"A STUDY ON CRAFTING YOUR DIGITAL IDENTITY: BEST PRACTICES FOR PERSONAL BRANDING IN THE AGE OF VIRTUAL ERA TOWARDS WORKING PROFESSIONALS"

A .ASHWINI   **Prof. Dr. G P. DINESH**

Department of business administration, VSKUB.   Department of business administration, VSKUB.

Abstract:

In the rapidly evolving virtual era, personal branding has become a crucial aspect for working professionals to establish a strong online presence and navigate the digital landscape successfully. This study aims to explore the best practices for crafting a compelling digital identity that aligns with the professional goals and aspirations of individuals. By employing a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and interviews with working professionals across various industries, the research investigates the strategies, tools, and techniques employed by successful individuals in building and managing their personal brands. The study sheds light on the importance of authenticity, consistency, and strategic positioning in creating a compelling digital persona. Furthermore, it examines the role of social media platforms, online portfolios, and networking platforms in shaping and enhancing personal branding efforts. The findings of this study offer valuable insights and practical recommendations for working professionals seeking to establish and elevate their digital identities, ultimately helping them thrive in the virtual era.

Keywords: Digital identity, Personal branding, virtual era, working professionals, Best practices.

INTRODUCTION:

Personal branding is a marketing effort by people to promote themselves for business success (McNally & Speak 2002; Nessmann, 2010; Rein et al., 2006). It helps others recognize people by presenting themselves through different networks (Henley, 2019; Molyneux & Holton, 2015). Personal branding first appeared in 1981 in the book titled The Battle for Your Mind, describing the beginnings of personal branding of business organizations, occupations, and all people. People have to build their personal brands to help them promote their professional expertise and increase the personal interest preferred by corporate owners or employers (Montoya & Vandehey, 2008). Everyone has a personal brand that does not have to do with age, position, or business. If personal branding principles are applied correctly, any person can be transformed into a unique brand in any field (Rein et al., 2006).

Wikipedia defines Personal Branding as the conscious and intentional effort to create and influence public perception of an individual by positioning them as a authority in their industry, elevating their credibility, and differentiating themselves from the competition, to ultimately advance their career, increase their circle of influence, and have a larger impact. The term is thought to have originated from an article written by **Tom Peters** in 1997.

Today most of the people have an understanding of what personal branding is, but most don't know how it came about. "Personal branding was invented in 1997 by Tom Peters when he said, 'we are the CEOs of our own companies… our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called you' (Shepherd, 2010)." Although some people hire others to create a brand for them, the best branding work will come from the individual themselves. "Personal branding represents a self-centered and highly individualistic approach to self marketing. (Shepherd, 2010)" Tom Peters, author of The Brand Called You, describes how personal branding increasingly popular in the digital age (Labrecque, 2010). Personal branding was once seen as a way for celebrities and politicians to make themselves better known throughout the world, specially using social media and the web. But online tools have given everyone the power to create a brand for themselves and market their own brand to the world (Labrecque, 2010).

What Does It Mean to Have a Personal Brand:

A personal brand is meant to be the virtual you. "Relationship is the key word in defining either a business brand or a personal brand. In both cases the brand recognition is an iterative process with an emotional component that describes the total experience of the relationship" (McNally & Speak, 2004). When a client looks at your brand, they want to have connection and relate to you and your work within a few seconds. "The word 'brand' does not mean the logo or marketing slogan. Rather, it is the repeated experience with the product that develops an emotional connection (McNally & Speak, 2004)". Having a personal brand will distinguish one from other people in the market and allow you to stand out as more of individual. "The key premise of personal branding is that everyone has a personal brand, or what Tom Peters calls 'a sign of self-distinction'…'if you don't brand yourself, someone else will' (Shepherd,2010).

Personal Brand Statement:

A Personal Brand Statement is 1-3 sentences explaining what you do and why you are unique in your field. It sums up your experience, your skills, and your passion so that people can easily understand who you are and what you offer. It should be short and catchy but also contain enough compelling information to convey your value and show your personality.

Personal Brand Statement has four parts:

1. The expertise you provide

2. The endgame benefit of your expertise

3. Specifically, who you provide it for

4. What makes you uniquely qualified

The Competitive Advantage of a Great Personal Brand A personal brand gives you three distinct advantages over the competition: (1) focus, (2) a powerful reserve of goodwill, and (3) the potential for superstar status.

Focus:

A personal brand provides you with a defined focus and point of centralization for all of your business and career development activities, something that most of the competition lacks. The proper focus can be

extraordinarily powerful. A great personal brand should influence just about everything you do: how you dress, communicate what you do, entertain, network, etc. If you are passionate about your personal brand, the intensity of your focus and the intentionality of your actions will propel you to levels you never imagined.

Goodwill:

A great brand also builds up a reserve of goodwill for those times when you do make mistakes. A person's ability to recover from major mistakes typically depends upon how he or she responds to the crisis and the amount of goodwill he or she has to draw upon.

Superstar Status:

The true superstar emerges when extraordinary talent meets powerful charisma. Neither fame nor money makes a superstar. A real superstar is someone who can inspire and mobilize a massive number of people for the purpose of driving positive change.

Think of the greats: Nelson Mandela, Ronald Reagan, and others. Noteworthy individuals possess—or possessed—an abundance of both talent and charisma. Superstars hone their skills through education, practice, and application. They harness their charisma by building a great personal brand.

The ROLE Model Of Personal Branding

Think of personal branding as a blue ocean strategy: a way to move away from competition, into a niche specific to your goals and your skill set. To stand out from the crowd, develop these four components of your personal brand:

Reach

How many people know and are exposed to your personal brand. Think about it not in terms of fame or showing off, but in terms of visibility versus invisibility

Outlook

Your view on industry developments, trends, etc. The things you're interested in learning about

Leadership

The elements of your personal style— your disposition, demeanor, feedback preferences, etc—that indicate the kind of professional you are today, and the kind of leader you want to

Expertise

Your skill set. The experience you have, the results you've achieved, the areas in which you specialize and stand out.

Why Personal Branding Is Important?

In an era where people's attention spans are getting shorter by the minute, the need to make an impression is more important than ever. And the best way to do this is by creating a solid and memorable brand identity.

Unfortunately, most business owners do not realize the importance of personal branding because they think it's a lot of extra work. However, the truth is that if you want to create a successful business, you must create a successful brand. People who know you and your business will trust you more and will buy more products and services from you.

What is Digital Identity?

A digital identity arises organically from the use of personal information on the web and from the shadow data created by the individual's actions online. A digital identity may be a pseudonymous profile linked to the device's IP address, for example, a randomly-generated unique ID. Data points that can help form a digital identity include usernames and passwords, drivers license number, online purchasing history, date of birth, online search activities, medical history, etc. Biometrics, Behavioral, Biographic are the modals that make up a person's identity.

Personal Branding for working professionals through digital identity in virtual era

Only a few decades ago, the arena in which professional behavior was expected and exhibited was clearly defined. However, in recent years, the rapid adoption of social media has significantly blurred the boundary between private and professional life. In response, the concept of "e-professionalism" evolved to describe how traditional professionalism paradigms may apply in digital media. Society is beginning to understand how to harness the potential advantages of social media. However, as social media use further develops into a societal norm, educators should understand the implications that social media presence, or lack thereof, has for individuals entering professional fields.

The Personal Digital Brand

The term "digital brand" was originally associated with corporate marketing efforts. However, the term "personal brand," associated with individuals and developed and popularized in the late 1990s, has been digitized as a result of the ubiquity and user-friendly nature of social media environments like blogs, Facebook,

and Twitter. Differentiating between corporate and digital brands has necessitated the creation of a new term: the "personal digital brand." For purposes of this paper, we define the personal digital brand as a strategic self-marketing effort, crafted via social media platforms, which seeks to exhibit an individual's professional persona.

THE 21ST CENTURY PROFESSIONAL AND THE ONLINE PERSONA

People use social media for a variety of reasons: to connect with family, to become part of a community, to receive support, and even to expand professional reputation. Professionals may have to learn how to manage dual and potentially competing interests with regard to their own social media use. It can be difficult to craft a professional digital brand while simultaneously using social media for personal pleasure or fulfillment. Moreover, in exchange for free use of digital tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Google, etc., users voluntarily comply with their marketing strategy of sharing of information from such sites.

In addition, while educating students about e-professionalism is important, efforts should extend beyond addressing privacy controls and ill-advised Facebook posts to encompass proactive, positive uses for social media. One challenge for the health care professions is harnessing the power of social media to promote the profession and the professional.

Personal digital branding will not benefit every professional. Presently, social media use is considerably more prevalent in younger generations. Individuals who have established professional reputations with years of experience may not need personal digital branding. However, young professionals whose careers will span deep into the digital age should be educated on emerging issues related to digital communications and skills necessary to use social media strategically. They may also need more education on reconciling their personal and professional personas online. The focus of social media education should, therefore, be on fostering in young professionals a "critical sensibility" of how to engage social media as a professional, while recognizing and respecting that strategic social media use will not look the same for every professionals.

The objective of the study is to identify the key components of a strong digital identity in the virtual era and develop best practices for crafting a compelling personal brand online, to explore the impact of different online platforms on personal branding in virtual era, to evaluate the effectiveness of different personal branding strategies in the virtual era and identity best practices for building a successful personal brand, to identify challenges and opportunities for personal branding in the virtual era and provide recommendations for individuals and organizations seeking to build and manage their personal brands in this context.

REVIEW OF THE LITREATURE:

1. **VILANDER, JENNI:** The authors shows in the study that the key points of personal branding needed on social media when aiming to become a social media based entrepreneur. The findings indicate that personal branding is a lengthy process that takes time; however, the effort put into it usually pays off. Authenticity, consistency and presence are the key points to success in social media.

2. **Helen Nneka Eke:** The author Helen seeks to say that due to the need for librarians to embrace the unleashed steps in creating a digital footprint of themselves in the present dynamic information environment and emerging knowledge society, the various online avenues are revealed, which can lead the way for librarians in the journey of making a mark in the digital society. The concept of digital structural change is also raised, in connection with building a digital society.

3. **Cholticha Rodgunphai, Jantima Kheokao:** The authors are suggesting that the study is aimed to analyze the element of reputation factors for the personal branding of journalists in Thailand. Using content analysis and factor analysis the reputation factors were found for personal branding of journalists in Thailand, the factors are professionalism, the ability to use communication technology corresponds, social responsibility in news events corresponds, facilitating good governance requires speaking up, use of experience in developing new reporting. It is identified a news broadcaster's qualifications as having credible personality, knowledge, and news reporting expertise.

4. **Veronica Canning:** Veronica is seeking to say that the aim of the study is to develop our Personal Brand for the career success, it mainly based on four core truths about our Personal Brand and also the steps involved in building our personal brand, it is important to recognize the behavior of our personal brand, to derail our personal brand.

5. **Dottie L. Blyth:** Dottie is representing that the aim of the study is to explore the idea of self-presentation as an integrated characteristic of digital work and to pursue the factors the perception of self-presentation held by digital workers on digital labor platforms, digital workers choosing themselves as a brand, the affordance and constraints that online platforms hold for digital workers in the context of self-branding.

6. **Beata Jones and Carrie Leverenz:** The authors are tells that the study is focused on building a strong personal brand within a framework of digital storylling eportfolios, the digital identity development and

personal brand creation, extending through eportfolio, to provide opportunities for self-exploration that include creating a personal brand.

7. **Mirza Sagdati:** Sagdati is replicating that the study tells us to know the concept of self-branding and its effects on individuals in their professional life. Personal branding is a fast-growing trend which is slowly turning into tool. The suitable ways for DIGGID to position personal branding services and the value it can bring to different target groups.

8. **Katryna M. Johnson:** Katryna is seeking to say that, the study tells us the importance of developing, maintaining and promoting one's personal brand. Providing students with tips on how to best convey their image on social media will help them be successful in building their careers. Many tools are available for students to use in social media to exhibit and monitor their personal brand.

9. **Andy Hines :** Hines makes to analyze this study considers branding more in line with bringing forth self-knowledge and self-expression than the creation of a cultivated or false self. Its about discovering the inner and authentic you and proclaiming it to your clients. Its not about selling "new improved" futures tools. The personal branding is about recognizing who you are and what you do best, and communicating that to clients.

10. **Prof. Avinash Pawar:** Pawar is in the study implicating that, the goal of the paper is to investigate different writing from various orders to address the importance of building up a personal brand. The significance of having a personal brand is to emerge from yourself . by appreciating what a personal brand is and figuring out how to make and look after it, one will see how this brand called you will advantage themselves in the expert world.

Research methodology:

The study is based on primary data and secondary data sources, the research design used a mixed method approach that combines both Exploratory and Descriptive data collection and analysis techniques. The research has been done using non-probability sampling method, in that snowball sampling technique is used to choose the respondents for the study, The primary data collection is done through structured questionnaires using various methods such as surveys, interviews and focus groups and Google forms to collect data directly from individuals who have experience with personal branding in the virtual era, the sample size of this study is relatively small, which limits to the 50 respondents . The secondary data is done on the conduct of

comprehensive review of relevant literature, including academic journals, books, websites and other sources to gather information on the existing research related personal branding. For analysis, the simple statistical tools have been applied like chi square test, percentages, diagrams and charts. This study has been conducted for 6 weeks.

Hypothesis of the study:

H0: There is no significant relationship between the gender of the respondents and their perception of the importance of having a personal brand in the virtual era.

H1: There is a significance relationship between the gender of the respondents and their perception of the importance of having a personal brand in the virtual era.

H0: There is no significant relationship between the gender of the respondents and their perception of the consistent brand image of having a personal brand in the virtual era.

H1: There is a significance relationship between the gender of the respondents and their perception of the consistent brand image of having a personal brand in the virtual era.

Data Analysis:

1. **The profession of the respondent**

   The analysis represents the Profession of the respondents, shows that the 40% (20) respondents are Doctors, 18% (09) respondents are Lawyers, 16% (08) respondents are Teachers, 12% (06) respondents are Business persons and also the accountants/ auditors, 2% (1) respondent is Digital marketer. The percentage of Doctors are more. The study reveals the majority of respondents are Doctors, who are creating the personal branding.

2. **how important do you think it is to have a personal brand in the virtual era**

   The given analysis represents the importance of personal brand in virtual era in respondents point of view, it shows 48% (24) respondents says some what important, 46% (23) respondents tells extremely important, 6% (3) respondents are saying not very important to have a personal brand in virtual era. In the study the majority of respondents tells that the importance of personal brand in the virtual era.

3. **On which social media platforms do you use for personal branding**

The given analysis represents the type of social media platforms used by respondents for personal branding, it shows that 36% (18) respondents says that they use Linkedin for personal branding, 22%(11) respondents says that they use Instagram and Facebook for personal branding, 10%(5) respondents says they use twitter and 10% of people selected others. The study tells that the majority of respondents use Linkedin for personal branding.

4. **how important do you think it is to maintain a consistent brand image across different social media platforms**

The given analysis represents that maintaining a consistent brand image across different social media platforms, it shows that 58% (29) respondents are that extremely important to maintain consistent, 32%(16) respondents are telling that somewhat important to maintain consistent, 10%(5) respondents are telling that not very important to maintain consistent. The study opines that majority of respondents 58% (29) are saying that it is extremely important to maintaining a consistent brand image across different social media platforms.

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Hypothesis testing:

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CHI SQUARE TEST FOR PERCEPTION OF IMPOPRTANCE OF HAVING A PERSONAL BRAND

Null hypothesis (Ho): There is no significant relationship between the gender of the respondents and their perception of the importance of having a personal brand in the virtual era.

Alternative hypothesis (H1): There is a significance relationship between the gender of the respondents and their perception of the importance of having a personal brand in the virtual era.

TABLE SHOWS CHI SQUARE TEST FOR PERCEPTION OF IMPORTANCE OF HAVING A PERSONAL BRAND

Gender * personal brand in the virtual era cross tabulation

GENDER	PERSONAL BRAND IN THE VIRTUAL ERA			Total
	Not very important	Somewhat important	Extremely important	
MALE	4	21	15	40
FEMALE	0	4	6	10
Total	4	25	21	50

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.214[a]	2	.331
Likelihood Ratio	2.929	2	.231
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.154	1	.142
N of Valid Cases	50		

a. 3 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .80.

INTERPRETATION: From the table it is inferred that p value (0.331) is greater than 0.05 we accept null hypothesis(H0). There is no significant relationship between the gender of the respondents and their perception of the importance of having a personal brand in the virtual era.

CHI SQUARE TEST FOR MAINTAING CONSISTENT BRAND IMAGE

Null hypothesis (Ho): There is no significant relationship between the gender of the respondents and their perception of the consistent brand image of having a personal brand in the virtual era.

Alternative hypothesis (H1): There is a significance relationship between the gender of the respondents and their perception of the consistent brand image of having a personal brand in the virtual era.

TABLE SHOWS CHISQUARE TEST FOR MAINTANG CONSISTENT BRAND IMAGE

Gender * consistent brand image in the virtual era cross tabulation

GENDER	CONSISTENT BRAND IMAGE			Total
	NVI	SI	EI	
MALE	4	13	23	40
FEMALE	2	0	8	10
Total	6	13	31	50

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.570[a]	2	.102
Likelihood Ratio	6.999	2	.030
Linear-by-Linear Association	.250	1	.617
N of Valid Cases	50		

a. 3 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.20.

INTERPRETATION: From the table it is inferred that p value (0.102) is greater than 0.05 we accept null hypothesis (H0). There is no significant relationship between the gender of the respondents and their perception of the importance of having a personal brand in the virtual era.

Findings , suggestions and conclusion:

Findings:

1. The study reveals that the majority of respondents are doctors, indicating a significant presence of medical professionals in the sample population. Additionally, it suggests that these doctors are actively working on creating their personal branding.

2. The findings of the study indicate that a majority of the respondents recognize the importance of personal branding in the virtual era for working professionals. According to the survey results, 46% (23) of the respondents considered personal branding to be extremely important, while 48% (24) stated that it was somewhat important. This combined total of 94% reflects a significant majority of the respondents who value the significance of cultivating a personal brand in the virtual landscape.

3. The findings highlight that LinkedIn is the most popular social media platform for personal branding among the respondents, followed by Instagram and Facebook. This suggests that professionals prioritize platforms that cater to their specific needs in terms of professional networking and showcasing their expertise.

4. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents, 58% (29), believe that it is extremely important to maintain a consistent brand image across different social media platforms. This suggests that a significant proportion of professionals recognize the value and impact of consistency in branding across various digital channels.

Suggestions :

1. The study suggests professionals to clearly define their professional goals, values, and expertise. Understand their unique selling points and what sets them apart from others in their field.

2. The study suggests professionals to establish a strong and consistent online presence by creating professional profiles on platforms like LinkedIn, personal websites, and industry-specific platforms. Optimize their profiles with relevant keywords and ensure their online presence, reflects their personal brand.

3. The study suggests professionals to regularly share valuable and engaging content related to their field of expertise. This can include articles, blog posts, videos, and info graphics. Position themselves as a thought leader by offering insights, sharing industry news, and providing valuable tips to their audience.

4. The study endorse to suggest professionals that digital landscape is constantly evolving. Stay updated with the latest trends, tools, and platforms in their industry. To   continuously improve their skills and adapt their personal branding strategy to stay relevant and ahead of the competition.

Conclusion :

This study on crafting your digital identity and best practices for personal branding in the age of the virtual era highlights the critical importance of establishing a strong and authentic online presence for working professionals. The findings underscore that in today's digital landscape, professionals must strategically manage their personal brand to stand out, enhance their career prospects, and effectively navigate the virtual realm.

Crafting a strong personal brand in the virtual era is essential for working professionals seeking career growth and professional success. By following the suggested best practices, individuals can effectively manage their digital identities, establish credibility, expand their network, and stand out in a competitive landscape. It is crucial to adapt to the virtual environment, consistently share valuable content, engage with others, and maintain authenticity throughout the personal branding journey. Ultimately, a well-crafted personal brand can open doors to new opportunities and contribute to long-term professional success.

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