

The Influence of Career Adaptability and Personal Branding on the Career Readiness of Generation Z Students in South Tangerang

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Abstract—Career readiness has become one of the most critical competencies that Generation Z students must develop to successfully navigate an increasingly competitive and dynamic job market. The rapid transformation of the work environment driven by digitalization and automation demands that students possess strong career adaptability and the ability to strategically build a professional identity through personal branding. This study aims to analyze the simultaneous and partial influence of career adaptability and personal branding on the career readiness of Generation Z university students in South Tangerang, Indonesia. This research employed a quantitative approach using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 3.2.9. Data were collected through online questionnaires using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), distributed to 103 active university students aged 18–25 years via purposive sampling. The measurement model demonstrated adequate validity and reliability: AVE values ranged from 0.612 to 0.667, Composite Reliability from 0.876 to 0.906, and Cronbach's Alpha from 0.834 to 0.873. The structural model yielded an R-Square value of 0.486, indicating that both variables explain 48.6% of the variance in career readiness. Career adaptability had a positive and significant effect on career readiness ($\beta = 0.427$, T-statistic = 4.112, $p = 0.000$). Personal branding also had a positive and significant effect on career readiness ($\beta = 0.381$, T-statistic = 3.780, $p = 0.000$). These findings suggest that higher education institutions should integrate career adaptability training and personal branding programs into their student development curricula to enhance graduates' workforce readiness.

Keywords: Career Adaptability; Personal Branding; Career Readiness; Generation Z; Students

1. INTRODUCTION

Generation Z, defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, represents the first fully digital generation to enter the workforce in significant numbers (Dimock, 2019). This generation has grown up amid rapid technological advancement, widespread internet access, and deep social media integration into everyday life. Despite their digital fluency and adaptability, Generation Z students face increasingly complex challenges in transitioning from academic environments to professional employment. The rapidly evolving labor market, characterized by automation, artificial intelligence, and the emergence of entirely new career paths, demands that students prepare themselves more strategically and proactively than previous generations.

Career readiness refers to an individual's preparedness in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and confidence to enter the professional workforce (Lent & Brown, 2020). However, empirical evidence suggests that many university students still experience significant uncertainty regarding their career direction, lack confidence in their professional competencies, and struggle to adapt to rapidly changing career demands (Di Fabio, 2020). This gap between academic preparation and workforce expectations represents a critical issue that warrants systematic academic investigation.

Career adaptability is a key psychosocial resource for managing career-related challenges. Savickas (2021) defines career adaptability as the ability to cope with career development tasks, occupational transitions, and work-related traumas. Individuals with high career adaptability demonstrate greater readiness for professional challenges, make more effective career decisions, and exhibit stronger resilience in dynamic work environments. Career adaptability is operationalized through four dimensions: Career Concern, Career Control, Career Curiosity, and Career Confidence (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), with an additional dimension of Adaptability to Change reflecting responsiveness to evolving professional contexts.

Beyond adaptability, personal branding has emerged as a critical factor in shaping professional identity and enhancing career prospects. Personal branding is defined as the deliberate process of establishing, communicating, and maintaining a unique professional identity that reflects an individual's competencies, values, and strengths (Rampersad, 2020; Schawbel, 2020). In the digital era, students can strategically build personal branding through professional networking platforms such as LinkedIn, digital portfolios, academic achievements, and active organizational involvement.

Despite growing scholarly interest in both career adaptability and personal branding as separate constructs, studies examining their simultaneous influence on Generation Z students' career readiness remain limited, particularly in the Indonesian context. Existing literature tends to examine these variables in isolation, without accounting for the synergistic contribution of both factors to career preparedness. Furthermore, the specific social and educational context of South Tangerang an urban region with high concentrations of private universities and competitive graduate employment markets has not been adequately represented in career readiness research. This study addresses this gap by simultaneously examining the influence of career adaptability and personal branding on career readiness among Generation Z students in South Tangerang, Indonesia.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design with an associative descriptive approach, aimed at analyzing the causal relationships between career adaptability, personal branding, and career readiness among Generation Z university students. The conceptual framework is based on the proposition that students with higher career adaptability and stronger personal branding will demonstrate greater career readiness. The framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

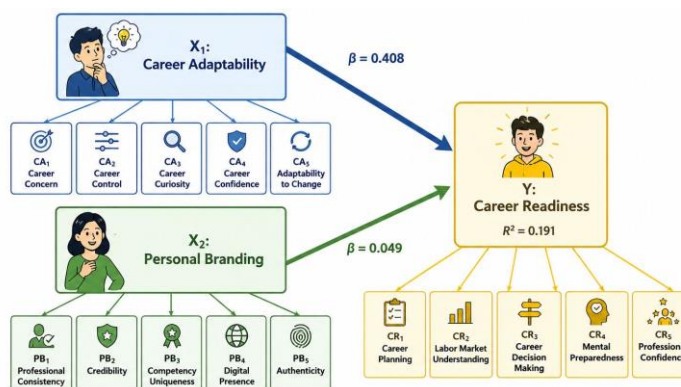


Figure 1. Research Conceptual Framework

2.2 Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique

The population of this study consists of active university students at Universitas Pamulang, South Tangerang, who belong to Generation Z (born between 1997–2012), aged 18–25 years. A purposive sampling technique was employed, with the following inclusion criteria: (1) currently enrolled as an active student, (2) aged between 18–25 years, and (3) have had exposure to career-related activities such as internships, organizational involvement, or career workshops. A total of 103 respondents were successfully recruited and participated in this study. While Hair et al. (2020) recommend a minimum sample of 100 for PLS-SEM analyses with models of this complexity, the authors acknowledge that a larger sample would strengthen the statistical power and generalizability of the findings.

2.3 Research Variables and Hypotheses

This study involves two independent variables and one dependent variable. Career Adaptability (X1) refers to students' psychosocial capacity to cope with career transitions and challenges, measured through five indicators: Career Concern (CA1), Career Control (CA2), Career Curiosity (CA3), Career Confidence (CA4), and Adaptability to Change (CA5), adapted from Savickas (2021). Personal Branding (X2) refers to students' ability to build and maintain a distinctive professional identity, measured through five indicators: Professional Consistency (PB1), Credibility (PB2), Competency Uniqueness (PB3), Digital Presence (PB4), and Authenticity (PB5), adapted from Rampersad (2020) and Schawbel (2020). Career Readiness (Y) refers to students' preparedness to enter the professional workforce, measured through five indicators: Career Planning (KK1), Labor Market Understanding (KK2), Career Decision Making (KK3), Mental Preparedness (KK4), and Professional Confidence (KK5), adapted from Lent and Brown (2020).

All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Based on the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses are proposed:
 H1: Career Adaptability has a positive and significant effect on Career Readiness.
 H2: Personal Branding has a positive and significant effect on Career Readiness.

2.4 Data Analysis Method

Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 3.2.9 software (Hair et al., 2020; Ghozali, 2021). The analysis was conducted in two stages: (1) Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model) to assess indicator validity and construct reliability, and (2) Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model) to examine hypothesized relationships. Validity was assessed using Outer Loadings (> 0.70), Average Variance Extracted (AVE > 0.50), and discriminant validity. Reliability was assessed using Composite Reliability (CR > 0.70) and Cronbach's Alpha (> 0.70). Hypothesis testing used bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples; hypotheses were supported if T-statistic > 1.96 and P-value < 0.05 .

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

The measurement model evaluation assessed the validity and reliability of all indicators. Table 1 presents the Outer Loading T-statistics for all indicators, which all exceed the minimum threshold of 1.96, confirming indicator validity.

Table 1. Outer Loading T-Statistics

Variable	Indicator	T-Statistic	Description
Career Adaptability (X1)	CA1 (Career Concern)	21.874	Valid
	CA2 (Career Control)	22.993	Valid
	CA3 (Career Curiosity)	8.908	Valid
	CA4 (Career Confidence)	18.307	Valid
	CA5 (Adaptability to Change)	34.344	Valid
Personal Branding (X2)	PB1 (Professional Consistency)	28.594	Valid
	PB2 (Credibility)	13.033	Valid
	PB3 (Competency Uniqueness)	22.434	Valid
	PB4 (Digital Presence)	25.817	Valid
	PB5 (Authenticity)	19.892	Valid
Career Readiness (Y)	KK1 (Career Planning)	29.015	Valid
	KK2 (Labor Market Understanding)	35.762	Valid
	KK3 (Career Decision Making)	33.790	Valid
	KK4 (Mental Preparedness)	30.027	Valid
	KK5 (Professional Confidence)	32.232	Valid

Table 2 presents the construct reliability and validity values.

Table 2. Construct Validity and Reliability

Variable	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	Description
Career Adaptability (X1)	0.618	0.882	0.844	Valid & Reliable
Personal Branding (X2)	0.612	0.876	0.834	Valid & Reliable
Career Readiness (Y)	0.667	0.906	0.873	Valid & Reliable

All constructs meet the validity threshold ($AVE > 0.50$) and reliability thresholds ($CR > 0.70$; Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70), confirming that the measurement model is adequate for further structural analysis (Hair et al., 2020).

3.2 Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

Table 3 presents the R-Square value, and Table 4 presents the path coefficient results from bootstrapping.

Table 3. R-Square Value

Endogenous Variable	R-Square
Career Readiness (Y)	0.486

The R-Square value of 0.486 indicates that Career Adaptability and Personal Branding jointly explain 48.6% of the variance in Career Readiness, while the remaining 51.4% is attributed to other variables outside the model. According to Hair et al. (2020), an R-Square of 0.486 is classified as moderate, indicating an acceptable level of explanatory power for social science research.

Table 4. Path Coefficient Results (Bootstrapping)

Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	T-Statistic	P-Value	Description
Career Adaptability (X1) $\rightarrow$ Career Readiness (Y)	0.427	4.112	0.000	Significant
Personal Branding (X2) $\rightarrow$ Career Readiness (Y)	0.381	3.780	0.000	Significant

Both hypotheses are supported at the 5% significance level ($T\text{-statistic} > 1.96$; $P\text{-value} < 0.05$). Career Adaptability ($\beta = 0.427$) demonstrates a stronger direct effect on Career Readiness compared to Personal Branding ($\beta = 0.381$), suggesting that adaptive capacity plays a marginally more dominant role in shaping career preparedness among Generation Z students.

3.3 Discussion

The first finding confirms that Career Adaptability has a positive and significant effect on Career Readiness ($\beta = 0.427$, $T = 4.112$, $p = 0.000$), thereby supporting H1. This finding is consistent with the theoretical framework proposed by Savickas (2021), who posits that career adaptability equips individuals with the psychosocial resources necessary to navigate occupational transitions and challenges effectively. Students with higher adaptability demonstrate stronger concern for their career futures (CA1), greater perceived control over career outcomes (CA2), broader curiosity in exploring career possibilities (CA3), higher confidence in their career-related capabilities (CA4), and superior ability to adjust to shifting professional demands (CA5). The dominance of CA5 (Adaptability to Change, $T = 34.344$) underscores that responsiveness to career-related change is the most critical competency in enhancing career readiness among Generation Z students in South Tangerang. This is particularly relevant given the volatile and rapidly transforming labor market landscape, where technological disruption continuously redefines job requirements and professional expectations.

This finding is further supported by Di Fabio (2020), who demonstrated that career adaptability significantly predicts career development outcomes among university students, and by Lent and Brown (2020), who emphasized adaptive career behaviors as central to workforce readiness.

The second finding confirms that Personal Branding has a positive and significant effect on Career Readiness ($\beta = 0.381$, $T = 3.780$, $p = 0.000$), thereby supporting H2. This finding aligns with the conceptualizations of Rampersad (2020) and Schawbel (2020), who argue that the deliberate construction and communication of a professional identity enhances individuals' perceived employability and workforce preparedness. The dominance of PB1 (Professional Consistency, $T = 28.594$) suggests that maintaining a consistent and coherent professional self-image across multiple platforms is the most impactful personal branding behavior for career readiness. In the digital era, where employers increasingly evaluate candidates' online presence before hiring decisions, students who can present a unified and credible professional identity through LinkedIn profiles, academic portfolios, and organizational participation demonstrate significantly greater career preparedness. These findings contribute to the growing body of evidence suggesting that career readiness is not solely determined by academic achievement, but is substantially shaped by students' proactive identity management and professional visibility (Bandura, 2020).

Taken together, the simultaneous contribution of Career Adaptability and Personal Branding to Career Readiness ($R^2 = 0.486$) highlights the complementary nature of these two constructs in fostering graduate preparedness. While career adaptability equips students with internal psychosocial resources to manage career uncertainty, personal branding enables them to strategically communicate their professional value to potential employers. These findings have important practical implications for higher education institutions, which should design integrated career development programs that cultivate both adaptive career competencies and deliberate personal branding skills among students.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Career Adaptability and Personal Branding each have a positive and significant effect on the Career Readiness of Generation Z university students in South Tangerang, Indonesia. Career Adaptability exerts a stronger direct influence ($\beta = 0.427$, $T = 4.112$) compared to Personal Branding ($\beta = 0.381$, $T = 3.780$), though both variables jointly explain 48.6% of the variance in Career Readiness ($R^2 = 0.486$). These findings underscore that adaptive capacity and strategic professional identity development are indispensable factors in preparing Generation Z students for the demands of the contemporary labor market. Based on these findings, higher education institutions are strongly encouraged to integrate structured career adaptability training encompassing career concern, control, curiosity, confidence, and change adaptability into their curricula. Simultaneously, institutions should develop systematic personal branding programs that guide students in building consistent digital presence, credibility, and professional identity across relevant platforms. Career counseling centers should further leverage these insights to deliver targeted, evidence-based career development interventions. This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample size of 103 respondents, while adequate for PLS-SEM, limits the generalizability of findings to broader populations. Future research should employ larger, more diverse samples across multiple institutions. Second, this study focused exclusively on two predictors of career readiness; future studies should examine additional variables such as self-efficacy, digital literacy, or social capital. Third, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; longitudinal designs would provide stronger evidence of the developmental trajectory of career readiness among Generation Z students.

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