



Personal Brands as the New Business Model: How Experts, Coaches, and Freelancers Can Leverage Social Media to Grow

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Abstract

This article examines the transformation of marketing strategies in the context of the digital economy, where the personal brand of a CEO has emerged as a key tool for building trust-based relationships with the audience. The evolution of the personal branding concept is analyzed, tracing its development from historical examples to contemporary digital practices that are prevalent today. Special attention is given to the significant role of social media platforms in shaping a leader's image and reputation, as well as the various functions that personal branding serves within a company's overall marketing strategy. Additionally, the article discusses the associated risks and challenges that come with cultivating a personal brand in an increasingly connected world. Through detailed case studies of prominent figures such as MrBeast, Emma Chamberlain, and Chris Brooker, various models of monetization and scaling personal brands are explored in both global and local contexts. These examples illustrate how different strategies can be employed to enhance visibility and engagement. The conclusion drawn is that in an era characterized by rapid digitalization, a CEO's personal brand transforms from being merely an optional element into a strategic asset that is capable of defining a business's competitive advantages and fostering long-term success. This shift underscores the importance of effective personal branding in today's marketplace.

Keywords: CEO Marketing, Content Monetization, Digital Strategies, Personal Brand, Social Media.

Currently, there is a shift in consumer experience that marketers utilize to engage with their audiences, where customization and emphasis on personality are becoming more important than merely following trends. Consequently, marketing professionals are compelled to develop promotion strategies that take into account consumers' individual characteristics. One intriguing method for establishing dialogue with audiences has been the phenomenon of personal branding. This approach not only alters sales mechanisms but also redefines traditional marketing strategies that rely on unconditional attachment to products and services. A personal brand represents an integration of individuality, reputation, and authenticity, making it a crucial element in building trust-based relationships with clients [11].

The idea of leveraging a personal brand in sales is not new. Historically, merchants and craftsmen have utilized their reputations and customer trust to promote their goods and services. For instance, during medieval Europe, artisans created unique marks to distinguish their products from those of competitors. These marks became symbols of quality and trustworthiness that attracted buyers [11].

In the 19th century, with the advent of mass production and advertising, the first commercial brands began to emerge; however, the personal connection between seller and buyer remained an essential component of successful sales. Notable figures such as Henry Ford actively used their personas to promote Ford automobiles or Thomas Edison whose reputation as an inventor contributed to his companies' success exemplify this point [8].

Thus, we can affirm that personal brands have always played a significant role in marketing; although their forms and methods have evolved over time and across cultural contexts.

Today's advancements in information technology and social media have opened new avenues for creating and promoting personal brands. Video hosting platforms, social networks, and messaging apps have enabled individuals to form virtual communities around their names based on shared thoughts and experiences [13].

This trend is particularly evident in small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), where communication with audiences typically occurs directly and fosters trust. In this context,

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CEOs can fulfill not only administrative and strategic roles but also actively participate in brand promotion by shaping its image through their media presence. Consequently, a leader's personal brand evolves into an independent and valuable marketing asset that requires systematic management and strategic oversight [10].

The term "personal brand" was popularized by American business author Tom Peters in 1997 when he asserted in his article "The Brand Called You" that every individual is a brand. Since then, this concept has undergone significant evolution and has secured its place within contemporary marketing and management theories [9].

Modern researchers define a personal brand as a collection of characteristics associated with a specific individual in the minds of target audiences. These characteristics encompass not only professional competencies but also communication style, visual identity, value system, as well as the emotional response elicited by that individual among others [6].

A personal brand, especially in the context of the digital environment, is viewed as a system of signs and meanings conveyed through various communication channels: social media, blogs, video content, public speaking engagements, participation in conferences, and interviews. It is formed at the intersection of an individual's real characteristics and their perceived image, making personal brand management a complex and multi-layered task [3].

From a marketing perspective, a personal brand is an asset capable of enhancing trust in a company, facilitating communication with clients, partners, and investors, as well as providing competitive advantages in saturated markets. The relevance of a personal brand becomes particularly pronounced in the digital environment, where access to information is simplified and audience attention is distributed based on personal engagement [7].

Digital marketing in the 21st century increasingly focuses on building not only transactional but also emotional connections with consumers. In an era of digital noise, where consumers encounter hundreds of advertising messages daily, it becomes evident that the brand that can establish trustworthy, "human" relationships with its audience will prevail. This is where a CEO's personal brand comes to the forefront, transforming into a key communication tool [12].

The digital environment offers CEOs extensive opportunities for direct dialogue with consumers. Platforms such as LinkedIn and YouTube allow leaders to convey brand values from a first-person perspective, share stories, comment on current events, and express expert opinions. All of this contributes to the formation of what is known as the presence effect, where consumers feel the "live" involvement of an individual in business processes and decisions, perceiving the brand as transparent and open [4].

The phenomenon of CEO influence also plays a significant

role. Unlike traditional influencers, CEOs can simultaneously be authorities within their professional communities, opinion leaders in their niches, and role models for employees and clients. Thus, their presence in digital media becomes a powerful channel for marketing influence [2].

Moreover, active participation by CEOs in the digital space contributes to the growth of brand media capitalization. Research shows that companies whose founders or top executives actively engage in public communication are more frequently noticed by the media, receive mentions in analytical reports, and garner greater trust from investors. A personal brand thus serves as a reputational buffer and a factor of resilience during crisis periods [1].

When considering CEOs as marketing assets, several key functions that a leader's personal brand can perform within a company's digital strategy should be highlighted:

1. **Value Transmission Function:** A leader who openly demonstrates their position, views, and ethics helps shape the company's value framework and attract clients with aligned beliefs.
2. **Trust Function:** Personalizing business through the CEO enhances trust levels. People tend to trust not anonymous logos but specific individuals with recognizable faces, stories, and voices.
3. **Attention Attraction Function:** Publications, speeches, and activities by CEOs generate organic reach and attract audiences often more effectively than traditional advertising.
4. **Differentiation Function:** In competitive markets where products and services are similar in characteristics, it is often the leader's personality that can become a unique selling proposition (USP).
5. **Corporate Culture Function:** The public image of a CEO influences not only how clients perceive the brand but also internal processes—employee motivation, talent attraction, and corporate identity formation [5].

Thus, a CEO with a strong personal brand becomes not only a strategist and manager but also the face, voice, and value core of the company. Their public presence is not a threat but rather a resource when strategically managed.

Building a strong personal brand in the digital environment is impossible without a strategic selection of communication channels and the effective use of appropriate tools. Today, there is a wide range of digital platforms, each with its own specifics, interaction formats with the audience, and levels of engagement.

Social media plays a key role in shaping and disseminating the personal brand of a CEO. The following platforms are particularly relevant:

1. **TikTok** – a visual platform that allows for the creation of an emotional connection with the audience. The behind-

the-scenes format, short videos featuring personal insights, reactions to news, and storytelling through Reels and Stories are in high demand here.

2. LinkedIn – a professional platform ideally suited for establishing an expert image, publishing analytical notes, case studies, management reflections, and showcasing company achievements. LinkedIn strengthens trust among partners, investors, and potential employees.
3. YouTube and podcasts – formats for deeper engagement with the audience. Vlogs, interviews, educational videos, and original formats allow for the demonstration of professional depth and speaker charisma.

Creating original content is a crucial element of branding. This includes:

1. Articles, essays, and blogs (on Medium, Substack, in corporate magazines),
2. Video formats – from short clips to full-length documentary stories,
3. Email newsletters and personalized letters to subscribers,
4. Online courses, workshops, and live broadcasts.
5. Publications and participation in events are also significant.

Speaking at professional conferences, participating in podcasts and interviews not only enhances the personal brand but also conveys the company's expertise.

Engagement in media projects, citations in industry publications, and articles in platforms like Forbes, Business Insider, Fast Company, among others allow CEOs to reach beyond their immediate audience and strengthen their reputation at the industry level.

Thus, the ecosystem of a personal brand is built through multichannel and targeted communication. It is essential that all channels convey a unified message, visual aesthetics, and value framework.

Despite the obvious advantages, using a CEO's personal brand as a marketing tool comes with several risks and limitations that require careful consideration and readiness to manage consequences.

High visibility increases vulnerability to reputational threats. An inappropriate statement, ethically questionable behavior, or an unsuccessful PR campaign can impact not only the CEO's personal image but also the reputation of the entire company. Instances of "cancel culture" are becoming increasingly common, especially on social media.

Excessive personalization can blur the lines between personal life and professional activity. This carries risks of losing focus, burnout, as well as uncontrolled dissemination of personal information.

In companies where the brand heavily relies on the CEO's personality, issues with sustainability and succession may arise. The departure or reputational blow to a leader can weaken the brand's market position. Therefore, it is important to simultaneously develop the corporate brand to ensure balance.

There is no image that will appeal equally to everyone. Positioning a CEO entails certain polarization: some audience members will identify with them while others will not. This is an inevitable process that requires thoughtful selection of target audiences and communication styles.

In the context of a digital economy, a company's leader's personal brand transforms from an optional element into a strategic asset capable of directly influencing marketing metrics, brand recognition, and audience trust. While traditional marketing still relies on product features and value propositions, digital marketing demands lively, personalized communication centered increasingly around the figure of the CEO.

A leader who consciously shapes and develops their personal brand has the opportunity to convey the company's mission and values through their own expertise and charisma. This not only strengthens the corporate brand but also provides sustainable competitive advantages—especially in small- to medium-sized enterprises where reputational trust plays a crucial role.

Nevertheless, leveraging a personal brand requires a strategic approach along with a well-thought-out content strategy that includes flexibility and readiness to manage potential reputational risks. Only under systematic management and continuous monitoring of the digital environment can a CEO's personal brand effectively serve as a marketing tool.

Thus, as a media figure, the CEO becomes not just the face of the company but also its voice and value—and in some cases—the primary driver of growth. In an era marked by constant digitalization within business environments, developing a leader's personal brand can be viewed as one of modern management's key competencies.

The personal brand in this digital age evolves into a full-fledged business model—especially for bloggers and entrepreneurs. We will examine case studies involving MrBeast (Jimmy Donaldson), Emma Chamberlain, and Chris Burkard from perspectives including strategy, monetization potential on an international scale as well as associated risks.

American YouTuber and entrepreneur MrBeast (real name – Jimmy Donaldson) have built one of the most successful personal brands in the digital age, transforming it into a multimillion-dollar media empire. His strategy is based on a combination of spectacular content, large-scale philanthropy, and the ability to create an emotional connection with a global audience. The primary platforms he operates on are

YouTube, TikTok, Twitter, and Instagram, but long-form video content remains the main driver of his business.

MrBeast's monetization extends far beyond standard YouTube advertising. He actively utilizes sponsored integrations (for example, with brands like Quidd, Honey, and current partners) and develops his own business projects: the MrBeast Burger chain and the Feastables confectionery brand. Additionally, merchandise sales play a significant role in strengthening fan loyalty.

A key factor in MrBeast's success is the deep attachment of his audience, achieved through extreme challenges and charitable initiatives. His videos such as "I Gave Away \$1,000,000 to Random People!" or "48 Hours in a Locked Store" create an image of a "philanthropic superhero" who not only entertains but also changes lives. His primary audience consists of teenagers and young adults who see him as an example of someone capable of "doing the impossible."

MrBeast's content strategy operates on several levels:

1. YouTube – high-budget videos with cinematic quality where each clip becomes an event.
2. TikTok and Shorts – adapted snippets from main videos to capture the attention of younger viewers.
3. Social media – constant interaction with fans through polls, discussions, and personal messages.

However, this model carries risks. Firstly, there is a dependence on an expensive format: if the audience grows tired of hyperbolized challenges, it will be difficult to pivot. Secondly, philanthropy as a content strategy sometimes faces criticism—some viewers and media accuse MrBeast of "capitalizing on kindness," arguing that helping those in need should not be part of a show.

Despite this, MrBeast remains a benchmark for personal branding in the digital economy. He is not just a content creator but a full-fledged media mogul whose business model is based on audience trust and the ability to monetize attention. His success demonstrates that a CEO's personal brand can be more than just an addition to a business; it can be its primary asset.

American YouTuber and entrepreneur Emma Chamberlain (full name – Emma Frances Chamberlain) has become one of the most influential figures of the digital age by redefining content standards for Generation Z. Her success is built on radical authenticity, an intimate storytelling style, and the ability to turn everyday life into art. The main platforms where she operates are YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and podcast platforms; however, her YouTube channel (with over 11 million subscribers) became the starting point for creating a multifaceted media business.

Emma Chamberlain's monetization goes beyond standard YouTube advertising. She actively collaborates with luxury brands (Louis Vuitton, Cartier, Lancôme), develops

her own projects (the coffee brand Chamberlain Coffee, merchandise, podcast Anything Goes), and even publishes books. Her podcast—recorded "straight from bed"—combines philosophical reflections with personal stories and spontaneous interviews, garnering millions of listens.

A key factor in her success has been authenticity as a content strategy. Emma Chamberlain has rejected the glossy style of traditional influencers in favor of "unpolished" sincerity: her videos are often shot without editing, featuring messy hair and candid conversations about everyday anxieties. This approach—termed "a new era of YouTube realism"—resonated with millennials and Gen Z who are tired of staged content. Her evolution from YouTube to multiplatform presence includes early viral videos (such as unboxing purchases from discount stores), her podcast Anything Goes (over 350 episodes), where she discusses everything from fashion to existential crises, and 15 million followers on Instagram where she blends personal moments with collaborations (Levi's, Calvin Klein).

Emma Chamberlain's business projects such as Chamberlain Coffee, merchandise sales, and books not only supplement her income but also strengthen her connection with fans by reflecting her personal brand as "the girl who loves iced coffee." However, her journey is not without risks: in 2021 she took a break from YouTube admitting that she felt like "an animal in a zoo" due to constant attention. Additionally, there is criticism regarding the commercialization of authenticity—some viewers believe that her openness has become part of carefully crafted marketing.

Emma Chamberlain's cultural influence extends beyond social media. She symbolizes a shift in digital culture that predicts "the death of mainstream content" while urging audiences to seek depth beyond trends. Her collaborations with Lancôme and Vogue (where she became one of the youngest interviewers at Met Gala) confirm her transition from "influencer" to media icon status. Emma Chamberlain has proven that a personal brand can be profitable without grand special effects—authenticity alone suffices when combined with strategic multiplatform presence and the ability to turn weaknesses into strengths. Her story represents an evolution from "the girl with a camera" to CEO of her own empire where content, coffee, and philosophy merge into one product. Like MrBeast, she demonstrates that in the digital economy audience trust is the primary currency; however, unlike him, her strength lies not in scale but in depth of connection with each subscriber.

American photographer and artist Chris Burkard has created a unique business model for his personal brand that successfully combines creative self-realization with commercial sustainability. Working primarily for an international audience through Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, and his personal website, Burkard showcases an alternative approach to monetizing creative content that differs from traditional influencer strategies. His model is

based on multichannel income diversification: from selling photographs and artworks to sponsorship contracts with brands like Sony and Patagonia; conducting workshops; and publishing authored books. This approach allows him to maintain creative independence while ensuring stable financial flow.

The hallmark of Chris Burkard's brand lies in crafting an image as a "philosopher-traveler," which transcends that of an ordinary photographer. His content combines visual aesthetics featuring breathtaking landscapes with profound reflections on creativity's meaning; nature; and humanity's place in today's world. This positioning resonates with a specific yet loyal audience composed of creative professionals; photography enthusiasts; and adventure tourism lovers. Unlike mass influencers who cater broadly to audiences for entertainment purposes alone; Chris Burkard consciously targets the premium segment by offering inspiration alongside professional insights.

Chris Burkard's content distribution strategy demonstrates deep understanding across various platforms' nuances. On Instagram and YouTube, he emphasizes visually rich materials—from captivating landscape photography to behind-the-scenes footage during shoots. LinkedIn serves as his platform for publishing expert articles about

entrepreneurship within creative fields which bolsters his reputation among professionals. His personal website features long essays revealing philosophical approaches toward creativity; life; thus, creating additional value for devoted fans while catering different levels engagement across audiences.

However, Burkard's business model is not without vulnerabilities. The primary risk stems from relatively niche audience limitations which restrict scaling potential compared mass influencers possess comparatively larger followings. Furthermore, significant reliance upon sponsorship contracts major brands creates certain vulnerabilities—shifts marketing strategies sponsors economic fluctuations could impact this revenue source. It's also worth noting high competition premium travel photography segment necessitates continual updates content strategies maintaining exceptional quality work.

Despite these challenges Chris Burkard exemplifies successful case building sustainable creative businesses within digital age. His experience affirms even amidst dominance mass-content there exists space premium personal brands merging artistic value commercial viability. This model gains particular relevance context growing demand authentic meaningful-content among specific segments digital audiences.

Table 1. Key Differences Between MrBeast, Emma Chamberlain, and Chris Burkard

Criterion	MrBeast (Jimmy Donaldson)	Emma Chamberlain	Chris Burkard
Main Platforms	YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter	YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, podcast platforms	Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, personal website
Content Strategy	High-budget videos featuring extreme challenges and philanthropy; Adaptation of content for Shorts/TikTok	Authentic, "unpolished" style; philosophical podcasts and everyday content; Collaborations with luxury brands	Visually aesthetic landscapes + philosophical reflections; expert articles on LinkedIn; premium content
Monetization	Advertising and sponsored integrations (Honey, Quid); own businesses (MrBeast Burger, Feastables); merchandise	Luxury collaborations (Louis Vuitton, Lancôme); podcasts; coffee brand (Chamberlain Coffee); books and merchandise	Sale of photographs and art; sponsorships (Sony, Patagonia); workshops; books
Audience	Teenagers and young adults (mass reach)	Generation Z and millennials (tired of "gloss")	Creative professionals, photographers, travel enthusiasts (niche premium audience)
Key Success	Emotional connection through large-scale initiatives and the image of a "philanthropic superhero"	Deep authenticity, "filterless realism," + multiplatform presence	Combination of art and philosophy, creating inspiring content for a narrow audience
Risks	Dependence on expensive formats; criticism of philanthropy as part of a show	Burnout from hyper-honesty; accusations of commercializing sincerity	Narrow niche limits scalability; dependence on sponsors
Uniqueness	Media empire built on virality and extreme content	Redefining "influencing" through intimacy and multifacetedness (coffee, podcasts, fashion)	Creative business without compromises that combines art and entrepreneurship
Business Model	Personal brand → Media company → Products (food, merchandise)	Personal brand → Luxury collaborations → Own products (coffee, podcasts)	Personal brand → Sale of art + Educational products (workshops, books)

All three cases demonstrate that a personal brand can serve as the foundation for a sustainable business model, although the approaches to its implementation vary. MrBeast focuses on scale and spectacle, gradually transforming his brand into a full-fledged corporation. Emma Chamberlain builds her success on authenticity, which itself becomes a product, while expanding her influence into adjacent niches such as coffee and fashion. Chris Burkard adopts a premium strategy targeting a niche audience, monetizing his knowledge and art. A unifying principle for all three cases is the deep emotional connection with the audience and revenue diversification—these factors are key to success in the digital economy.

Ultimately, a personal brand as a business model proves effective when there is a systematic approach to monetization and the establishment of genuine relationships with the audience. Global players can create true media empires, local projects can develop sustainable niche businesses, and expert brands can craft premium narratives with high levels of loyalty. Each of these approaches holds value and potential in the contemporary digital economy, affirming that in an era of personalized content, a personal brand evolves from merely being a marketing tool into a comprehensive business strategy.

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