

# PERSONAL BRANDING: TOWARDS CONCEPTUALIZATION

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**Abstract**— Personal branding is a new marketing phenomenon related to the marketing effort that a person adopts in order to promote oneself in the competitive job market. In recent years employer branding has gained popularity in practitioner venues, but little in the academic arena, this article presents a theoretical foundation for personal branding applying Goffman's dramaturgical theory.

**Keywords**— Personal branding, self marketing, impression management, capital, competitive job market

## I. INTRODUCTION

Personal branding is a new marketing phenomenon related to the marketing effort that a person adopts in order to promote oneself in the market. The popularization of personal branding is generally attributed to the rising number of books on the subject, magazines, web sites, training programs, personal coaches, and specialized literature about how exactly to brand oneself for success in the business world [1], [2], [3].

Personal branding is an individualistic approach. The key premise is that people can be considered as brands, everyone has a personal brand and that regardless of age, regardless of position, regardless of the business [4]. Everyone has a chance to be a brand worthy of remark, that, personal branding if applied correctly can transform any person into a brand in any field [5].

Personal branding is defined as a varied activities undertaken by individuals to make themselves known in the marketplace. In personal branding, branding approach that was used to promote products is applicable to individuals. The structured process of brand building is comparable to that of launching new product brands, and personal branding does the same for people as the marketers do for products [6], [7], [8]. Since the late 1990s, personal branding has become increasingly popular as subjects of self-improvement books,

web sites and consultancy services. These discourses of personal branding become popular because they do something useful. Writings on person branding have largely been dominated by advice from practitioners who advocate that anyone can develop a successful brand that will enable them to compete in the crowded market. This paper presents a framework to initiate the scholarly study of personal branding and proposes a theoretical foundation for the emergence and practice of personal branding based on the dramaturgical theory of Erving Goffman [9].

## II. PERSONAL BRANDING: THE EVOLUTION OF A CONCEPT

The business self-help genre of management communication traces its roots at least back to Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* [10]. Key to these self-help management moments is the idea that individuals in the corporate world can achieve success by engaging in a process of self-management. Some authors argued that personal branding was indirectly introduced by Erving Goffman (1959) in his book —*The presentation of self in everyday life*. Goffman views people as actors engaging in performances, in various settings which are seen by audiences the actor is on stage and acting in ways that will produce the most favorable impression and other's reactions are influenced by this impression.

Individual branding, was first introduced in 1980 in a book titled "*Positioning: The Battle for your Mind*", by Al Ries and Jack Trout [11]. More specifically in chapter 23, *Positioning Yourself and Your Career - You can benefit by using positioning strategy to advance your own career*. Key principle: Don't try to do everything yourself. Find a horse to ride". The term of personal branding is popularized by Tom Peters [4] in his article —*The Brand Called You*, who wrote: —We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer

for the brand called Youl. The original idea of personal branding coined by Peters did not focus specifically on the presentation of an online identity, but was more generally applied to individuals and their conduct in business.

According to [12], persons could be marketed much like products, stating: —Personal marketing is an endemic human activity, from the employee trying to impress his boss to the statesman trying to win the support of the publicl. Authorsalso noted that —no attempt is made to examine whether the principles of ‘good’ marketing in traditional product areas are transferable to the marketing of services, persons, and ideasl. Today researchers recognize that brands can also be human, and has been studied in many area, celebrity brand [13],athlete brand [14], CEO brands [15], leaders in politics [8], [16], scholars are also thought as human brands competingfor entry in job market [17] or for occupations and professions [18].

The key premise for personal branding is that everyone has a personal brand [4],but most peoplearenot aware ofthis and do not manage it strategically, consistently, and effectively [19]. A major selling proposition is the fear that if individuals don’t manage their own brand,thensomeone else will manage it for them: —If you don’t brand yourself, someone else will, writes[20], whocontinues:—you’re givingthepowertoother people to brand you if you don’t do it yourselfl.

Personal brandingbecomes an important marketingtask for everyday people and has accelerated in the social networking sites of Web 2.0 [21]. The rise of social media has formed the need for a deeper analysis of buildingpersonal brands not just for professional consumption but rather for social. Personal branding has become increasingly important in the digital age web 2.0, social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Google, Twitter, Blogs, Myspace and many other applications entered the scene and made it virtually impossible for anyone to keep fromcreatinga personal brand, whether they wanted to or not. Individuals not formally trained in the discipline of marketing may often participate in the act of marketing without being aware that they are doing so. Personal style and social interaction inherently lend themselves to the unconscious marketing of individuals and create platforms for communication and creativity [21], [22], [23], [24].

### III. HOW TO DEVELOP A PERSONAL BRAND

In this paper, we define personal branding as the process of establishing a unique personal identity, developing an active communication of one's brand identity to a specific target market and evaluating its impact on one's image and reputation, and that to fulfill personal and professional objectives. This process involves three phases just like other brands. The first phase is to establish a brand identity, the second phase is to develop the brand's positioning, and the third phase is to evaluate a brand's image.

#### A. Personal brand identity

Personal branding typically begins with establishing an inventory of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a role [2]. According to [25], people building person brands should differentiate themselves to stand out from a crowd while fitting expectations and needs of their target market. These personal characteristics are then compared and matched up with the target's needs and expectation. The self audit based on a full understanding of one's target market and one's competitors. Personal brand identity is based on inherent internal characteristics in a person to be branded and external elements encompass the person's relationship with other people. Researchers argue that personal branding is essentially an inside-out process that is based on the strengths and uniqueness of the individual in relation to a target market [5], [7], [26].

#### B. Personal brand positioning

A people brand needs to be positioned in the consumers' minds. Brand positioning refers to the active marketing communications efforts of one's brand identity to a specific target market. Personal branding is centered on the promotion of the self. Individuals use brand positioning to highlight their positive attributes that are of value to their target audience while at the same time differentiating themselves from other individuals in the marketplace.

‘Everything communicates’ is a known fact within the area of marketing and this can be applied to people as well as to products. For personal branding, brand positioning occurs through self presentation [24], nonverbal cues (appearance, manner), verbal disclosures (information about the self), and actions (performance, citizenship) shape others' perceptions of one's competence, character, and ability to meet the cultural standards [27]. Some authors have referred to the importance of social networking for individuals to improve the personal scope of the personal branding campaign and to increase the value of the personal brand for the individual [21], [22], [23], [24].

#### C. Personal brand assessment

Personal Branding is about taking control of one's own image, and just like a product or company, a personal brand is established to achieve results. People who construct viable professional images are perceived as being capable of meeting their aims. The mismatches between their self-stated goals and judgments by others represent branding failures [24]. As a brand is built for the satisfaction of the market, the basic objective of this step is to determine whether the branding efforts had achieved the branding goals and met personal goals. In this way, the incorporation of market feedback is essential. To become a brand requires recognition by the marketplace of such a status.

#### IV. GOALS OF PERSONAL BRANDING

Personal branding is popular because it supplies an individualized approach to dealing with précarité, contingency, and uncertainty economics of the day. According to [28], the emergence of personal branding in the late 1990s was a result of the same economic forces that influenced product branding as a communication method that job seekers began using branding as a method to position themselves in the competitive employment environment the same as marketers presented their products. The individual sees himself as his own manager or entrepreneur, responsible of work-based identities believing that if he invests in establishing a personal brand, he will have a return in human capital, social capital and economic capital, just like any other investor [29], [30].

- *Human capital:* Individuals involved in personal branding develop their human capital by investing in continuous learning. Human capital refers to the fact that human beings invest in themselves, by means of education, training, or other activities maximize their competitive potential. By positioning themselves as having unique characteristics that distinguish them from the competition, individuals can enhance their recognition as experts in their field, establishing reputation and credibility, advance their careers, and build self-confidence [1], [2], [3].

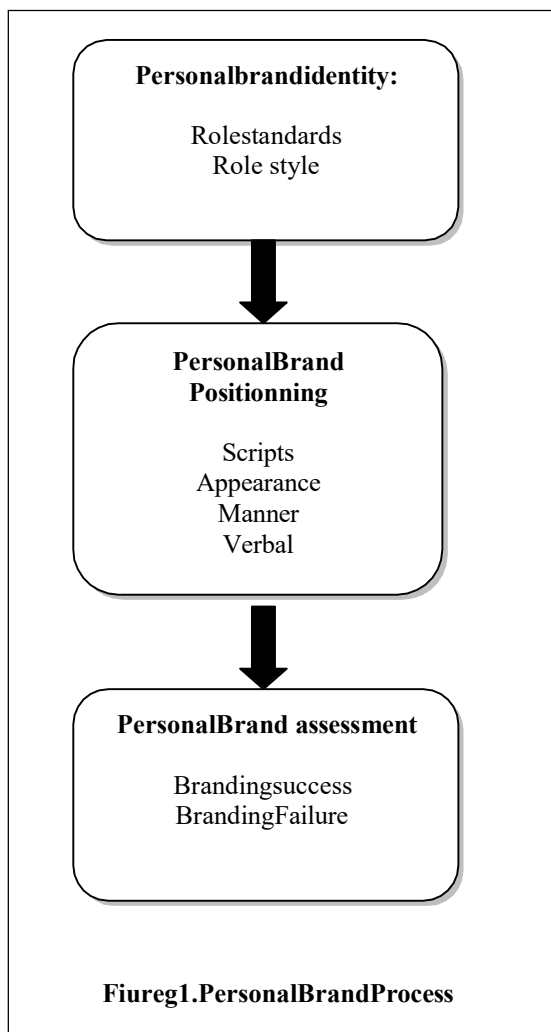
- *Social capital:* The personal branding literature essentially offers a technique for individuals to increase their social capital. Social capital reflects the extent to which one develops a wide network of relationships which incorporates broader contacts with family, friends, work, and community that can provide information, influence, guidance, and support to the individual. Personal branding represents investments made by individuals to enhance their public image. Notoriety and identification can be a measure of success, in the form of credentials, personal brand provides instant creditability and status for the holders, leading to a successful exchange, maximize visibility and a growing popularity [28], [2], [5].

- *Economic capital:* Personal brands, if cultivated, lead to financial success and economic profitability. Personal branding offers people a way to theorize and negotiate the changing employment landscape of globalized capitalism [6]. People position themselves as person brands when entering or career management in specific occupations or professions to compete against others for similar employment opportunities. Branded individuals generate increased worth or value for themselves, maximize their own employability and increase their lifetime earnings [1], [2], [3] [4], [5].

#### V. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To establish a theoretical base for the emergence and practice of personal branding, we propose the framework of Goffman (1959). In the Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Erving Goffman uses a dramaturgy metaphor to explain the self-presentation during social interaction. People in their everyday lives manage a role, settings, clothing, words, and non-verbal actions to give a particular impression, as if on stage; Goffman called this impression management.

Applying Goffman's dramaturgical perspective, we describe personal branding as a three-step process (fig.2) (a) The brand identity refers to the role relationship. To adopt certain roles, one need to meet target's basic expectations and fit standards of these roles and much to do with how individuals engage in role making, adopting a personal style to stand out by establishing and reinforcing points of differentiation. (b) brand positioning occurs through self presentation, choosing the kind of impressions to create, deciding how one will do so, and thus choosing the appropriate self presentation strategies through scripts, appearance, manner and verbal discourse (c) Impression construction: personal brand assessment requires an awareness of the impressions that the audience target place on our acts, to compare self-stated branding goals with others feedback.



*A. Role Internalization: personal brand identity*

The brand identity refers to the role relationship, everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role (boss, peer, subordinate, customer). At the interpersonal level, self-concepts are defined with respect to roles that delineate one's relations to others. Individuals incorporate the role into their interpersonal identities, they plan their actions in social settings by, first, reading the character of the situation to learn what self-presentational attributes are most relevant to a situation of that type and, then, constructing cognitive scenarios in which a person expresses and manifest those attributes in a fashion appropriate to the situation [9], [31].

To adopt certain roles then has little to do with objective characteristics tied to those roles that conform as closely as possible to prototypic characteristics and fit standards of these roles and much to do with how individuals engage in role making, adopting a personal style to stand out by establishing and reinforcing points of differentiation.

- *Role standards:* roles are the sets of expectations and activities that guide and govern individual behavior both in and out of organizations. The brand standard is the level of performance that one willing to set and adhere to values and core competencies. People who occupy roles strive to convey social images that conform as closely as possible to prototypic characteristics of the roles they play [32]. Adherence to these role-related expectations confers legitimacy upon the role-holder through developing —the appropriate mannerisms, attitudes and social rituals— that allows to comply with field and occupation-specific expectations in order to —fit in— [25].

- *Role style:* style consists of brand's personality. It's the subjective counterpart to the more objective attributes of standards—the part that makes one unique in someone else's mind. Generally, the role is the particular image that actor wants to convey. It is the essence, the contrived sense of self, that the individual wants to project to the world [33]. The desired image serves as a future, goal-oriented component of the self concept [34], [35]. Person brand identity happens through processes that help to portray a person as having field-specific social and cultural capital that allows to —stand out— of establishing and reinforcing points of differentiation and points of parity [25].

*B. Self presentation: personal brand communication*

For personal branding, brand positioning occurs through self presentation. According to the dramaturgical perspective, an actor's performance is a compound of artifactual, non verbal behaviours, and verbal tactics, influenced by actor's interaction motives. Impression management pertains to the performer's desire to maintain an ideal expression of the front, necessitating the concealment of actions that are inconsistent with this expressed front, the actor must control what information is accessible to the audience, pay close attention to the artifacts, appearance, manner and verbal discourse used in portraying the front.

- *Artifactual displays :* people create and develop scripts for career management allowing them to market themselves. A set of autobiographical practices exist and many tools can be used for managing and controlling information about one's potential, providing an avenue to show evidence of skills and qualifications that an individual possesses like resume and application letter. Web-based technologies present a potential application to person as brand. Social network, professional web sites, online portfolios, blogs can be used as a tool to assess skills and professional growth via writing posts, video and photo sharing, providing an additional advantage to increase visibility and accessibility communications [21], [36], [37].

- *Personal appearance:* appearance refers to the level of hygiene, personal grooming, and appropriate dress of an individual. There are certain norms of professional dress and level of cleanliness that are generally expected, appropriate business attire. Dressing appropriately for work takes a certain amount of physical and mental effort on the part of the attire

wearer, particularly for those who care a great deal about their workplace image. Individuals use appearance as part of how they construct their image in the workplace. People who are in control of their own hygiene and dress, professional appearance may reflect deliberate attempts to regulate appearance for self presentation purposes to influence the impressions formed by others in the workplace [38], [39].

- *Manner:* According to Goffman, a manner of interacting is also a sign vehicle. A manner of interacting consists of the attitudes we convey in an attempt to get others to form certain impressions about us. One of the most common ways to convey attitudes is through nonverbal communication, the ways we have of communicating that do not use spoken words. These consist of gestures, facial expressions, and body language and can convey many other kinds of information as well like cues relevant to opinions, moods, physical states such as fatigue, and cognitive states such as comprehension which indicate the role we expect to play in the interaction, such as haughtiness, friendliness, shyness, deference, command [40].

- *Verbal impression management behavior:* Verbal communication cues can be split up into two broad categories of tactics: assertive and defensive tactics. People make use of assertive tactics to create images that promote desirable qualities, while defensive tactics are used to protect or repair one's image (excuses, justifications, and apologies). Another taxonomy distinguishes between self-focused tactics and other-focused. Self-focused tactics are attempts to show that one possesses desirable qualities for the job like self-promoting utterances, entitlements, enhancements, and overcoming obstacles. Other-focused tactics are designed to evoke interpersonal attraction or liking through flattery, praise, or compliment [41], [42].

### C. THE REVIEW: PERSONAL BRAND ASSESSMENT

Since identities are validated through public recognition, brand assessment depends on information posted by the focal person, information posted by others, and the marketplace reaction to the presented information, which generally is based on visible behaviour, nonverbal behavior, and other observable cues and then interpret and make sense out of symbols, talk, action and the environment undertaken by the audience to a performance [43], [44], [24].

The suggested outcomes of the personal branding process are related to target audience's impression thus overlapping with the proposed inputs in order to assessing the success or failure of the personal brand. The actor perceives the response of the audience and creates a causal attribution for the success or failure of his performance [45].

- *Branding success:* If the actor creates the desired response, he will perceive a high level of congruence and connects this desired response with his performance. As a result, the impression management tactics utilized are reinforced and more likely to be used in the future. Branding Success occurs when the actor creates the desired impression and secures the expected outcomes

- *Branding failures:* If the audience considers the performance to be out of place, negative reactions are more likely to occur. The actor perceives the response of the audience and creates a causal attribution for the success or failure of his performance. Based on the interpretation, actor can either adjust subsequent performing actions to better fit the current audience, or target a different audience.

### CONCLUSION

Personal branding is a new marketing phenomenon related to the planned effort that a person adopts in order to promote oneself in the crowded marketplace. Recent academic work in this area indicates that people may be legitimately considered as brands and that this is an interesting and valuable area of research. The academic literature examining it is still underdeveloped and the popular nature of the phenomenon among practitioners invites further examination.

This article proposes a theoretical basis of personal branding applying Goffman's dramaturgical perspective. Personal branding involves a three-step process (a) to establish a brand identity, one need to fit roles standards and stand out adopting a personal role style. (b) brand positioning occurs through self presentation, choosing the appropriate self presentation strategies through scripts, appearance, manner and verbal discourse (c) personal brand assessment requires an awareness of the impressions that the audience target place, to compare self-stated branding goals with others feedback. For different person, personal branding has different impacts and different rewards. Advocates of personal branding argue that personal branding leads to financial gain, professional acclaim, and to enhanced personal relationships.

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