

Communication students' motives for and attitudes towards personal branding

Suvi Joensivu
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ABSTRACT

Faculty Faculty of Humanities	Department Department of Communication
Author Suvi Joensivu	
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<p>Abstract</p> <p>Personal branding, self-branding, and self-promotion have been privileges of celebrities from different fields. Social media has, however, made the processes and techniques of personal branding accessible for a lot broader audience. Indeed, it has been argued that social media channels are nowadays the main arenas for personal branding. Digital communication and social media have created a new form of communication, mass self-communication. Therefore, it seems that social media has simultaneously been the catalyst and enabler for a phenomenon called personal branding. There are also two new generations that have grown up during the information technology revolution and their ways to use technology are drastically different from their parents. These adolescents and young adults feel at home online and spend a lot of time with online activities on a daily basis. Thus, the generations are partly constructing their selves online, some forming online identities.</p> <p>This research aims to clarify the motives driving communication students to brand themselves. Also, they ways in which social media is used in personal branding efforts will be explicated. In addition, the study attempts to form an overview about the attitudes communication students have towards personal branding. The respondent group consists of the communication students from the University of Jyväskylä. Data was gathered with an online survey (N=61).</p> <p>The results indicated that the communication students found personal branding important. Yet, only one third of the students had a personal brand. Seemed, that if students had not branded themselves intentionally, they had difficulties in recognizing their personal brand. Also, it was noted that female and male students differ in the attitudes towards personal branding, and more likely had a male student a personal brand than a female student. The biggest motivator for personal branding was work and succeeding in the working world. Moreover, the students wanted to stand out and gain recognition as professionals. Indeed, the students linked personal branding quite strongly to work and professionalism. Social media was the main channel due to its ease and efficiency. According to the students, important in online personal branding was the quality of the content, activity, following other users, and the visuality of one's profile.</p>	
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<p>Tiivistelmä</p> <p>Henkilöbrändäys ja profiloituminen ovat olleet pitkään eri alojen kuuluisuuksien etuoikeus. Sosiaalinen media on kuitenkin mahdollistanut henkilöbrändäyksen hyvin laajalle yleisölle. Onkin arvioitu, että sosiaalisen median kanavat ovat nykyisin pääasiallisia areenoita henkilöbrändäykselle. Lisäksi digitaalinen viestintä ja sosiaalinen media ovat luoneet uuden viestinnän muodon: yksilöiden joukkoviestinnän. Näin ollen näyttää siltä, että sosiaalinen media on ollut sekä henkilöbrändäys-ilmion aiheuttaja että mahdollistaja. Informaatioteknologian vallankumouksen aikana on kasvanut myös kaksi uutta sukupolvea, joiden tavat käyttää teknologiaa eroavat merkittävästi heidän vanhemmistaan. Nämä nuoret ja nuoret aikuiset ovat kuin kotonaan online-ympäristöissä ja viettävät siellä paljon aikaa päivittäin. Näin ollen, osa näistä nuorista ja nuorista aikuisista on muodostanut itseyttään verkkoympäristöissä ja luoneet itselleen verkkoidentiteetin.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on selvittää, mistä motiiveista viestinnän opiskelijat brändäävät itseään sekä miten he käyttävät siinä sosiaalista mediaa. Lisäksi tarkoituksena on muodostaa kokonaiskäsitys siitä, miten viestinnän opiskelijat suhtautuvat henkilöbrändäykseen yleisesti. Vastaaajaryhmä koostuu Jyväskylän yliopiston viestintätieteiden laitoksen opiskelijoista. Aineisto kerättiin verkkokyselyllä (N=61).</p> <p>Tulokset osoittivat, että viestinnän opiskelijat kokivat henkilöbrändäyksen jokseenkin tärkeäksi. Kuitenkin vain kolmasosalla opiskelijoista oli henkilöbrändi. Jos opiskelija ei ollut brändännyt itseään tietoisesti, hänellä näytti olevan hankaluuksia oman brändinsä tiedostamisessa. Mies- ja naisopiskelijoiden suhtautumisessa henkilöbrändäyksen huomattiin eroavaisuuksia. Lisäksi oli todennäköisempää, että miesopiskelijalla oli henkilöbrändi. Suurin motiivi henkilöbrändäykseen oli työelämä ja menestyminen työmaailmassa. Lisäksi, opiskelijat halusivat tulla huomatuksi ja saada tunnustusta asiantuntijoina. Opiskelijat liittivätkin henkilöbrändäyksen vahvasti työelämään ja ammattilaisuuteen ja asiantuntijuuteen. Sosiaalinen media oli pääasiallinen kanava henkilöbrändäykseen helpoutensa ja tehokkuutensa vuoksi. Tärkeää verkkobrändäyksessä oli opiskelijoiden mukaan sisällön laatu, aktiivisuus, muiden käyttäjien seuraaminen sekä oman profiilin visuaalisuus.</p>	
Asiasanat: Henkilöbrändi, henkilöbrändäys, minä-brändi, asiantuntijabrändi, profiloituminen, yksilöiden joukkoviestintä, verkkoidentiteetti, sosiaalinen media,	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Just a decade or two ago, personal branding used to be a privilege of celebrities, actors and actresses, politicians, and well-known business leaders. Their personal brands were built and maintained mainly through mass media and managed by PR or other agencies. (Shepherd, 2005.) Nowadays, personal branding is accessible almost for everyone thanks to Internet and especially to social media (Shepherd, 2005; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011; Van Dijck, 2013). Besides being accessible, it seems that individuals are even encouraged to brand themselves. For example, when one is looking for a job he or she might be advised to have a website, to write a blog, to have profiles on relevant social networking sites, and to productize his or her know-how and expertise (Marwick, 2010; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011). That is, jobseekers are encouraged to brand themselves in order to get the attention of possible employers (Arruda, 2002; Shepherd, 2005; Merdin, 2011). Moreover, it has been suggested that personal branding has become intentional and acceptable way to present oneself for example on online environments (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011; Van Dijck, 2013).

Personal branding could have been linked to the sciences of business and marketing or to social sciences. However, in the present research the topic will be approached from a perspective where personal branding is linked to a larger alteration that consists of technological changes, evolution of generations, self and identity disclosure tactics on online environments, and finally, to communicational revolution. That is, in the present research personal branding is seen as a part of a wider cultural, societal, and attitudinal change as for example Lair, Sullivan and Cheney (2005, 314) also suggested in their research. In this chapter, which acts as an introduction, the premises of this research will be explained briefly and the research problem will be presented.

During the past decades, our society has faced a revolution that has affected the very basic elements of the social system and the habits and values of individuals. This revolution is called as the information

technology revolution (see e.g. Castells, 2010; Van Dijk, 2012) and the outcome of it is named as an information society or as a network society (Castells, 2010). The catalyst of this revolution was an invention, whose effects are so wide that they are almost impossible to list – the Internet. However, it is hard to argue, which one is the cause and which one the effect. As Castells (2010, 5) has expressed: “technology *is* society, and society cannot be understood or represented without its technological tools”. Network society and Internet have changed, replaced and created completely new functions in many dimensions of society. Two of these functions are particularly essential for this research: work and communication.

It has been stated that the information technology revolution has affected the work and employment in many ways. Not only are there completely new industries and professions, but also the values of employees and the ways they work have changed. (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2005; Castells, 2010.) One noteworthy difference lies in the entrepreneurial attitude of workers, also known as entrepreneurialism (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2005; Marwick, 2010; Castells, 2010). It encourages employees to be independent professionals and to be responsible for their own success (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2005). Moreover, some of the young professionals are not willing to commit to companies. They rather work for themselves (although if working in a company) and improve their own skills. Furthermore, they are continuously on standby and ready to seize a better, nicer or more interesting employment opportunity. (Marvin, 2005; Tapscott, 2009.) Entrepreneurialism is seen as a central factor in the spread of personal branding (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2005). But also has personal branding enabled the rise of the entrepreneurial attitude.

The second theme is communication – more specifically the second communication revolution (Van Dijk, 2012). The second communication revolution has enabled such concepts as digitization, computer-mediated communication and wireless networks to name a few (Castells, 2011; Van Dijk, 2012). In addition to the technological changes and innovations, the second communication revolution has influenced also on people and their behavior. Internet has enabled completely new and interactive ways to communicate and to be in touch with other people, groups and companies. Furthermore, the ways how people communicate about themselves and disclose their self-views and identities have altered (Turkle, 1999; Castells, 2010; Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008). Castells (2011) presented a new form of communication called mass self-communication that takes place between an individual and big, sometimes even global audiences. The reason why mass self-communication has not occurred earlier and is a product of this current time resides in technology. Digital media, Internet and social media have enabled the development of the new form of communication. (Van Dijk 2012.) Therefore, the importance of Internet,

web 2.0, social media and social networking sites (SNSs) and other interactive applications should not be dismissed. Apart from enabling mass self-communication, social media is one of the main channels for personal branding (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011).

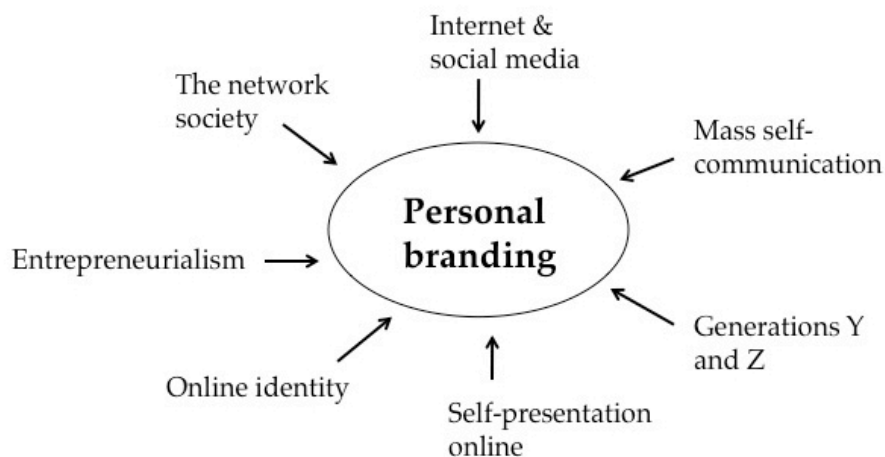


Figure 1. The background influencers of personal branding

These revolutions, evolutions and new technologies have made a phenomenon called personal branding possible in the scale it is known today. In Finland, personal branding started to become the topic of discussion at the end of the 2000s (see e.g. Sounio, 2010). At that time, first books about the topic were published, the pioneers of business, marketing and communication started to tweet, blog and discuss about it. In few years, personal branding started to gain more and more popularity and it has become a very trendy topic. Over the last couple of years, many business bloggers, thought leaders, gurus from various of fields and even companies have written about personal branding (Tolvanen, 2014; Sjöman, 2015; Sirkiä, 2015), given tips how to build a successful personal brand (Eilakaisla; Monster Klubi, 2014) or discussed about how they find the whole concept hideous (Tolvanen, 2013). In addition, news about personal branding has been written (Helsingin Sanomat, 2014; Kauppalehti, 2014; Yle, 2014; Yle, 2015), presentations about the topic are given, and some companies even serve personal branding as a service (see e.g. Piriste Oy; Petra Sippola Consulting Oy). Personal branding has also gotten the attention of academic world since some researches and articles about personal branding have been published also in Finland (see e.g. Iso-Berg, 2015). Based on the somewhat wide visibility personal branding has gained both internationally and locally in Finland, it could be assumed that quite many people are aware of personal branding – either they are practicing it or just being aware of the concept.

From these premises, the aim of this research is to explore the motives behind personal branding and the ways in which social media

channels are used in online personal branding. Furthermore, the general attitudes towards personal branding will be clarified. The target population of this research is communication students. Based on the aforementioned aims, the research problem of this research is: Why communication students brand themselves and how do they perceive personal branding in general. Motives were chosen to be the objective of this research, since there are not many studies that would clarify the motives behind personal branding.

The structure of this research is as follows: First, the conditions where personal branding has become this popular and mainstream will be presented (Chapter 2). This includes discussion about the changes in the society (Chapter 2.1), work (Chapter 2.1.1) and communication (Chapter 2.1.2). In chapter 2.2, the development of the Internet will be shortly described through the three layers of the Internet, web 1.0, web 2.0 and web 3.0 (Chapter 2.2.1). In chapter 2.2.2 the important channels for personal branding, social media and SNSs, will be treated. Thereafter, it will be discussed about individual's role in the network society (Chapter 3). This part of the theory will begin with a discussion about the two youngest generations, Generation Y and Generation Z (Chapters 3.1, 3.1.1, and 3.1.2), and then move on to the formation of self and identity in online environments (Chapters 3.2, 3.2.1, and 3.2.3). Finally, the main theme, personal branding, will be treated (Chapter 3.3). After the theory part, the hypothesis as well as the research questions will be presented in chapter 4.1. Moreover, the research method (Chapter 4.2), data collection (Chapter 4.3) and data analysis (Chapter 4.4) will be treated. That is followed by the presentation of the results of the research (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 compiles to whole research. First, the research questions will be answered and the results compared to previous studies (Chapter 6.1). Thereafter, the reliability and validity of the research are evaluated (Chapter 6.2) and the suggestions for further research given (Chapter 6.3).

2 ALTERATIONS OF THE SOCIETY

Our society is in the middle of an information technology revolution, also known as digital revolution, which can be considered as the most significant shift after the industrial revolution in the 18th century (Castells, 2010; Van Dijk, 2012). This revolution covers many aspects of our society, including energy solutions, medical applications, manufacturing techniques, and transportation (Castells 2010, 29). Technological implementations will only continue their spread to various fields when people invent new ways for exploiting technology. This will lead to a digital world and society, where information technology, our minds, and machines are integrated, and thus, the ways “we are born, we live, we learn, we work, we produce, we consume, we dream, we fight, or we die” will alter. (Castells 2010, 29.) This new social system has been called for example as network society and information society (see e.g. Castells, 2010; Van Dijk, 2012). It has been stated that the technological development alone won’t define the society, and the changes in society won’t determine the technological development. Yet, these two concepts together with “individual inventiveness” and “scientific discovery” form a complex and intertwined ensemble, where every piece influences to others. (Castells 2010, 5.) According to Castells (2010, 5): “technology *is* society, and society cannot be understood or represented without its technological tools”.

Alongside with the societal changes, the everyday devices have developed: computers have shrunk from building-size contraptions to light, powerful and portable laptops; landline telephones have developed to smartphones with Internet access; and completely new devices, such as tablets, have been invented, just to name few examples. Furthermore, Internet has developed from its early version ARPANET to social and interactive platform for many applications, services, and businesses. Internet has ‘shrunk’ the world, made it “globally connected”, and eased communicating and networking. (See e.g. Castells, 2010; Van Dijk 2012, 2.)

In this chapter it will be discussed about this alteration of society from two viewpoints: societal and technological. The societal changes were chosen to be treated first in order to understand the broad context. This is followed by the discussion of one major technological change, the Internet. There is no need to treat neither of these developments very deeply, but rather to understand the societal and the technological circumstances in which the main topic of this research, personal branding, has become popular.

2.1 The new social systems: the information society and the network society

The information technology revolution has spread worldwide faster than any revolution before. This current revolution began in the 1970s and by the early 2000 it had spread almost in the every corner of the globe. (Castells 2010, 32-33; Van Dijk, 2012.) Many names have been given to describe the new society. Information society and network society are somewhat established concepts and therefore used in this chapter (see e.g. Castells, 2010; Van Dijk, 2012).

Networks are important in the contemporary society and Van Dijk (2012, 2) has even described them as the “nervous system of our society”. Network is a collection of interconnected nodes or links (Castells 2011, 19; Van Dijk 2012, 28). Network requires at least three elements and two links; otherwise it is a relationship (Van Dijk 2012, 28). Network is not a new phenomenon. All the existence and life on earth is based on networks. There are for example physical, organic, and neuronal networks. (Castells 2011, 21; Van Dijk, 2012.) However, there are such networks that are typical for the present society: social, technical and media networks. In social networks individuals, groups, organizations or societies are the elements and the interaction between them is the link. By technical networks it is meant for example roads and distribution networks. In the network society, the technical networks could be for example computer and technological networks. Media network is the information and content produced in the technical networks. Media network requires human senders and receivers and the interaction between them is filled with information and symbols. (Van Dijk 2012, 29-30.) According to Van Dijk (2012), the network society consists of these three networks presented above.

Researchers have recognized that information technology revolution influences on our core values (such as social equality, democracy, freedom, and safety) and often this influence is twofold. Some people, especially in the Western countries, may benefit from the information technology, while some geographical areas and some population segments don't have

similar access to the most recent technology. This is one of the main causes of inequality in the contemporary society. (Castells 2010, 32-33; Van Dijk 2012, 3.) Information technologies have increased democracy, since individuals (as citizens, employees or consumers) are able to interact directly with institutions and companies. Then again, many technological solutions are controlled from top to down, which may threaten democracy. (Van Dijk 2012, 3.) Technologies have also increased individual's freedom (e.g. freedom of choice) but simultaneously companies and other parties gather detailed information about them for example based on their online actions. This threatens and decreases the freedom and privacy of individuals. Finally, various technological solutions may raise the sense of security but simultaneously, the network society and its information technology systems are very vulnerable and open to abuse. This may reduce the sense of security at national and individual level. (Van Dijk 2012, 3-4.)

The individual has become a central part of the network society: "the basic unit of the network society has become the individual who is linked by networks" (Van Dijk 2012, 45). Therefore it has been claimed that this era is characterized by individualization where one has to fight for the attention and place. On the other hand, individuals have to prove they add value to each network they are part of. If one fails in this, he or she will be isolated or excluded from the network. (Van Dijk 2012, 46.) The individualization of the network society is a consequence of few things. Van Dijk (2012, 45-46) suggested that individualization is caused by simultaneous scale extension and reduction. This means, that individuals live in the small communities as they have used to, but at the same time the whole world is on hand with just few clicks (Van Dijk 2012, 46). Internet and online environments have made it possible to find information, news, friends, social groups, etc. outside individual's local collectivities. This means that individuals have now the freedom to choose where, when and with whom they spend time and it is not tied to individual's location. A new form of communication, *mass self-communication*, has emerged as a side product of the information technology revolution (Castells, 2011). More about the new ways of communicating and the new form of communication will be discussed in the chapter 2.1.2.

In the following chapter, the transformation of work in the network society will be discussed. Lair, Sullivan and Cheney (2005) suggested in their research that the new working climate is one of the reasons for growing interest towards personal branding.

2.1.1 Work in the network society

The information technology revolution and the network society have also influenced the economic system. In the literature, this new economic order

has been called as the new economy (Castells, 2010), the network economy (Van Dijk, 2012), and the information economy (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2005). In this research, all of these concepts are considered to mean somewhat the same: societal and economical order during and after the information technology revolution. However, the focus here is not in defining the new economy but in discussing how the shift from the industrial world to the information world has affected the work (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney 2005, 315). According to Castells (2010, 226), the information technology revolution has influenced “work processes, and workers, and therefore employment and occupational structure”.

Many factors are in the background of the change that work and employment have faced in the recent decades. For example privatization of public services, emerge of the new industries, development of the new technology, changes in the hierarchy and management styles, relocation of some functions to the low-cost countries, outsourcing, consulting, working in teams, and entrepreneurialism are both the causes and the results of the change (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney 2005, 315; Castells 2010, 282). According to some researchers, the catalyst of the transformation of work is “the individualization of labor in the labor process” (Castells 2010, 282) and “individualization of workers” (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney 2005, 316).

The transformation of work has affected for example on working time, job stability and working location (Castells 2010, 282). Firstly, employees work more hours than they ever have, but they can decide when they work and modify their working hours suitable for their lives (Castells 2010, 282; Van Dijk 2012, 71). Secondly, work has become unstable. In the industrial era, work used to be stable and careers secured. Employees committed to organizations and organizations offered lifetime positions. (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney 2005, 315.) However, this arrangement has changed both from the employee and employer behalf. Part-time work and fixed-term contracts have become common and especially young employees are not willing to commit to companies for more than for few years at a time. (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney 2005, 315; Castells 2010, 282.) Thirdly, employees are no longer tied to one place. Due to the new technology, they can now work almost from anywhere and the successful completion of tasks is not related to one certain location (Castells 2010, 282; Van Dijk 2012, 71).

The new work sets also demands for the workers. Castells (2011, 30) indicated that the work has divided into two categories: “self-programmable labor” also known as knowledge work and “generic labor”. Still, most of the work is done by generic labor, but Castells predicts that this kind of work will eventually be “replaced by machines” (Castells 2011, 30). Therefore, emphasis is on the self-programmable labor and knowledge workers. This kind of work requires different set of skills compared to the generic work, and the emphasis is on the workers’ “capacity to search and recombine information” (Castells 2011, 30). That is,

employees should be able to find information, process it into knowledge and use that knowledge in relevant ways.

Furthermore, employees are encouraged to act, think and view themselves as entrepreneurs. This means that whether one actually is an entrepreneur or not he or she should treat the work in entrepreneurial manners. (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney 2005, 316-318.) Lair, Sullivan and Cheney (2005, 318) stated: “entrepreneurship gradually became to symbolize the aggressive and dedicated performance of employees of established firms as well as capturing an approach to specific projects”. According to them, this transformation in the atmosphere and in the attitudes of workers has created a fertile soil for personal branding (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2005). They stated:

The personal branding movement to some extent relies upon the image of an independent, resourceful, creative, and aggressive professional. This person is expected to be agile in a fluctuating job market, responsive to many opportunities, self-motivating, and self-promoting. (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney 2005, 318.)

2.1.2 Communication in the network society – the second communication revolution

The information technology revolution is closely related to the second communication revolution. In the literature, two communication revolutions have been recognized: the first one took place between the late 19th century and the early 20th century and the second begun in the late 20th century. (See e.g. Van Dijk, 2012.) The first communication revolution is linked to the industrial revolution and masses were in the center of that revolution. Therefore one specific outcome of that revolution was mass communication (e.g. photography, film, typewriter, wireless telegraphy, radio, and television), which aimed to reach masses of receivers or consumers. (Castells, 2011; Van Dijk 2012, 62.) During the Second World War, a leap was taken in computer and satellite technology. Since then, computers and chip technology have developed greatly, which has led us to the second communication revolution. (Van Dijk 2012, 62-63.)

The second communication revolution seems to be an antithesis of the first communication revolution in many ways. First, it has been suggested that the second communication revolution has generated a “flexible network organization” and a “new infrastructure of transportation and communication” (Van Dijk 2012, 63). By this infrastructure it is meant for example computer networks, communication channels and communication capacities, contrary to the very concrete infrastructures of the first communication revolution (e.g. paved roads) (Van Dijk 2012, 63). Secondly, when the first communication revolution concentrated on masses, the second communication revolution concentrates on “segmented and personalized communication” due to the individualized society (Van Dijk 2012, 63).

The personalization of communication has influenced the forms of communication. Formerly, there used to be two recognizable forms of communication: interpersonal communication and mass communication. Interpersonal communication is an interactive form of communication that happens between sender(s) and receiver(s) (one-to-one). Mass communication is mainly one-directional communication from one-to-many with potential to interactivity. (Castells 2011, 54.) However, the current communication revolution and its outcomes, such as Internet, have enabled a third form of communication that Castells (2011, 55) calls “mass self-communication”. This form of communication coincides with the Van Dijk’s (2012) idea of personalized communication. Mass self-communication is mass communication due to its potential to reach massive, even global, audiences through different online channels (Castells 2011, 5). Simultaneously, it is self-communication, since the message is produced by individual and also because “the definition of the potential receiver(s) is self-directed, and the retrieval of specific messages or content from the World Wide Web and electronic communication network is self-selected” (Castells 2011, 55). Furthermore, the content of the mass self-communication is sometimes concentrated on the sender himself or herself. Therefore, Castells (2011, 66) has stated the following: “Thus, to some extent, a significant share of this form of mass self-communication is closer to “electronic autism” than to actual communication”. If interpersonal communication is one-to-one communication and mass communication one-to-many, mass self-communication could be perceived as many-to-many or one individual-to-many communication (Castells 2011, 55). It’s important to notice that none of these forms of communication replaces the others; rather they should be viewed as complementary forms of communication (Castells 2011, 55).

In this chapter it was discussed about the changes in society, in work and employment, and in communication. Additionally, information technology revolution, communication revolution, and digital revolution were treated. After understanding the transformation from industrial era to the network society, technical development will be discussed. In the next chapter the focus will be on the recent development of Internet and on the new communication applications, which are nowadays the main channels for personal branding (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011).

2.2 The development of the Internet

As discussed in the previous chapter, the information technology revolution includes a wide range of digital innovations related for example to micro-electronics, computing, software, and telecommunication (Castells, 2010). Authors point out that only in few

decades we have become very dependent on these new technologies and the youngest generations take digital solutions as granted (Van Dijk, 2012). In this study it is relevant to concentrate on the development of the Internet and web-based communication. In this chapter, the three phases of Internet's development will be covered, web 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0. Thereafter, the outcomes of this development will be presented.

2.2.1 Layers of the Internet – web 1.0, 2.0, 3.0

The story of the Internet begins already in the 1960's, but in the present research it will be concentrated on somewhat recent history of the Internet (Castells 2001, 9). Noteworthy in the development of the Internet, is that it's not a linear continuum. The new phase does not replace the previous one; rather they stratify on each other and include elements from the previous layers. Therefore, it is justified to consider the three webs as layers of the Internet. (Fuchs et al., 2010; Barassi & Treré 2012, 1273; Lipiäinen 2014, 44-45.)

The first technological layer of the Internet was called as web 1.0. In order to function as designed, web 1.0 required only two actors: one that published the content and another one that viewed it. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Bateman, Pike & Butler, 2011; Lipiäinen 2014, 44.) There were no possibilities for these two actors to be in touch with each other or to have interaction through the web channels. Moreover, the viewer had no possibilities to impact or to modify the content. In the era of web 1.0 the web content was stable and meant only for watching, not for participating. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Lipiäinen 2014, 44.)

The next phase in Internet's development is web 2.0, which advances web 1.0 in many ways. Web 2.0 changed user's role and the way they use Internet (Bateman, Pike & Butler, 2011; Lipiäinen 2014, 44). As a matter of fact, it has been argued that the web was originally designed to be like web 2.0 (Barnes et al. 2012, 689): "a platform to facilitate information exchange between users" (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, 60). The term web 2.0 was launched in 2004 to mean the new way in which both software developers and users were able to use the Internet (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, 60-61; Lipiäinen 2014, 44). Web 2.0 can be understood as an umbrella term for all the technologies that make "two-way communication online" possible (Lipiäinen 2014, 44; Constantinides & Fountain, 2007; Marwick, 2010). That is, web 2.0 covers all the technologies that enable social platforms and applications, which in turn enable interaction online. This made web 2.0 a dynamic and "community-centred" version of Internet (Lipiäinen 2014, 44).

Web 2.0 has enabled a whole range of different applications, for example social networking sites, wikis, blogs, podcasts, instant messaging services, discussion forums, chats, online games, different audio, video, and photo sharing platforms, review sites, collaborative projects,

presentation systems and many more (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Barnes et al. 2012, 687; Lipiäinen 2014, 44). Most of these applications share the same basic idea that users are able to interact with each other and to modify, “create, share, and refine content” (Lipiäinen 2014, 44; Constantinides & Fountain 2007, 232-233; Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, 62). It has been suggested that due to these changes, the communication in online environments has been democratized (Marwick, 2010; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, Silvestre 2011, 241). However, this democratization has faced some criticism in the literature as “neo-liberal surveillance, corporate control and the exploitation of users’ immaterial labour” has been seen as dubious results of social web (Barassi & Treré 2012, 1271).

The most recent phase in the development of the Internet is web 3.0. Web 3.0 constructs on the web 2.0 and extends the possibilities it provided (Barassi & Treré, 2012; Lipiäinen 2014, 45). Technology-wise web 3.0 refers to the development of computers and software and their ability to “produce information and make decisions” (Lipiäinen 2014, 45), which enables users’ co-operation (Fuchs et al., 2010). Lipiäinen (2014, 45) even argued that these latest technologies could be seen as “an augmentation of human brainpower”. Therefore, could be stated that characteristic to web 2.0 was users’ interaction and participation whereas web 3.0 is based on users’ co-operation (Fuchs et al., 2010; Barassi & Treré, 2012). Fuchs et al. (2010, 43) argued: “We define Web 1.0 as a tool for cognition, Web 2.0 as a medium for human communication, and Web 3.0 as networked digital technology that supports human co-operation”.

2.2.2 Social media, user generated content and social networking sites

Above, the technical layers of the Internet and the characteristics of the three webs have been described. In this section, it will be concentrated on social media and its application, such as social networking services (SNS). These are closely related to the main topic of this study, since individuals use the channels for self-presentation, self-disclosure, self-promotions, and personal branding by sharing content about themselves (see e.g. Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011; Van Dijck, 2013).

Social media should not be understood only as one channel; it encompasses many sorts of applications and channels whose functioning logic varies (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Lipiäinen 2014, 50). Listing or defining all the existing channels, services and applications is almost impossible so researchers have instead divided them into categories and listed different types of social media. However, due to the constant change of social media and the rise of new applications one should remember that no categorization is permanent (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, 62). For example the following categories were recognized in the literature: collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia), blogs, content communities (e.g. YouTube), social networking communities (e.g. Facebook and LinkedIn), virtual games,

social world, and issue sharing sites (e.g. Twitter) (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, 62; Lipiäinen 2014, 54). There are also applications that combine features from two or more categories. Most, if not all, of the applications and services enable easy content creating, sharing, and modifying, open participation, dialogue, networking, and a “rapid and broad spread of information” (Aula 2010, 43-44).

A term closely related to web 2.0 and social media is user generated content (UGC). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, 61) defined UGC very comprehensively: “the various forms of media content that are publicly available and created by end-users”. Also OECD (OECD, 2007 in Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, 61) has a guideline concerning UGC that consists of three elements. First, the content should be on an open website or social networking site; second, it should be, for the most part, writer’s own text and not copied elsewhere; and finally, it should not be “created with a commercial market context in mind” (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, 61). In conclusion, user generated content means all the content users create online and all the ways users use social media (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, 61).

In the figure 1 it attempted to demonstrate how social media is built on web 2.0 technologies, and how social media needs UGC in order to be social or a media, and UGC needs the arenas social media offers. The figure is based on Kaplan and Haenlein’s (2010) definition:

Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, 61).

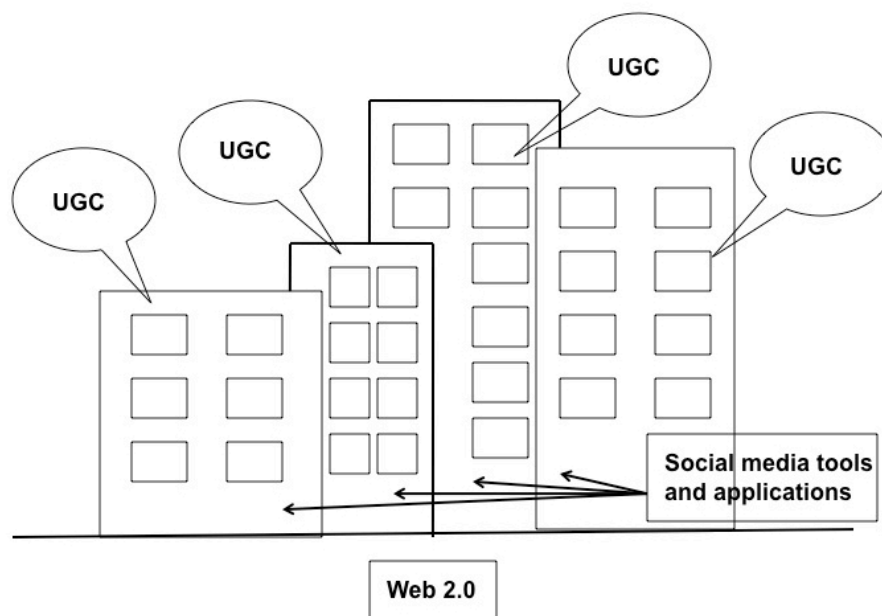


Figure 2. The relations of web 2.0, social media, and UGC

Social networking services (SNSs) are one application of social media and relevant for this research because people often use the channels for online personal branding (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011; Van Dijck, 2013). In just few years, SNSs have gained massive popularity, and there are hundreds of SNSs and millions of SNS users worldwide (Marwick, 2010). One of the best known service, Facebook, had 936 million daily active users and 1.44 billion monthly active users on March 2015. Micro-blogging service Twitter announces to have 302 million monthly active users and 500 million tweets send per day. Rapidly growing picture-sharing service Instagram has 300 million monthly active users and 70 million photos posted per day. Finally, professional social networking service LinkedIn has 364 million registered users. The advent of SNSs might be a result of individualized society and individuals' need for mass self-communication. Boyd and Ellison (2008, 219) suggested that the generalization of SNSs "indicated a shift in the organization and online communities". Indeed, SNSs have claimed to be egocentric networks where individuals concentrate on sharing stories and updates of their lives (Boyd & Ellison 2008, 219).

The main purpose and focus for each SNS varies but the main idea is that users are able to maintain their existing networks or to create new ones based on mutual interests (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). According to Boyd and Ellison (2008) there are three features that separate SNSs from other web-based services. Firstly, users usually have a profile on SNS that is either public, semi-public or private. Secondly, they connect with other users, which forms a list of their 'friends' or connections that is usually visible on user's profile page. Thirdly, users can "view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system". (Boyd & Ellison 2008, 211.) The privacy level of user's profile page depends usually on the nature and atmosphere of the SNS in question. However, most of the social networking sites encourage users to have a self-description, other personal details (such as age, location and interests), list of their connections and a profile picture. (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011; Van Dijck, 2013.)

Growing popularity of SNSs has influenced our media usage and attitudes towards social media and online presence. For example employers' attitudes towards social media usage on working hours was, understandably, bad at first: in many organizations the social networking sites were banned from employees. (Boyd & Ellison, 2008.) However, nowadays the employers have loosened the restrictions, and social media and SNSs have become very essential working tools in many fields, for example for communication and marketing professionals. Furthermore, SNSs have become an inseparable part of our everyday lives and interactions. The line between being online and offline has blurred due to the mobile and other technological devices. (Marvick, 2010.) Some studies have even indicated that teenagers are online all the time (Levickaite,

2010). And it seems that no matter how busy young people (e.g. university students) are, SNSs, such as Facebook, are part of their daily routines (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009).

In this chapter the recent history and development of the Internet was discussed. Furthermore, the three webs, social media and its applications, and user generated content were treated shortly. The following chapters will concentrate on individuals both in the network society and in the online environments. Themes such as Generations Y and Z, construction of the self in online environments, online identity, and finally, personal branding will be discussed.

3 INDIVIDUALS OF THE NETWORK SOCIETY

After discussing about the technological development, societal changes, employment and communication, it will be concentrated on the individuals. In this chapter, it will be first discussed about the two youngest generations that have grown up and are growing up in the network society. For example their habits, values and attitudes towards work will be treated. Thereafter, the focus is on self and identity. It will be discussed, how the self is constructed in online environments and how online identity forms. Finally, the main concept of the research, personal branding, will be defined.

3.1 Young generations of the network society

Generation is an age group, a cohort of people born approximately at the same time or within some year range (Levickaite, 2010). Individuals of one generation share the same significant experiences, trends, habits, cultural events, lifestyles, and values (Levickaite, 2010; Williams & Page, 2011; Parment, 2013) – in a sense, they create a common understanding and memory. These significant events are usually experiences during the late adolescent or early adulthood (McCrinkle, 2002; Parment, 2013). In the current society, four generations can be recognized: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z. The definitions of Baby Boomers and Generation X are already somewhat established contrary to younger generations that have many, sometimes overlapping definitions. In this research the focus will be on younger generations, Generations Y and Z.

Baby Boomers were born after the World War II, approximately between 1946-1964. The name of this generation refers to the increase in birth rates after the war (Levickaite, 2010). Boomers experienced hippie era, sexual revolution, Vietnam War, J. F. Kennedy, and rock 'n' roll. Many

boomers are workaholics (Williams & Page, 2011, Parment, 2013) and still view career as a lifelong position in one company. Boomers are individualistic and optimistic by nature (Williams & Page, 2011). They wanted to see the world so they have traveled more than previous generations (Parment, 2013); this was possible due to better economic situation. Baby Boomers are also the parents of Generation Y. Levickaite (2010, 172) argued that after Baby Boomers, the differences between generations concentrated more on the social aspects and significant experiences than on age. That is, common experiences became more important in defining generations. Furthermore, it seems that the level of adoption of the newest technology separates the generations (Levickaite, 2010).

Generation X (Xers) consists of the people born between the mid-60's and the late 1970's or the early 1980's (see e.g. Ortner, 1998; Loomis, 2000; Rodriguez, Green & Ree, 2003). Xers are independent, initiative and confident by nature and also technology-oriented (Loomis, 2000; Kinnaird, 2002). Their attitude towards working is very different from the previous generations. While Boomers lived for working, Xers work for living. Furthermore, Xers expect work to be flexible and fun. (see e.g. Loomis, 2000; Rodriguez et al., 2003.) They also appreciate when they are involved in decision-making but they don't fit into too hierarchical organization structures (Kinnaird, 2002; Joensuu, 2004). Xers are also more entrepreneurial than the previous generations, which may be a result of uncertain economic conditions when they were young adults (Joensuu, 2004). Significant experiences and conditions for Generation X were, for example, the rise in divorce rates, single parent families, multiculturalism, personal computers, and economic uncertainty (McCrindle 2002, 2). The latest generation – Generation Z – is raised by Generation X.

In the following two chapters the latest generations will be defined. In this research these generations are called as Generation Y and Generation Z, which both are somewhat established terms. However, it has been argued that after Generation X the precise and unanimous definitions for the two latest generations are lacking. In this research, the alphabetical logic will be used but other terms and definitions for the generations will also be presented in the chapters.

3.1.1 Generation Y

Generation Y (Yers) are the young adults born after late 1970's. Yet, there are quite many suggestions for the exact birth years of Yers: 1977-1997 (Tapscott, 2009), 1978-1988 (Martin, 2005), 1978-1989 (Armour, 2005), 1978-1990 (Tulgan, 2009), 1981-2000 (VanMeter, Grisaffe, Chonko & Roberts, 2013), and 1982-2000 (McCrindle, 2002). It seems that a valid estimation is that Yers were born between the late 1970's and the late 1980's or the early

1990's. However, it's the attitudes and values that make Generation Y special, not the years of birth.

Generation Y is not the only name for this generation. Many definitions have been made and each term describes the special features of the generation in some way. For example Millennials, Nexters, Generation WWW, Digital Generation, and Net Generation have been used as a synonym for Generation Y (see e.g. Martin, 2005; Tapscott, 2009; Curtin, Gallicano & Matthews, 2011; VanMeter et al., 2013).

It is said that each generation shares such significant experiences, events, changes, and trends that define and modify the generation's attitudes and values (Tapscott 2009, 16; Williams & Page, 2011). These events can be global, local or personal and they occur usually during childhood, youth and early adulthood (McCrinkle 2002, 2; VanMeter et al. 2013, 95). Significant experiences for Generation Y are for example Internet and social media, 9/11, reality television, globalization and environmentalism (McCrinkle 2002, 2; VanMeter et al 2013, 95; Parment, 2013; Morton, 2002). Parment (2013, 192) also suggested that the uncertain economic situation in the beginning of 1990's has affected Yers mindset: "one has to be one's own manager".

Yers are the mental little sisters and brothers of Generation X (Curtin et al., 2011; Van Meter et al., 2013) but they have also inherited some of their mentality from their parents, Baby Boomers. In the literature, following features are used to describe Generation Y: outspoken, confident, motivated, goal-oriented, and optimistic (Van Meter et al. 2013, 95). Additionally, Yers seem to appreciate freedom, they personalize or modify things suitable for them, they are natural talents in co-operation and they enjoy conversations. Furthermore, Yers demand honesty and loyalty, they want to have fun while working, they respect diversity and multiculturalism, they're familiar with the speed of both development and communications, and finally, innovations are truism for them. (Gorman, Nelson & Glassman 2004, 258; Tapscott 2009, 6-7 & 34-36, Tulgan 2009, 9-10.) Also tolerance and equality seem to be important issues for Yers (Morton, 2002).

Besides all this, there are two major factors that define this generation: Internet and IC technology. Yers grew up together with the developing ICT, which resulted in a very tech-savvy and technology-oriented generation (Gorman, Nelson & Glassman, 2004; Martin, 2005; Tapscott, 2009). It has been suggested that Internet, social media, and technological devices have such an important role in Yers' lives that it has affected their ways of thinking and communicating (Gorman, Nelson & Glassman 2004, 257; Tapscott 2009, 29-30; VanMeter et al., 2013). An example of this is the Internet language Yers have created for text and instant messaging (e.g. CU L8R, BRB, and LOL) (McCrinkle, 2002; Armour, 2002; Martin, 2005; Tapscott, 2009). Internet has also enabled communication to almost all over the world, which again has enabled the

spread of tangible (e.g. trends, fashion and music) and intangible (e.g. values, habits and attitudes) information worldwide (Tapscott 2009, 23; Tulgan 2009, 6). Therefore, it's suggested that for the first time it's possible to talk about a worldwide generation that shares the same values and habits despite of the geographical location (Tapscott 2009, 21).

Generation Y has entered or is just entering to the working world (Tulgan et al. 2013, 94). As employees, they want change and different projects where to learn and experience new things. They also crave for feedback, deadlines, fair managing, and support from their employers. (Armour, 2005; Martin 2005, 40-42.) Yers are natural talents in co-operation and they are at their best when working in teams (Tapscott, 2009; VanMeter et al. 2013, 95), whose members are motivated, committed, and like-minded (Martin, 2005). Yers view their co-workers as sources of information whom to learn new and to gain knowledge (Armour, 2005; Tapscott 2009, 169). Generation Y shares some attitudes towards working with Generation X. Yers, too, appreciate leisure time, hobbies, and family life higher than spending long hours at work (Armour, 2005; Burke, 2009). Therefore, they crave for freedom and flexibility to choose where, when and how to work (Tapscott 2009, 34). Furthermore, Yers are very entrepreneurial, and a sign of this is the number of start-up companies established by young adults during the last couple of years (Martin, 2005). This young generation seems not to be afraid of taking risks and failing (Martin, 2005). From the employer point of view, two things make Generation Y a tricky employee: they don't appreciate hierarchies (see e.g. Curtin, Gallicano & Matthews, 2011; VanMeter et al., 2013) and they are not ready to commit to organizations, since the term 'long-term' means only a year or a couple for them (Martin, 2005). This seems to follow a trend where individuals' careers consist of short-term job, and are therefore called also as project careers.

However, not all definitions of Generation Y are glorious. Authors have argued that this generation might grow to a narcissistic 'me generation' and additionally to be hedonistic, dumb, net addicted, shameless, grasping, and even violent (Tapscott 2009, 3-4; Curtin, Gallicano & Matthews 2011, 1; VanMeter et al., 2013). Additionally, despite of all the virtues of Internet, researchers have claimed that Yers spend almost all of their time online, which may result in poor social skills and unhealthy lifestyles (Tapscott 2009, 3-4, Curtin, Gallicano & Matthews 2011, 1). Also, Yers seem to shamelessly share their personal information online, which may be harmful for them in the future (Tapscott 2009, 7):

They are giving away their personal information on social networks and elsewhere and in doing do are undermining their future privacy. They tell me they don't care; it's all about sharing. -- I think they should wake up, now, and become aware of the extent to which they're sharing parts of themselves that one day they may wish they had kept private. (Tapscott 2009, 7.)

3.1.2 Generation Z

Generation Z (Zers) is the latest generation and it consists of people born between the early or mid-1990's and the late 2000 (Levickaite, 2010; Samodra & Mariani, 2013). Also Generation Z has many other definitions that are mostly related to the Internet or technology. They have been called for example as Generation I, The Internet Generation, iGeneration, Digital Natives, Generation Media, Silent Generation, and Generation XD (see e.g. Montana & Petit 2008, 140; Levickaite 2010, 173; Williams & Page, 2011).

Since most of the Zers are still quite young, the significant events of this generation are still more or less forming. However, some significant experiences have already been recognized. Zers have experienced and will experience for example global terrorism, school violence, and economic uncertainty (Levickaite, 2010; Williams & Page, 2011). Furthermore, Zers' parents got married older and had children later than previous generations, which has been claimed to influence on the shortness of the childhood of Generation Z (Levickaite, 2010; Williams & Page, 2011). Zers are also exposed to marketing in their adolescent and during their teen years, which makes them marketing-savvy (Levickaite, 2010; Williams & Page, 2010).

Zers are responsible, confident and optimistic youngsters by nature. They have high moral and they appreciate authenticity and "realness". (Williams & Page, 2010.) Many believe that Generation Z will be a conservative generation that respects traditional values, such as family and security, but whom social values are liberal (Williams & Page, 2010). Furthermore, Zers are natural multitaskers: they move quickly from one thing to another, but sometimes at the expense of accuracy or quality (Levickaite, 2010). Belonging to a group seems to be important for Generation Z. They value the opinions of their friends and they want to be part of a group – this might affect, for example, on Zers consumption decisions. (Williams & Page, 2010; Samodra & Mariani, 2013.) In addition, it's suggested that Zers' "self-concept is partially determined" by the group they belong to (Williams & Page, 2010).

Researchers have acknowledged that Generation Z has a shorter attention span than Generations X and Y because of the continuous information flood. Zers have also been predicted to become an unhealthy and overweight generation due to the lack of outdoor activity and exercise. Instead of, Zers spend time indoors playing video games or chatting on SNSs. (Posnick-Goodwin, 2010; Williams & Page, 2010.)

Generation Z is the first generation that was born into the digital world (Samodra & Mariani, 2013). This has undoubtedly influenced Zers' mindset and the way they see the world, technology and themselves. It's no wonder that the "technology-consciousness" of Generation Z is said to be high – probably higher than any generation's before – and therefore

they have been called as digital natives or full technological users (Samodra & Mariani 2013, 125; Levickaite 2010, 173). Indeed, most of members of Generation Z use smart phones, tablets and other devices smoothly already at a very early age (Samodra & Mariani 2013, 125). This generation doesn't need help from their parents or other adults for finding information and using devices. Most likely, they understand the functioning logic of the devices even better than their parents. (Williams & Page, 2011.) Levickaite (2010) studied the use of social networking services among the Lithuanian Xers, Yers and Zers. Two noteworthy results arose. First, Zers didn't necessarily demand meeting their online friends physically in the 'real world' whereas Xers found the physical meeting very important. Furthermore, Zers said they're social networking all the time; Yers and Xers did it mostly either every day or every second day. (Levickaite 2010, 180-181.) It seems that Zers' view of communication and social relationships differ from the predecessors and they don't value offline environment over online environment (Levickaite, 2010).

Since only the oldest members of Generation Z have entered the workforce, there is not much knowledge about Zers as employees. However, some assumptions have been given. Generations X and Y are loyal for companies only for few years and they change jobs easily. Generation Z seems to follow the same path as they are said to have an "extremely high level of distrust with corporations" and they are even less loyal to companies (Montana & Petit 2008, 140). Noteworthy is that Zers will probably change the world of work with technology and create such positions and careers that don't even exist yet (Posnick-Goodwin, 2010).

Table 1 sums up the special characteristics of all the four generations. It is based on a table formed by Ethic Resource Center (2009, 2)

Table 1. Differences of the four generations: Generation Z, Generation Y, Generation X and Baby Boomers

	Generation Z	Generation Y	Generation X	Baby Boomers
Other names for the generation	Millennials, Zers, Digital natives	Millennials, Generation WWW, Digital Generation, Net Gen, Yers	Baby Busters, Xers	Boomers, Love Generation, Woodstock Generation
Birth years	The early 1990's – the late 2000	The late 1970's – the late 1980's/early 1990's	1965 – the late 1970's/early 1980's	1946-1964
Significant world events and cultural trends	Internet, electronic devices Instant online Global terrorism,	ICT, Internet, social media, cell phones, cable television Immediate access to information	Rise in divorce rates and single parent families Growth of multiculturalism	Born after end of WW II Economic prosperity Vietnam War, Cold War,

	school violence	and communication worldwide	sm	threat of nuclear war
	Uncertain economy	Globalization	Downsizing of companies and economic uncertainty	TV Rock 'n' Roll
		Environmentalism	Widespread of personal computers	Sexual revolution
		Terrorism, 9/11	AIDS	
Positive characteristics	Full technological users, digital natives	Tech-savvy	Entrepreneurial	Hard-working
	Brave	Natural talents in co-operation and multitasking	Flexile, independent, initiative, confident, creative	Idealistic Committed to harmony
	Marketing-savvy	Appreciate diversity	Familiar with technology	
		Outspoken, motivated, optimistic		
Negative characteristics	Short childhood	Very short attention span	Skeptical, cynical, demanding	Sense of entitlement Workaholics
		Not loyal to companies they are working in	Lazy, indecisive, flighty	Self-centered
		Hedonistic	Don't appreciate authority figures	
		Net addicted		
Attitudes towards work	Still somewhat unknown	Integrating technology into workplace	Want to have fun while working, create good atmosphere	Belief that hard work=long hours
	Might change the working culture with technology	Demand feedback	Appreciate when involved in decision-making	Long-term commitment
	New careers and industries	Project careers		
		Entrepreneurialism		
		Team workers	Less hierarchical, flexible organization structures	
			Project careers	
Attitudes towards online	Consider personal branding as	Consider personal branding as an	Want to maintain their privacy	Want to maintain their privacy

personal branding	an inherent part of social media	inherent part of social media		No natural understanding of online personal branding
	Marketing-savvy			
Authors	Levickaite, 2010; Montana & Petit, 2008; Posnick-Goodwin, 2010; Samodra & Mariani, 2013; Williams & Page, 2011	Armour, 2005; Curtin et al., 2011; Martin, 2005; Parment, 2013; Tapscott, 2009; Tulgan, 2009; Van Meter et al., 2013	Joensuu, 2004; Kinnaird, 2002; Loomis, 2000; McCrindle, 2002; Ortner, 1998; Rodriguez, Green & Ree, 2003	Levickaite, 2010; Parment, 2013; Williams & Page, 2011

3.2 The construction of self and identity in online environments

After the discussion about generations, it is reasonable to concentrate on the individual. In this chapter it will be first defined the concept of self and how it constructs on online environments. Thereafter, online identity will be treated. After understanding how individuals form and construct their self-concepts and identities online it will be concentrated on branded individuals. That is, personal branding efforts both online and offline will be defined and discussed.

3.2.1 The definition of self

Over the decades, researchers have aimed to form a consensus concerning the concept self but there seem not to be such definition all researchers would recognize. However, it is widely agreed that self exists. (Bukowski, in Harter, 2012.) That being said, the purpose of this chapter is not to collect together all the definitions nor to construct a comprehensive definition of self. Rather, the aim is to create a decent understanding of the concept.

A person's self is a concept or a schema that is influenced by others, by social contexts and experiences, by surrounding environments, and by culture (see e.g. Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Banaji & Prentice, 1994; Cross & Madson 1997, 6; Rosenberg & Egbert 2011, 2). It's suggested that for construing, self needs interaction (Mead, 1983). Therefore, self can be considered as a social construction (Harter 1990, 353). In all social situations individuals get signals from others that tell "who they are, who they should be, and how to create an identity" (Cross & Madson 1997, 6). People shape their self-image based on the interaction they have with

others (Rosenberg & Egbert 2011, 2). Then, this constructed image is reflected back to others through the ways people interact (Rosenberg & Egbert 2011, 2). In other words, self takes form in the relations between an individual and the society and between an individual and the others (see e.g. Markus & Kitayama 1991, 226; Mead 1983, 135; Cross & Madson 1997, 6). The self that has constructed in this manner is called as outer self or public self (Markus & Kitayama 1991, 226).

In addition to public self, there is inner or private self that constructs of the thoughts, feelings, dreams, and emotions that only the individual himself or herself is aware of (Markus & Kitayama 1991, 225). Some researchers consider the private self to be equivalent to self-esteem (Harter, 2012). Hallowell (1955, in Markus & Kitayama 1991, 225) noted that all people seem to have an inner self: "People everywhere are likely to develop an understanding of themselves as physically distinct and separable from others". Also Markus and Kitayama (1991, 225) suggested that private self could, at least to some extent, be universal, but public self is influenced by the culture.

A self-construction is therefore a dual process: on the one hand, one has his or her own observations about himself or herself; on the other hand, one listens and senses other people's opinions about him/her and his/her traits (Felson 1981, 64). Harter (1990, 356) argued that reflecting from other's views is an important phase in the process of construing self or a "self-concept". Furthermore, she suggested that people have an ability to describe their personality with abstract features, and called it self-description (Harter 1990, 335). However, it has been stated that people might "evaluate themselves favorably in order to maintain their self-esteem" (Felson 1981, 42). Furthermore, people tend to choose their social environments on the basis that it supports their own self-view – whether that self-view is positive or negative (Banaji & Prentice 1994, 302)

In everyday life, people are involved in many different social environments and situations with different people. Therefore, it has been suggested that a person might have more than one self (James 1890, in Pervin, 2003; Mead, 1983). It has been stated: "Properly seeking, a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image on him in their head" (James 1890, 294 in Pervin 2003, 262); and: "We carry on a whole series of different relationships to different people" (Mead 1983, 142). It has also been suggested that these different selves aren't necessarily separate from each other but just different sides of a self: "rather they can be integrated in some way to form a more unified sense of self" (Pervin 2003, 262).

Self can also develop over time and be malleable (see e.g. Mead, 1983; Tesser & Paulhus 1983, 672; Cross & Madson 1997, 6). Banaji and Prentice (1994, 324-325) have identified two kinds of changes in the self-concept: immediate and permanent. As mentioned, self is linked to social context and if that social context faces a noteworthy change, it can produce an

immediate change in the “working self-concept” (Banaji & Prentice 1994, 324). Furthermore, if there occurs a bigger “life transition” in individual’s life (e.g. becoming a mom or dad for the first time) that may have more enduring effects on one’s self-concept (Banaji & Prentice 1994, 324-325). They argued:

Indeed, existing data suggests that self-concept change occurs primarily, and perhaps only, in response to major changes in role or situational demands. This conclusion again coincides with a view of the self as consistent in its motives and conservative in its strategies, yet ultimately responsive to environmental contingencies. (Banaji & Prentice 1994, 325.)

As mentioned, also culture has a role in the construction process of the self. Therefore, self has also been called as a “cultural creation” (Cross & Madson 1997, 6). According to Cross and Madson (1997, 6) cultural values, ideals, structures, and practices create a framework that determines how individual’s self-view, emotion and motivation take shape. The level of individualism plays important role in cultural differences. Therefore, there are significant differences for example between Western and non-Western cultures. (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Cross & Madson, 1997.)

In conclusion, self is a social construction that has different dimensions. Public self constructs in interaction with the surrounding environment and with other people. Private self constructs of individual’s thoughts, feelings, dreams, and emotions. Private self seems to be somewhat universal whereas culture influences more strongly on the public self. Cultures certainly affect on self, which is why it has been called also as a cultural creation. Essential seems to be the level of individualism. Self-concept may face immediate or permanent changes over time. Immediate change happens if the social context in question changes considerably. Permanent change comes along with bigger “life transitions” (Banaji & Prentice 1994, 324-325).

3.2.2 The construction of self, self-disclosure and self-presentation in online environments

People spend nowadays more and more time online. They do social networking, they chat together with friends and they play games, watch videos, series or movies and share content. (Vazire & Gosling 2004, 123; Back et al. 2010, 327; Labrecque, Markos & Milne 2011, 38.) While spending time online, having profiles on social networking services (SNS), having blogs or personal websites and having interaction with other people online, users inevitably disclose parts of their selves (Papacharissi, 2002; Schau & Gilly, 2003; Vazire & Gosling, 2004; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011). That is, by sharing and disclosing information about themselves people form a new side of self: *a digital self* (see e.g. Zinkhan,

Conchar, Gupta & Geissler 1999, 71; Schau & Gilly 2003, 399; Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008).

In the early phase of the Internet, the major difference between the 'real life' and the 'cyber life' was anonymity: individuals had the possibility to choose to be unidentified online characters (Papacharissi, 2002; Bargh, McKenna & Fitzsimons, 2002; Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011). Nowadays, in the era of social media, the nonymity has somewhat – but not completely – replaced the anonymity (Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008). That is, Internet has become a social and public environment where it's common to be present with own name, recognizable picture and to disclose fairly detailed information about oneself (Whitty, 2008). There is also another reason for the disappearance of online anonymity: offline relationships (e.g. family members) have moved online and online relationships to offline circumstances. These kinds of relationships that move from one environment to other are called *anchored relationships*. In these situations, individual can't be anonymous anymore nor disclose inaccurate information: their offline self and identity will transfer to online environment. (Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin 2008, 1818.) Nevertheless, Internet and social media give individuals more diverse ways for self-disclosure and self-expression than physical world.

Internet offers an environment where many attributes that play a role in physical life lost their importance (Bargh, McKenna, Fitzsimons 2002, 34; Labrecque, Markos & Milne 2011, 38). In online environments one can, for example, choose to hide his or her socioeconomic status, disability, mannerisms, race, personality and even gender (Papacharissi 2002, 348; Bargh, McKenna, Fitzsimons, 2002; Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin 2008, 1817; Labrecque, Markos & Milne 2011, 38; Chen 2013, 333). Hence, Internet enables people to explore such facets of their self that would be difficult or nearly impossible to explore in the physical world or in the social relationships (Bargh, McKenna & Fitzsimons 2002, 33-35; Schau & Gilly, 2003; Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008; Labrecque, Markos & Milne 2011, 38). Once individual decides to set up a blog or have a profile on SNS, one goes through a process where he or she defines himself or herself: what sides to hide and disclose, what content to post, what kind of an impression he or she wants to give to others etc. (Schau & Gilly 2003, 393.) Internet gives individuals the possibility to be creative in expressing their identity and digital self as long as they are aware where the 'true self' ends and the 'over-the-top self' begins (Whitty 2008, 1720).

When individuals are given the opportunity to choose what to tell about them and what sides of their personality to disclose, it would be easy to assume that they would communicate about their "idealized selves" (Back et al. 2010, 372). Indeed, it has been noticed that especially in the profiles of online dating services, users don't tell everything about themselves or they customize the truth because their aim is to attract

others. Typically, users customize their appearance, relationships status, age, weight, socio-economic status, and their interests. (Whitty 2008, 1714.) However, people don't usually think they are lying; they just polish the exterior. Despite of this, it seems that people are concerned about giving false impressions and therefore they are balancing between being truthful and as attractive as possible. (Whitty, 2008; Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008.) Contradictory, individuals don't appreciate if they notice that someone else has been polishing his or her appearance (Whitty, 2008).

Back et al. (2010, 372) argued that in other SNSs than online dating services, falsifying and exaggeration is somewhat harder for two reasons: 1) "OSN [online social networking] profiles include information about one's reputation that is difficult to control (e.g. wall posts)"; 2) "friend provide accountability and subtle feedback on one's profile". That is, users on SNSs tend to display their actual self rather than idealized one because on SNSs the audience consists of friends and acquaintances that control one's behavior (Back et al. 2010, 372). Additionally, it's argued that individuals use Internet in expressing those sides of their selves they most want to be noticed – this proves that they would express their 'true self' (Bargh, McKenna & Fitzsimons, 2002).

If the Internet constitutes a unique opportunity for self-expression, then we would expect a person to use it first and foremost to express those aspects of self that he or she has the strongest need to express – namely, the 'true self': those identity-important and phenomenally real aspects of self no often or easily expressed to others (Bargh, McKenna & Fitzsimons 2002, 34).

The digital self that has constructed in online environment may over time become a part of the whole unified self that combines 'the offline selves' and 'digital selves'. For an individual, the digital identity and self can be just as important as the ones in the physical world. (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011.) Internet's and online environment's importance in the self and identity construction should not be undervalued (Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008). As the youngest generation Gen Z grow up, it may well be that their primary environment for construing self is online.

3.2.3 Online identity

As can be concluded above, online environments undoubtedly affect our inner views of ourselves in many ways and furthermore, they enable new ways for expressing self. For example Turkle (1999, 843) has argued that Internet has effected also on our identities. Individual's identity is a complex construct that combines a personal identity (who I am, what's my personality) and a social identity (what are the social contexts and groups I belong to) (Wood & Smith, 2005). That is, identity comprises of three thoughts: "who we think ourselves to be, how we wish others to perceive us, and how they actually perceive us" (Wood & Smith 2005, 52). One of the major roles of identity is to separate a person from others, so to give

individual a feeling that he or she is a separate unity: “Without identity, people have no way of explaining who they are and how they differ from others” (Kim, Zheng & Gupta 2011, 1761).

Internet, together with the new online culture, has challenged the traditional idea of identity. It has been widely acknowledged that identity has many levels, but now the levels are more concrete due to the different online environments. Furthermore, identity is perceived more flexible and multifaceted unity. (Turkle, 1999; Van Dijck, 2013.) Moreover, the use of Internet has created a new identity level: *online identity*. In previous researches, such concepts as ‘Internet identity’, ‘digital identity’ and ‘online identity’ have been used as synonyms and so they are understood also in this research. However, online identity was chosen to be used in this research. (Kim, Zheng & Gupta, 2011.)

Researchers have recognized many differences between offline and online identities (see e.g. Kim, Zheng & Gupta, 2011). However, some have considered that no differences exist and online identity (or identities) is the same than offline identity (or identities), and the other way around (Millen & Patterson, 2003). In this research offline and online identities are considered as two intertwined and overlapping concepts since sometimes it might be hard to tell when one ends and another begins (Nabeth, 2009). Often in the literature, online and offline identities were discussed together or compared to each other, which indicates that very few researchers consider a possibility of someone having only an online identity.

Internet and social media have made the existence of online identity a reality in a large scale (Nabeth, 2009). Of course, people have shared and disclosed their identities for example via emails before, but this present-day social media culture has given more options for online identity construction. Besides this, development of social media has made online identity a must for individuals so that they are able to communicate and create relationships with others online successfully (Satchell, Shanks, Howard & Murphy 2006, 3). Nabeth (2009, 2) sees online identity as a puzzle, whose pieces consists of 1) the information individuals have shared about themselves for example in online profiles, websites or blogs; 2) individuals actions online; and 3) the information other users have shared about the person (e.g. comments or opinions) or individuals’ online reputation or “online social status”. The formation of an online identity is relatively fast and easy compared to the offline identity, which is a slow process as identity forms over the years. Reason for this is that online identities are not “constrained by the limitations of a physical space”. (Kim, Zhen & Gupta 2011, 1762.)

Individual’s identity has many levels and there are two ways for disclosing them: unconscious and conscious. This holds true also in online context since the platforms enable both intentional and unintentional ways for expressing one’s identity. (Van Dijck, 2013.) Intentional ways for

disclosing one's identity in online environments are for example pictures, personal information in online profiles, descriptions, status updates, blog posts, and followed or liked objects (people, companies, organizations) (Wood & Smith, 2005; Van Dijck, 2013). Characteristic for online environments is that, unlike in offline environments, unintentional ways to express the identity can be emphasized so that they become intentional (Van Dijck, 2013). Furthermore, individuals can consciously influence on the perception others have formed or will form of them (Wood & Smith, 2005; Kim, Zhen & Gupta, 2011; Van Dijck, 2013). Van Dijck (2013) sees the intentional ways for expressing one's identity as conscious self-promotion, which can be understood, in the light of this research, as personal branding.

Many researchers emphasize that although online and offline identities may be different facets of one identity, individuals have the possibility to explore completely new and different identities online. For example, people can experience new personality traits (a shy person offline can be extrovert online), change or hide physical attributes and portray themselves as they wish to be seen, and change or hide such features that would be almost impossible to hide offline (e.g. gender, age, etc.). (See e.g. Turkle, 1999; Kim, Zhen & Gupta 2011, 1761-1762.) Especially for adolescents, whose identities are still forming, Internet offers an incomparable environment for experiencing their identities as they can pretend to be someone else online than they really are (Turkle, 1999; Valkenburg & Peter, 2008). Many youngsters seem to do this at some extent and it may have an "indirect positive effect on adolescents' social competence and online communication" (Valkenburg & Peter 2008, 224).

People seem to maintain the different personas or roles they have in 'real life' also online. One might, for example, want to make a difference between a 'work me' and a 'personal me' in both environments. (Van Dijck, 2013.) But not only have people different personas, they also have a need for "multiple composite self" and this need has emphasized in online environments (Van Dijck 2013, 200). That being said, it's paradoxical that many popular SNSs want to think that people have only one transparent identity they share and disclose online by sharing personal information. This idea springs from the SNSs' and their advertisers' desire to know their users and their habits as well as possible. (Farnham & Churchill, 2011; Van Dijck 2013, 200.) Furthermore, the idea of one transparent and unified identity can be problematic for SNS users when they connect to people from different areas of their lives (e.g. family, work, etc.) but can only form and disclose one kind of an identity in one service (Farnham & Churchill, 2011).

Social media and its applications, especially SNSs are now at the point where they are not just passive storages of users' personal data but tools for "*storytelling* and "*narrative self-presentation*" (Van Dijck 2013, 200). Furthermore, users' way of using SNSs has changed. When SNSs (e.g.

Facebook) were first used in finding friends and connecting, chatting or playing with them, users have now recognized the potential these services have for personal branding and “(professional) *self-promotion*”. (Van Dijck 2013, 200.) Van Dijck (2013, 2002) evaluated that around 2009 a significant change occurred in users’ views towards self-presentation on SNSs and the self became “an object for marketing” since the successful presence online had a potential to realize success also offline. In the following chapter the phenomenon of personal branding will be discussed.

3.3 Branded individuals

Celebrities from different fields (e.g. musicians, actors and politicians) have been branding themselves already for decades (Shepherd, 2005; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011). From that point of view, personal branding is not a new phenomenon. The reason personal branding has been under discussion for the last few years is that Internet and especially social media have enabled personal branding for ‘ordinary people’ in a large scale (see e.g. Shepherd, 2005; Dutta, 2010; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011; Van Dijck, 2013). Although, the phenomenon of personal branding has existed for decades, the term *personal brand* was virtually introduced not until 1997 by Tom Peters (Shepherd, 2005; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011). In this chapter it will be discussed about personal branding in offline and online environments. It seemed that there were two terms in the literature that referred to branding individuals: personal branding and self-branding (see e.g. Shepherd, 2005; Marwick, 2010). In this research, these terms are considered as synonyms. Some researchers argue that there is a slight difference in the meanings (Shepherd, 2005) but no comprehensive analysis or prevalent understanding of the difference was found. However, personal branding was chosen to be used in this research.

3.3.1 Personal branding

A brand distinguishes two things or products from each other (see e.g. O’Guinn et al., 2003 in Chung & Ahn 2013, 169) and it could be stated that personal brand does the same for people. Personal brand helps a person to stand out and to communicate to others what makes him or her special (Arruda, 2002; Shepherd, 2005; Chen, 2013). Furthermore, personal brand is the perception others have of the person (Vitberg 2010, 45). In other words, personal brand could be seen as an image one has managed to create and express of him or her. In this sense, personal brand reminds a public and branded identity, which was discussed in the previous chapter. Shepherd (2005) argued that the same branding techniques could be used

for personal branding that were originally developed for branding products and companies. Actually, some have argued that in the personal branding discourse, individuals are encouraged to perceive themselves as products and “thus people define themselves both *through* brands and *as* brands” (Marwick 2010, 312).

Both in the researches of personal branding and in many personal branding self-help guides, different authors have tried to clarify the process of personal branding. Combining the information from the literature, the following six steps for personal branding process were found: 1) the importance of a personal brand and the process should be accepted; 2) individual’s unique attributes and traits need to be recognized; 3) keywords, statements or brand promises based on these traits should be created; 4) target audience or market should be identified; 5) the brand should then be communicated to this audience through suitable channels and with right messages; and finally, 6) published personal brand should be monitored and measured (see e.g. Arruda, 2002; Shepherd, 2005; Vitberg, 2010; Marwick, 2010; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011; Wetsch, 2012). However, it is important that a personal brand is not a polished advertisement; rather the aim is to express what kind of a person one really is (Van Dijck 2013, 212). Individual’s attributes and personality traits are the key in making one noteworthy in a desired environment or among the desired audience. Very often, but not always, this environment is labor market and the audience (potential) employers or colleagues (Arruda, 2002; Shepherd, 2005; Grant, 2008; Merdin, 2011). The positive attributes that should be highlighted, can be, for example, individual’s strengths, skills, values, achievements, weaknesses, goals or passions – depending on the desired brand (Arruda, 2002; Wetsch, 2012). Authenticity plays an important role in personal branding and therefore, one should be careful with promoting only true and real attributes (Arruda, 2002; Shepherd, 2005). Such situation, where the brand and the reality are not in line, is called as a branding failure, which may harm the brand (Labrecque, Markos & Milne 2011, 39). Bridgen (2011, 64) emphasized that authenticity is more than facts, it requires revealing something about one’s true personality, the ‘personal me’.

Some researchers have suggested that we all have a personal brand, especially in online environments, and the brand is managed either by the brand owner (you) or by someone else (Shepherd, 2005; Grossman, 2011; Van Dijck, 2013). Therefore, it’s suggested that everyone should be aware of their brand in order to be able to manage it (Shepherd, 2005). However, it is still possible that someone else, either intentionally or unintentionally, takes over the brand or temporarily affects it, positively or negatively. Especially this is a risk in online environments since people can’t always control what is said or shared about them (Labrecque, Markos & Milne 2011, 37).

The phrase “brand should be simple, clear and consistent” is considered as a fundamental principle for branding (Shepherd 2005, 595). However, this might be problematic, since individuals have different roles in different situations, as was discussed in the previous chapters. Therefore, Shepherd (2005, 596) rightly asked whether it’s accepted for individual to have multiple brands for different areas of their lives (e.g. work, personal, social, hobby). He then continued that having multiple brands includes a risk of “brand conflict” or “ineffective personal brand management” (Shepherd 2005, 596). The young generations (Gen Y and Gen Z), who have spend and are spending a lot of time online and have formed an online identity or identities, may find it hard to form only one coherent brand and to stick on it (Shepherd 2005, 596). Furthermore, a valid question is, do these young generations have a need to separate ‘the work me’, ‘the personal me’ and ‘the social me’, or do they have just one ‘me’ that operates smoothly in different environments?

Some authors have discussed about genders and personal branding. Lair, Sullivan and Cheney (2005, 328) argued that not only have women and men differing attitudes towards personal branding, but they also face differing expectations in the case of personal branding. According to them (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney 2005, 328), women are expected to work hard, take care of the home, children and husband and to look feminine. Furthermore, some personal branding guides advice women to conceal some of their internal feminine features and highlight the masculine ones. (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney 2005, 328). This gives an impression that some feminine features would be considered somehow insufficient or lower in importance than some masculine features in the context of personal branding. Nevertheless, women are still encouraged and expected to be externally attractive and feminine, while no such expectations are addressed to men (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney 2005, 328; Marwick 2010, 344). Marwick (2010, 345), who focused on tech-scene and personal branding in her research, found out that although women are advised to take advantage of their looks and to share attractive pictures of them, those women “who seemed to care about their appearance ‘too much’ were often viewed as ignorant or stupid”. Moreover, Lair, Sullivan and Cheney (2005, 329) pointed out that in some personal branding self-help guides for women it is even emphasized that the success (either in personal branding or in business) is their responsibility and possible failures are their own fault. This view could easily be criticized.

“The discourse of personal branding, then, carries with it particularly troublesome gender implications by simultaneously suggesting women feel as though they need to brand themselves to get ahead while at the same time making them feel individually responsible for failure, thus effectively placing women in a discursive double bind” (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney 2005, 330).

Besides gender, there are also other determining factors that may affect how different individuals perceive personal branding, such as class, race and age. Gender was chosen to be treated due to the fact that women are the majority in the Finnish communication field. However, also age is an important factor, since most of the respondents most likely belong to the youngest generations, Gen Z and Gen Y. As was discussed in the previous chapters, young generations don't expect or even want to have life-long careers in one company, rather they will most probably build a portfolio career and change workplaces every few years. Authors have argued that in this new working culture the role of personal branding increases, since people have to remain attractive in the eyes of recruiters and potential employers and to be acknowledged (Shepherd, 2005; Bridgen, 2011). Other reason for the increased importance of personal branding is digitalization, which has enabled personal branding for everyone through online applications (Labrecque, Markos & Milne 2011, 38). More about the personal branding processes online will be discussed in the following chapter.

3.3.2 Personal branding in online environments

As mentioned, Internet, and especially social media, has become an important arena for personal branding (see e.g. Vazire & Gosling, 2004; Dutta, 2010; Bridgen, 2011; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011; Van Dijck, 2013). These technologies have enabled personal branding almost for everyone and eased the communicating of and sharing the brand to the networks and audiences. In addition, it seems that personal branding is nowadays done mainly online, it has become intentional, accepted and normal behavior, and furthermore, people have become very skilled in it (Bridgen, 2011; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011; Van Dijck, 2013). Some authors use the term "digital footprint" to describe the traces people leave when acting online (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011). Digital footprint forms of all the actions one does online and it "implicitly brands people" (Labrecque, Markos & Milne 2011, 37). That is, if one has an online history or an online identity, he or she also has a personal brand. Yet, conscious personal branding requires more than only existence online.

Although part of an online personal brand is formed by just being present online, a successful and visible personal brand requires also information sharing and communicating the brand to the target audiences through different channels (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011). The channels can be for example blogs, personal websites, discussion forums, games, microblogging services, and different social networking services (Vazire & Gosling, 2004; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011; Van Dijck, 2013). Active communicating about one's personal brand is also called as brand positioning. In brand positioning one communicates his or her brand identity and his or her best features to the target audience and this

way differentiates him or her from others. In online personal branding process, the brand positioning “occurs through impression management”. (Labrecque, Markos & Milne 2011, 44.)

In online environment the brand is to some extent managed and controlled by the brand owner. That is, one has the possibility to choose what to share and disclose (e.g. pictures, status updates, blog posts, comments, etc.). (Vazire & Gosling, 2004; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011.) A successful online personal branding requires that one maintains steady and true image across the channels (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011; Van Dijck 2013, 211). In order to succeed in this, one goes through a selection process concerning the information one discloses or conceals online (Labrecque, Markos & Milne 2011, 44). According to Labrecque, Markos and Milne’s (2011) research, people are very aware that the information they post online will form and influence their online personal brand, which makes them to consider carefully what information and how they publish and what kind of impression that gives to others.

Due to the social and interactive nature of Internet today, friends, followers, subscribers and other users have a chance or even the power to impact on one’s personal brand through the content (e.g. comments, photos, etc.) they post on one’s channels or on their own channels about the person (Vazire & Gosling, 2004; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011). Harmful content for one’s personal brand are for example inappropriate, dubious, false or vicious status updates, pictures or comments (Dutta, 2010; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011). Friends (or family members) may also harm the brand unintentionally for example if they are not aware what kind of a professional brand one wants to maintain in a certain SNS (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011). However, as Vazire and Gosling (2004) noted, other users are also ‘guards’ for the personal brand. If one has an inauthentic or too polished brand identity, there’s a high risk that other users will expose him or her. Situation like that would obviously be a branding failure. As much as other users have power to harm the brand they have also the power to enhance or reassert it. For example by liking, commenting, sharing, retweeting, recommending, or by other positive actions they can reassert one’s brand, take it to the desired direction or increase brand’s visibility among the right audience.

Authenticity is highly valued also in online personal branding. Personal brand is considered to be authentic when it reveals some facets of person’s real identity (Labrecque, Markos & Milne 2011, 45). That is, personal brand should not be too polished or perfect. Authentic and believable brand is an advantage because it evokes empathy and understanding among people (Bargh, McKenna & Fitzsimons 2002, 35) and furthermore, “enhances message receptivity and relationships quality” (Labrecque, Markos & Milne 2011, 48). By contrast, inauthentic brand may get criticism from others (Labrecque, Markos & Milne 2011, 45). According to some studies, most people tend to be and want to be authentic and

avoid sharing too idealistic image of them (see e.g. Back et al., 2010; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011). However, online environments enable false and idealized personal branding with polished pictures and updates. It's argued that online branding or the brand's segmentation have failed if the brand is too far from the real life identity. (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011.)

Changing life stages may also cause tricky situations for individuals. Social media and SNSs have existed already for such a long time that users have experienced different phases in their lives while using social media. This means that the brands they have had at some point may become inaccurate along with the new situations that can be for example becoming a mother or a father, getting married or entering working life. The brand one has built, for example, during the studying years might not be equal to the desired professional brand, and thus, one has to modify the content of their profiles and their brand positioning to match with the new identity and desired personal brand. Furthermore, if the audience changes or expands the content need to be adjusted for the new audiences. (Labrecque, Markos & Milne 2011, 47-48.)

Different social networking services offer multiple ways for building different personal brands (e.g. personal brand in Facebook and professional brand in LinkedIn or Twitter). That means that individuals have to choose whether to synchronize or to separate these brands. (Van Dijck 2013, 211.) There is an interesting conflict between SNSs' way of thinking individual's identity as a transparent unity and individuals' need for having multiple identities for different areas of their lives (Van Dijck, 2013). However, Labrecque, Markos and Milne (2011, 48-49) pointed out that maintaining multiple online personal brand identities might be difficult or even impossible: "Managing multiple identities and audiences thus is an ongoing process, and our participants found it particularly difficult to brand both their personal life and their work life accurately" and "managing multiple online personas is increasingly difficult, and separating social and professional worlds appears nearly impossible without the proper mechanisms for control". Furthermore, it has been argued whether there even is a need to separate the personal and the professional in the first place. As mentioned, the line between work and leisure time has blurred so it can be sometimes hard to tell when the 'professional-me' ends and the 'personal-me' begins and vice versa. (Bridgen, 2011.)

Why do people brand themselves? The motivations behind personal branding in both online and offline environments are at least as interesting as the actual ways people brand themselves. As mentioned, reasons for the advent of personal branding can be found in the change of work and employment, in the entrepreneurial attitude of young employees as well as in the social media. Van Dijck (2013, 203) suggested that individuals "shape their online identities", in other words brand themselves, for

gaining popularity, recognition and connectedness. Also, he stated that many adults link their professional skills or achievements to their personal brand in order to attract “contacts, contracts, customers, or employers” (Van Dijck 2013, 203). This research aims to clarify the communication students’ motives for personal branding.

4 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the methodology of the research will be presented. First, the hypothesis and the research questions will be presented. Thereafter, the backgrounds of the chosen method will be discussed. Finally, the processes of data collection and data analysis will be explained.

4.1 Hypotheses and research questions

This study attempts to clarify the motives behind personal branding. Also, the purpose is to explicate the ways social media is used in personal branding efforts. Moreover, an understanding about the general attitudes towards personal branding is attempted to form. The target group of this research consists of the communication students from the University of Jyväskylä.

Altogether 10 hypotheses were formed based on the literature and the target group. The first six hypotheses (*H1-H6*) relate to personal branding and hypothesis *H7-H10* concentrate on the personal branding efforts in online environments. The hypotheses of this research are:

H1: Most of the respondents consider personal branding as important.

H2: Female and male respondents perceive personal branding differently.

H3: Personal brand benefits in work context.

H4: Respondents find authenticity important in personal branding.

H5: Respondents brand themselves for work.

H6: Respondents brand themselves for standing out.

H7: Active information sharing is considered to be an important factor in personal branding on SNSs.

H8: Personal brand influences on the content shared online.

H9: Respondents think that other people could harm their personal brand online.

H10: Respondents think that other people could reassert their personal brand online.

The research problem of the research is: Why communication students brand themselves and how do they perceive personal branding in general. Based on the aims of the research and the research problem, the following three research questions were constructed:

RQ1: How do communication students perceive personal branding?

RQ2: What are the motives of communication students for personal branding?

RQ3: How do communication students use social media in their personal branding efforts?

The hypotheses of the research will be tested by quantitative methods, which will be explained more carefully in the next chapter.

4.2 Quantitative research

4.2.1 Quantitative research and the epistemology of the research

The aim of a research, in general, is to increase knowledge about the researched topic. This aim is achieved best when suitable methodology and method in terms of the research problem are chosen. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara, 2014; Nummenmaa, Holopainen & Pulkkinen 2014, 13-15.) There are basically two types of researches: theoretical and empirical. Empirical researches are again divided into quantitative and qualitative researches. (Nummenmaa, Holopainen & Pulkkinen 2014, 15-16.) That is, quantitative research is a specific way to approach the researched topic. The present research is an empirical quantitative research. Quantitative research focuses on numerical measurements and typically attempts to answer the questions such as 'What?', 'Where?', 'How often? (frequency)', 'How much? (quantity)' and what is the correlation or cause-effect relationship of some certain objects.

(Nummenmaa, Holopainen & Pulkkinen 2014, 16.) In addition, a few features arise from the literature that characterize quantitative research. Firstly, in most of the cases, quantitative research is and should be repeatable in order to be reliable (Metsämuuronen 2005, 25; Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 231). Secondly, the researcher should be able to generalize the quantitative results to concern the whole population valid for the research (Gunter 2009, 215 in Jensen, 2009; Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 140). Thirdly, quantitative researches may examine and make the cause-effect relationships visible (Gunter 2009, 211 in Jensen, 2009). Quantitative research has also been called as hypothetico-deductive research, experimental research, and positivistic research (Metsämuuronen 2005, 388; Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 139; Gunter 2009, 230 in Jensen, 2009).

Quantitative and qualitative researches are sometimes seen as opposites, but some suggest it would be more accurate to consider them as complimentary ways to approach the research problem. As mentioned, quantitative research concentrates mainly on numerical factors, whereas qualitative research focuses on meanings. Therefore, in one research both approaches can be exploited for example in different stages of the research or the analysis. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 135-137.) Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara (2014, 137) suggested that numbers and meanings are dependent on each other and measuring always includes features from quantitative and qualitative methods.

In the research process, selections and decisions are made in how the research problem will be approached. These decisions are often philosophical and sometimes unconscious. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 123-129.) Additionally, it should be decided what is the purpose of the research. For example, a research can be an exploratory research, an explanatory research, a descriptive research or a predictive research. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 137-138.) Explanatory research aims to answer the questions 'Why?', 'What are the reasons?' and 'What are the consequences and the cause-effect relationships?' (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 138-139). This particular quantitative research is considered to have an explanatory approach to the research problem. Additionally, this research is deductive since the hypotheses are derived from the theory and tested based on empirical findings (Gunter 2009, 262 in Jensen, 2009; Metsämuuronen 2005, 387-388). The epistemology of this research is postpositivistic, since it is attempted to find as objective view as possible but being conscious that an objective truth about the topic might not exist (Metsämuuronen 2005, 200). Furthermore, this research may be considered as empirical cross-sectional study, since it studies a certain phenomenon at a certain time (Gunter 2009, 217-218 in Jensen, 2009; Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 177-178; Nummenmaa, Holopainen & Pulkkinen 2014, 16). In these types of researches, survey is usually used as a research method (Nummenmaa, Holopainen & Pulkkinen 2014, 16).

4.2.2 Survey as a method

A successfully selected research method completes the theory, hypotheses and methodology of the research (Metsämuuronen 2005, 198). There are three traditional research types in quantitative research: experimental research, survey, and case study (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 191; Nummenmaa, Holopainen & Pulkkinen 2014, 16-17). As mentioned, this research is an empirical quantitative research and thus survey was chosen to be the method of the research. Survey can be conducted by interviewing, by observing or through a questionnaire (Gunter 2009, 215 in Jensen, 2009; Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 193). Main principle is that the data should be collected from the population or from the sample of the population in standardized manners (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 193; Nummenmaa, Holopainen & Pulkkinen 2014, 16-17). It means that the questions should be presented exactly the same ways to each respondent. Thus, it is ensured that the answers remain comparable. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 193.) Through a survey, it's possible to obtain information about respondents' knowledge, habits, behaviors, attitudes, values, views, beliefs, and opinions (Gunter 2009, 214 in Jensen, 2009; Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 197).

Survey has its advantages as well as limitations as a method. The advantages and disadvantages listed below are related to surveys done through questionnaires. One of the biggest advantages is that survey enables collecting an extensive amount of data relatively effortlessly (Gunter 2009, 227 in Jensen, 2009; Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 195). Additionally, through a survey the researcher reaches the respondents in their own natural environments (Gunter 2009, 227 in Jensen, 2009). Hence, the respondents or their answers will not be manipulated, "but are observed as they occurred" (Gunter 2009, 227 in Jensen, 2009). Furthermore, surveys enable that many different areas can be inquired in one questionnaire. When the questionnaire is compiled carefully, it should be relatively fast to code the data into a right form in order to be analyzed. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 195.) Gunter (2009, 227 in Jensen, 2009) reminds that due to the ability to collect an extensive amount of data, the results of the survey may be generalized to concern the whole population.

However, surveys do have also limitations that should be taken into account during the research process. Perhaps the biggest limitation or weakness is if there are too few respondents taking part in the survey, in other words, if the sampling is small (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 195). Although one of survey's advantages is that respondents are in their natural environments, it includes also limitations. This is because the researcher has only a little or no control over the respondents and therefore, there is no certainty how seriously respondents have treated the survey and have they been honest in their answers. (Gunter 2009, 228 in Jensen, 2009; Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 195.) Furthermore, the

researcher can't be sure whether the response options have been relevant for the respondents and have they understood the questions and/or the options correctly (Gunter 2009, 228 in Jensen, 2009; Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 195). Disadvantages are also if the collected data is superficial (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 295) or if the sampling is biased (Gunter 2009, 216 in Jensen, 2009).

There are different ways to conduct a survey and an online survey is one of them. An online survey can be seen as a modern version of a mail survey or mail questionnaire although some differences exist. One way to conduct an online survey is that the researcher sends a questionnaire or a link to the questionnaire to the respondents via email (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 196). Online survey's advantage is that it's relatively fast, easy and cheap way to reach an extensive amount of respondents despite of their geographical location (Gunter 2009, 216 in Jensen, 2009; Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 196). Additionally, respondents can respond to the survey when and where it best suits them. Online survey also guarantees respondents' anonymity. (Gunter 2009, 216 in Jensen, 2009.) The major disadvantages of an online survey are low response rate and uncertainty about how respondents have answered and understood the questionnaire (Gunter 2009, 216 in Jensen, 2009; Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 195-196).

4.3 Data collection

The data of this research was collected from the students of the Department of Communication of the University of Jyväskylä. The students represented the following three subjects: Journalism, Organizational communication and PR, and Speech communication. The students of Intercultural communication were excluded since the subject offers a Master's Degree program only. The data was gathered by using an online survey, which was run for two weeks in February 2015 (17.2.-3.3.). A link to the questionnaire and a covering letter (see appendix 1) was sent to the students via three email lists that reached altogether 436 students. More about the questionnaire will be discussed in the next chapter. In total, 81 students replied the questionnaire but 20 responses had to be removed since either the respondents had not finished the questionnaire or the answers were significantly insufficient. After removing the insufficient answers, the survey had 61 responses and thus, the response rate was 14.0 %.

Some challenges occurred during the process of data collection. Firstly, although the number of the receivers was known, there was no information how many students had seen or opened the email. Secondly, there might have been invalid email addresses among the email lists.

Moreover, there were no ways to ensure the students would surely notice the email or that the email would not get buried under the extensive amount of emails students receive weekly. For these reasons and also to motivate the students to respond, one reminder email was sent during the two-week time period.

As mentioned, sampling is central in quantitative research if the researcher attempts to generalize the results to concern the whole population (Gunter 2009, 215 in Jensen, 2009). In this research, non-probability sampling was used for data collection. Furthermore, the sample was purposive. Online survey's disadvantage is that the sample might be biased for example if there are more responses from one social category than from the others (Gunter 2009, 216 in Jensen, 2009). However, it seemed that the key figures of the sample followed the trend among the population. Such key figures were for example gender distribution and age range. The majority of the respondents were female (83.6 %) and the largest age group was 22-25 years old (52.5 %).

The questionnaire

The questionnaire (see appendix 2) was conducted with SurveyMonkey, which is a web-based service for online surveys. Since the aim was to find out respondents' attitudes, views and motivations, it was considered that the questionnaire should contain open-ended questions, multiple-choice questions as well as structured claims. It is suggested that some specific questions should be inquired through open-ended or multiple-choice questions (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 197). Furthermore, open-ended questions give respondents a possibility to ponder freely their views about the inquired matter without restrictive response options. However, sometimes open-ended questions may generate very diverse data, which is difficult to code. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 201.) Nonetheless, multiple-choice questions and structured claims were also included in the questionnaire because they generate comparable data (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 201). The principles presented above were followed in the questionnaire.

Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara (2014, 203) suggested that the easiest questions should be placed at the beginning of the questionnaire. Therefore, the background questions concerning respondents' age, gender, major and study phase (Q1-Q5) were asked first through multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Furthermore, other general questions and filter questions were also placed at the beginning of the questionnaire. General questions mapped for example respondents' attitudes towards personal branding (Q6) and the importance of different features in personal branding (Q9). The claims of the latter question (Q9) were based on Kaplan and Haenlein's definition (2010, 66-67), except one of the claims was modified to make it more suitable for the context. Likert scale is often

ideal for measuring for example motivations and attitudes (Metsämuuronen 2005, 61). There are usually five to seven alternatives in the Likert scale and the respondents compare their inner thoughts to these given alternatives (Metsämuuronen 2005, 94; Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 200). Thus, in the questions Q6 and Q9 a five-point Likert scale from “not at all important” to “very important” was used. Additionally, it was inquired about the benefits (Q7) and risks (Q8) of personal branding in respondents’ point of view through open-ended questions. The first filter question concerned respondents’ own personal brands (Q10).

Respondents’ motives for personal branding were asked in three questions (Q12-Q14). One of them was an open-ended question (Q12), one a multiple-choice question (Q13) and one was conducted using structured claims (Q14). An open-ended question was considered to be suitable since it provides supplementary information to the structured questions (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 201). Multiple-choice question had also an option for open answer and thus it is also known as semi-structured question (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 199). The question with the structured claims was executed using a five-point Likert scale with a range from “totally disagree” to “totally agree”. The claims of the questions Q13 and Q14 were based on different theories by various authors and they are listed in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2. The background theories for the alternatives of a multiple-choice question (Q13)

Claim	Author(s)
Q13.1 Visibility	Marwick 2010, 314; Van Dijck 2013, 203
Q13.2 Creating a certain image of myself	Marwick 2010, 356; Vitberg 2010, 43; Labrecque, Markos & Milne 2011, 44
Q13.3 Standing out from others	Arruda 2002, 8; Chen 2013, 339;
Q13.4 Achieving an ambition or a goal	Arruda 2002, 9; Marwick 2010, 308
Q13.5 Attention from others	Marwick 2010, 314; Van Dijck 2013, 203; Chen 2013, 340

Table 3. The background theories for the structured claims (Q14)

Claim	Author(s)
Q14.1 It is beneficial	Marwick 2010, 317; Van Dijck 2013, 211
Q14.2 I want to disclose my competence	Arruda 2002, 6; Marwick 2010, 309; Van Dijck 2013, 203

Q14.3 I want to disclose my expertise	Arruda 2002, 6; Marwick 2010, 309; Van Dijck 2013, 203
Q14.4 It's entertaining	Marwick 2010, 347
Q14.5 Others brand too	Van Dijck 2013, 203
Q14.6 I want to get attention	Marwick 2010, 314; Van Dijck 2013, 203; Chen 2013, 340

Also other clarifying questions about respondents' own personal brands were asked through open-ended questions and multiple-choice questions (Q11, Q15-Q16).

Many researchers argue that Internet and especially social media and SNSs are nowadays the main channels for personal branding (see e.g. Marwick, 2010; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011; Van Dijck, 2013). Therefore, social media usage for personal branding was inquired (Q17). This question was also the second filter question of the questionnaire. Later in the questionnaire, it was inquired, what other methods or channels students use for personal branding besides social media (Q29). Students were also asked to tick the SNSs they use for personal branding (Q19) and to put the SNSs in order of importance (Q20). Using a five-point Likert scale (from "not at all important" to "very important") it was measured, which factors students found important in online personal branding (Q21). The claims of the question Q21 were combined from theories that are listed in the Table 4. Furthermore, through semi-structured questions it was inquired what kind of content students usually share (Q22) and does their personal brand affect on the content they share (Q23).

Table 4. The background theories for the structured claims (Q21)

Claim	Author(s)
Q21.1 The amount of the content	Van Dijck 2013, 207
Q21.2 The quality of the content	Dutta 2010, 5; Labrecque, Markos & Milne 2011,44; Van Dijck 2013, 207
Q21.3 Sharing content created by other users	Added as an additional claim for Q21.1 and Q21.2
Q21.4 Dialogue	Dutta 2010, 3
Q21.5 The number of comments	Marwick 2010, 315
Q21.6 The quality of comments	Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011
Q21.7 The number of likes / shares / retweets	Dutta, 2010; Marwick 2010, 315

Q21.8 Visuality of own profile	Marwick 2010, 344; Van Dijck, 2013
Q21.9 Following other users	Dutta 2010, 3; Van Dijck, 2013
Q21.10 The number of friends or followers	Marwick 2010, 315; Dutta 2010, 5, Labrecque, Markos & Milne 2011, 45-46; Van Dijck, 2013
Q21.11 The recognition/quality of friends or followers	Dutta 2010; Marwick 2010, 323-324
Q21.12 Activity and topicality	Dutta, 2010; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011

Labrecque, Markos & Milne (2011, 48) argued that especially in online environments, other people have a possibility to affect individual's brand. The questions Q24-Q27 concentrated on this theme. It was inquired, whether respondents feel that their friends or followers could harm (Q24) or reassert (Q26) their personal brand. These questions were conducted as semi-structured questions since respondents were asked to elaborate their multiple-choice answers if they answered "yes".

Two filter questions were included in the questionnaire. The first of these concerned having a personal brand (Q10). If the respondent answered "no" or "I don't know", he or she was then inquired could he or she imagine having a personal brand in the future (Q18). This question was a combination of a multiple-choice and an open question since a short reasoning for the response was asked. Another filter question was about social media usage in personal branding (Q17). If a respondent answered he or she does not use social media, one was then asked where and how he or she brands himself or herself (Q30). The researcher did not want to narrow down any possible responses, thus, an open-ended question was used.

Before implementing, the questionnaire was tested as is recommended (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 204). Pre-tests were executed in three different phases by two different methods. First, a think-aloud protocol was used. A test respondent went through the questionnaire and verbalized every thought he or she had in mind during doing the questionnaire (Jääskeläinen 2010, 371 in Gambier & van Doorslaer, 2010). This protocol was repeated three times with three different test respondents. After each, the necessary improvements were done. Additionally, two people tested the questionnaire and reported on the technical faults, spelling mistakes or the like. Again, the necessary improvements were done.

4.4 Data analysis

The data was first exported from SurveyMonkey to an Excel file so that it was possible to transform and code the data to a suitable form for IBM SPSS Statistics 22 (SPSS). SPSS was used for all the analyses in this research. The data was then coded, insufficient responses were removed, and finally, the data was entered to SPSS. Thereafter, some measurements were done including means, modes, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages.

The responses of the open-ended questions were analyzed by using qualitative thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is useful for example for analyzing interviews or written responses. Thematic analysis was chosen because the aim was to clarify the themes and topics related to personal branding that arise from the responses of the students. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006.) The responses were read carefully, and the themes were shaped based on them and named descriptively. Naming was done as descriptively as possible in order to keep the analysis clear and transparent. Thereafter, the responses were categorized under the suitable theme(s) using Excel. Once categorizing was completed, the data was coded and entered to SPSS so that frequencies and percentages and other measurements could be executed. Quotations of the responses will be presented as examples and proofs in the following chapters 5.1-5.3 as is suggested (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006).

Due to the small size of the sampling, it was essential to pay attention to the assessment tools and to ensure that they are suitable for small samplings. Moreover, the questionnaire included many semi-structured and open-ended questions instead of structured claims, which also affected on the selection of the analysis methods. Crosstabulation and Chi-Square test was used when compared two respondent groups (e.g. gender or BA and MA students). By crosstabulation, the reliance or difference between variables can be assessed. For the comparison of more than two respondent groups (e.g. age or major), Kruskal-Wallis test was used. Kruskal-Wallis test was chosen due to its suitability for small samplings and ability to execute comparisons between more than two variables. Additionally, Kruskal-Wallis test can be implemented although the sampling would not be normally distributed.

As said, many areas in this questionnaire were discovered using open-ended or semi-structured questions. It affected the analysis since these areas were investigated using thematic analysis. It is acknowledged that the present survey has limitations and issues with both reliability and validity. More about the reliability, validity and limitations will be discussed in the chapter 6.2 Evaluation and limitations of the research.

5 RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of the research are presented. First, the background information of the respondents will be covered. Thereafter, the means and standard deviations are assessed in order to clarify respondents' views about personal branding. Furthermore, the answers of different respondent cohorts will be compared and scrutinized. Later in this chapter, the results about motives and social media use will be presented.

5.1 Respondent background information

Majority of the participants (67 %) were studying at the Master's degree, while 31 % of the respondents were running the Bachelor's degree. One respondent had recently graduated. The major age group among respondents was between 22-25 years old (52 %). The second-largest age group was 26-30 years old (23 %), and the third largest group was 18-21 years old (15 %). Therefore, most of the respondents belonged to the cohorts of Generation Z (67 %) and Generation Y (28 %). The rest of the respondents belonged to the Generation X (5 %). A substantial majority of the respondents were female (84%) and 13 % were male. A few respondents (3 %) didn't want to reveal their gender, and this group is named as 'Other'. The gender distribution of the Finnish communication field explains this result, since the field is fairly female-driven. In 2013, 89 % of the communications practitioners in Finland were female and 11% male (ProCom, 2013).

Table 5. Respondent background information

Demographic factors	Frequency	Valid Percent
Gender		

Male	8	13.1 %
Female	51	83.6 %
Other	2	3.3 %
Total	61	100.0 %
Age		
18-21	9	14.8 %
22-25	32	52.5 %
26-30	14	23.0 %
30-35	3	4.9 %
36-40	2	3.3 %
Over 40	1	1.6 %
Total	61	100.0 %
Degree		
Bachelor's degree	19	31.1 %
Master's degree	41	67.2 %
Graduated	1	1.6 %
Total	61	100.0 %

5.2 Attitudes towards and motives for personal branding

In this chapter the attitudes towards and motives for personal branding will be treated. Furthermore, respondents were separated into respondent groups based in demographic factors in order to find out if there are differences among the groups.

5.2.1 Attitudes towards personal branding

H1: Most of the respondents consider personal branding as important.

Respondents' attitudes towards personal branding were measured by asking how important they consider personal branding to be on a five-point Likert scale. The mean was 3.72 and standard deviation fairly low (sd. 0.819), which suggested that respondents found personal branding somewhat important (see Table 6). In total, 74 % of the respondents considered personal branding to be very important or somewhat important, and 10 % thought personal branding is not at all important or not very important. 16 % of the respondents had a neutral view on the matter (see Table 7).

Table 6. The importance of personal branding (Mean, Mode, Std. Seviation)

N=61	Mean	Mode	Std.
			Deviation
How important do you consider personal branding in general?	3.72	4	.819

Measured on a 5-point Likert scale

Table 7. The importance of personal branding (Frequency, Valid Percent)

The importance of personal branding	Frequency	Valid Percent
Very important	6	9.8 %
Somewhat important	39	63.9 %
Neutral	10	16.4 %
Not very important	5	8.2 %
Not at all important	1	1.6 %

H2: Female and male respondents perceive personal branding differently.

Based on the literature, it was reasonable to observe genders' attitudes towards personal branding. Since there were only two respondents who did not want to reveal their gender they were excluded from this analysis. That is, only female and male respondents' responses were compared. There seemed to be a somewhat significant difference between the attitudes of female and male respondents towards personal branding ($X^2 = 11.572^a$, $df = 4$, $exact\ sig-value^2 = 0.034$, $p-value = 0.034$, $p < 0.05$). As is presented in the Table 8, male respondents considered personal branding to be more important (mean 4.38, sd. 0.518) than female respondents (mean 3.63, sd. 0.774). Furthermore, male respondents were more unanimous in the question, since the standard deviation was fairly low 0.518. The exact p-value was measured using a Chi-Square test.

Table 8. The importance of personal branding, genders (Mean, Std. Deviation)

	Male		Female	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
n=59				
How important do you consider personal branding in general?	4.38	.518	3.63	.774

Measured on a 5-point Likert scale

Furthermore, most of the male respondents considered they do have a personal brand (75 %), whereas the minority of the female respondents (25 %) considered the same (see Table 9). Among the male respondents, only one (13 %) was unsure and (13 %) said he does not have a personal brand. The majority of the female respondents (41 %) were unsure if they have a personal brand or not, and 33 % answered they do not have a personal brand. The Chi-Square test indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between male and female respondents ($X^2 = 7.773^a$, $df = 2$, $exact\ sig\text{-}value^2 = 0.021$, $p\text{-}value = 0.021$, $p < 0.05$). That is, among this respondent group, male students were more likely to brand themselves.

Table 9. Frequency of personal brand (Gender crosstabulation)

Do you have a personal brand?		Male	Female
Yes	Count	6	13
	% within Gender	75.0 %	25.0 %
No	Count	1	17
	% within Gender	12.5 %	33.3 %
Don't know	Count	1	21
	% within Gender	12.5 %	41.2 %

H3: Personal brand benefits in work context.

Based on the literature, personal brand was considered to benefit most in work context. Respondents recognized the following 11 different aspects as benefits of personal branding: work context, expertise and skills, to be known, networking, standing out, influencing, visibility, identity and self-image, to be memorable, credibility, and trust (see Table 10). As expected, the majority of respondents (57 %) thought that personal brand benefits most in work context, for example in job interviews, in getting a job or in building a professional profile:

“With successful personal branding one can get visibility for example in social media, and that, in turn, may bring along for example job offers.” q1

“Personal brand allows one to profile himself/herself suitable for some positions for example with good IT skills or with convincing abilities as a public performer.” q2

However, unlike was expected, networking was only the fourth most common benefit and standing out was the fifth most common. Second largest theme was 'expertise and skills' (31 %). Respondents answered that one can promote his or her skills and expertise or build an image of himself or herself as a professional in some very field. Furthermore, some respondents thought that personal branding may also help one to recognize his or her special know-how and thus to increase the professional self-image.

"Getting a job may get easier. Personal branding also helps one to promote his/her special know-how." q3

"Personal branding may create awareness, clarify the public image, highlight one's professionalism, and increase the value of one's professionalism in the eyes of the customers." q4

Moreover, respondents thought that a benefit of a personal brand is that it can make a person well-known among the audience. Being well-known seemed to have differing meanings among the respondents. For some, it meant being known at the national level (e.g. a politician), others thought that a person could be well-known in his or her field or known for his or her achievements or expertise. Furthermore, respondents had varying views about the benefits of being well-known. Some thought that getting a job may be easier or it has positive contributions on one's businesses, others said one is easier to remember if he or she is well-known.

"Getting a job and raising the profile among communications professionals." q5

"Raising the profile at the national level may positively contribute one's business." q6

Finally, respondents answered that personal branding might benefit in networking (20 %) and in standing out (18 %). Personal brand may, for example, make one to seem as an interesting person to become acquainted with and makes it easier for others to remember you. Additionally, personal brand enables one to stand out from the "gray crowd". On the one hand, one can stand out with a good personal brand so that others (e.g. employer) notice him or her. On the other hand, one can distinguish himself or herself from others with his or her brand and express that there is some unique features in he or she (skills, features, etc.).

"One is easy to remember, networking is easier and also the networks grow faster." q7

“Networking. One gets help, feedback, ideas, and encouragement also outside his/her own social circles. Own expertise and skills become visible and recognized. Thereby one gains confidence to take risks and pursue things in life.” q8

“With help of a personal brand one can stand out from the crowd and remain easier in the minds of people, for example employers.” q9

“To be known and distinguish oneself from the others for example in job-hunting.” q10

Table 10. The benefits of personal branding

N=61		
What are the benefits of personal branding?	Frequency	Percent
Work context	35	57.4 %
Expertise and skills	19	31.1 %
Awareness or recognition	13	21.3 %
Networking	12	19.7 %
Standing out	11	18.0 %
Influencing	6	9.8 %
Visibility	6	9.8 %
Identity and self-image	5	8.2 %
To be memorable	5	8.2 %
Credibility	4	6.6 %
Trust	2	3.3 %

H4: Respondents find authenticity important in personal branding.

Based on the literature there were expected to be two big risks with personal branding, which are: if the brand is not authentic and if the brand is too polished or perfect. These two risks arose from the answers of the respondents but in addition there were eleven recognized risks more. In total, respondents recognized thirteen risks in personal branding (see Table 11). The five most common risks were: falsity and affectation (34 %), difficult to change (20 %), distorted image (18 %), contradictions between the brand and reality (15 %), and too aggressive branding (13 %).

As expected, falsity and affectation were seen very harmful for one's personal brand. According to the respondents, one should be aware that the image one creates is in line with the reality. It means that one should not exaggerate for example own skills. Importance was given to the authenticity and falsity may vitiate a personal brand.

“One can brand himself/herself to be better than he/she really is, or even give a distorted image.” q11

“I think the biggest risks in personal branding are related to giving an untruthful image. When a person wants to show their best, it’s easy to smooth the truth.” q12

Secondly, the respondents thought that once created brand is difficult to change, which might be a risk. The respondents considered that if the brand is unsuccessful in some way, and cannot be changed, it might become a burden for its owner. Then again, such a situation is also possible that one would like to change the brand (e.g. changes in life or radical turnabout in a career) but has troubles with it.

“If the personal brand gets a bad reputation, it’s contrived or unskillful, it may be very hard to shake off.” q13

“If one has a strong specific brand and he/she would like to change it later on, it may be difficult.” q 14

The next three themes are somewhat intertwined: distorted image, contradictions between the brand and reality, and too aggressive branding or branding that has gotten too far. In all of these cases, respondents thought that one has forgotten the “real me” and tried, either on purpose or by mistake, to be someone who he or she isn’t. According to the respondents, one should be especially careful with a professional brand and not overstate one’s skills. Too aggressive branding was also seen as a risk. Respondents were concerned that in this case authenticity suffers and the audience might get tired of the brand. Too aggressive branding is very close to the risk of too polished brand image that arose from the literature.

“By branding one can create an image of himself or herself that is better than the reality or even distorted. Furthermore, too far planned branding jeopardizes authenticity. So, not necessarily do so, but jeopardizes it.” q15

“One risk that comes to my mind is, if branding that goes too far and doesn’t stand for the reality anymore. For example to Instagram, people often post pictures, through which they want to give a certain image of their life, though the reality would be totally different. This can cause many problems, for example if one starts to think his or her life solely through personal branding.” q16

“If the brand doesn’t truly match the skills or is inconsistent with the personality, problems may occur.” q17

Table 11. The risks of personal branding

N=61

What are the risks of personal branding?	Frequency	Percent
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Falsity and affectation	21	34.4 %
Difficult to change	12	19.7 %
Distorted image	11	18.0 %
Contradictions between the brand and reality	9	14.8 %
Too aggressive branding or branding has gotten too far	8	13.1 %
Narrowness	7	11.5 %
Getting pigeonholed	6	9.8 %
Loss of privacy	5	8.2 %
Arrogance	4	6.6 %
Brand evokes strong (negative) emotions	4	6.6 %
Risks with publicity	4	6.6 %
Negative effects on self-esteem, self-image, and identity	3	4.9 %
Unconvincing brand	3	4.9 %

5.2.2 Motives for personal branding

The respondents divided somewhat evenly when it came to having a personal brand or not. Almost one-third of the respondents (31 %) had a personal brand, whereas 33 % said they don't have a personal brand and the majority of the respondents (36 %) could not decide or didn't know if they have a personal brand or not (see Table 12).

Table 12. Respondent's personal brand (Frequency, Valid Percent)

N=61		
Do you have a personal brand?	Frequency	Valid Percent
Has a personal brand	19	31.1 %
Do not have a personal brand	20	32.8 %
Do not know	22	36.1 %
What kinds of brand do you have?		
Professional brand	15	79.0 %
Student's personal brand	15	79.0 %
Personal brand related to hobby/hobbies	7	36.8 %
Something else	3	15.8 %

H5: Respondents brand themselves for work; and H6: Respondents brand themselves for standing out.

Since this research concentrates on students' personal branding process, it is reasonable to continue the analysis with those 19 (31 %) respondents (6 male and 13 female respondents), who considered they had a personal brand. From these 19 respondents it was inquired what kinds of personal brand they so have (see Table 12). Most of the respondents answered they have a professional brand (79 %) or a student's personal brand, which is this research will be called as student brand (79 %).

It was expected that the respondents brand themselves mainly for labor markets and for standing out. According to the results, those respondents who have a brand, brand themselves because they want to disclose their skills (mean 4.53, sd. 0.964) or their expertise (mean 4.42, sd. 0.961) (see Table 13). Furthermore, the respondents answered to brand themselves because it's beneficial (mean 4.11, sd. 0.994). Seemed, that the respondents don't brand themselves for getting attention (mean 2.26, sd. 0.991) nor because others do (mean 2.68). However, the standard deviation for the latter was rather high (sd. 1.336), which indicated that some respondents might brand themselves because of external pressures.

Table 13. Reasons for personal branding (Mean, Mode, Std.Deviation)

n=19			
I brand myself because	Mean	Mode	Std. Deviation
I want to disclose my competence	4.53	5	.964
I want to disclose my expertise	4.42	5	.961
It's beneficial	4.11	4	.994
It's entertaining	3.26	4	1.195
Others brand too	2.68	4	1.336
I want to get attention	2.26	2	.991

Measured on a 5-point Likert scale

More about the reasons for personal branding was enquired with open questions. The answers were read through, categorized and then coded and entered to SPSS (see Table 14). As expected, the most common reason for personal branding seemed to be work (53 %).

"For reasserting my own professional identity, for improving my position in the labor market." q18

"In order to get interesting work positions in the future, and to be known for my competences." q19

The second most common reason was not standing out but to be known or identified (21 %). Other reasons for personal branding were that respondents thought they might benefit from the brand or gain success in

the future (16 %), personal brand helps in networking or in creating connections (16 %) and in standing out (16 %). Furthermore, respondents considered that personal branding helps them to reassert their professional identity (16 %). However, some respondents (16 %) were of the opinion that their personal brand has formed “unconsciously” without any investments for example as a result of one’s presence and actions in social media.

Table 14. Reasons for personal branding (Frequency, Percent)

n=19		
For what reasons you brand yourself?	Frequency	Percent
Work context	10	52.6 %
To be known or identified	4	21.1 %
Benefit or success	3	15.8 %
Networks and connections	3	15.8 %
To stand out	3	15.8 %
Forms by itself or unintentionally	3	15.8 %
Reassert professional identity	3	15.8 %
Visibility to own values or to important issues	2	10.5 %
Creating a specific image	2	10.5 %
Customers	2	10.5 %

However, when asked what the respondents would like to achieve with their personal brands, standing out was among the top goals (79 %). Additionally, the respondents wanted to achieve an ambition or a goal with the help of their brand (79 %) or to create a specific image of them through their brand (68 %). None of the respondents said that they would like to achieve attention from others.

Table 15. What do you want to achieve with your personal brand? (Frequency, Percent)

n=19		
What would you like to achieve with your personal brand?	Frequency	Percent
Standing out from others	15	78.9 %
An ambition or a goal	15	78.9 %
A specific image	13	68.4 %
Visibility	8	42.1 %

Attention from others	0	0 %
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It was hypothesized that the respondents would link personal branding strongly to work context. The previous responses confirm the hypothesis and so does the question about the audiences of respondents' personal brand (see Table 16). The majority of the respondents considered that the main audience for their personal brand is employers or recruiters (37 %). Other commonly mentioned audiences were other students or student organization (26 %), colleagues or work community (26 %), network (21 %) and communications professionals (21 %).

Table 16. Audiences of personal brands (Frequency, Percent)

n=19		
Who or what is the audience of your brand?	Frequency	Percent
Employers and recruiters	7	36.8 %
Other students or student organization	5	26.3 %
Colleagues or work community	5	26.3 %
My networks	4	21.1 %
Communications professionals	4	21.1 %
Field's organizations and companies	2	10.5 %
Professional stakeholders	2	10.5 %
Other organizations, companies, and quarters	2	10.5 %
People with same interests or hobbies	2	10.5 %
All my contacts	2	10.5 %

However, the majority of the respondents were not sure if they have a personal brand (36 %) and one-third considered they don't have one (33 %). These respondents were asked could they imagine having a personal brand in the future (see Table 17). Majority of them answered that they could imagine having a personal brand (46 %). The reasons for having a personal brand in the future were related to work, to career or to their professional identity.

"I wish I get to focus on environmental issues on my work. In that sense, branding could be helpful. However, I don't wish to have a 'tuomasenbuske' brand that exasperates people easily, but rather a purely professional brand that could reinforce my expertise and skills." q20

"I think that when my professional identity develops and knowing my skills becomes concrete, also personal branding eases. Personality matters while

working on communications field, and one can nicely bring out his/her personality by way of a [personal] brand.” q21

Respondents who thought they don't have a brand now and most likely will not have one in the future (13 %) viewed personal branding in quite negative light. They thought personal branding feels false or forced or it's "not their thing". Furthermore, respondents said they wouldn't like to be a topic of a discussion nor get too much attention. Finally, many of them wished they would get a job without a personal brand.

“Even an idea [of having a brand] horrifies me. I wish to get a job without a personal brand, because I find it [personal branding] labored and spurious. Additionally, I'm tired of keeping myself and my views on display in social media all the time.” q22

Some of the respondents were still unsure if they're going to brand themselves in the future (10 %). Interestingly, most of these respondents contemplated the nature of personal brand and came to conclusion that most of us do have a personal brand for example due to the presence in social media. However, they felt that personal branding is not necessary for them at the moment or it didn't belong to their current interests.

“I think that one's being and ways to communicate and interact automatically form a whole, that could be called as a brand. So, all of us have a brand, some just have a stronger and more public brand. I believe that my own “brand” will become stronger along with my expertise and skills, but I also believe that I wouldn't reinforce it by other means. The reputation of my “brand” could then improve along with the professionalism, but I won't do other kind of reputation work.” q23

Table 17. Having a personal brand in the future (Frequency, Percent)

n=42		
Could you imagine having a personal brand in the future	Frequency	Percent
Yes I could	28	66.7 %
No I could not	8	19.0 %
Don't know	6	14.3 %

5.3 Social media in personal branding effort

According to the literature, social media channels and social networking services (SNS) are nowadays the primary channels for personal branding. Majority of the respondents (95 %), who had a personal brand (n=19), said that they use social media channels for their personal branding efforts. Common reasons for using social media channels were that social media is easy to use (44 %), one reaches the audience broadly (22 %), social media is natural channel for personal branding (17 %) and one can demonstrate his or her skills there (17 %).

Table 18. Reasons for using social media channels in personal branding (Frequency, Percent)

n=18		
For what reasons do you use social media channels for personal branding?	Frequency	Percent
It's easy	8	44.4 %
Easy to reach the audience broadly	4	22.2 %
A way to demonstrate one's skills	3	16.7 %
It's a natural channel for personal branding	3	16.7 %
A present-day channel	2	11.1 %
It's free of charge	2	11.1 %
For communicating and networking	2	11.1 %
It's quick	1	5.6 %
Personal branding in social media is conscious	1	5.6 %
I use social media anyway	1	5.6 %
For enhancing visibility	1	5.6 %

Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter are popular and widely-used SNSs in Finland. They also seemed to be the most used SNSs in personal branding for the respondents (see Table 19). It was also inquired what are the most relevant social media channels for respondents' personal brands (see Table 20). Seemed that LinkedIn (9.17) was the most important, Facebook (8.63) the second, Instagram (8.55) the third, and Twitter (8.30) the fourth most important channel.

Table 19. The SNSs used in personal branding

n=18		
What are the services you use for maintaining your personal brand?	Frequency	Percent
Facebook	15	83.3 %
Twitter	15	83.3 %
LinkedIn	15	83.3 %
Instagram	13	72.2 %
Pinterest	4	22.2 %
WhatsApp	4	22.2 %
Tumblr	3	16.7 %
My own blog	3	16.7 %
My own website	2	11.1 %
Other blog	0	0.0 %

Table 20. The most important SNSs in personal branding

n=18	
What are the most important services relative to your personal brand?	Result
LinkedIn	9.17
Facebook	8.63
Instagram	8.55
Twitter	8.30
Pinterest	7.00
WhatsApp	6.50
My own blog	6.50
My own website	5.00
Other blog	3.00

Measured on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is the most important and 10 the last important

H7: Active information sharing is considered to be an important factor in personal branding on SNSs.

Based on the literature, active information sharing was assumed to be important feature in online personal branding. Table 21 shows, which activities or features respondents found important. Information sharing was considered to be important, but importance was given especially to

the quality of the shared information or content (mean 4.83, sd. 0.383). Additionally, activity and topicality were duly found important, since the mean was 4.56 and standard deviation fairly low 0.511. In addition to these two, respondents answered that in online personal branding the visuality of one's profile matters (mean 4.33, sd. 0.594) and also following other users was seen important (mean 4.22, sd. 0.878).

Table 21. Important features in online personal branding (Mean, Mode, Std. Deviation)

n=18			
How important are the following features for your personal branding effort on social media?	Mean	Mode	Std. Deviation
Quality of the content	4.83	5	.383
Activity and topicality	4.56	5	.511
Following other users	4.22	5	.878
Visuality of one's profile	4.33	4	.594
Dialogue	4.00	4	1.029
Sharing content from other users	3.56	4	.922
Number of followers	3.50	4	1.200
Number of shares and likes	3.44	4	1.199
Quantity of the content	3.39	4	.979
Quality of followers	3.39	4	1.145
Number of comments	3.06	4	.998
Quality of comments	3.83	3	1.150

Measured on a 5-point Likert scale

H8: Personal brand affects on the content shared online.

Although the quality of the content is seen important in online personal branding, the majority of the respondents said their personal brand affects on the content they share (83 %) (see Table 22). Mostly, the respondents wanted that the content they share is in line with their brand and wanted image (40 %). Furthermore, respondents said they usually post such content that somehow relates to their professional field (29 %). Personal brand affected also so that the respondents didn't want the content to be offensive or possible to be misinterpret (29 %).

Table 22. Personal brand affects on the content shared online

n=18		
Does your personal brand affect on the content you share?	Frequency	Percent

Yes it does	15	83.3 %
No it doesn't	3	16.7 %
n=15		
How does your brand affect on the content you share?		
	Frequency	Percent
Content is in line with the brand	6	40.0 %
Objective and neutral content	4	28.6 %
Content relates to one's professional field	4	28.6 %
Content is interesting and/or meaningful to oneself	3	20.0 %
Content isn't offensive or possible to be misinterpreted	2	13.3 %
Quantity and quality of the content	1	6.7 %
Content should not be too intimate	1	6.7 %
Emphasis on visuality	1	6.7 %

H9: Respondents think that other people could harm their personal brand online; and H10: Respondents think that other people could reassert their personal brand online.

Some authors considered that other people could influence on one's personal brand either positively or negatively – especially on online context. Therefore, it was assumed that the respondents would recognize the influence other people might have on one's personal brand, whether that influence is positive or negative. Majority of the respondents (72 %) considered that other people couldn't harm their brand (see Table 23). Only 28 % of the respondents thought it might be possible for example by publishing unwanted photos or inappropriate comments.

"Bringing out something I wouldn't have liked to be public. For example, photos in unfavorable situations or inappropriate commenting to posts." q24

Yet, most of the respondents (78 %) answered that other people could reassert their brand online for example with positive comments or by sharing or liking their content (see Table 24). Furthermore, the respondents considered that if a well-known or recognized person is their follower or belongs to their network it adds their credibility and thus reasserts the personal brand.

"By following, liking, commenting the material I have shared/created." q25

"So called "big names" among the followers/friends add credibility." q26

Half of the respondents have either started to follow someone/ added someone on their friendlist or considered of doing so on the grounds that he or she would reassert their personal brand. However, the minority (33 %) of the respondents have removed someone from their followers/friendlist or considered of doing so on the grounds that he or she would harm their brand. These results indicated that the respondents did not see that other people could or would harm their brand. Rather, respondents did invest in their online networks and such added connections that contribute positively to one's image and brand.

Table 23. Other people's negative effects on a personal brand (Frequency, Percent)

n=18		
Do you think that other people could harm your brand online	Frequency	Percent
Yes	5	27.8 %
No	13	72.2 %

n=18		
Have you ever removed someone from your friendlist or followers or unfollowed someone on the grounds that he/she could harm your brand?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	2	11.1 %
I have considered	4	22.2 %
No	12	66.7 %

Table 24. Other people's positive effects on a personal brand (Frequency, Percent)

n=18		
Do you think that other people could reassert your brand online	Frequency	Percent
Yes	14	77.8 %
No	4	22.2 %

n=18		
Have you ever started to follow or friended someone on the grounds that he/she could reassert your brand?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	7	38.9 %
I have considered	2	11.1 %
No	9	50.0 %

6 CONCLUSION

As this research aimed to explain the motives behind online personal branding and the ways in which social media is utilized in this process, the theoretical part clarified the current conditions where personal branding has emerged, while the empirical part focused on the perceptions and motives of communication students towards personal branding.

In the theoretical part of this study, personal branding as a phenomenon was linked to a wider societal change and development. At first, the new social system called network society, digitalization and social media were treated. Thereafter, it was discussed about individual's role in the network society and the two youngest generations were defined. Furthermore, self and identity and their forming processes in online environments were treated. Many scientific disciplines were touched on in the theoretical part, but the approach was tried to remain communicative.

This chapter is the conclusion of the study, which unites the parts of the research. Here, the research questions and research problem will be answered. Moreover, validity, reliability and the limitations of the research will be evaluated, and finally, the suggestions for further research are given. In table 25, an overview of the results for the hypothesis is given together with short explanations.

Table 25. The results for the hypothesis

Hypothesis	Result	Explanation
H1: Most of the respondents consider personal branding as important.	Confirmed	Most of the communication students found persona branding very or somewhat important.

H2: Female and male respondents perceive personal branding differently.	Confirmed	Male respondents' attitudes towards personal branding were more positive and more likely had a male respondent a personal brand.
H3: Personal brand benefits in work context.	Confirmed	Most of the students considered that personal brand benefits in work related situations.
H4: Respondents find authenticity important in personal branding.	Confirmed	Many of the risks of personal branding were related to the lack of authenticity. Thus, authenticity must be perceived important.
H5: Respondents brand themselves for work.	Confirmed	Most of the communication students considered they have a professional brand and work is their primary motive.
H6: Respondents brand themselves for standing out.	Partly confirmed	Seemed that the students sought for professional recognition and attention to their skills and competences.
H7: Active information sharing is considered to be an important factor in personal branding.	Partly confirmed	Most important was the quality of the content then the activity and topicality. Also following other users and visuality were quite important factors.
H8: Personal brand influences on the content shared online	Confirmed	Content should be inline with the brand and also, harmless and neutral yet interesting and relevant.
H9: Respondents think that other people could harm their personal brand online.	Not confirmed	The communication students seemed to think that others wouldn't or couldn't harm their brand online.
H10: Respondents think that other people could reassert their personal brand online.	Confirmed	The students believed and wished that others could reassert their brand by commenting, sharing or liking the content.

6.1 Discussion

RQ1: How do communication students perceive personal branding?

Based on the data, it was concluded that communication students found personal branding important as was hypothesized (*H1*). The fact that personal branding is fairly popular topic at the moment, might be the reason that only one respondent considered personal branding to be not at all important. Therefore, it seemed that the students were quite unanimous about the importance of personal branding. Furthermore, these results may reflect that personal branding is becoming or even has become a somewhat established phenomenon amongst communication students and that they attach moderate importance to it. Although communication students realized the importance of personal branding in general, they seemed to have difficulties in recognizing their own personal brands. This conclusion was based on the result that approximately only one third of the communication students said they have a personal brand. Possible reasons are that the students were afraid or unwilling to admit they have a personal brand. Moreover, it might be that if a student had not built a brand intentionally, he or she may have difficulties in recognizing it. However, as for example Labrecque, Markos and Milne (2011) have noted, our online presence inherently brands us. Thus, most of the communication students most likely had a brand, they just might not be aware of it. More about the communication students' own brands and their motives for branding will be discussed later on.

Despite of the general unanimity, the data of this research confirmed the differing attitudes towards personal branding between male and female communication students. Based on the data, male students seemed to consider personal branding to be more important than female students did. Additionally, the results indicated that it was more likely that a male student had a personal brand than a female student. As already mentioned, the communications field in Finland is fairly female-dominated and this was presumed to have an influence on the attitudes of male and female students. Yet, one could have also assumed that female students would practice personal branding more often compared to male students since male practitioners might stand out with less effort. However, the results indicated the contrary. There might be differences in the attitudes or even in the personalities of female and male communication students or maybe the male students just dare to say aloud that they do brand themselves. The results supported the hypothesis (*H2*) and confirmed the results and thoughts of previous studies about the topic (see e.g. Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2005). However, an accurate hypothesis about the differing attitudes was found troubled to define. In the literature, the discussion was focused on the differing pressures and expectations women and men face in the field of personal branding (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney 2005, 328). Marwick (2010) approached the differences between genders through an idea of entrepreneurialism. She stated, "The branded self is an entrepreneur whose product is a neatly

packaged, performed identity” (Marwick 2010, 298) and “First, it is widely agreed that the trope of the ‘entrepreneur’ is specifically *white* and *male*” (Marwick 2010, 168). These views gave a reason to expect that there might be differences in the attitudes between genders. Unfortunately, the data of this research was insufficient for more in-depth analysis. Therefore, more investigation or perhaps a separate research would be needed.

Based on the literature, it was hypothesized that the students would find personal brand benefitting in work context. The results supported the hypothesis (*H3*) but in addition, the students found a whole range of other matters and situations where a personal brand might be helpful. The number of the matters was somewhat surprising and may indicate that the backgrounds of the students and their attitudes towards personal branding might be varying and affect on their views about personal branding. It was expected correctly that the students would see personal brand benefitting most in work related situations, as for example Shepherd (2005), Merdin (2011) and Van Dijck (2013) have suggested in their researches. The communication students seemed to understand the benefits of a personal brand in a work context from three different viewpoints: 1) personal brand may benefit in job-hunting/recruiting process/getting a job; 2) one may get job opportunities by way of a personal brand; and 3) one may guide his or her career to a desired direction or to profile himself or herself as an expert of some specific field or area. That is, it could be concluded that personal brand benefits individual by way of getting a job or job opportunities and/or giving the possibility to direct one’s career in communication students’ point of view. The results resonated with the literature since it has been suggested that job markets have changed to such direction where employees have to do efforts for getting the desired positions and for standing out from other applicants, and therefore, a professional image is ever more important (Merdin 2011, 104; Van Dijck 2013, 211). Interestingly, almost all of the remaining matters and situations were also quite clearly related to professional brand and even to work context with few exceptions. Despite of this, themes were decided to keep separate instead of merging them under the work-theme. Based on the responses, the communication students seemed to think that personal brand may also be beneficial in branding one’s expertise and in raising one’s profile for example among the colleagues or other work related audiences. Furthermore, according to the communication students, personal brand may help in networking by way of making one to seem a desirable person to become acquainted with. It might also help one to stand out from others, give better conditions for influencing, help one to gain visibility and thus to help a person to be memorable. Finally, personal brand might help one to gain credibility and to grow trust for example among customers or other audiences.

An idea that personal brand may have a positive impacts on one’s identity and self-image, was an exception in the list of personal brand’s

benefits. Some students thought that along with personal branding one could recognize his or her identity and the positive personality traits and highlight them in his or her personal brand. In other words, by branding oneself one notices the positive, nice and likable traits of his or hers, and the traits are brought out in one's personal brand. A person then gets positive feedback of the personal brand or of the traits from others, which might have a positive impact on one's self-image and strengthen the self-esteem. However, it was only a minority of the students who considered that personal brand could influence on one's self-esteem or self-image. Some authors (see e.g. Marwick, 2010; Van Dijck, 2013) have discussed about self-disclosure and identity work in personal branding but personal brand's impacts on self and identity was rarely discussed in the literature.

While some of the students considered personal branding might have positive effects on self-esteem, some expected it to effect self-image, identity and self-esteem negatively. This view was in the minority amongst the students but it was considered to be essential to treat the topic from both perspectives. Some of the communication students saw that due to the growing popularity of personal branding, individuals might feel pressure to brand themselves, sometimes even against their will. This might lead to a situation where individual compares himself or herself to others and that might cause uncertainty or even jealousy and envy. This again may lead to deterioration of self-image and self-esteem. Recently, there has been some discussion about social media behavior on blogs and news (see e.g. Rotonen, 2015; Lehtniemi, 2015; Tolmatsova, 2015; Lehto, 2015). According to this discussion, some social media users want to give a perfect and flawless image of their life through status updates, blog posts, pictures, etc. Undoubtedly, many social media users are aware of this and might even do the same. Yet, some may start to compare their own life to this "perfect" life presented through social media channels. The comparison might evoke jealousy, envy, a feeling of inferiority or other negative thoughts, which may have negative effects on self-esteem. The impacts personal branding might have on self-image, self-esteem and identity – whether they are positive or negative – should be investigated and discussed more.

Based the results, it was concluded that the importance of authenticity in personal branding was recognized also by the communication students, which supported the hypothesis (*H4*). Quite many of the risks students related to personal branding were linked to the lack of authenticity by some means. For example falsity, distorted image, contradictions between the brand and reality, and a too polished brand were seen as risks of a personal brand. The results were in line with the literature, since authenticity was considered as one of the most important feature of a personal brand, in good and bad (see e.g. Shepherd, 2005; Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2005; Marwick, 2010; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011; Van Dijck, 2013). Marwick (2010, 48), for example, named

“reputation, trustworthiness, and authenticity” as the key dimensions in personal branding. Moreover, she pointed out that it seemed to be believed that presenting the authentic self brings success of some kind to the person (Marwick 2010, 354). Also another research argued that being authentic is very central in personal branding since “it captured a slice of the real self” (Labrecque, Markos & Milne 2011, 45). Authenticity was also criticized in the literature and for example Lair, Sullivan and Cheney (2005, 314) have stated: “In short, the personal branding movement positions workers as irrational when they attempt to preserve and promote what they experience as their true or authentic selves. Personal branding, then, promotes a hyper-individuality based on a lack of deeper identity and self-awareness.” Indeed, based on the literature it seemed that authenticity has a significant role in personal branding. It could be stated that the results of this research confirmed the view as the communication students thought that a lack of authenticity is a major risk in personal branding or is even a branding failure (Shepherd, 2005; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011).

RQ2 What are the motives of communication students for personal branding?

As mentioned above, approximately one third of the communication students considered they have a personal brand. In this chapter, students’ motives and reasons for personal branding will be discussed. Moreover, most of those students who said they didn’t have a personal brand at the moment of the survey thought they could imagine having a personal brand sometimes in the future. Also their motives will be discussed later in this chapter.

Based on the results, it seemed that the communication students mainly branded themselves for work and for succeeding in the working world. Many responses confirmed this view and the hypothesis (*H5 Respondents brand themselves for work*). For example, the students were asked to elaborate what kinds of brands they have, and the majority considered they have a professional brand and/or a student brand. Furthermore, disclosing one’s competences and expertise seemed to motivate communication students for personal branding. On the other hand, getting attention and branding only because others brand were not as motivating factors for the students. The students were also asked to tell about their reasons for personal branding in their own words. The responses only strengthened the view that the biggest motivation for personal branding was work and benefitting from the professional brand in the working world in some ways. However, the viewpoints seemed to be varying: some students wanted to reassert their professional identity or increase their professional self-esteem and self-assurance, some wanted to stand out from other applicants and get the desired job position, some again wanted to be known for their competences, and others branded

themselves in order to give a certain image of themselves to (potential) employers. Indeed, the students thought that employers, recruiters, colleagues and work community are the main audiences of their personal brands. To sum up, the results of this research indicated that the communication students did not only link personal branding closely to work and professionalism but the work and branding one's skills seemed to be the major motives for personal branding. Moreover, it seemed that students' motivations were somewhat intrinsic since they wanted to achieve their own goals and ambitions through personal brand not brand themselves because others do or for the desire to get attention from others.

It was also hypothesized that another motive for personal branding would be standing out (*H6*). The communication students had somewhat twofold views towards this claim. Most of the students said that getting attention from others is not very important for them. In addition, only a few students mentioned standing out as their reason for personal branding. Yet, when the communication students were inquired what would they like to achieve with their personal brand, the majority of them answered 'standing out from others'. Despite of the somewhat inconsistent responses a suggestion for a conclusion was drawn after a careful comparison and analysis of the responses. As said, it seemed that the communication students did not brand themselves in order to get attention from others. Yet, they wanted to stand out from the crowd with their personal brands, which might mean that you have to attract someone's attention in order to stand out. Moreover, the communication students mentioned they would like to be recognized and known for their professional skills and remembered by the recruiters, which was the second most common reason for personal branding. Based on the data and the responses of the students, could be suggested that the hypothesis (*H6 Respondents brand themselves for standing out*) was partly correct. Seemed that the communication students might not want to stand out because of who they are as persons but rather as professionals and through their skills. The responses also implied that students might like to get attention for and highlight their competences more than their personality traits. If this were true, it would be justified to consider how *personal* a personal brand actually is for communication students – or is it rather a professional image of oneself. However, standing out seemed to be relatively important to communication students, especially in work related situations. Yet, the results indicated that the students probably sought more for professional recognition than just sheer attention.

Two third of the communication students considered that they either did not have a brand or they were not quite sure about the matter. The majority of this cohort said, however, that they could imagine having a personal brand in the future. The biggest reason for them was also work, which indicated that the students would prefer having a professional brand. Yet, they mentioned that in order to have such a brand their

professional identity should still shape up or strengthen. Could be concluded that those of the students who had this view, were still unsure about their professional identity or 'work me' and their competences, which is more than understandable, for example, in a situation where one has not yet worked in the industry. Some students also considered that a personal brand would be necessary in the communications field since it is appreciated by the recruiters and other practitioners. This view might indicate that some of the communication students may feel a slight pressure for professional branding and think that the field expects them to have a brand or that succeeding in the field calls for a personal or a professional brand.

Some of the communication students were still unsure whether they want to have a personal brand in the future. Interestingly, some of these students admitted that one's behavior both online and offline comprises an image that could also be considered as a brand. Following the same logic, also the students of this respondent group would have a personal brand. Yet, the students still thought that personal branding is also conscious since, in their opinion, some may be more talented and motivated in branding themselves and getting attention for their brand. The responses indicated that these students saw personal branding as a combination of unconscious and conscious actions, which is in line with the claim by Labrecque, Markos and Milne (2011, 48): "The evidence herein supports the idea that people both explicitly and implicitly brand themselves using content they place online". The students admitted that one's behavior implicitly forms an entity that can be called as a brand. But making the personal brand striking asks for more conscious branding efforts and motivation. However, it is interesting that these students were unsure about their own brand now and in the future. Probably the same logic that was mentioned above is relevant also here: if the students felt they have not build a personal brand intentionally, it might be difficult for them to recognize, realize or admit the existence of their personal brand.

There were also students who couldn't imagine having a personal brand in the future. Some of them did not find personal branding as their thing and others did not want to have attention but rather stay on the sideline. The unifying element for the answers of the students in this cohort was a view that a personal brand is an intentionally created fake exterior. Furthermore, they thought that an inevitable part of having a personal brand is getting attention or even begging for the attention of others, which was perceived negatively by the students. Based on the results, could be suggested that this group of the communication students had somewhat negative attitudes towards personal branding. They linked features such as fake to personal brand, which gave an impression that they might not see personal branding as making the self, personality traits or competences visible but rather as building a mask on top of the individual and hiding the person. A possible reason for this kind of

attitude might be that they have seen bad examples of personal branding or unsuccessful personal brands. However, the detailed reasons for these thoughts will remain unknown in the light of this research.

RQ3 How do communication students use social media in their personal branding efforts?

As was mentioned previously in this research, social media and SNSs have nowadays a major role in personal branding (see e.g. Marwick, 2010; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011). Social media has both enabled personal branding in a large scale and encouraged people for self-promotion (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011; Van Dijck, 2013). The results of this research proofed that social media seems to have a very special role in personal branding since nearly all of the communication students who had a personal brand used social media channels in their personal branding efforts. Reasons for social media usage in this context were factors like it's easy, the audience can be reached broadly, and one can demonstrate his or her social media skills or other skills there. The latter seemed to be important for the communication students, which may be due to the requirement for digital communication and social media skills in the industry. In addition, the students commented that social media and SNSs feel like a natural channels for personal branding as was also suggested for example by Marwick (2010, 346).

As was mentioned, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter are all very popular and widely used channels in Finland. Based on the results it could be stated, however, that photo sharing service Instagram has reached the top-ranking. Indeed, it was noticed that LinkedIn was the most important SNS for personal branding, Facebook was the second, Instagram the third and Twitter only the fourth most important SNS. Therefore, Instagram could be added to the list of important channels for online personal branding. The fact that these four channels were important was not surprising since they are all popular and widely used in Finland. Furthermore, since it seemed that the communication students linked personal branding often to professional world it was quite natural that LinkedIn was the most important channel due to its professional nature (Van Dijck 2013, 207). Instagram is the most recent channel of these four and probably this is why its role in personal branding was not treated in the literature as thoroughly as other channels' role and importance. One social media application has become somewhat common very recently among adolescents and young adults: Snapchat. At the time when this particular survey was conducted, Snapchat was not considered to be a common channel among the participants. However, since the landscape of social media changes sometimes rapidly, Snapchat has gained popularity

among new user groups. Therefore, it would be reasonable to investigate also Snapchat's role in personal branding in the future.

Active information sharing was presumed to be essential in personal branding on social media. Based on the data it was noticed that the hypothesis (*H7*) was on the right track but somewhat too general. The communication students considered that most important in online personal branding is the quality of the content they share and post on social media channels together with activity and topicality. That is, the quality of the content was valued higher than the amount of the content. Could be, that the communication students thought that posting massive amounts of content does not guarantee a successful personal brand if the quality of the content is poor or irrelevant. Moreover, the communication students seemed to both prefer and appreciate topical information. Would be interesting to know, however, what is actually the level of good quality and how active is active enough for the communication students. Might be that the standards vary for each student: what is active to some may be too much or too little to other. As was assumed (*H8*), personal brand affects of the content the communication students shared online. Not only did they want the content to be high quality and topical but also in line with their brand. Furthermore, the students wanted to share such content that is neutral and objective and sometimes it might touch on their professional field. Based on these results could be concluded that the communication students would like to keep their content harmless and neutral yet interesting and relevant.

In addition to quality and activity, the communication students also thought that following other users and visuality of one's profile are crucial in online personal branding. The first, following of other users, could be explained by the nature of social media (Boyd & Ellison, 2008) but also by the theory that other people have a surprisingly big influence on individual's image (Utz, 2010). Yet, it was noteworthy that the quality of the followers was not as important as could have been considered based on Utz's (2010) research in which she stated that the friends of a target person do influence on the impression others form of the person. Therefore, the results of this research seemed to be somewhat contrary with Utz's findings, but more a thorough study should be conducted in order to draw conclusions. However, following other users might be important also for the reason that other people use the number of friends or followers as a cue when determining the impression and popularity of a person (Utz, 2010) – this will be discussed more later on. Also visuality rose high in the list of important factors in personal branding efforts on social media and in addition, the students were quite unanimous about it. It might indicate that the students found it valuable how one looks and appears, what does his or her profile looks like and what kind of impression others get of them based on their profile. The results are in line with Marwick's (2010) findings and may confirm the view that our present

highly visual culture affects on students' attitudes. Furthermore, social media encourages users for visual representation through profile pictures and cover photos but also through the ever-growing emphasis that is given on visual content. Marwick (2010) suggested that this topic might be gendered, which would have been interesting to test also in this research but due to the small number of male respondents a sample would not have been sufficient. Future research about the topic would be needed.

In the literature it was discussed other people's influence on one's personal brand (see e.g. Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011). Two hypotheses were drawn based on the literature: Respondents think that other people could harm their personal brand online (*H9*); and Respondents think that other people could reassert their personal brand online (*H10*). Based on the data, it was concluded that the communication students saw that other people couldn't or wouldn't harm their personal brands on online environments. Therefore, the results did not support the hypothesis (*H9*). However, the students thought that other people could influence their personal brands positively or reassert them on online environments, which supported the hypothesis (*H10*). That is, the respondents acknowledged that other people have influence over one's brand, but they thought or hoped that people would not use that influence in bad. Students listed that harming one's brand would be possible by inappropriate commenting or by sharing unwanted and unfavorable content of the target person from communication students' viewpoint, which is in line with the literature (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011). Yet, the students felt that they are not interesting persons enough that someone would have the interest to harm their brand. Noteworthy is that students seemed to think that harming one's brand is intentional and wouldn't happen by accident. However, as was argued by Labrecque, Markos and Milne (2011), one's friends may fail in identifying what kind of information is appropriate for example for one's professional brand. That is, a branding failure might happen accidentally due to an error of judgment of a friend.

Positive influence, in turn, would be possible through commenting, sharing or liking the content created by the target person. Moreover, seemed like the students had recognized the importance of their social media networks since they would like to have so called "big names" on their follower or friend lists. In addition, they had started to follow people or friended with someone wishing the person would reassert their brand or add credibility to them for example as communications professionals. Some of the students acknowledged that other people might form an impression of a target person partly based on his or her networks. This idea confirms Utz's (2010, 325) findings that the friends of a target person would affect on the impression other people form of him or her. Furthermore, Utz (2010, 326) suggested: "People expect people to have similar *friends*". Also this idea might validate why the communication

students seemed to appreciate their networks – perhaps they don't want their networks to give a bad or an unprofessional impression of them. And contrariwise, if a person has a number of other communications professionals or other “big names” on his or her friend list or among his or her followers, others might consider he or she to be professionally at the same level, whether or not that is actually true.

6.2 Evaluation and limitations of the research

Each research probably aims to avoid errors in measuring and in analysis. However, the credibility of a research should be evaluated through the concepts of reliability and validity. Reliability relates to the repeatability of the research, the consistency of the used measurement techniques, and the consistency of the analysis. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 231; KvantiMOTV, 2008.) The reliability of a research can be evaluated through two components: stability and consistency. That means that in order to be reliable the research should be pretty stable over time and consistent. (KvantiMOTV, 2008.)

However, the results of a research can be stable and consistent but there's a possibility that they are not valid. Validity refers to the ability of a test to measure what was supposed to be measured (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 231; KvantiMOTV, 2008). During the research process there might occur problems or failures in sampling or even between the researcher and the respondents. These kinds of issues might decrease the validity of the test. For example, a respondent may understand a question in a survey differently than the researcher meant, and thus give an incorrect response. Issues like this might affect to the overall validity of the research if they remain unidentified. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara, 2014, 231-232; KvantiMOTV, 2008.) In this chapter, the reliability and validity as well as the limitations of the present research will be evaluated.

6.2.1 Reliability and validity

This research aimed to explain the attitudes communication students have towards personal branding, their motivations for branding, and the role of social media in personal branding process. The data was collected with a survey that included three types of questions: structured claims, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended questions. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in the analysis of the research, which affects on the repeatability of the research. As said, in order to be reliable, a research should be possible to repeat, and be stable and consistent. The data collection and analysis methods were tried to explain thoroughly so that other researchers could see what was done and repeat the study. In

the quantitative analysis regard, the results should be more or less corresponding. Although, must be taken into account that the attitudes of people might change in time, sometimes significantly. That is, the quantitative parts of the research are considered to be reliable. However, the qualitative part of the research and its reliability must be treated with critical eye since a qualitative analysis includes interpretation of a researcher. Although the thematic analysis of the qualitative data was conducted as carefully, as objectively and as consistently as possible, another researcher could end up grouping the responses differently. Moreover, sometimes some parts of the interpretation of the researcher might be subconscious and therefore impossible to open up to others. For these aforementioned reasons, the repeatability and reliability of the research might suffer. Yet, it is estimated that the qualitative data of the present research is not so ambiguous that another researcher would end up in drastically different results.

As mentioned, validity means the ability of a method to measure what was intended to. It can be argued that this study suffers from a lack of validity, for various reasons. Firstly, the questionnaire and assessment tools were not based on previous studies where they would have been tested and discovered to be functional. At least the motivation measures should have been planned and executed more carefully and be based on existing motivation measurements. However, respondents' motivation towards personal branding was inquired with open-ended questions but more coherent assessment tools might have given richer data. Also, each topic should have been inquired with few different tools to be sure that the results are reliable and valid. The researcher has noticed that there were several issues and difficulties in compiling the questionnaire and the final questionnaire does not meet all the criteria. The validity of the research could have been improved with more careful planning and compiling of the survey.

However, the aforementioned issues were compensated by some actions. Firstly, the fact that the research mixed quantitative and qualitative methods in the data analysis improves the validity of the research (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 233). The survey of the research was quantitative and mainly analyzed in quantitative manners but some of the open-ended questions were analyzed using quantitative methods (Brannen, 2005). Secondly, the claims and alternatives of the multiple-choice questions and structured claims were derived from the literature as was presented in the tables previously (see Table 3, Table 4, and Table 5). Furthermore, the questions as well as the response options were aimed to keep as comprehensible and as unambiguous as possible to avoid misunderstandings. Thirdly, the questionnaire was tested in three different phases by two different methods. After each, the required improvements were done. Fourthly, the survey was conducted anonymously so that the respondents were able to answer the more

delicate or personal questions without worrying that the researcher could identify them.

6.2.2 Limitations of the research

The biggest limitation of this research is the sampling. The questionnaire was sent to over 400 communication students but only 81 of them responded and 61 completed the questionnaire. University students get sometimes quite a lot of requests to take part in surveys via e-mail and they might not have time or interest to participate them all. Moreover, the topic of the present survey might have been unfamiliar to some of the students and for that reason they might have skipped the questionnaire. Also, the length of the survey might have been the reason why some of the respondents did not finish the questionnaire. Due to the small size of the sampling, the results of this research should not be generalized without questioning the accuracy of the results. However, it is believed that the results indicate the general attitudes communication students have towards personal branding. Yet, as will be suggested, a research should be conducted with a broader sampling so that a reliable data analysis could be executed. Furthermore, the gender distribution was unequal, which can partly be explained by the gender distribution of the communications field. However, some analysis was found troubled to execute due to the low number of male respondents compared to female respondents. The unequal gender distribution was somewhat expected and the problems related to that could have been avoided with more careful planning in data collection and data analysis or with a larger sampling.

In addition, survey as a research method has limitations and they apply also to the present research (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014, 195). Firstly, there is no certainty whether the respondents answered the questions honestly and diligently. Secondly, there is a possibility that the respondents have understood the questions differently than the researcher meant or the response alternatives have been insufficient. Also, the researcher may have misinterpreted some of the answers of open-ended questions although the responses were treated and analyzed with care. Thirdly, there is a risk that the respondents have given socially acceptable responses to some questions, instead of expressing their own views. Fourthly, the topic of the research might have been unfamiliar for some of the respondents, which might have affected their responses. This limitation was tried to avoid by explaining the concept of personal branding in the very beginning of the questionnaire, but still there is a possibility that not all of the respondents read or assimilated it. Finally, there are also limitations with the questionnaire. Some of the questions and parts of the questionnaire could have been compiled with more care and leaning on previous studies.

Furthermore, one might question the decision that was done with the main concept of the research. In the literature, the concepts of self-branding and personal branding were used somewhat overlapping. In the early articles about branded individuals, a distinction between self-branding and personal branding was drawn. However, it was noticed that this distinction had worn off over time and no such distinction was found from the recent articles. Therefore, it was decided that in this research the concepts were treated as synonyms, although some may find differences between the concepts. Yet, one must admit that having self-branding as the main concept would have been a rational choice since the concept of self was treated in the theory part.

6.3 Further research

Since online personal branding is a recent phenomenon in this current scale, there are many themes and viewpoints that have not yet been studied. Furthermore, the arena of social media will develop, new generations grow up and the world of work continues altering – in other words, there will be new circumstances and new target groups where personal branding occurs and where it can be studied. In this chapter, some suggestions for future researches will be proposed.

During the research process, it was noticed that personal branding relates closely to identity work and self-disclosure on online environments. Therefore, more studies about personal branding could be done in the fields of psychology and social psychology. For example, personal brand's influence on individual's identity and self-image could be investigated in the future studies. In this research, the theme arose from the responses of the communication students. Some of the students thought that personal branding has positive effects on identity and self-image. Others, in turn, believed the effects would be negative. Since this theme was not in the center of this research, there was no possibility to analyze it thoroughly. More detailed themes are difficult to assess since these fields of sciences are unfamiliar to the researcher. However, the fields were touched on in the present research but only for providing background information and knowledge.

A theme that arose from the literature and was confirmed by the results of this research, was the differing attitudes women and men have towards personal branding. The topic raises a number of thoughts for example about the expectations genders face, pressures they might have and gender roles in the working culture. In the future studies, it could be investigated why there is this difference in the attitudes of genders, does it influence on the actions of women and men in practice, and what kind of results that possibly has, if any? In the present research, the gender

distribution was quite unequal, which possibly would have skewed the data and analysis. Therefore, the topic could be investigated with a broader sampling when the gender distribution could be more in balance.

Another topic for the futures studies could be looking into the importance and roles of visuality of a profile and appearance of a target person in personal branding process. The topic arose from the responses of the communication students and in the literature it was assumed that this might be gendered. The importance of pictures and visual content has increased in many social media channels. Therefore, it could be interesting to investigate what kind of a role pictures have in personal branding and how big part of branding efforts happens through visual content. Secondly, it could be explored does the appearance of a target person affect his or her personal brand or the ways he or she brands himself or herself. It has been demonstrated that the profile pictures of one's friend affect on the impression others form of him or her. Therefore, future researches could investigate the role of target person's own appearance and its effects on one's impression. Furthermore, the attitudes of women and men could be clarified to see if there are any differences in the attitudes or requirements.

Moreover, future studies could focus on students' or other young adults' personal branding efforts more in detail. This research did not cover questions such as to what extent do students plan their brands, what parts of their branding effort are intentional, do they monitor their brands somehow, are they having long-term plans for their personal brands, and do they aim to improve or develop their brands in time? Furthermore, future studies could be conducted with a broader sampling and different age groups. Future researches could also include the newest social media channels and find out their role in personal branding. Additionally, the viewpoint and attitudes of recruiters could be investigated to see if there are any differences or similarities in the attitudes of the students and their future employers towards personal branding.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: THE COVERING LETTER

Hei vastaanottaja!

Olen yhteisöviestinnän opiskelija ja teen pro gradu -tutkielmaa Viestintätieteiden laitokselle. Tutkielmassani tutkin viestinnän opiskelijoiden suhtautumista henkilöbrändäykseen. Tutkimus keskittyy Jyväskylän yliopiston viestintätieteiden laitoksen opiskelijoihin.

Pyydän sinua ystävällisesti vastaamaan 3.3.2015 mennessä kyselyyn osoitteessa: fi.surveymonkey.com/r/henkilobrandi

Kyselyyn vastaaminen vie noin 15 minuuttia. Kysely toteutetaan täysin anonymisti, joten yksittäistä vastaajaa ei voida tunnistaa. Kerätyt tulokset käytetään vain tämän tutkimuksen suorittamiseen.

Jokainen vastaus on arvokas.

Vastaamisesta etukäteen kiittäen,

Suvi Joensivu

APPENDIX 2: THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Tällä kyselyllä tutkitaan viestinnän yliopisto-opiskelijoiden suhtautumista henkilöbrändäykseen.

Henkilöbrändiksi voidaan käsittää itsestä luotu mielikuva muille: minkälaisen kuvan haluan, että muut saavat minusta. Lisäksi henkilöllä on mahdollisuus erottautua muista brändinsä avulla. Henkilöbrändäys voi olla tiedostettua ja suunnitelmallista tai sattumanvaraista ja vähemmän tiedostettua toimintaa. Henkilöbrändäyksestä puhutaan usein työelämäkontekstissa, mutta se ei suinkaan ole ainoa ympäristö itsensä brändäämiselle. Henkilöbrändäämistä voi esiintyä myös harrastuspiireissä tai henkilökohtaisessa elämässä.

Toivon, että pohdit kyselyssä henkilöbrändäystä omasta näkökulmastasi ja tuot rohkeasti esiin mielipiteitäsi.

Kiitos vastauksistasi, jokainen vastaus on tärkeä!

Q1 Ikä

- 18-21
- 22-25
- 26-30
- 30-35
- 36-40
- 40+

Q2 Sukupuoli

- Nainen
- Mies
- En halua vastata

Q3 Pääaineesi

- Journalistiikka
- Puheviestintä
- Yhteisöviestintä

Q4 Opintojen aloittamisvuosi

Q5 Opintojen vaihe

- Suoritan kandidaatin tutkintoa
- Suoritan maisterin tutkintoa

Joku muu, mikä?

Q6 Miten tärkeänä pidät henkilöbrändäystä yleisesti?

1 En lainkaan tärkeänä	2 En kovinkaan tärkeänä	3 Neutraali kanta	4 Melko tärkeänä	5 Todella tärkeänä
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q7 Minkälaista hyötyä henkilöbrändäyksestä voi mielestäsi olla? Mainitse vähintään kaksi asiaa.

Q8 Onko henkilöbrändäyksessä mielestäsi riskejä? Minkälaisia? Mainitse vähintään kaksi asiaa.

Q9 Miten tärkeäksi koet seuraavat tekijät henkilöbrändäyksessä? Henkilön pitää olla...

	1 Ei lainkaan tärkeää	2 Ei kovinkaan tärkeää	3 Neutraali kanta	4 Melko tärkeää	5 Todella tärkeää
Aktiivinen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mielenkiintoinen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nöyrä	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Rento	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Rehellinen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q10 Koetko, että sinulla on henkilöbrändi?

- Kyllä
 En
 En osaa sanoa

Q11 Minkälaisia henkilöbrändejä koet sinulla olevan? Voit valita useamman vaihtoehdon.

- Ammatillinen henkilöbrändi
 Opiskelijan henkilöbrändi
 Harrastukseen liittyvä henkilöbrändi
 Joku muu, mikä? _____

Q12 Mistä syistä brändäät itseäsi?

Q13 Mitä tavoitteet henkilöbrändilläsi? Voit valita useamman vaihtoehdon.

- Q13.1 Näkyvyyttä
 Q13.2 Tietyn mielikuvan luomista itsestäni
 Q13.3 Erottautumista muista
 Q13.4 Jonkin asian tai tavoitteen saavuttamista

- Q13.5 Muiden huomiota
 Jotain muuta, mitä? _____

Q14 Henkilöbrändään itseäni, koska...

	1 Täysin eri mieltä	2 Jokseenkin eri mieltä	3 Neutraali kanta	4 Jokseenkin samaa mieltä	5 Täysin samaa mieltä
Q14.1 Se on hyödyllistä	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q14.2 Haluan tuoda ilmi omaa osaamistani	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q14.3 Haluan tuoda ilmi omaa ammattitaitoani	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q14.4 Se on viihdyttävää	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q14.5 Muutkin brändäävät	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q14.6 Haluan saada huomiota	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q15 Kuka, ketkä tai mikä on henkilöbrändisi yleisö?

Q16 Oletko koskaan hyötynyt omasta henkilöbrändistäsi?

- En ole
 Kyllä. Miten? _____

Q17 Käytätkö sosiaalisen median kanavia henkilöbrändisi muodostamiseen?

- En käytä
 Kyllä. Miksi? _____

Q18 Voisitko kuvitella, että sinulla joskus olisi henkilöbrändi?

- Kyllä
 En
 En osaa sanoa

Perustele lyhyesti vastauksesi:

Q19 Mitä seuraavista kanavista käytät henkilöbrändisi ylläpitämiseen? Voit valita useamman vaihtoehdon

- Facebook
 Twitter

- LinkedIn
- Instagram
- Pinterest
- Tumblr
- Whatsapp
- Oma blogi
- Muu kuin oma blogi
- Omat nettisivut
- Joku muu, mikä? _____

Q20 Merkitse tärkeysjärjestykseen kolme tärkeintä kanavaa henkilöbrändisi kannalta? (Varsinaisessa kyselyssä käytettiin alavetovalikkoja)

- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Instagram
- Pinterest
- Whatsapp
- Oma blogi
- Muu kuin oma blogi
- Omat nettisivut
- Joku muu

Q21 Miten tärkeäksi koet seuraavat asiat henkilöbrändisi kannalta sosiaalisessa mediassa?

	1 Ei ollenkaan tärkeä	2 Eivinkaan tärkeä	3 Neutraali kanta	4 Jotseenkin tärkeä	5 Todella tärkeä
Q21.1 Sisällön määrä	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q21.2 Sisällön laatu	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q21.3 Muiden tuottaman sisällön jakaminen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q21.4 Keskustelu	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q21.5 Kommenttien määrä	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q21.6 Kommenttien laatu	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q21.7 Tykkäysten tai jakamisten määrä	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q21.8 Oman profiilin visuaalisuus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q21.9 Toisten käyttäjien seuraaminen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q21.10 Seuraajien tai kavereiden lukumäärä	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q21.11 Seuraajien tai kavereiden tunnettuus/laatu	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q21.12 Aktiivisuus ja ajankohtaisuus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q22 Minkälaista sisältöä jaat tai tuotat oman henkilöbrändisi vahvistamiseksi? Voit valita useamman vaihtoehdon.

- Omat päivitykset
- Kuvat
- Videot
- Muiden päivitykset (share / retweet tms.)
- Uutisten jakaminen
- Blogitekstien jakaminen
- Jotain muuta, mitä? _____

Q23 Vaikuttaako henkilöbrändisi siihen, minkälaista sisältöä jaat?

- Ei vaikuta
- Kyllä. Miten? _____

Q24 Koetko, että jotkut kaverisi tai seuraajasi voivat vahingoittaa henkilöbrändiäsi?

- En koe
- Kyllä. Miten? _____

Q25 Oletko koskaan poistanut kaveriasi tai seuraajaasi sillä perusteella, että hän voisi vahingoittaa henkilöbrändiäsi?

- En ole
- Olen harkinnut
- Olen

Q26 Koetko, että jotkut kaverisi tai seuraajasi voivat vahvistaa henkilöbrändiäsi?

- En koe
- Kyllä. Miten? _____

Q27 Oletko koskaan lisännyt kaveriksesi tai seurannut henkilöä sillä perusteella, että hän vahvistaisi henkilöbrändiäsi?

- En ole
- Olen harkinnut
- Olen

Q28 Oletko koskaan huolissasi, että muut saisivat sinusta väärän kuvan sosiaalisen median perusteella?

- En ole
 Kyllä olen

Q29 Koetko henkilöbrändisi muodostuvan myös sosiaalisen median ulkopuolella? Missä ja miten?

Q30 Missä ja miten koet henkilöbrändisi muodostuvan?

Kiitos vastauksistasi ja osallistumisesta kyselyyn!