
Social Media Marketing: How to Create a Strong Personal Brand

Additionally, this study can serve as a contribution to managers a more in-depth understanding of not just personal branding but also personally branded professionals. This research can also provide a contribution to marketers, as it may bring to their awareness the potential of collaborating with successfully personally branded individuals. As this study will further explore, personally branded individuals are not to be underestimated as the reach and following of some even surpasses that of major corporate brands. Therefore, managers should be aware of the potential of social media in their career space.

RATIONALE (300)

There are various reasons why this topic is worthy of further research and study. Even with the increasing digital domination in society, there is still a lack of specific empirical studies and findings on personal branding and social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Hsu and Tsou, 2011). There is a gap in the literature to investigate the effects of social media on variables of self-marketing (Laroche, Habibi and Richard, 2012). Most of the studies conducted on social media so far do not cover the phenomenon of personal branding. The scope of most of the researches conducted on this topic focuses mainly on branding and marketing in general and does not take individuals into consideration. Branding is not just for products or celebrities anymore. People from all walks of life are taking charge of their personal and professional image using social media. Therefore, research and study on this subject matter is long overdue and highly relevant in today's time (Karaduman, 2013).

TIME, COST, PROJECT MANAGEMENT (300)

Time:

Cost:

Project Management:

LITERATURE REVIEW

LITERATURE INTRODUCTION (200)

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In order to study and conduct a critical literature review, an in-depth systematic analysis of literature relevant to social media, marketing and branding will be explored. Moreover, this literature will be critically assessed to evaluate the strong and weak points of the key literature and its scope as well as limitations. Current sources of literature will be included in a comprehensive form. Several key themes will be analysed in the following literature review.

Important and relevant journal articles will be evaluated to assess how social media helps people from various walks of life build their personal brand and how cost-effective it can be. The correlation between social media strategies and personal branding and marketing will be thoroughly examined. Contextually, this research will also explore whether or not people have personally and professionally benefited by utilising social media strategies. This will also meet the objectives of this research by probing whether or not social media users have been able to successfully establish their personal brands without incurring additional expenses.

LITERATURE THEME ONE: SELF-MARKETING (300)

For years, marketing and branding have been key in building loyalty-based relationship with consumers leading to long-term business success (Tuskej, Golop and Podnar, 2013).

Ever since the late 1990s, self-marketing and personal branding have become prevalent subjects of self-help books and websites (Shepherd, 2005; Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2005; Chen, 2013). Peters (1997) was one of the pioneers of the topic of personal branding mentioning it in his article named "The Brand Called You". Self-marketing can blatantly lean towards self-commodification and calls for a thorough analysis (Lair, Sullivan and Cheney, 2012). Labrecque, Markos and Milne (2011) have observed how individuals delve into self-marketing in a web 2.0 setting.

According to Brandfog's research (2013), this is the best period for the reinvention and revolution of new-age leadership. Young professionals are now evolving to become more visible, connected, and accessible than ever before. The competitive nature of the world now has similarly evolved, leading customers and stakeholders to expect brand connect from professionals. Consequently, young professionals are relying on social media to market their talents, personalities and what makes them unique.

All young professionals bring their knowledge, capabilities and leadership styles to their workplaces. As Bates (2011) stated, most of them possess unique qualities and capabilities. This indicates that every person can be considered as a brand. Nevertheless, just having a good personal brand is not enough to ensure professional success. Good self-marketing is required to guarantee personal branding success.

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Self-marketing using traditional methods can vary according to the results required. As the team at CreativeBloq (2015) suggest, “Moving up the cost scale” allows for the execution of more creative strategies. Subsequently, costs can rise up to the hundreds for “off-the-wall” ideas. For example, the team estimates £150 for getting posters made, £365 for hiring a bike rider at alternative-advertising.co.uk, £350 for renting a blimp for a day or two, and £150 for two helium canisters. More ambitious endeavours could cost even more. Successful self-marketing also requires strategic planning for proper execution.

LITERATURE THEME TWO: PERSONAL BRANDING (300)

Social media has been the subject of many research projects, but only of late has personal branding begun piquing the interest of researchers (Barware & Meehan, 2010; Holt, 2016; Gensler et al. 2013; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Even so, the research conducted so far and the existing literature are not in-depth and raise a few concerns which need to be addressed.

Experts claim that personal branding is a three-stage process which has been abridged by Arruda (2005, cited in Shepherd, 2005, p. 590) as “extract, express and exude.” This entails a) exploring the unique value of a person or what differentiates an individual from the rest; b) developing a strategy to communicate the unique value; and c) effecting a strategy for making the personal brand reach the intended audience (Arruda, 2005; Roffler, 2002, cited in Shepherd, 2005).

Also, according to Arruda (2009) as well as traditional branding theories, communication is the key element which implies that brand communication is pivotal for creating brand awareness. Brand communication is often considered to be the main ingredient for long-lasting brand loyalty and essential for remaining in the minds of people. As Ellwood (2000, p. 11) elucidates, brand communication can be equated to a flag in the sense that it is implemented by “waving to consumers, creating awareness of the product and differentiating it from other competitors”.

King (1984) reiterates, “[b]rands succeed because they offer consumers added values that are communicated through advertising” (cited in de Chernatony, 1998, p. 123). Therefore, the collective consensus on branding in general or personal is that communication is key. Conclusively, as an individual, the best way to create communication pathways with the most number of people is via the means of social media.

LITERATURE THEME THREE: SELF-IMAGE BUILDING ON SOCIAL MEDIA (300)

Building a personal brand is usually an extensive and ongoing process and entails the process of highlighting one’s positive qualities, skills, and achievements. With more and more people

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across the world social networking, social media has inevitable become a vital hub of extensive personal data and a genius tool for image building (Okanovic). Creating and maintaining a personal image online is a significantly effective way of personal presentation to any target group.

Career-centric social networking sites like LinkedIn come to mind when building a personal brand online for professional purposes. However, Leder (Leder) states that personal image can be developed via LinkedIn and other social networking sites as well like Facebook. Studies on the effect of social media for students in Serbia indicated the significance of having a personal brand on Facebook (Miller, 2017). A study by Kostic, Stankovic and Damnjanovic highlight the many reasons for using social network platforms in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina for education and professional advantages. Employees of big chain companies like Delta Air Lines have learned that their online behaviour not aligning with their company's values could cost them their jobs (David, 2018). Online activity on any social media platform and not just typically professional ones are considered an extension of one's personal brand.

LITERATURE THEME FOUR: SOCIAL MEDIA AND MONEY (300)

LITERATURE CONCLUSION (200)

The results of this review can be considered to have made a noteworthy contribution to the existence literature pertaining to social media, self-marketing, and personal branding. Since the study on the aforementioned topics are relatively new and ongoing, this review makes a cumulative deduction. Reviewing of the literature leaves no doubt regarding the benefits of using social media for career leverage. This study uncovers the potential of using social media as a platform to present and build personal image which could add to the scope of a young professional's career. The outcomes of this study demonstrates the prodigious options and opportunities for self-promotion that come with social media which could benefit young professionals from almost any career path.

The study found a strong correlation between social media, personal image and self-promotion costs. A positive correlation has been found between social media strategies and self-marketing. Similarly, a possibility of lowered self-marketing costs has been found with use of online marketing tools as compared to more traditional marketing methods. A social media presence backed with well-planned and well-executed strategies can help create value and even result in monetary gain for professionals.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH STRATEGY (500)

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Exploratory Research by Inductive Approach

The research is based on the research question: “Can social media enhance personal branding while reducing self-marketing costs for young professionals?” To successfully answer this question, the relevant existing literature on social media, self-marketing, and personal branding will be reviewed. Following that, pertinent data will be collected in order to uncover new insights on the effects of social media on online image among young professionals.

By implementing these methods, this thesis can be classified as an exploratory study that propositions an open and inquiring approach to the research (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Furthermore, the theories that are charted in the second part of this study are deliberated to be the foundation for the comprehension of the phenomenon; however, they do not aid as a stepping stone of this research.

In lieu with the research aims and exploratory purpose, this study seeks to reveal aspects of personal branding that can be considered as key success elements. Additionally, based on these understandings, a new theoretical framework will be created. As a result, an inductive approach will be taken (Bryman & Bell, 2007). A clear direction of the research approach is specifically significant as the main criteria of the study is understanding the extent of the effect social media has in the process of building self-image especially in the professional sphere. (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008, cited in Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009).

Qualitative Strategy

A qualitative strategy is deemed an applicable course of action for this research as it fulfils the objective of discerning the phenomenon comprehensively and consequently building an appropriate abstract outline through data collection and analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2007). As has been conferred earlier, the literature and research on the correlation between social media and self-promotion is rare, primarily in the study of personally branded content.

For this purpose, a qualitative strategy is considered fitting since it offers a broader range in terms of data collection and analysis for a theory to transpire (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Also, a qualitative strategy comprises of words and hence necessitates abundant descriptions (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Comparative Research

Content Analysis

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Finally, the process of content analysis is chosen as it is usually regarded as a suitable method for examining “social groups that are difficult to gain access to” (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 313). Prominent YouTubers are an example of this as many of them have achieved celebrity status are not easily accessible. Besides, as the academics are concerned with gaining an honest depiction of how successful social media personalities have built their brand via their own creativity and content, the method of content analysis seems apt. This is in part due to the fact that this method is assumed to be a non-reactive method (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This implies that by taking on a non-reactive approach, it is assumed to be less probable that the subjects of the study behave differently because they are aware that they are being studied.

POPULATION AND SAMPLING (500)

Before the main study, with a preliminary research, 15 young professionals, between the age group of 21 and 40, who are already participants of any social media platform will be selected. These participants will form a random mixed group of gender, nationality, age, profession, and so on. The selection process of the 15 young professionals will be done by visiting various social media platforms. After the candidates have been chosen, the people who are connected with them via their social media presence will also be made note of. 10 connections per candidate will be randomly selected. So, a total of 150 people will be identified for the first phase of the research.

Another phase of the study will focus on YouTube as the main social media platform. For this study, generic purposive sampling as termed by Bryman and Bell (2015) will be applied for the selection and analysis process. “The research question should give an indication of what units need to be sampled” (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 433). Taking the previous statement and the research question into account, the candidates for this study will be ‘successful’ by online and professional standards. Focusing on the generic purposive sampling approach and the set conditions, the selected YouTubers for this research are: Shane Dawson, Lilly Singh, and Zoella. The choice of studying three YouTubers is in line with the idea that three or less YouTubers would make it difficult to contend for the accuracy of the discovered results. Following is a brief description of each of the YouTubers sampled:

Shane Dawson:

Lilly Singh:

Zoella:

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS (500)

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For the first phase of the study, to get a good indication of the real online behaviour of the candidates, the 15 plus 150 social media accounts will be examined individually. They will then be divided into four categories (Karaduman, 2013). The first category will contain the 'casual members' who have social media accounts but are not active on it and only go online occasionally to read the latest updates and don't share much of their personality or lives with others online. The second category will comprise of 'reactive members' whose activity on social media is mainly reactive. They reply to people or subjects that catch their interest. The third category will encompass 'active members' of the group who react as well as share a variety of content online. The fourth type are the 'proactive members' who are usually leaders and pioneers and who publish their own content and tend to have a huge following.

The social media platforms that will be used to identify and examine the candidates fall into four categories as follows:

- Social Media Category Example
- Social Networking Sites Facebook
- Micro Blogging Sites Twitter
- Professional Networking Sites LinkedIn
- Blogging Sites Tumblr

Table 3: Social Media Memberships of Participants

Preliminary research

To test the hypotheses of the research, a survey will be conducted via a questionnaire. The data on the questionnaires will then be studied using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. The scale items in the questionnaire will be analysed using the Likert scale (anchored by 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree).

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