

Increasing Gen Z Personal Branding Using Emotional Intelligence. The Mediating role of Learning Agility

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Abstract– This research investigates the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Personal Branding (PB), with Learning Agility (LA) as a mediating factor, focusing on Generation Z. In an era where digital engagement drives career success, Personal Branding emerges as a critical tool for professional growth and social recognition. Emotional Intelligence, encompassing self-awareness, empathy, and interpersonal skills, is pivotal in shaping impactful branding strategies. Meanwhile, Learning Agility—the ability to adapt and innovate in dynamic environments—amplifies the influence of Emotional Intelligence on Personal Branding. A quantitative methodology involved structured questionnaires distributed to 210 Generation Z participants. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The result shows significant relationships between Emotional Intelligence, Learning Agility, and Personal Branding. The findings emphasize the importance of emotional awareness and adaptability in establishing authentic and adaptive personal brands, aligning with the needs of modern competitive landscapes. This study contributes to the understanding of psychological and behavioral mechanisms underlying Personal Branding and offers actionable insights for educators, organizations, and individuals seeking to enhance career resilience and visibility.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Learning Agility, Personal Branding, Generation Z, personal branding. Emotional Intelligence encompasses the ability to recognize, understand, and regulate one's emotion

INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected and digitally driven world, personal branding has become a cornerstone for professional success, particularly for Generation Z. This demographic, born into the digital era, exhibits unparalleled fluency in utilizing digital platforms for self-expression and career advancement. Personal branding is a strategic process through which individuals craft and communicate their unique identity, values, and competencies to establish credibility and differentiate themselves in competitive environments. The increasing reliance on social media and other digital tools underscores the importance of understanding the psychological and behavioral underpinnings of effective personal branding. For Generation Z, mastering this skill can be transformative in achieving career and personal aspirations. In the competitive professional landscape, personal branding not only serves as a tool for differentiation but also enhances employability and career resilience. As industries increasingly prioritize adaptability and emotional intelligence, individuals with strong personal branding skills are better positioned to align themselves with market demands. The proliferation of digital platforms such as LinkedIn, Instagram, and TikTok has enabled Generation Z to showcase their skills and values to global audiences. However, the effectiveness of these efforts hinges on the individual's ability to manage their emotional responses, build trust, and adapt to rapidly changing environments. Emotional Intelligence (EI), introduced by Salovey and Mayer (1990) [1], emerges as a vital construct in shaping while effectively navigating interpersonal relationships. These competencies form the foundation for building trust, fostering meaningful connections, and managing one's image in social and professional contexts. Research suggests that individuals with high Emotional Intelligence are better equipped to adapt to complex situations, enhance communication, and align their personal brand with their goals and audiences. Complementing Emotional Intelligence is Learning Agility (LA), which is a dynamic capability that enables individuals to adapt, learn, and innovate amidst changing circumstances. Learning Agility allows individuals to absorb new information, unlearn outdated approaches, and apply insights to real-time challenges, making it a critical mediator in the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and personal branding. The interplay of these constructs provides a comprehensive framework for

understanding how individuals refine their personal branding strategies in response to evolving demands. This research delves into the mediating role of Learning Agility between Emotional Intelligence and Personal Branding among Generation Z. By employing a quantitative approach and robust statistical analysis through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), this study seeks to elucidate how these psychological constructs interact to influence personal branding outcomes. The findings provide actionable insights for professionals, educators, and organizations to foster skills that enhance visibility, credibility, and adaptability in today's competitive landscapes. In doing so, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on personal branding, emphasizing its relevance in the digital age.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence (EI), a construct introduced by Salovey and Mayer (1990) [1], refers to an individual's ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions to guide behavior and thinking effectively. Extensive research underscores its critical role in fostering interpersonal effectiveness, adaptability, and professional success (Mayer & Salovey, 1997) [2] ; Karimi, 2021 [5]. Emotional Intelligence components—self-awareness, empathy, emotional regulation, and social skills—are foundational for personal and professional growth. These competencies enhance individuals' abilities to connect with others, establish trust, and communicate effectively, which are crucial for building impactful personal brands. This study integrates Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) [14] to frame Emotional Intelligence as a dynamic interplay of individual traits and behaviors shaped by environmental influences, aligning with its significance in crafting Personal Branding strategies.

The role of Emotional Intelligence in digital interactions

has gained prominence as professionals increasingly rely on virtual platforms for networking and collaboration. High Emotional Intelligence facilitates the effective management of online communication, enabling individuals to navigate the challenges of non-verbal cues and asynchronous conversations. Additionally, individuals with enhanced Emotional Intelligence can tailor their online personas to project authenticity and credibility, which are key drivers of personal branding success in a highly competitive digital ecosystem.

Learning Agility

Learning Agility (LA), defined by DeRue et al. (2012) [4], represents the capability to adapt, learn, and apply knowledge in ever-changing environments. As an enabler of continuous learning and unlearning, Learning Agility fosters innovation and enhances problem-solving abilities, allowing individuals to refine their approaches dynamically. The synergistic relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Learning Agility lies in their shared focus on adaptability and self-improvement. Research highlights that Learning Agility mediates the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Personal Branding, translating emotional competencies into actionable strategies for branding effectiveness (Sari et al., 2022) [8]. Individuals with high Learning Agility are better equipped to navigate complex challenges, continuously refine their strategies, and enhance their Branding efforts.

Moreover, Learning Agility serves as a critical asset for professionals facing industry disruptions and rapidly evolving job requirements. By fostering an openness to feedback and a proactive attitude toward skill acquisition, individuals with high Learning Agility can maintain relevance in their fields while simultaneously strengthening their personal brand. This adaptability is particularly valuable in Generation Z's context, where constant innovation and change demand an ongoing recalibration of branding strategies.

Personal Branding

Personal Branding (PB) is the strategic process of shaping and communicating a unique identity that reflects an individual's values, skills, and aspirations. This process, particularly significant for Generation Z, enables differentiation and credibility in competitive landscapes. Studies reveal that Emotional Intelligence contributes significantly to effective Personal Branding by enhancing self-awareness, empathy, and communication, which are vital for trust-building and audience engagement (Moreti, 2024) [7] ; (Krykavskyy et al., 2023) [11]. Moreover, Learning Agility enables individuals to adapt branding strategies

to dynamic contexts, emphasizing the importance of ongoing learning and adaptability. Empirical evidence suggests that individuals with high Emotional Intelligence and Learning Agility achieve superior branding outcomes through enhanced trust-building, communication skills, and adaptability (Sivanthinathan et al., 2023) [15].

Integrated Framework and Context

The interplay of Emotional Intelligence, Learning Agility, and Personal Branding forms a cohesive framework for understanding how individuals adapt and thrive in evolving professional and social environments.

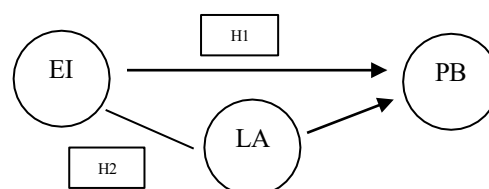


FIG. 1 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Cultural nuances further influence this dynamic, with collectivist cultures emphasizing community-driven branding and individualistic cultures prioritizing personal differentiation (Hofstede, 2001) [9]. While existing literature provides insights into these constructs, gaps remain in exploring their interaction with Generation Z—a demographic characterized by digital fluency and adaptability. This study bridges these gaps by examining how Emotional Intelligence and Learning Agility mediate Personal Branding among Generation Z, contributing to a deeper understanding of the psychological and behavioral mechanisms underpinning effective branding strategies.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research design to explore the relationships between Emotional Intelligence (EI), Learning Agility (LA), and Personal Branding (PB) among Generation Z. Quantitative research is suitable for this investigation as it allows systematic data collection and statistical analysis to validate hypothesized relationships and enable generalization of findings (Creswell, 2014) [19]. The study utilizes structured questionnaires to measure the constructs, ensuring reliability and validity through standardized scales.

Quantitative methods were chosen due to their ability to uncover the strength and direction of relationships between variables while accommodating the mediating effects of Learning Agility. This design is particularly appropriate given the structured nature of the constructs under investigation and the need for robust statistical validation. The study's hypothesis-driven approach emphasizes the empirical testing of conceptual frameworks using data representative of the target demographic.

Measurement of Constructs

Each construct in the study is measured using established scales:

Emotional Intelligence (EI): Items adapted from Salovey and Mayer's Emotional Intelligence scale assess an individual's ability to perceive, regulate, and utilize emotions effectively [1].

Learning Agility (LA): DeRue et al. (2012) scale measures adaptability and the ability to learn from experiences and challenges [4].

Personal Branding (PB): Moretti's (2024) diagnostic model evaluates self-awareness, communication strategies, and interpersonal engagement in building an effective personal brand [7].

Data Collection Sampling

The target population includes individuals aged 18-25 years, representing Generation Z. A purposive sampling technique was employed, focusing on participants with active engagement in social and professional environments where Emotional Intelligence, Learning Agility, and Personal Branding are critical. Surveys were disseminated online and offline to maximize response diversity. A total of 210 valid responses were collected, satisfying the sample size requirements for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis, as recommended by Kline (2015) [20].

To ensure the diversity of the sample, participants were recruited from various educational and professional backgrounds, with efforts to achieve gender balance and geographic representation. Ethical considerations were adhered to, including informed consent, confidentiality of responses, and voluntary participation.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using PLS-SEM via SmartPLS software, a robust tool for analyzing complex relationships among latent variables. The following steps were undertaken:

Reliability and Validity Testing: Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were computed to confirm internal consistency and construct validity. **Path Analysis:** Hypothesized relationships were evaluated using path coefficients to assess direct and indirect effects between Emotional Intelligence, Learning Agility, and Personal Branding.

Mediation Testing: Bootstrapping methods examined the mediating role of Learning Agility, providing robust estimates on indirect effects.

RESULT

Outer Loading

Outer loadings indicate the strength of each item's relationship with its respective construct. All values exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.6, confirming that the indicators effectively represent their latent variables.

The items under Emotional Intelligence (EI) demonstrated strong individual contributions, with EIMT2 achieving the highest loading of 0.758, indicating its significant role in representing the construct. Similarly, Learning Agility (LA) items showed robust loadings, with LARA1 having the highest value (0.805). For Personal Branding (PB), while all items met the threshold, their comparatively lower loadings suggest room for refinement to enhance their measurement precision.

TABLE I. OUTER LOADING

Variable	Items	Outer Loading
EI	EIPD1	0.698
	EIMT1	0.700
	EIMT2	0.758
	EIEM1	0.655
	EIKS1	0.724
LA	LARA1	0.805
	LARA2	0.722
	LARA3	0.706
	LAMA1	0.712
PB	PBKT1	0.696
	PBWB1	0.746
	PBKE1	0.697

These results confirm the reliability of the measurement model, with all item loadings above the threshold, indicating strong indicator-construct relationships.

Construct Reliability and Validity

The reliability and validity of the constructs were evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

TABLE II. CONSTRUCT RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Outer Loading	AVE
EI	0.750	0.834	0.501
LA	0.719	0.826	0.543
PB	0.517	0.756	0.509

Table II The reliability analysis confirmed strong internal consistency for Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Learning Agility (LA), with Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.750 and 0.719, respectively. However, Personal Branding (PB) exhibited moderate reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.517), suggesting that the construct requires additional refinement. This may include revising or replacing items to better capture

the multidimensional nature of Personal Branding, particularly in dynamic digital contexts.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The square root of the AVE for each construct exceeded its correlations with other constructs, ensuring distinctiveness (Table III).

TABLE III. DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY (FORNELL-LARCKER)

Variable	EI	LA	PB
EI	0.708		
LA	0.650	0.737	
PB	0.480	0.407	0.713

The Fornell-Larcker analysis confirmed that each construct is distinct from the others, as evidenced by the higher square root AVE values compared to inter-construct correlations. This finding reinforces the conceptual independence of Emotional Intelligence, Learning Agility, and Personal Branding, allowing for reliable interpretation of their interactions.

R-Square Values

The R-square values indicate that Emotional Intelligence explains 42.2% of the variance in Learning Agility and, along with Learning Agility, explains 24.6% of the variance in Personal Branding (Table IV).

TABLE IV. COEFFICIENT OF DETERMINATION

Variable	R-square	R-square Adjusted
LA	0.422	0.419
PB	0.246	0.239

The R-square values suggest a substantial explanatory power for Learning Agility and a moderate influence on Personal Branding. The variance explained by Emotional Intelligence underscores its primary role in driving Learning Agility and its contribution to shaping Personal Branding through direct and mediated effects.

Effect Sizes

Effect size (f^2) analysis revealed that Emotional Intelligence had a strong effect on Learning Agility ($f^2 = 0.730$), a small effect on Personal Branding ($f^2 = 0.107$), and Learning Agility had a negligible effect on Personal Branding ($f^2 = 0.020$). Table V summarizes these results.

TABLE V. EFFECT SIZES (f^2)

Variable	R-square	R-square Adjusted
LA	0.422	0.419
PB	0.246	0.239

The strong effect of Emotional Intelligence on Learning Agility highlights its critical role in fostering adaptability. In contrast, the negligible effect of Learning Agility on Personal Branding suggests that while adaptability aids branding efforts, its impact is relatively less significant compared to direct emotional competencies.

Predictive Relevance

Predictive relevance (Q^2) was assessed via blindfolding. The values for Learning Agility ($Q^2 = 0.409$) and Personal Branding ($Q^2 = 0.215$) confirm the model's predictive capability (Table VI).

TABLE VI. BLINDFOLDING (Q^2)

Variable	Q^2	RMSE	MAE
LA	0.409	0.776	0.633
PB	0.215	0.897	0.700

These results validate the model's ability to predict outcomes for Learning Agility and Personal Branding. The higher predictive relevance for Learning Agility reflects its stronger integration within the model's framework compared to Personal Branding.

Path Coefficients

The hypothesized relationships were tested, revealing significant direct effects of Emotional Intelligence on Learning Agility ($\beta = 0.650$, $p < 0.001$) and Personal Branding ($\beta = 0.374$, $p < 0.001$). Table VII presents the path coefficients.

TABLE VII. PATH COEFFICIENTS

Hypothesis	Coefficients	Std. Deviation	T Statistic	P Value
EI → LA	0.650	0.043	15.266	0.000
EI → PB	0.374	0.072	5.216	0.000
LA → PB	0.163	0.079	2.075	0.000

The significant path coefficients indicate robust relationships between Emotional Intelligence and the two outcome constructs. The partial mediation effect of Learning Agility on Personal Branding suggests its intermediary role while emphasizing Emotional Intelligence as a direct influencer.

Mediation Analysis

Mediation testing indicated partial mediation by Learning Agility in the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Personal Branding. Table VIII presents the mediation results.

TABLE VIII. SPECIFIC INDIRECT EFFECT

Path	Coefficients	T Statistic	P Value
EI → LA → PB	0.106	2.004	0.045

The mediation analysis supports the hypothesis that Learning Agility partially bridges the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Personal Branding. This underscores the importance of adaptability in translating emotional competencies into impactful personal branding strategies.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence for the interplay between Emotional Intelligence (EI), Learning Agility (LA), and Personal Branding (PB) among Generation

Z. These results highlight the critical role of Emotional Intelligence and Learning Agility in shaping effective personal branding strategies, reinforcing prior theoretical and empirical insights while offering practical implications for personal and professional development.

Role of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence emerged as a significant predictor of Personal Branding, both directly and indirectly through Learning Agility. High Emotional Intelligence equips individuals with the emotional awareness, empathy, and interpersonal skills necessary for managing perceptions and building trust, which are essential for effective branding. These findings align with Salovey and Mayer's (1990) theoretical framework, which posits that Emotional Intelligence fosters self-regulation and meaningful connections, critical components of personal branding. The strong direct effect of Emotional Intelligence on Personal Branding underscores its foundational role in branding strategies, particularly for Generation Z, who prioritize authenticity and emotional connection in their personal and professional relationships [1].

Additionally, Emotional Intelligence equips individuals with the capability to manage their emotional responses in high-pressure situations, enabling them to maintain consistency in their personal branding efforts. This is especially relevant in the digital age, where public and private personas often merge, and any inconsistency in emotional regulation can impact brand authenticity and trustworthiness [3].

Learning Agility as a Mediator

Learning Agility was found to partially mediate the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Personal Branding, emphasizing its integrative role in adapting branding strategies to dynamic contexts. This finding corroborates prior research by DeRue et al. (2012), which identified adaptability as a key determinant of professional success [4]. The relatively small yet significant indirect effect of Emotional Intelligence on Personal Branding via Learning Agility suggests that while Emotional Intelligence is the primary driver, Learning Agility adds value by enhancing the adaptability and relevance of branding strategies.

This mediating effect illustrates how Learning Agility empowers individuals to refine their branding strategies in real time by integrating feedback, embracing innovation, and navigating uncertainty. For Generation Z, who operate in an ever-changing digital landscape, Learning Agility is critical for sustaining a competitive edge and maintaining relevance in their personal and professional lives [8].

Implications for Generation Z

Generation Z's digital fluency and unique social dynamics position them as a distinctive cohort for studying personal branding. This study highlights how Emotional Intelligence and Learning Agility

collectively enable this demographic to establish impactful personal brands. The findings emphasize the importance of continuous learning and emotional competence in navigating the rapidly changing digital landscape. The moderate reliability of the Personal Branding construct suggests the need for further refinement to capture its multidimensional nature, such as the integration of communication strategies and self-presentation skills tailored to digital platforms [7] [11].

Moreover, the study sheds light on how Generation Z leverages Emotional Intelligence to build trust and foster authenticity while using Learning Agility to stay adaptable to technological advancements and audience expectations. This dual focus on emotional competence and adaptability offers a pathway for Gen Z professionals to craft dynamic, future-ready personal brands [21].

Practical Implications

The result has significant implications for educational institutions, organizations, and professionals. Training programs designed to enhance Emotional Intelligence and Learning Agility can equip Generation Z with the skills required to build authentic and adaptive personal brands. For educators, integrating emotional intelligence and adaptability training into curricula can prepare students for competitive professional environments [19]. Organizations can leverage these insights to develop leadership and branding workshops, ensuring employees' alignment with evolving market demands.

Additionally, businesses can benefit from these findings by tailoring recruitment strategies to identify candidates with high Emotional Intelligence and Learning Agility, as these traits predict not only personal branding effectiveness but also broader professional success. Implementing workshops and continuous learning platforms to foster these skills can enhance both individual and organizational performance [12].

Theoretical Contributions and Future Research

This study advances the literature by integrating Emotional Intelligence, Learning Agility, and Personal Branding into a cohesive framework that elucidates their interdependencies. The findings suggest avenues for future research, such as exploring additional mediators (e.g., digital literacy or social capital) or examining the longitudinal effects of Emotional Intelligence and Learning Agility on Personal Branding. Investigating cross-cultural differences in branding dynamics could also provide valuable insights, particularly in understanding how collectivist versus individualist values influence these relationships [17] [16].

Future studies could also explore the role of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality in shaping personal branding strategies. As Generation Z increasingly interacts with these technologies, the interplay between Emotional Intelligence, adaptability, and tech-savviness may redefine the components of effective branding in the digital age [14] [20].

CONCLUSION

This study provides significant insights into the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Learning Agility (LA) in shaping Personal Branding (PB), particularly among Generation Z. The findings confirm that Emotional Intelligence has both direct and indirect effects on Personal Branding, mediated by Learning Agility. This emphasizes the dual importance of emotional awareness and adaptability in crafting effective personal branding strategies [1] [4].

The results reveal that Emotional Intelligence is a strong predictor of both Learning Agility and Personal Branding. Individuals with higher Emotional Intelligence exhibit enhanced interpersonal skills, empathy, and self-regulation, enabling them to effectively manage perceptions and build meaningful connections—cornerstones of impactful personal branding. Learning Agility, on the other hand, plays a mediating role by fostering adaptability and innovation, allowing individuals to refine their branding strategies in response to changing contexts. This synergy between Emotional Intelligence and Learning Agility creates a robust framework for achieving branding success in competitive environments [3] [12].

Furthermore, the implications of this study extend beyond individual professionals to organizations and educational institutions, highlighting the value of fostering Emotional Intelligence and Learning Agility at a systemic level. Training programs aimed at enhancing these competencies can provide Generation Z with the tools to navigate complex career paths and rapidly changing industry landscapes. By embedding emotional and adaptive skills into professional development initiatives, institutions can enable individuals to achieve personal growth while contributing to organizational success [19].

The study also highlights key areas for improvement in the measurement of Personal Branding, which showed moderate reliability. This indicates a need for refining the construct to capture its multidimensional nature more effectively. Future research could incorporate additional indicators such as digital literacy, self-efficacy, and social capital to better reflect the complexity of Personal Branding, particularly in the digital age [20] [21].

From a practical perspective, the findings underscore the importance of developing Emotional Intelligence and Learning Agility through targeted training programs. Educational institutions and organizations can integrate these competencies into curricula and professional development workshops to equip Generation Z with the tools needed to establish authentic and adaptive personal brands. These efforts can enhance career success, personal growth, and professional visibility in a highly dynamic global landscape [6].

Finally, this study contributes to the growing literature on the psychological and behavioral mechanisms underpinning Personal Branding. Exploring the interplay between Emotional Intelligence, Learning Agility, and Personal Branding, lays a foundation for future research to examine longitudinal impacts, cross-cultural variations, and additional mediators or moderators that influence branding outcomes. These avenues of inquiry could further deepen our understanding of how individuals navigate the complexities of personal branding in the modern era, offering valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners [15] [17].

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