

It's a brand new world:
Develop a strong personal brand

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Abstract

Personal branding is the process that takes an individual's skills, unique characteristics and personality and puts them together into a strong identity. This identity provides the individual with the opportunity to be lifted above the sea of anonymous faces. The purpose of this thesis is to identify what it takes to develop a strong personal brand, and to identify the possible advantages that a strong personal brand might provide. The aim is also to find out whether individuals can take advantage of the various marketing instruments that are used for branding a product or service.

The research was done using qualitative research methods that included conducting interviews to obtain a deeper insight into the subject and into the participants' experiences of having a strong personal brand. Five individuals who were considered to have strong personal brands agreed to participate. They had in common the fact that they had communicated their brands in a public way using social media. The research questions were as follows:

- What does it take to develop a strong personal brand?
- What are the advantages associated with a strong personal brand?

The results indicated that the strategies and instruments needed to develop and build a strong personal brand are aligned with those used by marketers to develop a strong business brand. The main findings from the interviews did not contradict what the literature indicated. Individuals with strong personal brands have in common a passion for their professions. They are aware of the consistency and relevance needed in order for a personal brand to develop and remain strong. The opportunities acquired by an individual through having a strong personal brand are believed to be increased awareness and opportunities within their profession, being a role model, and an expanded network. The results of this research indicated that having a strong personal brand can offer people various opportunities.

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1 Introduction

The world of work is in the midst of change (Gratton, 2011). The internet, methods of communication and career development are also changing. The internet itself is evolving into a tool that allows any user to utilize its networking power (Schawbel, 2010). Traditional methods of communication are developing and there are increasing requirements to be connected. The internet allows people from all over the world to connect, which creates job opportunities (Peters, 1997).

In recent years, a new area of branding has surfaced – the branding of individuals, or personal branding. Everybody has a personal brand, although they are not necessarily aware of this. The changes that are occurring empower individuals to begin developing a strong personal brand in order to differentiate themselves and introduce themselves to the job market (Townsend, 2014). Every individual is born with a personal brand. Everything we do contributes to our personal brand: our personal brand is the sum of our actions, our behaviours, our communication, and the perception of society. Instead of passively letting life push us around like a canoe without oars, we are able to take charge and set our own course by developing a strong personal brand. Every day, individuals are blessed with new opportunities to do better and there is no reason why they should not take advantage of those opportunities rather than sitting and waiting (Peters, 1997).

The reason for the author's choice of this topic is the growing interest in personal branding around the world (Schawbel, 2010). The topic recently caught the author's attention because of the role played by social media in the launch of her sister's career as a photographer. It is inspiring to witness the power that can be provided by a strong personal brand if the individual pays attention to its development. The researcher was very interested in the benefits for career development that it might provide to individuals. The purpose of this thesis was to identify what it takes to develop a strong personal brand and the possible advantages of such a brand for career development. In addition, the hope is that this thesis can help individuals to find the right direction towards that goal. Furthermore, the author wished to find out whether individuals can

take advantage of the various marketing instruments used in the branding of a product or service. Finally, the thesis aims to inform and inspire the reader and explain to him or her the basics and importance of personal branding. Two research questions were formulated and kept in mind throughout the thesis:

- **What does it take to develop a strong personal brand?**
- **What are the advantages associated with a strong personal brand?**

To answer these questions, it is of paramount importance to explain what a brand is and what characterizes a strong brand. The concept of personal branding will be discussed, along with the growing attention being given to this new area of branding and its importance. Furthermore, the methods for developing personal brands, according to the existing literature, and the instruments used to do this, will be discussed. The existing literature will be used, and the author also conducted qualitative research through interviews. The five individuals who were chosen as interviewees were considered to have strong personal brands. They had in common the fact that they had communicated their brands in a noticeable way using social media. The results from the interviews will be presented, discussed and put in perspective when compared to the theoretical findings.

The main findings from the interviews did not contradict what the literature indicates. All individuals with a strong personal brand have certain things in common and having a strong personal brand is believed to bring people opportunities.

“It’s a brand new world”

- Tom Peters (1997)

2 Brands

In this chapter, the history and definitions of brands will be reviewed. Moreover, the chapter will discuss how brands work and what researchers believe brands need to achieve in order to be considered strong.

2.1 Brand history and definitions

In the beginning there was a product. With increasing number of products, a need arose to differentiate them, and branding was born (Keller, Apéria, & Georgsson, 2008). Brands have existed for centuries. It is recognized that commercial companies in medieval Europe used trademarks to guarantee the quality of goods to customers and ensure legal protection for the producers. The use of a name as a brand has a shorter history, and dates back to the early sixteenth century. The names of whisky distillers were branded onto wooden barrels to differentiate the whisky from other products and to prevent cheaper whisky being sold as quality whisky. A foundation was built that, to this day, remains at the core of branding theories (Farquhar, 1989). Later on, brands started representing more than differentiation. They began symbolizing image, packaging and awareness (Keller et al., 2008).

It is helpful for this discussion to distinguish between the concept of product and the concept of brand. According to Stephen King, “a product is something that is made in a factory; a brand is something that is bought by a customer. A product can be copied by a competitor; a brand is unique. A product can be quickly outdated; a successful brand is timeless” (as cited in Aaker, 1991, What is Brand Equity section, para. 1). A product is “a thing that can be offered to a market to satisfy a want or need” (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010, p. 248). Numerous definitions of brand can be found. The following illustrate the diversity of the existing definitions and concepts.

- “A brand is a distinguishing name and/or symbol (such as a logo, trademark, or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors. A brand thus signals to the customer the source of the product, and protects both the customer and the producer from

competitors who would attempt to provide products that appear to be identical” (Aaker, 1991, the Role of Brands section, para. 1).

- “A brand is a product that adds other dimension that differentiates it in some way from other products designed to satisfy the same need” (Keller et al., 2008, p. 39).
- “A brand is a name, term, sign, or design, or a combination of these, that identifies the maker or seller of a product or service” (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010, p. 255).

As can be seen, there are many ways to define a brand. For customers, a brand is a visual symbol that typically indicates something about the product or service (Johansson & Carlson, 2015).

2.2 How brands work

Brand names help consumers identify products, and communicate product quality and consistency. A brand name and logo provide the seller with legal protection in the event that unique features are copied by competitors. The importance of branding has grown to the extent that today almost nothing goes unbranded. Building and managing brands might be the marketer’s most important task (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010).

Brands have come to be one of companies most valuable assets (Aaker, 1991). This is the result of consumers learning to trust brands and to rely on them when they are deciding which product to purchase. Brands are known to reduce risk, offer emotional benefits, and simplify decision making. Customers choose their favourite brand to obtain these benefits, and for this reason, strong brands are valuable assets to companies (Johansson & Carlson, 2015). To consumers, a brand is the identification of the source of the product. If the brand is strong, this reduces the search cost and the risk, as well as being a signal of quality. The competition for consumers’ attention has grown over the years and is now higher than ever. An established brand is of great value, partly because of the increased difficulty of establishing a brand. This is mainly because of higher advertising and distribution costs, as well as the increasing number of brands and increased competition (Aaker, 1991).

Managing a brand involves creating an aura around the symbol that suggests positive associations in relation to performance, identity, image and personality. Familiarity with the brand's symbol or logo is then developed through exposure to promotion and trial of the product or service. The competitive advantage of a brand comes from the positive association that the customer has with the brand. Furthermore, competitive disadvantages stem from negative associations. Brand identity, image and personality are important concepts in brand management. A strong brand has an established and authentic identity, a positive image and a distinctive personality. It provides a strategic leverage to the owner of the brand (Johansson & Carlson, 2015).

2.2.1 Brand identity

Brand identity is the expression of brand characteristics, both tangible and intangible, giving legitimacy to the specific values and benefits (Kapferer, 2008). Brand identity is how a company wants to be perceived by its consumers. The brand's components are created by the company to reflect and provide an answer to the question "Who are you?", which is similar to the function of an individual's passport. The identity can be found in the brand's name, logo, age, product or service category, and country of origin. A strong brand has an identity that is unique and distinct and should include a brand's soul. The identity is communicated by the products and promotions. A brand builds credibility and trust among consumers when the product or service fits the expectations induced by the identity (Aaker, 1991; Johansson and Carlson, 2015).

2.2.2 Brand image

Brand image is based on brand identity. Brand image is what the brand appears to be to consumers and how they actually perceive the brand (Johansson & Carlson, 2015). The definition of brand image is "perceptions about the brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory ... Associations come in all forms and may reflect characteristics of the product or aspects independent of the product itself" (Keller et al., 2008, p. 47). The marketer can try to influence the perception of the brand by emphasizing the brand's strengths. As consumers begin to use the product and information circulates by word of mouth, performance-related attributes of the brand will be identified and an image will be created. Recognition of the brand will eventually

be strong enough to bring to mind association with the various attributes. At this stage, a brand asset has been built (Johansson & Carlson, 2015).

2.2.3 Brand personality

Brand personality develops step by step from consumer interactions with the brand through observation, promotion and exposure. As a result, the typical user emerges (Plummer, 1984). Brand personality is bound to the image and the identity in two different ways. First, it comes from the personification elements of the identity and image associations (for example, “the Apple brand is like Steve Jobs”). Secondly, the brand personality comes from the personality traits of the typical user (for example, “Harley riders are real men so the brand personality is masculine”). The external expression of the brand can be explained as the “brand style”, and applies to the external factors of the brand or the person, such as how the person dresses or communicates (Johansson & Carlson, 2015).

2.3 Brand equity

No common point of view has emerged on the definition and measurement of brand equity. It has been examined from both customer-based and financial perspectives and the relevance to this discussion is customer-based brand equity. Customer-based brand equity is the consumer response to a brand name (Keller, 1993). Customer-based brand equity is the “differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of a brand” (Keller, 1993, p. 8). Various pieces of research into brand equity have been conducted over the years, but they all seem to rely on one or more dimensions of the Aaker model (Keller, 1993). Brand equity has four dimensions: brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty. These dimensions are illustrated in Figure 1 (Aaker, 1991).

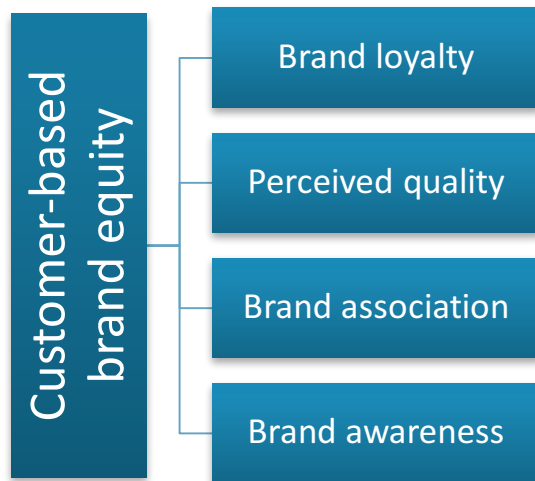


Figure 1: Customer-based brand equity (Aaker, 1991)

Brand awareness is a key determinant of the model, and refers to the strength of the brand's position in the consumer's mind. It is necessary for a brand to have certain brand awareness so that brand image and brand equity can be built (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993). Brand awareness is the ability of a customer to recognize or recall that a certain brand is a member of a particular product category (Aaker, 1991). Moreover, Aaker includes a higher level of awareness, or "top of mind" awareness, meaning that the brand is ahead of other brands in an individual's mind. The consumer has to be aware of the brand if he or she is to be able to develop a set of associations (Keller, 1993). Brand association is anything linked to a brand in a consumer's memory, such as feelings, perceptions, images, beliefs, experiences, and attitudes (Aaker, 1991). Perceived quality is the customer's perception of a products or services total quality. In relation to the competition an in respect to its purpose (Aaker, 1991). It judges the complete quality of a product or service (Keller, 1993). Perceived quality is the brand association that has been shown to drive financial profit (Aaker, 1996). Brand loyalty is a fundamental dimension of brand equity, and measures the customer's attachment to a brand. It indicates how likely a customer will be to change to a different brand, particularly when that brand changes some product features (Aaker, 1991).

Firms that build a strong brand grow a valuable asset. Loyal customers reduce the threat from new entrants and lower the customer retention cost. Furthermore, strong brands are a solid foundation for marketing. They provide companies with benefits, such as the ability to charge a price premium, they make the entry to new markets

easier, they facilitate product line extensions, and they increase channel leverage. In order to be able to create this foundation, the company needs to devote time and effort to shifting consumers from knowing the brand, to trusting the brand and from there to being loyal to the brand. Trust is gained and withheld through one experience at a time (Johansson & Carlson, 2015).

3 Personal branding

The following chapter will outline the main characteristics of personal branding, beginning by reflecting on its history and definitions. Furthermore, it will discuss how to discover, create, communicate and maintain a personal brand, according to the literature.

3.1 History and definitions

According to Keller et al. (2008), anything can be branded: products, services, retailers and distributors, art, sports, entertainment, locations, countries, causes, ideas, organizations and, as discussed in this thesis, people.

Personal branding is the process that gathers a person's skills, unique characteristics, and personality. It puts these together them into a strong identity that gives the individual the opportunity of being seen in the sea of anonymous faces. Individuals can establish reputation and credibility, enhance their recognition in their field, and build confidence. One's personal brand is what comes to mind when one is thought about. The values, actions, and abilities that people associate with an individual should be positive and should represent what the individual stands for. A personal brand is an alter ego created to influence people's perception of an individual and to turn that perception into opportunity. It communicates what one does, who one is, what differentiates one and how one can create value for one's target audience (Montoya, 2009; Schawbel, 2010).

The beginning of the study of personal branding can be traced back to an article written by Tom Peters (1997). "Regardless of age, regardless of position, regardless of the business we happen to be in, all of us need to understand the importance of branding. We are CEO's of our own companies: Me Inc." (Peters, 1997, it's a brand new world, para. 4). The acknowledgement that personal branding is a career strategy has been becoming more common in recent years, and personal branding has become a global phenomenon. The reason for the growth can in some ways be linked to social media, as today almost everyone is connected. Celebrities have been their own brands for a long time, but nowadays all of us are playing the same game. If an individual is looking for a job, is already employed, or is a student, it is important for him or her to

attend to his or her personal brand. An individual's brand identity is who he is or who he wishes to represent himself as (Johansson & Carlson, 2015).

3.2 Discovering a personal brand

To be able to discover a personal brand, it is of paramount importance to invest in personal discovery. Individuals can do this by reflecting on what they would like their personal brand to tell the world. A personal brand is an individual's own perception of himself, and other's impression of him (Schawbel, 2010).

It is important to have confidence, a positive attitude, and self-believe. Individuals need to be the captain of their own ship. It is important for individuals to be persistent and to be willing to put in the hard work and commitment needed to achieve a specific goal. If people are confident about their brand, they are more likely to work hard on improving it and, furthermore, to overcome obstacles, learn from mistakes, and achieve success. Part of discovering a personal brand is to define personal success from a personal branding standpoint, and this will help individuals set goals. People may identify success as being a billionaire, making it to the Olympics, or winning a Nobel prize or an Oscar. That might be their passion. If an individual is doing what he is confident and passionate about, his brand will naturally come out of his actions (Schawbel, 2010).

3.2.1 Personal SWOT analysis

An effective method used by companies to assess themselves and their competitors and to help them create their strategies is called SWOT analysis. This involves examining the company's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. When constructing a marketing plan, a business may conduct this analysis to see where it stands in relation to the competition. Instead of the SWOT analysis being carried out for a product or a service, the analysis can focus directly on a personal brand. After defining career aspirations and objectives, the SWOT analysis provides the individual with guidelines for understanding more about himself and his internal strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, the analysis considers information about the individual's external environment – the opportunities and threats. As individuals in search of opportunities, we must focus our attention on making the most of our strengths, minimizing our

weaknesses, identifying opportunities, and stabilizing threats (Quast, 2013; Schawbel, 2010; Wood, 2013).

3.3 Building a personal brand

A personal brand is not born overnight; to build a personal brand takes a series of attempts. Creating a personal brand is in many ways similar to the task of building a brand for a company. It is helpful to take into account aspects of marketing that will be discussed from a personal branding point of view in this chapter. Building a personal brand is the process of identifying skills and characteristics and putting them together into an identity that differentiates the individual from his competitors and makes him unique (Montoya, 2009).

The objective of personal branding is for others to be captivated by the brand and to be persuaded to invest in its success by giving an individual; a job, attention, venture capital, or simply time. The compelling nature of companies such as Apple or Ikea drives us to their brands (Schawbel, 2010).

3.3.1 Target audience

Targeting means choosing a specific audience for the personal brand, because the brand needs an audience. An individual's personal brand cannot please or be relevant to everyone. Some people will value it, while others will not. It is therefore important to define the target market or target audience. The target audience should be in the sector in which a person has decided to specialize. It is important to build the brand with the mindset that it needs to provide people with value. The long-term goal should be to acquire a permanent place in the target audience's mind (Kaputa, 2005). Montoya (2009) identifies greater benefits of targeting, such as more relevant clients, more focused messages, less time spent on marketing, increased profits, stronger referral base and more focused efforts.

3.3.2 Differentiation

Montoya (2009) concludes that differentiation, or the ability to be seen as original, is the most important aspect of personal branding. Personal branding is about being authentic and presenting a true picture of oneself and what one has to offer. Authenticity will foster a sense of trust and make customers feel more comfortable.

What a personal brand does for an individual is that it helps to distinguish him from the crowd, or to be unique (Peters, 1997). Having a unique identity is a necessity for creating and maintaining a personal brand. In the modern world, consumers at all levels are smart and vigilant, and know what they want. In addition, there is tough competition in almost every market (Montoya, 2009).

Competitive success depends on what are called points of difference and points of parity. The attributes for which the brand is superior to the competition are the positive points of difference. Those for which it is inferior are the negative points of difference. Furthermore, attributes for which the brand is equal to the competition are points of parity. The brand message should stress positive points of difference using advertising and other communication to establish a favourable image (Johansson & Carlson, 2015).

Humans and brands have strengths and weaknesses. It is important for an individual to realize that these attributes can allow him to stand out from the crowd and that they make up his differentiators. The attributes are unique life experiences and skills. To find these differentiators, authors have suggested to listen to what people have to say about us, for example, how they introduce us. Individuals spend too much time focusing on their weaknesses, and they often end up becoming obsessive about them. Individuals do not necessarily know their strengths, as they tend to come so naturally to us. Individuals should be focusing on their strengths, rather than focusing on trying to improve their weaknesses, so that they are not always playing catch-up (Pande, 2012; Schawbel, 2010).

Once one has acquired a realistic picture of one's differentiation it is important to improve constantly and to tell people about one's strengths. If the person hiring does not know an individual's key strength, they are less likely to be appointed (Pande, 2012; Schawbel, 2010).

3.3.3 The marketing mix

The marketing mix consists of what are called the seven P's: product, place, price, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence; this can be seen in Figure 2. These elements are the result of marketing research that has concluded that this mix contains the elements necessary for building a brand.



Figure 2: The marketing mix (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2013)

Product identifies what is being sold and to whom, Price identifies what the customer is willing to pay, Place identifies the place where the product is sold and Promotion identifies how customers are addressed. For service brands, three elements are added because of the nature of a service: it is consumed in a particular place, provided by people and cannot be stored. These elements are the People who provide the service, the Process followed to coordinate and define the service, and the Physical evidence of the service, which is tangible and visible (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2013).

Applying the seven P's to a personal brand will help develop a stronger marketing strategy. However, in personal branding, the seven P's become eight (Rachelson, 2011). The eight P's are shown in Figure 3 and consist of Positioning, Packaging, Promotion, Presence, Passion, Personality, Product and presentation, and Proof. They are in many ways similar to the marketing mix needed to build a brand in business, but some further elements are needed (Kaputa, 2005; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2013).



Figure 3: The personal marketing mix (Rachelson, 2011)

Positioning: An individual must understand his target audience and determine which characteristics people find valuable, in order to be in a position to express what he stands for. **Packaging:** For a brand to become powerful it is important to understand and consider the impact of the visual elements of the brand. Everything the individual communicates something about his brand – his image, how he presents himself, how he communicates, who he is associated with, and other visual elements associated with the brand. **Promotion:** A brand needs an audience. Visibility is often more important than ability. It is important to determine the best strategies for the target audience. **Presence:** When a personal brand has presence it is captivating and appealing. Individuals who have presence show an interest in other people because they understand that in order to be perceived as interesting, they need to show interest too. **Passion:** Passion is what a personal brand needs to survive. In order to publicize the brand, individuals need to radiate enthusiasm, energy and passion in their actions. The assumption underlying this “P” is that in order to have passion it is important for individuals to love what they do, not just get the job done. **Personality:** Powerful brands are authentic and sincere. Authenticity is a key ingredient, so an individual has to make sure he is always representing himself accurately. There should be nothing fake about the brand. When individuals disclose who he or she is, they become vulnerable. However, they are perceived to be easier to relate to when there is coherence between their words and their actions. **Product and presentation:** People often need to understand the benefits they derive from being associated with people or, in other

words, they need to know what is in it for them. Individuals need to define the value they add and ensure that they communicate this consistently and effectively, to reinforce what they stand for, what differentiates them, and how their brand adds value. **Proof:** The brand needs to have credibility, a continuous proof of its value. It is important to have evidence and to research arguments. Furthermore, it is important for individuals to understand how they want their brand to be perceived and how it is perceived by others (Kaputa, 2005; Rachelson, 2011).

3.4 Communicating a personal brand

The American Marketing Association (n.d.) defines marketing as “the activity, conducted by organizations and individuals, that operates through a set of institutions and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging market offerings that have value for customers, clients, marketers, and society at large”. Traditionally, marketing has been focused solely on businesses; however, in the modern world, everyone needs to market their own brand. It is important for individuals to recognize how they can communicate their message to others appropriately (Schawbel, 2010).

The process of communicating a personal brand takes place in every way interaction occurs between people. If individuals fail to promote their brand to the target audience, it has little chance of succeeding, even if it is incredible. Therefore, it is important to recognize that a brand needs an audience. The rise of social media has created both the ability and the need to manage a reputation both online and offline. A personal brand is all about who the person is and what he or she want to be known for: your life is your message. Communication should eco a persons values and beliefs. The first impression the target audience forms of an individuals offline and online appearance is very important to brand acceptance, perception, and credibility (Schawbel, 2010).

When communicating a personal brand, it is the process of taking everything that has been created, and promoting it to others. Routinely and effectively communicating a personal brand will ultimately result in an individual being discovered. An objective in communicating a brand should be to meet as many individuals as possible and to form a relationship or acquaintance with them. Some key networking channels are schools, organizations, workplaces, social life, and social media. Creating a strong personal brand requires the development and unfolding of an effective online and offline presence that

will ultimately claim the target audience's attention. As the brand develops, the audience grows, and more opportunities for success unfold. Individuals need to develop a personal marketing strategy that focuses on their strengths. Showcasing a personal brand involves the ability to communicate its purpose and objective successfully with the help of various marketing tools. These marketing tools make up a personal branding equipment (Schawbel, 2010).

Montoya (2009) recognized "top of mind" status to be one of the many advantages of having a strong personal brand. This means that when someone is thinking about a job, a project or some kind of opportunity and a specific individual is one of many candidates, his or her name is one of the first that he thinks of. Montoya further identifies management roles to be a benefit, along with greater recognition and more of the appropriate audience. This can be achieved with strong communication.

3.4.1 Offline and online brand presence

Even though online presence is important, the real test is how an individual represents himself in person. It is rather easy to misrepresent online, but offline it is harder to get away with. To have a powerful presence offline, it is important for an individual to know what he stands for, and to remain authentic at all times. There are plenty of venues at which an offline presence can be created, such as schools, work, special interest groups, industry summits and conventions. The objective should be to focus on participating in events that are related to the personal brand. It is important for individuals to use opportunities to network and learn about their chosen field. To network effectively online, it is essential to use interpersonal skills and to treat each interaction as an opportunity to promote the brand (Schawbel, 2010).

Social media has drastically changed networking and is deeply ingrained in personal branding. The internet is constantly evolving in surprising ways. Social media has become a powerful tool for achieving and communicating objectives. Making an impact online is essential for personal brands in the modern world, primarily because of the competition, which is tougher than ever, and the need for a brand to stand out. If an individual chooses not to be involved in social networks, he will find himself at a competitive disadvantage. An online brand is, transparently, an extension of an offline brand (Schawbel, 2010).

Traditional networking has advanced and expanded into social networking. Social networks allow individuals to reach across borders, to share knowledge and to unearth new opportunities. Whether skill or interest is demonstrated through art, photography, writing, personal information, audio dialogues or video podcasts, social networks can be the medium. Social networks are websites that connect people virtually and are instruments that can strengthen brands and allow individuals to share information, make valuable contacts, and extend the reach of their brands. Table 1 illustrates the most dominant social networking sites. It is important to keep in mind that these sites change rapidly, and not only in their internal key features: the sites are also competing in a popularity contest. Therefore, it is important to stay on top of the latest internet activities (Schawbel, 2010).

Table 1: Predominant networking sites

Name	Type	Description
Facebook	Social community	Facebook is currently the main social network, giving users free access to peoples' profiles, invitations, and groups from around the world.
Google+	Social community	Google+ gives users control over who sees their content and who they interact with in real time. It allows users to put the different people in their lives into circles and share content with them.
LinkedIn	Professional network	LinkedIn was built to allow users to make professional contacts. It acts as a virtual display of users' CVs and as a venue for expressing users' personal brands.
YouTube	Video	YouTube is the most popular video-sharing site on the internet.
Flickr	Photo-sharing	Flickr is a photo-sharing website on which users can tag pictures of their friends, store pictures, and use pictures on their website or blog.
Pinterest	Photo-sharing	This gives users a visual notice board on which they can post their work portfolios.
Twitter	Microblogging	Users can broadcast their current activities or thoughts in up to 140 characters per message.
Instagram	Photo-sharing	Instagram is connected to Facebook and lets users post and see photos and videos from their friends.
Tumblr	Microblogging	Tumblr is a microblogging platform and social networking website.

3.4.2 Consistent online and offline branding

Online and offline branding must be synchronized and consistent. Everything an individual does communicates. When business brands advertise products, they focus on communicating a consistent message. Personal branding is no different, and can certainly benefit from the same strategy. Consistency is an important determinant of the strength of a personal brand (Gustafson & Mattsson, 2006; Schawbel, 2010). It is imperative for an individual not create a false expectation for those who follow are following him online, as they will be disappointed when they meet him offline. If an individual has decided to brand himself online as a health mogul, a fashion diva or an environmentalist, then he must make sure that this extends to how he comes across in person. An example of being consistent is having the same photo on different accounts for example CV, blog, Facebook profile etc. In this way, people might remember the person more easily (Quast, 2013; Schawbel, 2010).

3.5 Maintaining a personal brand

Personal branding and social networking are activities that require constant work. Maintenance and monitoring is an essential factor in protecting and sustaining a strong personal brand, because a personal brand is a representation of who a person is. As individuals progress through life, they grow, mature, and develop, and, consequently, so do their brands. It is even possible to redefine one's personal brand drastically on the basis of new passions and discoveries, or to match one's target audience and current trends. Individuals should maintain and update their personal brands on a regular basis (Schawbel, 2010).

Maintaining a personal brand requires managing all aspects of the brand, by ensuring that these aspects are synchronized, updated and relevant. For an individual to be relevant it is imperative that he stays constantly updated and regularly acquires new skills that strengthen his brand attributes and market niche. To explain this, it is helpful think of Apple: their iPhone is constantly under review, and they offer new updates and models. The same applies to personal branding. New skills should, ideally, match the requirements of the new positions that unfold, to allow an individual's career path to sustain a competitive advantage. Furthermore, the updating can communicate a strong

message of relevancy, consistency and effectiveness to the target audience (Montoya, 2009; Quast, 2013; Schawbel, 2010).

Brand development takes time. Individuals can develop the elements of a strong brand and put them in place, but the rate of growth is not in their own hands. Brands grow organically (Montoya, 2009).

4 Methodology

This chapter includes the methodology chosen to conduct this study and the philosophy behind it. Furthermore, it covers the preparation and practice, the data collection and data analysis and finally the ethical considerations and limitations of the research. The research questions for this thesis are the following:

- What does it take to develop a strong personal brand?
- What are the advantages associated with a strong personal brand?

4.1 Choice of methodology

Research methods are often categorized into two distinct methods, quantitative and qualitative. A quantitative method is an objective approach that involves collecting and analysing numerical data. The method is formalized and general; the information collected is mainly presented numerically, and the sample is used to represent the whole population. In contrast, with a qualitative approach the focus is on attaining a deeper understanding of human and social activities (University of Iceland, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The objective of this research is to explore the participants' experience of having a strong personal brand and the kinds of characteristics and tactics that are required. The research question is of a nature that means that it is important to gain insight into the interviewees' experiences. This research can therefore be categorized as qualitative research.

Qualitative research methods can be traced back to philosophies and theories that emphasize the individual as an interpreter of reality. Qualitative research is based on individual or group interviews on a predetermined topic of discussion. The objective is to achieve a deeper perspective on the subject that is being researched. Qualitative methods are used to gain insight into human experience and into how humans define their understanding and knowledge of the topic. By obtaining the information straight from the participants, it is possible to gain an understanding from the participants' perspectives. When using qualitative research, it is not possible to generalize about the results, but, rather, the results can be used to emphasize the validity of the research and provide insight into the research topic (Silverman, 2013).

Qualitative research methods are more appropriate when seeking to explain and clarify a certain subject. The philosophy behind qualitative methods depends on the fact that reality is subjective and is constantly changing. It is important that the researcher himself is impartial towards the participants' experiences and tries to understand the topic from their perspective without importing his own opinion. The researcher has to put himself in the interviewee's shoes so that he focuses on understanding and exploring the individual's world (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Storytelling without hindrance is encouraged in the interviews. The researcher's background, ideas and experience are influential, and therefore it is important that the researcher recognizes these factors and the way in which they might influence the research. The reason why the researcher chooses a certain topic indicates in most cases that the topic is important to him and therefore emphasizes the requirement to be objective. The role of the researcher is to interpret what the interviewees say and how they say it, without the influence of other factors. In many instances it can be difficult to remain objective, and it is argued that one can never remain completely objective (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004).

The research analysis that will be used will have a phenomenological format. This is a philosophy that emerged in the twentieth century and has had a great influence on the practice of philosophy. When conducting research that involves finding new perspectives on or understandings of human experience, phenomenology is used. The strategy investigates human consciousness as it appears from a first person perspective, and this thesis will seek to identify how an individual describes his experience or, more particularly, how an individual with a strong personal brand experiences the development and building of the personal brand and the advantages of having a strong personal brand. Human experience is situational and depends on how the individual experiences the world, along with the researcher's interpretation of the description given by the interviewee (Giorgi, 1997; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

4.2 Preparation and practice

The author conducted a practice interview to prepare and refine the interview questions. The interviewee was in the process of developing a strong personal brand and was in a position to answer the questions and give feedback to improve them. When choosing the other interviewees, a combination of judgment sampling and

convenience sampling was used. Convenience sampling is used, as the name implies, because it is convenient. Judgment sampling is often an extension of convenience sampling – the sample is selected based on judgment. With this method, the researcher chooses the interviewees specifically by how typical they are of the population. The population consisted of individuals who had a strong personal brand and were well known in Iceland for their social media presence. The interviewees were therefore selected with the requirement that they had to fit this predetermined specification. Not everybody who was contacted replied, but those who did all agreed to participate. Two women and three men were interviewed. The interviewees' names will not be mentioned as discretion was promised. They will be named A to E, in the same order as they were interviewed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Neuman, 2011).

4.3 Collection of data

This research relies on both primary and secondary data, as these are both relevant to the purpose. Secondary data were collected before the primary data in order to obtain a reliable base of knowledge about the different aspects of personal branding. The primary data used in this thesis were collected by the researcher through the interviews discussed above. The primary data were used to gain insight into individuals' experiences of personal branding. Primary data are important for this thesis, as personal branding is a relatively new area within branding and the secondary data were not sufficient to answer the research questions. Furthermore, it is imperative to rely on new and updated information as the development of a personal brand is a continuing process (Peters, 1997). Secondary data are data that have been collected in the past for other purposes. Secondary data were collected before the primary data, as it is important for the researcher to gain familiarity with the subject. Secondary data can also provide a comprehensive understanding of various concepts. The secondary data collected were compared with the findings from the interviews and were used to determine the reliability of the primary data collected. Furthermore, the secondary data were used to develop the interview framework for the interviews (Silverman, 2013; Wood, 2013).

As this is qualitative research, a semi-structured interview was used. Semi-structured interviews consist of predetermined questions that complement the topic of discussion,

but new questions can be added as the conversation flows. In this way the interviewer can react to interesting answers with further questions. The interview data were gathered using a tape recorder. The interviews included open questions, which encouraged further discussion. The order and content of the questions depended on the flow of discussion in each interview, and the objective was to obtain the interviewee's impression of certain issues and his or her viewpoint on them. By keeping this in mind throughout the interview, the interviewer was able to obtain a deeper understanding of the interviewee's experience of the subject and further to examine its meaning for the individual (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The interview framework that was prepared can be found in Appendixes 3 and 4. It was used in the interviews with reference to the secondary data that had previously been collected. The interview framework was created in order to elucidate the research questions. To begin with, the participants were asked some personal questions about their education, profession and personality, to give a clear idea of their background and experience. Later, there were questions about their personal brand and about how they developed and communicated this. They were asked how they perceived themselves, and how they believed they were perceived by others and can affect others. At the end of each interview the participants were given the chance to add anything they thought was important.

The initial letters of enquiry sent to the individuals can be seen in Appendix 1 in Icelandic and Appendix 2 in English. The interviewees were all contacted by email with a message that introduced the researcher and explained the purpose of the research and the topic. The five interviews took place on 14th, 20th, and 22nd March, 2016, with three of them on 22nd March. All participants received the interview framework in advance so that they could review the questions and prepare themselves if they wished to do so. It was considered a priority that the interviewees were comfortable, and therefore they were allowed to choose where the interview should take place. One interview took place in the interviewer's studio, one in a private home, one at a café and two using FaceTime as the individuals lived abroad. The interviews were all conducted in Icelandic to allow a better discussion and to make the interview simpler for the interviewees (who are all Icelanders). The quotes used in chapter five are therefore translated by the researcher. The interviews were all conducted face-to-face or through a web camera to

maintain the flow of the discussion, to allow open questions to be asked, and to permit the researcher to witness the interviewer's emotions so that she could interpret the answers better. The length of the interviews was between 30 and 45 minutes, and the researcher tried to ensure that the interviews resembled conversations. The questions circled the topic of the interviewee's own personal brand and their awareness and understanding of the concept.

4.4 Analysis of data collected

The interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees and afterwards were copied to a computer. The recording was deleted after the copying was done, and after the analysis the copies were also deleted to protect the participants' anonymity. After the data had been gathered and documented, they were analysed using qualitative methods and a phenomenological approach. The phenomenological approach involves acquiring a deeper understanding of the participant's view of the subject, and discovering themes that can be found in patterns throughout the interviews.

To begin with, the researcher read the interviews over carefully a few times to deepen her understanding of the participants' overall experience. The researcher noted the elements that were considered interesting. The researcher then searched for correspondences between those interesting elements, and categorized the concepts and themes that matched. Issues that were emphasized and repeated were extracted and themes from the dialogue were highlighted to indicate the issues that were important to the interviewee. After this, the researcher gathered together the significant themes that were mentioned most often in the interviews (Giorgi, 1997; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

4.5 Ethical considerations and limitations

The method chosen for this thesis was a qualitative approach. It is argued that this was the best option, as human and social activities were being researched. The most persistent criticism of qualitative research is that the method depends on the interpretation of the researcher himself. It is easy to question the researcher's interpretation of the analysis, because there is always a certain risk of bias when conducting qualitative research. In qualitative research it is important to remain neutral

and to keep validity and reliability in mind at all times. Validity refers to the extent to which the procedure measures what was being sought – that is, how well the research answers the questions that were posed. Quality control must be present throughout the research process – during the preparation, analysis, conclusion and results. A reasonable argument is clear, strong and convincing. Reliability refers to consistency in results, meaning that there must be accurate and continuous data collection and that it must be possible to repeat the study in similar circumstances and get the same results. The researcher's position in qualitative research is very important since the results depend on his interpretation. It is of paramount importance that the researcher realizes his responsibility for the validity of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Neuman, 2011; Silverman, 2013).

Because the research relies on a qualitative method, the sample size is less relevant than it would be in quantitative research. Nonetheless, to increase the trustworthiness of this study it might have been helpful to include more interview participants to obtain more perspectives on how a strong personal brand is developed. This means that there is a risk that important factors might have been missed. However, the small number of selected individuals in the sample may still provide some insight into how a strong personal brand is developed (Neuman, 2011).

The researcher is a participant in creating the research data, and therefore there are difficulties in ensuring the validity of the data. The media has painted a certain picture of the participant, which might have jeopardized the objectivity of the research. The researcher made sure that she did not know the interviewees personally, in order to increase validity. The participants were asked to explain their answers, to ensure that they were correctly understood. Furthermore, the participants were given the opportunity to add anything they thought was important. During the interview, the participants had a copy of the questions, to minimize the risk of the questions being misunderstood or misinterpreted. Throughout the research process the researcher recorded and wrote down thoughts and important matters that were worth examining further. The researcher placed great emphasis on keeping the data from the interviews and the overall research accurate, to increase their validity and reliability (Neuman, 2011).

5 Interview results

This chapter will present the main findings from the interviews, and is a systematic description of the researcher's results, highlighting observations for the reader that are most relevant to the topic under investigation. The findings were categorized into four main themes that are suitable for analysing the findings from the interviews. These are passion, consistency, relevance, and advantages. In some cases, there were findings that were not only related to one theme, and these will therefore be discussed under the most relevant theme. Theme analysis was performed to gain insight into the interviewees' experiences, to deepen the understanding and to answer the research questions that had been proposed at the beginning of the research: What does it take to develop a strong personal brand? What are the advantages associated with a strong personal brand? The main findings from the interviews will be presented in the following four subchapters, which follow the main themes.

5.1 Passion

The interviewees were asked what their interests were and what they did for a living. They all agreed that they were doing what they loved, or at least that their profession was related to their interests. They said that, in order to have a strong personal brand and to be willing to pursue its development actively, passion was a necessity. Interviewee A explained that passion was a key ingredient in being willing to invest the work and time. He further said that under no circumstances was he doing what he did for the sake of the money. Interviewee D, who works in fashion, said:

D: I have many interests, fashion, photography and travelling. My main interest is probably people, I am interested in different types of people. I am doing what I love to do, and that is why I am still doing it. I wake up in the morning and love going to work, and for as long as I love going to work, I will keep doing it.

Interviewee B explained that: *"my main profession is photography, because that is my biggest passion and has always been my priority, if you are not happy doing your job or in your career, there is no point in doing it"*. He believes that if you are to represent yourself to others and to keep doing what you do, you have to have a passion for it; the passion might evolve and change but there has to be a passion or interest. Interviewee

C, who is a musician, agreed: *“my interests are, and have always been, football and music. I would definitely say that I was doing what I love, or one of the biggest two.”* He also said that being passionate about his profession is the reason he has a big following on social media – his passion is translated into his communications and the frequency of his posts.

5.2 Relevance

The participants agreed that their personal brand needs to be relevant to people. They believed that in order to remain relevant an individual has to be up to date and in the loop, learning new skills, experiencing new things and increasing knowledge. Furthermore, the brand needs to be updated frequently on social media in order to keep it relevant and interesting. People want to see new and exciting information.

D: To believe in yourself and what you are doing, so the brand will be strong and continue to be strong, you have to work on it. You can't develop a strong brand and expect it to hold. You have to have something fresh. A lot of belief and interest, and that, I believe, can be delivered to people. You have to find new and clever ways to find new things that are interesting. I am constantly doing new things.

Interviewee C believed that, in order for a brand to be strong, an individual has to have something people are interested in, and said that there were a lot of options. He further asserted that there has to be something to draw people in, something that evokes their interest.

C: Those things that you believe in and stand for should also be important for others so that they can relate themselves to you. It will be easier for other people to identify themselves with you if the brand is relevant to them.

Interviewee E mentioned that in order to stay relevant it was important to be active, to keep doing new things and to push yourself out of your comfort zone. He further mentioned that if you are active and doing exciting things, people start finding you interesting and worth following. He said that in order to keep himself relevant he tries to make people more curious about him and to keep pushing himself further.

5.3 Consistency

The participants agreed that consistency was an important aspect of developing a strong personal brand. It is important for them to think about the messages they send. Most interviewees agreed that everything they did contributed to their personal brand, although one interviewee thought that it was an exaggeration to say “everything”. Even though this was the case, some interviewees mentioned that it was important to be yourself and not to be too aware that everything you do contributes to your brand, because you might end up being obsessed about this. Interviewee B said that it was important to be consistent with your values and objectives, but also constantly to learn, improve and update yourself. All the interviewees had discovered their passions, and try to live according to their values and to communicate their messages in a consistent way. The participants agreed that in order to remain consistent it is important to be yourself and not to feel the need to exaggerate or paint an untrue picture of yourself. Participant A said: “...*what do I have to offer that they want to see, and I really do not know, I just tried to do my thing, and keep doing what I have been doing. Then I received more followers.*” Interviewee D mentioned that in order to achieve consistency it was important to be authentic.

D: It is important not to show only the shiny side of life, just the way life is. From the beginning to be yourself, because it would be discovered soon enough if you were trying to be someone else. It would never give you anything.

Interviewee A agreed, and said that the person you portray yourself to be online has to be identical to who you are in real life: “*The deal with personal branding is that it had better not be fake from the start.*” The participants unanimously agreed on the importance of conveying a message that was authentic, and pointed out that social media has a funny way of reminding you when you veer off course.

E: Be yourself and don’t speak against what you said the day before, because people will notice it. Like some girls on Snapchat, who are motivating people, and the next day they are taking photos of the diet pills they are taking, or the chocolate they ate, and then going to the gym because they ate too much. You have to be consistent with what you portray yourself to be.

Interviewee A wanted to be perceived as a positive person and he mentioned that he tried to convey that attitude both offline and online. Interviewee B agreed: *"I really try to work hard towards being sincere. Really regarding everything I do."*

5.4 Advantages

The participants mentioned various advantages, related to their specific careers, of having a strong personal brand. The advantages mentioned were job opportunities, status, "top of mind" awareness, and the people they meet. All participants agreed that having a strong brand came with opportunities.

B: I have received job opportunities, job offers, jobs, experiences and projects. I love the people I work with. We have been there for each other, which is amazing. There have been a lot of positive things coming from this. This is fun. I have been hired to do projects and then I know that hard work paid off.

Interviewee C said: *"The objective is always to be at the top of people's minds. I would say it is the most important to be there, because I am not going anywhere. People want to associate themselves with you, that is important."* The interviewees mentioned that they had developed networks that made it easier for them to be given projects related to their careers, because having a strong brand made people think of them. Interviewees A and E agreed that what was most enjoyable was the people they met. Some participants mentioned perks such as free gifts if they promoted products for companies. Interviewee E mentioned that he was happy to be an inspiration and a role model and to proclaim messages: *"this has provided me with opportunities and I am aware that I am some kind of a role model for young girls and I always try to do that."* Interviewee D agreed:

D: I am aware that I am a relatively open person and that I share a lot of my life with my readers. I have created a brand. This has provided me with opportunities and I am also aware that I am definitely some kind of a role model for young girls, which I always try to live up to.

Interviewee C also agreed with D and E: *"...to be a role model in something I believe is important"*. Furthermore, C mentioned: *"You have easier access into people's daily lives by using social media. So awareness and network because there is a lot of people following*

you and you are just one click away to get yourself out there." The interviewees agreed that the opportunities related to having a strong personal brand resulted in career development opportunities.

A: I can't be sure about it, however, there are certain offers popping up now that haven't before (before becoming a social media celebrity). They are 100 per cent connected to photography and not to Snapchat, but if there is a marketer who watches my Snapchat story every week then I am definitely more in his head than I was, so this is a certain awareness.

The interviewees therefore all agreed that there are some advantages associated with having established a strong brand.

6 Discussion and conclusion

In this chapter, the results from the analysis in the previous chapter are presented and the research questions discussed. The main findings from the interviews are gathered together, with an emphasis on what the researcher believes to have significance in providing insight into the research questions. The purpose of this thesis was to identify what it takes to develop a strong personal brand and the possible advantages of doing this, and furthermore, to find out whether individuals are able to take advantage of various marketing instruments used for branding a product or service. The first three themes, passion, relevance and consistency, are believed to provide insights into the first research question, and the fourth insights into the second question.

➤ *What does it take to develop a strong personal brand?*

The analysis of the interviews indicated passion as a key ingredient for a strong brand. This conclusion is strengthened because it is also indicated in the literature: Rachelson (2011) points out that passion is what a brand needs if it is to survive. Furthermore, she argues that in order to have passion an individual has to do what he loves, not just get the job done. It is interesting to see that the participants in this research are pursuing what they consider to be their interests. Their profession is their interest. One interviewee even mentioned that he would have chosen the same profession even if he earned no money from it. Passion could be identified throughout the interviews. The interviewees were interested in speaking about their brands, and spoke with passion. Schawbel (2010) argues that if an individual is doing what he is confident and passionate about, his brand will naturally come out of his actions.

The interviews suggested that relevance was a factor in creating a strong brand. If an individual is to date and stays relevant to his target audience, he is more likely to have a strong brand. This means constantly learning new skills, experiencing new things and increasing knowledge. It was mentioned in the interviews that in order for a brand to stay relevant it has to have something fresh. This is in line with Schawbel's (2010) findings: he argues that having a personal brand is an activity – the brand has to stay current and up to date. Both Montoya (2009) and Schawbel (2010) discuss relevance in relation to maintaining a brand. Part of maintaining a brand is keeping it relevant to the

target audience. The researcher argues that it is easier for other people to identify themselves with an individual if the brand is relevant.

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2010), brands communicate product quality and consistency. The interviews revealed that, for a brand to be considered strong, consistency is important. According to the literature, everything individuals do (their looks, actions, verbal communication and non-verbal communication) contributes to their personal brand. Most interviewees agreed with that, although one believed it to be an exaggeration to say “everything”. The interviewees considered that in order to achieve consistency it was important to be authentic, and that the person an individual portrays himself to be online has to be identical to the person he is in real life. One must show not only the shiny side of life, but just life the way it is. Right from the beginning individuals have to be themselves, because it would be discovered soon enough if they were trying to be someone else. This matches Montoya’s (2009) beliefs that personal branding is all about being authentic and presenting a true picture of oneself. Schawbel (2010) held the same – that in order for a personal brand to be consistent, the online and offline brand presences must be synchronized.

➤ *What are the advantages associated with a strong personal brand?*

The interviewees did not agree on specific advantages related to having a strong brand, but they did agree that there are advantages associated with this. The main advantages they mentioned are being role models, being at the top of people’s minds, receiving job opportunities, and having expanded networks. Another advantage that the interviewees associated with having a strong brand is that people are more likely to think of them in relation to projects or job opportunities. This is in line with Aaker’s (1991) higher level of awareness or “top of mind” awareness, which means that the brand is ahead of other brands in an individual’s mind. Montoya (2009) also addresses this and recognizes “top of mind” status as one of the many advantages of having a strong personal brand. One is more likely to be thought of for a project or a job opportunity if one has a strong personal brand. The individuals interviewed are prominent on social media and therefore can be noticed by professionals inside their profession. The researcher argues that increased job opportunities can be related to their social media status and that personal branding can provide people with opportunities.

Most of the literature on personal branding outlines some kind of “to do” list or steps for building a strong personal brand. The researcher argues that a strong personal brand can be very helpful as it encourages differentiation. An individual needs to know himself, what he stands for, what differentiates him, and what his values and beliefs are, and he needs to communicate this consistently to his target audience. This can be achieved by being passionate and consistent and staying relevant.

The researcher argues that the participants have strong brands because they have passion for their professions and they are aware of the need to keep their brand relevant so that other people can identify themselves with it. Furthermore, they are consistent about their images and how they make their images visible to their target audiences. They remain consistent with the messages they communicate online and in person. They recognize the importance of being authentic in all situations and they do not try to be someone else. Growing and promoting a personal brand is, according to this research, likely to lead individuals towards future opportunities. The internet and social media have made it easier to promote personal brands, and have opened a universe of new opportunities; they help people to achieve brand recognition at lightning speed.

The research shows that the strategies and instruments needed to develop and build a strong personal brand are aligned with those used by marketers. The main findings from the interviews did not contradict, in any marked way, what the literature indicates. Individuals with a strong personal brand and a strong social media presence have passion in common. The results indicate that having a strong personal brand can lead to opportunities.

Every day, individuals are blessed with new opportunities to do better, and there is no reason why they should not take advantage of those opportunities rather than sitting and waiting. Everybody is communicating their personal brands, whether they know it or not. Most people think, for example, about the way they look, what they say and what they post on social media. However, few have adopted the marketing instruments that lie behind the development and communication of a strong personal brand. This can be compared to a company that has no marketing strategy, sells its products or services like other companies, and leaves it to chance how those products or services are promoted. Such a company is not likely to be a prosperous company in

the long run. By adopting marketing strategies and instruments in the same way as companies do for products, a strong personal brand can be born. It is helpful to think of personal branding as a way of organizing the clutter in the job market. It gives employers easier access if differentiators are specified. The researcher believes that individuals might benefit from taking a closer look at their own branding.

It is hoped that this research will give some insights into the world of personal branding and the attributes of a personal brand that is and remains strong. It also sheds light on the advantages associated with having a strong personal brand. Personal branding is relatively new within the branding literature. As time passes, more research on personal branding is likely to surface. Even though a great deal of literature reading about the subject can be found, the academic world seems to be reluctant to research it further. In the author's opinion, there is a need for further research. It would be interesting to study why the area of personal branding is gaining more attention, and, moreover, to see how individuals who are not well known in society (such as people within certain professional areas or CEOs of major companies in Iceland) have developed strong personal brands. It would also be interesting to see how employers take advantage of social media to learn about job applicants.

Because this is qualitative research, it depends on the interpretation of the researcher himself. It is easy to question the analysis because there is always a certain risk of bias when conducting qualitative research, and the interpretation varies depending on who the researcher is. The researcher tried to remain neutral and to keep validity and reliability in mind at all times (Neuman, 2011). It might have increased the validity if there had been more than five interviewees. The intention of this research was, however, to provide readers with an insight into the subject. To the researcher's best knowledge, this research is the first of its kind in Iceland. The subject has, however, been researched from other perspectives.

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Appendix 1 – Fyrirspurn (Icelandic translation)

Góðan daginn!

Ég heiti Ingibjörg Elín og er að vinna að lokaverkefni mínu til B.s. gráðu í Viðskiptafræði við Háskóla Íslands. Ég er að leita af viðmælendum fyrir rannsókn sem tengist því. Verkefnið fjallar um þróun persónulegs vörumerkis og þá mögulegu kosti sem persónulegt vörumerki getur veitt einstaklingi þegar hann fer inn á vinnumarkaðinn. Rannsóknin snýr að því að skoða það ferli og leiðir sem einstaklingur fer í gegnum til þess að byggja upp sitt persónulega vörumerki og hvaða mögulegu forskot það býður uppá á atvinnumarkaðnum.

Um er að ræða stutt viðtal um fyrstu mikilvægi persónulegs vörumerkis og leiðir í uppbyggingu þess, því er ég að leita eftir viðmælendum sem eru leiðandi og sem hafa þróað og nýtt sér sitt eigið persónulega vörumerki. Mér datt þú strax í hug þar sem þú ert þekktur einstaklingur í samfélaginu og ert að nýta þér samfélagsmiðlana til þess að koma þér á framfæri.

Viðtalið mun taka um það bil 20-30 mínútur. Fyllsta trúnaðar er að sjálfsögðu gætt og munu viðmælendur ekki koma fram undir nafni.

Bestu kveðjur,

Ingibjörg Elín Gísladóttir

Appendix 2 – Enquiry

Hi!

My name is Ingibjörg Elín and I am working on my bachelor thesis in Business at the University of Iceland. I am searching for individuals to interview in relation to some research for this thesis. The subject of the thesis is “How to build a personal brand and the advantages of having a strong personal brand in the job market”. The purpose is to investigate the importance of having a strong personal brand and the possible advantages it might provide towards building a personal brand for business or career development as well as, I hope, to help individuals in the right direction towards that goal. This is a relatively new area of research and I want to interview individuals that I believe to have built a strong and interesting brand. It would be a pleasure if you would be willing to participate in this research. The interview will not take longer than 20-30 minutes and personal details will be treated as strictly confidential.

Best regards,

Ingibjörg Elín Gísladóttir

Appendix 3 – Viðtalsrammi (Icelandic translation)

1. Hver er þín menntun og við hvað starfar þú?
 2. Hverjir eru þínir mikilvægustu eiginleikar?
 3. Hverjir eru veikleikar þínir?
 4. Hver eru áhugamál þín?
 5. Hvað er í forgangi í þínu lífi og hvers vegna?
 6. Ertu meðvituð/meðvitaður um það að þú sért með persónulegt vörumerki?
 7. Hvernig sérð eða skynjar þú þitt persónulega vörumerki? Hvað einkennir ímynd þína?
 8. Hvernig byggðir þú upp þitt persónulega vörumerki?
 9. Hvaða samfélagsmiðla notarðu hvað mest við að koma þér á framfæri?
 10. Ertu meðvituð/meðvitaður um það að flest sem þú gerir hefur áhrif á þitt persónulega vörumerki? Hversu lengi hefur verið meðvituð/meðvitaður um það?
 11. Hverja teluru vera kosti þess að hafa sterkt vörumerki?
 12. Hvert er markmið þitt með persónulega vörumerki þínu? Notarðu það við að koma einhverju sérstöku á framfæri?
 13. Hvernig telur þú þig hafa grætt á því nota samfélagsmiðla við að koma þér á framfæri?
 14. Hvernig markaðseturu sjálfan þig og/eða fyrirtækið þitt með hjálp persónulegs vörumerkis þíns?
 15. Hvernig helduru að aðrir skynji þig? Hvernig viltu að aðrir skynji þig?
 16. Hvað við þitt persónulega vörumerki teluru að geri þig einstaka/einstakan í hugum fólks?
 17. Fyrir hvað stendur þú og hvað viltu gefa af þér?
 18. Hvað finnst þér þurfa til að byggja upp sterkt persónulegt vörumerki?
- Er eitthvað sem þú vilt bæta við?

Appendix 4 – Interview framework

1. What is your education and profession?
 2. What are your most valuable qualities?
 3. What do you consider to be your weaknesses?
 4. What are your interests?
 5. Which areas in life do you consider your priority and why?
 6. Are you aware that you have a personal brand?
 7. How do you perceive your personal brand? What characterizes your image?
 8. How did you build your personal brand?
 9. What social media do you use the most to promote yourself?
 10. Are you aware of that most of what you do contributes to your personal brand? For how long have you been aware of this?
 11. What do you consider to be the advantages of having a strong personal brand?
 12. What is your objective with your personal brand? Do you use it to express something in particular?
 13. How do you believe you have benefited from using social media to promote yourself?
 14. How do you promote yourself and/or your business with the help of your personal brand?
 15. How do you think you are perceived by others? How would you like to be perceived?
 16. What do you think makes you unique in other people's minds?
 17. What do you represent and what do you hope to give to others?
 18. What do you believe it takes to build a strong personal brand?
- Is there anything you would like to add?