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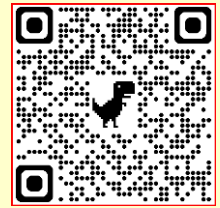
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A Personalized Branding Strategy for Job Seekers: Mechanism, Boundaries, and Optimization in Vocational Education

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ABSTRACT

Amidst the structural contradictions in the current labor market, job seekers must stand out through differentiated positioning rather than traditional job-hunting methods. This paper reconceptualizes the job-seeking process through the lens of a "Personalized Branding Strategy," restructuring the traditional paradigm of "Roadshow-Exploration-Matching" into a logical sequence of "Brand Presentation-Brand Building-Brand Effectiveness." Using Minxi Vocational and Technical College as a case study, this research investigates how job-seeking roadshows (brand presentation) facilitate person-job fit (brand effectiveness) through career exploration behaviors (brand building), with career adaptability acting as a boundary condition (moderator). By integrating Social Cognitive Career Theory, Career Construction Theory, and Experiential Learning Theory, this study uncovers the underlying mechanisms and effective boundaries of personalized brand strategies, and proposes a "precision-oriented" optimization pathway to resolve the conflict between standardized training curricula and personalized brand development.

KEY WORDS: Personalized Branding Strategy; Job-seeking Roadshow; Career Exploration Behavior; Person-Job Fit; Career Adaptability

1. Introduction

In the contemporary labor market, characterized by information asymmetry and fierce competition, the traditional paradigm of job-seeking—relying solely on submitting standardized resumes—has proven insufficient. The dual contradiction of "employment difficulties" for graduates and "recruitment difficulties" for employers highlights a fundamental mismatch: educational outputs often fail to dynamically align with industrial demands. Job seekers are increasingly required to differentiate themselves by articulating a unique value proposition, shifting the focus from merely finding a job to strategically marketing oneself (Khedher, 2014). This shift necessitates viewing the job search not just as an application process, but as the implementation of a Personalized Branding

Strategy.

Despite the widespread implementation of experiential training courses, such as the "Job-Seeking Ability Training Course" in Chinese vocational colleges, a significant theoretical gap remains. Previous literature and practical instruction predominantly treat the job-seeking roadshow as a terminal presentation skill or a mere communication exercise, overlooking the deeper psychological and behavioral mechanisms that bridge self-presentation and actual employment matching. There is a lack of theoretical explanation for how the act of presenting a "brand" translates into the cognitive and evaluative outcome of person-job fit.

To address this gap, this study introduces the "Personalized

Branding Strategy" framework. Centered on this concept, the research restructures the original framework into a logical sequence: Brand Presentation → Brand Building → Brand Effectiveness. Specifically, it poses three core questions: 1.How does the personalized branding strategy, using roadshows as the primary presentation tool, facilitate person-job fit through career exploration behaviors? 2.What are the boundary conditions career adaptability that determine the effectiveness of this strategy? 3.How can standardized training programs be optimized to better accommodate personalized brand development?

2. Theoretical Framework: The Logic of Personalized Branding

The foundation of this study lies in reconceptualizing established career development variables through the logic of brand strategy, integrating three core theories to provide a robust explanatory framework.

2.1 Brand Presentation: The Job-Seeking Roadshow

The starting point of the brand strategy is the Job-seeking Roadshow, which serves as the "Personalized Brand Presentation Tool." Originating from corporate finance, the roadshow in a job-seeking context requires candidates to utilize carefully crafted content, visual presentations, and on-site delivery to conduct intensive self-promotion to employers. It represents a fundamental shift from passive job hunting to active value co-creation, requiring students to articulate a strategic dialogue about "who I am" and "what unique value I can offer."

This aligns closely with Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), where the preparation and execution of the roadshow serve as a concrete experience and reflective observation. According to Kolb (1984), learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. In the branding context, the roadshow acts as a "forcing function"—a structured cognitive disruption that compels students to transform their abstract, often vague self-concept into a concrete, testable brand presentation. Unlike traditional resume writing, which is a solitary and passive act, the public nature of the roadshow demands active articulation and immediate feedback, thereby initiating the experiential learning cycle necessary for brand positioning.

2.2 Brand Building: Career Exploration Behavior

The intermediate process of the brand strategy is Career Exploration Behavior, constituting the "Core Component of Brand Building." A brand is not merely presented; it must be constructed. Exploration acts as a bridge connecting self-awareness and external needs. It involves two dimensions: *Self-exploration* (reflecting on personal strengths, weaknesses, and values to clarify the "Needs" dimension of fit) and *Environmental exploration* (actively seeking information about industries and job requirements to clarify the "Demands" dimension) (Blau, 1993).

This process is theoretically grounded in Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). SCCT posits that self-efficacy and outcome expectations drive the formulation of career goals and actions. In the branding context, exploration behaviors are the actionable steps through which individuals refine their brand identity based on self-cognition and market feedback. As Lent et al. (1994) suggest, it is through these self-regulatory actions that individuals align their internal capabilities with external occupational requirements. Without this exploratory building phase, the brand presentation remains a hollow shell, disconnected from market realities.

2.3 Brand Effectiveness: Person-Job Fit

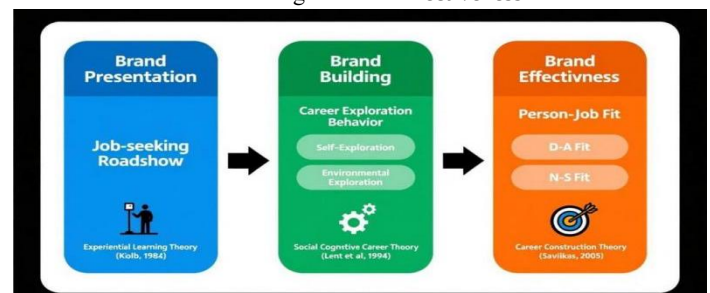
The endpoint of the brand strategy is Person-Job Fit (PJF), representing the "Manifestation of Brand Effectiveness." A successful brand strategy is not measured by the attractiveness of the presentation alone, but by the alignment between the personalized brand and the target job requirements (Cable & DeRue, 2002). PJF encompasses Demands-Abilities fit (alignment between job requirements and individual competencies) and Needs-Supplies fit (alignment between individual needs and the job's provided rewards).

In the traditional view, matching is a static event. However, through the lens of brand strategy, achieving PJF is a dynamic validation process. When a personalized brand accurately reflects the individual's capabilities and aligns with organizational needs, brand effectiveness is achieved, leading to higher job satisfaction, lower turnover intentions, and better career resilience (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). The transition from "fit ignorance" to "fit awareness" is the ultimate proof that the brand strategy has successfully bridged the gap between self and the labor market.

2.4 Boundary Condition: Career Adaptability

Career Adaptability functions as the "Moderator of Brand Strategy Effectiveness." According to Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2005), adaptability is a psychosocial resource comprising the "4Cs": concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, enabling individuals to navigate career transitions. In the context of branding, individuals with higher adaptability possess the "control" and "confidence" to process complex exploration data, filter out irrelevant information, and effectively map their findings onto the PJF dimensions (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Conversely, for those with low adaptability, the same exploratory behaviors may lead to cognitive overload or anxiety, weakening the translation of exploration into perceived fit.

Figure1: Brand Strategy Logic Framework—Brand Presentation→Brand Building→Brand Effectiveness



3. Mechanism and Boundaries of the Brand Strategy

The core contribution of this framework is the uncovering of the "black box" between brand presentation and brand effectiveness, establishing a moderated mediation model.

Figure2: The Hypothesized Theoretical Model—AModeratedMediation Model



3.1 The Mediating Mechanism: From Presentation to Effectiveness

Existing research often assumes a direct link between a “successful” roadshow performance and employment success. However, this oversimplifies the psychological transition. This study posits that Career Exploration Behavior serves as the key intermediary in transforming brand strategy from “presentation” to “effect.”

The act of preparing for a job-seeking roadshow acts as a structured cognitive disruption. To construct a compelling personal value proposition, students are forced to ask: “What are my unique strengths?” (triggering self-exploration) and “What do target employers actually need?” (triggering environmental exploration). It is the depth and frequency of these exploratory behaviors—stimulated by the roadshow—that synthesize into a higher subjective perception of Person-Job Fit. Therefore, the roadshow is not the end, but the catalyst for brand building, which in turn delivers brand effectiveness. This finding aligns with the broader job search literature indicating that proactive behaviors mediate the relationship between job search inputs and outcomes (Zikic & Klehe, 2006). The roadshow provides the *impetus* and the *framework* for exploration, but it is the exploration itself that constructs the brand substance required for genuine matching.

3.2 The Moderating Boundary: The Role of Adaptability

The effectiveness of the brand strategy is not universal. The study identifies career adaptability as a critical boundary condition. The indirect effect of the job-seeking roadshow on person-job fit via career exploration behavior is contingent upon the student’s level of adaptability.

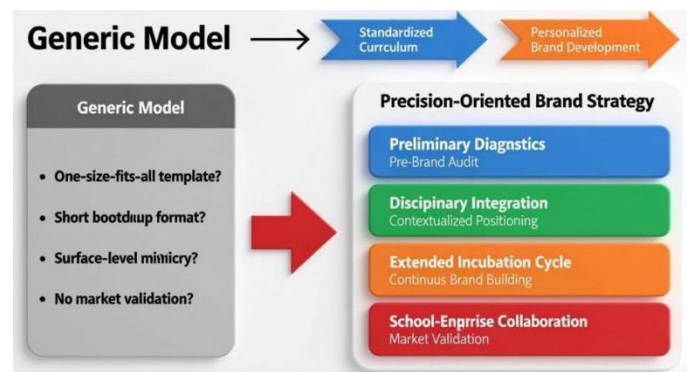
Students with high career adaptability are more likely to translate exploratory behaviors triggered by the roadshow into positive matching outcomes. They view the roadshow and subsequent exploration as a controllable challenge (Career Control) and are confident in overcoming obstacles (Career Confidence). Their high curiosity (Career Curiosity) drives deeper environmental scanning, and their future orientation (Career Concern) ensures the exploration is goal-directed. In contrast, students with lower adaptability may experience performance anxiety or engage in superficial mimicry during the roadshow, failing to internalize the exploration process, thereby blocking the pathway to actual Person-Job Fit. They may “perform” a brand they do not authentically possess, leading to a mismatch between presentation and reality, ultimately undermining brand effectiveness.

4. Practical Optimization: Addressing the Conflict

The application of the Personalized Branding Strategy within the context of Minxi Vocational and Technical College reveals a fundamental practical tension: the conflict between standardized training curricula and personalized brand development. Specifically, the contradiction between “shortened training duration” (e.g., a 7-day intensive bootcamp) and the “cumulative nature of exploration” hinders the deep incubation of a student’s brand. Furthermore, the standardized “one-size-fits-all” template often clashes with the concrete, experiential cognitive styles of vocational students, leading to surface-level mimicry rather than deep cognitive integration.

To address this, the study proposes an optimized curriculum framework based on a “Precision-Oriented Brand Strategy,” moving away from a generic model:

Figure3 : Transition from Generic Model to Precision_Oriented BrandStrategy



1. Preliminary Diagnostics (Pre-Brand Audit): Before the roadshow preparation begins, implement diagnostic assessments to evaluate the student’s baseline self-efficacy and adaptability (e.g., using the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale). This allows for differentiated scaffolding, ensuring that students with lower adaptability are not overwhelmed by the cognitive load of brand presentation (Lent et al., 1994). Tailored guidance can be provided to help them bridge the gap between their current self-concept and their desired brand identity.
2. Disciplinary Integration (Contextualized Brand Positioning): Embed discipline-specific contexts into the roadshow preparation. Rather than generic interview skills, guide students to explore industry-specific demands, helping them to position their brand accurately within niche labor markets. For instance, nursing students should explore healthcare competency demands, while mechatronics students focus on smart manufacturing trends. This transforms abstract self-presentation into a concrete, sector-relevant brand positioning.
3. Extending the Incubation Cycle (Continuous Brand Building): Break away from the isolated “bootcamp” format. Integrate the brand-building process (career exploration) into regular semester-long activities, treating the roadshow as a milestone rather than a finality. This allows time for deep self-reflection and environmental scanning (Kolb, 1984). By stretching the exploration phase, students can engage in the iterative cycle of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and testing, which is essential for authentic brand construction.
4. School-Enterprise Collaboration (Market Validation): Involve industry professionals and HR experts directly in the roadshow evaluation and feedback process. This provides real-world validation of the “brand effectiveness,” allowing students to adjust their exploration strategies based on authentic market signals (Cable & DeRue, 2002). Such collaboration ensures that the brand presentation is not just an academic exercise, but a viable market-positioning tool that has been tested against actual employer criteria.

5. Conclusion

This study redefines the functional paradigm of the job-seeking roadshow in academic literature. By shifting the focus from a static communication tool to a dynamic psychological trigger, the research establishes a “Personalized Branding Strategy” framework that logically connects “Brand Presentation (Roadshow) → Brand Building (Exploration) → Brand Effectiveness (Matching).”

The theoretical contribution lies in uncovering the mediating role of career exploration behavior and identifying career adaptability as the

boundary condition that governs the strategy's success. This framework resolves the previous theoretical gap regarding the direct connection between roadshows and talent matching by illuminating the psychological "black box" of the transformation process. Practically, by addressing the mismatch between standardized templates and the cognitive characteristics of vocational students, this study provides a precision-oriented optimization pathway. It empowers students to shift from passive job hunters to active brand architects, ultimately enhancing their Person-Job Fit and long-term career resilience in a complex labor market. Future research should continue to explore the longitudinal effects of brand strategies on career development and investigate the applicability of this framework across diverse cultural and educational contexts.

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