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# PERSONAL BRANDING CONCEPT FOR GRADUATES

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**ABSTRACT**

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Nowadays, the internet and social media consolidate themselves into an interactive and powerful platform to enhance people visibility and increase their opportunities. Internet and social media are considered as “a genie to Personal Branding” by offering multi-platforms to express oneself and connect with people. Now would be the most critical time to start building a strong personal brand and improve yourself to meet the demand of the future industry.

The objectives of this study are to create a concept of personal branding for recent graduates and shine a new light on the new phenomenon through an examination of current theories. Traditional frameworks of product-based branding are utilized as the grounded foundation.

This study focuses on the case of recent graduates for the significant benefits and necessity toward this subject. Qualitative research method has been conducted to gain in-depth insight and test the theoretical findings and to establish a practical and precise new concept.

The results are displayed by the answers of five research questions and two models of personal branding ( The Elements of A Personal Brand and The Concept of Personal Branding for Graduates). The concept and findings provide a brief and comprehensive tactics for beginners to start building their own brand, especially for recent graduates.

**Keywords**      Personal branding, brand image, career development, brand image, reputation, portfolio, self marketing

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The topic of this study relates to “personal branding for graduates”. Personal branding with the root from self-help genre and marketing orientation was introduced as a self-development tool by applying different methods to gain positive changes, especially in career advancement. It is increasingly recognized as a serious and helpful tool to help people make the most of what they can offer. There are many publications, articles, principles written by marketing experts and scholars that cover various aspects about this term, e.g., Peter Montoya, Speak and McNally, Del Blanco, etc. However, none of them meet the standard to be considered the official theoretical framework of personal branding (Khedher, 2010).

### 1.1. Background of The Study

In the social networking sites of Web 2.0, the emergence of personal branding has quickly accelerated and become an important marketing task for everyone to enhance their visibility and opportunities (Shepherd, 2015).

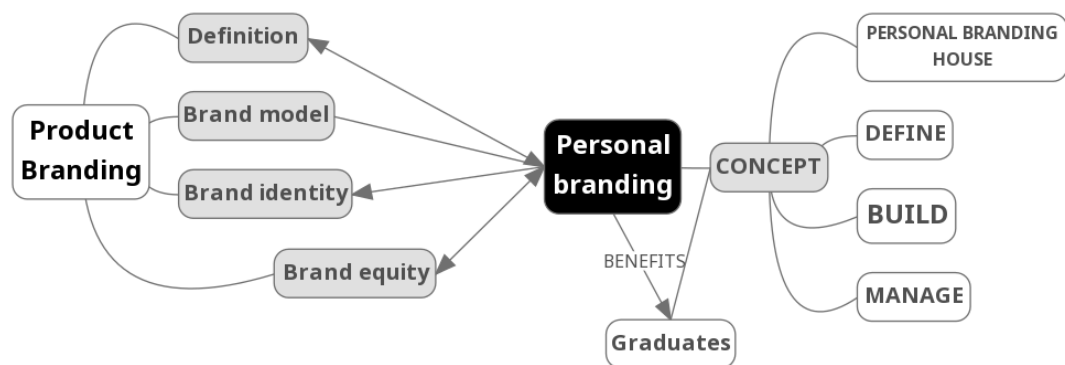
In this thesis, the new concept called “personal branding”, which is developed from selective models and strategies of product-based branding to apply to the case of individual is introduced. The main subject of the study aims at graduates who recently finished their bachelor degree in a university or college and have a desire to take an active role in the direction of their lives. The subject choice presents both opportunities and challenges. The advantages are the willingness and self-motivation of recent graduates to learn and improve. In addition, because the majority of them are young, their business profile is a blank page that needs to be filled by establishing their personal branding elements. The chosen subjects are facing a decisive time in their lives when they ought to make independent decisions about career directions and be responsible for their actions and habits, whether they are ready or not. The benefits of personal brand to this subject are developing more in-depth understanding of one’s self-awareness, personal value, career intuition and passion. However, their lack of self-awareness is a challenge to identifying their personal brand because it will hold the process back or lead it to a wrong direction.



### 1.2. Research structure

Another concern arises about what perspective personal branding is compared to other branding methods. Based on the foremost statement about personal branding on Fast Company (Peters, 1997), personal branding is considering yourself as a product and you are the head marketer of the brand called YOU (1997, p.86). It demonstrates the fundamental foundation of personal branding initiates from the frameworks of product-based branding. However, by adapting the specific brand concept, personal equity, identity and other characteristics can be formulated. Simultaneously, establishing the concept of personal branding based on traditional branding disciplines that have been confirmed by time would make the concept more valid and transparent.

The thesis structure is presented by the structure of **Figure 1**. The study will first focus on the definition, theoretical framework of branding and theories, advantages of personal branding; then a more in-depth look into the concept of personal branding will be introduced; and finally, the result of the research of a comprehensive concept for targeted subject will be presented.



**Figure 1.** Research structure

### 1.3. Research objective and research questions

As a recent graduate, one might face significant difficulties when stepping his first step into the turbulent world of adulthood. There are obstacles in expressing

strengths when trying to impress recruiters, inadequate networks and career guidance that lead to confusion, unproductive time squandering with wrong path, etc. Being an undergraduate of Vaasa University of Applied Science, the writer understands those difficulties from her own experiences and through her friends' stories. The attempt to eliminate those issues for her generation and the generations afterward encouraged in selecting this research topic as well as this specific research subject. It is believed that personal branding can be a critical weapon for graduates to strengthen their value and thrive in their career. Therefore, **the research objective of this thesis is defining the concept to build an effective personal brand for graduates to achieve their career goals.**

Thus, the main research question is how to establish the personal brand with all the tools you have. To answer this question, firstly, one should understand precisely the definition and benefits of personal branding, what elements it is made of and how it would benefit a person in career and self-development. Secondly, the graduate should define his tools for developing the personal brand (e.g., strength and weakness, vision, passion, inspiration, talent, desired value). By determining these aspects, the graduate will be able to improve his performance, define his personal value, and set the goals to fulfill the purpose.

The last step is collecting all the pieces to accomplish the research objective – the concept of personal branding in the case of graduates.

To be more specific, there are five research questions that will be answered in the thesis.

1. What is personal branding and how is it comparable with product branding?
2. What are the benefits of personal branding generally and specifically in the case of graduates?
3. What are the elements that represent a strong personal brand and which of them would be the most important one?
4. How can building an efficient network that advance your career?

5. How is it possible to continuously manage and improve your personal brand?

## **2. FROM PRODUCT BRANDING TO PERSONAL BRANDING**

This chapter focuses on significant theories of branding and personal branding from reputable authors of the fields, e.g., P. Montoya, J. Kapferer, M. Edmondson, R. Brown, etc. In addition, the brand equity model of Keller (2001) and the brand equity prism of Kapferer (1986) are utilized as adapted theoretical approaches.

### **2.2. What is Branding?**

“A product can be quickly outdated; a successful brand is timeless” - Stephen King.

According to the American Marketing Association, a brand is a name, term, design, symbol that identifies one seller's product or service to be distinctive from those of the competitors. In the book *Brain Tattoos* (Karen Post, 2004), a brand is alluded as the Brain tattoo, which is a psychological impression of emotions that is based on values and is adapted into customer's mind just like the tattoo ink printed on the body. This interesting comparison means that the tattoo is firstly inked by the decision of the buyer. However, during time and changes, it can be removed when its personal value does not exist anymore (Post, 2004).

Branding is not only a marketing tool for increasing profits, it is a process of making people remember your products and value. Branding management is the decisive drive to gain customer loyalty that will lead to further success and strengthen the company's position in the market.

In the long history of branding, its first role is developing a trademark which holds permanent rights to enable legal authority of the owner. After years of transforming, the brand has outgrown from its role as a trademark and becomes an mandatory technique to insure the product's quality and identity to attract potential customers who the brand has not associated with yet ( Jones, David M, and Slater, 2014)

To emphasize this idea, a brand is also defined by Mammarella as: “A brand is a mark that identifies a property, and it is also a promise of quality, of style, and of a way of doing business.” (Post, 2004).

Today, as the global market is becoming more technology focused and competitive, in order to stay recognized in this over-information age, companies must focus on developing their brand. There are many reasons that branding as a powerful tool is becoming more essential to the marketing process and is highly applied in many firms all over the world. To begin with, a strong brand positioning can differentiate a brand’s contextual meaning to make it stand out from the competing brands. This condition is significant for increasing profits and consolidating an active role in the market. For instance, Swatch’s brand message is “high quality, low cost, provocative, joy of life”; Ford Escort is “the most economical car” or Mercedes is “the most prestigious” (Duncan & Moriarty 1997, 73). Defining a clear and unique message of your brand and managing it with consistent strategy is the key to building a success brand. Secondly, as Randall (2000, p.4) mentioned, a brand is “a holistic combination of product and added values”. A strong brand can add tangible and intangible value to its business by building a valuable and trustworthy brand that will convince the consumer to choose that products among other similar products. Moreover, customers that are concerned about quality will be more likely choose familiar brands that they know, even at a higher price. There are researches who have said that customers believe branded products to be worth higher prices than unbranded products. In addition, according to Kapferer, brands are the specifically and the only international language in this intense global market (1994).

### **2.3. The Brand Model**

The branding perceptions can be defined by three essential dimensions: visibility, associations and brand longevity (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000). Creating visibility means increasing attention for the product by keeping it in sight of customers. The more often the customers see or hear about a certain brand, the

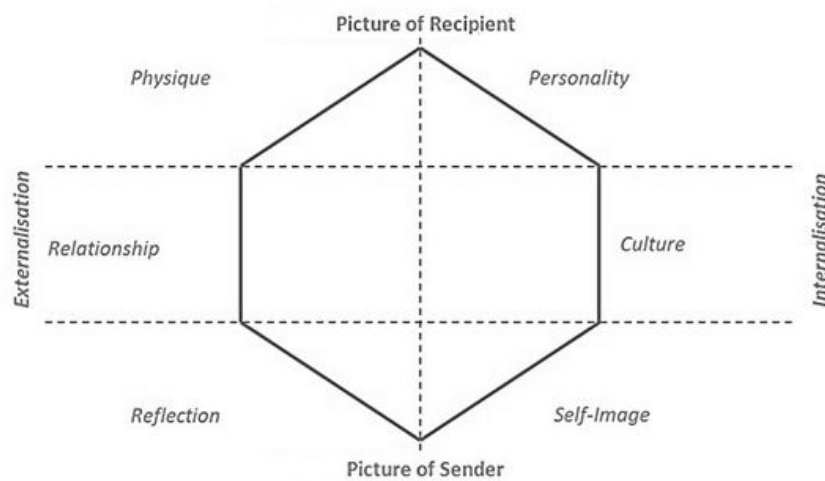
more valuable the brand will become and the higher the possibility of selling its products. Secondly, brand association is developed as a part of brand equity. A brand strategist must stay focused on the product's unique value and distinctive characteristic to identify brand equity. Leclerc, S. and Dube has given an example of brand association that has promoted the product successfully. People might not know that Giorgio di Sant'Angelo and Haagen-Dazs ice cream are not from Italy or from Denmark, they are both made in the USA. However, they represent the authentic quality of that country and the company is willing to build its brand image as foreigners' product (263).

More importantly, maintaining and improving customer relationships is the most effective way of achieving customer longevity, which is also the ultimate goal of the branding process. In order to activate brand longevity, the company should specify the product's value proposition and develop credibility. The value proposition is defined by Aaker (1996) as a combination of the functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits that the brand distributes, which provides value to the target customer.

#### **2.4. Brand Identity**

Brand identity is a part of customer's external experiences toward the product, along with its logo, brand name, packaging, graphics, product descriptions, colors, etc. In other words, it is the face of the brand. Brand identity is built from the unique performance of brand associations to deliver promising values of the product to customers (Aaker et al. 2012). Kapferer (1986) introduced his Brand Identity Prism model that helps business to build sustainable and clear brand identities that signify their core characteristics. According to the Kapferer, brand identity consists of six key dimensions: Physique, Personality, Relationship, Culture, Reflection and Self – Image, as shown in Figure 2.

## Brand Identity Prism



**Figure 2.** Brand identity Prism

Physique reflects the physical forms of the brand, which is considered as the basis and the distinctive representation of the brand, e.g. the remarkable trefoil three-striped logo of Adidas or the dynamic logo of Nike and its influential slogan “Just do it”.

The second element, personality, is the characteristic the brand is perceived through its marketing communication process, copy writing and design. For instance, the happy spirit that Coca-cola reinforces in its customer’s mind in form of the red and yellow color, or how the Sun-Maid raisins brand focuses on the image of the mothers cooking in the kitchen to connect with customers’ peaceful childhood and gain a strong feelings toward the brand.

Thirdly, the culture element is a part of the internal experience, which displays the system and principles on which the brand’s performance is based, e.g., the organization’s working culture, Starbuck’s culture initiative to “make the workplace more positive” that creates close bonds with its employees, or Google’s innovative, creative and fun working environment.

Fourthly, the relationship element presents how the company engages with its customers beyond the products, i.e., after-sales service. For example, Sephora offers a 10% discount for its members or Vascara sends birthday cards with a 30%

discount coupon for their members. This element drives brand association and create customer longevity.

Fifthly, reflection is based on the typical personalities of brand's users, in order to define an effective brand message for the target segmentation. For example, Kiehl's reflection is the person who cares for his/ her skins and is concerned about the environment, or Zara is the individualism and fashionable style at a reasonable price.

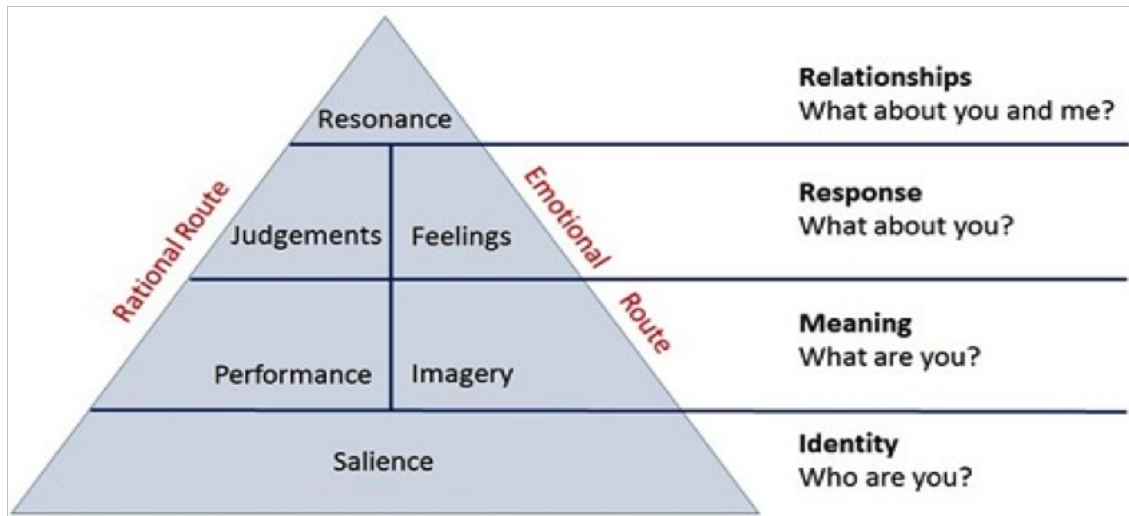
The last element is self-image – the ideal identity that the target customer wants to perceive. Any brand that figures out this element will be able to carry the desired value for their customers, e.g., Apple's users want people to see them as innovative, cool, modern, free thinking and as a stylish person.

## **2.5. Brand Equity**

According to David Aaker (1991), brand equity is a set of brand assets and credibilities connected to a brand's name and symbol that provide values to customers by increasing their interpretation, purchase decision, satisfaction, and to firm by advancing efficiency, brand loyalty, prices, trade leverage, competitive advantage and brand extensions ( Aaker, 1991). Brand equity is divided into four dimensions: brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand associations and perceived quality. By identifying the brand equity's value, the brand can have an clear picture to manage and gain those potential values.



In 1993, Kevin Keller developed the Brand Equity Model, displayed in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Keller's Brand Equity Model.

The pyramid model shown in Figure 3 has four levels. To begin with, brand identity is located at the bottom, brand meaning is the second level, brand response is in the third level and brand relationship is on the top level. In other words, brand identity plays an initial and essential role in building a strong brand and this level should be developed steadily. The relationship, or brand resonance is the desired value that any brand aims to achieve. It can only appear when other three levels are well-established.

### **3. PERSONAL BRANDING**

This chapter is to define the concept of building a personal brand in the case of graduates. In this section, the Personal Branding House model of Hideyuki (2010) is applied as the framework, supported by validated outcomes from the qualitative research and personal brand characteristics reflected on the research subject.

When these two sections are intertwined, the main research objective will become clear.

#### **3.1. What Is Personal Branding?**

“Personal Branding is what people say about you when you are not in the room.”  
– Jeff Bezos, Amazon’s founder.

As branding is a crucial tool for company to win potential customers’ attention and maintain their loyalty, personal branding is a promising tool to create audiences’ belief in values of personal perceptions, to become the person you want to be seen as ( Montoya, 2002). Montoya has implied in his book about personal branding - The Personal branding Phenomenon, that everyone is creating their own branding without intention. Your brand can be perceived by your achievements, your professional skills, your personality, abilities, lifestyle, friends, etc. To be more specific, how you introduce yourself to others and how they evaluate your characteristics behind your back are your unintentional personal brand (2002, p.14). In order to stand out in the competitive job market and to make people remember you with your best values and characteristics, a personal branding strategy should be implemented as the starting point of your career.

In other words, you should picture yourself as a product and your job is to define and build the brand YOU. Thus, it can turn your unintentional-already-had personal brand into an unique and powerful tool to win people and stay emerged in your career development. In the book Managing Brand You, it has been mentioned that studying, analyzing and applying techniques to manage product

and company brands into your personal brand, with discipline and persistence, will improve your life effectively (Wilson and Blumenthal 2010, 2 ).

### **3.2. Personal Branding Phenomenon**

The history of personal branding started long ago through the concept and the idea of marketing yourself to perform better in your career and life, i.e., self-positioning, individual branding. Those terms have been introduced since 1937 by Napoleon Hill in the book *Think and Grow Rich*. In 1981, Ries and Trout wrote a chapter in their book – *Positioning: The Battle of Mind* about the strategy of positioning yourself in your career. The authors stated: “Don’t try to do everything yourself. Find a horse to ride” (1981).

The personal branding phenomenon was popularized by the article “The Brand Called You” issued on *Fast Company Magazine*, September 1997, written by Tom Peters. The article cited that everyone has a chance to improve their competence, learn and develop a remarkable brand for themselves and it would bring them massive rewards, e.g., opportunities, power, distinction. Beside, they should consider their brand as the way a CEO defines his product’s brand, to maintain, improve, protect and stay loyal to it. In addition, Peters suggests his readers to perceive themselves as the CEO of Me Inc. The article identifies the benefits, characteristics of personal brand and shapes a basic tactics to develop the brand called You. Throughout the article, Peters presents five main questions of what makes them different, what is their pitch, what is their power, what is their loyalty and what is the future of them. The idea became influential for its inspiring point of view that career development should not be limited within a specific target position, e.g., department manager, the career goal should be considered as self development.

### 3.3. Personal Brand Identity

The comprehensive Brand Identity planning model was established by David A. Aaker (1996). The author clarifies four perspectives of brand identity that brand strategists should consider; the brand as a product, an organization, a person and a symbol. Those perspectives support the brand identity to be clarified, enriched and differentiated (Aaker, 1996). Stated in the planning model, brand identity is divided into three levels: Brand essence, core identity and extended identity. Transferring to the subject of individual instead of firm, Del Blanco presents personal identity structure by applying Aaker's brand identity planning model. As product-based brand identity provides added value to firm and customers by promoting brand associations, differentiating from its competitors, reflecting the business strategy (Aaker 1996), meanwhile, personal identity is also significant to access direction, proposal and meaning in life (Del Blanco 2014, p.7). According to Del Blanco, personal identity can be defined by identifying the person's basic value and goal, how he wants himself to be perceived, his desired personalities, quality relationships (**Figure 4.**).

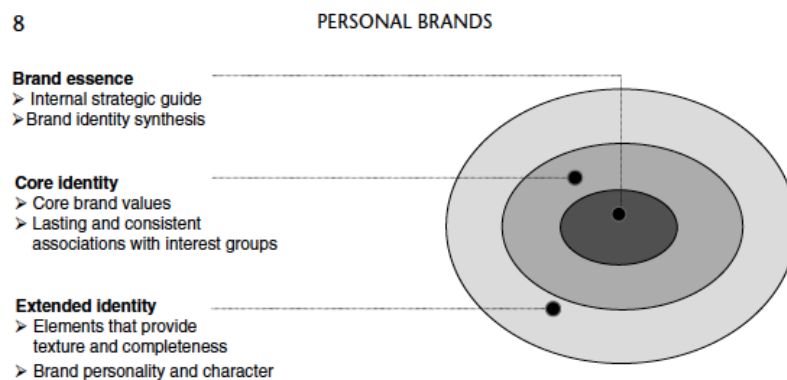


Figure 1.2 Identity structure

**Figure 4.** Personal identity structures (Del Blanco)

**Figure 4.** displays the identity structure of brand identity, which consists of the central identity and extended identity. These main elements cooperate to serve the brand's essence, which is defined by Wilson and Blumenthal as the heart and soul of the brand, represented by your background, wisdom, opinions, habits and so on (2008, p.95). The core identity is the timeless central value of your brand, it contains brand essence that should remain constant (Del Blanco 2014, p.8). In the case of individual's brand, it can be possessed by asking yourself what spirit and values your personal brand should present, what skills can support it, how it can be maintained. Moreover, defining your strength and unique value can enhance the core identity and contribute to value propositions of the brand. If your identity is distinctive and your brand association is efficient, you would gain significant advantages from emotional benefits, e.g., authenticity, respect.

The second element in Del Blanco's structure is the extended identity, which consists of elements that provide texture and completeness and brand characteristics (2014, 8). In order to develop more relevant relationships, one should reinforce extended identity to be more flexible and connecting to life (8). When these two elements (central and extended identity) are intertwined, the brand essence will be successfully represented and secured and the personal brand will be sustained. In order to achieve that, Del Blanco recommends to aim at creating your influence by implementing value associations and verbal communication.

Taking Barack Obama - the United States' first black president, who is also preferred as one of the most successful personal brand in the history, as an example of a strong personal identity. "Barack Obama is three things you want in a brand: New, different, and attractive." (Reinhard, 2008). During the political campaign, he has defined a critical visual identity to promote his image as a powerful candidate. His marketing team, leading by Chris Hughes has changed the way political branding worked by adopting Web 2.0 and social media to develop Obama's campaign. His dynamic visual identity represents the idea of change, enhancing the strengths of visual design (typography, colors) to differentiate his posters, banners and stay emerged from other competitors. After winning the election, Obama continued to maintain his credible presence by appearing constantly on TV shows, news, etc. His solid brand is managed and secured continuously as a man of the family, a man of his words, a caring President. His bright smile and talented presentation skills, together with his calm manner and pure political characteristics, have co-created the most memorable brand and helped him to achieve two elections victory.

Analyzing Obama's brand identity with the identity structure of Aaker and Del Blanco, the core identity of the President is his ethnicity and race, his vision of "Change" (expressed by the campaign slogan "Change We Can Believe In") in economic themes for American, his dynamic messages and narrative personal stories. To make the whole picture of the brand completed, Obama's extended identity includes mission implementation, contributions to health care organizations, fights among equal rights and success use of social media. The outstanding management of both elements differentiates The Obama brand's essence and achieves brand loyalty and resonance (Newman, 2016; Smith, 2015; Post, 2011).

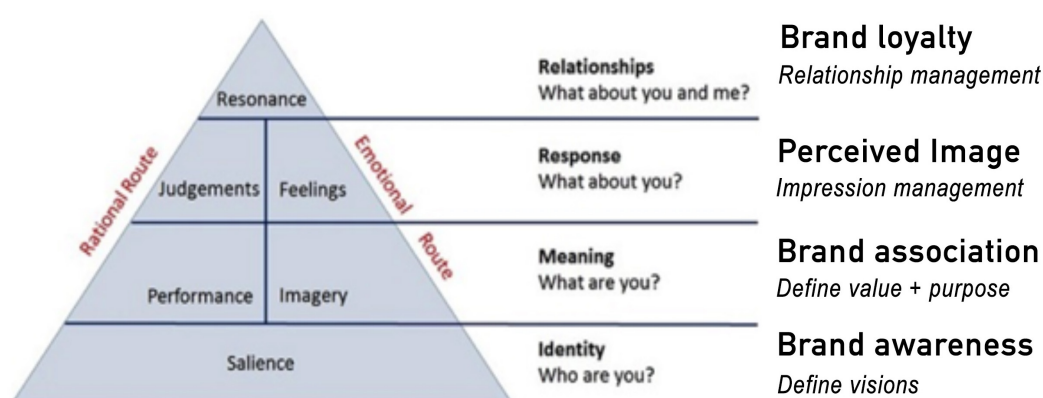
### **3.4. Personal brand equity**

As brand is the creation of expectations and association in the audiences' minds, personal branding, together with the personal equity will generate a promise of ability and belief within its audience (Montoya, 15). Personal equity is the professional skills or the tool to create specific values that a person often use to introduce themselves to the world (234).

In order to build a strong personal brand, you should focus to build your personal equities firstly. A great personal branding is defined in the Personal Branding Phenomenon as “a personal identity that stimulates precise, meaningful perceptions in its audience about the values and qualities that person stands for”(Montoya, 15).

As mentioned in chapter 2, brand equity of a product is the combination of brand awareness, brand association, brand loyalty, perceived quality. By defining and preserving those elements, brand will grow sustainably and more value will be added to the firm and its customers ( Aaker, 1971). Transferring this definition to validate the definition of personal brand equity, it can be seen that those elements are controlled by emotional value and functional value. To be more specific, in order to achieve brand awareness, which refers to the strength of brand’s essence in customers’ minds (Aaker, 2002), one should establish an unique image or a relevant role or consistent values in key relationships to be most recognised. Similarly, brand loyalty and brand association are developed by networking skills, e.g., impression management, relationships management.

This method to develop personal equity will be further discussed in Chapter 4.



**Figure 5** Keller's Brand Equity Model in Personal branding

Applying Aaker’s brand equity elements to the model of Customer-based brand equity of Keller (**Figure 5.**), the role of each element is clearly identified. Firstly,

Brand awareness represents the bottom of the model – Salience, to answer the question of “Who are you?” and define the personal identity. Secondly, Brand Association evaluate performances and imagery of the brand, therefore answer the question of meaning, “What are you stand for?”. Thirdly, the third element of Perceived Image reveals emotional relation toward the brand, i.e., judgements, feelings. More importantly, Brand loyalty demonstrates the resonance among key relationships of the subject.

As an example for this matter, Oprah Winfrey is an excellent personal brand profile that represents the most influential African – American woman in the world and her admirable contribution to women’s empowerment. Her personal brand was built based on her honesty, openness and persistency to build her dynasty, including her magazines, TV shows, Book Club and the meaningful spirits she brings to the humanity. In this case, Winfrey’s personal equities are her willingness to overcome such difficult past, her honesty and bravery to share her personal life as a part to connect with her audiences, who might share the similar background. She spreads the sincerity to influence other women with her positive life style and personalities. Ultimately, Oprah Winfrey knows exactly how to promote her personal brand in the beginning by honestly sharing her miserable childhood and the failures in her film projects, in order to bring them the attitude of never give up. This step won her millions of sympathetic audiences that made her become their ideal role model. She is a great case of a high resonance personal brand.

### **3.5. Reputation**

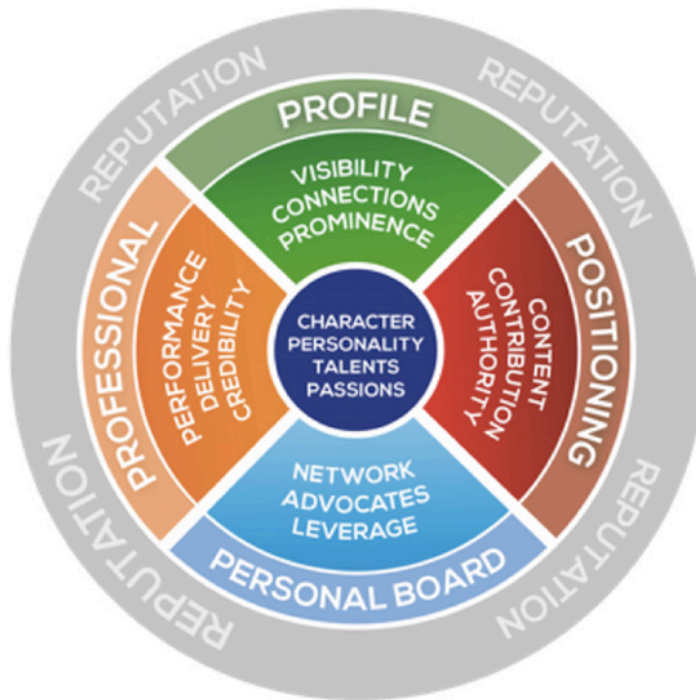
The roles of the personal branding concept are providing people better control of how they want the world to perceive them. In other words, the process’s central benefit is advancing individual’s reputation.

“A good reputation is more valuable than money.” – Syrus states.

“Reputation is everything” - agrees by Brown in his book *Build Your Reputation* (2016, p.9). To be more specific, the key component that decides one’s success in



this world is considered as his reputation. In addition, Brown introduces the Reputation Toolboxes representing core values that build up the reputation of one person.



**Figure 6.** Reputation Vault (R. Brown)

According to the four Reputation Vault (Brown 2016, p.15) in **Figure 6.**, reputation is made of four main components: the person's profile, professional, position and personal board. Each component is created by three other factors. One's profile is evaluated based on his visibility, which can vary from the person's outlook, visible behaviors, connections and influence within his networks. The second component is the professional, which can be measured by how the role is performed, how the results are delivered and credibility. The third elements is the personal board, which consists of one's network, advocate and leverage. Finally, the fourth element is self-positioning, which is defined by three main factors of the content, contribution and authority. When the brand is strongly developed, one's authority toward his contents will be guaranteed and contributed to his position and reputation. The core value that create one's reputation is within himself, i.e., his characters, personalities, talents, etc.

Regarding the advantages of reputation, Brown mentions that your reputation is the reason everyone pays you ( Brown 2016, p.14). There are three things one would expect to get paid: Respect, Attention and Money (2016, p.14). If you own a solid reputation, you will earn respect at work and in your social life, people will listen to your ideas and your opinions will matter. Moreover, attention and increasing income come along with respect. In contrast, a poor reputation would make you uncomfortable in your workplace with lack of voice, your credit got taken away to others, your idea might not be considered seriously and you might feel like you are working for other's target, not yours. For recent graduates who find themselves struggling in their new workplace, these obstacles might sound familiar.

Reputation and brand are created by time, effort and consistence, in order to stay solid and thrive. It could not happen by night or by any accidental scandal or any matter of luck, the Brand "You" happens because people take effort to think, act, plan and control it.

### **3.6. The Necessity of Personal Branding In The Case of Recent Graduates**

The thesis subject is dedicated to students who have recently graduated from their university or college, with the range of age from 18-25. When interviewing several Personal Branding experts from Vietnam, the Netherlands and Finland, different perspectives were emerged toward this selected subject. Heli Sirkiä, a Finnish Personal Branding Coach, expresses her focus on more experienced clients, i.e., at least the Master Degree students, professionals and especially the entrepreneurs, because they already have a set of values and clearer career intentions that Bachelor Degree graduates are lack of. Sirkiä suggests that graduates should take part in more activities, volunteer jobs, internships in order to gain experiences and assure about their career intuitions before they start building their brand. In contrast, Ivan Bartholomeus, a Dutch Personal Branding coach who is also a Marketing Teacher in Fontys University of Applied Sciences, believes that the age of Bachelor's Degree graduates is the critical time to define their personal brands because it will be helpful and mandatory for them to make important decisions later on.

Personally, I shares the same opinion with Ivan Bartholomeus, which drives me to dedicate the thesis objective to define the concept of building a strong personal brand for recent graduates.

#### **3.6.1. To raise self-awareness**

After graduating from university, it is the time for students to be in charge of their actions, career choices and life. You are the one who decides what you would spend your life on what to achieve and become. If you are not well-prepared, you might fall to the rest of those ordinary graduates who might not know what they are standing for and what they should do to achieve the kind of life they want.

However, recent graduates with lack of experience and self-awareness often mistaken achieving goals into fulfilling their purpose. This mistake might result in committing to the life that does not align with their morals and values. Tran Thanh Ly – a Vietnamese Personal Life Coach for young people, explains in her course about Perspectives of Inside Happiness, that when you achieve something,

you still have the urge to continue to accomplish more, you will set another goal to continue chasing because the current achievement does not feel enough. Fulfillment, however, is the beyond state of mind when you complete your life purpose and you feel “fulfilled”, i.e., you feel enough, satisfied, happy, at peace, you do not want to change anything about that, you do not want more. Tran emphasized that fulfillment is the goal of life everyone should aim at, in order to gain inside happiness (2019). Defining and raising self-awareness is a part of the beginning step in developing your personal brand. To eliminate this issue and avoid misusing your valuable time, it is critical for graduates in the early days of their career to define their personal brand.

### **3.6.2. To make yourself stand out.**

Edmondson also stated that in order to navigate your career in the energetic and turbulent global market of today, you need to perform a clear, brief, persuasive message towards your value (2015). Self-presentation is a skill to practice during the personal branding process. It requires in-depth understanding about yourself to bring your core value, strength and form them into a brief introduction that can achieve impression.

After defining your values and vision, there is plenty of work to achieve emotional benefits and functional benefits that will lead to further success and certain impression. Establishing a strong personal branding gives you better preparation towards job interviews and employer’s challenges. Moreover, obtaining a quality network and relevant connections offer opportunities as well as valuable referral and endorsements.

The personal branding tactics appear to be associated with making your profile distinctive from the rest and enhancing your power of influence.

#### **4. THE CONCEPT OF PERSONAL BRANDING IN THE CASE OF GRADUATES**

Personal Branding House model of Yamamoto (2014) is applied as the framework, supported by validated outcomes from the qualitative research and Personal brand characteristics reflected to the research subject. When these two sections are intertwined, the main research objective will be clarified.

##### **The House of Personal Branding**

According to the book *Personal Branding – How to be chosen for what you desire to do* (Yamamoto, 2014), building the personal brand is like building a two-staged house. The Japanese author invented a simple and powerful model of personal branding which is called The Personal Branding House. It consists of two floors and a roof. The first floor represents functional values of the brand, the second floor is emotional values and the roof of the house is the vision. To be more specific, the functional values are identified by Yamamoto as your technical skills, knowledge and experiences that can benefit your professional profile. In addition, emotional values on the second floor are your how people feel about you after communicating with you. The floor that you want people to focus at when they connect with you depends on what your vision would be. Differently, the house of personal branding is not built from the first floor like typical house, it is built from the roof top – the vision. The house can only begin to be made when the vision is clearly defined. Then, it comes the second floor of emotional value. Yamamoto mentioned in the fifth chapter of his book that it is possible but not recommended to start building the house from the first floor – the functional value – which means from your professional career. People who focus on their career often neglect on nurturing their relationships with others (2014, p.129).

#### 4.1. Defining The Vision

Many strong personal brands have one common characteristic: they started and established under the motivation of a desired vision (Del Blanco, p.63).

Stating in the book *Managing Brand You* (Wilson et al 2010, 2), Wilson and Blumenthal wrote that the first step to build a personal brand visualizes how you want it to become, by imagining what you want to stand for and the specific field in life you want to engage. Yamamoto also mentioned by presenting the house of personal branding model (2014), that dissimilar to any ordinary house, it is built from the top and its rooftop is the vision. Having a clear and transcending vision is the major factor to make your brand stand out. You have to envision your brand carefully and differently in this step. Moreover, take a clear look at yourself, your life, your strengths and weaknesses, your talents, your values, your background, your points of view, in order to have a clear reflection of what people evaluate you. From the images of you in others' views that you reflect, you can start to build your personal brand (Wilson et al., 3).

To be more specific about the term of defining a transcending vision, Blanco presents the two primary segments that reinforce vision: The Philosophy guide and the tangible image, represented in **Figure 7**. (2010, p.63).

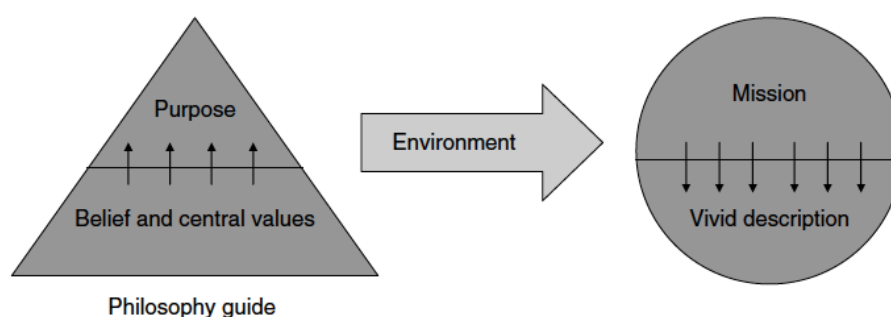


Figure 3.5 Brand vision

**Figure 7.** Brand vision (Del Blanco)

#### **4.1.1. The philosophy guide**

The philosophy guide gives a solid base of decisions, behavior and actions to develop the vision. It is established from the impulsive ideas, core values and belief. The core values are required to be authentic and precise, as for the vision to advance.

In the book *Marketing Your Values: 9 steps to navigate your career* (2015), Edmondson stated the importance of identifying our purpose and value in order to make a right career choice. To Edmondson, it is a human essence to search for the meaning of life and to identify his authentic self (2015, p.3).

The journey of identifying one's purpose and meaning begins with advancing self-awareness. Developing self-awareness helps you to understand your authenticity, to become realistic and have the mindfulness to fulfill your purpose and maximize your possibilities.

Sirkiä answers the interview question about personal branding for recent graduates, that "students need to validate their career intention before they decide their brand". This step should be taken carefully and with conscious because suitable career path may only emerge after trials and failures from the previous unsuitable ones. In addition, the coach suggests undergraduates to take part in as much experiences as possible from internship to volunteer jobs during their learning process, in order to gain broader perspective and to make better career decision afterward.

In the model of personal equity indicated in Figure AA. , the second step to answer the question of "What are you standing for?" is to define the personal value and purpose.

## 1. Value

Personal value in this case includes brand essence and central value in the model of brand equity (Figure BB) which presents true and unique characteristics of a person. To identify this term, Peters suggests several questions for individual to brainstorm and self-evaluate to develop the brand called You (1997). The first and foremost question is “What makes you different?” and the answer is required to be a less-than-15-word description, short and shape. By identifying this matter, the individual considers himself a brand similarly to Apple, Nike, Zara and takes the role of a marketing manager to clarify distinctive characteristics that can help his brand stand out in the market (1997).

Bartholomeus calls this step “the mirror exercise”, which he applies in his class for students to take a look at the reflection of themselves in the mirror and practice the questions of “Who am I?”, “What am I standing for?”. To the Dutch personal branding expert, it is initially necessary for graduates to understand who they are. He stressed that “you have to know yourself before you show yourself” (Bartholomeus). By understanding your values, you will have ability to deliver them to your employer and influence others. To be more specific, this process requires brutal honest to evaluate not only your strengths but also your weaknesses. Your strengths, distinct characteristics should be stated in your self-description to achieve impression. Moreover, you should improve, update and practice constantly to master the skills you are good at. Similarly, your weaknesses which make you less confident or reduce your brand credibility or diminish your opportunity should not be avoided during the self-evaluation but taken seriously to overcome. For instance, your unpunctuality might affect the professional identity you want to be perceived, hence, it needs to change. Putting yourself into disciplinary to lose bad habit and overcome a weakness requires plenty of efforts, consistency and time. However, it is a part of self-development progress which will carry tremendous rewards in the future.

Anh Tuan Le – Career and Education Consultant at Vietnam Insight Ltd. suggests to choose your career intention from your likes and strengths. Working in the field



that you are passionate about and holding the talent to outperform the job can motivate you to overcome any barrier and difficulty that might occur in the future. In addition, Le cited that you will feel more comfortable sharing and marketing your professional profile when you are devoted to it. This will help to inspire people and advance your network.

## 2. Purpose

After identifying your central value and essence, the next task is to discover your purpose in order to define your vision. Life purpose is defined by Leider as “the reason for getting up in the morning”, the foundation of life and the expression of your essence (2010).

The fulfillment of life purpose implies decision-making, goal-setting, clear direction to grow whole. To summarize his interviews to thousand people about their life purposes, Leider concludes the definition of life purpose as what people are meant to do while they still exist (2010).

“What a man can be, he must be” (Maslow, 1943). Psychologist Abraham Maslow, author of the book *Theory of Human Motivation* – inventor of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs stated that people’s needs are divided into 5 levels, from the most basic to higher: physiological needs, safety and security needs, love and belonging needs, esteem and self-actualization need. Once a level is satisfied, another higher level emerges and motivates our performance (Maslow, 1943). According to Maslow’s hierarchy (**Figure 8.**) the highest level of needs is Self-fulfillment needs or self-actualization which can be satisfied by understanding personal potentials, achieving creativity, mastering specific talent (Maslow, 1970). Maslow explains the level of need as a desire “to become everything one is capable of becoming” (Maslow 1987, p.64). To achieve the highest stage of human’s needs, individuals are motivated to seek fulfillment, meaning of life, what is important to them, their potentials.

Identifying your value and purpose is a part of the process to self-actualization. It is the need of human being to understand themselves, their moral standards, their

characteristics, desire, passion, in order to achieve certain personal growth. When the purpose of life and core value are clear and solid, career path and life goals will emerge. Growing with conscious and clear purpose is a process of becoming.



**Figure 8** Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Terry Fox is a specific example of a personal purpose and meaningful cause can move millions of people and last longer than his life. He was the man who ran marathon for five months with his artificial leg across Canada in 1980. The young man with only a healthy right leg, the left one was cut off when he was 18 because of cancer. Fox invented Marathon of Hope to raise 1 million dollars for cancer research. During his treatment in the hospital, Fox witnessed deaths and sufferings from cancer patients that brought him to the moment of purpose. “Somewhere, the hurting must stop... and I was determined to take myself to the limit for those causes” – Fox wrote in his letter asking for sponsorship. His Marathon of Hope donates more than 23 million dollars to cancer research. Moreover, his story still continues to inspire people all across the world through Terry Fox Run and brings

hope and strength to patients who are fighting cancer. His fundraising run is declared not to rest until the cancer disease is defeated. (The Terry Fox Foundation, 2019)

#### **4.1.2. The Tangible Image**

The second main element of the brand vision is the tangible image, which can be described by mission and living description. Mission focuses clearly to the attempts of personal brand, meanwhile the living description contains certain and more visible value of the missions that brings motivation to the objective. The philosophy guide is considered as a solid foundation of the vision, the tangible image, on the other hand, is the sense of reality, aspirations and emotions (Del Blanco, p.65). To develop personal brand, many mission objectives are required depending on each individual's characteristics. As personal branding is a process of personal growth, after understanding your value, purpose and specialization, Del Blanco suggests to identify tangible images of your vision as well as missions and goals to generate self-actualization process. Proposing an enthusiastic mission and goal can motivate you to elevate your development without getting frustrated. The missions can vary from overcoming a weakness, changing a mindset, learning a new skill or completing a study degree, as long as they are relevant to the brand called you. The difference between the term of purpose and mission is a mission has deadline and is more specific. For instance, a person wants to become a best-selling author, her life purpose is to write influential stories that bring meaningful value to her readers. Her missions would be: to publish her first book in the next 2 years, to read at least one book in a week to gain more vocabulary, to write at least two posts on her blog a day to maintain associations with the readers, to network with the publishers.

Live descriptions are the visible goals of the mission that can be creatively distributed in the subject's mind, e.g., a wonderful scene of success, the satisfaction after achieving the goal, the imaginary of wealth and power (Del Blanco). Dream big, shoot for the moon, if you can dream it, you can do it, those are all the quotes

given by reputable men (Peale; Disney). Branding is a long-term process. It requires patience and consistence, dreams bring more motivation and willingness to commit.

#### **4.1.3. Authenticity**

“Truth is a point of view, but authenticity can’t be faked.”– Peter Gruber.

“Authenticity is the key. To build your brand, you have to dig deep in who you are” - stated by William Arruda – one of the most well-known personal branding guru. To Arruda, authenticity is a person’s true, genuine and unique characteristics that should be considered as the brand essence, the central value, the initial and most essential factor of the personal brand.

In the age of information where there is so much influential news provided by the internet, people can easily get distracted and effected. To avoid this issue, one must build a strong authenticity to protect him/her from the massive information to stay focus on the certain value and purpose.

Branding is developing an unique identity to manage other’s perceptions (Montoya 2002, p.35) not a production of false identity to meet any demand. Personal branding is promoting your already-had genuine value to become the best version of yourself. In fact, Montoya emphasizes that personal brand provides awareness of one’s core value to increase deeper focus and achieve life purpose (p.215).

All of the experts who have been interviewed believe that authenticity is the key element to be assured when developing a personal brand.

Sirkiä explains that defining a personal brand is different from defining a company brand because in personal branding, personal equity and strategy will be implemented to your own process and will adhere with you for years. Hence, to build a sustainable personal brand, first and foremost, you need to go to the core, focus on who you are as a person and build the solid base of your brand based on your true values (Sirkiä, 2018)

Anna Mattinen – Branding Consultant, Founder of EIGHTAM also agrees with the above statement by emphasizing the importance of staying true to yourself and your value, whether the case is for personal brand or company brand. “Do not pretend to be someone else rather than you. If you claimed to be you are something you are not, the clients, customers, recruiters who interact with you would notice by time and your brand would be distrusted” (Mattinen 2019)

## **4.2. Building The Brand.**

According to the coherent personal branding model of Yamamoto (2014) – The House of Personal Branding, the writer wants to define the concept of building a strong personal brand by implementing tactics for change and behave

### **4.2.1. Emotional Values**

It can get easier to control others' perception of you when you get closed to them, that is when the relationships are tied with emotions (Speak and McNally, 2010)

#### **a) The Emotional Benefits**

Strong feelings last longer. Building your brand through emotional connections is the surest way to gain your brand longevity towards people around you. This can be aligned with the attempts to maintain and enhance customer loyalty in commercial branding. For instance, in product branding, companies intend to interact with their customers beside simply providing the products or services, by offering aftercare service to increase the customer satisfaction or implementing marketing campaign, slogans to express their brand value. Similarly, personal branding performs its best when the person can make other people see them as their ideal image, even at work and in their personal life. The concept of Speak and McNally's personal brand management is to empower a you to change other's judgements among you so you can be understood better and get the recognition that you deserve for the values you gave to others (2010, p.8). One should choose to make a meaningful difference in life by adding better values, lessons, trusts to others. This step takes plenty of efforts, persistence and especially sincerity because quality relationships require those characteristics as the solid foundation.

Del Blanco (2014) is in agreement with Speak and McNally's (2010) findings which showed that emotional connections are essential in strengthening your personal brand, regardless the complication of the situation and the results of the relationships involvement (2010, p.6).

“It is a two-way street” (Speak and McNally, 2010). A person with strong personal brand can transfer distinctive and valuable emotional results to people who interact with the brand and make them feel contented by receiving sense of security, greater knowledge, authority (6).

### **b) Make a Positive Difference**

“It’s not about being different, it’s about the difference you make.” (McNally and Speak 2010, p.8)

K. Speak and D. McNally present tactics for the question of “How to build a strong personal brand?”. The authors suggest that in order to build a sustainable brand, one must make a difference, more specifically, a positive difference to others (2010, p.7). You should make yourself standing out with your unique values in the mind of every individual you meet.

This statement aligns with the product-branding concept, e.g., R. Baisya mentioned in her book about Branding in competitive market (2013) that typical potential brands usually have “very high differentiation factors”, and when the awareness and reputation are higher than knowledge, the brand is healthy and rising (76).

As an example for this statement, Heli Sirkia, the personal branding coach shared a success story of one of her clients – Riina Laine – a world-champion body painter during the interview with the writer. Despite her award winning, Laine’s reputation in 2015 was not emerged in the market. In the end of 2014, her personal business coach - Heli Sirkia came up with an idea to introduce her to The U.S. Ambassador in Finland – Mr. Oreck, who is also a famous body builder. The idea was to create an interesting collaboration between body painting and body building. At that moment, Mr. Ambassador is well-known for his previous hilarious Christmas cards that he published before. Riina was introduced to do her pitch with Oreck about her service and idea. The idea was quite spontaneous, however, Riina has made her pitch bravely with enthusiasm and confidence. Her “out of the box” pitch matches with Oreck’s sense of humour. The result was the

hilarious christmas card of The U.S. Ambassador of Finland has gone viral on the internet that Christmas, with the picture of the shirtless Ambassador wearing a white shirt and tattoo, painted by Riina with a line wrote: “This year I wanted to keep my holiday card simple. Nothing controversial. Just back to basics, blue jeans, a white T-shirt and a big American smile.” ( Appendix ). After one night, the card has been posted to the front page of NBC News, Iltasanomat.fi, etc., and received positive feedbacks for its inspiring and brave ideas. Riina Laine’s reputation is remembered as the creative mind behind the project and has risen quickly.. Heli expressed her surprise when the spontaneous idea reached to the mass success (went viral). She thinks that the artist deserve the spotlight because she was able to think out of the box and brave enough to believe and execute her brilliant idea.

The specific example of the body painter’s personal brand demonstrates benefits of emotional impact through self-presentation or specifically in this case, her courage to present a distinctive idea to the Ambassador.

### **c) Be relevant**

In order to influence a person and make a difference to their lives, you should learn the art of communication to get closed to them. In other words, finding a way to be relevant to others to make an impact.

Relevance means that you hold a place in their minds and hearts and it can bridge the sympathy gap among you and gives you more control in the way they feel about you. (Speak and McNally, p.20). Identifying your target audience is crucial to optimize your strategies. Relevance requires strong aspirations to understand what is important to your audiences and the sincerity to offer solutions and meet their needs. When contributing your goodwill to define their needs and interests, your brand will grow stronger in their heart. For instance, relevance is created when you as a mentor giving support and advises to a younger friend who is in need. “The more relevance you demonstrate, the stronger your brand becomes to them.” (20).



Mattinen mentioned as an advice for graduates to perform better in their job search that it is necessary to learn and research about the company before the interview, e.g., read their revenue, learn who the CEO is, where the most money come from, and the most importantly, the benefits they will get when they hire you. To the Founder of EIGHTAM, recruiter wants to find out if the candidate understands the company and the position they are applying for by asking company-oriented questions. Mattinen shares her experience of the time she did an interview with a company where the recruiter asked her if she has seen the company's latest store. Mattinen, who had done a careful research about the company answered that she has been to the store once and found its wall color attractive, which totally impressed them. "You should know a lot and have to be prepared for everything." – Mattinen expressed. Hence, it would be a plus point when candidates are able to express their knowledge about the company. Moreover, the brand consultant also recommends to give the recruiter a clear message that you are really interested in the job. Identifying the benefits and added value the company would obtain if they hire you, i.e., the reason they should hire you, would make you stand out. This step requires more work and effort but it is demanding, because you have all the information you need in the internet, the recruiter expects you to look for it.

As we are living in the age of information, recruiters have more tools to research about you before the interview. Anything you share on LinkedIn, Facebook or Instagram can effect your brand identity. The rise of LinkedIn as a business social media channel offers a professional community to express your business profile. A person cannot be everything, he has to choose a specialization and commit to the path, master it, become an expert in that field. To achieve that, he will need a community where people understand his contents, where he can express himself and contributes his influence to others. LinkedIn is the perfect place for networking where relevant content is suggested to polish your business profile. In order to obtain relevance among your specializations, you should discuss, write, talk about them and connect with people in the agenda you want to get involved.

Mattinen, who studied Luxury Brand and working in Fashion, shares that when she meet new clients in Fashion, she talks about companies she had worked with before in Fashion. She wants to give her clients the signal that she has experiences in this field, to create the relevance between them.

#### **4.2.2. Functional Value**

According to the concept of product branding, when customers associate with a brand, they expect to achieve the emotional, functional, personal, social value that brand offers. As the main objective of this thesis is advancing graduates' career, functional value plays a key role in the brand measurement tools.

Functional value is measured by how well the job performance is evaluated, the satisfaction of the employers, the added value contributed to the company, salary, promotion, etc. The measurement tools of this element are more visible to access than the other two's, when the results can be evaluated through a promotion or an accomplished mission. However, in product-based branding, it is stated that "branding is more important than the product itself" (Magrath, 1993). The product in this case relates to the functional value of an individual, his contribution, benefits to the audiences. Hence, it is necessary to be prepared critical skills, degrees, knowledge regarding your specialization (Montoya, 2002) More importantly, personal branding will help you to express your talent, strengths, skills significantly and thrive in your career.

##### **a) Focus on your specialization**

The first law of Montoya's 8 personal branding laws dedicates to The Law of Specialization. Montoya emphasized that personal marketing campaign should focus on specific field to be effective. In other words, the author explains that a person cannot be good at everything, he needs to choose a specialization that he will target his audiences from and prepare the contents to attract them. This law is suggested to the subject of graduates, who may not assure yet about their specialization or career intuition. Peak experiences are always recommended by branding experts in order to expand your vision and shape your mind, however, a coherent marketing concept for your personal brand requires a specific domain and target

audiences. These factors are identified by analyzing your advantages in professional segment and narrow down to the most valuable subject and dig deeper in that (2002, p.60).

Your business profile represents your performances, experiences, skills relating to your specialization, e.g., your portfolio, curriculum vitae, LinkedIn profile. The recruiter evaluates you by reviewing your business profile to shape their decision if you could be the potential candidate. As a recent graduate, one should own several experiences to inform in their profile, though it might not be related to the field they are applying. For instance, part time job in a restaurant can show your customer service skills and laboring experience.

In branding, everything matters and every communicates. (Bedbury, 2006). In a well-crafted brand, every element represents and relates to the brand identity, e.g., the theme color, typography, slogan, logo, etc. Similarly, a coherent brand message is expected in your business profile. Remembering your vision, value, purpose and your specialization to perform an aligning brand identity. Adopting this perspective to the personal growth of graduates, in order to own a well-crafted and relevant business profile, graduates should start to in the early days of their career. An impressive portfolio cannot be made in 1 month after graduation to send to recruiters by collecting any job experience, as much as possible into a piece of paper. An impressive portfolio, i.e., the specific skills and experiences the company expects, should be established in a process with conscious, where a person understands his specialization and career intuition, as well as the requirements to achieve a target. Hence, he can be prepared to be suitable for the job and to form a strong portfolio that meet the target employer's demand.

### **b) The Power of Networking**

“Human being cannot survive alone. All he needs, he gets only through society” – Avicenna.

Peters (1997) implies that the decisive technique of personal branding is “word-of-mouth marketing”. The term is defined by Business dictionary as endorsing a person through positive feedback or recommendation of a satisfied audience, in

order to offer opportunities and reputation to that person. By engaging with significant network of relevant relationships, powerful connections and tremendous acceleration will favor your career path. According to Dulworth and his book *Connect Effect* (2008), the benefits of networks are concluded into seven groups: personal satisfaction, career guidance, door opening, problem solving and feedback, learning and expertise, changing the world. Firstly, networking with different people stimulates your knowledge and delivers more perspectives to your point of view. It is the need of human being to communicate and learn from others which would satisfy and complete them. Secondly, networking is the key to a rapid career path and the power of endorsement is undeniable. In 2012, there are statistic that said 80% new jobs are never listed (Smith, 2013), this statement reveals the competitive job market nowadays. Dulworth added that it is not only a fortunate if you are offered a job from your connection, it is because you collected the most important factor that get you the job (2008, p.6). Moreover, by surrounding with high-quality people who share similar interests, professions, you have the key to access to the most valuable class in the world. In addition, networks are critical when problems occur, sometimes all we can do is relying on helps of others. More importantly, Dulworth states that networks not only advance your life but also offer you the tools to support others' lives too, if you have the goodwill to spread the helps to whom in need (6).

Similar to your brand, your networks already exist. It can vary from your group of friends from college to your relatives. As your personal brand needs to be defined and polished, your networks need to be expanded based on certain qualitative targets. Bartholomeus asserts that networking should aim at quality over quantity, which is also agree by Dulworth, stated in *Connect Effect* book (2008, p.27). "In a room of 10 people and you have 15 minutes to network, implement non-verbal communication skill to choose 1 or 2 persons you think would be the most relevant to you and spend more time to talk to them, do not try to speak to all of them with 1 minute per person."— Bartholomeus explains the situation as an example for the previous statement.

Dulworth introduces specific guidelines to establish your network, including three steps:

1. Understand your Network
2. Plan for Networking
3. Take Care of Your Network

To begin with, Dulworth encourages to focus on your current network, by identifying and appreciating each person in the list and analyzing their needs, characteristics and relationships with you. Hence, you can divide them into groups, e.g., acquaintances, close friends, friends who owe you a favor. From that you can have an overview about which connection should be improved, who you should be closer to? Meaningful connection can benefit you in many possible ways. Therefore, taking time to intensify a potential one is recommended (2008, p.52).

The second step requires spending your time to reach out to people by taking part in community, event, meeting that serve your specialization (Dulworth, p.52). In other words, you need to make a plan for networking and consider it as a desire to grow and go beyond. “You need to have the network going before you need it” – Dulworth emphasizes (p.53). There are many activities in a day for an adult to complete his role as an employee, learner, family members, part of the society, some people shares the excuse of not having enough time for networking or meeting new people. However, it is a matter of priority. It is advised to consider networking as an investment to your future (Dulworth, p.53). Prioritizing networking and planning to make it happen, by actively participate in projects that networking must include.

Networking is not about getting to know as much people as possible, it is also how helpful it can accelerate you when you are in need. To achieve that, relationships should be treated with sincere by adapting four significant tips from Dulworth: maintaining their trusts, keeping in touch, giving back or give first, being sensitive. In the age of internet, there are more possibilities to sustain connections with certain relationship, e.g., commenting on their new posts on Facebook, “waving” them on messenger to start a small conversation once in a while, or picking

up the phone and viber call to them to ask how things are going. Moreover, maintaining trusts means having deep connection to the person to gain trust in the first place. Trusts need to be nurtured and developed, it requires discretion to confidential information, promises establishment, responsibility. In addition, networking is also about giving. The advice is not to focus only to yourself but to the value that you can give to others. “Find great people, give them things, and work on a relationship where they try to give me as much as I give them” ( Marshall Goldsmith). The last tip is to be sensitive when it comes busy people’s time constraint. There are many self-help books demonstrating the art of relationship management by presenting principles of psychology, e.g., the notable Dale Carnegie’s *How To Win Friends And Influence People* (1936). Hence, it is expected that recent graduates intensively practice these tips and skills to develop a vibrant and effective network.

### **c) Impression Management**

To Khedher (2015), there is a powerful method to manage perceptions of others that has been specified as Impression Management (Goffman 1959). It is defined as a goal-directed activity to control and manage information to achieve impression (Khedher 2015, p.22).

The Impression Management tool requires a solid foundation of distinctive authenticity from one who understands his value, purpose and meaning precisely. By implementing this method, the person learns to identify accessible information that should be exchanged to others (22). Impression management establishes distinguished self-presentation, artifactual displays, personal appearance, manner.

Self-presentation is also referred to self-pitch nowadays. It is the art of controlling information regarding oneself into a brief and sharp introduction to influence the audience’s impression (22).

In addition, artifactual displays plays a key role in employability, e.g., personal website, online portfolio, blogs, social network. The growth of Internet access

people to more job opportunities that can be found online, which means the recruiters are also searching for job hunters. Hence, the need to make your online representation distinctive is increasing. People create contents related to their career intuition to attract employers. Nowadays, they have more channels and tools to express them. To be more specific, personal website is a great tool to present your portfolio, LinkedIn is an effective channel to network with professionals.

More importantly, personal appearance shapes proper impression initially, especially to recruiters with high expectation of workplace image. Khedher states that it is necessary to follow standards of hygiene, formal dress code to look appropriate in business environment. Being able to apply a formal style, hygiene and grooming reflect a professional appearance that will win you the first and foremost influence to their impression. When self-presentation and appearance are intertwined, initial impression would be assured. This matter should be emphasized in the case of young graduates who want to develop a variety network with older professionals. Graham (2012) states that young professionals should dress respectfully, behave in professional manner to generate credibility and overcome the age objections (p.39).

In addition, Khedher introduces non-verbal and verbal communication management, which is the key to present an individual's manner (2015, p. 22). Manner is the attitude and signal that one creates through his non-verbal and verbal communication in order to achieve an ideal impression (Goffman 1959). To DePaulo (1992), non-verbal communication is the popular way to reveal our attitudes, through unspoken expression such as facial expression, gestures, body language, eyes contact. In contrast, verbal communication can be divided into self-focused and other-focused tactics. Similarly to self-presentation, self-focused method aims to promote perception of oneself, through story-telling to present experiences, qualifications and strengths to form impression. Other-focused tactic focuses on giving praise, compliments, advices to audiences to gain liking and impression (Khedher 2015, p.23).

### **4.3. Managing your brand**

Once the personal brand is defined and adjusted to career development, significant results will follow in the form of brand awareness, impression, network expansion, career acceleration. However, controlling one's brand performance and reputation demands strategic maintenance for the brand to assure its focus to certain target.

#### **4.3.1. Evaluation**

Montoya compares managing a strong personal brand with owning a luxury car, both of them requires proper maintenance and regular evaluations (2002, p.195). In addition, the author introduces three aspects to evaluate the personal brand, such as: Short-term results, brand awareness and distance to the goal. Short-term results are established from short-term plan and target that are explained in chapter 4.1. Evaluating this factor helps guiding the process to an effective path. Moreover, brand awareness is a visible measurement to evaluate personal brand. By analyzing how saturated your brand is to its audiences, you can access to how they notice your existence and understand your message. The results of a right personal branding process should be positive. If it is not, you should observe your brand characteristics with conscious to identify the problems and fix them, or consider current culture change or specialization switch (199).

A personal brand may cause direct effect to one's life, persistence should not be continued when the brand cannot bring positive value to the person anymore. It is also suggested by informants to keep some room for changes when it is necessity, e.g., other desire occurs, direction changing (Sirkiä). The consultant encourages changes in personal branding if more outcomes would be foresighted in the future. Simultaneously, difficulties are unavoidable, the set of brand identity might need to be redefined. In addition, Sirkiä shares her experience about changing in direction, "It's a difficult decision" - she states. She started her brand in Finnish and decided to change her target audiences from domestic to global, hence, she had to



redefine her brand to approach the international audiences. Canadian and American coaches are hired to gain more international perspective, or else she would be thinking too Finnish. Nowadays, her website and display language is in English.

#### **4.3.2. Persistence**

In general, a successful brand is one that conquer the most powerful weapon and challenge: time. Montoya relates the process of personal branding with muscular building progress, which share the same characteristic of hard work, devotion, patience, gradual improvement and consistency. The result will not appear by days or week, it arrives slowly and steadily by years with tremendous rewards. One day you look at the mirror and see the body of yours has been dramatically transformed, the satisfaction can be aligned with realizing the power your brand has gained when the goal is accomplished. It is why persistence is the central characteristic to maintain the progress and not give up when the result is yet in the picture.

To practice this personality, one should have a strong authenticity to stay solid with their goal and value when obstacle occurs. By understanding precisely your brand identity (value, message, purpose) and having formed a clear plan to build the brand called you, persistence would be accessible.

#### **4.3.3. The benefits of social media**

Montoya relates the growth of internet and social media to “a genie to personal branding” (2002, p.216). Speak and McNally clarify it as “the most powerful personal brand-building tools created in our lifetime” (122). Sirkiä also agree with statement by stating that the internet offer the most significant development to her career in the last 10 years. To the personal branding expert, it was much more difficult to brand yourself in about 10 years ago when she started her career. In the

old days, if you want to raise awareness to your identity and approach more audiences, you have to paid for journalist to write positive things about you. “Now the game has changed” – Sirkiä claims – “You can create your own narrative, take pictures, open a blog, make vlog (video blogging), write your stories, post them on your social media, enhance your visibility, influence others, control your engagement. You have all the tools in your command”.

The Internet allows individual to approach recruiters and job opportunities through multi-channels: email, websites, hiring system, social media. There are more available methods to connect recruiters and job hunters. Hence, one should learn to ultimately implement social media to advance their career opportunity and upgrade their personal to another level of display. However, the possibilities to attract the recruiter through online cover letter and curriculum vitae are increasingly competitive. It leads to constant attempts to make yourself distinctive in the social media world.

Speak and McNally called the term of being consistent in real life and on social network as “IRL, i.e., in real life and URL (refers to the online personal brand)”. To the authors of *Be Your Own Brand* (Speak and McNally, 2010), IRL and URL should work together and support each other consistently. In other words, the way you communicate online should align with your communication styles to real life audiences (p.115).

Today, recruiters in big corporations may not read your cover letter and profile anymore, they transfer the task to robots that will proactively scan total resumes to choose the most suitable ones. In addition, recruiters only select proper candidates from the list which was functioned by artificial intelligence. Learning how the system works and applying your knowledge to strengthen your resume will enhance your employability. This tactic can also be implemented with your contents on LinkedIn – the professional social network. Speak and McNally encourage to use social media tools purposeful and with conscious. To be more specific, you should consider the reason why and how you should start to use a social media channel, how it can benefit your personal brand. Hence, the authors recommend to create a strategy, plan and relevant contents to promote your brand for that social

media tools (116). Every social media channels have its own platform, purpose, audiences, it depends on your interests and brand culture to decide which channel to focus on.

However, the social media tools contain both pros and cons. Beside the advantages that have been mentioned above, there are several disadvantages that may effect to your career. Mattinen states that we are living in an era of internet where most information can be found online, the recruiter will Google you before your interview and they will evaluate you on all the contents you have created online and offline. For instance, **Figure 9.** is an example. For this matter, Mattinen suggests graduates to learn to control their brand image, portfolio, social media channels, network, i.e., their personal brand, avoid devisive topic or commenting on sensitive issue. In other words, you should manage what you want to be known for on an emotional and thoughtful level.



"According to your LinkedIn profile you're a focused, disciplined achiever. According to your Facebook photos you love Jack Daniels and are pretty comfortable with your body."

**Figure 9.** Everything you put online matters.

## 5. CHALLENGES

Besides the ultimate benefits of personal branding, it remains several arguments toward this phenomenon.

### 5.1. New Concept

The pioneer of personal branding was published in 1997 by Peters, who is from the United States, hence, the term is highly influenced by American mythos – “a strong work ethic, centered on individual initiative” (Alger, 1990). Since 1997, the phenomenon is increasingly popularized by American business experts, e.g., William Arruda, Speak and McNally, Gary Vareychuk. The success of personal branding in American culture is undeniable, however, it still contains huge cultural barriers when transferring it to other continents’ market, e.g., European and Asian.

In Finland, according to Heli Sirkiä, Personal Branding is still a new term that has not been known by the majority. Sirkiä mentioned that many people still assume Personal Branding as something superficial, the icing on the cake. She has to explain to them by demonstrating its credibility from the root of self-help genres, moreover, the results can be measured by the better job, higher salary, reputation and higher revenues of the company.

Mattinen, a Branding consultant in Finland, shares that Finland are so focused on business, and they do not have intention to see the whole big picture. Her experience in Finnish industry shapes her mind that the Finns do not really understand what branding is. “Brand for them is just logo and pictures”. Hence, Personal Branding in Finland shares the same ignorance or even worse.

The circumstance is not getting better in Asian market, especially in Vietnam.

Tuan Anh Le, who is currently a Life Coach for Students and Personal Branding expert in Vietnam, expressed the similar situation in his country. Personal Branding is a strange concept to the majority. It often be mistaken as marketing management for celebrity which causes difficulties to convince his students to

prepare one. “Despite my passion about personal branding, my main job is coaching students to choose right career path, which brings smaller result than the concept but sounds more familiar to the parents to pay for the course” – Le mentioned.

## **5.2.The effects of personal branding to personal life**

According to one of the oppositions against Personal Branding in the Marketization and The Recasting Of The Professional Self (Lair, Sullivan and Cheney, 2003), personal branding phenomenon requires more precise examination to demonstrate its “rhetorical appeals” (2003, p.319).

There are arguments that said the ideal tactics of personal branding contains so much effort and sacrifice to achieve. According to the concept developed above, the process of personal branding includes multi-task from expanding and strengthening your networks, mastering your specialization, maintaining a consistent brand equity, evaluating the results, etc. Moreover, Vaynerchuk - the millionaire entrepreneur and successful personal brand implies that the key to form a strong personal brand is to get on social media and craft a content strategy to increase your brand awareness and visibility in a daily basis. “If you don’t create content, you don’t exist.” – Vaynerchuk states with his content model that motivate to enhance your influences on social media.

The question is how can a graduate find time to execute those tactics for his brand and still maintain his life balance? Hence, consistence in branding requires constant practice, online and offline, from your business life to your personal life. Every contents, images, conversations you produce need to be relevant and coherent with your authenticity. This statement raises a problem to pursue the concept of work and life balance that most people salute. To Cubukcu (2018), work-life balance means maintaining a limit between their professional life and personal life by attempting to complete their work tasks within office hours and focus on their social life, family responsibility, hobbies, sports for the rest of the day.

This issue has been raised to Bartholomeus, a Dutch personal branding expert, about the impact of personal branding in personal life. Bartholomeus, with a long-term experience in the field, agrees with the argument and mentions that it is a true challenge for anyone who wants to commit with his personal brand. “Because you have to bring it home, bring it to your social media so your friends will see it, anywhere you go. The drawback comes along with the benefit, you cannot avoid it. If you only act like your brand and lower it down for sometimes, your brand is just a covered-blanket, you have to be your brand and live it as a part of your personal growth.

However, Marx (2007) implies different perspective toward this issue by presenting the case of Terri Williams, a successful business woman who suffered from work overloading effects that lead to depression and break down. Marx states that it will cause extreme damage in the future if you turn your life into a 24/7 work-orientation. Williams, who has recovered from the depression and becomes an expert of work-life balance and mental health, gives her advices to prevent this problem, such as practicing meditation, having more “me-time”, doing exercise, volunteering to help others, spending time with your precious relationships.

## **6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter explains the research techniques that have been adopted in this study. Therefore, it contains detailed explanation of how the research method was chosen and how it has been conducted. Moreover, it reveals how the research questions were presented through the theoretical framework and literature review. In addition, the research design and the process of data collection are explained.

### **6.1. Research approach and design**

The objective of this study is to define the necessity of personal branding for graduates and develop a concept of personal branding for this subject. Hence, it requires valid and qualified resources collected by an applicable research method to consolidate the grounded theories. There are two types of research methods: qualitative research and quantitative research.

The qualitative research method was developed for scientific research to investigate answers, evidences and findings for a specific problem. The method requires thorough understanding of the research topic to perceive different perspectives of informants (McCombes, 2019). It is stated that qualitative research is advisable for investigating a new study or demonstrating a certain theory (Jamshed, 2014).

The quantitative research method, however, is applied for data in numerical and statistical platforms which will be organized in categories and orders to rank and measure. (McLeod, 2017).

Moreover, there are two types of research approach methods: inductive approach and deductive approach. Firstly, inductive approach is often generated to support qualitative research while deductive approach often associates with quantitative research method. Induction's characteristics include developing the new generation of a theory based on the collected data from the observation, hypothesis and pattern (Gabriel, 2013). On the other hand, the deductive approach is for formulat-

ing a new hypothesis from a grounded theory and generate observation or examination to confirm or reject the hypothesis. In addition, deductive approach often links with quantitative research method (Gulati 2009, p.42; Wilson 2010, p.7)

After considering the nature of the study topic and characteristics of different research methods, it is believed that qualitative method and inductive approach are the most appropriate techniques to find answers for the research questions in this study. More importantly, they enables the “human” side of the concept, which is the central value of this study, as personal branding aims at personal growth and raising self-awareness.

## **6.2.Data collection**

This section explains how collecting information from different techniques is administrated to define answers for the research problems, how the results are analyzed and obtained, how the theory is examined. Data collection methods contains two criteria: secondary data collection methods and secondary collection methods.

### **6.2.1. Secondary data collection method**

Secondary data represents sources of data that have been published in the platform of journals, books, database etc. This method is essential for demonstrating the validity and credibility of the research (Dudovskiy, 2019).

In this study, I as the researcher have approached several personal branding experts’ (interviewees) through their online displays (Linkedin profile, websites) or publications. By studying the experiences and knowledge shared by the professionals, I have gained extensive understanding of the research topic and the interviewees’ background that supports the data collecting process. For instance, Anh Tuan Le – one of the interviewees, has published a book named *Self-positioning - Định Vị Bản Thân* (Le, 2018), which contains effective techniques for building personal brand on social media. Moreover, the interviewees tend to recommend other’s success cases that lead to further research of the person’s story. For in-



stance, Riina Laine's success story is available on her website - <https://www.riinalaineartist.com>. As a professional in personal branding, the interviewees enable artefactual displays' benefits, hence, their "brand" names are associated with their social media channels, articles endorsed them and enhance their brand visibility, e.g. Anne Mattinen's interview on Tuuli Design: "Hyvä brändi lunastaa lupauksensa joka ikinen päivä", which appears on the fourth result on Google when searching her name.

### **6.2.2. Primary data collection methods**

Primary data is data that is collected directly by the researcher. To obtain that, different methods can be applied, e.g., an interview or a survey (Driscoll and Brizee 2017). Primary data is divided into two categories of qualitative data (interviews, data, observations) and quantitative data (questionnaires, calculations, statistical analyses) (Dudovskiy, 2019). As explained above, this study analyzes qualitative data by generating interviews with targeted consultants, professionals, life coaches and experts in the specialization of personal branding or branding. The purpose of this method is to ensure the validation of personal branding concept by collect more characteristics, challenges and evidence from the informants.

### **6.2.3. Interviewing**

Interview is considered as the most common technique of qualitative research method (Jamshed, 2014), which involves direct approach to informants to collect their understandings, perspectives of the concept, methods, or ideas (Boyce and Neale, 2006). The diversity of individual's characteristics, background, specialization and culture can affect the outcome of a study. Hence, the research has been conducted by utilizing the interviewing method, aiming the subject of personal branding and branding experts in different markets to gain variety perspectives and comprehensive interpretations of this phenomenon.

Methods of interviewing are divided into three categories of structured interview, unstructured interview and semi-structured interview (Dudovskiy, 2019). Structured interview is the most professional method of the three types, which contains standardized questions to be answered in order. On the contrary, an unstructured interview is considered to be the least reliable of the three because of its informal system and lack of preparation (Dudovskiy, 2019). A semi-structured interview, however, combines both mentioned styles. In a semi-structured interview, a list of questions and guidance is prepared by the interviewer and the list is followed by the respondents to keep the interview in focus. Additional questions and further discussions can also be included when unexpected idea emerges (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Moreover, according to Saunders et al. (2009), structured interviews are more suitable for quantitative research while semi-structured and unstructured interviews are often implemented in qualitative research. Hence, the semi-structured interview method is considered to be the most appropriate method to be applied in this qualitative research.

The attempt to conduct the interviews in a comfortable and informal way has been generated to enable a flexible but respectful atmosphere for the interviews. This matter assures the decision of semi-structure interview.

In order to gain the most effective outcomes, semi-structured interviews are generated with five respondents. Except for Heli Sirkiä (**Appendix 1.**), the other respondents have been approached through LinkedIn platform. The summary of the interviews and brief background of the informants are covered in this section. In addition, more details of each interview and the list of questions are included in Appendix section.

1. Heli Sirkiä, who is a Personal Branding Coach and the Founder of Diamond of Life.

Ms. Sirkiä is a values-driven personal branding and business coach who helps professionals and companies. In July 2018, she attended as a mentor in The Ship Start Up Festival where I was volunteering as a content writer. Hence, a special interview has been made with Sirkiä for two purposes. The first one is based on the questions scripts provided by the Ship, in order to write a blog post about the

mentor. The second one came from the urge to learn more about personal branding to apply to this study. Permissions have been confirmed from the interviewee and the event organizer. The interview was made in person. Ms. Sirkiä has shared information about her background, her coaching program, the importance of personal branding for professionals and an example of her success clients.

The blog post has been written after the event and published on the event's website on September 2018 (**Appendix 1**).

## 2. Anne Ala Mattinen, who is a Branding Consultant and the Founder of EIGHTAM.

Ms. Mattinen has international experience of luxury branding and advertising. Her knowledge and passion for Branding includes personal branding, which she also continuously applies to her own brand. Ms. Mattinen shares her perspectives about branding in particular, which added more in-depth insight to the grounded theory. More importantly, she emphasizes the importance of authenticity in personal branding development. Specific interview advice with recruiters has also been given to the graduates. The objectives of this interview is to gain more validate alignment and comparison between the concept of product-branding and personal branding, in order expand a comprehensive picture for the study.

## 3. Anh Tuan Le is Career Consultant and Education of Vietnam Insight.

Mr. Le is a Vietnamese author who has published the book *Self-Positioning* (how to build personal brand in the age of social media) in 2018. He is one of the first Vietnamese coaches who has launched Personal Branding Programs for students. His specialization is coaching students to be prepared for their future careers, including soft skills, time management, personal branding, etc. The aim of this interview is to understand the necessity for students (the upcoming graduates) to develop their personal brand and how it would advance if the process could start at younger ages.

#### 4. Ivan Bartholomeus is a Personal Branding Coach and Teacher.

Mr. Bartholomeus is a Personal Branding Coach and Communication and Marketing Teacher of Fontys University of Applied Science in the Netherlands. He guides young athletes in the university in developing their personal brand to achieve different targets, e.g., sponsorship, internship and jobs in big corporations. Mr. Bartholomeus agrees with the chosen subject of this study because to him, 17-25-year-olds are the right age for defining personal brand. The objectives of the interview are to achieve extensive understanding about personal branding education to students and define the set of skills that they should be prepared to advance their career. Moreover, Bartholomeus introduces one of his students: Mahdi Nasrallah as a success case who is also the fifth interviewee.

#### 5. Mahdi Nasrallah

Nasrallah is a student of SPECO Sport Marketing Fontys University of Applied Science in Tilburg, the Netherlands. He is a success case of personal branding, endorsed by his teacher, Mr. Bartholomeus. Nasrallah is currently working for AFC Ajax Esport, which is the biggest sport marketing company in the Netherlands while he is in his sophomore year of student. The interview was held on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2019. The purpose of this interview was to explore Nasrallah's journey and analyze how he defines his brand, expands his network as well as his impression management skills in integrating the concept of personal branding.

## 7. CONCLUSION

As the main purpose of this study is developing a concept to define and build personal brand for graduates to achieve their career goals, the conclusion chapter contains the result of the research topic. In other words, there is a summary of each chapter, answers for the five research questions and the concept of personal branding for graduates.

### 7.2. The research question are resolved

	Research question	Answer
1	<b>What is personal branding and how is it comparable with product branding?</b>	<p><b>What is personal branding?</b></p> <p>Personal branding is the combination of personal growth techniques and branding strategies. The concept emerged around 1997 and soon became a phenomenon that makes significant changes to many individuals' career. It is identified that everyone owns a brand which is how people perceive them when they are not around. The personal brand can be expressed by your actions, manners, networks, behaviors, etc. that lead to a certain evaluation of others about you. By having an intention of personal brand and consider yourself as a product, you would be a marketing manager with the responsibility to promote a brand called you. The personal branding process contains defining your core value, improving your brand awareness online and offline, building networks while preserving your authenticity. The rewards of a strong personal brand can be measured by the success at work, supportive and diverse networks, reputation and better control of other's perceptions.</p>

**What is personal branding like to product-based branding?**

The first and the foremost difference of these concepts are in product-branding, the characteristics of the brand are developed by analyzing the market research to find the unique, distinctive and effective ones. Meanwhile, in personal branding, you cannot create promising value to meet the expectation of the market. I agree with the interviewee, Ms. Mattinen that with personal branding, the true values come naturally and you only need to developed layers and depth to your brand.

The core characteristics and value must come from your-self and the authenticity needs to be maintained consistently as the foundation of your brand. Hence, the concept of personal branding includes self-awareness and personal development which were applied from selective psychology theories, e.g. Maslow's theory (1943).

Because personal branding foundation is based on product-based branding as the grounded theories, they share several similarities in formulations and techniques, e.g., brand identity, brand equity and necessity. However, personal brand association aims at building connections between two persons, not customers and the firm or the products, hence, emotional value requires more humanizing procedures, e.g., impression management, verbal and non-verbal communication.

2	<p><b>What are the benefits of personal branding and the necessity of personal branding to graduates?</b></p>	<p><b>The benefits of personal branding.</b></p> <p>The Reputation Vault of Brown is applied to investigate this matter. According to Brown, the central benefit of personal branding is advancing one's reputation, which will lead to further advantages, including higher perceived value, increasing income, respect, attention, credibility, authority and greater position (Brown 2006). After reviewing the research conducted from the interviews, the findings corroborate with the idea of Brown (2006). For instance, one of the interviewees Anh Tuan Le, shares the benefits he has gained since the development of his brand: more respect received from his audiences, higher position and income and a more confident attitude at work because he knows that beyond his current job, he always has his personal brand as an asset.</p> <p><b>The necessity of personal brand to graduates</b></p> <p>The main subject of the study is identified as individuals who have recently graduated from an university or college, with the age from 17-25. This range of age has been encouraged by one of the informants Ivan Bartholomeus, it is believed to be the right age to define personal brand.</p> <p>The results of this study indicate the two main advantages of personal branding to graduates: to raise self-awareness and to stand out in the market. Self-awareness is necessary for identifying one's value, purpose, vision, strengths and weaknesses. Those factors are considered as the foundation of one's personal brand. The findings for the research interviews are in agreement with the previous statement, which highlighted the necessity to enhance self-awareness of graduates to prevent misusing time and</p>
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		<p>clarify the right career path. The second core advantage is also stated in the definition of personal branding that it develops unique identity with a coherent and consistent message to make one stand out from the competitors (Montoya, 2002). This statement is demonstrated by Edmondson (2015) that obtaining a clear, brief, convincing self-presentation can help you to navigate your career more effectively. According to the current study results, personal branding process contains expanding your presence and strengthening your networks. Moreover, it increases understanding about your value and limitations, optimizes your control to others' perceptions and advance impression management without losing your authenticity. These components contribute to the development of your position and your sustainable self-esteem. The ultimate results can be displayed by a powerful reputation and distinctive position in the market. Specifically, in the case of graduates, the outcomes can be measured by getting hired in a targeted position, more in-depth self-awareness, clearer goals and higher motivation.</p>
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3	<p><b>What are the elements that present a strong personal brand and which of them would be the key element?</b></p>	<p><b>The elements that present a strong personal brand</b></p> <p>Based on the theories from the customer-based brand equity model of Aaker, and personal equity structure of Del Blanco (2010), personal branding house model of Yamamoto (2014) and coherent findings from the research, the results present significant elements that develop a personal brand.</p> <p>The elements of the personal branding's model are created by the writer of this thesis as an illustration for this research problem (<b>Table 1.</b>). The findings reveal four main groups of elements, which are identity, emotional value, functional value and presence.</p> <p>To begin with, personal identity includes one's central value, purpose, authenticity, strength and weakness. This criteria represents the most genuine value of an individual and is considered as the fundamental foundation to optimizing and developing the brand. Secondly, emotional value has the same role as brand association of a product-based brand, to operate and manage the relationship between the owner of the brand and his audiences. This group contains the positive difference one should make to other, e.g., relevance, trust, communication skills. Thirdly, functional value as well as one's specialization, networks, credibility and impression management are required to express one's professional and his role in the society. The last group is individual's presence which should be managed carefully to keep the branding process in control. It includes social media management and relevant online and offline presence. A consistent message and persistent</p>
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	<p>performance are expected as the main characters to build a strong brand.</p> <p>It is necessary to understanding thoroughly the set of elements a strong personal brand consists of to establish the main research objective.</p> <p><b>The most important elements</b></p> <p>According to the previous findings and theories, there are notable differences between the personal branding model of Yamamoto (2014) and results of the research method regarding this issue.</p> <p>Yamamoto emphasized that the fundamental foundation of personal branding is The Vision by considering it as the roof of the Personal branding house. Vision is a critical character of leadership nature, which is made of one's purpose and perceptions. To Yamamoto, obtaining a practical and innovative vision is the key to a successful personal brand. However, all of the six informants share a similar disagreement with Yamamoto by indicating that authenticity should be the key element in personal branding. This element is also highlighted in the several publications of reputable personal branding experts, e.g. Ar-ruda (2013) mentions that authenticity should be considered as the heart, initial and most essential factor of a personal brand.</p> <p>It is stressed by one of the interviewees, Mattinen, to stay true to yourself, or else your audiences will notice and your reputation might be damaged. "Personal branding is not pretending to be someone else. Your pretense might impress your audiences in the beginning but it will not last</p>
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		<p>long” - Bartholomeus indicates. Moreover, consistency is one of the central characteristics in the maintenance process of personal branding, in order to achieve a coherent brand messages and a long-lasting trust among your networks. It requires your genuineness and most authentic value to remain consistent.</p> <p>In conclusion, it is confirmed that the most important factor in personal branding would be authenticity.</p>
4	How can building an efficient network that advance your career?	<p>This question has been defined in the second section of Chapter 4.3.3. Functional Value, which refers to The Power of Networking. The benefits of networking can be listed in seven groups: personal satisfaction, career guidance, door opening, problem solving, feedback, learning, expertise and changing the world (Dulworth, 2008). These benefits are able to offer significant opportunities to your career, such as job recommendation, valuable lessons from more experienced mentors or variable supports from the diverse networks.</p> <p>The interview results reinforce the previous study of Dulworth by declaring their practical experiences toward this matter. The previous theory is exemplified in the exceptional case of Nasrallah. The sport marketing student reaches his career goal of working for Ajax Esport in his sophomore year by starting his personal branding journey, taking small steps by taking part in many different activities, especially the Esports Exhibition where he raised questions to the speaker, approached them for small conversation and introduced himself. Nasrallah indicates that his current job would not have happened if he did not to</p>

		<p>have enough courage to network with the people in various events.</p> <p>It is also advised not to focus on yourself but to the value you can give to others.</p>
5	<b>How is it possible to continuously manage and improve your personal brand?</b>	<p>It is stated in this study that there are three maintenance techniques that can be implemented to maintain and improve one's personal brand. They are self-evaluation, persistence and social media.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Self-evaluation needs to be practiced regularly by checking short-term results, brand awareness, distance to the goal. This activity supports navigating the personal branding process to an effective journey or to make significant changes if necessary.</li> <li>- Persistence is required to conquer the challenge of time and other obstacles. Personal branding process may not be an easy path, frustrations may occur when success and goal take longer than expected to achieve. To prevent giving up or losing the will to continue, persistence is considered as the central characteristic in maintaining personal brand. Moreover, a solid authenticity and powerful vision can be the greatest supports to practice this persona.</li> <li>- Social media is considered as the most powerful tool for building a personal brand (Speak and McNally). It offers variable platforms for expressing one's identity in many possible ways, from writing a blog to making a vlog or to connecting with others. If being utilized effectively, social media would accelerate one's brand to higher number of audiences, including potential recruiters.</li> </ul>

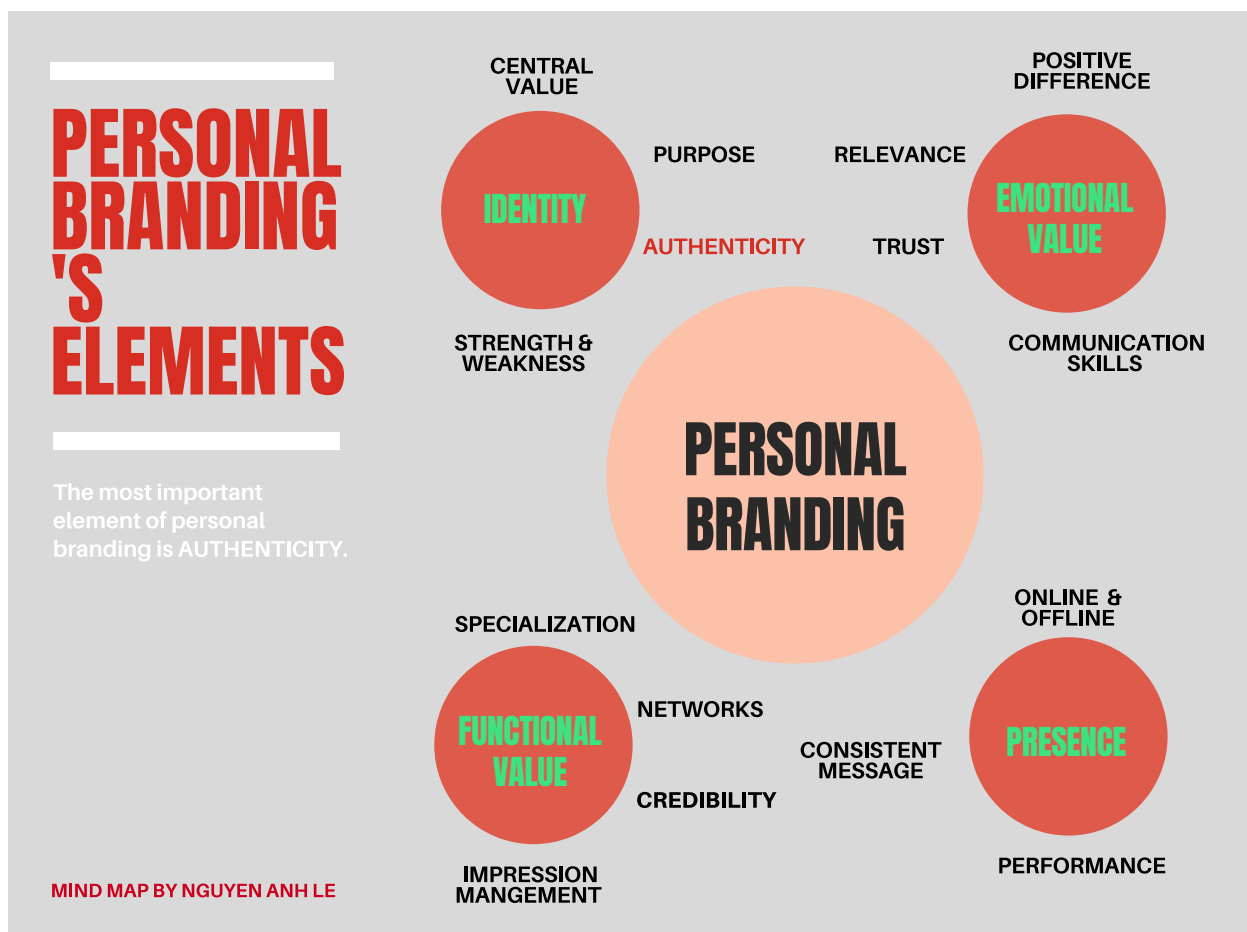
		<p>However, this technique contains several disadvantages, e.g., inappropriate content can leave wrong judgement and further consequences or the overloading information and online platform system can cause addiction and waste your time.</p> <p>Hence, social media strategies should be implemented to promote your brand and control your online presence.</p> <p>The results that are conducted from the research interviews show similar opinions about the benefits of social media and its possible consequences. In conclusion, it is necessity to optimize your personal brand presence on the Internet in certain platforms, e.g., Linkedin, a personal website, Facebook, etc., depending on your purpose, to advance your career opportunities. However, you should consider it carefully before posting anything online because it will be one of the materials for evaluating your brand.</p>
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## 7.2. Study results.

### 7.2.1. The Elements of personal branding.

This result has been explained in the second research question. By combining all the elements in one model, a comprehensive overview of Personal Branding is compiled.

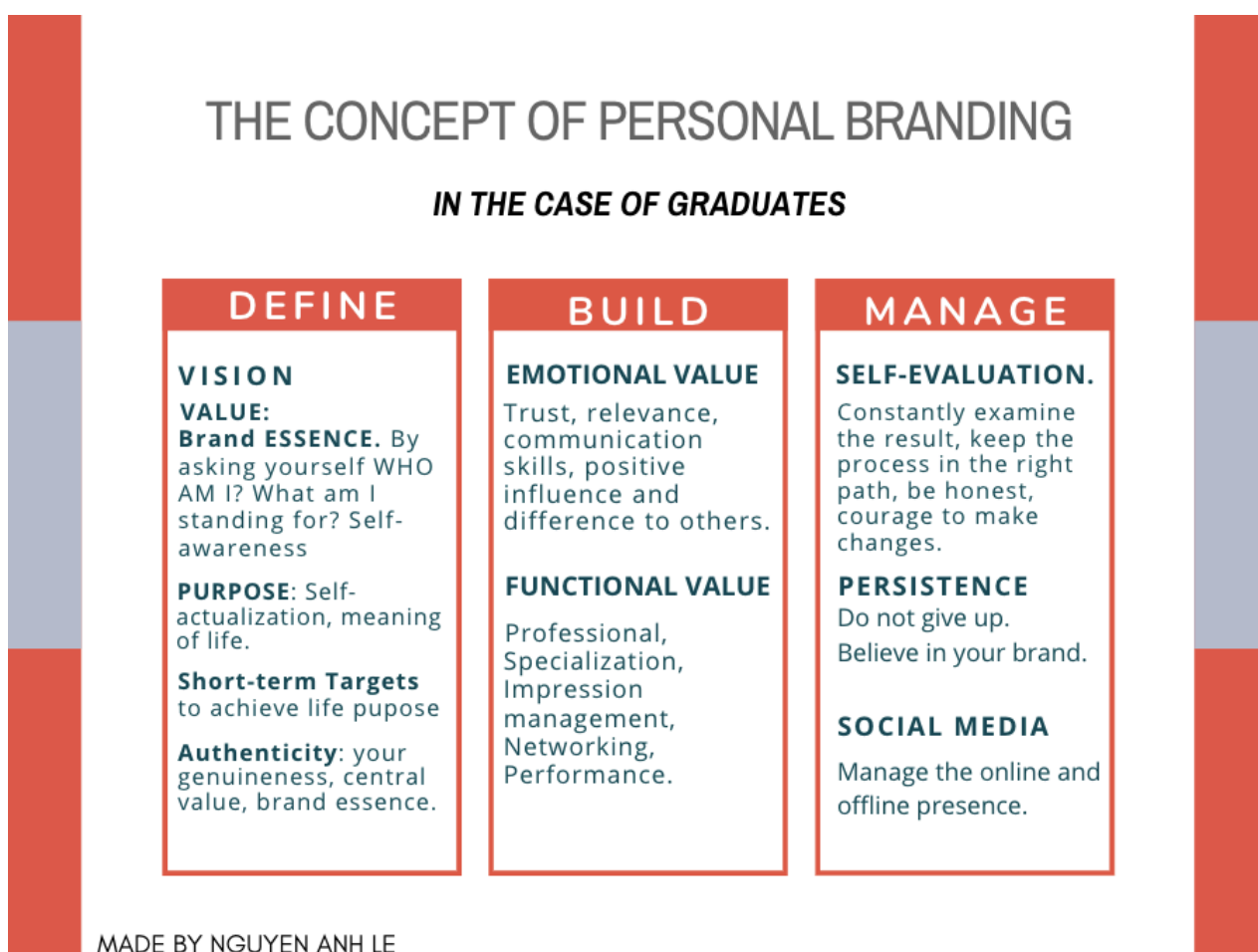
**Table 1.** Personal Branding's Elements



### 7.2.3. The Concept of Building A Strong Personal Brand For Graduates

The concept presents tactics to develop personal brand for graduates, which contains three steps of Defining, Building and Managing. In the Define section, there are four main components that a graduate should identify in order to understand himself better (self-awareness). Life purpose and short-term targets are also determined to clarify the next steps and gain more motivation. The next step is Building emotional value and functional value based on the characteristics and value that already exist in oneself, to nurture and advance it as a part of the personal branding process. The results from the previous stages need to be managed consistently by regular evaluation. Moreover, persistence is required to conquer the obstacles and time, in order to reach the highest target. There is also a necessity to optimize and control the online presence.

**Table 2.** The concept of Personal Branding for graduates



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4/24/2019

Heli Sirkiä: Personal Branding and Business Coach | \*ship Startup Festival



September 3, 2018

## Meet Heli Sirkiä: Personal Branding and Business Coach

September 3, 2018 \*ship Guest Posts, Interviews

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**Heli Sirkiä** is a values-driven personal branding and business coach who helps professionals and companies in making their expertise visible and build their reputation in an authentic way that can

<https://www.shipfestival.org/meet-heli-sirkiä-personal-branding-and-business-coach/>

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Heli is an important mentor that hosted a 60-minute-masterclass on the first day of \*ship, with the topic of Aligning Customer Experience, Company, and Personal Branding.

She started her career as an image and color consultant in the 90s, when Windows was just launched. Marketing has evolved a lot since those early days of the Internet, it is now a completely different game. In 2009, she realized that Personal Branding is her true passion and strength. She decided it's the time to develop her career path into Personal Branding, by so she created Diamond of Life (ElämänTimantti®) Personal Branding and self-leadership concept in 2009 based on her experiences.

### ***But what exactly is Personal branding?***

Just like companies have brands, also people are creating their brands during their lives, perhaps not so intentionally. Your brand is formed by your achievements, your professional skills, your personality, abilities, lifestyle... How you introduce yourself to others and how other people evaluate your characteristics creates your unintentional personal brand. In order to stand out in your "market", which is the competitive job market, and to make people remember you with your good values, a personal branding strategy should be implemented in the early years of your career. In other words, you should picture yourself as a designer in your career, and your job is to build a brand and promote a marketing strategy for it. Thus, you can turn the unintentional-already-had personal brand into a unique and powerful tool to win people and stay in charge of your career development.

Heli's target customers are individuals, companies, and entrepreneurs who are seeking career transformation and self-improvement (personal development). When developing her services, she decided to market her business in English, not Finnish, in order to aim at the global market and international startups.

*"It was a difficult decision, it's an example of changing the directions of your brand", Heli said.*

She started in Finnish so she had to redefine her strategy and contents to the international audiences. She hired Canadian and American coaches to give a more international point of view, otherwise, she might have been thinking too Finnish.

*"If you want to grow outside of Finland, you need mentors representing those audiences", Heli advised.*

Heli's greatest motivation is helping people in their self-development path.

*"Many people have gifts and skills, they just need the confidence to develop them further and market themselves. And whatever people want to offer, I can help them give it a try."*

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She is now developing another program for leadership, called "Redefining Leadership", with the objective to take company Leadership on a sustainable path with a long-term focus.



Heli said that many people still think about Personal Branding as something superficial like icing on the cake. She still often needs to explain that the results of successful personal branding can be evaluated by a new better matching job, higher salary, reputation and higher revenues for companies. She is not the one who creates the brand for her customers. She is just a coach, a mentor, a guide who uses her skills and experiences to develop the client's brand visibility and brand equity, it's always the individual that makes the decision and takes action.

*"There is no magic formula out there to create a brand for you, it's inside you. What I can do, is help you define your authentic voice and better express yourself and the value you offer."* – Heli

*Author: Nguyen Anh Le – a Vietnamese writer, author of one Vietnamese first book and on the way to her second book. Born to be a trendsetter and content writer. An entrepreneur and personal branding consultant wanna-be.*

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## ANH LE

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### PERSONAL BRANDING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Research question: “How to build a strong personal brand in the case of graduates?”

Research objective: Defining the concept to build an effective personal brand for graduates to achieve their career goals

Ms. **Anne Ala Mattinen** (Helsinki- Finland) – Branding Consultant – Founder of EIGHTAM  
Time: 1330-1430 (GMT +2) 18/03/2019

Questions:

1. Can you describe briefly about your background and professional?
2. What are the differences between personal branding and product branding?
3. What are the benefits of personal branding according to your own experience/ profession?
4. What do you think about the Work/Life balance and how focusing to build a personal brand can affect to your personal life?
5. Which factor you think would be the most important factor to make a strong personal brand? Why?
6. I can see on your LinkedIn profile that your passion is about Fashion, Design and you also graduated from Polimoda Institute in the major of Luxury business management. How do you think about the importance of building a good brand image (professional style/ outlook)? Do you have any advice of how to dress?
7. Do you have any advice to the graduates about creating a strong personal brand?

Thank you for offering your time to my Personal Branding research for my thesis! Wish you all the best for your career!

BR  
Anh Le

## Example of A Interview Report (conducted after the interview based on the record audio and notes)

Interview with Mr. Ivan Bartholomeus – Communication and Marketing Teacher of Fontys University of Applied Science – Tilburg – Netherland.

Ivan is a personal branding coach for young athletes.

He believes that the age of students from 16-25 is the right age to define their Personal brand, because they will need it to make important decisions for their life later on. They need to define what they want, their targets, ambitions, likes... As a teacher, Ivan teaches his students soft skills that he thinks will benefit their career development, such as: self- presentation ( give pitch ), negotiation, convincing, sales to sale your business ideas or convince the recruiter why they should hire you. He mentioned that it is important for young people when they get out of uni/college to understand themselves, learn about who they are. In his class, he gives the students exercise to hold a mirror and have a reflection of who they are representing. It is also essential to know what people say about them, to learn to control it by reducing your weaknesses and express more of your strengths.

In his opinion, the most important thing to remember in personal branding is to be yourself, don't try to be someone else. "You may perform very well, very active and cheerful in the job interview that you practiced a lot before, and then when you do the job trial, you present as a shy and silent person who is opposite to what you performed, it won't be good."

Being asked about tips for networking, Ivan shared his tips:

1. Do it do it do it.
2. Practice non-verbal communication.
3. Have fun doing it.

Focus on 1-2 person to build a relevant/ quality connections. Quality > quantity.



He shares a success case that he has helped: his student: Mahdi Nasrallah. He is a great example of building a strong personal brand since his young age, that has helped him to achieve his goal. Mahdi showed up since his freshmen 2016 in Fontys University of Applied Science and shared with everyone about his goal: to work in the football club Ajax. He is very keen about the goal and has a clear awareness of what to do to achieve his mission. He is good at socializing and also has the natural talent of networking. After 2 years in university, he has taken more courses, part time job as personal trainer, to prepare the skills that might support him. He buildt his social media channels amazingly. By contacting with the right person, he's got the job as a Fitness Coach AFC Ajax in 2018, even before his graduation in 2020.

Mahdi's success story shows the immediate result of personal branding in young career.

Regarding the impact of personal branding in personal life. Ivan agrees with the statement and say that it is a true challenge for anyone who wants to commit with his/her personal brand. "Because you have to bring it home, bring it to your social media so your friends will see it, anywhere you go. You can't avoid the effect. If you only act like your brand and lower it down for sometimes, your brand is just a covered-blanket, you have to be your brand.