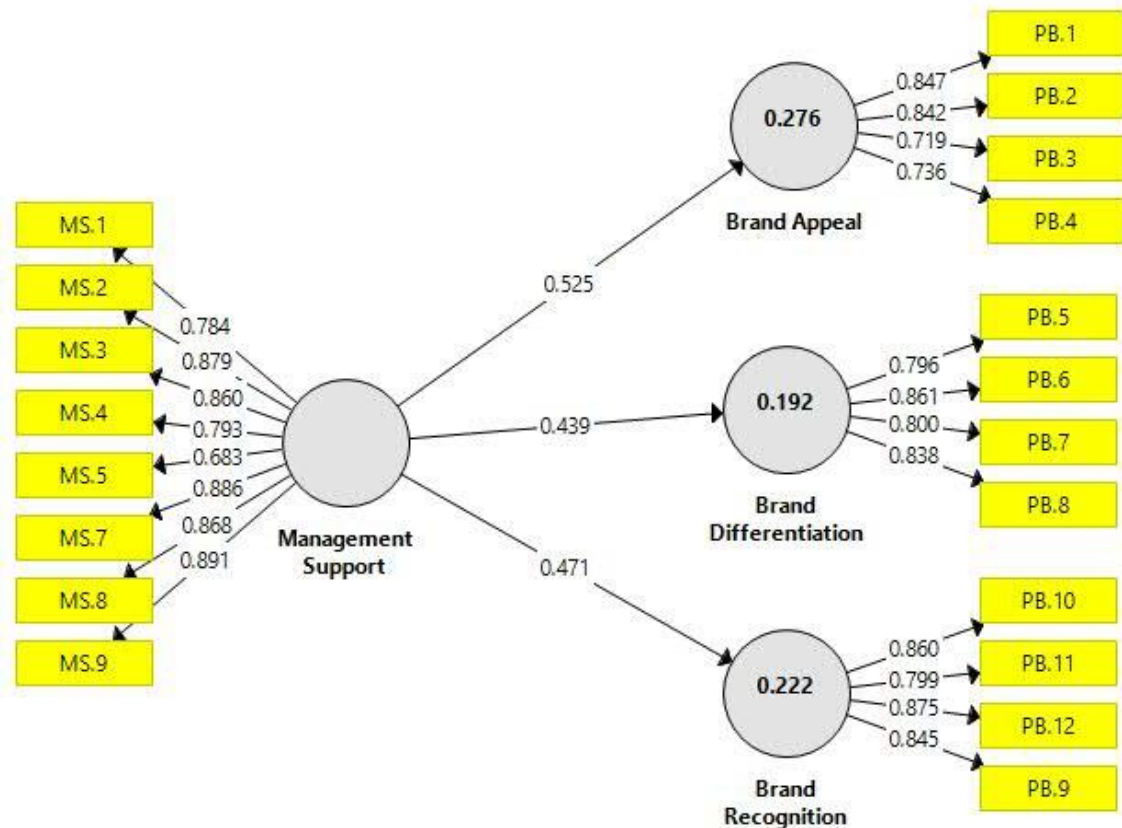


Figure (1): Final model of the study for top management support and personnel branding dimension

Hotel top management support affects personnel brand equity’ dimensions. Management had a substantial impact on employee brand appeal, where, management has a significant role in motivating employees to create a brand and explain its importance in the labor market. Management also had a moderate impact on employee brand recognition, by orienting employees to have a well-known professional value in the labor market. Furthermore, management had a moderate impact on employee brand differentiation, by distinguishing them from others and making them preferable in the labor market . This was confirmed by the study of Saemian *et al.* (2013) who argued that it is the responsibility of organizations to maintain employee motivation and ensure performance improvement. Personal branding has also emerged as a crucial new area of organizational support for employees. Consequently, branding is not only relevant to businesses and products; it also applies to individuals. Mollaei *et al.* (2021) argued that strengthening employees' skills and personality qualities is essential to assist them in becoming conscious brands so that they may contribute to the company with a sense of value till retirement.

Conclusion and Implications

The current study aimed to investigate the role of hotel management in supporting hotel employees' personal branding and how personal branding affects guests' attitudes toward the brand. The results emphatically demonstrate that employee personnel branding is very important to hotels; either employees or customers. Personal branding could be recognized as an important career competence to achieve success in the hotel industry. The importance of the personal brand has emerged among the experienced employees in hotels, who are considered a source of trust and good representatives of hotels. However, hotel employees faced difficulty in building their personal brand, as they did not receive sufficient support from hotel

management as training programs that allow them to establish a distinct and lasting personal brand. The study also revealed the low satisfaction of employees with their brand, which reflects the lack of taking into account the employee brand within the hotel brand strategy. Furthermore, the study argued that personal branding affects hotel guests' attitude toward hotel brands through improving the credibility of hotel brands.

The current study provides theoretical and managerial implications. Regarding the theoretical contribution, this study responds to a call for studies of personal branding (i.e. Arruda, 2014; Wojtaszczyk & Maszewski, 2014; Jacobson, 2020), especially in hotel industry context. Thus, this study broadens the present knowledge in hospitality literature as it considered the first effort to investigate such concept in hotel industry setting. Regarding the managerial contribution, the results could provide recommendations for improving the features and design of hotel service platforms. For example, the platform should be designed in a way that facilitates improving employees personal branding and delivering information to guests. Furthermore, the results have meaningful recommendations for hotel management; *first*, the hotel management should prepare a clear strategy and provide all the necessary resources to create and develop the employees' brand, *second*, hotel management could present motivating methods for employees such as linking the employee's brand with compensation and promotion to create a strong branding, *third*, activating the role of the human resource department in cooperation with the marketing department to design and implement training programs for hotel employees that aim to attain the following objectives:

- To improve skills needed for effective personal branding such as presentation skills, interpersonal Skills, and social media skills.
- To audit social media profiles of hotel employees and hotel website pages as well.
- To encourage hotel employees to make valuable connections with hotel stakeholders.
- To encourage hotel employees to build their reputation offline as well.
- To get hotel employees to be authentic, encourage them to talk about their achievements and even inflate their image.
- To help employees to be themselves showing what they are passionate about.

Limitations and Further Research

The framework proposed in this study applied on five-star chain hotels in Egypt and certain number of guests from different nationalities. This could be a limitation because research on other hotel types and study of visitors from diverse cultural contexts were not conducted. Perhaps future studies, especially as the internet is a global medium, on multi-cultures' guests and diverse-hotels could address this limitation in other emerging market nations in Middle East region. Moreover, this study only investigated the role of management support on personal branding. Combining this factor with other elements such as personality differences, social presence, and media multiplexity to provide a holistic model can result in a successful personal brand for hospitality employees. Furthermore, personnel brand is not easy to produce, it has risks because it requires personal information about the user and may be controlled by website policies. Therefore, further studies could find what risks employees may face on social media platforms and how to be avoided during building their personal brand. In addition, this study used two different structured surveys; one for guests and the other for employees. However, each survey was statistically analyzed separately, thus guest' attitude toward personal branding did not included in the structural model presented in the current study. Therefore, further studies could ask employees and customers to respond and then adopt matching technique for different surveys. Lastly, as a self-report survey was used in this study, a social desirability bias may have hindered participants from being truthful with their answers. Therefore, further

studies could rely on other research methods such as observations and data mining as a practice to analyze employee's activities on social media in addition to guests' feedbacks.

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العلامة التجارية الشخصية لموظفي الفنادق: من منظور دعم الإدارة العليا وموقف العملاء

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الملخص العربي:

هدفت الدراسة الحالية إلى توضيح دور إدارة الفنادق في دعم العلامات التجارية الشخصية لموظفي الفنادق وكيف تؤثر العلامات التجارية الشخصية على موقف النزلاء تجاه العلامة التجارية للفندق. تم جمع البيانات من 16 فندق تتبع فنادق السلسلة تقع في منطقة القاهرة الكبرى في مصر. تم توزيع نسختين مختلفتين من الاستبيانات لجمع البيانات؛ واحد للعملاء والآخر للموظفين. في حين تم جمع 380 استبياناً صالحاً من الموظفين، تم جمع 400 استبيان من نزلاء الفنادق. تظهر النتائج أن العلامات التجارية للموظفين مهمة جداً للفنادق؛ سواء للموظفين وللعملاء. كشفت النتائج أيضاً عن وجود ارتباط إيجابي ذو دلالة إحصائية بين دعم إدارة الفنادق والعلامات التجارية الشخصية للموظفين. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، كان لنزلاء الفنادق موقف معتدل تجاه العلامات التجارية الشخصية. يمكن أن تساعد هذه الدراسة الفنادق على تطوير استراتيجيات لتعزيز العلامات التجارية الشخصية للموظفين. قد تساعد الدراسة أيضاً في إنشاء روابط جديدة بين العملاء الداخليين والخارجيين للمؤسسات الفندقية وتعميق فهم العلامة التجارية الشخصية في الفنادق.

الكلمات الدالة: العلامة التجارية الشخصية، الدعم الإداري، موقف العملاء، الفنادق.