

The Influence of Personal Branding and Adversity Quotient on Work Readiness of Final Year Students Through Mediation of Self-Efficacy

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to examine the influence of personal branding and adversity quotient on the work readiness of final-year students, with self-efficacy acting as a mediating variable. The research emphasizes the urgency of preparing students for the competitive labor market amid Indonesia's rising unemployment rates among graduates. **Method:** Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 287 senior students at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Malang State University, via structured questionnaires on a 5-point Likert scale. Structural Equation Modeling with SmartPLS 4.1.0 was employed to analyze the relationships between variables, including the assessment of validity, reliability, and hypothesis testing. **Results:** Findings indicate that personal branding significantly influences self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.167, p < 0.001$), which in turn significantly impacts work readiness ($\beta = 0.430, p < 0.001$). Personal branding does not have a direct significant effect on work readiness ($p > 0.05$). Conversely, adversity quotient directly affects both self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.674, p < 0.001$) and work readiness ($\beta = 0.308, p < 0.001$). The model explains 36.9% of the variance in work readiness. **Novelty:** This research is the first post-pandemic study in Indonesia to investigate these internal psychological factors among final-year students, highlighting the crucial role of resilience and self-confidence over external branding in fostering graduate preparedness. The study provides insights into internal resilience strategies as a means to improve employability, urging higher education institutions to prioritize psychological development in career readiness programs.

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly competitive labor market, the transition from university to professional life demands more than just academic competence. Graduates are expected to possess a range of psychological and personal attributes that enhance their employability and readiness to face workplace challenges. This challenge is particularly evident in Indonesia, where unemployment rates among university graduates remain a critical concern. Statistics Indonesia (BPS) reported that as of August 2023, the unemployment rate for university graduates rose to 5.18% from 4.8% the previous year, with approximately 452,713 graduates categorized as Not in Employment, Education, or Training (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024; Barus & Simarmata, 2023; Rizqianto & Hidayat, 2025).

Research by Priyono & Nankervis (2019) highlights a significant mismatch between industrial requirements and the competencies of fresh graduates, a finding corroborated by the OECD, UNESCO, and the World Bank. Today's professional landscape demands graduates who possess an objectively demonstrable competitive advantage and can meet rigorous corporate standards (Diah et al., 2017; Nur et al., 2025). Consequently, work readiness the preparedness to effectively perform in a professional environment is

influenced by both technical skills and internal psychological factors such as career identity, adaptability, and employability (Fugate et al., 2019; Sagita et al., 2020).

In the context of career identity, personal branding serves as a vital tool for students to differentiate themselves. Defined as the deliberate effort to craft and communicate a unique professional identity (Vallas & Christin, 2018), it facilitates the transition from university to the professional world (Santisi et al., 2018). Mccool (2019) asserts that a positive brand image significantly increases a candidate's likelihood of progressing through recruitment. In the digital era, social media plays a crucial role; a survey by Career Builder (2018) revealed that 70% of hiring managers use social media to assess candidates' personal brands.

Table 1. Distribution of Preliminary Survey Responses (n=30)

No	Item / Indicator	Main Findings (Percentage)	Indication Category
1	I regularly update my digital portfolio with new projects and experiences	30% reported not updating regularly	Low Strategic Planning
2	I am able to clearly articulate the contributions I can offer to a company	10% struggle to articulate contributions	Weak Value Proposition
3	I have a strong understanding of my strengths in the workplace	Majority understand, but hesitate in application	Limited Self-Awareness
4	I am confident in my ability to secure a job matching my expertise	Indicates doubt regarding competitiveness	Strategic Self-Confidence
5	I find it difficult to handle tasks or work when facing pressure	60% find it difficult to handle pressure	Low Endurance
6	I feel worried about the narrowing job opportunities in my field	73.3% feel excessive anxiety/worry	Weak Psychological Resilience

Source: Primary Data Processed from Researchers' Preliminary Survey (2025).

However, a preliminary survey involving 30 final-year students at the Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB), Universitas Negeri Malang, indicated that 30% do not routinely update their digital portfolios, and 10% are unable to articulate their potential contributions. These results suggest that students have not optimized their self-promotion, which can diminish their visibility in the job market (Gorbatov et al., 2019).

Organizations increasingly consider a candidate's Adversity Quotient (AQ), which reflects the capacity to transform challenges into opportunities (Jasak et al., 2020; Stoltz, 1997). Students with high AQ demonstrate optimal work readiness due to their resilience and ability to persist through setbacks (Nasrullah et al., 2023; Violinda, et al., 2023). Despite its importance, the researchers' survey at FEB Universitas Negeri Malang revealed that 60% of students find it difficult to handle pressure, and 73.3% feel anxious about diminishing job opportunities. This reflects low endurance a key indicator of AQ which hinders the ability to adapt to changing circumstances and acquire necessary new skills (Dewantari & Soetjningsih, 2022).

An individual's work readiness is also strongly correlated with self-efficacy. Conceptualized by Bandura (1997), self-efficacy refers to the belief in one's ability to execute actions necessary for success. High self-efficacy serves as a primary antecedent for work readiness, helping students understand their circumstances realistically and face dynamic competition (Cabrera-Aguilar et al., 2023; Elfranata et al., 2023). Studies by Damayantie & Kustini (2022) confirm that self-efficacy strengthens the readiness of final-year students, acting as a benchmark for self-evaluation against corporate standards.

Despite the recognized importance of these factors, existing research presents mixed evidence. While some studies suggest that personal branding directly influences employability, others highlight inconsistencies in the mediating role of self-efficacy and resilience (Azizah & Hasanah, 2021; Violinda, et al., 2023). These discrepancies may stem from variations in research design or respondent characteristics. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of literature specifically discussing the influence of personal branding on work readiness within the Indonesian higher education context (Trang et al., 2024).

Leveraging Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1997) and Stoltz's adversity quotient model (1997), this study seeks to explore the relationships among personal branding, AQ, self-efficacy, and work readiness. Specifically, it aims to determine the direct effects of personal branding and AQ on work readiness, as well as the mediating role of self-efficacy. By focusing on final-year students at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Negeri Malang, this research addresses the critical transition phase into the labor market, providing insights for developing educational strategies that foster both technical skills and the psychological resources essential for career success.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach to analyze the relationships among personal branding, adversity quotient, self-efficacy, and work readiness among final-year students. The research population consisted of active final-year students at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Negeri Malang, totaling 1,019 students. To determine the sample size, Slovin's formula was initially used, resulting in a target of 287 respondents. Proportional random sampling was employed to maintain representativeness across the seven study programs within the faculty. The proportion of students selected from each program was based on the total number of students enrolled in each. For example, if Program A comprised 20% of the total student population, approximately 20% of the sample was drawn from that program, ensuring proportional representation.

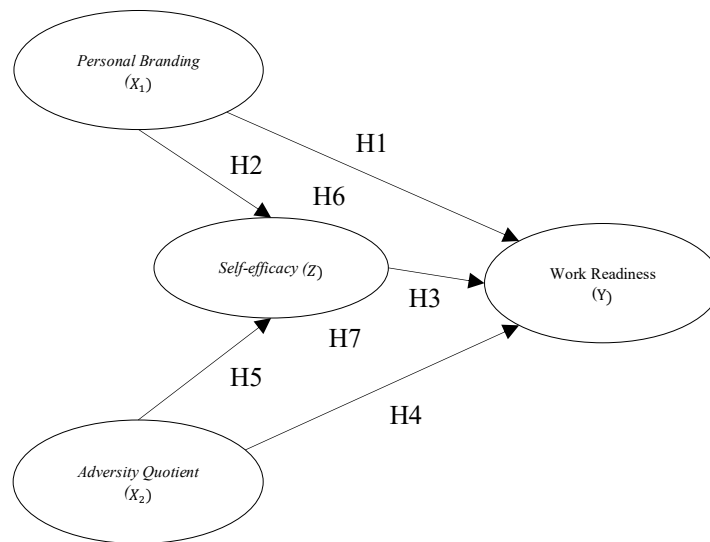


Figure 1. Research Conceptual Model

A structured questionnaire was developed to measure the variables of interest: personal branding, adversity quotient, self-efficacy, and work readiness. Content validity was established through expert judgment involving two academics specializing in educational measurement and psychology. Their review ensured that items adequately represented each construct, and that the language was clear and appropriate for the target population. Minor revisions were made based on their feedback. Furthermore, a pilot test involving 50 students was conducted to assess item clarity, comprehension, and preliminary reliability. Results of the pilot indicated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha > 0.70) for all constructs, and item-total correlations exceeded the recommended threshold ($r > 0.30$). These procedures strengthened the instrument's validity and reliability before deployment.

Data were collected digitally via Google Forms to facilitate widespread and convenient participation. To minimize potential bias, several steps were taken: (1) only one response per respondent was allowed via IP address restriction, (2) the survey link was distributed explicitly to students through official channels, (3) the survey instructions emphasized honesty and encouraged participants to answer independently, and (4) responses were monitored for duplicate entries or outliers, which were subsequently excluded based on response time and consistency checks. Respondents were also informed about confidentiality and voluntary participation to reduce social desirability bias.

Data screening included checks for outliers using standardized z-scores ($|z| > 3.29$). Missing data accounted for less than 5% of responses for any variable; these missing values were addressed through mean imputation, given that the data were missing at random, as confirmed by Little's MCAR test ($p > 0.05$). No significant deviations from normality were observed, as assessed through skewness and kurtosis statistics within acceptable ranges ($|Skew| < 2$, $|Kurtosis| < 7$), justifying the use of PLS-SEM, which does not assume multivariate normality.

Normality was assessed via skewness and kurtosis, with all variables within acceptable limits, supporting the use of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation

Modeling (PLS-SEM). To address potential common method bias since data were self-reported and collected simultaneously Harman’s single-factor test was performed. The results indicated that no single factor accounted for the majority of variance (the first factor explained less than 50%), suggesting the absence of substantial common method bias. PLS-SEM was selected over covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) due to its suitability for exploratory research, complex models with multiple mediators, and smaller sample sizes. Moreover, PLS-SEM is robust against violations of normality assumptions, which aligns with our data characteristics, and is ideal for predicting endogenous constructs, fitting the study's aims.

Table 2. Model Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation Aspect	Cut-off Value	Explanation
Outer Loadings	> 0.5 or 0.7	Indicators should load significantly on their constructs to ensure validity
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	> 0.5	Measures convergent validity: indicates that more than half of the variance is captured by the construct
Composite Reliability	> 0.7	Ensures internal consistency of constructs
Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker)	$\sqrt{AVE} >$ Inter-construct correlations	Distinctiveness among constructs
HTMT Ratio	< 0.85	Additional check for discriminant validity
SRMR	< 0.08	Model fit indicator: the obtained value was 0.065, indicating a good fit

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Outer Model Testing

This study employs second-order Confirmatory Factor Analysis (2nd Order CFA), which comprises Stage I and Stage II testing. Stage I focuses on evaluating the measurement model at the dimensional level, whereas Stage II evaluates the outer model at the variable level.

Validity Stage I Test

Convergent Validity

Within the Stage I validity assessment, convergent validity is utilized to ensure that the instruments applied in the study yield relevant and representative data. Convergent validity is specifically measured through factor loadings and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). An indicator is considered reliable if it exhibits a correlation exceeding 0.70; however, correlations ranging from 0.5 to 0.6 are still deemed acceptable for research purposes (Ghozali & Latan, 2016).

Table 3. Factor Loadings

Item	Dimensions	Outer Loading
Personal Branding		
1. I deliberately engage in experiences to enhance my professional image	Strategic	0.863
2. I strive to expand my professional network		0.864
3. I have established routines to communicate my professional image to my network		0.849
4. I aim for a distinct profile compared to others in my professional field	Differentiated	0.765
5. I communicate my successes to my professional network		0.874
6. I consistently communicate the value and quality of my work output		0.890
7. I actively communicate my professional activities via social media	Technologically Savvy	0.854
8. I ensure my online educational and professional profiles are complete and engaging		0.795
9. I share examples or explanations of my work projects online		0.893
Adversity Quotient		
1. I can formulate appropriate strategies to address workplace challenges, even when dealing with difficult tasks	Self-Control	0.820
2. I maintain self-control and focus when encountering difficulties in completing tasks within the work environment		0.840
3. I consistently learn from workplace failures or obstacles to enhance my skills and expertise		0.773
4. I can find solutions and recognize that external factors do not hinder my efforts when goals are not met	Origins	0.872
5. I identify reasons for task difficulty and seek improvements without attributing failure to external limitations		0.880
6. Despite limited facilities or resources, I can foster a positive and productive work environment		0.877
7. Despite technological skill gaps, I employ appropriate strategies to overcome professional challenges	Scope	0.886
8. I can anticipate boredom or loss of motivation and maintain my enthusiasm and productivity at work	Endurance	0.834
9. I can provide solutions to simplify complex tasks, making them easier to understand and execute		0.886

Item	Dimensions	Outer Loading
Self-Efficacy		
1. I can consistently solve difficult problems through persistent effort	Task Difficulty Level	0.772
2. I can find ways to solve problems when obstacles hinder my goals		0.750
3. I find it easy to remain committed to and achieve my objectives		0.765
4. I am confident in my ability to perform effectively in unexpected situations	Strength of Conviction	0.818
5. Due to my capabilities, I know how to manage unforeseen circumstances		0.842
6. I can solve various problems through earnest and serious effort		0.692
7. I remain calm during difficulties by relying on my ability to overcome them	Flexibility	0.799
8. When faced with a problem, I generate numerous ideas to resolve it		0.841
9. In difficult situations, I can identify effective solutions to overcome the challenges		0.852
Work Readiness		
1. I am eager to learn new things to perform my job effectively	Personal Characteristics	0.848
2. I trust my ability to make decisions and take responsibility for results independently		0.816
3. I am proactive in learning the company's organizational structure and bureaucracy		0.733
4. I can adapt quickly to changes in the workplace environment	Organizational Acumen	0.852
5. I can adjust to the workplace culture and established regulations		0.831
6. I possess the necessary knowledge and understanding for my professional tasks	Work Competence	0.884
7. I can take proactive measures when encountering challenging situations		0.855
8. I recognize the transition from university to the workplace and adjust accordingly	Social Intelligence	0.854
9. I can cultivate positive and professional relationships with colleagues and clients		0.879

Source: SmartPLS-4.1.0.9 Software Output (2025)

Table 3 shows that the factor loadings for each item are considered valid because their values are greater than 0.5. This applies to all variable dimensions namely, personal branding, adversity quotient, self-efficacy, and work readiness all of which meet the criteria for convergent validity. Therefore, the indicators in this study are considered

valid. Another method for testing convergent validity is based on the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value. The AVE value must be > 0.5 (Ghozali & Latan, 2016).

Table 4. Average Variance Extracted

Dimensions	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Strategic	0.737
Differentiated	0.713
Technologically Savvy	0.719
Self-Control	0.658
Origins	0.768
Scope	0.777
Endurance	0.740
Task Difficulty Level	0.581
Strength of Conviction	0.619
Flexibility	0.691
Personal Characteristics	0.693
Organizational Acumen	0.651
Work Competence	0.756
Social Intelligence	0.751

Source: SmartPLS-4.1.0.9 Software Output (2025)

Table 4 shows that the AVE values for each dimension met the established criterion of >0.5 and were therefore deemed valid. Consequently, it was concluded that no issues were found in the convergent validity test.

Discriminant Validity

The purpose of the discriminant validity test is to ensure that each constructed variable is distinct from the others. The Fornell-Larcker criterion is used to evaluate discriminant validity, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Fornell-Larcker Criterion Values

	AQ2	AQ4	PB2	AQ3	WR1	WR4	SE2
AQ2	0.876						
AQ4	0.576	0.860					
PB2	0.347	0.413	0.845				
AQ3	0.594	0.615	0.405	0.881			
WR1	0.534	0.405	0.283	0.391	0.832		
WR4	0.433	0.397	0.259	0.378	0.547	0.867	
SE2	0.568	0.518	0.481	0.590	0.511	0.451	0.787
SE3	0.516	0.518	0.430	0.468	0.437	0.350	0.640
WR2	0.492	0.491	0.356	0.425	0.520	0.587	0.551
WR3	0.489	0.493	0.475	0.479	0.540	0.568	0.584
AQ1	0.668	0.593	0.391	0.552	0.588	0.463	0.606
PB1	0.317	0.375	0.630	0.403	0.343	0.342	0.429
PB3	0.354	0.413	0.725	0.361	0.227	0.152	0.376
SE1	0.523	0.560	0.321	0.467	0.498	0.432	0.585

	SE3	WR2	WR3	AQ1	PB1	PB3	SE1
AQ2							
AQ4							
PB2							
AQ3							
WR1							
WR4							
SE2							
SE3	0.831						
WR2	0.509	0.807					
WR3	0.499	0.704	0.870				
AQ1	0.528	0.516	0.514	0.811			
PB1	0.305	0.389	0.459	0.416	0.859		
PB3	0.331	0.316	0.352	0.316	0.567	0.848	
SE1	0.502	0.599	0.491	0.581	0.382	0.334	0.762

Source: SmartPLS-4.1.0.9-SoftwareOutput (2025)

Description: Strategic (PB 1), Differentiated (PB 2), Technologically Savvy (PB 3), Self-Control (AQ 1), Origins (AQ 2), Scope (AQ 3), Endurance (AQ 4), Task Difficulty Level (SE 1), Strength of Conviction (SE 2), Flexibility (SE 3), Personal Characteristics (WR 1), Organizational Acumen (WR 2), Work Competence (WR 3), Social Intelligence (WR 4).

Based on Table 5, the loading values for each tested instrument do not exceed those of the other constructs. Therefore, it can be concluded that all indicators possess adequate discriminant validity.

Stage I Reliability Test

The reliability test aims to evaluate the measurement model to ensure that the indicator items of an instrument are reliable for accurate measurement. A construct or variable is considered reliable if its composite reliability value is ≥ 0.7 (Haryono, 2016). The following are the results of the composite reliability calculations.

Table 6. Composite Reliability Values

Dimensions	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)
Strategic	0.822	0.825	0.894
Differentiated	0.797	0.809	0.881
Technologically Savvy	0.804	0.809	0.885
Self-Control	0.740	0.740	0.852
Origins	0.697	0.697	0.868
Scope	0.713	0.713	0.874
Endurance	0.652	0.664	0.851
Task Difficulty Level	0.640	0.641	0.806
Strength of Conviction	0.688	0.698	0.829
Flexibility	0.776	0.777	0.870

Dimensions	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)
Personal Characteristics	0.557	0.560	0.818
Organizational Acumen	0.730	0.737	0.848
Work Competence	0.678	0.684	0.861
Social Intelligence	0.669	0.672	0.858

Source: SmartPLS-4.1.0.9 Software Output (2025)

According to the data above, the composite reliability values for each endogenous construct meet the required criterion of ≥ 0.7 . This indicates that the constructs in the research model are considered valid and meet the reliability standards necessary to support further analysis.

Stage II Outer Model Evaluation

Based on the results of the Stage I testing, it was found that the 36 items were valid and reliable. Next, Stage II testing will be conducted, focusing on the evaluation of the measurement model at the variable level. Stage II outer model testing begins by conducting validity and reliability tests on each variable using the latent variable scores from the Stage I testing results. The following are the results of the Stage II outer model testing.

Stage II Validity Test

Convergent Validity

The validity test using convergent validity is based on correlations between items, scores, or score components estimated using SMARTPLS 4.1.0.9 software. The results of the convergent validity test are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Factor Loadings and Cross-Loadings

Dimensions	Variable	Outer Loading
Strategic Differentiated Technologically Savvy Self-Control	Personal Branding	0.852
Origins Scope Endurance		0.905
Task Difficulty Level Strength of Conviction Flexibility		0.858
Personal Characteristics Organizational Acumen		0.852
Work Competence Social Intelligence	Adversity Quotient	0.851
	Self-Efficacy	0.814
		0.828
		0.823
	Work Readiness	0.884
		0.832
		0.784
		0.861
		0.862
		0.797

Source: SmartPLS-4.1.0.9 Software Output (2025)

Based on Table 7, the results of the Stage II test indicate that each dimension of the research variables has a factor loading value greater than 0.5. Thus, all of these dimensions are valid and reliable and can be analyzed further. Convergent validity can also be determined from the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value. According to the AVE value meets the validity criteria if it is greater than 0.5.

Table 8. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Values

	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Personal Branding	0.760
Adversity Quotient	0.700
Self-Efficacy	0.718
Work Readiness	0.684

Source: SmartPLS-4.1.0.9 Software Output (2025)

Table 8 shows that the AVE values for each variable meet the criterion of >0.5 , indicating that they are valid and that there are no issues with the convergent validity test.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity is a measurement model designed to ensure that indicators of different constructs do not exhibit high correlations. The discriminant validity test uses the Fornell-Larcker Criterion values shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Fornell-Larcker Criterion Values

	Adversity Quotient	Work Readiness	Personal Branding	Self-Efficacy
Adversity Quotient	0.836			
Work Readiness	0.681	0.827		
Personal Branding	0.515	0.469	0.872	
Self-Efficacy	0.760	0.711	0.514	0.847

Source: SmartPLS-4.1.0.9 Software Output (2025)

Based on the data in Table 9, it can be concluded that the loading values for each construct tested do not exceed those of the other constructs. Therefore, it can be stated that all indicators possess excellent discriminant validity.

Stage II Reliability Test

The reliability test aims to evaluate the measurement model to ensure that the indicator items of an instrument are reliable for accurate measurement. A construct or variable is considered reliable if the composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values are ≥ 0.7 (Haryono, 2016).

Tabel 10. Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha Values

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)
Personal Branding	0.842	0.851	0.905
Adversity Quotient	0.857	0.860	0.903
Self-Efficacy	0.803	0.807	0.884
Work Readiness	0.845	0.853	0.896

Source: SmartPLS-4.1.0.9 Software Output (2025)

As shown in Table 10, the composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values for each endogenous construct met the required criteria, namely ≥ 0.7 . Therefore, the reliability of this research model is good.

Inner Model Evaluation

Inner model measurements are used to project causal relationships between latent variables that cannot be directly determined.

Adjusted R-squared

R-squared is a measure used to quantify the extent to which independent variables contribute to the variation in the dependent variable. A higher coefficient of determination indicates a greater degree of determination of a variable. The evaluation criteria are as follows: if R-Square is 0.67, the effect is considered strong; if 0.33, the effect is moderate; and if 0.19, the effect is weak (Musyaff et al., 2021).

Table 11. R-Square Value

	R-square
Work Readiness (Y)	0.558
Self-Efficacy (Z)	0.598

Source: SmartPLS-4.1.0.9 Software Output (2025)

Referring to Table 11, it can be seen that the R-Square value for the Work Readiness variable is approximately 0.558, or 55.8%. This indicates that the variables of self-efficacy, adversity quotient, and personal branding collectively contribute approximately 55.8% to the Work Readiness variable, while the remaining 44.2% is influenced by other variables not discussed in this study. Thus, this contribution is categorized as a moderate effect. On the other hand, the R-Square value for the self-efficacy variable is recorded at 0.598 or 59.8%. This indicates that the self-efficacy variable plays a role in explaining the relationship between personal branding, adversity quotient, and work readiness with a contribution of 59.8%, while the remaining 40.2% is influenced by other factors outside the scope of this study. Based on the criteria for influence, this value also falls into the category of moderate influence.

F-Square

F-Square is used to calculate the relative importance of exogenous variables compared to endogenous variables. The following are the F-Square correction criteria: a value of 0.02

indicates a low level of impact, 0.15 indicates a moderate level of impact, and 0.35 indicates a high level of impact.

Table 12. F-Square Value

	Personal Branding	Adversity Quotient	Work Readiness	Self-Efficacy
Personal Branding			0.013	0.051
Adversity Quotient			0.086	0.831
Work Readiness				
Self-Efficacy			0.168	

Source: SmartPLS-4.1.0.9 Software Output (2025)

Based on F-square (effect size) analysis in Table 12, the results reveal varying degrees of influence among the variables in the model. The relationship between personal branding and work readiness yielded a value of 0.013, which is categorized as a low influence. Similarly, the relationship between adversity quotient and work readiness shows a value of 0.086, also falling into the low influence category. These results suggest that while these variables contribute to work readiness, their direct impact is minimal, highlighting the potential importance of mediating or other external factors. Furthermore, the relationship between personal branding and self-efficacy yielded an F-Square value of 0.051, which is classified as a low influence. In contrast, the relationship between adversity quotient and self-efficacy demonstrated a value of 0.831, indicating a high influence. This suggests that adversity quotient is a major driver of self-efficacy within this population. Finally, the relationship between self-efficacy and work readiness resulted in a value of 0.168, which falls into the moderate influence category, emphasizing the role of self-confidence as a key factor in professional preparedness.

Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Predictive Relevance (Q^2) is used to assess the predictive relevance of the model. The Q^2 test uses the following criteria: if $Q^2 > 0$, the model is considered to have predictive relevance; conversely, if $Q^2 < 0$ the model is considered less relevant for prediction (Anindya et al., 2023). The following are the Q^2 calculation results:

Table 13. Predictive Relevance (Q^2) Value

	SSO	SSE	$Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)$
Adversity Quotient	1180.000	1180.000	0.000
Work Readiness	1180.000	744.455	0.369
Personal Branding	885.000	885.000	0.000
Self-Efficacy	885.000	510.498	0.423

Source: SmartPLS-4.1.0.9 Software Output (2025)

Regarding predictive relevance, the (Q^2) values for adversity quotient and personal branding were 0.000, as these variables do not serve as endogenous constructs in the model. However, based on Table, the (Q^2) values for work readiness and self-efficacy are 0.369 and 0.423, respectively. Since these values are greater than zero, it indicates that the

model has relevant predictive power and possesses predictive relevance for these endogenous constructs.

Model Fit Evaluation

The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) test is used to evaluate model fit. The criterion is that a model is considered to have a good fit if the SRMR value is below 1.00 (Hair et al., 2014).

Table 14. Model Fit Test Results

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.065	0.065

Source: SmartPLS-4.1.0.9 Software Output (2025)

According to the SRMR results for the data above, the value is 0.065, indicating that the model has a good fit. This finding is consistent with the view of Hu & Bentler (1999), who state that an SRMR value of up to 0.08 is considered acceptable for a well-fitting model.

Estimate for Path Coefficient

In hypothesis testing, which refers to the significance level of the relationship between variables, the coefficient of determination and the significance of the t-statistic are reported. This analysis was conducted using the bootstrapping method. The testing criteria include the Original Sample (O) value, which represents a positive direction of influence, and a T-Statistic value >1.96 as well as a P-Value <0.05, indicating a significant effect.

Table 15. Estimate for Path Coefficient

Hypothesis	Variable	Original sample (O)	T statistics	P values
H1	Personal Branding -> Work Readiness	0.089	1.603	0.109
H2	Personal Branding -> Self-Efficacy	0.167	3.798	0.000
H3	Self-Efficacy -> Work Readiness	0.430	5.547	0.000
H4	Adversity Quotient -> Work Readiness	0.308	3.873	0.000
H5	Adversity Quotient -> Self-Efficacy	0.674	15.378	0.000
H6	Personal Branding -> Self-Efficacy -> Work Readiness	0.072	3.232	0.001
H7	Adversity Quotient -> Self-Efficacy -> Work Readiness	0.290	5.641	0.000

Source: SmartPLS-4.1.0.9 Software Output (2025)

The model test results indicate that the personal branding variable does not have a significant direct effect on the work readiness of graduating students (H1). The path coefficient value of 0.089 (t=1.603, p=0.109) indicates a statistically insignificant effect.

Nevertheless, the effect of personal branding on self-efficacy (H2) was found to be significant with a coefficient of 0.167 ($t=3.798$, $p=0.000$). Self-efficacy, in turn, significantly influences work readiness (H3) with a coefficient of 0.430 ($t=5.547$, $p=0.000$). The effect of adversity quotient on work readiness was also significant (H4, coefficient=0.308, $t=3.873$, $p=0.000$), as well as on self-efficacy (H5, coefficient=0.674, $t=15.378$, $p=0.000$). The relationship between personal branding and self-efficacy indirectly had a significant effect on work readiness (H6, coefficient = 0.072, $t = 3.232$, $p = 0.001$). Meanwhile, the effect of adversity quotient on work readiness through self-efficacy was also significant (H7, coefficient = 0.290, $t = 5.641$, $p = 0.000$).

Discussion

The hypothesis testing results indicate that personal branding does not have a direct effect on the work readiness of final-year undergraduate students at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Negeri Malang. This is evidenced by the original sample value, t-statistics, and p-values, which failed to meet the significance criteria established in this study. These findings suggest that although personal branding is often regarded as a vital factor in cultivating self-image and enhancing individual competitiveness, its presence alone is insufficient to directly improve students' work readiness. This result aligns with research by Aqilah et al. (2024) which demonstrated that personal branding does not significantly influence student work readiness. Conversely, other studies offer contrasting perspectives for instance, Cooley & Yancy (2020) revealed that personal branding on the internet or social media can positively impact objective career achievement. Similarly, Gorbatov et al. (2019) found that personal branding is positively and significantly correlated with perceived employability, while Vinod Dani (2018) highlighted its pivotal role in individual career development.

In the context of this study, the personal branding of FEB UM students may not be fully mature or sufficiently aligned with labor market demands, thus failing to contribute directly to their readiness to enter the professional world. This divergence can be understood theoretically through signaling theory (Spence), which posits that signals such as personal branding are only effective if they are credible and complemented by other indicators such as skills, experience, and social capital. In the FEB UM context, students' personal branding efforts might lack the necessary credibility or authenticity to serve as effective signals for employers. This is likely due to underdeveloped soft skills or limited practical exposure that could link these personal signals to real competencies. This suggests that without a comprehensive signaling system reinforcing personal branding such as internship programs, soft skills, or verified achievements mere online self-presentation or self-promotion may not be strong enough to influence the perception of work readiness.

Many young professionals struggle to establish personal branding due to a lack of soft skills training and guidance during their education. Higher education institutions, therefore, play a crucial role in equipping students with personal branding skills through the curriculum, training, and extracurricular activities (Velásquez-arana & Alonso-gonzález, 2017). Collaboration with industry partners, such as through internships and mentoring, is also essential to strengthen students' professional identities. This is consistent with studies by Allison et al. (2020), Rahayu & Marka (2024), and

Sulistioyuwono (2025) which emphasize the importance of teaching students marketing strategies – such as personal branding to transform opportunities into career success.

Furthermore, the results of this study are consistent with research by Peter & Gomez (2019) which indicates that significant personal branding requires targeted strategies, including the utilization of digital portfolios, networking, and consistency in self-presentation. Without these elements, personal branding fails to yield optimal impact. Research by Lee (2018) further supports these findings, emphasizing that students must cultivate an image aligned with their authentic values and personality. By doing so, they can build trust with potential employers and colleagues. Social media serves as a tool for personal branding; thus, students must understand that their online interactions can influence how prospective employers perceive them. It is imperative for students to leverage various social media platforms to communicate their personal brands effectively (Jhonson, 2017).

In contrast, personal branding was found to have a significant positive influence on self-efficacy. This is supported by a positive path coefficient of 0.167 and a p-value of 0.000, fulfilling the significance criteria ($p < 0.05$) This indicates that students' efforts to present a professional self-image online through social media contribute to an increase in self-efficacy among final-year students. This aligns with research by Johnson (2019) which states that when students build a strong personal brand, they tend to be more confident in seeking employment, better at articulating the value they provide, and more capable of establishing meaningful professional relationships. Peter Montoya (2002) in "The Personal Branding Phenomenon," also asserts that personal branding is the process of creating a public identity for oneself as a business project. Through personal branding, individuals can cultivate a positive self-image, both in person and via social media. This reinforces confidence in facing challenges and enhances perceived competence through social recognition, such as digital validation and professional appreciation. Research by Pathmanathan & Dodamgoda (2018) further supports this finding, suggesting that personal branding can be utilized to increase recognition as an expert in a specific field, strengthen reputation and credibility, advance careers, and boost self-confidence.

The findings of this study are consistent with Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, which posits that successful experiences and external recognition significantly enhance an individual's self-efficacy. Consequently, students who actively cultivate their personal branding do not merely project a positive image but also reinforce their belief in their own capabilities the core essence of self-efficacy. A study by Gorbato et al. (2019) demonstrates that personal branding, as an individual effort to promote unique value propositions, can elevate positive self-perceptions regarding one's abilities. Furthermore, well-developed personal branding encourages confidence in showcasing competencies, which ultimately exerts a positive influence on self-efficacy. This assertion aligns with the findings of Hartanto et al. (2019) demonstrates that personal branding, as an individual effort to promote unique value propositions, can elevate positive self-perceptions regarding one's abilities. Furthermore, well-developed personal branding encourages confidence in showcasing competencies, which ultimately exerts a positive influence on self-efficacy. This assertion aligns with the findings of Hartanto et al. (2019), who revealed that personal branding has a positive impact on self-confidence and self-belief. These results illustrate that personal branding serves as a mechanism to strengthen self-efficacy within professional environments, emphasizing the vital role of education in

assisting students to build robust personal brands to enhance their self-belief. Although statistically significant, the effect size is considered small ($f\text{-square} = 0.051$). This suggests that while personal branding contributes positively to self-efficacy, the variable only explains a small portion of its variance. This indicates that other factors such as prior work experience, mentorship, or social support likely have a stronger influence on self-efficacy in this context. The relatively small effect size underscores that personal branding alone is insufficient to significantly increase students' confidence levels, emphasizing the need for a multifaceted development approach.

Furthermore, this research reveals that self-efficacy has a significant impact on work readiness. This is supported by a positive path coefficient of 0.430 and a p -value of 0.000, which satisfies the significance criteria ($p < 0.05$). This finding reinforces several previous studies, such as those conducted by Wiharja et al. (2020), Damayantie & Kustini (2022), Nasution et al. (2022), and Hariyati et al. (2022), which established that self-efficacy influences work readiness. However, the results diverge from the study by Violinda, et al. (2023), who found no significant effect of self-efficacy on student work readiness. Discrepancies in these findings may stem from various factors, including the educational environment, instructional methods, and the level of institutional support provided in fostering student self-confidence. Therefore, the academic sector must be more proactive in designing programs aimed at boosting student self-efficacy.

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Students with high self-efficacy are better prepared to enter the workforce as they are more capable of enhancing their skills, expanding their knowledge, and building professional networks. They tend to be proactive in seeking self-development opportunities, adapting to new work environments, and facing challenges with greater confidence (Ramadhan et al., 2024; Rodriguez, 2017). Self-efficacy also assists individuals in recognizing their strengths and weaknesses (Aeni & Rahmawati, 2023). Moreover, students with high self-efficacy tend to be more flexible in the face of change and more resilient in overcoming failure (Mahmud & Khidir, 2023), as self-efficacy strengthens the self-confidence and mental resilience essential for managing workplace pressures (Nguyen, 2018).

Additionally, adversity quotient was found to exert a positive influence on work readiness, indicated by a positive path coefficient of 0.308 and a p -value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). This finding supports previous research by Violinda et al. (2023), Nasrullah et al. (2023) and Jasak et al. (2020) which indicated that adversity quotient significantly impacts student work readiness. Adversity quotient contributes to the career success of individuals seeking to increase productivity and achieve workplace excellence (Zhao & Sang, 2023). The ability to navigate obstacles is intrinsically linked to one's achievements (Anggresela & Sulistiyorini, 2022). Students with high AQ are better equipped to face professional challenges; they are persistent, enthusiastic, and strongly motivated to learn and grow (Nasrullah et al., 2023). In line with this, higher education institutions play a pivotal role in developing these skills to ensure graduates possess not only technical competence but also the ability to adapt and collaborate effectively.

Finally, adversity quotient also significantly influences self-efficacy, based on a positive path coefficient of 0.674 and a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). According to Stoltz (1997) theory, *adversity quotient* is a measure of an individual's capacity to face challenges, withstand pressure, and recover from failure. Students with high AQ perceive the job search process as a challenge rather than a threat, remaining motivated and committed to continuous self-improvement (Kamila et al., 2023). High *adversity quotient* encourages students to overcome obstacles, complete tasks, and achieve their goals. This motivation enhances work readiness by fostering a desire to learn and evolve (Azky & Mulyana, 2024). A high level of resilience allows students to respond quickly to new challenges, shifts in the professional world, and changes in roles or responsibilities. Such individuals adapt to conditions, devise new strategies, and develop new skills to overcome these hurdles (Dewantari & Soetjningsih, 2022).

Regarding the link to self-efficacy, Bandura (1997) states that confidence in completing tasks is influenced by successful experiences, emotional management, and the observation of others' success. A high *adversity quotient* supports this process by helping individuals remain positive, resilient, and motivated despite pressure. Thus, students with a high capacity for facing adversity tend to be more confident in their abilities to achieve goals, even under difficult conditions. These findings support previous research by Astri & Latifah (2017) which found a positive correlation between self-efficacy and adversity quotient. Regarding the large effect size observed for the influence of adversity quotient (AQ) on self-efficacy ($f\text{-square} = 0.831$), this may be due to the conceptual proximity between the constructs or measurement instruments capturing overlapping aspects of resilience and confidence. AQ, which reflects an individual's capacity to overcome difficult situations, naturally correlates strongly with self-efficacy because both involve coping beliefs and resilience. Additionally, the measurement scales' emphasis on similar behavioral indicators may inflate this relationship, potentially indicating measurement artifacts rather than a fundamentally massive effect.

Through the mediating role of self-efficacy, personal branding and adversity quotient (AQ) exert an indirect influence on student work readiness. This finding is consistent with research by Goca et al. (2024), Mitra & Attiq (2024), Sholihah & Listiadi (2021) and Eliyani et al. (2016), which demonstrated that self-efficacy effectively mediates the relationship between independent variables and work readiness. Self-efficacy describes an individual's conviction in their ability to succeed when facing specific situations or tasks. It pertains not only to possessed skills but, more crucially, to an individual's belief in their capacity to overcome challenges by effectively utilizing those skills (Evioni et al., 2022). The more positively individuals demonstrate their competence and potential, the greater their likelihood of securing employment (Susanti & Panduwinata, 2024). Mediation analysis reveals that self-efficacy partially mediates the relationship between personal branding and adversity quotient with work readiness. Specifically, the indirect effects (H6 and H7) are substantial but do not overshadow the direct effects, indicating partial mediation. A quantitative comparison shows that the indirect effect magnitude for H7 (adversity quotient \rightarrow self-efficacy \rightarrow work readiness) at 0.290 is larger than for H6 (personal branding \rightarrow self-efficacy \rightarrow work readiness) at 0.072. This indicates that the influence of adversity quotient on work readiness is more strongly mediated through self-efficacy.

These results suggest that effective personal branding indirectly enhances work readiness by reinforcing self-efficacy as a mediating variable. This is further corroborated by Gorbatov et al. (2024) who indicated that individuals with positive self-perceptions are better prepared to explore and plan their career trajectories. Research by Gorbatov et al. (2019) supports these findings, showing that personal branding influences career satisfaction, while career-related self-efficacy plays a role in shaping that branding. Self-efficacy is pivotal in strengthening personal branding because individuals with high self-confidence are more capable of building a robust reputation. Brand trust is established when an individual exhibits the confidence and consistency required to deliver the values and promises they project (Kongsri & Jaroenwanit, 2024).

On the other hand, adversity quotient significantly influences work readiness, with self-efficacy amplifying this effect. In educational contexts, adversity quotient assists students in transforming obstacles into opportunities to achieve their objectives (Ismawati & Andriyani, 2022). Stoltz (2010) emphasizes that self-efficacy plays a critical role in helping students confront challenges and achieve success. Self-efficacy enables students to believe in their capacity to successfully complete tasks or manage pressure, ultimately enhancing overall work readiness. This aligns with research by Basuki et al. (2023) which revealed that individuals with high levels of self-efficacy tend to possess greater confidence in their abilities. This confidence contributes to increased motivation and readiness when facing various professional challenges (Kristina & Kuslina, 2025). Furthermore, research by Violinda et al. (2023) indicates that adversity quotient can serve as a potent predictor of work readiness, with self-efficacy strengthening this relationship. When students possess a high adversity quotient, they tend to exhibit greater self-belief in problem-solving and adapting to professional demands (Hepriyadi & Pahlevi, 2026).

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: The study found that self-efficacy is a significant factor in enhancing students' work readiness, with a strong positive effect ($\beta = 0.430$, $p < 0.001$). Personal branding does not have a direct effect on work readiness; however, it influences work readiness indirectly through self-efficacy. Additionally, adversity quotient positively impacts both self-efficacy and work readiness, with contributions of 59.8% and 55.8%, respectively. These results underscore the importance of internal psychological resilience and confidence over external branding in preparing students for the workforce.

Implication: The findings imply that higher education institutions should prioritize developing students' internal psychological qualities, such as resilience and self-efficacy, through targeted training programs. Emphasizing resilience-building (adversity quotient) and self-confidence can better equip students to face professional challenges. Integrating these into the curriculum can foster more adaptable, motivated, and competent graduates, ultimately improving their readiness to enter the competitive labor market. **Limitation:** This research is limited by its scope, as it was conducted within a single faculty at a public university using a cross-sectional design. These factors restrict the generalizability of the findings to other institutions or populations. Moreover, the study did not account for external variables such as the quality of internships, social support systems, or institutional differences that might influence students' work readiness, which could have affected the results. **Future Research:** Future studies should employ longitudinal designs to observe how students' work readiness develops over

time, providing more definitive insights into causal relationships. Expanding the research to include private universities and various faculties can enhance the applicability of the findings. Additionally, incorporating external factors like internship quality, social support, and institutional characteristics will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of student preparedness for the workforce.

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The Influence of Personal Branding and Adversity Quotient on Work Readiness of Final Year Students Through Mediation of Self-Efficacy