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THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL BRANDING IN INDIVIDUAL'S CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN FINLAND

Bachelor's thesis

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I hereby declare that I have compiled the paper independently

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis explores the theory behind personal branding and how it can affect individuals in their professional life and their career development. Personal branding is a fast-growing trend that is slowly turning into a tool which many already calls "the new resume".

The aim of this thesis is to explore personal branding in today's world and how it can affect one's career development in Finland. To find answers to the aim of this thesis is accomplished by doing semi-structured interviews with competent Finnish business professionals. By reading this research, one can get an overlook of what personal branding is today and how it can affect positively in an individual's career development in Finland.

This bachelors' thesis is divided in two parts. The first part presents the overview of literature regarding the assets and importance of personal branding in today's job market, adding practical mechanisms that can be used for building the professional personal brand and ways to promote it using different social media channels. Furthermore, the author addresses the issue on how personal branding works in the business world in Finland today. The second part employs the qualitative research method that the author uses to map, how five Finnish business professionals see their journey to success in Finland with the help of branding.

The results obtained through this research show that in a small country like Finland it is very rewarding to an individual's professional development to build a personal brand. To get awareness through social media can help an individual for example at getting different exciting job proposals and boost their sales. The research show that being systematic, motivated and willing to work hard will help an individual to achieve the desired goal within their personal brand.

Keywords: Personal branding, social media, career development, Finland, bachelor thesis

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to explore personal branding in today's world and how it can affect one's career development in Finland. Branding is today more than just a logo or a common phrase. It includes everything an individual or a business does. Having a strong and solid personal brand can set an individual apart from their competitors. To market one's personal brand has mainly become a requirement for getting noticed in the business world. Nowadays, when looking at branding, companies and entrepreneurs are no longer seen as identified by their products. Instead, both companies and entrepreneurs are active personalized themselves. Their doings are known in a different way and this is between brand identity and the entrepreneur's identity. The branding system individualize personality and allows now to change the perspective and personification. Entrepreneurs and people who are working for a company are being more creative and innovative online, and personality is the absolute core concept that allows the individual to identify him or herself in the society. Building your network through different social media channels will boost one's career and chances to find interesting job opportunities. The common phrase "network is your net worth" is the idea behind this thesis.

In this bachelor's thesis, which has its focus on Finnish business professionals, the research problem is the following: Personal branding is a concept that is discussed more openly within business and everyone has the chance to create one. Thus, Finns are known to be shy and they tend to underestimate their success and competence. Being recognized and exultant is not seen as a positive thing in Finland. Will a personal brand give a positive direction in an individual's career despite the opinions that Finns usually has?

The meaning and ambition of this thesis is to study that and to find answers to the following research questions:

- How does a personal brand influence an individual's professional career development in Finland?
- What aspects does it require from an individual to build a successful personal brand?

- How to successfully maintain a personal brand?

The whole purpose of this bachelor's thesis is to analyse what current personal branding practice is, identify the level of capability it has now and research the impact it has on the professional life. The author wants to study how a personal brand can positively affect one's professional life in Finland and see if one needs to brand him-herself to get noticed in the hectic fast-growing business world. For this reason, the aim to do a research on this topic and interview professionals in Finland who have built their career around their brand is interesting for the author. It is a fascinating and a vast experience, since the author is herself currently building her career and starting to be more active on social media. The author wants to succeed and build a strong career and wanted to know if building a personal brand can speed up her career success in Finland.

To find answers to the stated research questions, the author uses qualitative research methods. The author carried out qualitative interviews with five Finnish business professionals who all have developed their career in Finland through their personal brand online and offline. Interviewees met the author in May 2019 and November 2019 and told their stories. The data is collected with the help of interviews forms and the primary data for the research questions. The secondary data composes a conventional outline of personal branding and its importance in an individual's career development. Therefore, information is collected from academic sources such as articles and books that where relevant to the topic and has updated information about personal branding.

The thesis is divided into three different parts. In the beginning of the thesis is the theoretical framework about personal branding and the importance of it in business. The overview of what personal branding is in practice and the benefit it can bring to an individual's career development today is presented. The second part of the thesis leads into the methodology of the research. The planning of the research and data collection method is presented.

The last part is about the empirical part of the study, including the main data, interviews that are carried out and analysed, and the end results. Lastly, the research questions are answered based on the study in the best possible way, followed by the discussion and conclusions.

The author of this thesis is grateful for all the time, effort and knowledge the interviewees have given. With all the information gained through this research, the author is convinced that one can build a successful network with their personal brand in Finland and succeed in their field with it.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW OF PERSONAL BRANIDNG IN BUSINESS

Personal branding is a concept that has been with us for years. The theory behind focuses on a person instead of a company or a product, seeing the person as a brand. With new social media platforms and constantly changing world within technology, it is hard to keep up and stand out of the crowd. With the help of personal branding an individual can, with the right knowledge, build an powerful brand that tells a personalized story of them to other business professionals.

Therefore the author wanted to study the overview of personal branding and know the history of the concept and the meaning behind it today. Also, it was interesting to study the benefits a personal brand can give to an indvidual and what the basics are behind th concept. Then the author saw it interesting to research the building process behind a personal brand and know how to continuly develop the brand to keep it relevant to the audience.

1.1. The overview of personal branding

Amazon CEO and founder Jeff Bezos once said, "Your brand is what people say about you when you are not in the room" (Simmons n.d., 4).

The concept was introduced by Tom Peters in 1997 and he means that individuals' can be brands in the same way as products can be, individuals should thereby market themselves correctly. A personal brand clarifies and communicates what a person is (Arruda 2009) and continues to be built and developed around the clock through documents and statements. The personal brand is thus about how you want to be perceived by the outside world and not how you perceive yourself (Bence 2009). To brand yourself one should be different from others and try to stand out in the crowd. Marketing and positioning yourself can have an impact in your career (Khedher 2014, 30).

In the past, individuals could build a reputation and gain more visibility by networking at business meetings, social events and gatherings. Creating a personal brand was also about handing out nice looking business cards and hiring a graphic designer to do your logo. With the development of social media and an increasingly individualized society, the brand individuals build around themselves is perhaps the most important way they today can stand out in their circle of influence. Personal branding is the means by which people remember you, it is more than an impressive logo, it is how an individual present him-/herself online and offline. (Lake 2019)

The most important elements of a great personal brand are your thought of leadership, your style and choosing the right platform. With a special outstanding style, and individual can be recognized in a whole different way. It is almost a must to have something that really stands out. For example, a beard, a crazy colour in your hair, or the way you dress and what you say does usually help in personal branding development. (Reed 2017, 12)

The second is an individual´s thought on leadership. It is crucial to have opinions, being proactive, being controversial and interesting, but most importantly, one should never be boring. Sharing thoughts and opinions on social media can bring more supporters and haters. Looking on how you communicate is important. (*Ibid.)*

The third important thing is to choose the right platform. If you want to be recognized and heard on social media, you need to be incorporating different styles of engaging, and interacting with your audience. The platform could be LinkedIn, it could be Twitter, it could be Instagram, but it is crucial to ensure that you choose your platform to communicate your personal brand. (Ramsey 2018, 19)

In 2019, the biggest difference in personal branding is based on how networking is done. Previously, anyone had a chance to be recognized and build a reputation by attending dinners, business meetings, and other networking events. The main reason for attending these events where to meet other business-minded people and to build a relationship with them. In 2019, personal brands can be managed online through the same way: socializing and networking. With other words, the more a person focuses on networking in 2019, the better their brand is going to grow, simple as that. Having a strong networking strategy will help individuals towards more recognition by their preferred audience. (*Ibid.,* 18)

Many people think networking on social media is simple. Yet, social media is quickly changing, and the networking front needs to be done with a strict strategy. If an individual want to have a strong reputation built on social media, he/she needs to add different styles of engaging, sharing and interacting with audience. Taking advance of the different features on social media platforms and covering multiple different platforms is crucial in 2019. The more an individual shares and posts on social media, the more attention towards their brand will arise. This is how an individual create reputation and maximizes their success. (*Ibid.*, 19)

In 2019, anyone willing to create a mark of success needs to know how to stand out from the rest of the world. Standing out is the only way to be recognized and seen by the desired audience. It is crucial to understand how social media works because the competition is getting more intense every year. (Greenspan 2017)

1.2. The benefits of having a personal brand

Nowadays, personal branding is crucial when building a successful career. Personal branding includes much more than going to events to make contacts these days. It is how an individual present themselves to customers, potential clients, and anyone vital to their career. The brand is an expression of what an individual has to offer, it shows confidence and credibility. (Stahl 2019) A personal brand can enable to earn more clients or sales via business, get industry recognition, get better jobs, and moreover to create new opportunities for person or a company (Ramsey 2018, 17).

Personal branding is great for example for recent graduates who want to differ themselves among the other competitors and for entrepreneurs who want to tell their story in a personalized way and hopefully with this get recognition. Being active online as an entrepreneur can lead to that investors could find them and potentially invest in them. Self-promotion has some great benefits since it will increase one's reputation, influencers or other business professionals can give endorsement and opportunities will grow faster. (Kang, 2013)

A professional personal brand that is detached from the work role is still rare, but examples are still found in many fields, and such are among digital media professionals. A person does not need to quit their job to build a personal brand online. Business professionals are starting to

realize the power of branding more and more. The actuality is that the employer benefits from having a well-networked and knowledgeable employee. The employer can get more contacts and opportunities to improve the companies brand image. If an employee has an impressive network online, it could give them an asset when negotiating a better salary, a career path or the ability to select the most interesting projects. (Aalto, Uusisaari 2010)

Leaders generally mishandle their way to brand themselves. In this fast-growing digitalized world, leaders should be able to successfully identify who they are, what they stand for and how they help people and businesses grow; technology is dominating common daily processes and personal branding is called "the business of people". Great leaders who passionately brand themselves can successfully manage their career progressions and maximize great opportunities that adjust with their purpose. Personal branding can develop the leadership outlook. The real challenge is to educate future leaders and managers on the concept and assist with the implementation of a remarkable personal brand. When creating a personal brand, it is essential to be honest. Transparency and the willingness to share personal stories can help one to great alignment and credibility with followers. (Greenwade 2018)

Everything a leader does will shape their companies' brand, if you like that or not. In todays' world, leaders and/or business executives must be aware of their offline and online reputation. The way a person act online should also be the same they act offline. (Simmons n.d., 5)

Personal branding is much about LinkedIn, according to Chris J. Reed, who wrote the book "Personal Branding Mastery for Entrepreneurs". He thinks that LinkedIn is an entrepreneur "first port of call", because it is the first thing that shows up when someone is typing your name on Google. Afterwards, the one who is searching, then clicks on the persons LinkedIn profile and gets a positive or negative impression of it. (Reed 2017, 15)

The excellent thing about LinkedIn is that an individual can position him-/herself on the platform. According to Reed, one of the biggest mistakes some people make is that they only talk about their job. Instead of doing that, people should think LinkedIn as a networking event. In today´s world network is your net worth. It is positive to share your personality with your audience. To talk about features that are your target audience´s interest is going to give you a positive attention. Looking at your brand values and then talking about them in a way so your target audience respect and endorse your message. (*Ibid.*)

1.3. Basics of personal branding

There are a lot of different goals that individuals have with their own personal brand. The goals usually depend on the individual's experience, current job position or interest. Recent changes in working life allow employees to develop a professional personal brand that may not be in relation to the traditional job roles offered by the employer. The basis for creating a reliable and impressive personal brand is true expertise and solid experience. In addition, work needs to be made visible, for example, by writing articles and posts, organizing related trainings and writing books. The most important function of a personal brand is to provide an answer to the question "why would I trust this person?". Trust is important to build up from the beginning; it is like excellent customer service. A personal brand requires patience, therefore the person who is branding themselves cannot be influential if he/she does not commit to his/her brand. (Aalto, Uusisaari 2010)

The base of an impressive personal brand is knowledge, motivation and a positive mindset. To build a brand online should not be forced and seen as the only option to get more successful. If a person has a desire to learn and understand new digital and networked culture, opportunities can show up quite quickly. Using social media as a tool to build a brand requires great self-esteem and ability to show respect for others. The professional online journey is most rewarding when someone can be both humble and honest. Honesty is something that is important in personal branding. The audience online can be very cruel if some statements are not true or valuable. Therefore, it is good to be honest that you do not know everything. If a post has some own thoughts and expressions that are not research or true then, the audience can see that as a negative thing if one has not been completely honest. (*Ibid.*)

The recommended way to build a personal brand is on personal experience that defines the personal brand and makes it stand out. The experiences mean that the person lives, breathes and communicates in accordance with the brand he/she has built. Therefore, the audience wants to see the real thing behind the brand. This means that a good strategy is to present him-/herself in a genuine way, not fake. As Oscar Wilde once said: "Be yourself, everyone else is already taken". Individuals who emphasizes their personal brand are true to themselves and broadcast their unique qualities and essence to give their brand some depths. Being yourself is unique and it is admiring. Individuals who are being themselves generate interest and curiosity. These are excellent personal branding characteristics. (Reed 2017, 83-87)

11

Every person has already a personal brand. Therefore, one's personality, sayings, style of fashion and one's gestures will put one in categories. The core that characterizes an individual's brand is their experience and their knowledge. For example, their past studies or work history can put one's brand to a higher value. If one has a strong knowledge and interest about recruiting, it could be smart to build a personal brand within that area. In case if for example recruiting is not working and not giving one the push to the next level, then it is smart to consider changing the brand and focus on some other area. Therefore, getting recognition offline and online can be challenging. The audience cannot read minds, for this reason it is crucial to network, communicate and market yourself. When self-branding, it is seen important to advertise your contributions smartly to the audience. (Kang, 2013)

A strong personal brand has a strategy behind it. Like other brands, a personal one should have a strategy, understandable and clear message. It is also recommended that the message of a personal brand communicates clearly what that person wants to achieve with the branding. After one knows the clear path with their personal brand it is them recommended to create their positioning within that area. The next step is to think about the areas one will and need to invest in to. These steps can help a person to create their desired brand and therefore deliver a special value. (*Ibid.*)

Communication skills is a key element already in the beginning of the brand process. It is good to think of the network one has now and start to develop new relationships with the right people. Building new relationships with people in the same area or potential new customers is important to do through social media and in person. These new contacts can help one getting noticeable in a faster pace. Therefore, it is crucial to think about communications skills, since communicating the personal brand effectively can be a "do or die" in the beginning. One can achieve their goals faster if the personal brand is both conclusive and visible in the beginning. (*Ibid.*)

1.4. Using the personal brand to develop a portfolio career

The traditional 9-to-5 jobs, where one works at the same place with the same colleagues are losing attractively. The future seems to lie in a portfolio career where one does several paid jobs for different customers at the same time, rather than just having one role in one organization. (North 2012)

A portfolio career is becoming more popular and it is increasingly the idealized next step for many people. The new way of building a career is more stress-free and not a full-time corporate life. The portfolio career is more interesting, full of part-time roles, consulting roles, some lectures and writing. The reason why the portfolio career is being more wanted is that an individual can still advance their career, earn money and be happier and have more flexibility in life. The change itself seems to be more difficult than most of the people think. A portfolio career can be an excellent and rewarding choice, but there are several things to consider. (Greenspan 2017)

The benefits of a portfolio career are more control over who is paying the salary, who is the boss and what does the daily work consist of. The control means that an individual can build a business of his/her own and have more flexibility to express the passion for other things. It gives the individual the opportunity to develop the business as desired; that would not be possible when working for somebody else. (Reed 2017, 124)

Knowing people is important when building a portfolio career. A place to get connections is LinkedIn. By using LinkedIn, one finds clients and decision-makers. LinkedIn is the best tool to win businesses and find jobs as well. A great example is to start doing some sort of business training at LinkedIn and hopefully get asked to do the training for a company or a private person. The goal is to get people wanting to pay for the training the individual is offering, for example managing their LinkedIn accounts. (*Ibid.*, 125)

There are many reasons why people are starting to think about switching to a portfolio career. One reason is self-accountability which means that the individual does not have a boss, instead, he/she has people he/she is responsible to. The boss who is usually dominating one´s work is no longer there – this is attractive to many people. Also, with this comes the choice of

workplace location. People with a portfolio career often have multiple work locations including the own home. (North 2012)

As mentioned before, the traditional 9-to-5 jobs losing popularity. A portfolio career gives an individual the ultimate freedom to think and be creative on his/her own. One can establish own routines and rhythms, instead of accepting work loaded onto you by others. Also, when an individual can plan his/her time according to personal preferences, there is more room for spending quality time with friends and family. Usually these things increase peace and joy in life. (*Ibid.*)

Having and maintaining a portfolio career can be hard as well. One must keep track of the different, varying amount of income and look after taxes. The cash flow can be different and the income lower than in the past. When an individual switch from a 9-to-5 job to self-employment, the income is often lower in the beginning since switching to a portfolio career means various costs. The most apparent cost is information technology. An individual need to be able to work from different locations, so it is crucial to have the right technology for it. Hidden costs arise as well, for example insurances and a printer. Making up a budget beforehand is thus important. (*Ibid.*)

After considering all the aspects, having the right mind-set and a positive action, it is possible to create a new business and a portfolio career. It is crucial to be on LinkedIn; it is the access to other creative thinkers and gives the opportunity to optimize networks and create new work opportunities. (Reed 2017, 130)

When one is passionate about his/her work and becomes an expert in the field, an income stream by sharing their knowledge to help benefit other people. In 2019, being an inspirational and motivational specialist speaker is valued. Building a portfolio career can give an individual a lot, especially if he/she is passionate about developing the business. (*Ibid*, 131)

1.5. Building a personal brand

Keller's CBBE model (Customer Based Brand Equity) describes that there are no shortcuts when building brands. A good brand is not built by mistake, but it is a long one and thoughtful process. A basic assumption in the model is the strength of the brand depends on how consumers think, feel and act around the brand. The model consists of four basic steps: 1. Establish a suitable brand. Build an identity and create associations to the brand in a specific product class or a specific consumer need. 2. Create a value in the brand. Establish an image of the brand and its function the consumer by strategically linking material and non-material associations to mark. 3. Create a positive response from the brand. Attract the real consumer response to brand identity and meaning. 4. Create a strong bond between the brand and the customer. Transform the brand's response into one intensive, active and loyal relationship between the consumer and the brand. In order to use the CBBE model, it is necessary to define the position of the brand, its core value and being able to convey its soul. The same things are considered in self-branding. (Keller, 2006)

In other words, a personal brand is a relationship that will focus on what the individual stands for and how others see him/her. An individual's personal brand is his/her key concept in the business. The personal brand shows other what they should expect. The brand displays the persons' values that others can relate with. (McNally, D., Speak, K. 2009)

The audience builds its image of the person from the brand. A strong brand quickly gives the customers a clear picture of what the person stands for and has a point in their doings. What the brand stands for is crucial and it needs to be something others also consider important. The main aspect of a strong personal brands is understanding the needs of others and aiming to meet those needs. It is also important to stay true to the values and promises the person as a brand has told others. (*Ibid.*,13)

When starting to "sketch" the plan for a personal brand it is important to focus on defining the personal brand by asking what is that the owner of the brand as a person wants to do for the rest of his/her business career. A person who is starting to build his/her brand needs to think of the best qualities and accomplishments that he/she is proud to talk about publicly. Colleagues and current customers can offer input by telling how they benefit from working with the brand

owner. From these answers it is convenient to create a powerful presentation of his/her highlights. (Arms 2014, 42-43)

If one wants to brand him-/herself online, the place to start with are the social media pages since they are an asset to the career. Most people and recruiters google the person and become thus the first impression. It is smart to delete old pictures and information that can harm business since the pictures and information will support your brand. After deleting the old information online, one can build a digital portfolio consisting of social media pages, perhaps also website and blog. The digital portfolio supports one's own personal brand. The portfolio, in an ideal case, presents exactly what the person as a brand and a professional can offer. (*Ibid.,* 43-44)

The next thing is focusing on in-person networking. If the person is working at a company, he/she can network with the colleagues from different departments and company's customers. Besides work, networking and alumni events offer a platform to meet potential new customers. A mentor can help during the branding process. (*Ibid.,* 46)

1.6. How to develop and maintain a personal brand

A personal brand takes time to develop. Successful personal brands develop with the result of excellent communication and with the help of the person who is standing behind the brands promises repeatedly. Brands require consistency and clarity. Marketing the personal brand does not always mean that the person needs to please the public, according to Arruda. He states that it is rather a matter of self-confidence. Arruda says that it is important to express a brand confidently. A brand that is conveyed confidently will be respected regardless of whether many disagree on expressed views. (Arruda, 2009)

There are different tactics for developing a personal brand. An individual must be made aware and need to know what skills they should develop to reach their goal. Nothing says more about one's reputation than being able to achieve results, having the right attitude and helping others at the same time. Working with tasks that no one else wants to work with can be a way to stand out from the crowd. Learning new skills can also contribute to differentiation. Continuous

personal reinvention and learning of new skills to remain competitive are beneficial aspects. (Shepherd, 2005)

A personal brand is a work in progress, and it is something an individual is managing online and offline every day. The personal brand that is created by an individual becomes extremely important and it shows how successful someone is. Table 1. shows a list of tools that help one to form and manage the personal brand. In the ideal case the tools all send out the same message and show what an individual's brand represents and what value it delivers. (Magowan n.d.)

After an individual has defined what the personal brand is, the next step is to look at the tools that help to manage it:

Career Vision	Appearance	Achievements
Resume	Work and Social Networks	Public Speaking
Elevator Pitch	Writing and Verbal skills	Published Works
PR	Word of mouth	Networks

Table 1. Personal Branding tools
Source: (*Ibid.*)

All the above-mentioned tools – things one should continuously develop – are mentioned by the executive coach Kelly Magowans. Everything is changing; thus, the brand should be updated and relevant thanks to continuous training of skills and knowledge. Keeping the brand relevant on the latest developments and ensuring that one connects with the right people in the field is a valuable way to keep the personal brand´s value high. (*Ibid.*)

Appearance is important when an individual is branding herself-himself and it is part of the developing process. An individual's appearance can be divided into three parts: visual, verbal and vocal. The visual part is telling others how one looks when presenting something, with other words this is the appearance part. Verbal is the content of what one is says to the audience and vocal is how one sounds when saying something. (Morgan 2011, 14)

The appearance of the person is the key element to branding success. It is the first impression the potential new customers see and should match the online reputation. The way one dresses communicate the image of a business professional who is serious with the business. Clothing is a nonverbal tool that can be controlled to help to achieve goals and ambitions. (Chritton n.d.)

Despite good skills, qualifications and experiences, the appearance is the first thing an eventual employer or customer notices. 55% of what expectations about others are based on observation and interpretation of non-verbal signals. Well-dressed individuals are mostly more liked than those who are not worried about their public appearance. Well-dressed individuals are likely to be considered more successful, intelligent and wealthy. (Morgan 2011, 14)

Most people want to represent themselves as strong, intelligent, caring and cool to make a successful first impression. The posture, smile, eyes, personal hygiene and the way one dresses form the basis for other's impression of a person. (Kuhel 2014)

The uniqueness of the appearance is beneficial since people remember the person – the brand – better in that case. When dressing unique it often requires showing and demonstrating qualifications that overshadow even the unique style. (Morgan 2011, 14)

If a person wants to connect with the right people, it is important to understand one´s own body language and how he/she is communicating with others. Those who understands the meaning behind body language and can use it in the right way make an impact on their listener. Good eye contact, healthy posture and a stable handshake for example are the basic things. (*Ibid.*)

1.7. Personal branding on social media

Social media can be useful in several ways in brand enhancement. Using social media opens many possibilities such as: more contact surfaces, fast dissemination opportunities, ongoing monitoring of the world, long-term relationships and a dialogue and closer contact with customers. (Mangold, Faulds 2009)

The online environment brings a lot of opportunities for individuals who want to be seen and heard – the growth of social media has transformed the whole communication culture and created new online platforms that offer opportunities for businesses and for personal use (Karaduman 2013).

In 2019, there are 5.11 billion mobile users in the world with an annual growth of 100 million users. There are 4.39 billion internet users in 2019 with an increase of 366 million since January

2018. Social media users are growing fast and in 2019 there are 3.48 billion users with a total growing of 288 million since last year. (Kemp 2019)

Personal branding online involves managing different social networking profiles while giving the opportunity to the people to promote themselves as brands in a relatively cheap and efficient manner. People have noticed how much cheaper it is to market something online rather than through traditional media (Television, Radio, Newspapers etc.). This has let traditional media to face enormous challenge when people are becoming producers and distributors of content themselves. Social media-based entrepreneurship is an interesting phenomenon that will only keep evolving and creating new opportunities in the social media market. Instagram and LinkedIn have evolved to the biggest platforms for personal branding. (Karaduman 2013)

Facebook is the most used platform in the world, but Instagram is growing to be as popular as Facebook across all ages, locations, and brands. It has an enormous user base and it has higher per-post engagement rates than any other social platforms. Instagram was bought by Facebook in 2012 and has now over 1 billion monthly active users. The platform is known of its "visuality" because it is adjusted towards photos and video-sharing. (Ahlgren 2019)

The common demographic on Instagram is between the ages of 25-34 years old. A lot of different online brands customers' demographic falls in the same range, which means that Instagram is a powerful area for a lot of brands. Instagram gives the brand or the individual a great opportunity to create a more personalized and a visual brand. In the beginning, social media was known as an impersonal and disconnected tool because of the people who did not get together and networked through it. At first, people did not understand the power of social media back. When getting on Instagram, an individual put themselves directly in front of an audience who is looking exactly on what and who you are. Nowadays, the platform gives also one the opportunity to add visual elements and creating genuine engagement between the person and his/her audience, which is the main object of Instagram in 2019. (Ramsey 2018, 77)

Being authentic and sharing the real aspects of who one is, is the key in social media in 2019. Thus, Instagram is a strong tool for anyone looking to grow the personal brand. The time where everything was being surrounded by who has the most likes, and followers has passed- The most potential accounts people are interested in are those that share genuine and authentic content. Since the application is "busy" with users who uploads pictures daily and create other

content., a well thought through Instagram strategy that consists of three steps – an attractive feed, a flexibility in regular posting, and genuine engagement – is of help. *(Ibid., 79)*

The attractive feed shows how creative the owner is. It is like visual marketing: the audience cares about the brand aesthetic. Consistency is another key: posting three times per day will keep the feed active at the top of peoples´ pages and easy to locate for new followers. It is challenging to post three high quality pictures per day. (*Ibid.,* 81-82)

Another important thing while building a stronger brand identity on Instagram is engaging. To engage with the audience on a regular basis is good for networking. Commenting on other people's pictures and liking comments is necessary since it shows that one cares and is genuinely engaged. (*Ibid.*, 83)

LinkedIn has matured into a professional and educational development designed to feed an e-persona over time and serious users of the platform are starting already at a young age. LinkedIn is aimed at business professionals and skilled specialists and it has gowned into internet's primary source of professional or personal branding. LinkedIn can help students to find jobs via influencers and build new connections that help them in the transition to a business career. (Using LinkedIn…, n.d.)

LinkedIn is originally a marketplace, which makes professional's profile a product or a service that needs to be fed and promoted. The tools that LinkedIn offers are specifically designed to let users maximize the salesmanship of their professional product. There are hidden rules when using LinkedIn as a personal branding tool. According to Reed, the biggest mistakes people make when using LinkedIn is just talking about their job. It is important that one stay relevant, interesting and never boring. Also, posting clichés and buzzwords and not making the most of recommendations can lose ones' credibility on LinkedIn. If a person truly wants to maximize the sites usefulness, the profile must be looked at as an ongoing brand promotional campaign. One should add their qualifications, achievements, relevance, and personality. These should come together to create a trustworthy brand worth investing in. (Reed 2017, 152)

1.8 Marketing and branding trends in Finland

Popular marketing methods used in Finland before the digital revolution were print press, TV and radio. If one wanted to market anything and get recognition, those were the platforms. Today these methods are still used by companies but there are more ways to market your product or service. Online marketing gives the opportunity to target a larger consumer group than before. Social media has turned into an important aspect in Finnish marketing strategies, both for individuals and companies. (Finnish Search engine masters 2016)

Finnish business experts were asked to line up growing social media marketing trends. One of the trends mentioned was content marketing, focusing on authentic content. (Jokinen 2015) High quality videos and photographs will continue to be a norm in social media marketing. The quality of the posts has a huge impact and it is on its way to replace the amount. This means that a person needs to focus on quality more than quantity. Together with videos, live streaming is becoming more popular on different social media channels. (Lintulahti 2014)

Finland in general is known to follow trends a bit slowly than for example other Nordic countries. However, international marketing trends are known in Finland, yet the growth is slow. Marketing technologies and inbound marketing has currently a rapid growth in Finland. Many companies in Finland, mostly B2B-companies have already taken actions to invest a lot in these marketing areas. (Liimatainen 2017)

Self-promotion, praise and being publicly visible has always been considered almost unacceptable in the Finnish culture. Therefore, for Finns the restriction to creating a personal brand can be the reason for those mentioned above. Throughout history, Finnish culture has been influenced by genetic factors, namely, Ugrianism and Lutheran religion. The anti-change stance brought by Ugrians and the Lutheran emphasis on greed and enrichment have made Finns modest attitude. With this being said, branding yourself puclicly is only beginning to be accepted now in Finland. (Parviainen 2013, 11-15.)

Personal branding as a phenomenon have been appearing in Finland for a long time but the concept is still quite new. In Finland a few persons have been lifted as role models and named as professionals in theirs field. (Aalto, Uusisaari 2010) Traditionally Finnish celebrities and politicans have been practising personal branding but now as the concept is getting more attention while the labor market is change, more ordinary people are showing interest to brand

themselves online. The concept has driven working Finns to think about their own picture, the attention and the pros and cons that a personal brand can give you in the labor market. The continuesly changing digitalized world have destroyed some jobs for Finnish workers who have had to find new ways to get attention in the business. (Kauppalehti 2014.)

To sum up, whether one like being out there branding themselves is up to that person. Most people do not like to market or advertise themselves and prefer to take the easier way and continue being silent. It can be thought from a young age to not make a scene and be humble. If one cannot let go of "the myths" of self-branding, it can be hard to even start it. To get success with self-branding a person should own their place and not be afraid of others opinions. Therefore, sharing their good ideas and showing their core value will help them in their personal branding journey. Forgetting to be extra "humble" and sharing achievements puclicly is seen as an excellent help to achieve success. For an individual it can be good to ask friends and family how they preceive you. It is positive to aks both the good and the bad to get an fair and honest opinion. Afterwards one can acknowledge their good qualitites and their positive achievements. After acknoledging these above mentioned things it is healthy to not let them magnify their ego or in worst case define their life. Therefore, to brand yourself, one need courage and self-esteem to achieve their personal brand. (Kang 2013)

2. THE METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

This part of the bachelor's thesis will include the research methods used to meet the aim of this research. The aim is to find out how personal branding can affect one's career development in Finland. To find answers to the aim there are different ways of collecting the actual data. The different data strategies used in this thesis to collect the data are primary data and secondary data. Secondary data is orginally collected for different use and then used again later for a purpose and primary data is the original data collected for a exact use. (Joop, Hennie 2005)

The author used secondary data to form the theoretical background and primary data is used for the upcoming empirical part. Qualitative research method is used in this thesis to get more detailed answers to the questions listed in Appendix 1. A qualitative research method was seen as suitable, because interviewees in a method like this are given a sort of a freedom to talk openly about their experiences, rather than answering without converations to questions in a survey. (*Ibid.*)

2.1. Planning the research

The main goal of the study is to detect the importance of personal branding in today's fast-growing digitalized world and to find out how personal branding can affect and help people in their career development in Finland. This bachelor thesis includes information gathered from different secondary data sources to answer the research questions. The theoretical data is found in up-to-date literature – books, articles and academic papers.

A qualitative research method – qualitative interviews – is used to collect empirical data and analyse it with the help of a qualitative content analysis. Qualitative research is the best choice for this research since it focuses on the "why" instead of the "what". Qualitative research methods rely on the straight experiences that one cannot get by using quantitative methods. A qualitative method is also chosen thinking that knowledge is subjective rather than objective and one can learn from the interviewees. Besides, the research method values flexibility and the freedom to talk about experiences. The answers are up to date and realistic. (Crossman 2019)

The author chose the interviewees very carefully to make sure that the collected data would be related to the research questions and give an up to date and realistic image of personal branding in Finland. By the choice of interviewees their relevance to their career of choice and their visibility and gained online network played a role as well. Each interviewee is famous in their field in Finland and they all have built an online platform and moved forward in their careers with the help of the latter. They all have a large network and have started from the scratch, building their own personal brand. The interviewees Roni Arvonen, Juho Toivola, Samuli Salonen, Tea Latvala and Joey Palmroos allowed me to use their full names in the thesis since they consider themselves public personalities and share their expert knowledge willingly.

2.2. Data collection methods

The analysing method used in this thesis is qualitative content analysis. It is a method used for analysing the actual gathered data and its purpose. Qualitative content analysis is used as a method for getting systematic and objective means. The method gives the author the opportunity to then reduce the gathered data to concepts and afterwards detail the research questions. Furthermore, it gives the author also the opportunity to find different opinions and attitudes to get more detailed data to the questions. (Elo et al. 2014)

The author asked fifteen questions from the interviewees and the questions derived from the theroretical part of this thesis. The interviews where held face-to-face during 2019. During interviews the author transcipted the answers and afterwards analyzied them carefully to understand the differenties and the whole content. Later on, the author collected the answers together and put them in different categories which are presented in the empirical part of this research. The interview framework can be found in Appendix 1 and the actual interview texts from the attached link that can be found in Appendix 2.

2.3. Sampling

Purposive sampling method was chosen in this thesis. The author chose purposive sampling since it is a nonrandom technique where the author can choose the interview questions and the interviewees by herself. The purposive sampling method is usually used in a qualitative research. (Etikan I, et al. 2016)

The aim of this qualitative research is to understand the subjective reality of the interviewees. This is not achieved through a large group of interviewees, instead the author wanted to reach experts who can share their unique segment of reality so that all slices together illustrate the range of variation within the study area. Qualitative studies do typically have in-depth and high focus on small samples. The meaning behind it is that purposefully chosen samples offer information-based cases to study in-depth that can give the author and the reader loads of information. (Elmusharaf 2012)

The author chose the interviewees according to their background and their success gained from their personal brand in Finland. With an attentive sampling and with the right collection techniques, a notably small number of interviews can yield the collected data to answer research questions. The number of interviewees does not need to be large since Finland is a small country. The participants have approximately over 20 000 connections on different social media channels, which is already a big part of the businesspeople in Finland.

3. THE RESEARCH

This part of the research will include the empirical part. The author presents in this part analysis of the semi-structured interviews and the main results of them. In the end, the discussion part and limitations are listed.

3.1. Data analysis methods

Next the five in-depth interviews are analysed. All the interviewees where selected according to their field of working and their success in the process of personal branding in Finland. The interviewees agreed that their names can be published in the thesis. The interviewees have different backgrounds and have graduated from different Universities in Finland. They are all working full-time and maintaining their personal brand in their spare time.

Roni Arvonen has graduated from Turku School of Economics in 2017 and his major was Information Systems Science. Since he graduated, he has been working in the real-estate business and now he is working as a real-estate agent for a company called Bo LKV. He has moved forward quickly at a young age because of his platform and connections online.

Samuli Salonen graduated from Tampere University of Applied Sciences in 2017 and his major was International Business. Since Samuli graduated, he has been working as a manager and at the same time worked in the real estate and finance industry. He is currently working as a LinkedIn and sales coach at a Finnish company called Trainers' House Plc.

Juho Toivola graduated from the University of Turku in 2011 with a M.A. in psychology. In the early stages of his career, he was working as a consultant in a couple of head-hunting companies and made personal evaluations there. Then he went to work for Finnair to recruit and was there for almost four years. After that, he went to work for Elisa for the same thing, i.e. the acquisition of labour. Juho is still working at Elisa but now as an Executive Vice President and he is also working with strategic resources. He has been an entrepreneur for the last seven years as a side-line in various fields. Juho has also been a shareholder in other companies over the years.

Tea Latvala graduated from Helsinki University of Art and Design in 2007. She worked in fashion industry as an art director for years before she became an entrepreneur. She is now the owner and founder of Teatiamo Oy. The company designs wooden sex toys and Tea wanted to break taboos. She has become very popular on LinkedIn and other channels where she is posting things about her products.

Joey Palmroos is a Finnish filmmaker and photographer from Turku, Finland. He studied filmmaking at the University of West London and graduated in 2013. He's career got a boost when a Finnish movie director Pete Riski contacted him. He worked as Risk's right hand and travelled the world with him. Palmroos opened his Instagram account in 2013 and started to post pictures from his business trips. He started his own company when a lot of brands started to contact him, company's like Porsche, Volkswagen, Peugeot, Citroen and Nocco.

Now the analysis of interview text follows. I carried out a qualitative content analysis, creating categories while reading and rereading the text. The results are presented below.

Category 1: The beginning of personal branding

The interviewees agree that branding themselves today is a key part of professionalism and they consider it important to communicate their own experience and be active. Joey, Roni and Samuli, who are younger, wanted a "boost" to their careers with the help of personal branding. Back then they thought that branding themselves would help them in their future: *"Today, to get recognition online is a big thing. Many who see your profile and like it, will tell others about you. Social media gives you the opportunity to tell your story and your knowledge to others without any costs. Brands, recruiters and potential new customers will find you with just a few clicks. It is easy and very effective".* (Joey Palmroos)

Juho, who is older, had a different perspective how personal branding would benefit him to start off: *"Personal branding will give my audience and my clients a picture of me that I am not a "drought expert" / boring sales man, instead I wanted to show others that I am a human who is easy to approach".* (Juho Toivola)

Tea Latvala has a different story about why she started to brand herself online: *"My story is different and so is my company. No one wanted to market a sex toy company because of all the*

taboos out there. No one in Finland wanted to cooperate with me. I had no other choice but to start to use my own platforms and be creative. I am very glad I trusted myself since without the power of personal branding I do not know where I would be today". (Tea Latvala)

According to interviewees, anyone starting to brand him-/herself needs to focus on one thing he or she wants to be recognized by. Many do the same mistakes and talk about a lot of stuff they know about. Reducing all that and focusing on one thing is according to the interviewees the key to success. Also, they are of the opinion that it is a long process, it is time consuming and nothing happens overnight. It took a year or two for all of them to get recognizably online. Or, like they say themselves: *"I see a lot of people who are continuously doing the same mistakes /.../ talking about too many things at the same time. If your core knowledge is for example real estate, you should just talk about that in the beginning. Nothing else. People get confused of what your core and knowledge is if you talk about many things at once."* (Roni Arvonen)

"My path to this point has been very long. I have been mocked and laughed at. People have given me "a dildo dealer" as nickname. You have to be quite thick skinned in this business. All in all, everything has worked out just as I planned. I just did not give up. People need to be patient and know that it will take time." (Tea Latvala)

The interviewees did not have a clear strategy in the beginning or if, then they did not follow it. The respondents started to post pictures and publications online every day for a period of time. After they posted pictures and publications, things started to happen, and it became more profound:

"In the beginning I started to talk about things I really did know much about, which was for me an easy start." (Juho Toivola)

"I had no clue what I was doing, and I did not have any strategy behind it. I was brave and wanted to share my story." (Tea Latvala)

"Well, I opened my Instagram in 2013 and I wanted to share pictures from my trips with Pete Riski with my friends. I did not think about any strategy, I just found out that people liked my

style in the pictures. When I did my first collaboration with Porsche and posted pictures about it, things started to happen.” (Joey Palmroos)

“I wanted to share my listings online and get more customers, so I posted a lot. There are a lot of real estate agents, so my goal was to stand out. I did not think of a particular strategy, I just hoped I would be seen.” (Roni Arvonen)

The interviewees agreed that anyone who starts branding him-/herself needs a clear goal, a target audience, a sharp tip and simplicity to their strategy.

“Basic stuff is required. Putting your own profile (LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram etc.) on the right track is important because after all you are driving the audience there. It is required to build a profile from the customer's world. Lastly, content productions and regularity is important to get recognized”. (Samuli Salonen)

Category 2: Why do personal branding?

The interviewees´ aim while doing personal branding is clear: to get awareness in the business world and to gain trust and creditability from others and to get new customer acquisitions. Also, to have the freedom to choose a job that they really want;

“When Sani Leino said that “A personal brand is a professional life insurance", I thought, in a sense, that it is a reputation when it is value in your working life. I think it will help me in the future, I have a better position in working life.” (Juho Toivola)

“Where do I aim? What I'm going to do with this is what I decide to do, for example, I can suddenly start selling insurance, because I can use my platform. At the moment I am interested in the coaching side and the fact that people are willing to pay me for my services is great” (Samuli Salonen)

“I wanted to break taboos and let people know of my business in a serious way. My goal was that people would not see me as a sex object – I hoped people would see me as a serious businesswoman.” (Tea Latvala)

"My customers usually find my work at Instagram. They contact me and suggest collaborations. It is hard to think where I would be without the platform." (Joey Palmroos)

"I market myself online because I want to stand out from other real estate professionals and find customers." (Roni Arvonen)

The interviewees are sure that they never have to fear unemployment since their personal brand is giving them opportunities and they get job proposals monthly because of their platform:

"Personal branding today replaces CVs. You can never be unemployed; this is my opinion." (Roni Arvonen)

"I started realistically to brand myself on LinkedIn two years ago. This process has helped me get jobs and helped me get more direct business and good contacts that can then be utilized. Plus, there are many more queries!" (Juho Toivola)

"I never have to worry that I would not find any work. One posting on LinkedIn and there will definitely be job offers." (Samuli Salonen)

Category 3: Beneficial activities

According to the interviewees, the biggest benefit for them has been that they get creditability and trust from other people. Also, they say that sales have become easier thanks to personal branding. They do not need to sell their product or service as much as before, because people come to them and the demand comes to them directly. They all claim that they get a lot of different work request and employers want them because of their platform:

"The demand for collaborations comes more often directly, which is reducing my stress." (Joey Palmroos)

"Lately I have been asked to join events and speak about my company. This is something new and interesting. People usually contact me directly online or by phone. This is all thanks to branding myself online. People are taking me more seriously." (Tea Latvala)

"I get a lot of messages regarding my services. I meet a lot of potential new customers weekly, thanks to my public profile." (Samuli Salonen)

The respondents think that the best skills to have are courage, not giving up / impersonality and being systematic. They agree that good customer service is a key skill to have. With the lack of good service skills, according to them, one cannot be fully capable of succeed with their brand:

"My absolute best skill is that I can take digital channels over and can use them pretty well, thanks to my childhood. I was a computer nerd when I was a teen, so I handle computers and digital stuff well, which helped me to get started building my personal brand". (Juho Toivola)

"The absolute best skill I have is my customer service skills. I listen to the customers and always help them in the best possible way. Also, I have been travelling all my life, so the connections I gained during that time have helped me a lot." (Tea Latvala)

"I believe in goodwill. I started to offer my help without taking any money from that. I think it is called excellent customer service. (Samuli Salonen)

Nowadays they do not have any specific post rhythm, but they publish stuff when they are amused, and that takes place regularly:

"Now in recent years, I have highlighted commercial selling to my strategy which has proven my courage a lot. I think courage is something everyone needs when branding themselves". (Juho Toivola)

"I am at the point that I can easily take one to two weeks break from posting things on social media. I have created that creditability. It is quite nice not to post every day something new. I have time to also focus on my health and family now." (Joey Palmroos)

Category 4: Offline presence

The interviewees think that not only it is important to be active on different social media platforms, but meeting people face to face is crucial. Without the offline contact, one cannot build strong relationships. Many who are interested in the entrepreneur want to meet him/her and see how he/she is in person.

"I meet people on a regular basis. For example, today I have met already three people, it cannot be underestimated. If someone wants to buy something from you, it is also good to meet people face to face. Then if you really want to sell something then you have to meet people." *(Juho Toivola)*

"I'm pretty much visible, or quite frankly, you can find me everywhere. If I, for example, am at the gym or in a public sauna, I do not get out of there, until all are aware that I am a real-estate agent and the fact that I am a credible real estate agent." *(Roni Arvonen)*

"I meet new business customers on a weekly basis. When working as a consultant, you need to focus a lot on outbound sales which requires meeting new people weekly." (Samuli Salonen)

Category 5: Choice of platforms

The interviewees think that LinkedIn and Instagram are the best platforms at the moment. One reason is that both platforms are free of charge and in the opinion of interviewees one can reach their audience in the best possible way:

"I'm using LinkedIn, and it's currently the number one platform for me. I'm trying to take over other channels. I currently have two main points: e-mail and web pages and the other is Instagram. I have started to study Instagram more, and I've noticed that you get everyday activity in a good way out there. The stories on Instagram do not require much more than taking your phone out of your pocket and record a short film while walking to a sales meeting." *(Samuli Salonen)*

"LinkedIn is the platform for business professionals. It is the best platform for me, because I want people to take my business seriously and I want to be seen as a business professional." (Tea Latvala)

"For me as a producer the best platform is Instagram. I can easily, without paying show people my art. The companies find me easily and can offer me cooperation straight on Instagram." (Joey Palmroos)

Category 6: Side-effects of personal branding

The hardest part in personal branding seems to be the hate that comes along with it. If one posts a statement and some people do not agree with it, there comes the hate. Or, if one is perceived as 'too active' and seen everywhere, some people can consider that annoying:

"People talk bad about you a lot, which is pity. The hardest part is to hear your old friends talk bad about you." (Roni Arvonen)

"There are a lot of haters and people make a bad image of me. Many thinks that I am a douche or a shit person. For example, if I disagree on something, that usually brings the haters out." (Juho Toivola)

"I have been struggling a lot as a woman in sex business. People say horrible things and some men still see me as a sex object. I have been criticised for not being sexual enough to represent my brand." (Tea Latvala)

Another drawback seems to be that personal branding is extremely time consuming. The interviewees work full time and maintain their channels in their spare time. They see and hear many "new starters" who give up fast because it is so time consuming. Especially in the beginning that can scare many off since it self-control and motivation to keep going:

"The hardest part is that this is time consuming. People are used to get in touch with me in the channels and I have to have the time to serve everyone there. For example, if it takes one week to answer one message it creates immediately a bad customer experience." (Samuli Salonen)

3.2. Presenting the results

The interviews were carried out in the hope to gain a clearer and deeper understanding of how a personal brand can develop someone's career in Finland. Now, the data analysis is compared with the data collected from written sources for comprehension.

The interviews show that a personal brand is an excellent tool for boosting up an individual's career development in Finland. A personal brand is called 'the new resume', with other words, many who have successfully maintained their personal brand do not need to seek for new job opportunities since the opportunities come for them. This is a cause of creditability and trust that an individual gain through his/her personal brand.

According to the theory and the interviews, there is not one way to do it, everybody creates and maintains his/her personal brand how its suite him/her the best. Of course, there are strategies behind how to create a personal brand, but the interviews show that many individuals have done it differently. When it comes to appearance and content production, simplicity came up many times both in interviews and in theory. To keep a straight line and simplicity when creating and maintaining a personal brand is crucial according to the interviewees. According to the information gained via the interviewees, many new beginners make a mistake by talking about a lot of different things. Instead, it is important a least in the beginning to keep it simple and talk about one thing only. Also, talking about things one actually knows a lot about is a must according to the professionals.

Interviewees stated that the best possible way to maintain the personal brand is to be active on different social media channels. According to the interviewees and the studied theory, the most popular channels for personal branding are Instagram and LinkedIn. However, it is always good to spread the wings, say the interviewees who do not trust that all the platforms are here for good. The interviewees claim that meeting people outside social media is also important since it gains the trust and builds deeper relationships.

Based on interviews can be said that a personal brand influences an individuals' professional career development in Finland. A person needs to study first the pros and cons, because many talented young entrepreneurs give up within a year since it is so time consuming. According to

the interviewees, nothing special happens in the first year and that is why people give up so quickly. Millennials are known to be impatient and expect everything to happen in one night.

3.3. Discussion and recommendations

The discussion part will include the answered questions of the research and focus on the research questions to see whether personal branding influences an individual's professional career development in Finland.

This thesis first research question is how a personal brand influences an individual's professional career development in Finland. The data collected via interviews shows that the professionals certainly have gained more opportunities in Finland within their field by branding themselves online and collected trust and confidence trough their personal brand. In 2019 branding has certainly gained a lot of positive attention in Finland's business world. The interviews show that, a good structured personal brand can improve the image of both the individual and their company. Related to that, branding yourself to make your business and network grow has become more popular than ever before. Having a solid personal brand can help an individual to stand out from the crowd and get more attention in the business world (among recruiters). It gives one the opportunity to demonstrate his/her in-depth knowledge of the industry and connect with the right people. Some the interviewees have repeatedly been asked to be a speaker at a business event, thanks to their appearance on social media. According to the information gathered from the interviews, branding is the key in business, if the individual wants to open more doors. As mentioned in the discussion part, a personal brand is a professional life insurance and many who already are successful in their branding strategy today, do not have to worry about getting a solid job in the future. Recognition and the ability to trust are key elements that come along with a good personal brand.

Three interviewees are still in their 20ies and their mission with their personal brand is to get a 'boost' to their career and never worry about unemployment. The interviewees who are in their 30ies and 40ies have a different meaning behind their personal brand. According to the information gathered from the interviews, Juho Toivola and Tea Latvala wanted to give their personal brand online a picture of them as a human being who is easy to approach to rather

than a dry expert. That helps a lot when doing sales and meeting people offline. Latvala also wanted to be taken more seriously as a businesswoman.

The second research question of this thesis is that what aspects does it require from an individual to build a successful personal brand. The interviewees also agree that when someone starts to brand him-/herself, he/she needs to have a clear goal and a simple strategy. The research shows that all the basics are required when one starts to brand him-/herself. This means that it is recommended to put the social media accounts on the right track is important since the audience comes there as the first thing and that is the first impression they get. Building a profile from the customer's world is essential and a good recommendation. Having a regular posting track and keeping your audience satisfied is the key. Also, according to the interviewees, excellent customer service has a great impact on the personal brand.

The third research question is that how to successfully maintain a personal brand. All interviewees agreed that not only it is important to be active on different social media platforms, but meeting people face to face is crucial. If a person really wants to sell something, then it is recommended to meet the customers face to face at one point. Therefore, being active both online and offline is recommended. Maintaining positive and talking about relevant subjects that is related to their own brand was important. Creativity and coming up with new ideas how to help others was also mentioned as a helpful advice when trying to maintain a successful personal brand. As it was mentioned in the interviews, almost everyone who is working on building his/her 'own empire' by branding him-/herself is working full time at the same time. The interviewees agreed that personal branding is extremely time-consuming, and one must be fully committed to the process.

The interviews provide valuable insights into the subjective everyday of self-branders. Although we cannot generalize the results to all population, the interviewees are experts in personal branding and thus we can say that they are one step ahead in supporting their career with the help of social media - something that is gaining importance in Finland and surely also in Estonia.

CONCLUSION

In this bachelor's thesis the focus was to find out what personal branding means in todays' world, what are the benefits a personal brand can give you and the strategy behind it. Also, the focus was to study how a personal brand can influence an individual's professional career development in Finland.

To start with, the author read books, academic papers, magazines and blog posts about personal branding. The theoretical part explains the concept of branding and personal branding. The strategy behind personal branding and the benefits that comes along with it is also included in this thesis.

The author chose three research questions:

- How does personal branding influence an individual's professional career development in Finland?
- What aspects does it require for an individual to build a successful personal brand?
- How to successfully maintain a personal brand?

To find answers to the research questions, the author chose a qualitative research method since that gives the thesis more personalized answers and goes deep in the topic. Five interviews where held in Spring 2019 and Autumn 2019. The interviewees are all business professionals from Finland who have become popular in their field with the help of their personal brand. All the participants took their time to explain to the author what it takes to build a personal brand and how to maintain it, and what benefits the personal brand has given to them in Finland.

The first research question, how can a personal brand influence an individual's professional career development in Finland, got the following answer: The interviewed Finnish business experts agree that branding yourself in Finland will help you boost your career a lot, get new job proposals and get more creditability in the business world. They also agree that they would not be in the position or situation they are now without their personal brand. They have no fear of unemployment in the future. The interviewees are sure they will have a bright future and excellent job offers in Finland, which they already get every now and then. Despite that Finns are known of disliking people who are being publicly visible and proud, the interviews show

that Finns are changing to be more open about it. But still, according to the interviews they get hate comments from different people on a daily basis.

The second research question, what aspects does it require for an individual to build a successful personal brand, was also answered. The data gathered from the interviews shows that since the internet is constantly changing there are different opportunities to build a personal brand online and offline. According to the information gathered in the theoretical part and from the interviews, the main thing is that one needs to be one hundred percent committed. Many people start branding themselves while working full-time. Personal branding is time consuming and, in the beginning, it does not seem to pay off: one must repeat him-/herself a lot to get attention. The interviewed experts agree that not only it is important to be active on different social media platforms, but meeting people face to face is crucial. Building business relationships and being active offline is still something one needs to do to make it, despite the power of social media. Another thing the interviewees agree on is that everyone who starts branding him-/herself needs a clear goal, a target audience, a sharp tip and a simple strategy. The interviewees are being themselves and do not care for negative comments. Without courage one cannot make it. An excellent tip was given from one expert who said that it is very important to give a realistic picture of what your situation is because people like to follow the growth stories.

The third research question, how to successfully maintain a personal brand got the following answer; the interviewees agree that maintaining a personal brand is time consuming and it is a second job for almost everyone who starts. One must be motivated and committed to the process and willing to spend time on it. Maintaining a personal brand in the best way is committing to the process, being active both offline and online and keeping the audience fully aware of the content of the personal brand. This requires a clear strategy and if a person does not follow the simple steps, the personal brand suffers and so do the audience. Data gathered from the interviews and the theoretical part also shows that being yourself and not acting like you know everything will give the audience a realistic picture of the personal brand. People like to follow growth stories. The ones who are honest and true about their journey and knowing will be more likeable in the public eye.

The empirical results reported herein should be considered in the light of some limitations. The qualitative research gave a possibility to get opinions and excellent insights from experts in the

field, yet, as it usually is, the studied group was relatively small. As personal branding as a concept is relatively new in Finland, there where limitations to find excellent candidates to be interviewed. Still as an author of this theses I cannot predict that the findings of this research are the comprehensive truth and therefore to get the exact truth I would need to interview everyone who is branding themselves in Finland. Usually when someone's or a groups opinion are studied, there cannot be a right or a wrong answer. Nevertheless, this research in my opinion gave a realistic picture of how personal branding can affect your career progression in Finland. The findings on this research are the overall findings of this thesis only.

For further research a quantitative study could be planned to gain thoughts from a large group of people. The Finnish business world is relatively small and personal branding is mostly "located" in Southern Finland where the four interviewees are currently based. The fifth interviewee, Tea Latvala is based in Rovaniemi, and thus she currently travels to the southern part to Finland for business meetings and events. Also, the Finnish network is small, and the interviewees have a large network online and offline.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview guide

1. Name of the respondent
2. Background information
3. Current job
4. What would you consider being the benefits of developing a personal brand?
5. Why do you strive to have one?
6. What skills would you think is important for your personal brand?
7. What would you tell people to focus on as a starting point?
8. How would you describe the strategy used when developing a personal brand?
9. Which steps do you think a person should take in order to develop a personal brand?
10. Which communication tools would you use in order to implement your brand (Networking, WOM, word-of-mouth)?
11. Is there anything you would like to add in regard to the strategy used in developing a personal brand?
12. What platforms do you prefer using when developing your personal brand? Which is the best one?
13. What is the hardest part of having a personal brand?
14. How has personal branding helped you in your career development?
15. Where do you aim with all your personal branding?

Keränen, C. 2019

Appendix 2. Interview texts

The transcriptions of the research interviews have been uploaded to an external server. Tran scripted interviews can be found in the link below:

https://tinyurl.com/Appendix2-CK