

THE APPEARANCE OF PERSONAL BRANDING AS A SUBJECT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

In our study, we examine the relationship and interaction between personal branding and education, including higher education. So far, personal branding has not been a subject of the utmost importance within the framework of education. However though, the results of our survey demonstrate that if personal branding as a subject is included in the syllabus of higher education, it may support the chances of jobseekers and new entrants on the labour market, facilitating their successful employment. Thus we can get a clear picture of the necessity for including personal branding in the processes of education, which is facing new challenges.

Keywords: *higher education, personal brand, human resources, marketing*

Introduction

The 21st century educational methods are becoming more and more practice-oriented, highlighting the significance of providing the students with up-to-date knowledge. The everyday use of online communication tools places great emphasis on the change of education towards this direction, which results in new subjects and supplementary courses. In addition to these processes, generational changes also progress.

One of the current topics is personal branding, as most people (and not only young people from today's generation) exactly know that they need personal branding and self-marketing.

The education of personal branding may become a complex process, which may also involve a number of other subjects. During the process of personal branding, the application of effective communication and problem-solving skills must also come to the fore, together with abilities such as empathy and flexibility. However career planning and basic guidance are also essential besides self-awareness. With the help of a personal brand, job search techniques can be used effectively if students are provided with ready-to-use, proactive and up-to-date methods and knowledge. It should also be remembered that the aims of personal branding also include utilitarian aspects such as higher salary, growing reputation and faster promotion.

It is also a tool of self-expression if someone does not engage in branding in order to achieve direct financial benefits, but to raise awareness and create a positive image among a specific audience.

What is a personal brand?

The first industries where the spread of personal branding was realised were the ones where personal branding paid off to the greatest extent, for example the film industry, fashion, music and professional sports. People engaged in these fields usually build strong personal brands. When we mention strong brands, we often think of stars, that is, people with a particularly strong position whose outstanding performance is

acknowledged by the environment, also rewarding them to an outstanding degree [Törőcsik, 2017]. Think of David Beckham as an example.

According to the laws of marketing, branding itself can be used virtually anywhere if consumers have branding opportunities. Examples that can be branded include physical products, services, businesses, geographical units, organisations and ideas [Papp-Váry, 2013]. Personal branding is not much different, as a book by Tom Peters, management consultant suggests. In his book *The Brand You 50*, Peters presents fifty ways an employee can transform himself/herself into a brand. He uses the term 'Brand You' referring to some kind of an independent entity providing a promise of a reliable, fresh, first class 'something' (Peters, 1999). We may see the expression as a synonym of brand you: 'Your brand is a promise kept.' [Purkiss - Royston-Lee, 2010]. Dan Schawbel already mentions the term 'personal branding'. His explanation defines the process of personal brand building: 'Personal branding describes the process by which individuals and entrepreneurs differentiate themselves and stand out from the crowd by identifying and articulating their unique value proposition, whether professional or personal, and then leverage it across platforms with a consistent message and image to achieve a specific goal. In this way, individuals can enhance their recognition as experts in their field, establish reputation and credibility, advance their careers, and build self-confidence [Schawbel, 2012].'

On the one hand, authors describe me-branding (or self-branding) as a process including the conscious and consistent communication of our professional and personal qualities and values, making them visible to others [László, 2015]. On the other hand, they define the term 'human brand', emphasising that 'formally, a human clearly corresponds with the criteria of a brand, because he/she is self-identical and can be separated or distinguished from other people [Törőcsik, 2017].

Through further analysis of the term we finally come to a definition of personal brand building. According a definition by Árpád Papp-Váry, this means the definition and demonstration of personal strengths, successes and values, increasing the awareness of one's influence on others and presenting one's own story. First of all, it requires persistent and consistent work and thoughtful construction, also involving some courage [Papp-Váry, 2009]. Outstanding examples of personal branding always highlight key competences such as communication, reliability and transparency. The stability and developability of the personality and self-awareness are essential for the conscious representation of the values distinguishing him/her from others. In addition, professional performance is also one of the key elements that serve as the basis for a personal brand. Strong brands are always developing – they always seek to improve and provide better quality.

The connection between personal brand and generations

The rapid spread of personal branding was significantly affected by generational change. The Z generation (people born after 1995) was socialised in this era. This generation thinks it is natural to make itself marketable through the same means (Nagy, 2014). For the Z generation, social media has become a natural part of life, and they experience their personality, relations and life through these channels. They have grown into a world where it is easier to understand everyday events with the help of the internet than using classic methods [Trunk, 2017].

In the case of the young generation, real-time textual and visual communication has become dominant [Törőcsik, 2017]. A variety of social platforms have been created including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Flickr, LinkedIn, etc. Attractive introduction and

self-representation have become a common practice on these platforms, because online presence is often realised visually – in those cases, photos tell our stories, not textual platforms. It has become fundamental to be interesting, stand out, get noticed, and generate impulses all the time. A virtual space of personality building was born. In this space, people can build themselves and even their personal brands according to their intelligence and needs.

The Z generation also arrives at workplaces with a new attitude. Their mindset does not focus on work, but tasks to solve. Annual performance reviews are replaced by ongoing evaluation, where instant feedback may be decisive. Their network of relationships basically exists in the digital space, therefore they are not proficient in personal conflict management techniques [Willin-Tóth, 2018].

The role and importance of personal branding in education

This new era and this new generation require a different kind of education, where new approaches and methods adapted to the members of the new generation are essential [Hajnal M; Czeglédi Cs; Fodor-Borsos E, 2019]. In the United States of America, specific online learning platforms such as LinkedIn Learning, edX, Udemy or Udacity have become increasingly popular. These all necessitate a new kind of education system. The younger generation prefers affordable alternative solutions to traditional means of education, and employers accept qualifications acquired this way as well. Self-directed learning is driving the need for new credentialing systems. More employers will be accepting different types of credentials as they seek to build diverse talent pools and expand their reach. Younger generations are starting to refuse traditional degrees due to the ever-increasing cost of tuition, which has increased by nine percent in a year in the case of four-year public school programmes. Some people avoid college altogether, pursuing free or low-cost online courses that provide enough education on important skills to get by. As companies continue to accept non-traditional credentials, students become able to avoid debt, and study at their own convenience without fear of unemployment [Schawbel, 2017].

Personal branding as a school subject was first introduced in Hungary by a private university, Budapest Metropolitan University. The training was launched for first-year (full-time and part-time) students at the Faculty of Business, Communication and Tourism in autumn 2018. The programme was aptly named MyBrand and provides a professional portfolio-based training. The aim of MyBrand is to ensure that the graduates of the university start their professional life and career on the labour market more confidently, in possession of a professional portfolio. This also means conscious and constant career planning for the students during their university years as they organise their professional experiences in a so-called professional portfolio, which they can take along after their graduation. As a result, they have an opportunity to build their own brand, and learn to present their competences in way that is the most attractive and relevant for potential employers. This gives them credibility, competitive advantage and tangible results. Therefore they successfully enter the labour market as new entrants, and their promotion, professional development and representation is facilitated after their years of work experience.

MyBrand enables the easier motivation and activation of students, because the compilation of their portfolio requires more active participation, stronger work ethic, individual responsibility and closer cooperation with educators.

The introduction of MyBrand is not only an advantage for students, but it also allows the university to position itself as an innovative educational institution. It adds to

the prestige of the university as it increases the value of degrees received there, also providing awareness and credibility. In addition, it provides educators with new methodological knowledge as it requires a new Anglo-Saxon kind of teaching attitude, establishes partnership with students, and presupposes an open attitude. The teaching staff of the university can also employ these techniques and educational methods with great efficiency.

According to the plans of Budapest Metropolitan University, the subject will also be included in its international programmes from September 2019, encouraging even more students to apply for the university.

The subject matter and methodology of this research

We carried out an online research in order to map the situation of personal branding in higher education. The questionnaire survey took place in March 2018. We based our research on a Google Drive tool designed for this purpose, the Google Forms format. The link of the questionnaire was distributed online among Budapest Metropolitan University students. (At that time, the MyBrand programme had not started yet.) The size of the available sample that also served as the basis of further results was 158 persons (n =158). In connection with the survey methodology and the target group reached (Budapest Metropolitan University students), 87 percent of interviewees are less than 25 years old, and this means a count of 130 persons. As interviewees included part-time students, we presumed that this category would also include students over the age of 36, and 6 persons belonged to this age group. 43 persons from the sample are part-time students, which is 27 percent of the total number of respondents, while full-time students amount to 73 percent (115 persons).

Most respondents aware of the term 'personal branding' have heard about the expression during their studies: their number is 98 persons out of 120. This is followed by 66%, the ratio of people who met the term on the internet. 29 percent of respondents met personal brand at events and conferences. 20 percent of them stated that a well-known person was an example of a personal brand. 17 percent of the interviewees learned about the term in their circle of acquaintances, and 16 percent of them learned about it from the TV or the radio. Only 4 percent saw bad examples to avoid in connection with a well-known person. At the same time, only 1 percent wrote that they encountered this term at work. Also, only 1 percent marked the answer that a well-known person (or several well-known persons) provided good and bad examples of personal branding as well. (Fig. 1).

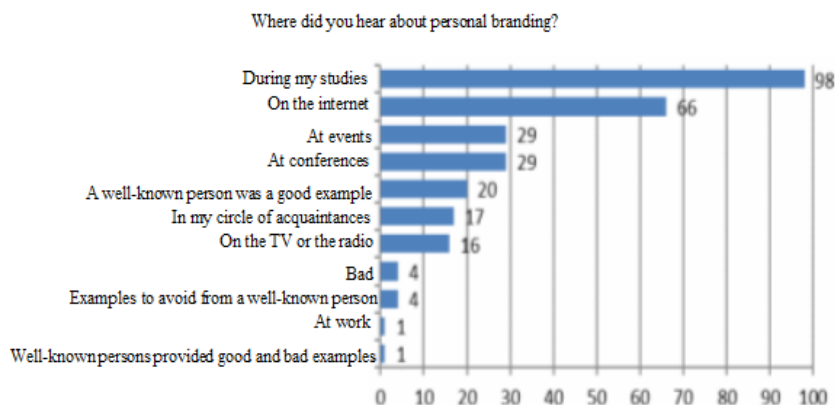


Figure 1 - Where did you hear about personal branding?

Source: The authors' own edit, 2018

The abovementioned study clearly shows that personal branding is a popular topic in higher education. Its presence is especially strong in higher education programmes with marketing subjects (or subjects discussing the topic).

Results

It was also concluded from the results of our research that more than 2/3 of interviewees (68 percent) would avail themselves of professional help in their personal branding. However, they consider personal branding to be important – respondents ranked career-related values, characteristics and definitions such as life and career goals, diligence, professional relations and job search as the top 5 items on the lists.

According to our respondents, personal brand has the greatest effect on the increasing of popularity, the establishment and development of professional and personal relations, and job search (from among the fields provided), while it has little effect on other non-professional fields (e.g. family, dating, completion of studies) (Table 1).

Descriptive Statistics									
What do you think, how much does personal branding affect the fields below?									
Please mark your answer on a scale of 1 to 5.									
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
15. [Increasing popularity]	158	2,0	5,0	4,525	,7375	-1,487	,193	1,547	,384
15. [Building professional relationships]	158	2,0	5,0	4,506	,7026	-1,195	,193	,486	,384
15. [Job search]	158	1,0	5,0	4,316	,7494	-1,053	,193	1,566	,384
15. [Development of personal relationships]	158	2,0	5,0	4,228	,7729	-,587	,193	-,562	,384
15. [Job interviews]	158	1,0	5,0	4,158	,8853	-,986	,193	,902	,384
15. [Self-realisation]	158	1,0	5,0	4,152	,9182	-,757	,193	-,220	,384
15. [Promotion]	158	2,0	5,0	4,139	,8018	-,633	,193	-,170	,384
15. [Dating ladies or gentlemen]	158	1,0	5,0	3,962	1,0213	-,723	,193	-,282	,384
15. [Successful completion of studies]	158	1,0	5,0	3,108	1,1150	-,187	,193	-,503	,384
15. [Deepening family relations]	158	1,0	5,0	2,791	1,2469	,164	,193	-,857	,384

Table 1 - How personal branding affects the fields below

Source: The authors' own edit based on a questionnaire survey, 2018

Respondents were also asked about their needs in terms of assistance or services by professionals or consultants. 73 percent of them mentioned professional training, followed by professional support in verbal communication (64 percent) and self-confidence and self-awareness (64 percent). We think that it is a forward-looking and positive result that 59 percent of students would also require help in website creation. The creation and publishing of professional content is almost as important (the difference is only 3 percent), 56 percent of students would require support in this field. The creation of uniqueness is important for 46 percent, while 44-44 percent think that a revision of their social media profile or body language would be important. Clothing (which is associated with appearance) was only mentioned by 34 percent. The writing of their CV was only mentioned by 30 percent of them, which shows that respondents usually solve this by themselves, possibly with the help of the internet.

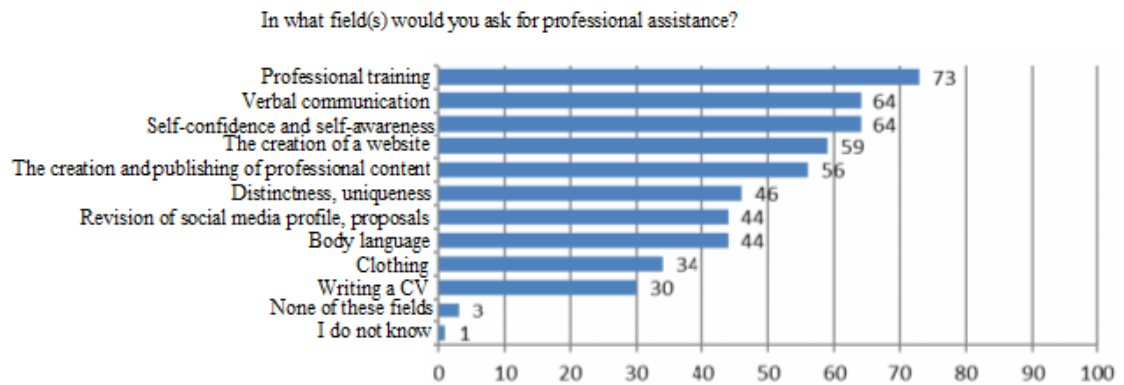


Figure 2 - In what field(s) would you ask for professional assistance?

Source: The authors' own edit based on a questionnaire survey

The results of the survey clearly show that there is considerable demand for professionals' services in order to make the personal brand more successful and better known.

Conclusions

The results of our survey justify the forecasts predicting that personal brand consulting may be one of the fastest growing fields of the next three decades (Schawbel, 2012). At the same time, it is clear that the need arises for human consulting services facilitating and supporting the development of a personal brand.

All around the world there is an increasing number of consulting and marketing companies providing assistance for job seekers to develop their personal brands and thus become 'marketable' in the labour market (Brooks – Anumudu, 2016).

Our study clearly demonstrates that the idea of personal branding is well-known among students of business higher education. It is also obvious that the field is important to them, therefore it may be useful to create distinct courses on personal branding in universities and other higher education institutions.

As we have pointed out, personal branding in this sense is actually about communicating the professional skills and personal qualities relevant to our professional life to as many important people (in terms of our career) as possible. Thus our personal brand becomes a tool to reach our professional goals, bringing us closer to the success to be achieved.

The example of Budapest Metropolitan University clearly shows that conscious personal branding may be taught and learned through programmes operating within the framework of higher education, for example MyBrand. Furthermore, the MyBrand portfolios of the students provide them with an opportunity that may define their future both professionally and personally.

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ПЕРСОНАЛЬНЫЙ БРЕНД В СИСТЕМЕ ВЫСШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ

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Аннотация

Изучена взаимосвязь и взаимодействие между понятиями «персональный бренд» и «высшее образование». До сих пор персональный брендинг не был предметом первостепенной важности в рамках системы высшего образования. Тем не менее, результаты нашего опроса показывают, что изучение специфики персонального брендинга и его внедрение в программу высшего образования может увеличить шансы соискателей и новых участников на рынке труда. В статье обосновывается необходимость изучения особенностей построения персонального бренда в системе образования.

Ключевые слова: *высшее образование; персональный бренд; человеческие ресурсы; маркетинг.*



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