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PERSONAL BRANDING IN SOCIAL MEDIA

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I hereby declare that I have compiled the paper independently and all works, important standpoints and data by other authors has been properly referenced and the same paper has not been previously presented for grading. The document length is 8927 words from the introduction to the end of conclusion.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	4
1. INTRODUCTION	5
2. PERSONAL BRANDING	8
2.1. The concept of personal branding	8
2.2. Literature review	9
2.2.1. Benefits of a personal brand	10
2.3. Building a personal brand	12
2.3.1. Personal brand in social media	13
2.3.2. Micro-publicity	15
3. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH	16
3.1. Methodology	16
3.2. Data	16
3.2.1. Contacting the interviewees	17
3.2.2. Introducing the interviewees	17
3.2.3. About the interviewees	18
4. EMPIRICAL RESULTS	21
4.1. About building a personal brand	21
4.2. Advantages and disadvantages of a personal brand	23
5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	26
LIST OF REFERENCES	30
APPENDICES	33

ABSTRACT

This study examines how a personal brand is built by using social media. The thesis will not aim to explain all the steps on building a successful brand in social media, but rather explain different approaches and strategies that may be useful when considering building a personal brand. These strategies and views are introduced presenting previous literature on the matter and also by explaining the findings of the interviews. Based on the interviews, a clear strategy and a plan is very important in the process of building a successful personal brand that can maintain its followers.

Truly, the data is collected from the interviews of five different chosen candidates, who all work in the field of business, are all financially wealthy and all share a capitalistic view of the world. The interviewees are all Finnish and they all somehow benefit business-wise from their personal brand that is built on social media. The interviewees were chosen by their social media activity, which is at least posts once a day from all of them. Even though all the interviewees work in the field of business, they were selected so that they are of business would differ from each other. Thus, there is only one real estate agent, only one investor, only one insurance agent, etc.

The thesis will aim to point out what kind of advantages and disadvantages having a strong personal brand in social media can have on an individual or on a company that employs the individual having a strong personal brand. The results suggest that there are far more benefits and harms from having a strong personal brand, these will be explained further. Thesis will not only concentrate on personal branding, but also open up the concept of micro-publicity, which is strongly associated with the understanding of successful personal branding.

Keywords: personal branding, social media, marketing, micro-publicity

1. INTRODUCTION

In addition to products, companies and services, the brand and branding field has also expanded to individual people. A personal brand can bring numerous benefits to an individual, such as easier access to new employees for a small entrepreneur, better employment possibilities for students, expanding one's professional network and customer base or new opportunities through different channels of social media (Kang 2013). Social media is increasingly becoming the central of marketing communication, thus the branding channel. Therefore it is safe to say that social media has revolutionized the way we communicate (Wincci & Mohamad 2015). According to Kang (2013), people are more dependant on their brand than ever before as the world is now global and there is enormously more competition in the field of business or marketing than there have ever been.

Peters (1997) explain how today's career path is no longer the same as before when there used to often be exactly one path for a succesful career. Peters (1997) describes the career path to be similar to a chess board or a maze when before it could easily be comapred to stairs. There used to be only two ways, up and down as in today's world the steps can be going up, down, sideways or even across. A personal brand helps with this uncertain career path and makes it easier to to keep the direction up. The essential thing in the article by Peters (1997) described above is that it is much more rare these days to graduate from a school just to spend 40 years in the same job and then just wait for the retirement. It is acknowledged across the world that it is important for the employees to take care of their employment and market value. Thus, the personald branding offers the tool for that.

Ward (2013) and Molyneux (2015) remind us that social media also has its own drawbacks and tensions. For example, Ward (2013) states in his article that personal branding is often seen in social media as an excuse to promote and brag about own accomplishments even it is often unnecessary or out of the context. According to Molyneux (2015), there are some unfortunate events for companies when an employee starts to brand themselves so succesfully that the company where the person is working is getting unnoticeable, thus the employee leaves the

company to by relying on their own strong personal brand to face new challenges. Even with the challenges of personal branding, findings of this thesis clearly suggest that there are much more fortunate possibilities than unfortunate threats in the field on self-branding. At least for the people behind the personal brands, branding has been very useful for them

This research focuses on building a personal brand for micro-influencers on the internet and especially on social media. Earlier studies are largely based on personal brands at a general level and the existing surveys do not explain or visualize the branding process the persons enjoying the micro-publicity. Marwick and Boyd (2010) define micro-publicity as follows: “Micro-publicity can be understood as a mindset and set of practices where the audience is perceived as a fan base. Activity of the fan base is maintained with an active fan management and the micro-influencer appears to its fanbase very carefully and thoughtfully so the fanbase continues to follow the influencer.” There is very little research on micro-publicity. This thesis will study the building of an personal brand and becoming a micro-influencer by using the channels of different social media. The information on the building process is gathered by the interviews had with different Finnish micro-influencers and the conclusion from the interviews is that it is very important for one to have a clear strategy for the building process so that the personal brand will have the wanted results.

Research questions

There are two main issues that this thesis will concentrate on. These issues are formed into two separate questions which the thesis will aim to answer in the end of the paper:

- 1) What are the advantages and disadvantages of using social media from the perspective of personal brand?
- 2) What do micro-influencer think of their own brand?

Research limitations

The study excludes all personal branding that is built or done outside the internet. So the focus of the research is on a personal branding that is builded via internet and to be more specific, builded through the social media platforms. Another limitation is the level of publicity the sampe influencers have. This research concentrates only on lesser-known public figures. In additions, all the interviewees are Finnish. The third limitation concerns what kind of persons were chosen to be interviewed. It is common for the interviewees that they have a capitalist view of the world and

in addition, the interviewees are doing well economically. This research would probably have been very different if interviewees would have been, for example, fitness models or self-made make-up artists with different ethnic backgrounds and with varying financial situations.

The study structure consists of four separate parts. The first part is the introduction where the purpose of the study is explained. The introduction then continues to the second part that consists of theoretical explanations and literature review. Theory presents an overview on the matter of personal branding and micro-publicity. The literature review introduces previous studies on the subject of personal branding. Thirdly, the empirical part aims to answer the questions at hand that were presented in the purpose of the study. The study then ends with the summary and conclusion part that can be categorized as the fourth part.

2. PERSONAL BRANDING

2.1. The concept of personal branding

Personal branding was first mentioned in the literature in 1997. In this case, Peters (1997) began his article by telling us that we all are already walking brands. We walk with a certain brand's cup of coffee in hand, we put on jeans that are a certain brand and so on. He continues that our being is a brand, we wanted it or not. Peters (1997) says it is just that easy and that difficult as it sounds. Karaduman (2015) agrees with Peters and later states the same thing that we all have a personal brand, but highlights that it is not enough to own a personal brand. Good marketing makes the brand known to other people, he adds.

Personal branding also includes things like self-development. Self-development is about how well you know things and what your internal skills are. By utilizing these internal skills, a person opens his own door to success. Branding, on the other hand, is how one shows these self-developed skills in his public image. This successfully shown public image brings out the subject core competencies. This is how Lair (2005) summarizes branding internal knowledge. Covey (1989) emphasizes that building a personal brand is about what people know about you and what is the value you create. His book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* share the idea that a person can achieve significant results in the business world by conscious self-development aimed at improving one's personal position so that others benefit from it as well. This is precisely what branding is about: creating value for the marketplace by marketing your own strengths to the target audience who buys services or products from you.

Kotler (2000) defines a brand as follows: "a name, signs, symbol or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate from those of competitors." The brand is usually combined with large companies, their products, and services. However, today the brand means just as much a brand of a person than a brand of a big corporation. According to Koçiajin et al. (2016), a personal brand can be defined as: "Personal branding entails capturing and promoting an individual's strengths and uniqueness to a target

audience". Therefore, personal branding is marketing your own strengths to your target audience. Luca et al. (2015), on the other hand, define personal branding as follows: "Personal branding is what a person does to escape the anonymity of his profession and to be visible to a group or for a particular reason. "

Personal branding defined in this thesis

There are many debates and definitions of what personal branding actually means. Many definitions needed to be sorted out to find the most suitable one to perfectly exemplify what this thesis aims the personal branding to be understood. The definition of personal branding that is used by Rampersadin (2008) is the definition of how this thesis understands the concept of personal branding. Rampersadin (2008) defines a personal brand as follows in his article: "Your personal brand is a synthesis of all expectations, images, and perceptions it creates in the minds of others when they see or hear your name." Rampersad (2008) lists the famous people who open up this definition and what they associate with each other: for example, Oprah Winfrey is linked to empowering women, Bill Gates reminds technology and charity, and, for example, J. K. Rowling is associated as an author but also with Harry Potter.

2.2. Literature review

In 2007 or before, the personal brand and social media were not in the interest of researchers. This is because social media did not exist in the early 2000s. The amount of related literature is growing at an accelerating pace, so the subject is very timely. Khedher (2012) states that in 2012, the academic literature on personal branding was still underdeveloped. It is therefore very possible that the top of the literature on personal branding has yet to be seen. The articles presented in this study have been selected only from high-quality peer-reviewed scientific publications. The data is collected from databases called ProQuest, EBSCO, Google Scholar, Scopus, Elsewhere in Science, and ISI Web of Knowledge. The literature is searched by using commands as "personal branding", "personal brand" and "self-branding", from which all the relevant sources are picked out from each article.

2.2.1. Benefits of a personal brand

This chapter discusses the benefits of a personal brand that have emerged from the literature. The benefits of a personal brand are examined separately in two subsections, one of which outlines the benefits for individuals and the benefits for businesses.

Benefits for the individual

The key to personal branding is the so-called word of mouth, which spreads the wildfire ways to give it the right things. When you do things exactly as agreed and briskly, the word will inevitably advance. This is what branding is all about. People tell you about a great experience with you and tell your friend about you. There is good news for all of us in personal brands: anyone can build one for themselves and anyone has the opportunity to be different and thus stand out from the mass (Peters 1997).

Similarly to Peters (1997), Rampersad (2008) states that every individual should take control of their own personal brand, as it is the individual's own brand that people will remember him by. Especially if a person is a top professional in his / her own field, it is important to create one's own personal brand in order to genuinely give people a professional image. Your personal brand must be strong and above all genuine. A personal brand should represent who the person really is. A personal brand must be built on a person's own values to make it a strong entity. In this way, the brand is genuinely valuable to other people. (Rampersad 2008). People experience changes in their life situations during their lives. In this case, the old personal brand may no longer represent reality, so the brand must change to be valid. Thus, the personal brand must be built so that the change is not treated as an alternative but as an inevitable thing (Labrecque et al. 2011).

Little (2012) writes about the benefits of a personal brand in terms of sales in his article "E-Selling", which was growing in popularity in 2012. In E-selling, the seller had to have a channel on the internet from which a person can find his / her personal brand. According to the article, trust in sales is everything and here the personal brand is a great help. Little (2012) brings out an interesting perspective relating to the brand and sales. He writes that people of the Y generation buy different from the internet than people older than them. Thus, in his view, the brand that sells on the internet must be where the Y generation searches for information as the product that he sells could possibly solve the problem that the potential customers might have. He presents a personal

brand and a strong presence in social media as a solution. That makes it much easier to Y-generation to find and buy the product of the seller.

Benefits for the organization

Vosloban (2014) states that the biggest asset of every company is the people who work there. Such a human capital is impossible to copy by competitors, and so it can be a competitive advantage for the company. Vosloban (2014) continues that if a company wants to be ahead of its competitors, employees' strong personal brands play a key role in this. This is because an employee with a strong personal brand will always be a factor in the marketplace that raises the company's level. The contribution of such an employee is of particular importance to the company's image and visibility in the marketplace. In the same study, it is said that personal brands contribute to the company's performance and help in to create a positive image of the company. Vosloban (2014) highlights that especially emerging economies would particularly benefit from employees with strong personal brands.

In the article by Vallas and Cummins (2015), employees should be proactive when they are with customers. The article says this means in practice that individuals should market themselves in the marketplace to strengthen their own personal brand. This conscious enhancement of your personal brand will help the company you work for to succeed and make your own brand stronger. Miles and Mangold (2005) also wrote about the benefits of a personal brand for businesses. According to them, the well-known airline Southwest Airlines sought to grow their own business specifically through their employees' brands. According to them, this means practically engaging customers and increasing people's faith in their brand.

In addition to the benefits to businesses mentioned above, a personal brand can also benefit non-profit organizations. According to an article written by Nolan (2015), non-profit organizations benefit from the strong personal brand of their leaders. According to Nolan (2015), this added value means in practice the dissemination of awareness of this non-profit organization among the general public. A manager involved in charity work can write to some social media platform, for example, about an ongoing campaign or collection. Thus, a personal brand also benefits non-profit organizations.

However, Molyneux (2015) reminds that despite all the above benefits, companies need to be vigilant when their employees start building their own personal brands. For example, there have

been situations with reporters where an individual reporter has gained a huge personal fanbase, then left and found his own company in the same field. The disadvantage was thus for the company. For the individual, the popularity of his personal brand was obviously extremely profitable in this case.

2.3. Building a personal brand

According to Martin (2009), the value that an employee creates for a company in their their work, is no longer limited to the walls of the workplace nowadays. The employee, especially in a leading position, should pay a special attention to their external image. The personal brand of such an employee should also be appreciated by the colleagues. Everyone can improve their own brand by talking in events, being a volunteer in relevant organizations and writing articles. All such acts lead to a stronger personal brand.

According to Wetsch (2012), building a personal brand for students begins with a personality test. For example, Myers-Briggs' 16 personalities is a useful test, after which students have a reasonable understanding of their own personality. Relying on this legitimate result, students are ready to create a vision of their own strengths, weaknesses, passions and achievements. After this, students make a position pitch where the student summarizes everything he know about himself. This part is at the heart of your personal brand. Then the social media stage begins, where students start to build their personal brand in the real world in a way they see best fit. Students were introduced to social media channels such as LinkedIn, Google+, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. According to students' feedback, this course has helped them to get jobs, network ore efficiently and stand out from the crowd.

Doctors also benefit from a strong personal brand. Luca et al. (2015) surveyed the personal brands of Romanian doctors. Their results show that a doctor who chooses to build his own brand earns more money than a doctor who does not give time to build a personal brand. The article by Luca et al. (2015) also mentions that doctors with a strong personal brand receive a lot of recommendations from their patients. At the end of the study, it is still stated that the famous doctors are the most expensive but still more popular. This study suggests that doctors really should book some time in the beginning of their career to build a personal brand. It will benefit them for years to come.

2.3.1. Personal brand in social media

Dutta (2014) says that modern leaders need to use social media for three reasons. The first reason is that you can easily and above all build your own personal brand. As a second reason Dutta (2014) mentions that social media can be a tool to network with all stakeholders. As a third reason he mentions that social media provides an excellent learning environment through the collection of immediate feedback.

According to Harris and Raen (2011), the construction and maintenance of a personal brand are the things that differ employees in today's labor market. Use of social media tells who is reactive and one who is proactive. Thus, according to them, it is imperative that all that is written about a person on the internet must be something that drives towards this goal and which is not detrimental to the individual. Harris and Raen (2011), states that Google's search engine is a "Reputation Management System" because any person can find good and bad things when his name is searched in the Google. In their article, they list the tools how anyone can improve their internet presence:

- 1) Blogging
- 2) Networking in LinkedIn
- 3) Twitter presence

In their opinion, another pillar of a successful personal brand is to act as a "giver". This term means that the person gives more to others than asks from them. The last important element mentioned by Harris and Rae (2011) is that sometimes a personal brand can be built too much. With this they mean that, for example, a company employee's personal brand is becoming too known, too big and too familiar, which, in their opinion, can lead to suspicion and seem as a threat to other employees.

Marwick and Boyd (2011) states that the technology offered by social media gives people the opportunity to experience the feeling of unity between the people they follow by creating and sharing existing content. Social media followers and their formed communities create new opportunities for people to expand their networks, but it should be kep in mind that social media also has its own drawbacks and tensions.

The purpose of branding is to build an asset and capital for a particular person. Generally, building a brand requires huge financial investments, but in the era of social media, an individual is able to brand themselves effectively and relatively cheaply. In addition, people are willing to commit and engage with companies and personal brands created by these leaders in social media. (Karaduman 2013). Karaduman (2013) also adds that social media creates opportunities for companies as well as for people working in them, especially through branding. When marketing and social media management are at an excellent level in the company, the company and its branded executives are allowed to wait for the same from the marketplace.

Wetsch (2012) mentions in the conclusions of his article that the traditional and social media are integrating at a very fast paced way. Especially for students who will become professionals in their field in the future, building their own brand from an early stage is important. According to Wetsch (2012), in such a changing environment in media field, it is even the responsibility of teachers and professors to teach young students about branding through social media. According to research of Wetsch (2012), the proper use of social media clearly helps students who want to work in the field of marketing. He continues, that by learning social media and own personal brand building already at the beginning of professional career, it has far-reaching effects for the rest of the career.

Instagram, LinkedIn and Facebook

In their article, Lindahl et al. (2013) study picture platform Instagram in the context of a personal brand. They point out in their article that through the images one can tell exactly the story he wants. According to them, the images do not have to be true, but the story they tell can be also false. However, publishing such false images is not a good way, at least because the followers often take this way very irritating. In the study by Lindahl et al. (2013), images were seen as a better way to build a brand in a wanted way than mere text, as they say that pictures can express things better.

Where image service Instagram is mainly used for image sharing, LinkedIn is used as a social media specialized in networking. LinkedIn is used specifically to find suitable candidates for different job positions. In the eyes of recruiters, Facebook is then the tool that blocks some of the candidates (Hood et al., 2014). LinkedIn is perceived through recruiters more like a digital curriculum vitae (CV) where you can see the potential employee's work history and interests. Facebook, on the other hand, is more of a personal footprint on the internet and if inappropriate material is found in this footprint, the recruiter can leave this potential employee uninvited even

for an interview. Such inappropriate material may mean images or postings containing alcoholic beverages or political opinions, the article explains. Hood et al. (2014) state that sometimes LinkedIn is also used to exclude bad candidates. According to the article, such bad features can be, for example, unprofessional or poor quality pictures and even bad keywords. Labrecquen et al. (2011) adds that some people deliberately share such harmful content and some unconsciously. There may be a risk that if a person does not understand the possible negative aspects of social media, his business and professional career may have harm (Labrecque et al. 2011).

Although social media offers the above-mentioned opportunities for personal branding, it also has its own challenges. For example, the changes in algorithms and content management. If a person who has built a personal brand on a particular social media channel does not stay updated in this change, the audience, or part of the audience, may be lost to some other substitute (Labrecque et al. 2011).

2.3.2. Micro-publicity

Micro-publicity can create tensions between users in social media, such as in Twitter. Twitter does not use the term "friends" or "connections " but speaks of "followers". The more a person has followers, the more valuable he is to third parties, such as companies interested in marketing. Thus, social status of an individual has a quantitative indicator. The fact that the user has a huge amount of followers on Twitter, gives this user the power to influence a lot of people, which the user can perceives a status symbol, which in turn can irritate these followers. However, this can be avoided by being genuine and staying humble. A popular user should not present he knows everything about everything, but he must be authentic (Marwick & Boyd 2010).

Micro-publicity has increased as content sharing in social media has been so eased, thus the people of micro-publicity have had it easy to grow their own audience. The number of things to follow and the number of people in social media is so high, that the audience shrinks to a smaller extent than the mass media. Thus, a person may be well known to a particular group, even if he is generally unknown. The person enjoying the micro-publicity can thus be defined as one who is known among a certain group, but the general public does not know him (Marwick & Boyd 2010).

3. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

3.1. Methodology

The methodology used in this thesis is a qualitative method. According to Hirsijärvi et al. (2005), typical features of qualitative research are the following aspects:

- The research is a comprehensive acquisition of information, and the material is gathered in natural, real situations.
- Preferring people as an instrument for data collection.
- Using inductive analysis.
- Use of qualitative methods in material acquisition.
- Select the target population appropriately, not using the random sampling method.
- The research plan will take shape as the study progresses.
- Treat cases as unique and interpret the material accordingly.

Based on the above-mentioned issues, a qualitative research method is suitable for this research. This research is a comprehensive information gathering in nature, and the material is gathered in real two-sided interview situations either face-to-face or on a phone. Thus, naturally, this study uses people as an instrument of data collection. The analysis of the study is inductive and a qualitative method was used in the acquisition of the material. The target population was appropriately selected by direct contact and interviewed. The research plan was formed all the time as the research was more ready. Cases have been treated uniquely and material has been interpreted through this perspective. The research plan was formed according to the progress of the study.

3.2. Data

The empirical part of the research is carried out with semistructured interviews. Introducing the interviewees' own perspectives is the main characteristic of semistructured interviews (Ayres 2008). According to the same source, the answers you receive from the interviewees are usually much wider than, for example, using an open interview method. According to Ayres (2008), semistructured interviews are interviews where the interviewer asks the interviewees questions that are in specific order but they are really open questions. Thus, semistructured interviews are

particularly suitable for this thesis, as it is wanted to minimize directing the interviewees in a specific direction. Interview questions were also meant to be answered as deeply as possible to get out of the most essential hidden information that would not necessarily come out during open questions. The main goal is to give the voice to the interviewees and their interpretations. In addition to the mentioned interviews, the interviewees' social media profiles have been reviewed and analyzed to gain more essential data. There was 8 different questions used in the interviews, these were not copied from previous studies, but rather constructed by taking the interviewees business field, their background and willingness to answer truthfully into consideration. The discussions had in the interviews were all written down into notes and later on transferred into this thesis. The tape recorder was not used as it was told the interviewees that their identity would stay anonymous.

3.2.1. Contacting the interviewees

In total, there were five different interviewed people. They were all contacted via LinkedIn. There were 12 people contacted at first, from which 7 of them agreed for an interview. Because of the few interviewees overlapped with each other regarding their field of work, there were two candidates eliminated and last result was 5 interviewees. Four out of five interviewees were interviewed via traditional phone call and one of them met for a lunch. The interviews were all amazingly interesting and they all offered more than expected, both information and tips wise. Interviews varied a little by their length, the shortest one being just 25 minutes and the longest one being 90 minutes. The longest one was the face-to-face meeting during lunch.

3.2.2. Introducing the interviewees

When the interviewees were first contacted, they were shortly explained the research and asked them to agree for an interview only if they could agree on the thesis to publish their name. This might explain why so many did not agree for an interview. However, in the beginning of each interview, interviewees were told that all the information and and talks will be presented anonymously. This is because there is not any relevant reason how could publishing their names in this paper bring any added value and it might have helped the interviewees to open up even more than they were prepared as they knew their identities was going to stay hidden. This could easily be the reason why there were such a great data gathered from the talks with the interviewees.

The interviewees are numbered just simple from 1-5, first interviewee being named interviewee 1 and the last being interviewee 5. They will be shortly called IV 1, IV 2, IV 3, etc. Their numbering is made with the same order that the actual interviews happened which was also scheduled randomly, thus there is no reason to assume that one interviewee is more important or valuable than the other, regardless their number. Some of the interviewees are easy to recognize from the interviews, especially for Finnish readers, but this was acceptable for all the interviewees. The next table presents the interviewees with the information of their profession, content of their publications, frequency of their publications, and finally the number of their followers on Instagram.

	THE INTERVIEWEES				
	1	2	3	4	5
Profession	Insurance Agent	Real Estate Agent	Financial Specialist	Professional investor	Lawyer
Content	Travel & Wellness	Success & Motivation	Customer Service	Investing	Men's Fashion
Frequency	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily
Followers	6450	7100	3100	2850	21 000

Table 1. Overview of interviewees

3.2.3. About the interviewees

Interviewee 1

IV 1 is an Insurance Agent specializing in regular household insurances. His social media posts are only seldom regarding insurances precisely as his main goal is to gain people's trust and then use it for a business. As mentioned below, he is a real giver. The good thing about IV 1 is that he is genuine a good hearted person, you can see that kilometres away and you automatically trust his posts. IV 1 mainly uses Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn, but he is definitely most active in Instagram with his daily stories and updates. His posts are usually very well taken photos where he shares his thoughts about life and human mind through the caption of the photos. He says he gets a lot of feedback how inspirational and important his messages are and he has increased his follower amount by thousands just during this year of 2019. He says that he started doing these

captions and stories about everyday life in the beginning of the year 2019 and he is now concentrating gaining Finnish followers. That is why he is mainly writing and talking in Finnish on his posts.

IV 1 gets customers asking for insurances simply because he has mentioned in his profile that he is in the insurance business, even though his posts are usually about something else. His main goal is to be a motivational speaker or some kind of a life coach in the future. That is why he is talking about inspirational daily things to motivate people to workout, be more positive or even get over a break-up.

Interviewee 2

IV 2 is very well known real estate agent and one of the most successful ones in his field in Finland. He is known to use his Russian language skills on his benefit and has a huge customer base of wealthy Russian investors and simple home buyers. He also released his first book this year about selling, and he is starring in a reality-tv show where the citizens authorize the real estate agent to buy an apartment of their needing without the citizens seeing the home before the purchase.

He is most active on Instagram and Facebook, and of course on LinkedIn. He also has his own blog. He is not currently very active in any other social media channels. IV 2 is very known on his personality that is anything else then quiet and humble. He likes to show off his recent purchases, for example, expensive watches, cars or trips, and he also actively tells the statistics of his sales on the current week or month. This person really lives in social media and he also states that there has not been a working day for three years now where he would miss to post something on social media, mostly on Instagram.

Interviewee 3

IV 3 is a financial specialist working in the banking sector. He mainly concentrates on publishing posts on LinkedIn as there he can have an access to direct business. IV 3 is concentrating on new customer acquisitions so the main business comes from outside sources. These outside sources are anybody who works in a field where customers might need new housing loan. He says that his target group are the real-estate agents in LinkedIn as they meet hundreds of new house-buyers per month and by serving real-estate agents quickly and being very helpful to them, he gets a lot of prospects for new housing loans.

IV 3 says that real-estate agents need readiness and getting things quickly done from banks as the buyers of their listing need the money from a bank and also a purchase date. IV 3 promises to help with these and concentrates on making a name of himself in the different real-estate agencies. He is in a point where he gets daily emails from different real-estate agents regarding possible house loan prospects. He posts and talks a lot about great customer service and is very active on giving positive feedback publicly in LinkedIn. This is how he gets the positive feedback himself as well.

Interviewee 4

IV 4 is a long-term housing investor and asset manager. He, like everyone else interviewed, publishes daily in social media. The social media channels used by IV 4, according to the interviewee himself, are Instagram, Facebook and his own website where he keeps his blog. His Instagram reveals his real estate adventure in the United States. There, through his company, he buys really bad shaped houses in poor conditions from auctions. The idea of the IV4 is to improve neighborhoods, and thus improve the well-being of the whole community and society. IV 4 transforms often deserted houses into stunning properties and sells them to ordinary American people. That way, the whole residential area can live better when one house looks better and not deserted.

Interviewee 4 publishes several times a day on Instagram and Facebook. On a normal day, he publishes about 3-6 pictures. Most reactions, comments, likes and sharings are collected by his so-called funny posts. For example, memes related to housing investment are such, where he gets a lot of reactions from his followers.

Interviewee 5

IV 5 is also a Finnish man with his own online shop for men's style and clothing. He actively produces content related to men's dressing. He has his own blog that is available in his online shop. His main social media platform is Instagram, where he has by far the highest number of followers of all interviewees. In addition to these media, he also actively uses Facebook. IV 5 gets the most responds to his publications that are specially fine or different from the rest of the genre. He publishes stunning images about men's style and the most wonderful ones get the most reactions. He publishes to all his social media channels once a day, except for Instagram about 3 times a day.

4. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

4.1 About building a personal brand

Based on the interviews, the interviewees had all knowingly followed some kind of social media image building process or a model. Each of the interviewees shared the view that their social media publicity has come somewhat intentionallly, and after realizing their micro-publicity, they have put on even a bigger effort to try keeping it up and increase it purposefully.

This is not a surprising results when comparing it to previously mentioned literature, where several articles mention that a strong personal brand is built through conscious construction, e.g., Gall (2010), Rampersad (2008) and Wetsch (2012). However, the difference between this study and the earlier literature is in the publicity of the personal brands mentioned. In this thesis, the focus is on slightly less known social media influencers and not on public figures known widely around the world or even in a country. The results would still suggest that in order to get a great follower base in social media, you do have to follow deliberately some kind of process of building a personal brand. The table below shows these observations in compressed form.

Interviewee	Followed a specific process on building a personal brand	Benchmarked other social media influencers / personal brands
1	Yes	Yes
2	Yes	Yes
3	Yes	No
4	Yes	No
5	Yes	Yes

Table 2. Building process of the interviewees

Some of the interviewees admitted on benchmarking other social media influencers in the beginning of their personal branding process. They mostly gathered tips and ideas on how frequently it would be optimal to post pictures or texts, what times during the day or even what days during the weeks are best to get the most likes and shares. The interviewees that denied

benchmarking others simply explained this by telling that they wanted to keep their posts very authentic and by not copying or even taking examples from other would help to keep things very original and minimize overlapping with other influencers in the same field.

The results of the thesis go hand in hand with Kang's (2013) interpretation. He states that the starting point for a successful personal branding is that one has a clear and unambiguous goal toward which he or she will go with his / her brand. This research confirms the words of Kang (2013), as each interviewee has created and succeeded in his social brand with a clear and unambiguous goal in social media. Kang (2013) also argues that it is possible to know whether the branding was successful by mirroring the current situation to the starting point. This is true for those interviewed in this study, as they are all able to look back in starting situation and find that they have succeeded in building their personal brand when they compare it to their starting point. However, some of the interviewees believed that they had also taken risks, tried new things and sometimes made big mistakes. Thus, the area is still so immature that even with trying and mistakes, it is still possible to go a long way, if the goal and the plan are clear.

According to Martin's (2009) article, the biggest illusion of people's perception of personal brands is that they are specifically made. According to Martin (2009), this is wrong and could not be farther away from the truth, because personal brands are built through what is natural and authentic. The results are not exactly in line with Martin (2009) as most of the interviewees of this thesis explain that building their successful personal brand, they had to talk and post about things that they do not really care as much as they say. Also they had to act positive all the time, even when not feeling that way and as they work in the field of business, they have to talk only good things about customers. Again, the reason why the results are not in line with the arguments of Martin (2009) can be explained that this thesis displays interviews that are made with influencers from quite a narrow field.

According to Kozinets and Ceronen (2014), without a strategy, content providers of social media often do not go anywhere but merely provide information, even if consumers have a need for intelligent vision and inspiration. This study confirms this statement, as all interviewees have according to their own words, have a clear strategy for social media. In addition, I received answers to the strategy question of how many times the interviewees publish in social media and what the aspiration they are seeking. As a common factor, the interviewees have set quite an ambitious goal,

thus, for example, the publication frequency is often missed and most of them post every single day. This means that many of them would like to post even multiple times a day.

4.2. Advantages and disadvantages of a personal brand

Social media was perceived by the interviewees mainly as a benefiting element. Each interviewee had also experienced some drawbacks from social media. However, the benefits weigh much more than the disadvantages that were clearly lower. Finding are similar with the previous literature where disadvantages are mentioned much more clearly. One of the recurring side effects of the famous personal brand was that influencer could no longer speak freely in the public what he thought, even if the subject was not related to his own field. For example, they do not dare to take a stand on politics or discussions on minorities, as they are constantly thinking about how it looks to potential customers. Thus, the interviewees felt that they were no longer ordinary citizens, but that they were constantly on duty of customer service. This is likely to be inherent to this sample.

Interviewee	Have faced advantages on having a personal brand?	Have faced disadvantages on having a personal brand?
1	Yes	Yes
2	Yes	Yes
3	Yes	No
4	Yes	No
5	Yes	Yes

Table 3. Advantages and disadvantages on having a personal brand

Advantages

Most of the advantages interviewees mentioned were similar to each other:

- Invitations for job interviews without applying
- New friends
- Collaboration possibilities
- Fame (in some level)

- People apply for work or internships
- Employer satisfaction
- Invitations to public and private events to speak out

In their article, Marwick and Boyd (2011) write that the followers easily create a state in which they feel that they know the public figure that they are following. Many interviewees mention this when they tell that they earn customers' trust much more easily if the customer is a social media follower when comparing it to customer that do not know the interviewees before hand from social media.

Little (2002), states in his article, that the personal brand supports internet sales. The interviewee 5 has his own online shop and a blog that he keeps under his own name. Interviewee 5 mentioned that most of the online purchases are made through the blog and links shared on Instagram, so customers buy much more easily if they go to the online shop through a channel that is about the public figure. They feel like they are buying directly from this public figure even though it is just a link that could be found anywhere else on the internet. This confirms the results of Little's (2002) research.

Martin (2009) writes that by going to talk to different events, a person can strengthen his personal brand. Some of the interviewees said that they had been invited to talk to different events. Thus, the personal brand, according to this study, is a self-reinforcing feature when it is combined with Martin's (2009) findings. Thanks to the visibility of social media, a person carrying a strong personal brand are asked to speak in events, which further strengthens their personal brand.

Disadvantages

Here are some of the disadvantages mentioned by the interviewees

- Feeling like being on duty for customer service all the time
- Not having a freedom of speech without the consequences
- Negative feedbacks are usually on the carpet for others to see as well

In the same way as previous literature support advantages mentioned in this thesis, the disadvantages applies to previous literature as well. Martin's (2009) article speaks explicitly of people's hate towards known brand names. This has happened to all of the interviewees except the interviewee 1. Angry comments or private messages are so much easier to say than talking to somebody face-to-face and giving them the same negative feedback. The problem in these feedback are of course the fact that when they are not sent private, they are visible to all followers. IV 1 explains that the reason why he has spared from negative comments might be that he is now deliberately talking about his business but rather giving tips and points for traveling, living a more positive life and taking care of one's health. His profile is too positive to anybody to dare to speak bad publicly.

Two of the interviewees have been directly told that they will not be accepted to the workplace they are applying because they are public figures that they do not want in the company, regarding their public opinions and statements. Similar references are given by Hood et al. (2014), telling about potential employees being cut down by employers by using Facebook, if the material distributed and the image provided by these public figures were inappropriate.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to find out what are the advantages and disadvantages of having a social media personal brands. In addition, the aim of the study was to identify potential strategies used by people constructing a personal brand in social media. The research questions were as follows:

- 1) What are the advantages and disadvantages of using social media from the perspective of personal brand?
- 2) What do micro-influencer think of their own brand?

In this study, five people with strong social media brand were interviewed, all of whom were asked the same questions. The results show that there is much more benefits for having a strong personal brand in social media than harm. These benefits include, for example, career opportunities and increased sales for entrepreneurs. These benefits came up with every interviewee. The results also show one clear disadvantage that came out of every interviewees; If you have a strong personal brand in your social media, you cannot act anyway you want as you are always on the customer service duty, because you have to act pleasingly to your current and possible customers. In addition, micro-influencers think of their personal brand in such a way that it is hardly earned and worked for. They have all used certain strategies and posted daily even not feeling like it, so it represent the results of a hard work for them. They are of course all grateful for the publicity they are having and feel like they have a responsibility as well to speak up for the community of their own field. Thus, the results show somewhat expectedly that a conscious strategy has been used in the building of the social media personal brand. The results also show that there are clear basic rules that have been used by successful social media personal brands.

Probably the most important finding in this study is that none of the interviewees gained their micro-publicity by chance. On the contrary, the influencers, even the ones with the smallest followers have used a specific strategy for the personal brand building process in social media. This as such may not be a discovery, but a confirmation of previous studies. Gall (2010), Rampersad (2008) and Wetsch (2012) all emphasize the importance of a personal brand building process and consider it essential as part of a successful brand building. According to the findings of this paper, this is very true. Of course, this research could be expanded by involving more influencers in the field, from both genders and from different ages. Certainly, there are those micro-

influencers who have gained their publicity by accident. This has happened several times, for example, through Youtube videos made with humor.

Second key discovery of the study is that practically every person interviewed experienced that they benefited from social media more than they got harm. Every interviewee talked about the benefits for a very long time, but the disadvantages were spoken with only a few words. The biggest benefits experienced were increased business for those who have companies and employees have benefited from having made their positions stronger in their current jobs. The second biggest benefit was that the interviewees feel that they enjoy a certain power of word. They are often invited to speak and their opinions clearly have a value in their field. The biggest drawback was that the influencers were not able to be completely who they really are in social media, perhaps never. This means that they have to constantly contemplate both current and potential customers and behave publicly in a pleasant way. That is, you have to do constant customer service. This study was able to show that the benefits mentioned in previous literature are very much true. M. Vallas and Cummins (2015), Miles and Mangold (2005) and Vosloban (2014) are on the same line with the results of this study.

The third interesting finding is that the person who created a strong personal brand do not really use all possible social media channels. The quality therefore compensates the amount. The interviewees used only channels that were easiest for them to learn and where they were more active in the role of a follower before even starting to build a personal brand. So none of them learned a new platform of social media just to build a personal brand. Instagram and LinkedIn are definitely the most popular social media platforms used by those interviewed in this study. Everyone also has access to Snapchat, but it is only reserved for friends and family members where they can freely goof around, so they haven't even shared their user IDs openly.

An interesting subject for further research could be that this same research would be done so that the interviews would only be of the opposite sex, so only women. Also, mixing both genders could work. Another interesting subject for a follow-up study would be what kind of impact it would have if all the influencers would expand their social media channels to all possible and available social media platforms rather than just sticking in few channels that they find convenient. A third interesting subject for a follow-up study would be to examine fitness or lifestyle bloggers or other large group and find out what kind of process they use to build up a personal brand and what kind of benefits and disadvantages they experience. The fourth interesting subject of further research

could be how building the brand of public figures known to the whole nation differs from the micro-publicity influencer who were the subject of this study.

Based on the results of the interviews and previous studies, the suggestions for people aiming to build a successful personal brand would firstly be having a clear and strong strategy of the building process. The target audience should be selected and the main goal of what one wants to achieve with their micro-publicity needs to be decided. For example, this could be increasing sales, customer base, awareness of a certain cause or organization or just simply aiming for a micro-publicity. In today's world, simply by having a devoted follower base can bring you a lot of opportunities via collaborations and marketing of other brands.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. The Questionnaire

Q1: Did you start to build your personal brand consciously with a certain strategy?

Q2: Did you benchmark other brands or influencers before or during your building process?

Q3: Where did you learn to use your certain strategy or building process?

Q4: What channels of social media do you use currently? Did you use them before starting to knowingly build a personal brand?

Q5: What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a personal brand in social media in your own situation?

Q6: What are the possible risks or negative effect on having a micro-publicity?

Q7: How strongly did your social media behaviour change after deciding to build a personal brand?

Q8: How do you choose the channels that you use for maintaining your current personal brand?

