

Research Article

Personal Brand Logo and Student Course Engagement in Undergraduate Introductory Marketing Courses

Phillip Frank¹, Mary Judene Nance¹

¹ Marketing, Pittsburg State University, USA

Keywords: Personal Brand Logo, Student Engagement, Pedagogy

<https://doi.org/10.63963/001c.156226>

Journal for Advancement of Marketing Education

Vol. 34, Issue 1, 2026

Personal Brand Logos (PBL's)] have been utilized in business courses to encourage professional development (Montoya & Vandehey, 2002), leadership (Rampersad, 2009) and creative design (Kucharska & Mikolajczak, 2018) among others. This also comes on the helm of the Personal Branding Phenomenon (Khedher, 2018) which argues that individuals are adopting marketing principles to position themselves effectively in the professional landscape. The current study will extend the literature by adopting the Personal Branding approach to increase student success in the classroom. Students enrolled in an introductory marketing course were asked to develop a Personal Brand Logo (PBL) that they would wear throughout the course. Data was collected on knowledge and skill development as well as personal reflection essays. Findings support the utilization of PBL's to encourage engagement and retention among all students and specifically among students who claimed low interest in the material.

Introduction

Brand logos have the power to elicit cognitive and emotional resources in the marketplace (Keller, 1993). Keller and Aaker's Brand Equity model (Aaker, 1992; Keller, 1993) set out to demonstrate the financial contribution that logos can have on products. Various studies have been conducted to explore the processes, antecedents and consequences of logo adoption on products and services (Burnham et al., 2003; see Fa & Khomehchi, 2024). Furthermore, this is a core knowledge that marketing educators aim to teach students at all levels in marketing curriculum.

More recently, personal brand logos (PBLs) have been promoted as a means to apply this similar process to the advocacy of individuals in various situations (Frank, 2025; Kucharska & Mikolajczak, 2018; Rampersad, 2009). PBLs have been adopted in multiple approaches including professional development and career preparedness (Frank, 2025), digital content management (Kucharska & Mikolajczak, 2018), entrepreneurship (Vitberg, 2010) and others. While these applications have focused on specific upper-division courses, there has been a dearth of articles that illustrate its usage in student engagement, retention, and success in introductory marketing courses. Introductory marketing courses provide an important environment in which to apply personal brand logos due to their broader audience and higher than average dropout rates (Krueger & Storlie, 2015). In their 2024 article in the *Journal for*

the Advancement of Marketing Education, Valdez, Villegas and Penn undertook a study that reviewed the teaching of personal branding on LinkedIn. The authors indicate that marketing faculty should be encouraged to teach personal branding earlier in a business program. Thus, the current study provides a case study of one application of personal brand logos in undergraduate introductory marketing courses.

Literature Review

Brand Placebo Effect

In their 2014 article, Ji Kyung Park and Deborah Roedder John tested the amount and process of influence that brand logos can have on a person's performance in academic and athletic situations. Students were given either branded or unbranded pens in test environments and branded or unbranded athletic apparel in exercise environments. Across the studies, Park and John (2014) found that branded items could influence performance and were especially influential when students held entity theorist mindsets through enhanced self-efficacy in the specific field under investigation. In their suggestions for future research, Park and John (2014) posited that, by using well-established brands, the associations that consumers attribute to the logos would be consistent and aligned with the task being performed by participants. However, this assumes that all consumers as-

sociate the brands with similar attributes and in a favorable manner.

Garvey, Germann, and Bolton (2016) extended this approach to show that the adoption of attributes assigned to brand names and logos by participants was similar to a placebo effect. The authors stated, “The performance brand placebo is due to a lowering of task-induced anxiety, driven by heightened state self-esteem” (pg. 931). Thus, as a person’s level of anxiety lowers, their perceived focus on the task at hand increases and their self-confidence in achieving the desired outcome also shows positive shifts.

The “Placebo Effect” met considerable interest in marketing literature with researchers contributing to the field by testing its effect on various consumer decision-making processes including price perceptions (Shiv et al., 2005), healthy food purchasing (Huang et al., 2024), cheating (Gino et al., 2010), Country of Origin effect (Lazzari & Slongo, 2015), and others. However, not all literature suggests that the Placebo Effect results in positive outcomes for the consumer. In their 2020 article in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Banker, Gosline, and Lee argued that when utilized in a service-oriented scenario, such as branded golf lessons, the Placebo Effect could act as a source of increased anxiety. “...unlike performance-enhancing products, which act as teammates serving and assisting consumers in achieving performance goals, performance-enhancing experiences act as coaches demanding outcomes from consumers, who take on a more subservient apprentice role,” (pg. 140). The researchers conducted an experiment where college students participated in a brain-training exercise that was either branded with NASA logos or no logos. They found that students in the branded scenarios answered a significantly lower number of questions than in the non-branded group, leading the authors to conclude that in certain situations, premium logos can create a “brand-as-master” situation where consumers attempt to live up to the prescribed expectations of the brand which can lead to negative results.

It is worth noting that each of these studies utilize existing brand logos and the average associations that society prescribes to these brands. However, the current study looks to investigate personal brand logos and their effect on student engagement, comprehension and learning in introductory marketing courses. By having individuals design their own brands, associations attributed to the brand as well as Brand Equity are known.

Personal Brand Literature

Personal branding has been a popular development in modern society and relates to an individual’s creating a logo specific to them as a tool to promote self in the market (Khedher, 2015). It presents an individualist approach where every person may be considered a brand. Khedher (2015) proposes that Personal Branding is a three-stage process: first, a person develops a personal brand identity by investing attributes that have cultural capital within established organizational fields; second, a person manages their brand’s position by managing impressions through

both non-verbal and verbal behaviors; and third, the person assesses based on feedback from society.

The personal branding phenomenon has been popularized throughout the last 30 years through the expansion of popular press books on self-improvement. In his 1997 book entitled *The Brand Called You*, Tom Peters promotes the self-branding approach as a method for personal career advancement. He states, “We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You.” (pg. xi). The book walks a person through the activity of creating a personal brand and provides best practices for marketing your personal brand to career advancement. Peters (1997) argues a person should be using the same methods that companies use in establishing and managing their brands in the marketplace. Readers are encouraged to write their own mission statements, brand manifestos, and marketing plans as it relates to personal advancement in their respective careers.

The personal branding phenomenon has also seen application in educational settings. PBLs have been utilized in business courses focused on professional development (Montoya & Vandehey, 2002), leadership (Rampersad, 2009), creative design (Kucharsha & Mikolajczak, 2018), and accounting (Vitberg, 2010) among others. In their book titled, *The Personal Branding Phenomenon: Realize greater influence, explosive income growth and rapid career advancement by applying the branding techniques of Oprah, Martha and Michael* by Montoya and Vandehey (2002), the authors denote how the concepts of personal branding can be used in business courses to best position a student as they enter into the marketplace. The authors provide “Eight Laws” that personal brand builders should follow to manage their equity in their profession. These laws consist of leadership, specialization, personality, distinctiveness, visibility, persistence, unity, and goodwill. Each chapter uses well-known brands such as Oprah and Martha Stewart to illustrate these laws in the establishment and management of their brand over time. The book ends by challenging users to adopt a corporate branding mindset in how they approach their professional careers.

Rampersad’s (2009) book titled, *Authentic Personal Branding: A new blueprint for building and aligning a powerful leadership brand* focuses on how to utilize the personal branding mindset to developing leadership qualities. The author focuses on authenticity’s role in effective leadership and posits that people follow leadership who seem identifiable. Through personal branding, the author posits that a person can develop admirable leadership qualities and project them to the target audience. Regarding the generation of an individual’s brand the author argues that “...your personal brand should emerge from your search for your identity and meaning in life and it is about getting very clear on what you want, accepting it, fixing it in your mind, giving it all your positive energy, doing what you love and improving yourself continuously.” (pg. xiii).

Kucharsha and Mikolajczak (2018) expanded the practice of personal branding into the knowledge economy. In their 2018 article, they looked at artists and found that personal

branding was important to establishing the necessary network connections needed to be successful in art-related fields. Expanding on this, Kucharsha (2022) wrote a book entitled, *Personal Branding in the Knowledge Economy: The Inter-relationship between Corporate and Employee Brands*. In it, the author suggests that the practice should be applicable to any profession in the knowledge-based economy. “Personal branding in the new-networked reality became a new in-demand skill for all professionals today... personal brands are predominantly a tool for the self-presentation in the networked reality. To be well-known and be known for the best, personal branding activity helps to achieve success in the networked business environment” (pg. 1). The author provides a conceptual framework for the Personal Brand Equity Structure. The framework offers antecedents and pathways for personal brand equity to be developed. Specifically, self-confidence, self-esteem, self-vision, self-concept, and self-awareness are seen as being the foundational concepts by which personal brands may be developed; reiterating the importance of self-reflection necessary for authentic personal branding to be possible.

Vitberg (2010) added the accounting profession to the list of business subjects to apply PBLs. He promoted a process by which individuals create a brand logo, craft personal brand equity statements, and manage their personal brand equity just like a firm develops and manages corporate brands. He argued that the accounting field (a knowledge-based industry) requires a strong network of connections. In addition, accounting professionals need awareness of one’s self to be successful. “Building a reputation in the accounting profession takes time but is critical to success. Traditionally, partners build their reputation, or personal brand, by pushing information out to clients, prospects and friends. The timeworn mantra “it’s not what you know, but who you know” has been a fundamental building block for counseling younger partners and rising stars.” (pg. 42). Vitberg recommends new accountants develop marketing plans for their personal brand including attributes that they deem important as well as marketing strategies for communicating these messages to the market.

More recent studies include addressing leaders’ personal branding tactics specifically as it relates to the use of social media platforms (Venciute et al., 2024). Venciute and colleagues found that organizational leaders developed and maintained their personal brand through social media platforms such as LinkedIn. Findings suggested personal and organizational outcomes were affected by executives’ strong focus on personal branding strategies. Specifically, the authors argued that leaders see associations between the organization’s brand and their own personal brand. At times, leaders can find tensions between maintaining their personal brand authenticity while still maintaining the best brand position for the organization.

Additional research has focused on the use of personal branding among students and young professionals. Loke & Zheng (2025) investigated the use of personal branding strategies among Chinese entrepreneurs. Salsabila and Putra (2025) showed how Emotional Intelligence and Learning Agility may impact a student’s proficiency with personal

branding strategies that lead to early career success. Valdez, Villegas and Penn (2024) apply Personal Branding on LinkedIn in an upper-level marketing course.

While the personal branding approach has been utilized in a variety of fields, there is a lapse in utilizing this approach when it comes to educational achievement including acquisition of knowledge, retention, engagement and self-efficacy in subjects. Higher education as an industry has seen considerable shifts over the last decade and institutions are increasingly aware of business metrics as a means for survival. Applying personal branding to educational experience seems a path that is positioned well for the modern environment.

Curriculum Development

In their 2007 article, Norm Borin, Lynn E. Metcalf, and Brian C. Tietje posit that marketing educators need to periodically evaluate their curriculum to ensure that content is up-to-date as well as administered in an effective manner that best fits the needs of the current student body. Incremental disruptions in the curriculum compound difficulties in educating. This can result in a discipline to misstep many areas. The authors cite five sources of curriculum disruptions: bureaucratic forces, personality and leadership change, market-driven forces, professional-driven change and learning community-based change. The authors propose a process that requires practitioners’ commitment, consensus, collaboration, and compromise as a means to instill a culture of innovation into the curriculum development in marketing departments.

Since this article, it seems that all five sources have imparted changes in the higher education industry, making it even more relevant for marketing instructors to assess and innovate in their methods of educating students. In her editor’s corner, Victoria Crittenden (2023) wrote about evolution vs. revolution in the marketing educational field. How COVID, the fragmentation of higher education industry and explosion of modalities and offerings for a decreasing base has created the unique zeitgeist that we face today. Taking these articles’ call to action, the current research looked to investigate core obstacles to student success. Academic engagement (Taylor et al., 2011) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) were found to be core antecedents to student success in early college courses (Honick & Broadbent, 2016; Richardson et al., 2012).

Student Engagement

Regarding higher education, research assesses engagement at the “macro level” where data is assessed at the institutional level with emphasis on retention and graduation rates (see Zhang, 2020). These approaches are increasingly being adopted by state and federal governments to assess the well-being and sustainability of institutions of higher learning. However, an alternative focus on “micro-level” factors has been emphasized to some success (see Handelsman et al., 2005). In 2007, colleagues at the University of Colorado at Denver developed the Student Course Engagement Questionnaire (SCEQ) to assess student en-

agement at the individual course level. They posited a 23-item, 4-dimensional scale to measure the level of cognitive allocation to the course as an indication of student engagement. They argued this allocation can be measured on four dimensions: skills, performance, emotion, and participation. The “skills” dimension looked to capture the degree to which students were applying the concepts presented in the course curriculum such as “taking good notes in class.” The “participation” factor looked at the interaction that students had with the instructor and other students with questions such as, “Helping other students.” The third factor was labeled as “emotional” which was to represent a student’s emotional involvement with the class material included questions such as, “Think about class material outside of class sessions.” The fourth and final dimension was labeled, “performance” which was aimed at capturing the student’s perceived mastery of the content and included items like, “Being confident that I can do well in the class.”

Since first being proposed in 2007, the SCEQ has been utilized by many researchers across various subjects to mixed results. Zhang (2020) utilized the SCEQ to investigate undergraduate students across all majors at a Chinese institution. Randell et al. (2024) investigated the usage of simulation in introductory business courses and the impact of student engagement. Many researchers have utilized the tool to investigate student engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Bozan et al., 2024). In summation, with over 900 citations, the SCEQ scale has established itself as a premier scale for investigating student involvement in course designs.

Methodology

Questionnaire Design

A multi-sectioned questionnaire was developed for this study, forms of which were administered for both the pre-test and the post-test. The first section of the questionnaire included basic demographic information including gender, year in school, major, current GPA, and age. Additionally, students were asked questions about their involvement with other student organizations and athletics. The second section of the survey started with a question on the student’s interest in the subject (marketing). This was measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1=Not at all Interested; 5=Extremely Interested). Then, participants were asked questions about their perceived understanding of key concepts that were to be covered in the course. These questions were designed to determine a base-level of perceived knowledge about these core concepts and was in line with university curriculum assessment policies. All items were measured on 10-point Likert-type scale with 1=Not at all knowledgeable and 10=Extremely Knowledgeable. The third section included the 23-item SCEQ developed by Handelman and colleagues (2005). These items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale with “1 = Not at all Characteristic of me” and “5 = Very Characteristic of me.” Finally, students were asked to come up with a unique 4-digit series that would serve as their unique identifier to be used during the 2nd iteration of the survey at the end of the semester.

Data Collection

In Fall 2023 and Spring 2024, students enrolled in the Principles of Marketing course were provided the following study administration. During the 3rd week of class, they completed the pre-test survey during class through Canvas; the online LMS used at the university. Students were informed that this was part of an overall course assessment and that responses would not impact their individual grade in the course.

Upon completion of the pre-test survey, and over the subsequent weeks in the semester, students were exposed to core introductory content in marketing as well as additional content built around Placebo Effect, authenticity, storytelling, history of marketing industry, and brand equity (see [Figure 1](#)). During the 8th week of the semester, students were given their midterm exam. After students received their grades for their midterm, students were provided with an extra credit activity where they were asked to create their own personal brand logo. Students were encouraged to utilize any software to create their logo (e.g. PowerPoint, Canva, etc.) but that the end logo had to fit in a 3-inch diameter circle. Students also had to write a short (1-2 page) description explaining their logo and the associations that they ascribed to it. After students had developed their personal brand logo, the instructor of the course brought into class a button-making machine. During class, students had the opportunity to make a button that had their logo on it.

Shortly after this activity, students were offered a second extra credit assignment. Students who opted into the study could select to wear their own personal brand logo or a button that contained the logo of the university they attended during class sessions throughout the remainder of the semester. Students who opted into this portion of the research were invited into a secure online Learning Management System (LMS) where they would complete check-ins as well as a self-reflection essay to be completed at the end of the semester. The self-reflection essay had open-end discussion questions such as, “What, if any, expectations did you have at the start of the time of them wearing the button? How did you feel wearing the button in public space? and Did you feel that wearing the button changed your experience in the course?” All essays were submitted via the online LMS and only available to the individual student and instructor of the course. No identifiable information was collected in the essays.

Finally, during the last week of class, all students enrolled in the course were asked to complete the post-test survey. The survey contained the same subject knowledge, level of engagement, self-efficacy, and demographic questions that they completed at the beginning of the semester. Students were asked to input their unique self-generated 4-digit code that they supplied at the pre-test in order to connect responses. The only additional questions added were 1) “Did you participate in the button research study?” and 2) “If so, did you wear your own personal brand logo or the button with the university’s logo?” An outline of the course can be found in [Figure 1](#).

Results

Across two semesters and a total of four sections of the course, a total 149 surveys were completed. Eighty students decided to participate in the Button Study with 72 wearing their own design. Due to low sample size, no comparison between personal design logo and university logo wearers was able to be performed. For the remainder of analysis, only the 72 personal design Button Study participants will be analyzed.

Demographics

Reviewing the demographic data, showed a relatively even composition of males and females across total enrolled and Button Study participants. There were no significant differences in gender, year in school or participating in student organization or student athletics across total and Button Study participants. The majority of participants were sophomores in college, as was consistent with the curriculum guidelines and structure of the course. Students' majors were diverse across both total and Button Study participants; with the highest being accounting (16.4%) and finance (16.4%). At 13.7%, marketing was the third most popular major. Collectively, we saw 57.8% of participants coming from a major within the College of Business, (accounting, economics, finance, management and marketing); with 10.9% from construction management, 6.8% from education, 5.5% from communication or sports management. Finally, nearly 60% of students were also members of other student organizations (59.7%) and 3.4 % were student athletes (see [Table 1](#)).

Analysis: Base of Knowledge

Looking at interest in the subject in the pre-test survey data, we saw 13.5% of total participants claiming Top 2 Box (9 or 10). The average score among all participants was 6.84 which was consistent across those who did participate in the study ($\mu_{\text{Button}} = 6.91$) and those who did not participate in the study ($\mu_{\text{NoButton}} = 6.77$). While study participants show a slightly higher average level of interest, this was not significantly different ($F=0.314$ $p=0.755$). This continues as we see the results of self-prescribed understanding of key content that was presented in the course with all items receiving a mean source of understanding ranging from 4.45 (History of Marketing Industry) to 6.58 (4 P's) with the majority of students denoting relatively low to middle knowledge about each of the items. It is worth noting that participants in the Button Study showed slightly higher levels of knowledge in most of the topic. Interestingly the two topics that Button Study participants scored lower on average were the 4P's and Global Marketing. This could be due to the extra credit associated with it or perhaps the activity connected with person on a level not aligned with their original understanding of the marketing discipline. The 4P's are a staple concept taught in many business courses in early college and high school. Nonparticipants may have ranked their perceived knowledge on these subjects higher in comparison to the other topics.

Analysis: PCA

Prior to any analysis, it is important to test the reliability of the SCEQ scale. As a first step, a principal component factor analysis was performed. Eigenvalues of over 1 were extracted. Initial PCA showed a 4-factor model with Eigenvalues over 1.0. Two items from Skills, 3 items from Participation and 1 item from Emotional Engagement were removed leaving a 4 dimension, 17 item model which explained 71.3% of total variance and all Eigenvalues over 1.0.

Cronbach alpha was calculated using IBM SPSS version 28. The data showed factor-loadings level for the revised 4-factor, 17-item model to all be acceptable (≥ 0.60) with relatively low crossloadings. In addition, 62.32% of the total variance was explained by the revised model. (see [Table 3](#)) Cronbach alphas were calculated for the adjusted dimensions. All received acceptable levels of reliability with values ranging from 0.855 (Skills) to 0.734 (Performance) (Cortina, 1993).

Analysis: Pre vs. Post

Utilizing the revised model, we analyzed results for those who participated in the Button study against those who chose not to participate. We see that there was no significant differences in initial scores across the two groups. Students who participated in the Button study showed an average score for Total Engagement of 3.371 while those who did not participate showed an average value of 3.414 ($t\text{-value}=0.979$). Looking at each underlining dimension, we see that Performance showed the highest mean at 3.808 for participants and 3.696 for non-participants. Participation showed the lowest mean at 2.873 for participants and 2.858 for nonparticipants. These means would suggest that students did not seem to be engaged in the course early in the semester. This was consistent across genders, and business or non-business majors, and would be partially expected for students in a new course.

In comparing results from both surveys we see that there was a significant change in the Total Engagement results across Button Study participants, ($\mu_{\text{EngagementPRE}} = 3.371$ vs. $\mu_{\text{EngagementPOST}} = 3.814$; $p < .001$). There was no significant change in Total Engagement among nonparticipants ($\mu_{\text{ButtonEngagePRE}} = 3.414$ vs. $\mu_{\text{ButtonEngagePOST}} = 3.669$). Looking at the individual dimensions, we see that among those that did participate in the Button study, their average scores across Emotional Engagement ($\mu_{\text{EmoPRE}} = 3.352$ vs. $\mu_{\text{EmoPOST}} = 3.657$; $p < .001$) and Participation /Interaction ($\mu_{\text{PartPRE}} = 2.873$ vs. $\mu_{\text{PartPOST}} = 4.153$; $p < .001$) were increased significantly. The strongest affect seemed to be among Participation leading one to conclude that the Button participation made students feel more participatory in the course. Looking at nonparticipants, we see that only Emotion saw a significant increase from the beginning of the semester to its conclusion ($\mu_{\text{EmoPRE}} = 3.344$ vs. $\mu_{\text{EmoPOST}} = 3.923$; $p < .001$). This would lead one to speculate that even those students who did not participate in the study felt more emotionally connected to the class over the semester.

Table 1. Participant Profiles

Items	Total (n=149)	Button (n=72)	No Button (n=77)
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	56.4	55.6	57.1
Female	42.3	43.1	41.6
Other	1.3	1.3	1.3
<u>Year in School</u>			
Freshmen	15.4	15.4	15.4
Sophomore	69.9	70.8	69.1
Juniors	13.4	12.5	14.2
Seniors / N/A	1.3	1.3	1.3
<u>Intended Major</u>			
Accounting	16.4	16.7	16.1
Finance	16.4	19.4	13.6
Marketing	13.7	13.9	13.4
Management	10.0	12.5	7.7
All Business Majors	57.8	59.7	56.0
Construction Management	10.9	12.5	9.5
Education	6.8	6.9	6.7
Communication / Graphic Design	5.5	8.3	3.0
Sports Management	5.5	6.9	4.2
All Other Majors	13.5	5.7	20.8
"Yes" participating in student organization	59.7	58.3	61.0
"Yes" a student athlete	10.1	13.9	6.5

Table 2. Interest in Subject and Base of Knowledge

Items	Total (n=149)	Button (n=72)	No Button (n=77)
How interested are you in the subject of Marketing			
Top 2 Box	13.5	13.1	13.8
Bottom 2 Box	11.4	15.3	7.8
Mean	6.84	6.91	6.77
<u>How knowledgeable do you feel on the following subjects</u>			
	μ_{Total}	μ_{Button}	$\mu_{NoButton}$
Marketing Mix	5.30	5.58	5.04
History of the Marketing Industry	4.45	4.46	4.44
Ethics in Marketing	5.47	5.64	5.31
Professional Marketing Organizations	4.62	4.69	4.55
Digital marketing	5.84	6.26	5.45
The 4 P's	6.58	6.30	6.84
The role Marketing holds in society	6.25	6.49	6.03
Legal and regulatory governance in marketing	4.53	4.54	4.52
Global Marketing	5.12	5.05	5.18

The impact of Button Study participation seems more evident when we look at the change in knowledge over the course. [Table 4](#) shows the change in mean score for Button

Study participants and nonparticipants. We see that both groups showed an increase in knowledge over the course of the semester; as one would hope. However, this increase

Table 3. PCA Results for Revised 4 Dimensions, 17-item Model

Items	Factor Loading	Variance Explained
Engagement		62.32%
<u>Skills (6 items) $\alpha=0.855$</u>		<u>20.93%</u>
Doing all the homework problems	.670	
Taking good notes in class	.763	
Looking over class notes between classes to make sure I understand the material	.725	
Putting forth effort	.700	
Being organized	.642	
Listening carefully in class	.633	
<u>Emotional (4-items) $\alpha=0.834$</u>		<u>14.29%</u>
Thinking about the course between class meetings	.613	
Really desiring to learn the material	.602	
Finding ways to make the course material relevant to my life	.835	
Applying course material to my life	.880	
<u>Participation / Interaction (3-items) $\alpha=0.786$</u>		<u>13.64%</u>
Raising my hand in class	.830	
Going to the professor's office hours to review assignment	.654	
Having fun in class	.616	
<u>Performance (3-items) $\alpha=0.784$</u>		<u>13.45%</u>
Getting a good overall grade	.860	
Doing well on the exams	.665	
Being confident that I can learn and do well in the class	.700	

in knowledge is more pronounced among those who participated in the Button Study with the average gain being 2.73 among Button Study participants and 2.05 average increase among those who did not participate ($t\text{-score}=3.02$; $p < .001$). Looking at specific topics, most topics showed a significantly higher increase in skills learn among Button Study participants and No Button participants. The only topic that did not see a significantly different change was Digital Marketing. This topic is only introduced in the introductory course; with later courses going into more detail. This suggests that learning outcomes showed significantly higher improvement among those who participated in the study.

Analysis: Moderating Effect of Interest in Subject

We next examined whether interest in the subject had a moderation effect. First, we performed a median split and divided groups into High- and Low-Interest. Results showed that interest in the subject did moderate the impact of the Button Study ($F=4.542$; $p < 0.05$). Specifically, those with lower ascribed interest in marketing at the start of the semester showed higher change in engagement by the end of the semester. This was primarily due to significantly higher gains in Participation and Performance dimensions. One would conclude from this analysis that the Button Study showed a positive impact on student engagement

over the course of the semester and that this increase was inversely related to the student's interest in the subject.

Analysis: Student Essays

The final stage of analysis allows us to investigate the written essays from participants in the Button Study about their experiences. As a reminder, all students were required to write an essay about the creation of their personal logo. They were asked to address the components of the logo and meaning associated with these components. Additionally, for students who opted into the Button Study, at the conclusion of the semester, students wrote essay responses to address key questions (What were your expectations as you started this activity? How difficult was it to wear your button in public? Do you feel your effort in the course changed? Why/Why not? Do you feel you comprehended the material better after starting the project? Why?/Why not?) The next section of this paper will present the analysis of students' responses for themes.

Process for Creating Personal Brand Logo

When asked about how students developed their personal brand logo, students appeared to draw from two different perspectives. The first perspective was from a lens of professional advancement where the focus was on how

Table 4. SCEQ Results

Items	Button (n=72)		No Button (n=77)	
	<u>Pre-test</u>	<u>Post-test</u>	<u>Pre-test</u>	<u>Post-test</u>
Total Engagement	3.371	3.814**	3.414	3.669
Participation	2.873	4.153**	2.858	3.021
Performance	3.808	3.912	3.696	3.965
Skill	3.601	3.750	3.615	3.632
Emotion	3.352	3.657*	3.344	3.923**
ΔBase of Knowledge	Button (n=72)		No Button (n=77)	
Δ Marketing Mix	2.55		1.51**	
Δ History of the Marketing Industry	3.51		2.45**	
Δ Ethics in Marketing	3.15		2.53*	
Δ Professional Marketing Organizations	2.47		1.62**	
Δ Digital marketing	1.75		1.38	
Δ The 4 P's	2.92		2.40*	
Δ The role Marketing holds in society	2.55		2.24	
Δ Legal and regulatory governance	2.98		2.21**	
Δ Global Marketing	2.66		2.15*	
Average Δ	2.73		2.05**	
t-score	2.053**			

* = p<.05

** = p<.01

Table 5. Moderating Affect of Interest in Subject

Items	Low (n=74)	High (n=75)
ΔTotal Engagement	0.324	0.110
Δ Participation	1.217	0.538
Δ Performance	0.353	0.021
Δ Skill	0.157	0.006
Δ Emotion	0.112	0.105

their PBL would be perceived in the specific professional field that they inspired to pursue.

Participant A: “I was aiming to embody a simple, honest, and professional meaning to the logo. With countless other construction competitors in the market, both small local, to large outsiders I wanted to create something different. A common trend...was that they overwhelmed their services. Having a company name, logo, slogan, big pictures, contact info, and an endless list of the services that company offers (roofing, siding, window, painting, concrete etc.) is far too much. This was something I was strictly trying to avoid, steering away from too much information while maintaining an attractive, simple and professional look.”

Participant B: “I wanted a design that look recognizable in the market. As I am going into graphic design, I

wanted something that was fun and creative that people in the industry would see and be impressed with.”

Alternatively, students approached their design with a personal narrative. Students discussed how there were aspects of their personal identity that they wanted to demonstrate in their logo. Stories of past experiences that impacted them greatly and were part of their personal narrative were expressed. Here, the position was less on what others, specifically professionals, would see in their logo and more about wanting to illustrate their identity as a reflection of their journey.

**Participant C:* “*When it came to designing my button, I did experience some struggles in the creative process. I easily could have made the button very surface-level and thrown on a couple of colors I prefer. However, I understood that if I hadn’t created a button

that felt personal, I wouldn't have been doing the study correctly. So, I decided to take time and truly figure out what kind of button I would feel a sense of pride with. I wanted to represent me. That's why I included a dove because I felt like since I was little, my religion was very important to me. And the dove is important to the promise that God made to Noah after the flood."

Participant D: "When I was creating my logo I wanted to tell my story. I wanted people to see it and see a part of me. For me, that meant including my pet dog. It is hardly ever a chance that people don't see me without my dog. I also wanted to use colors that I like and that expressed my personality"

Difficulty with wearing the button in public

Most students indicated that they felt somewhat conspicuous at first; however, once they started consistently wearing the buttons in the classroom students indicated that feeling disappeared rather quickly. In fact, from the comments below, it is apparent that students not only felt comfortable wearing the button in the classroom, but many would forget to take it off once they left the classroom. When this did occur, students did not feel uncomfortable wearing the button in public and some even felt proud.

Participant C: I had no problems showcasing my button in class... In class, if I forgot to put my button on, first I would look up and see others wearing their buttons and remember to put mine on... Indeed, my button represented me so well. It was clear that my classmates enjoyed wearing their buttons too because we all first thing would put it on even without a reminder. It was kind of like how some people rest their pencils on their ear but instead we pinned a button on our clothes. Really you just kind of forget it is there until you notice it. I can't reiterate that point more but seriously I would forget it was even on. Having to put it on was like routine.

Participant D: I would completely forget I was wearing it. There were times after class I would leave and did not realize I still had the button on until I got to the truck or sometimes home.

Perceived change in effort or comprehension

Responses to this question were more varied in nature with some students indicating their effort did indeed increase in the classroom while other students stated that they were not sure. Some students felt the effort they expended in the class was not dependent on the button and they give their full effort in a class no matter what stimuli may be introduced. Others commented on how drawing their attention to wearing their personal logo made them more aware of why they were in the class and the anticipated goals that they wanted to achieve throughout the course. By reminding themselves of their desired goals, students denoted how it made them focus more on making sure they exerted the effort deemed necessary to achieve those goals.

Participant G: Honestly, I find my effort in this class has both increased and decreased, I decreased my in-depth

reading of the textbook but increased the notes that I took and used in class.

Participant H: I think my effort in class changed slightly after starting the personal brand logo button project. By the end of the semester, wearing the button became part of my routine, and it almost subconsciously put me in a learning mindset when I entered the classroom. It made the transition into class time easier, especially after the weekend or a break. I'm also relatively shy around new people, but the button project helped me meet a few classmates. It helped serve as a great conversation starter. I found that talking about the meaning behind my button often opened the door for deeper conversations.

Students who claimed that their effort didn't change due to the experiment, provided comments of the experience still engaging them with the course. The activity of designing and wearing a personal brand logo connected the students to the class even if their perceived effort wasn't altered. All students who participated in the study denoted a positive experience and one they hope to be replicated in future course offerings.

Participant I: I don't think my effort in the course changed because of the button. I think getting the button was a refreshing change of pace that made the content more receivable for a time, however I don't believe it changed the overall effort I put into the course.

Participant J: I do not think that my effort changed due to wearing the button in class. It was a fun activity and it helped me to get more excited about coming to class. I also found myself talking to my friends about the button and then about the class. But I do not think my individual effort changed. Maybe just my excitement about coming to the class.

Do You Feel You Comprehended the Material Better After the Start of the Project?

It is quite evident that students did not feel that they comprehended the material any differently after starting the project. While a few did indicate a positive response, overall comments would indicate that this was not the case. Most students appeared to be motivated by wanting to obtain a good grade in the class and did not see how a button could provide the impetus. For those who did cite a connection with comprehension and participation in the study, it appeared that their initial expectations of the course content were less than other students. This would suggest that it was students who had less knowledge or interest in the subject who were more impacted in the area of comprehension while participating in the research. It should be reiterated that the Principles course is designed to provide a broad overview of a lot of marketing concepts. For students who have a business or marketing background or pre-existing intention to go into the field, many of the concepts would most likely have been previously seen. However, students from nonbusiness or marketing backgrounds appeared to have connected the button with the marketing concepts to better facilitate learning to occur.

Participant M: I'm not sure if I comprehended the material or lectures better after starting the button project. However, it might have helped because it facilitated my transition into class time. In a way, it gave my brain a little kickstart in the mornings. Since it helped me get into a marketing learning mindset, I would say it likely improved my ability to comprehend the material and information during class. I could see how it fit my personal goal of starting my own construction business. It created a subtle shift in my focus and made me feel more prepared to engage with the content being taught.

Participant N: Overall, I'd say that this social experiment has had no effect one way or another on my ability to comprehend the study material provided in class. It was fun to see how I could develop a logo that I could use in my future profession. I guess that it help me connect some of the concepts to what I plan to do after graduation

Discussion

In conclusion, the effects of the Personal Brand Logo (aka Button Study) showed positive effects on students' level of engagement in the course, increased knowledge and appreciation for the marketing concepts being taught. Documented through the SCEQ data, students denoted both emotional and participatory engagement increases over the course of the experiment. This suggests that by having students build something that is uniquely identifiable and connected to their own self-identity or career aspirations, the course became more relevant to them. As many students denoted in their comments, they felt that they *had to do better* because people saw their logo and associated it with their efforts in the course.

The study showed positive effects among less-interested students enrolled in the course. This suggests that this or similar type activities are ideally positioned for introductory courses and for early (first- or second-year) students. The button allowed for a personalized application of key marketing concepts which in turn allowed for students less familiar or interested in the subject to draw a parallel to marketing and areas where they had more interest.

Finally, as we move to encourage more entrepreneur curriculum and language in business courses (see Mai, 2024), activities like the PBL can serve to broaden the application of core business principles to a broader segment of a university's population. Through personalizing the concepts of the marketing curriculum, students would be more likely to visualize their time in higher learning as it relates to their career aspirations. One area for future investigation is a personal brand logo attached to a student's transcript or degree. As universities increase efforts to develop certificate programs through CRM software, by including a PBL activity that is then assigned to the student as they progress through their studies, might serve to facilitate personalization and affiliation to their efforts across all courses they take. Recent literature on Comprehensive Learner Records (CLRs) illustrates the growing discussion around these types of approaches to higher education (Munip & Klein-Collins, 2024; Wolf et al., 2022).

One similar example to this recommendation would be the inclusion of a student's Clifton Strength Finders profile to a student's transcripts that University of Nebraska at Lincoln does (Nebraska Today, 2022). While different in that there, the university is using a third-party affiliated personality assessment tool, here students would generate their own brand persona that they could carry with them throughout their academic tenure. It would also be another "deliverable" that students can utilize as they move out of college and into the workforce. PBL can be used on resumes, portfolios, personal LinkedIn pages and/or websites, all illustrating their personal journey and hopefully the impact that our faculty, staff and institutions may have along the path. While skepticism remains regarding the application for PBLs assignment to collegiate transcripts, we are seeing more and more personalization in collegiate deliverables.

Limitations & Future Research

While this study provides a good foundation to support the implementation of PBLs activities in marketing curriculum, there remain some limitations. One limitation would be sample size. As this study only collected research across 4 sections, it would be beneficial to have a larger sample pool. It would also be good to have students across different locations. Additionally, it could be beneficial to follow the student's performance in their courses after the study participation. A longitudinal study would further substantiate the claims of lasting impact that activities such as the one outlined in this paper have on student long-term success. Furthermore, it would be good to collect additional data from non-participants. This could include essays about why they did not participate, thoughts about the course, as well as perceptions of learning outcomes.

Overall, the current paper presents an example of one way that instructors can connect with the ever-changing profile of students in introductory courses. By providing an activity to allow students to develop a personal brand, instructors can facilitate the discussion on career aspirations and development plans. Additionally, by having the personal brand logo, students can become personally invested in their success in the course. Having a publicly visible design that students embed with meaning, it appears to connect with students' engagement from an emotional and participatory standpoint. Through this and similar methods, students with lower interest in the subject may see connection and persevere through difficult periods to achieve success in their academic pursuits.

Submitted: May 30, 2025 CDT. Accepted: February 01, 2026 CDT. Published: February 06, 2026 CDT.

Figure 1. Course Schedule

Week	Topics	Assignments Due
Week 1	Introductions: Syllabus Review	Syllabus Quiz
Week 2	Chapter 1: Marketing Industry	Assign Groups & Personal PPTs
Week 3	Chapter 2: Marketing Strategy	Pre-test survey
Week 4	Chapter 3: Ethics & Social Responsibility	Dan Ariely Ted Talk and write 1-paragraph essay on what ethics in marketing means to you.
Week 5	Chapter 4: Consumer Behavior	Video on data analytics and CB research in marketing
Week 6	Exam 1	
Week 7	Chapter 6: Global Marketing	Case study on Global Marketing
Week 8	Chapter 7: Marketing Research	Personal Brand Logo design submission
Week 9	Chapter 9: New Products	In-class activity to make button
Week 10	Chapter 10: Products, Service & Brands	Start wearing button in class
Week 11	Exam 2	
Week 12	Chapter 11: Pricing	Pricing activity
Week 13	Chapter 12: Marketing Channels	Guest speaker from global supply chain firm & LMS Check-in
Week 11	Fall Break: No Class	
Week 12	Chapter 13: Retailing & Wholesaling	Retailing activity
Week 13	Final Exam	
Week 14	Presentations	Reflection essay due



This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CCBY-4.0). View this license's legal deed at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0> and legal code at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode> for more information.

References

- Aaker, D. A. (1992). The value of brand equity. *Journal of Business Strategy*, 13(4), 27–32. <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb039503>
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. Freeman.
- Bozan, K., Gaskin, J., & Stoner, C. (2024). Student engagement in the HyFlex and online classrooms: Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic. *Technology, Knowledge and Learning*, 29(1), 509–536. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10758-023-09661-x>
- Burnham, T. A., Frels, J. K., & Mahajan, V. (2003). Consumer switching costs: A typology, antecedents, and consequences. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 31(2), 109–126. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0092070302250897>
- Cortina, J. M. (1993). What is coefficient alpha? An examination of theory and applications. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 78(1), 98. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.78.1.98>
- Crittenden, V. L. (2023). The scholarship of teaching and learning in marketing education. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 45(2), 103–108. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02734753231175048>
- Fa, F. A., & Khamsehchi, H. (2024). A Meta-Analysis of the Antecedents and Consequences of Customer-Based Brand Equity. *Quarterly Journal of Advertising and Sales Management*, 5(3), 14–36.
- Frank, K. (2025). Create Change: Your Creative Vision And Your Personal Brand. In *Raising Creative Teams: Practical Leadership for an Emotional Business* (pp. 163–181). Apress.
- Garvey, A. M., Germann, F., & Bolton, L. E. (2016). Performance brand placebos: How brands improve performance and consumers take the credit. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 42(6), 931–951. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucv094>
- Gino, F., Norton, M. I., & Ariely, D. (2010). The counterfeit self: The deceptive costs of faking it. *Psychological Science*, 21(5), 712–720. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797610366545>
- Handelsman, M. M., Briggs, W. L., Sullivan, N., & Towler, A. (2005). A measure of college student course engagement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 93(3), 184–191. <https://doi.org/10.3200/JOER.93.3.184-192>
- Honicke, T., & Broadbent, J. (2016). The influence of academic self-efficacy on academic performance: A systematic review. *Educational Research Review*, 17, 63–84. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2015.11.002>
- Huang, L., Song, X., Liu, M. T., Chang, W. Y., & Shi, G. J. (2024). Placebo effect in food marketing: Young consumers' perception of food healthiness and tastiness in reduced-sugar labeling. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 36(7), 1595–1615. <https://doi.org/10.1108/APJML-07-2023-0700>
- Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022424299305700101>
- Khedher, M. (2015). A Brand for everyone: Guidelines for personal brand management. *Journal of Global Business Issues*, 9(1), 18–27.
- Krueger, G. B., & Storlie, C. H. (2015). Evaluation of a flipped classroom format for an introductory-level marketing class. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 15(1), 19.
- Kucharsha, W. (2022). *Personal branding in the Knowledge Economy: The inter-relationship between corporate and employee brands*. NY Routledge Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003178248>
- Kucharsha, W., & Mikolajczak, P. (2018). Personal branding of artists and art-designers: necessity or desire? *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 27(3), 249–261.
- Lazzari, F., & Slongo, L. A. (2015). The placebo effect in marketing: The ability of country of origin to modify product performance. *Brazilian Business Review*, 12(5), 39–56. <https://doi.org/10.15728/bbr.2015.12.5.3>
- Mai, Y. (2024). A two-stage model for business school innovation and entrepreneurship curriculum development: From the cumulative learning perspective. *The Educational Review, USA*, 8(10). <https://doi.org/10.26855/er.2024.10.010>
- Montoya, P., & Vandehey, T. (2002). *The personal branding phenomenon: realize greater influence, explosive income growth and rapid career advancement by applying the branding techniques of Michael, Martha & Oprah*. Peter Montoya.
- Munip, L., & Klein-Collins, R. (2024). *Comprehensive Learner Records: Empowering lifelong learning in the digital age*. American Council on Education. ERIC. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED640046.pdf>
- Nebraska Today. (2022, April 4). *Students develop talents through Clifton Strengths Institute*. <https://news.unl.edu/article/students-develop-talents-through-clifton-strengths-institute>
- Park, J. K., & John, D. R. (2014). I think I can, I think I can: Brand use, self-efficacy, and performance. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 51(2), 233–247. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.11.0532>
- Peters, T. (1997). The brand called you. *Fast Company*, 10(10), 83–90.
- Rampersad, H. K. (2009). *Authentic personal branding: A new blueprint for building and aligning a powerful leadership brand*. Information Age Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-60752-181-5>
- Randall, G., Wysang, S., Dilla, B., & Stodnick. (2024). Thrown into the fire: Do simulations in an introductory business course increase student engagement. *The International Journal of Management Education*, 23(2), 101–149. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5005834>

- Richardson, M., Abraham, C., & Bond, R. (2012). Psychological correlates of university students' academic performance: A systematic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 138(2), 353–387. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026838>
- Salsabila, A. S., & Putra, B. (2025). Increasing Gen Z personal branding Using Emotional Intelligence. The mediating role of Learning Agility. *International Journal of Environmental Sciences*, 11(13). <https://doi.org/10.64252/7tb5fe11>
- Shiv, B., Carmon, Z., & Ariely, D. (2005). Placebo effects of marketing actions: Consumers may get what they pay for. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 42(4), 383–393. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.2005.42.4.383>
- Taylor, S. A., Hunter, G. L., Melton, H., & Goodwin, S. A. (2011). Student engagement and marketing classes. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 33(1), 73–92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0273475310392542>
- Valdez, C., Villegas, J., & Penn, D. (2024). A Blueprint for Marketing Faculty About How to Teach Personal Branding on LinkedIn Using Impression Management Behaviors. *Journal for the Advancement of Marketing Education*, 32(3), 18–42. <https://doi.org/10.63963/001c.155156>
- Venciute, D., April Yue, C., & Thelen, P. D. (2024). Leaders' personal branding and communication on professional social media platforms: motivations, processes, and outcomes. *Journal of Brand Management*, 31(1), 38–57. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-023-00332-x>
- Vitberg, A. (2010). Developing your personal brand equity: a 21st century approach. *Journal of Accountancy*, 210(1), 42–51.
- Wolf, A., Carbonaro, S., & Wolf, R. (2022). Empowering metacognitive learning in a competency-based curriculum in health professions through comprehensive learner record. *Intersection: A Journal at the Intersection of Assessment and Learning*, 3(2).
- Zhang, Z. (2020). Engaging with automated writing evaluation (AWE) feedback on L2 writing: Student perceptions and revisions. *Assessing Writing*, 43, 100439. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2019.100439>