

IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL BRANDING FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract - Personal branding is a practice followed by people to market themselves and their career as a brand. With the shift in the corporate culture and increasing competitive market, it is becoming difficult for individuals to differentiate themselves from the competitors. The general purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate the importance of personal branding for career development. The study focus on the tools of personal branding, its importance and uses by various professionals from different fields. The researcher analyzed 8 professional individuals using a method of qualitative content analysis as an empirical way. This is a self-funded research.

Keywords - Personal Brand, Career Development, Social Media Tools, Online, Offline Tools for Personal Branding, Importance of Personal Brand, Evaluation, Monitoring Tools and Websites, Traditional Personal Branding.

I. INTRODUCTION

Personal branding has a potential to launch a person to new heights, there is a mutual relationship between career success and personal branding (Barry S. Saltzman, 2015).

STAKEHOLDERS

This study will benefit professionals, jobseekers, solopreneurs, entrepreneurs and individuals by giving them an understanding on personal branding, offering them effective ways of distinguishing themselves from the competitors. The study will also offer means to establish a consistent, highly desirable image in the minds of targeted audience and help them further in career success.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The following research questions were created to have an understanding of personal branding and its footprints it has in future success and career development.

1. What is a personal brand?
2. Importance of personal brand.
3. What is personal branding tool kit?
4. How does one develop a personal brand?
5. How is personal brand used in career development?
6. How is personal brand monitored and evaluated?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

DEFINING A PERSONAL BRAND

“Personal branding is a description of the process whereby people and their careers are marked as brand.

Personal Branding is the means by which people remember you. It's more than a trademark; it is how you present yourself online and offline to potential clients and customers. Your personal brand builds

your business, but it still centers around you as an individual.

The concept of personal branding was firstly introduced by Tom Peter (1997). He acknowledged that identity is created by the person's skill, personality traits and other features that will make him different from others. His concept Brand YOU, everything you do – and everything you choose not to do – communicate the value and character of your brand, is a depiction of personal brand.

IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL BRAND FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Branding is an executive-level strategy that works for professionals at all levels, no matter what kinds of positions they are seeking. It is a powerful way to differentiating oneself that is being used for years. (Meg Guiseppi).

“One can establish himself as a natural leader by creating a strong brand, making people look up to you as a firm thought leader. Leadership qualities naturally evolve as success and branding interact with one another, which can launch a career into exciting new directions” (Barry S. Saltzman).

Building a strong personal brand helps to interact with the target audience in a clear, consistent way that quickly becomes familiar. Its consistency builds trust in the target audience, which allows to form emotional connections (Dummies- A. Wiley Brand). Personal branding gives an edge while looking for a new job or pitching to a new client (Farzana Baduel).

PERSONAL BRANDING TOOL KIT

Personal branding starts offline and later can be mirrored online. Presenting oneself online via- social media or personal blog, is creation of an image of oneself (Julita Davies).

1. Offline personal branding tool kit:

It contains some traditional tangible assets like business cards and newsletters, which works as a

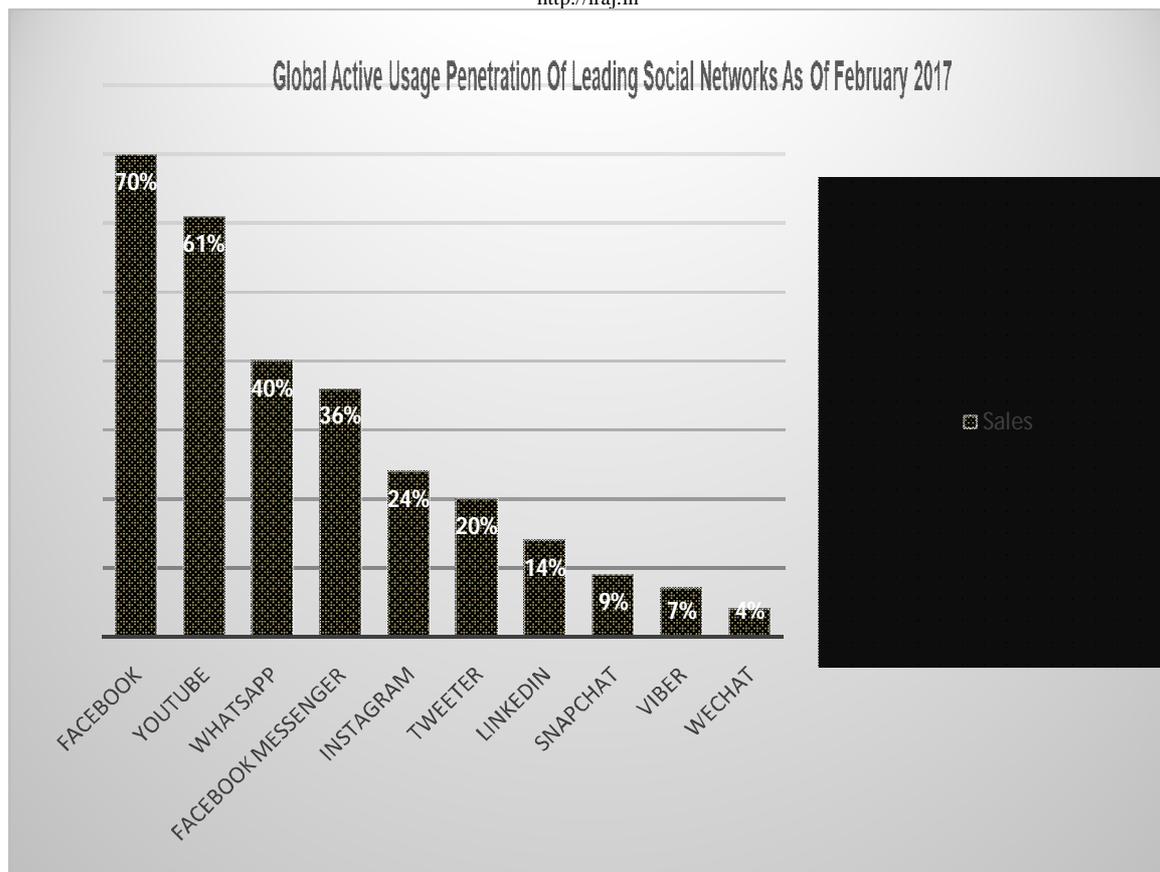
personal designed guideline that shares the values of the brand.

<p>A. Appearance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dressing. • Confident posture • Firm handshake • Gestures used • Right vocabulary 	<p>B. Some practices for personal branding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The gadgets used. • The brands, companies and people you are associated with.
<p>C. Personal Branding by encountering public in general</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information interviews at companies. • Distribute samples of your work. • Participate in events and activities where you will be introduced publicly. • Speak at conferences. • Throw a press conference to share something news worthy that's related to your brand. • Getting on TV and radio interviews • Give seminars or workshops about a topic you know in depth. • Organizing and participating in as many industry-related networking events, exhibitions and job fairs. • Join local, national and international brand-related communities such as business forums and professional groups. • Volunteer for groups where you are likely to attract the most positive attention. 	<p>D. Personal branding through print media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A personal logo or monogram • Personal stationery • Your resume or CV • Portfolios • Business cards • Calling or visiting cards • Thank you cards • Event-related cards, such as holiday or condolence cards • Articles published in newspapers, journals, magazines, circulars, etc. • Printed reports on topics such as about the impact of recent changes in your industry by government or changes that you'd like to see. • Posters, Flyers

2. On-line personal branding tool kit:

Social media is becoming a focus of marketing. It is an excellent tool to build a community around you, expand your target audience, and to listen to what your stakeholders expects. Some popular social media tools are:

<p>Facebook: The most popular platform, not only for personal use, but business as well. For businesses, Facebook is a place to share photos, updates, and general news with those who “follow or like” you.</p>	<p>Twitter: A social media platform that allows the user to share quick pieces of information and photos to drive people back to your site or landing pages.</p>
<p>LinkedIn: It is different from the rest of the social media outlets because it's specifically designed for business and professionals. It is used to showcase their job experience and professional thoughts, making it one of the more important platforms to use for those in B2B.</p>	<p>Instagram: IT is a mobile, desktop, and Internet-based photo-sharing application and service that allows users to share pictures and videos either publicly, or privately to pre-approved followers.</p>
<p>YouTube: It is the leading video-sharing platform in the world. One can create channel, upload and edit videos, create playlists, and prompt discussions.</p>	<p>WhatsApp: It is a free, simple, secured, reliable messaging and a calling tool, available on phones all over the world.</p>



Source - Statista – The portal for statistics
 Figure.1

DEVELOPING A PERSONAL BRAND:

Today, building a personal brand is just as important as building a company's brand - in fact, it might even be more important. It means putting yourself out there and marketing yourself in addition to your business or profession (Jonathan Long, 2017). Institute for Public Relations (IPR) a nonprofit foundation dedicated to research on public relation, has put up following steps to build a road map for future success (Jacqueline F. Strayer, 2017).

Step 1: Identify desired brand traits: Traits are distinguished quality or characteristic belonging to a person. It is important to know how one wants to be viewed and be identified with the traits. For example, if one wants to be viewed as organized, trustworthy or creative.

Step 2: Research your personal brand perception: Second step is to determine the brand's reality and understand how you are viewed by others. In this process the first step is to identify your stakeholders. Stakeholders are group of people one wants to be related to. They are the audience. Stakeholders involves peer group, colleges, clients, bosses, friends etc. The next step is to collect sufficient information through qualitative and quantitative research or 360-degree feedback from the stakeholders about the perception of your personal brand. The next step in this part of process is to

conduct a self-assessment on social media controlled by you. It can act as an eye opener and give a scope for further improvement.

Step 3: Vision: Vision is the future plan where one wants to be headed. A clear understanding of personal vision is needed for developing personal brand. Example, vision of an entrepreneur can be business growth, a fresher job seeker looking for a launch pad at corporate, professional intending to expand network.

Step 4: Values: Values are the things that drives one's life. They are beliefs and are referred while making decisions. The values advanced in public are the ones for which a person is actively known for. Values, for example, can be caring about environment, voicing for human and social rights.

Step 5: Analysis: At this juncture one needs to analyze if there are any gaps between your brand traits and perception. This analysis would help to review and build a strong personal brand strategy.

Step 6: Establishment of a personal brand strategy: Based on the above steps a strategy regarding your personal brand can be formed. It can be either to change and improve your brand, or to build a new brand altogether. Brand strategy could be online, offline or both.

Step 7: Measurement: Measurement of personal brand is essential, it is a baseline based on the research in the above steps. Measurement is based on;

- Number of reviews, followers
- Visitors on your posts, blogs or website.
- Feedback acts as a tangible proof for your progress.
- Physical approach of people etc.

EVALUATION AND MONITORING OF PERSONAL BRAND

Evaluation plays an important role in any sound branding strategy; it provides an opportunity to monitor and make changes where appropriate.

A. Facebook Page Metrics:

A feature on Facebook page 'Insights', which provides information about the performance of user's Page, like demographic data and how people are responding to the posts. It can be used measure:

1. Volume in terms of like share and comments.
2. Organic reach: It is direct and indirect hits on the posts.
3. Engagement: This measures the number of people that have directly acted on the post in any way.
4. People Talking About This (or Storytellers): This metric is part of the engagement metric. It only measures three types of actions: likes, comments or shares.
5. Click-through rates: It tell you the number of people who have clicked on a link in your content, watched your video or viewed a larger version of your photo.
6. Negative Feedback: It can be used for hiding a specific post, hiding all future posts from your Page, unlinking your Page or reporting it as a spam.
7. Subscribers: Number of people who subscribes your page.

B. YouTube: YouTube boasts a great analytics dashboard, and there are lots of metrics to explore;

1. Views
2. Subscribe
3. Drop-off point
4. Likes, Dislikes, and Favorites
5. Comments

C. Instagram: Metrics used to track and measure user's effort;

1. Comments:
2. Most engaged hashtag: hashtags on Instagram, functions like keywords for search engine optimization. The hashtags with the most engagement is like your keywords that bring in the most traffic.

3. Engagements per Follower: This metric shows you how many likes and comments your posts are getting per individual follower.
4. Followers Gained: This metric indicates the total reach of your posts. For the brand to grow, number of followers should grow over the time.

D. Twitter:

1. The **home screen** gives a monthly summary of Twitter highlights.

- Tweets published
- Tweet Impressions
- Profile visits
- Mention
- New followers
- Tweets linking to you

2. **Tweet Activity Tab:** Used to pull-up Individual Tweets, any time by clicking on the tab.

3. **Audiences Insights Tab:** The Audience Insights tab helps to discover valuable information about your followers and the people who've engaged with your Tweets. Following data can be accessed;

- Demographics
- Interest graph displays what percentage of your audience are interested in specific topics, ranging from technology and entertainment to business and tech news.
- Lifestyle
- Purchasing behavior
- Mobile footprint: Informs you about which wireless carrier and device your audience is using.

4. **Events on Twitter Tab:** It helps find plethora of events, ranging from holidays and conferences to sporting events and movie premieres.

5. **Advanced Options:** It includes Twitter Cards, Videos, App manager and conversion tracking.

E. LinkedIn Metrics:

1. Number of connections, profile viewed,
2. Rate of engagement
3. Type of followers and connections
4. Company page report: Assist in finding out how your company page is performing in terms of number of likes, comments, shares and mentions.
5. Comparison with competition

With increase in social media tools, it becomes immensely necessary for the user to monitor all the tools used by him, to improve process and be updated about the trends and behavior of the audience.

Some popular social media monitoring tools as per a web search (Scott Sims, 2017);

social media monitoring tools	Social media websites monitored by these tools	Features and benefits offered by the monitoring tool	Paid/ Unpaid services
Buzzlogix	manage all social media channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is all about 'catching the buzz' about you, so that one knows what the public and competitors are saying about you in real time. It is a powerful tool for keyword monitoring, reply directly from the dashboard, and interact with the community and a tool for media analytics and reports. 	Offers paid as well as unpaid services.
TweetReach	Twitter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is used to understand the reach of your tweet. It measures the impact that social media discussions have. It is also used to learn about influential followers, which points toward the right people. 	Fully paid
Digimind	Tweets, Blogs, Articles, Videos and other social media posts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It enables the user to see if the perception of a keyword is negative, neutral, or positive. It can also be used to analyze and see how the public perceives your brand versus the competitor. 	Paid Service with free trial
Hootsuite	LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Google+, Foursquare, and WordPress(contain management).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> User can manage social media accounts by scheduling posts across multiple platforms. If more than one person is involved handling a social media account, user can delegate task to them. 	Free for basic features and paid service for advance features.
Buffer	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn and Google+.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buffer is a social media monitoring tool, used to schedule posts and track the performance of user's content. It is also used to choose when and where to post a link, text, picture or video by adding it to Buffer. 	Both paid and unpaid
Keyhole	Twitter and Instagram	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps to monitor accounts, one can look at keywords, hashtags, URLs, and usernames. Keyhole shows a real-time data, historical information and heat maps that show the user's activity levels in certain parts of the world. 	Free trial but fully paid
Other	Simply Measure, Zoho social, Falcon etc.		

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It is a qualitative study for which the experts in the field were interviewed using an open and close ended questionnaire. The interview was in depth and conducted during March 2018.

Participants: Total number of participants selected were 8, all from different region and fields. All participants were divided in two equal groups A & B to have a balance in the study.

Group A-Set of 4 participants, employed at mid-level management.

Group B-Set of 4, self-employed.

Participant No	Name of Participant	Field of expertise	Location	Employed / self employed
1.	Sagar Kadam	Automation	Australia	Employed Group-A
2.	Swapnil Gaikwad	IT	U.S. A	
3.	Mayank Goel	Investment Banking	Bangalore	
4.	Vishal Patil	Banking	Nasik	
5.	NrupaliKendale	Interior Designer	Nasik	Self employed Group-B
6.	P.K Bagle	Lawyer	Nasik	
7.	KetakiKarnik	Photographer	Mumbai	
8.	Aadesh Dhadiwal	Marketing	Pune	

INTERVIEW DESIGN

For data collection, following set of questions were posed to the experts from different fields.

Your Name	
Name of your Organization	
Designation & Current Location	

1. How would you define and describe a personal brand?
2. How important is personal branding for your career development in your profession?
 - a. Important
 - b. Not Important
 - c. Neither important or unimportant
3. Which social media platform do you use for personal branding? (E.g.; Facebook, tweeter, Instagram, blogs)
4. Which traditional method do you use for personal branding? (E.g.; Appearance, communication and linguistic skills, gesture, posture, personal visiting card, public speaking)
5. What according to you are the skill set required for personal branding?
6. How do you evaluate your personal branding?
 - a. Using social media evaluators (E.g.: like, comment, share etc.)
 - b. By taking feedback from peer group, colleagues, friends, family etc.
 - c. Both

DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

The explanations of participants and their answers to the questionnaire are summarized in the form of direct quotations and paraphrased responses.

Question 1: How would you define and describe a personal brand?

Participant No	Response
1.	Marketing of yourself
2.	Presenting yourself in a unique way so that you get noticed.
3.	Having a strong recall and impact on people around.
4.	Showcasing your skillset
5.	Being out of box
6.	Being unique and convince your clients.
7.	Presenting self in such a way, so you have a positive gut reaction.
8.	Know your USP and brand yourself.

Findings: The question was farmed to understand the meaning of personal branding from the point of view of people from different field. Based on the literature the responses had quite a match, though not a perfect definition. An inconsistency was observed in the responses of all the participants, as the understanding, perception and values differs from person to person from all the fields, whether employed or self-employed.

Question 2: How important is personal branding for your career development in your profession? A. Important B. Not Important C. Neither important or unimportant

Participant No	Response
1.	Important
2.	Important
3.	Important
4.	Important
5.	Important
6.	Important
7.	Important
8.	Important

Findings: The question was framed to understand the importance of personal branding. Based on the literature the responses did match, also there was consistency observed in both the groups.

Question 3: Which social media platform do you use for personal branding? (E.g.; Facebook, tweeter, Instagram, blogs)

Participant No	Response
1.	Only Facebook
2.	Only LinkedIn (Restrict professional group)
3.	Facebook and LinkedIn (Restrict professional group)
4.	Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp (share finance related information in the limited and professional group)
5.	Facebook, Instagram, SlideShare, WhatsApp (to connect with the clients)
6.	Facebook, Twitter, Google+ (business expansion)
7.	Facebook, LinkedIn, blogs, YouTube
8.	Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp (share information with a larger audience)

Findings: The question was framed to understand the different social media tools used for personal branding and why are they used. Based on the

literature the responses were quite a match. Both the groups used the top 5 social media tools as per Fig.1, though for different reasons. Group A used minimum tools as they wanted to limit their reach to specific audience whereas Group B used multiple tools as they wanted to reach out the large audience and viewed personal branding as a mode of forming connection and business expansion.

Question 4: Which traditional method do you use for personal branding? (E.g.; Appearance, communication and linguistic skills, gesture, posture, personal visiting card, public speaking etc.)

Participant No	Response
1.	Visiting cards, personalize gifts, appearance
2.	Attending casual clients meeting, office parties, communication, appearance
3.	Communication
4.	Communication, professional approach towards clients and social group, conducting educational programs etc.
5.	Visiting cards, presentations on platforms like designing institutes, arranging social gathering for clients and friends, participating in exhibitions etc.
6.	Appearance, visiting cards, communication, and conduct social programs to spread awareness about his own field.
7.	Appearance, visiting cards, communication skills, gesture
8.	Appearance, visiting cards, communication

Findings: The question was framed to understand the different tools used for personal branding other than social media. Based on the literature the responses were quite a match. Both the groups gave more importance to communication and appearance. No consistency was observed in Group A, as all the participants used different tools depending upon their personalities and demand of their profession whereas Group B used common tools like visiting cards and social platforms.

Question 5: What according to you are the skill set required for personal branding?

Participant No	Response
1.	No Response
2.	Knowledge, getting adopted to the culture and ability to solve problems

3.	Education, promptness.
4.	Planning, making optimum use of resources, time management etc.
5.	Leadership quality, communication, team building
6.	Knowledge, attitude, confidence etc.
7.	Time management, accuracy, having clarity in work
8.	Creativity, understanding, knowledge, education etc.

Findings: The question was framed to understand the different skill set used to build personal branding, however skillset is one of the major component to form personal branding strategy. Both the groups had different responses and there was no consistency among the groups, but both the groups believed that skill set is important to build your personal brand ultimately resulting in career development.

Question 6: How do you evaluate your personal branding?

A. Using social media evaluators (E.g.: like, comment, share)

B. By taking feedback from peer group, colleagues, friends, family etc.

C. Both

Participant No	Response
1.	Social Media
2.	Both, because feedback gives an actual understanding whereas, social media gives a quick response and has a wider platform.
3.	Both, have its own benefits.
4.	Both, personal feedback gives a proper understanding of others perception, profession restricts the use of social media when it comes to sensitive information, but its immense benefits can't be ignored.
5.	Both
6.	Both- are equally important
7.	Both
8.	Both

Findings: The question was framed to understand the evaluation and monitoring tools used for personal branding. Based on the literature the responses of the participants partly matched as the participants used evaluation tools and not monitoring tools. Responses of both the groups were common but reasons differed.

III. LIMITATION OF STUDY

1. Researcher had to rely on self-funding, because of which researcher could access only non-paid features of social media websites.

2. Limitation of time lead to:
- Selection of small sample size,
 - Limited social media tools were referred,

CONCLUSION & SUGGESTIONS

Given the findings of the study, it is concluded that personal branding plays an immense role in career development for every individual irrespective of his field of expertise. Personal branding is a conscious and subconscious effort made by every individual from different fields. Individual personalities and profession also has an impact on personal brand. Based on the literature review and the interview conducted for the study, researcher provides some key suggestions;

- A training at corporate as part of CSR and at individual level is required for a better

understanding and use of personal branding tools, evaluation and monitoring tools.

- Personal brand should be used at every stage of career for future success and development.
- A more conscious effort can be made with respect to personal branding.

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