



STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVE TO PERSONAL BRAND VALUE IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Turning the gaze from the self to the others

Master's Thesis
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Abstract

The objective of the study was to introduce the stakeholder perspective into the field of personal branding. The research problem was to find out, how the value of a personal brand is defined by its stakeholders. This problem was addressed from two research angles. First, the study was set to determine how the value of a personal brand is described by its stakeholders. Second, the study aimed to reveal how and why do the stakeholders participate in the value co-construction of personal brands in social media.

The research was conducted using mixed methods. A quantitative online survey with open-ended questions was conducted to communication professionals in Finland, in order to get an overview of stakeholder perceptions of personal brand value within one professional field. Twitter accounts of the most valued personal brands, according to the survey, set the scene for the second research method, content analysis, revealing the various ways of stakeholder participation in value co-construction. The concept of social brand value (Dennhardt, 2014) was used as the theoretical lens to the analysis of the potential motives of individuals to participate in personal brand value co-construction.

The study showed that stakeholder involvement has paramount importance for personal branding. Individuals assess the value of other people's brands in terms of the brand authenticity, uniqueness and identification, communication, as well as on the basis of the perceived personal benefits. Individuals contribute to each other's personal brands by participating in social interaction in various ways: both quantity and perceived quality of communication around personal brands seem to have a crucial effect on their perceived value. The personal brand owner has a special role in feeding and facilitating interaction, and thus, keeping the brand alive. The ongoing and active interaction provides the participants social brand value (identity value, communal value and informational value, Dennhardt, 2014) that serves their fundamental human needs and thus motivates them to engage in value exchange.

The study introduces a paramount shift to personal branding, both as a field of research and practice. As an alternative to the individualistic, inside-out model dominant in the field, this study introduces an outside-in perspective, perceiving personal branding not only as output of but also as input for identity work and self-development. The study proposes that the success of personal branding is based on the individuals' ability to deliver value primarily to others, and to evoke positive reactions among them.

As a practical implication of the study, individuals need to acknowledge that personal branding is an on-going process of interaction, the effectiveness of which requires time and effort – not only in continuous self-development but also in compelling and credible communication.

Keywords international business communication, co-constructive personal branding

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Tiivistelmä

Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli tuoda sidosryhmänäkökulma henkilöbrändäystutkimukseen, joka tähän on saakka säilynyt hyvin yksilökeskeisenä. Tutkimusongelmana oli selvittää, kuinka sidosryhmät määrittävät henkilöbrändin arvon. Tätä tutkimusongelmaa lähestyttiin kahdesta näkökulmasta. Tutkimuksen ensimmäisenä tavoitteena oli ymmärtää henkilöbrändin arvon määrittelemisen sidosryhmän näkökulmasta. Toiseksi tutkimuksessa haluttiin selvittää, kuinka ja miksi sidosryhmät osallistuvat henkilöbrändin arvon luomiseen sosiaalisessa mediassa.

Tutkimuksessa käytettiin kahta eri tutkimusmenetelmää. Avoimiin kysymyksiin perustuva kvantitatiivinen kyselytutkimus tehtiin suomalaisille viestinnän ammattilaisille, jotka edustivat tutkimuksen sidosryhmänäkökulmaa. Kyselytutkimuksen avulla arvokkaimmiksi määritettyjen henkilöbrändien Twitter-tilien sisällön analyysin avulla tutkimuksessa pyrittiin selvittämään sidosryhmien osuus henkilöbrändien arvon luomisessa. Analysoitaessa mahdollisia syitä sidosryhmien osallistumiselle brändiarvon rakentamiseen tutkimuksen teoreettisena viitekehyksenä käytettiin sosiaalisen brändiarvon käsitettä (Dennhardt, 2014).

Tutkimuksen mukaan sidosryhmien osallistaminen on ensiarvoisen tärkeää henkilöbrändäyksessä. Henkilöbrändin arvon määräytymiseen vaikuttavat sidosryhmien näkökulmasta henkilöbrändin aitous, poikkeuksellisuus ja samaistuttavuus, brändiin yhdistettävä viestintä sekä koetut hyödyt. Niin viestinnän määrä kuin myös sen laatu ovat tärkeä osa henkilöbrändin arvoa. Henkilöbrändillä itsellään on erityinen rooli vuorovaikutuksen rakentajana ja ylläpitäjänä, mikä on tärkeää brändin hengissäpysymisen kannalta. Aktiivinen ja jatkuva vuorovaikutus luo viestijöille sosiaalista brändiarvoa (identiteettiarvoa, yhteisöllisyyttä ja informaatiota), mikä palvelee ihmisten perustarpeita ja siten motivoi osallistumaan arvon jakamiseen.

Tutkimus edustaa tärkeää muutosta henkilöbrändäyksessä niin tutkimuksen kuin käytännönkin kannalta. Vaihtoehtona vallallaoleville yksilökeskeisille malleille tämä tutkimus katsoo henkilöbrändiä ulkopuolelta ja osoittaa, että henkilöbrändäyksessä ei ole kyse vain yksisuuntaisesta, itsereflektointiin ja itsensä markkinointiin perustuvasta viestinnästä, vaan samalla se tarjoaa rakennusaineita muille ihmisille identiteetin rakentamiseen ja itsensä kehittämiseen. Tutkimuksessa esitetään, että yhteistyöhön perustuvan henkilöbrändäyksen menestystekijä on arvon tuottaminen ensisijaisesti muille ihmisille ja siten positiivisten reaktioiden herättäminen heissä.

Käytännön kannalta tutkimuksen keskeinen päätelmä on, että ihmisten tulee ymmärtää henkilöbrändäys jatkuvana vuorovaikutusprosessina, joka vaatii aikaa ja vaivaa – ei pelkästään itsensä kehittämiseen mutta myös vaikuttavaan ja uskottavaan viestintään.

Avainsanat yritysviestintä, henkilöbrändäys, sosiaalinen media, sosiaalinen brändiarvo, yhteistyö

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“Nobody alone knows what digitalization brings – that’s why we’re here, to share and to learn collectively @villetolvanen #digitalist”

- @sonjasofia Nov 23, 2016

1 INTRODUCTION

Working life has changed tremendously during the last few decades. Career paths of young graduates now facing work life will most probably look quite different from the career paths of their parents or grandparents. Whereas traditionally, a career has been related to long-term employment and movement within an organizational hierarchy with a sequence of increasingly challenging jobs, today, both the number of firms supporting traditional careers and the number of people seeking such a career is decreasing (O’Mahony & Bechky, 2006). We are undergoing a change from stable employment towards dynamic employment (Arthur & Rousseau 1996), contemporary careers being described as nonlinear, discontinuous and boundaryless (Arthur, 1994; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; O’Mahony & Bechky, 2006). For individuals, all of this means increasing pressure to continuously take care of one’s employment value, or human capital, and to continuously stand out in the job market (eg. O’Mahony & Bechky, 2006; Haverila, 2004).

During the recent decades, personal branding has become a popular phenomenon, as a response to the paradigm shift in the employment environment (Shepherd, 2005; Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2005). The key premise of personal branding is that everybody has a personal brand (Peters, 1997) but only few manage it consciously and strategically (Rampersad, 2009). Individuals continuously build their personal brands in social interaction without necessarily being aware that they are doing so (Way, 2011). Just as brand building has been considered “the best way of doing business because of the constant changes in the marketing environment” (Aaker, 1996), personal branding can be seen as a strategy for individuals to negotiate the chaotic employment environment

around them (Lair et al., 2005). Therefore, personal branding is being promoted as an opportunity for individuals to make their professional skills and competences visible to the public, and thus, to take control of their personal brand awareness, and attractiveness as employees (Khedler, 2015).

Social media has provided individuals unprecedented opportunities as well as countless new tools and platforms to express themselves, expand their social networks and reach new audiences. Those who have managed to take full advantage of the new channels may have succeeded to become media themselves, with as much as thousands of people as active followers. Some well-networked individuals have achieved the status of opinion leader, and for them, social media has become a source of discursive power: they are seen by others as powerful, trusted and knowledgeable sources of information (Tuten, 2008). The status of the opinion leader is achieved through the acts of personal branding, such as online blogging, word-of-mouth-marketing, content contribution and brand community building (Kelley & Alden, 2016). The social networks of opinion leaders, often consisting of thousands of active followers, make up a valuable resource for them, with potential benefits varying from purely status-related (eg. Wasko & Faraj, 2005) to psychological (identity, eg. Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008) and even economical ones (eg. Tuten, 2008).

In the recent years, personal branding has awaked more interest also from the organizational view point. Employers world-wide have acknowledged that knowledgeable and engaged employees are a valuable asset to build a positive employer brand (eg. Landers & Callan, 2014; Helm, 2011; Men, 2014): they have an insider perception of the corporate culture and can therefore act as convincing advocates of their employer, thus potentially having a huge impact on the organization's reputation (Dreher, 2014). By communicating their professional identities in their various social networks, organizational members build up collective sense making about the organization (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011). Thus, Scott and Lane (2000) argue that organizations need to take a proactive role in orchestrating stakeholders' interaction so that "attention is continuously focused on the overlap between organizational identity and stakeholder identity".

As organizations are formally represented by top executives, personal branding can be considered particularly relevant among them. In fact, prior research suggests that personal branding practices of the CEO and of other powerful and knowledgeable people in the organization can be transformed into monetary value for the organization (Zerfass, Vercic, & Wiesenber, 2016; see also Amoako & Adjaisson, 2012). For example, powerful personal brands in top positions have a positive influence on the media coverage of the company and, thus, can have a crucial importance for the company brand (Zerfass et al., 2016). Similarly, the CEO brand affects the shareholders' perceptions of the company, and thus, the stock prices (Zerfass et al., 2016; Zinko & Rubin, 2015). However, even though most companies acknowledge the need to manage the personal brands of the CEO and the other top executives, only a few companies use an established management process to guide this endeavour (Zerfass et al., 2016). As pointed out by Zerfass et al. (2016), the gap reflects uncertainty and a lack of professionalism in this fairly new field of corporate communications.

Prior literature has described personal branding as an inside-out process (Khedler, 2014), in which individuals aim to project their authentic identity to others (Rampersad, 2009) through the acts of self-marketing (Shepherd, 2005). The self-centred approach has raised concern in the academic world, with researchers accusing this kind of a mindset as leading to decreasing attention to emotional growth, learning and higher values of people (Lair et al., 2005; Gehl, 2011). Thus, as I aim to show in this thesis, the individualistic promotional approach should be replaced with the co-constructive approach, in which the focus is shifted from strategic self-marketing into on-going value sharing, learning and self-reflection.

In general branding literature, it is generally accepted that brand value is determined by the consumers, and the consumers' perceptions of brand value are grounded in their engagement in brand relationships (eg. Fournier, 1998; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Dennhardt, 2014). The co-constructive approach to branding (Csaba & Bengtsson, 2006, Hatch & Schultz, 2010, Merz, Yi & Vargo, 2009, Scott & Lane, 2000; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013; von Wallpach et al., 2017) suggests that the stakeholders of the

brand should be considered as active participants in creating the brand value, brand identity and brand meaning (Dennhardt, 2014). This means that the value of personal brands is determined by their ability to provide value for others and to engage them in meaningful interaction.

Drawing from Dennhardt (2014), this thesis introduces the outside-in approach to personal brand value co-construction, suggesting that personal branding shouldn't be perceived only as output of self-reflection but as a part of a co-constructive social process that acts as a resource for identity work and self-development. The propositions of this study represent a paradigm shift in personal branding literature, in which the stakeholder approach has been widely ignored, and in which other people's social media disclosure has been presented not as the enabler but as a threat to one's personal brand (eg. Kaputa, 2006; Rampersad, 2009).

Freeman (1984, p. 46) defines stakeholder as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm's objectives." As the context of this paper is personal branding, I use the term stakeholder to refer to the various audiences and contributors who can affect or be affected by an individual. In a social media environment, an individual's stakeholders can include basically anyone and anything from close relatives, friends, colleagues and professional acquaintances to people, products and companies and other organizations all over the world. However, it is evident that some stakeholders are more important than others for the construction of personal brand value.

1.1 Research objectives

The objective of the study is to introduce the stakeholder perspective into the field of personal branding. The study aims to show that research and practices in this field should evolve in accordance with the principles adopted in mainstream branding, those underlining relationship management, collaboration and value sharing. As in general branding literature, the stakeholder perspective to personal brand value is seen as two-fold. On one hand, it is generally accepted that the stakeholders determine the value of a

brand, and thus, this research aims to cast light on how personal brand value should be defined from the stakeholders' point of view. On the other hand, the stakeholders also participate in co-constructing the brand value in interaction with each other, and thus, stakeholder involvement should be regarded inseparable from the personal brand value.

The main research problem of this thesis is the following: How is the value of a personal brand defined by its stakeholders? This research problem is divided into two sub-questions:

- 1) How is the value of personal brands described by their stakeholders?
- 2) How and why do the stakeholders of personal brands contribute to their personal brand value?

By answering these questions, this thesis introduces the stakeholder-based branding practices into the field of personal branding, and thus, opens up a new research angle into this topical research area that is still in its infancy. As the main practical implication of this study, I hope to evoke individuals to shift their focus from self-marketing into continuous self-development and value sharing in interaction, by increasing understanding of the value co-creation logic of networks.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

In the second chapter, I will provide a more comprehensive picture of the personal branding phenomenon and introduce a new theoretical framework for personal brand value, as an alternative to the individualistic model dominant in prior literature. The third chapter serves as an introduction and validation for my own research, of which findings are represented in chapter four. In the fifth chapter, I will discuss the findings of this research in relation to prior studies, represented earlier in the literature review. In the concluding sixth chapter I will provide a summary of the key propositions of the thesis, and discuss the implications of the key findings of this research, as well as the limitations of the study, with suggestions for further research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive view on personal branding as a special field within the marketing discipline, and to argue for a shift from the person-based approach to the stakeholder-based approach in the discourse that guides this endeavour.

The literature review is divided into four sections. In the first section, I will cast an overview on personal branding, as a specialized field of branding research and practice, and discuss its various definitions. In the second section, I will introduce the value-determining components of personal brands, as assessed by their stakeholders. The stakeholder perceptions of personal brand value are expanded with the stakeholder involvement in section three. These theoretical underpinnings are drawn together in the fourth section, in which I will provide a theoretical framework for personal brand value.

2.1 Personal branding as a marketing phenomenon

In order to fully understand the co-constructive approach to personal brand value, it is useful to first understand the paradigm shift in the discourse around the principles of branding, in general. The aim of this section is to explain the main terminology around personal branding and to argue for a need to increase our understanding of a personal brand as a social construction, following the foot-steps taken in the mainstream branding literature.

2.1.1 The evolution of branding

The term *branding* refers to the marketing practices of differentiating products that satisfy similar needs and wants, from each other (Keller, 1993). The traditional marketing model emphasized tight control, nurture and protection of the brand's product-based assets, through defining, designing, and communicating brand value to consumers (Kaufman & Horton, 2015). The definition of *brand* by Kotler & Keller

(2009) can be considered a traditional one: “*a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors*”.

In marketing literature, brand positioning has been described as the key driver of creating a strong brand, with the focus traditionally having been drawn to the brand owner’s role in emphasizing the distinctive characteristics that differentiate the brand from its competitors (Keller, 2003). This uniqueness and essential idea of the brand has been usually referred as brand identity (Aaker, 1996, Kapferer, 2008). One of the most commonly used definitions for *brand identity* is that of Aaker (1996): “*a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create and maintain*”. The traditional managerial perspective in the branding literature and practice has assumed that the brand owner creates and unilaterally communicates the brand’s meaning to consumers, who have been considered as passive receivers of brand communication (Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). Successful brand management has been outlined as the alignment of brand identity with the *brand image*, defined by Kotler & Keller (2009), as: “*the way the public actually perceives the firm or its product*”.

However, the recent research has revealed the dynamic, fluid and enacted nature of brand identity (Csaba & Bengtsson, 2006; da Silveira, Lages, & Simões, 2013; Lucarelli & Hallin, 2014; von Wallpach, Hemetsberger & Espersen 2017), building ground to the performative view on branding that acknowledges brands as “complex social relations that develop among a multitude of enacted identities” (von Wallpach et al., 2017). Social media has become an extremely important set of platforms for marketers to interact regularly with consumers and to build consumer brand relationships (Turri et al., 2013). For individuals, social media has opened up the opportunity to participate in the construction of social value in ways never seen before in history. As a result, brands are co-constructed from multidirectional and interconnected information that is difficult to predict (Hennig-Thurau, Malthouse, Friege, Gensler, Lobschat, Rangaswamy & Skiera, 2010).

The increased power of consumers has challenged brand managers to shift the focus into “brand democratization”, “crowdsourcing” and “digital dialogue”, all representing the need to increase customer engagement in the branding process (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Tuten, 2008; Dennhardt, 2014). Consumers shouldn’t be perceived as passive participants anymore: prior research shows that they actively shape and contribute to the brand (eg. Dennhard, 2014; da Silveira et al., 2013; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). The co-creation of brands emerges between “economic and social actors” who interact and exchange across and through networks (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, p. 5). The social brand is an “interactive platform” or “open ecosystem” that interacts with fans and followers and co-produces the experiences that keep consumers engaged (Kaufman & Horton, 2015).

Thus, the focus of branding is shifting from the role of the brand owner to the various performances played by the consumers of the brand (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). This approach recognizes that branding is not something that can be evaluated in terms of the end state or the goal, but it is the on-going process of interaction that keeps the brand alive (Kornum, Gyrd-Jones, Zagir & Brandis, 2017). Research suggests that relationships based on active co-creation of content and an emotional bond lead to stronger and more enduring connection, which in turn can have multiple positive implications for the brand (Turri et al., 2013). However, to date, the positive implications of stakeholder involvement have been largely ignored in the personal branding literature, where the focus has been on the traditional individualistic, inside-out process (Shepherd, 2005).

2.1.2 Personal branding as a field of research and practice

The industry around personal branding has blossomed in the recent years, consisting of a variety of advisory services, books and web sites tied with self-management and self-promotion (Shepherd, 2005). These mainstream personal branding guides suggest that successful people engage in the process of self-reflection, and systematically build an external image of themselves (Khedler, 2015). However, despite the popularity of the personal branding phenomenon across the business world, academic research in the

field is still in its infancy (Khedler, 2015). It has been argued that the principles of branding can be expanded to humans, because they 1) can be strategically managed and 2) have additional associations and features of brands (Close, Moulard & Monroe, 2011). However, due to the lack of academic research in this field, the literature has been dominated by the so-called self-help genre (Lair et al., 2005), where the trustworthiness of the material is dubious as it can be affected by the economic interests of the authors.

Even though Kotler and Levy pointed out already in 1969 that “no attempt is made to examine whether the principles of ‘good’ marketing are transferable to the marketing of services, persons and ideas”, it took nearly five decades before personal branding raised broader interest in the academia (Khedler, 2015). However, during the last decade, scholars have slowly started to draw more attention to the variety of means people use to craft, define and manage their professional identities. Personal brands have been studied in various professional contexts, such as CEO brands (Bendisch, Larsen & Trueman, 2013), athlete brands (Arai, Ko & Ross, 2014), celebrity brands (Thomson, 2006), students (Labrecque et al., 2011; Close et al., 2011) and political leaders (Omojola, 2008; Motion, 1999). Some scholars seem to have taken an advocate approach, providing evidence for the benefits of various means, processes and practices that guide an individual’s self-storying (eg. Amoako & Adjaison, 2012; Bendisch et al., 2013; Rampersad, 2010). Some researchers have adopted a more sceptical approach, raising ethical viewpoints and negative connotations regarding people branding (eg. Lair et al., 2005; Shepherd, 2005). All in all, as Khedler (2015) points out, the recent academic work in the area indicates that people may be legitimately considered as brands and this popular phenomenon calls for further examination.

A variety of terminology and definitions have been used in parallel to describe the different tones and meanings of individuals’ self-storying. The rhetoric around personal branding underlines competition and personal brand has been seen as a competitive advantage of an individual in relation to others (Rampersad, 2009). The advocates of personal branding commonly use the phrase “to stand out from the crowd”, as the main objective of the practice (Gehl, 2011). Rampersad (2009) describes personal branding as

“an effective way to eliminate competitors”. Thus, Gehl’s (2011) definition captures the essence of the mainstream approach in the field: “*Personal branding is about clearly establishing who you are, what you’re good at, or even what you like to do, so you can stand above the competition.*”

Initially, the term *personal marketing* was used to describe a firm’s marketing efforts, targeted to customers, on a more personalized level (Way, 2011). During the last decades, the term has expanded from corporate marketing world to the actual humans, incorporating the individuals’ ability to brand themselves and their careers, as the actual product (Rampersad, 2009; Way, 2011).

A common approach to define a personal brand has been just to expand the concept of a brand (Keller, 1993) to cover also human brands. Thus, Parmentier, Fischer & Reuber (2013) define person brand as: “*the set of associations that a group of people identify with a particular person*”. Thomson (2006) argues that a *human brand* can be either a well-known or emerging persona, who is the subject of marketing, interpersonal, or interorganizational communications. Zinko and Rubin (2015) separate personal brand from *personal reputation*, by stating that, unlike brand, reputation may occur regardless of intent. Another way to distinguish the terms from each other is to define reputation as the stakeholders’ perception of the brand (Bendisch et al., 2013).

The term *personal branding* was popularized by Tom Peters (1997) in his famous article “The Brand Called You”, in which he stated that “we are all the CEOs of our own companies, the Me Inc”. He claimed that everybody has a chance to stand out from the crowd by recognizing their own strengths, by developing new skills and by making them visible to audiences (Peters, 1997).

However, a similar idea was introduced already in 1959 by Erving Goffman in his seminal book “The presentation of self in everyday life”. He represented people as actors of performances through which they were seeking to make a favourable impression and stir a reaction within their audiences. Khedler (2015) has translated this dramaturgical approach into the vocabulary of personal brand positioning and defines it

as a form of impression management: “a planned process in which people make efforts to promote themselves”. These views are thus close to the term *self-marketing*, that stems from individuals’ own motives and self-centred concerns, defined as “those varied activities undertaken by individuals to make themselves known in the marketplace, usually, (though not exclusively) for the purpose of obtaining employment” (Shepherd, 2005). Miles and Mangold (2004) view personal branding as a process by which the person internalizes the desired brand image and is motivated to project that image. All in all, the definitions indicate that the researchers have mainly taken an individualistic approach to personal branding.

Personal branding literature generally follows the principles of traditional product-based marketing (Khedler, 2014; Shepherd, 2005), focusing on “personal marketing, image building, selling, packaging, outward appearances, promoting yourself, and becoming famous” (Rampersad, 2009). The guidelines for personal branding practices are generally based on a person-centred approach, advising individuals to construct a “product” based on themselves that can then be marketed in an appealing ‘package’ (Shepherd, 2005). Other people’s involvement has been presented as a threat for an individual: “If you don’t brand yourself, someone else will do it for you” (Kaputa, 2006). People are advised to make their authentic identity visible, through the act of written self-evaluation, and to constantly monitor their public image in case it is being hampered by others (Gehl, 2011). Brand positioning is used to highlight individuals’ positive attributes that enable them to differentiate themselves from other individuals in the employment market (Labrecque et al., 2010). Khedler claims that personal brand positioning occurs through self-presentation (Labrecque et al. 2011), nonverbal cues, verbal disclosure (information about the self) and actions that shape other people’s conceptions of one’s competence, personality and ability to meet the cultural standards. Rampersad (2009), one of the most popular authors in the field, summarizes that in the end personal brand building is about marketing and promoting yourself. Evidently, the view-point of the individuals’ stakeholders has been overlooked, the gap in which this study is a response to.

2.1.3 Personal branding in social media

Social media refers to online environments such as blogs, wikis, media-sharing sites, social-networking sites, and other social-media-based websites that have had an enormous impact on the manner and depth of consumer-brand interactions (Christodoulides, 2009). These channels are based on relationships, shared interest and identification (Turri et al., 2013) and are characterized by multi-way communication, conversion and collaboration (Tuten, 2008). Rowley (2004a) argues that marketing communications in social media means creating a presence, relationships and shared value. Thus, it seems particularly important to take the stakeholder perspective to personal branding in social media.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, 63) have defined social media as "*a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological foundations of web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content*". Web 2.0 here refers to the technological transformation that has enabled content and applications to not just be created and published by individuals, but also them to be continuously shaped by various users in cooperation (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). User generated content, such as user-reviews and blog posts, has become a popular term for all the various forms of media content that are publicly available and created by end-users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) and it has become one of the most valuable sources of online information today (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008).

Various research suggests that the popularity of social media is a result of its various features that enable consumers to communicate about themselves in ways that the offline environment cannot offer (Khaldi, 2014). Social media offers various platforms for individuals to use digital referents in order to affect their public image (Zhao et al., 2008). The tactics of self-disclosure involve creating and maintaining social and networking profiles, personal web sites and blogs, accompanied with search engine optimization techniques through which one can lead traffic to one's contents (Labrecque et al., 2011). Through the functions of social media, individuals can communicate their personal identity either directly, through explicit self-description and self-related

content, or indirectly, by declaring opinions and preferences and through the functions of these applications such as following, liking or joining groups (Zhao et al, 2008).

Blogs are a valuable media for personal branding, as they enable individuals to share knowledge on specialist matters and craft their “story” in an appealing and innovative way (Harris & Rae, 2011). According to Kozinet et al. (2010), the backbone of blog content is formed by two forms of representations: the shorter term “life projects” and the longer term “life themes”. The first term refers to the practice of using the blog as an online diary to reflectively perform a narrative about one’s life, the plot formed around self-related goals and meanings that are continuously evolving throughout a person’s life (Kozinets et al., 2010). The latter term refers to the pertinent narrative motifs that are revealed through the sequence of interrelated topics in the blog, holding a deeper significance to lifelong goal pursuits (Kozinets et al., 2010). Thomson (2005) has conceptualized a similar idea as “identity project”. According to Fournier (1998), relationships are an important resource for both the “life themes” and the important “life projects”, and thus, an individual’s stakeholders hold a significant meaning to these pursuits. Kozinets et al. (2010) discovered that the narratives of the person’s life define the type of audience attracted to the blog and also their response to its content.

Besides blogs, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter are among the primary social media platforms, at the time of writing this. Regular use and active contribution of content to these and other social media sites are important for building one’s personal brand awareness, by gaining more followers and by increasing the likelihood of being displayed in the search engines (Harris & Rae, 2011).

From a critical stand point, social media also enables individuals to participate in personal branding practices without being forced to comply with their online actions in the real world. As a matter of fact, the liking, sharing and commenting functions of social media enable people to associate themselves with almost any field of expertise without having any particular work experience or knowledge at all. The virtual self-image is relatively easy to strip away from the most unfavourable qualities that would become inevitable in face-to-face interaction (Khaldi, 2014). As Khaldi (2014) suggests,

people tend to find it important that others see them in a good light, and thus communicate in social media accordingly – with sometimes conflicting outcomes. However, social media also enables a whole new level of transparency: it is a platform for people to share their opinions, experiences and achievements, and thus to prove the authenticity of their professional competence.

Social media enables individuals with common interests to join forces and merge resources to achieve their goals, which leads to strong interdependencies between them (Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). Value co-creation plays a central role in these relationships and is enabled by genuine involvement of multiple stakeholders (Turri et al., 2013). Similarly, it seems legitimate to shift the focus from oneself to others in the context of personal branding. However, even though personal branding has been studied in social media context (eg. Alipour, Jahan, Jamaati-e-Somarin, 2015; Harris & Rae, 2011), so far, research hasn't paid considerable emphasis on the difference that social media environment creates in terms of stakeholder involvement in personal branding. Thus, the ideas introduced in the following sections are borrowed from other fields of marketing research.

2.2 Stakeholder perceptions of personal brand value

Just as mainstream branding has confronted a paradigm change due to the popularity of interactive communication platforms, it seems reasonable to also re-think what determines the value of personal brands in the dynamic social media environment. As the brand value is determined by the brand's stakeholders and not by the brand itself (eg. Aaker, 1991, Keller, 1993), it makes sense to approach the value of personal brands from the stakeholder perspective. Adopting the work of Vargo & Lusch (2004) and Schau, Muniz and Arnould (2009) into the context of human branding, I suggest that the value of personal brands reside in the actions and interactions that their acquired cultural and social resources make possible or support.

Prior research (eg. Khedler, 2015; Parmentier et al., 2013) has defined the valuable assets of an individual using Bourdieu's capital and field theories. They suggest that for

a personal brand to be valuable to its holder, the individual must be positioned in other people's minds as someone who possess rare and valuable skills and characteristics (Khedler, 2015). A dominant claim in the personal branding literature is that not only does a successful personal brand "stand out" but it also requires a certain kind of *habitus* (Bouerdieu, 1983) that allows a person to comply with the field-specific expectations, in order to "fit in" (Parmentier et al., 2013). Standing out and fitting in are similar to the processes of establishing and reinforcing points of differentiation and points of parity, well-established marketing practices for product brands (Parmentier et al., 2013). According to Keller (1993), the points of parity result from creating associations in consumers' minds that are expected to be similar between competitors in a given product category, whereas the points of differentiation result from creating associations that are unique.

In this section, I will discuss the three components of personal brand value assessed from the stakeholder perspective:

- authenticity
- points of differentiation
- points of parity.

However, first I will discuss why it is important to assess the value of personal brands from the perspective of their stakeholders.

2.2.1 Stakeholder perceptions as the determining factor of personal brand value

On a broad level, brand value can be approached either from input (brand owner) or output (stakeholder) perspective (Bendisch et al., 2013). Whereas personal branding literature has mainly focused on brand value to its holder (Shepherd, 2005), this thesis takes the approach of the stakeholders. For the stakeholder, the brand value derives from the benefits or functions that the brand possesses (Dennhardt 2012).

Brands need to be associated with quality in order to be able to generate additional value for others (Dennhardt, 2012). According to Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman

(1988), the perceived quality refers to “the consumers’ subjective judgment of the quality of a product or service”. As information carriers, brands lower the consumers’ search costs and perceived risk by being easily recognized and identified as products of certain origin and quality. In a similar way, we can assume that individuals need to meet their stakeholders’ expectations of certain quality, in order to become valued personal brands.

In social media, the value of personal brands is assessed in the form of the content they provide for others to consume. Rowley (2008) argues that the value of digital content is contextual because of the nature of information: it is determined by how it is used or experienced by its consumer. Due to its subjectivity and ambiguity, ongoing debate surrounds the concept of customer value (Rowley, 2008). However, as Rowley (2008) points out, researchers seem to agree that the value of digital content is determined by “the customer in the marketplace and not by the supplier”. Applying this in the personal branding context, we can assume that the value of an individual’s online disclosure is not what the individual content creator puts in but what his/her stakeholders get out. Thus, personal branding practices in social media should be considered from the perspective of the perceived value of an individuals’ stakeholder, and not solely from the individual’s own stand point.

Grönroos (2006) uses the notion of “value-in-use” for customer value creation, meaning that the value of interaction is attached to the consumption experience. An individual’s experience of the digital content is influenced by various stakeholders in the social media environment, including his own contribution, which in turn depends on his learning and skills (Rowley, 2008). Rowley argues that adoption of the “value-in-use” philosophy requires the digital content providers to take on the role of facilitator of other people’s value creation, by providing them with resources. In the personal branding context, these resources can entail both cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1983) of an individual, such as information, ideas and new connections.

The perceived quality of online content can be considered worth the effort, as it has been found to increase brand loyalty (McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig, 2003), spur

communication around the brand in social networks (Chen, Wang & Xie, 2011), potentially leading to endorsements and advocating behaviour (Dennhardt, 2012). From another viewpoint, Dennhardt (2014) reminds that annoyance has become a considerable issue for all marketing communication efforts in the postmodern societies suffering from information overload. Spamming networks with too much or irrelevant content can quickly turn people against the brand, leading to increased spread of negative word of mouth (WOM). This implies that continuous self-centred disclosure that is promoted by the mainstream personal branding literature, might in fact lead to negative outcomes.

The general claim of this thesis is that the value of an individual's personal brand is not constructed in isolation but it is co-created in interaction and thus also dependent on the resources of one's stakeholders. Therefore, I claim that the perceived value of a personal brand (in the minds of the stakeholders) is affected by both the individual's own unique and scarce resources and the ones shared and attached to him/her by the stakeholders in the social network.

2.2.2 Authenticity as the basic ethical requirement

Personal branding literature underlines the importance of authenticity of the personal brand. A common suggestion (eg. Khedler, 2014; Lair et al 2005; Rampersad, 2009) is that personal branding starts from self-reflection, the identification of one's unique skills and characteristics, which enable the person to differentiate oneself from the crowd. For example, Rampersad (2010) argues: "*Your personal brand should emerge from your search for your identity and meaning in life. You should be clear about what you want, fix it in your mind and give it all your positive energy.*" Thus, individuals are not encouraged to pretend to be someone they are not, but to become more conscious of their own strengths and weaknesses to be able to manage "an ideal expression of the front" (Khedler, 2015).

However, the flaw of the dominant conception is to perceive identity work as an inside-out process (Khedler, 2014), with the cost of overlooking the outside-in perspective and

the “dynamic, emergent and ongoing process of becoming” (Corlett & Mavin, 2014). In order to understand the outside-in approach to personal branding, it is useful to note the difference between *self-identity*, as “*the individual’s own notion of who he/she is becoming*” and *social identity* as “*cultural phenomena [which] relate to various social categories existing societally and are, in effect, ‘inputs’ into self-identities (mediated by identity work)*” (Watson, 2008, p. 131). In other words, the self-identity is constructed of a variety of social identities related to different social contexts people act in (Leary & Tangney, 2003), for example I as a researcher, a mother, a business professional, Finnish, a soccer fan etc.

Even though authenticity is being brought up by the advocates of personal branding as the basic ethical requirement, simultaneously, it has also been criticized from the ethical stand point. The critics argue that being authentic and transparent in the online environment requires individuals to “trade away their personal lives”, leading to hyper-individualism and to distortion of social relations (Gehl, 2011; Lair et al., 2005). Lair et al. (2005) claim that “*a professional work world where personal branding predominates would also be one with few enduring bonds and little trust but a great deal of political maneuvering, competition, and cynicism*”. In contrast, I suggest that the co-constructive approach to personal branding accumulates social value of online networks and provides resources for self-reflection and identity building.

In contradiction to the dominant presumption in the personal branding literature, this thesis draws from the performative view of identity co-construction that suggests that identity is not something one “has” but rather something one “does” or “performs” (von Wallpach et al., 2017). The performative perspective is grounded in a linguistic understanding of action, perceiving language not only as a representation of reality but also as construction of reality (Schultze, 2014). Where personal branding literature predominantly perceives identity performances as conscious and strategic processes, performativity regards them as the “unconscious enactments of mundane, everyday practices that replicate and ultimately subjects the individual to cultural regimes” (Strozier, 2002 as referred in Schultze, 2014).

According to Hemetsberger & Mühlbacher (2015, as referred in von Wallpach et al., 2017) the dynamic brand identity has two facets: the *intended identity*, developed by a deliberate, strategic process, and *enacted identity*, emerging through enactment and social discourse. Where the traditional inside-out model of personal branding puts emphasis on the strategic management of intended identity, the co-constructive approach acknowledges brands as “complex social relations that develop among a multitude of enacted identities” (von Wallpach et al., 2017).

Thus, this thesis continues the work of Harris & Rae (2011), who suggest that authenticity of a personal brand means a proven track record and continuous delivery of value. As they put it: “*the best long-term way to build brand influence is to be seen as a ‘giver’ of good quality practical information and advice*” (Harris & Rae, 2011). Personal branding is seen here as a part of individuals’ “identity work”, in which they make connections both “inwards” towards the self and “outwards” to others (Watson, 2008). This means that the value of personal brands can be approached not only in terms of the identity work it reflects but also in terms of the identity value it provides for other people’s self-reflection.

2.2.3 Points of parity (PP)

Bourdieu’s theory suggests that actors within *fields* share a certain kind of *habitus*, a common understanding and ways of acting that can be considered as ‘correct’ or expected behaviour and performance of individuals (Bourdieu 1990, p. 54 referred in Parmentier et al., 2013). According to Bourdieu (1983), *fields* are “structured networks of social positions within which actors strive to gain access to greater power and control over more resources” or capital. From the personal branding perspective, Parmentier et al. (2013) argue that it is essential for individuals to learn these field-specific schemes of perception and patterns of action in order to comply with the expectations of a specific organizational field, in other words, to “fit in”. The need to “fit in” is in line with the traditional assumption in the marketing literature that brand identity must be “solid and stable” and “stakeholder identities strategically aligned” (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 2008). However, the need to fit in leads to continuous cross-pressures, as

simultaneously people need to differentiate themselves from the social groups to which they belong (Brewer, 1991).

Following the work of Zukin and DiMaggio (1990), Goldberg et al. (2016) distinguish between two social dimensions through which people are embedded in their social worlds: structural embeddedness and cultural embeddedness. *Structural embeddedness* refers to “the configuration of interpersonal networks and the extent to which individuals are anchored in tightly-knit social communities”. Goldberg et al (2016) argue that individuals’ position in the social networks affects their performance through the channels of information access.

Cultural embeddedness means “the extent to which individuals share similar norms and taken-for-granted assumptions about appropriate behaviour with those around them and how these shared understandings shape their interactions with others” (Goldberg et al., 2016). Cultural fit is important for individuals’ professional performance, as it affects how an individual and his/her performance is perceived and valued by others (Goldberg et al., 2016).

The work of Goldberg et al. (2016) reveals that low levels of cultural fit in fact benefit highly constrained individuals, those with a central position in interpersonal networks, as it enables them to stand out from their peers in their social communities. Among the individuals with high levels of cultural fit, on the other hand, the best performers are the “integrated nonconformists”, who may not have access to informational benefits of networks due to their weaker social position, but who are able to stand out with their “normatively noncompliant behaviour”, due to their acceptance that stems from status parity with their peers. In other words, the high performance of these individuals is due to their cultural fit into the field-specific expectations, which allows them to introduce unconventional and potentially valuable ideas.

Whereas personal branding literature suggests an individual to position herself as someone who complies with the field-specific expectations, through the acts of self-disclosure (Khedler, 2015; Parmentier et al., 2013), the findings of Goldberg et al. (2016) bear supporting evidence to the opposite view. Goldberg et al. show that the

alignment of social identity within the organization may in fact lead to negative performance for individuals whose structural embeddedness is loose. For these individuals, the lack of social capital represents a limitation to non-redundant information, and thus, the lack of cultural distinctiveness would make it more unlikely for their contributions to be recognized as unique and irreplaceable.

Therefore, the proposition that the individuals need to “fit in” shouldn’t be taken for granted. Instead, it depends on their structural embeddedness, in other words, on their social position in their interpersonal networks. Furthermore, the findings show that individuals who are “habituated” to an organization, and in fact “fit in”, benefit more from questioning and nonconforming to the taken-for-granted expectations than from aiming to align one’s image with others inside the field. This approach to branding is supported by the pluralistic view, building evidence that “brands with differing, even tenacious meanings and values may be even more powerful than their traditional, tightly controlled counter-parts” (Shepherd, Chartrand, & Fitsimons, 2015; Geraldine, 2017).

Furthermore, prior research in personal branding has ignored the boundaryless and fast-paced employment environment that requires individuals to fit in to various and continuously changing circumstances. As the expectations and requirements of “fitting in” are in continuous flux, I suggest that the practices of co-constructive personal branding are needed by individuals to provide each other resources for “fitting in” to the expectations of future working environments and changing work roles.

2.2.4 Points of differentiations (PD)

Whereas “fitting in” refers to field-specific points of parity, points of differentiation stem from individuals’ social and cultural capital that allow a person to “stand out” from the crowd (Parmentier et al., 2013). According to Bourdieu (1983), actors habituated to a field share a certain understanding with regards to the value of the field-specific types of “capital” that are used as resources for differentiation. The three forms of capital, namely economic, cultural and social capital, have the capability to give strength and power and consequently profit their holder (Bourdieu, 1983).

Economic capital consists of everything that is "immediately and directly convertible into money" and it can be used to accelerate the other two forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1983). Personal branding has been seen as the means for individuals to gain better return on investment (ROI) for his or her acquired cultural and social capital, and thus, it has been considered to stem from individuals' economic interests (Khedler 2015).

Cultural capital can be described as "socially rare and distinctive tastes, skills, knowledge and practices" and it appears in the forms of "implicit practical knowledge, skills and dispositions; it is objectified in cultural objects; and institutionalized in official degrees and diplomas" (Holt, 1998, 3). In other words, it is the sum of a person's informal and formal knowledge, skills, educations and advantages, such as linguistic competence and specific attitude, which give her a higher status in society (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, as referred by Khedler, 2015).

From the viewpoint of the stakeholders of a personal brand, cultural capital allows him/her to have something to share – knowledge that can be perceived valuable by others. Therefore, the possession of cultural capital doesn't make an enduring and influential personal brand *per se*, one must also be able to actually share and accumulate it. In social networks, cultural capital is shared by various participants – in fact, the social networks of individuals represent an access to resources of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1983). Therefore, individual's social capital, the value that stems from networks and relationships, is equally paramount for personal branding.

Individual's *social capital* refers to the collective value of networks and relationships (Khedler, 2015). From the social capital point of view, a powerful personal brand has been defined in terms of high status, visibility and popularity within the network (Khedler, 2014). However, perceiving personal branding as a social process, the stakeholder approach suggests that the value of a personal brand can not be evaluated solely in terms of the achieved status but also in terms of the ongoing interaction and continuous engagement of audiences.

According to Bourdieu (1983), social capital contains all the “actual and potential resources that arise from more or less durable networks of institutionalized relationships”. The value of social capital is embedded in the resources of social networks: people can use their social relations to borrow or use other people’s resources, from which they may profit (Lin, 2001). According to McAlexander et al. (2003), consumer experiences are central to the existence and benefits of relationships within a brand community. These experiences build up social capital, help people form their identities and realize personal goals (Dennhardt, 2014). Dennhardt (2014) claims that “the social capital a brand offers stems from being relevant in social networks and, thereby, providing individuals the possibilities to connect and interact with each other about the meaning and experiences that a brand offers”. Therefore, people with more social capital are better able than others to enhance their own value by facilitating exchanges of information and accumulating knowledge (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Khedler, 2015).

The co-construction of personal brand value requires critical mass, which is why the number of followers can be considered a predictor of the influence of individuals. However, not only the number of people, but – even more importantly – the frequency of their interaction: the more actively and regularly they are in contact with each other, the more likely they are to develop a “habit of cooperation” (Marwell & Oliver, 1988; Wasko & Faraj, 2005). This habit of cooperation is more likely to be adopted by individuals who have a central position and a number of direct ties in the network (Lin, 2001). Therefore, we can expect that the value of a personal brand is linked not only to the size of the person’s social network but also to the cultural and social capital of the people in the network, enforced by their engagement in meaningful interaction.

As the personal branding literature states that an individual’s success relies on his/her unique skills and know-how, it might seem paradoxical to suggest one to share the differentiating expertise and personal asset to others. However, if we acknowledge that the value of a personal brand is not determined in terms of an individual’s *possession* of the scarce resources but in terms of the *perceived value* of these resources, we may need to re-think the principles that guide this endeavour.

2.3 Co-construction of personal brand value in social networks

The aim of this section is to show how the stakeholders of individuals contribute to their personal brand value. As a paradigm shift, this section introduces an outside-in perspective to personal branding, filling up the gap found in prior research, in which personal branding has been solely seen as an inside-out process.

In this section, I suggest that individuals contribute to each other's personal brands in two ways:

1. directly, by influencing other stakeholders' perceptions of the personal brand
2. indirectly, by providing resources for identity building, "fitting in" and "standing out", in online interaction.

Before hopping on to explaining these two forms of stakeholder involvement in personal brand value co-construction, I will briefly discuss, why it is paramount to include the perspective of stakeholder participation in the study of personal brand value.

2.3.1 Personal brand value co-construction

The contemporary branding literature and practice is increasingly building on the co-constructive perspective, acknowledging the importance of cooperation and shared value as determinants of success (eg. da Silveira et al., 2013; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013, Vargo & Lusch, 2004). The co-constructive approach to branding (Csaba & Bengtsson, 2006, Hatch & Schultz, 2010, Merz, Yi & Vargo, 2009, Scott & Lane, 2000; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013; von Wallpach et al., 2017) suggests that the stakeholders of the brand should be considered as active participants in creating the brand value, brand identity and brand meaning (Dennhardt, 2014). Taken into the context of personal branding, this means that the value of personal brands is not only constituted by the stakeholder perceptions of the brand but it is also dependent on their actions and participation in value co-creation.

In social media, the interlinked content made up by various actors form a continuous, improvisational process (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2010) have described the complexity of the co-created brand narrative through a pinball metaphor: managing the co-created brand narrative is like playing pinball. The ball, referring to the brand narrative, often does not go where the brand owner intends. However, the brand owner's interest is to set the direction of the narrative and play the game in a way that the story fragments of the different participants form a coherent and meaningful whole. In this case the brand manager is no longer a “guardian” but more like a “conductor” who must harmonize the various meanings contributed by stakeholders (Michel, 2017).

Even though the importance of relationships and social networks has been acknowledged in the personal branding literature, to date, there has been little attempt to formulate co-constructive versions of personal branding practices (Shepherd, 2005; Lair et al., 2005). If we assume that the principals guiding brand management in general can be applied in the personal branding context, the emerging co-constructive approach suggests that too much attention has been drawn to the inside-out process of personal branding, with the cost of overlooking the importance of network engagement.

Applying the principles of co-constructive branding to the human branding context, I suggest that personal branding is a continuous social process, in which cooperative value sharing plays a key role. Value sharing is a particularly significant success factor in social media, which has become an important channel for the practices that are referred to here as co-constructive personal branding.

2.3.2 Stakeholder involvement as an influencer of stakeholder perceptions

The participation of people in social networks can entail different levels of engagement, consisting of consumption, contribution and creation dimensions (Muntinga, Moorman & Smith, 2011; Schivinski, Christodoulides & Dabrowski, 2016). Rowley (2008) argues that most users of online communities are “content consumers” or “lurkers”, who passively observe other people’s content. In contrast, “content creators” are those that add value to others, for example by posting comments or publishing and sharing content

(Rowley, 2008). Co-produced marketing communication is being referred to as word-of-mouth marketing (Kozinets et al., 2010). According to the definition by Kozinets et al. (2010): “*Word-of-mouth marketing (WOM) is the intentional influencing of consumer-to-consumer communications by professional marketing techniques*”.

Kozinets et al. (2014) show that WOM marketing is not about “accurate spread of marketing messages” nor the spread of “positive messages or recommendations”. Instead, it refers to social brand engagement that is formed around genuine interconnection between brand mentions and social experiences of individuals (Kozinets et al., 2014). The depth of engagement depends on how the narrative around a brand provokes and excites each actor: just enough to become an interested listener or strongly enough to participate ‘vocally’ in the conversation (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012).

The most valuable form of co-constructive personal branding for individuals is brand evangelism. Brand evangelism refers to active recommending of brands to other consumers and the advocating of brands (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Schau et al., 2009). Brand evangelism goes beyond brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991), as it stands for “consumers’ willingness to proactively show and convince others of their object of loyalty” (Dennhardt, 2014). In social media, brand evangelism can take different forms, from “I like” recommendations and peer-to-peer communications to direct referencing and recommending (Zhu & Zhang, 2010).

According to Turri et al. (2013) brand evangelism can be the most influential source of information for consumption decisions (here referring to content consumption), as it is perceived by consumers as originating from “a less biased, more trustworthy source” – someone from their own network. Furthermore, active WOM behaviour accelerates value co-creation as it encourages more people to join one’s network and to contribute to content creation (Thomson, 2006).

Drawing from Kozinets et al. (2010), we can expect that individuals can foster brand evangelism by actively sharing relevant and valuable content in their networks. Moreover, the research of Turri et al. (2013) reveals that individuals that are affectively

committed to a content creator are more likely to promote him/her via positive WOM. For example, people who have worked closely together can be expected to be more willing to endorse each other for their special skills than people whose social tie is looser.

However, perceived quality doesn't automatically lead to vocal participation: as mentioned, many social media users only consume content and "lurk" on other people's sites. Therefore, Dennhardt (2014) suggests that social brand value mediates the relationship between perceived quality and brand evangelism (Figure 1). Drawing from Dennhardt (2014), I suggest that the value of co-constructive personal branding practices is mediated through social brand value, which I will explain in the following subsection.

2.3.3 Stakeholder involvement as a source of social brand value

Drawing from Bourdieu's social capital theory, Dennhardt (2014) demonstrates that the assessment of brand value should include a measure of social brand value. According to Dennhardt (2014), "*Social brand value (SBC) is the perceived value derived by exchange and interactions with other users of the brand*".

Dennhardt's (2014) model shows how brands can facilitate the value co-creation through accumulation of social capital. According to Dennhardt (2014), social brand value acts as a mediator between the perceived quality of the brand and active recommending behaviour, referred to as brand evangelism. The conceptual model for social brand value is presented in Figure 1. Drawing from Dennhardt (2014), I suggest that individuals affect the value of each other's personal brands in social interaction, by providing resources for identity building as well as for "standing out" and "fitting in".

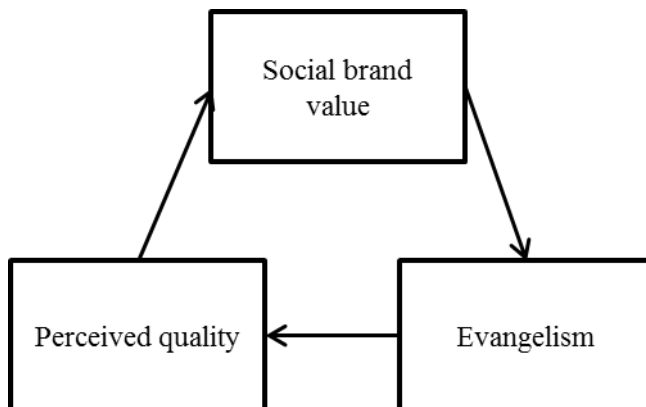


Figure 1: Conceptual model for Social Brand Value (Dennhardt, 2014)

Dennhardt (2014) provides evidence that brands can deliver social brand value to consumers through three forms of social resources, which serve the fundamental and innate human needs of self-identity building, relatedness, and competence (Deci & Ryan, 2000):

- social identity value
- communal value
- informational value.

In the following paragraphs, I will briefly explain each of these terms and discuss how they are attached to personal brand value.

Social identity value

Social identity value refers to the (personal) brands' ability to help others create and build self-identities (Escalas and Bettman 2005), which is one of the fundamental needs and behaviours among humankind (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Thus, the virtual exchange of opinions, knowledge and experiences can be considered not only as acts of personal branding, as simultaneously providing resources for individuals to build their self-identities.

For individuals, it makes sense to serve the identification needs within one's network, as group identification has been found to increase interaction, support and advocating behaviour of group members (Scott & Lane, 2000; Escalas & Bettman, 2005;

Dennhardt, 2014). As people often prefer brands that are congruent with their self-concepts, cultivating affective commitment in others requires a self-connection or identification with the brand's offering (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Therefore, identification needs of others can be taken into consideration, for example, by targeting personal branding efforts towards audiences within one's own professional or occupational field.

Communal value

Sense of community, or relatedness, refers to the human desire to belong to a social sphere (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The sense of belong created among members in the social network provide them value by leading to a sense of mutual trust, solidarity and support (Esser, 2008) as well as sharing of social credentials (Lin, 2001). Therefore, by facilitating the sense of community in the social network, individuals provide each other resources for "fitting in", and simultaneously co-construct each other's personal brands. Moreover, the communal orientation to communication is likely to result in a more favourable response in the audience and attract positive WOM more efficiently than an individualistic approach (Kozinets et al., 2010). Therefore, a personal brand's ability to facilitate the sense of community in his/her social networks is likely to further increase interaction – and thus, accumulate value co-construction – in the network.

Dennhardt (2014) suggests that brands can foster a sense of community in social networks by providing communal value, defined as "a brand's ability to allow consumers to develop a feeling of belonging to a group based on shared interests, rituals and traditions related to a specific brand". In other words, strong personal brands with wide social networks have the ability to bring people together, build social ties and, therefore, accumulate social capital (Dennhardt, 2014). Kozinets et al. (2010) argue that a communal orientation to communication, characterized by relevant, useful and communally desirable content, fosters individuals' sense of belong. Thus, an individual can facilitate communal value in the social network, for example by helping others to connect with people who share similar professional interests and by sharing experiences around a specific professional theme (Turri et al., 2013).

Informational value

Dennhardt (2014) argues that brands should aim to maximize the information and knowledge shared within the brand community, in order to accumulate the participants' social capital. Social networks serve as learning systems (Brown & Duguid, 1991), by providing access to other people's knowledge and resources, and accelerating the flow of information and influence (Arthur, 1994). In other words, by sharing their knowledge and experiences, well-informed individuals are able to accumulate cultural capital in the social network, and thus, provide each other resources for "standing out". Therefore, we can expect that well-targeted content, with real informational value for audiences, serves the objects of personal branding better than individualistic self-disclosure.

2.4 Theoretical framework for personal brand value

In this last section of the literature review, I will sum up the stakeholder perspective to personal branding with a theoretical framework for personal brand value (Figure 2). As discussed in previous sections, the stakeholder perspective is paramount to the study of personal brand value at least for two reasons. First, the framework shows that besides the individualistic personal branding practices, we should pay attention to the variety of ways individuals' stakeholders participate in co-constructing each other's personal brands. Not only do individuals directly affect other stakeholders' perceptions of each other's personal brand value but they also provide resources for each other to develop the sources of their personal brand value: self-identity, points of parity and points of differentiation. Thus, instead of focusing on individualistic self-disclosure, the stakeholder perspective encourages individuals to provide each other with resources.

Second, we should bear in mind that the value of personal brands is determined in the minds of their stakeholders, and not by the individuals themselves. As visualized in the framework, the perception of value further increases the stakeholder involvement, and thus, acts as the requirement of this ongoing social process.

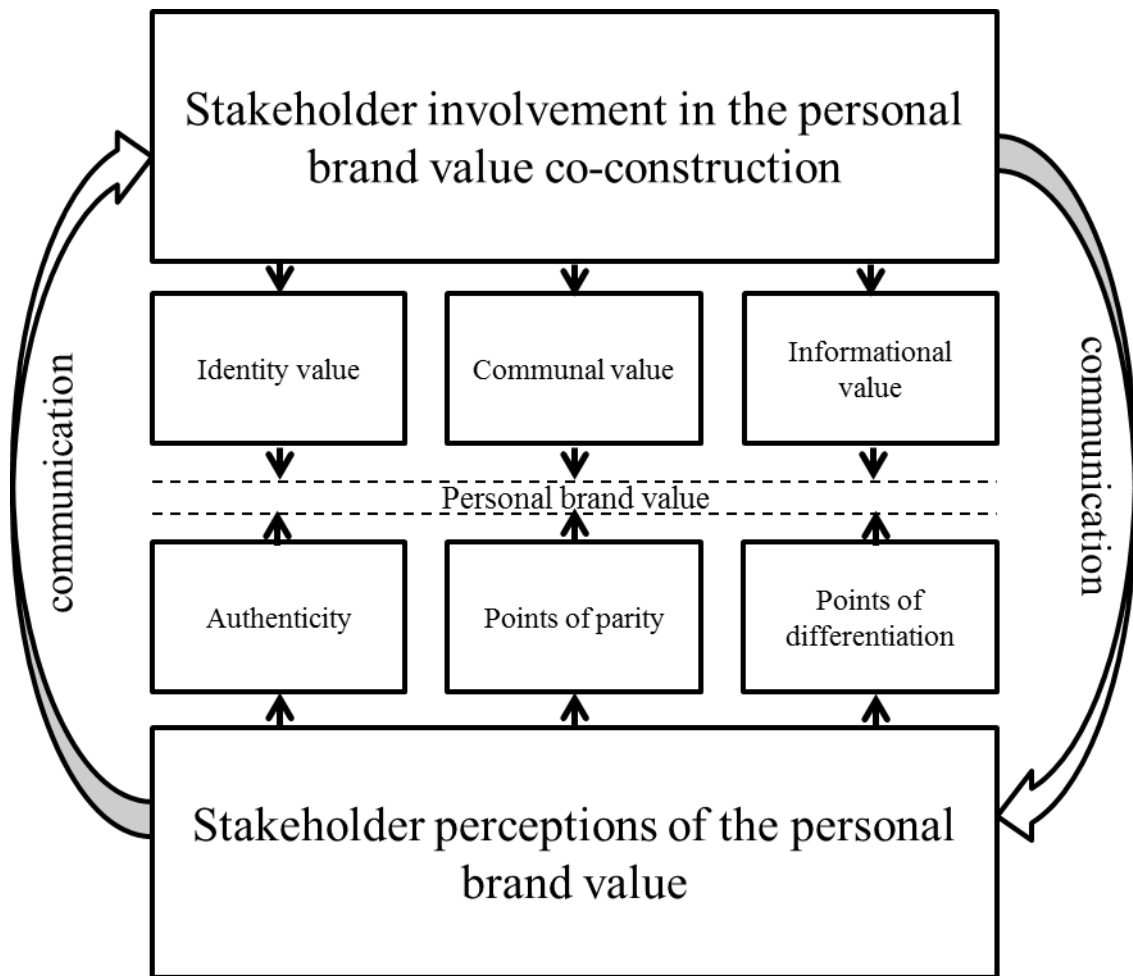


Figure 2: Theoretical framework for personal brand value

Communication is a central element of this framework, pointing out that personal brand value is not an end state of personal branding activities, but instead, it is developed continuously throughout a person's life, in continuous interplay between people.

Drawing from this theoretical conception, the aim of my empirical study was to test the validity of this framework among the field of communication professionals in Finland and in social media context, the findings of which will be discussed in the following chapters.

3. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this chapter is to provide the reader with the opportunity to evaluate the quality and usefulness of this research by explaining the methodology used in the data collection and analysis. The chapter is divided in three sections. The first section introduces the data collection methods, which is followed by the data analysis methods discussed in section two. The research ethics of this study are outlined in section three.

3.1 Data collection

This section introduces the data collection methods of this study that were two-fold. The main objective of the research was to grasp a stakeholder perspective to personal brand value. As it is problematic to define a person's stakeholders, I decided to let the "stakeholders" decide the personal brands who they regard themselves as stakeholders to, by letting a group of people determine the personal brands they value. Thus, the first objective of my research was to determine, who are the personal brands that were perceived valuable in a chosen occupational field and why. This first phase set the scene for the second part of the data collection, in which I then focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of how the value of personal brands were co-constructed in social media.

Two primary methods were used in data collection: the first phase was conducted by using an online survey, and in the second phase, data was collected from a social media platform, namely Twitter, in accordance with the survey results.

3.1.1 Online survey

The survey was supposed to give answers to three questions: 1) who are the personal brands that are perceived valuable by their stakeholders, 2) why, and 3) where does the value sharing take place? Here, the question of why was supposed to answer the first research question, and thus, to give an overview of the value-determining components of personal brands from the stakeholder perspective. The other two questions were used to set the scene for the second phase of data collection.

The survey was targeted at one professional field, in order to be able to identify the potentially valuable field-specific expectations and requirements for personal brands. Communications professionals were chosen as the target group of the survey, primarily because the topic of the research can be considered a particularly timely concern in their own field. Therefore, the online survey was conducted in co-operation with the Finnish Association for Communication Professionals, ProCom ry.

The link to the survey was sent to all regular members (excluding students and other non-paying members) of the association, which means that the survey reached a comprehensive proportion of the communications professionals in Finland. The online survey was conducted during a two-weeks-period, during Oct 17-30th, 2016. The survey was conducted in Finnish, the native language of the vast majority of the target group. Out of 2152 recipients of the survey link, 217 responded. The prerequisite for participating in the study was that the respondent used social media for any professional purposes, which led to 3% of the respondents being left out from the analysis.

In the survey, there was no reason to affect responses with pre-defined alternatives, and thus, open-ended questions were used to find out who were the personal brands that the respondents perceived as valuable in a professional sense and why. Open-ended questions are particularly useful for pilot and exploratory studies with relatively small samples, increasing the validity of this sort of research (Keeter, 2005).

3.1.2 Twitter content

As the survey had revealed the value-determining components of the personal brands from the stakeholder perspective, the objective of the second phase was to systematically grasp as much information as needed to understand how the perceived value of the personal brands was being enacted in social media.

The Twitter accounts of two people, Ville Tolvanen and Katleena Korteso, were chosen as the objects of content analysis for two reasons. First, they were an obvious

choice, as they were perceived as the most valuable personal brands within the stakeholder group of communication professionals. Second, two people were selected instead of one, because they represented rather different kinds of approaches to personal branding, as will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Similarly, Twitter was chosen based on the survey findings but also for its particular features that better enable networking and interaction between complete strangers and not just with professional acquaintances. Twitter, a micro blogging platform, allows the users to publish short messages of less than 140 characters and follow the publications, or “tweets” of their selected users. The service can be used as a learning system, as it allows people to stay up-to-date on trends in the areas of their interests and to stay in touch with their contacts “with a level of immediacy, regularity and intimacy that would be hard to replicate in the offline world” (Harris & Rae, 2011). Twitter is also commonly used as a platform for personal branding, not least because it is well suited for the purpose, helping to establish individuals as well-connected, knowledgeable and approachable personalities (Harris & Rae, 2011).

The data was collected from the Twitter accounts of Ville Tolvanen and Katleena Korteso, during a 10-day-period, from Oct 15 to Oct 25, 2016. All tweets were collected, both the ones published by Tolvanen and Korteso themselves but also the ones published by others. During this time period, 690 tweets were collected from Tolvanen’s account and 580 tweets from Korteso’s account, the vast majority of them published by other people in their networks. This amount of data was considered sufficient as certain patterns of interaction could be detected already from the data and thus, the saturation point was deemed to be achieved.

Another reason for using this particular time period for data collection was that it enabled me as the researcher to participate in the value co-creation process, and thus to gain better understanding of the phenomenon. The survey results were published by ProCom during the time period of data collection, and as I was attached to the survey as a researcher, this enabled me to provide value-in-use for Korteso and Tolvanen as well as for their followers, especially the people working in the field of communication. By

providing them social brand value by discussing the survey results, I was able to better observe the accumulation of value, both in terms of my own and the other participants' personal brands. The researcher's participation in interaction has been considered legitimate in constructivist qualitative research in which the researcher should aim to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of those experiencing it (Constantino, 2008). Thus, as an active participant, I was able to capture the essence of the constructivist research process, as according to Constantino (2008): "The researcher's understanding is co-constructed with that of the participants through their mutual interaction".

3.2 Data analysis

This section opens up the methods used in the data analysis of this research. Again, the data analysis phase was two-fold, consisting of content analysis of both the open-ended survey responses and the data collected from Twitter.

Content analysis was chosen as the method for data analysis, due to its flexibility and adoptability into multiple communicative settings. Content analysis is defined by Holsti (1969) as "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages".

An important decision in conducting content analysis is whether to develop an original coding system or to adopt categories used by others in related applications (Druckman, 2005). Typically, the choice between original and adapted content analysis systems requires trade-offs between reliability and validity of research findings (Druckman, 2005). As the area of this research is new and lacks established standards, in this research, it was decided to use an original coding system that better supported the validity of the findings. The categorization, however, was based on the theoretical framework introduced in Section 2.4. The constructivist, emic research tradition favours original categories, for their ability to "better capture the essence of the phenomenon" (Druckman, 2005).

3.2.1 Content analysis of the survey responses

The survey questions 6 and 7 (see Appendix 1) were supposed to provide answer to the research question one: 1) How is the value of personal brands described by their stakeholders? The responses to these questions were analysed using a manual coding system.

First, the data was read through several times in order to form an overall picture of the themes that were repeated in several responses. In the second phase, three main categories were identified on the basis of re-occurring phrases in the data sample: the stakeholder perceptions were divided between the ones related to the personal brand as an individual, the ones related to communication and the ones related to the personal benefits of the respondents. Then, in the third phase, each response was analysed word-by-word and coded either in one or several of these categories. Each of the main categories contained several subcategories, which were based on repeatedly occurring phrases and synonyms. The categories introduced in the theoretical framework were used in the analysis of the perceptions related to the personal brands as individuals. Other categories – those related to communication and personal benefits – emerged from the data sample. This led to the formation of the list of the stakeholder perceptions of the personal brand value represented in Table 6 in Chapter 4.2.

3.2.2 Content analysis in Twitter

The objective of the second phase of the data analysis was to gain understanding in order to answer the second research question: 2) How and why do the stakeholders of personal brands contribute to their personal brand value? In content analysis, interaction can be described by addressing questions of “what was said, who said, and to whom”, whereas the interpretation of interaction is provided by addressing the questions of “why something was said, how it was said, and with what effect” (Druckman, 2005). This means that the researcher’s interpretation of the data plays a significant role in the

data analysis, thus, representing both the main risk and the main success factor for the validity of the findings.

The first phase, the “rough” analysis, took place simultaneously with the data collection, which enabled me to form an overall perception of the amount of needed data in the analysis. In this first phase, all tweets were being transferred from the Twitter accounts of the objects of the study, along with their related information: the publishing date, the author, the reactions of others (number of responses, re-tweets and likes), the role of the personal brand related to the tweet (Ville/Katleena) and additional content (eg. links or visual images included in the tweets). As additional information, it was noted if the tweet was part of a conversation.

The categories formed on the basis of the survey responses were used as the coding system. These categories were appropriate and usable for both data samples, the one collected from Ville Tolvanen’s account and another collected from Katleena Korteso’s account. The comparability of these data sets with the chosen coding rules can be considered as an indication of reliability of the analysis.

Finally, in order to provide an answer to the third research question, the data set was analysed in relation to the possible motives of individuals for participating in the value co-construction of the personal brands. This question was addressed with using the concept of social brand value (SBV) as the lens of the analysis. The interpretation of these findings is discussed in the following chapter. However, it is to be noted that constructivist research, like this, doesn’t produce one objective truth but, instead, there are many possible and meaningful interpretations of the same data (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

3.3 Research ethics

This thesis work followed the guidelines of good scientific practice, defined by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2012). The research data was handled in compliance with good administrative practice. The survey respondents remained

anonymous in the study and were properly informed of the purpose and use of the collected data.

The common interest with the researcher and the partnering association, Procom ry, was to raise discussion around personal branding in the field of organizational communication, and around the changing communicative landscape of organizations, in general. No financial support was received from the association or other organizations for the research. To avoid any conflicts of interest, decisions regarding the data collection and analysis were not influenced by any external parties including Procom ry.

Before conducting any systematic data collection in Twitter, Ville Tolvanen and Katleena Korteso were asked for permission to be involved in the study. From the perspective of copyrights, data collection in social media has raised conflicting opinions, and thus, the data collection from multiple authors turned out to be the most problematic part of the research from an ethical perspective. Thus, in order to avoid any potentially harmful implications to any of the content providers within the data sample, it was decided that other content providers besides Tolvanen and Korteso remain anonymous in this study.

4. FINDINGS

In this chapter, I introduce my research findings, through which I show how the personal brand value is perceived by and co-constructed in interaction with various participants in the personal brand's social network. The research findings are based on two data collection methods, introduced in Chapter 3: a survey conducted among communication professionals in Finland, and content analysis conducted in the Twitter accounts of two valued personal brands, Ville Tolvanen and Katleena Korteso. The former method enabled me to shed light on the stakeholder perceptions of the personal brand value, whereas the latter analysis method enabled me to form a more in-depth understanding of how the personal brand value was co-constructed in social media.

This chapter is divided into four sections. In the first two sections, I elaborate on the survey findings, first, introducing how perceptions on valuable personal brands were divided between communication professionals in Finland, and second, providing an analysis of the sources of their perceived personal brand value. In the third section, I discuss these survey findings in terms of the content analysis in Twitter, arguing that the stakeholders of personal brands should be perceived as active participants in value co-creation. Fourth, I propose that interaction should be perceived as a direct value-determining component of personal brands, as the participants gain value-in-use, in the form of social brand value, by participating in interaction around brands. Throughout this chapter, I demonstrate how the personal brand value of Ville Tolvanen and Katleena Korteso is co-constructed within their social networks and how they orchestrate these social activities.

4.1 Valued personal brands among communication professionals in Finland

The survey sample mainly consisted of women (93% of the respondents), which is due to the female dominance in the communication professions in Finland. According to statistics from the year 2015, 90 % of the communication professionals in Finland were women and their average age was 42 (ProCom & Taloustutkimus, 2015). The age of the

respondents was also distributed similarly in this study. The division of respondents by their employers was distributed between public and private sector and other organizations, however, private sector employees together with entrepreneur respondents covered over half (54%) of the sample. The sex, the age group and the employer group of the sample have been visualized in Tables 1, 2 and 3.

Table 1: The division of respondents by sex

Sex	No. Of Resp.	% of total
Male	15	7 %
Female	198	91 %
Unknown	4	2 %
Total	217	100 %

Table 2: The division of respondents by age

Age group	No. Of Resp.	% of total
25-30	13	6 %
31-35	21	10 %
36-40	47	22 %
41-45	42	19 %
46-50	30	14 %
51-55	37	17 %
56-60	15	7 %
over 60	12	6 %
Total	217	100 %

Table 3: The division of respondents by the place of employment

Place of empl.	No. Of Resp.	% of total
Publicly listed company	34	16 %
Other privately owned company	65	30 %
Public sector + publicly owned companies	46	21 %
Third sector (associations and other organizations)	39	18 %
Church, religious organizations	5	2 %
Self-employed, entrepreneurs	17	8 %
Others	11	5 %
Total	217	100 %

Responses to the survey question 4 (Appendix 1) set the scene for the data analysis in social media. Twitter was considered the most relevant social media channel for professional purposes by 30 % of the respondents and as the second most relevant by 33 %. The results for LinkedIn were similar, as it was chosen the first by 29% and the second by 26%.

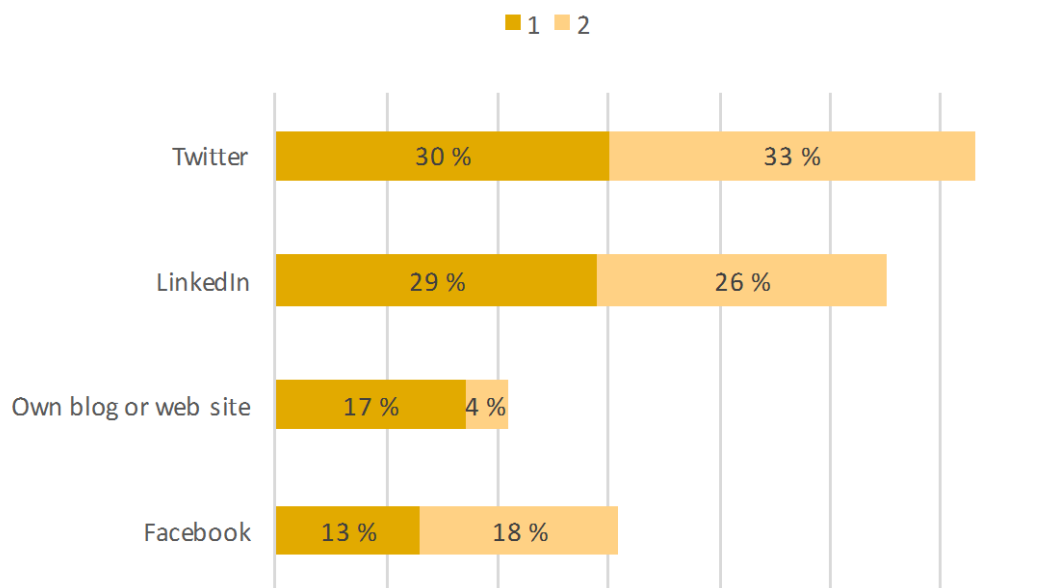


Figure 3: The most valuable social media channels for professional purposes

The survey findings revealed that personal branding is still fairly new theme for communication professionals in Finland. Only 51% of the total respondents (n=186) were able to name a personal brand who they perceived professionally valuable. From the rest of the respondents who used social media for professional purposes, 37% couldn't remember any personal brand or were not able to name anyone, and 12% perceived that they didn't gain real value from anyone in their social networks. These results indicate that personal branding hasn't been generally associated with valuable knowledge exchange among the communication professionals, and thus, the potential of social media as a platform for self-development might be under-utilized among them. Table 4 gives an overall picture of the communication professionals' perceptions of valuable personal brands in Finland.

Table 4: The perceptions of valuable personal brands among communication professionals in Finland

Responses	No. of resp.	% of total
Ville Tolvanen	14	8 %
Katleena Kortesusuo	8	4 %
Others	73	39 %
"Not able to name anyone"	69	37 %
"No added value from anyone"	22	12 %
n	186	100 %

From those responses, in which a valuable personal brand was mentioned (n=95), 51 % of the votes were distributed between 12 people (Table 5). Other votes were distributed evenly between 46 other names. The two people who were given the most votes were Ville Tolvanen and Katleena Kortesusuo

Table 5: The most valued personal brands among communication professionals in Finland.

Personal brand	% of respondents
Ville Tolvanen	15 %
Katleena Kortesusuo	8 %
Alf Rehn	5 %
Kirsi Piha	4 %
Pekka Sauri	4 %
Piritta Seppälä	3 %
Elina Melgin	2 %
Hanna Takala	2 %
Jari Sarasvuo	2 %
Kati Kalliomäki	2 %
Richard Branson	2 %
Tommi Tervanen	2%
Others	49 %
n=95	100 %

Ville Tolvanen

The person who got the most votes (15%) in the survey, was Ville Tolvanen, a professional keynote speaker, business consultant and the founder of Digitalist Network - an active community of business professionals with a common interest in digitalization. After joining Twitter in 2009, Tolvanen has published 67,7 thousand tweets and gathered 27,9 thousand followers. He represents himself in Twitter the following way:

"#V | #Digitalist | #Keynote | #CMO | #CDO | #Strategist | #Coach | #Digitalnomad | #Founder | #Digitalistnetwork @digitalistinfo".

Ville was described by the survey respondents as the forerunner for digitalization, an active content creator in multiple online channels, and his way of writing was described courageous and compact. According to the survey respondents, Tolvanen provided them added value by sharing knowledge, by endorsing people, by awakening new insights and by forcing them to question their current ways of working.

Katleena Kortesuso

Another person who stood out in the survey responses (8% of the votes) was Katleena Kortesuso, an entrepreneur specialized in crisis communication, and a writer of several non-fiction books. Just like Ville Tolvanen, Kortesuso had first signed into Twitter in 2009, and since then, tweeted 37,6 thousand times and gained 14,5 thousand followers. She describes herself in Twitter (texts being translated from Finnish) as:

"The most expensive cleaner in Finland. The favorite children: #crisiscommunication, #EOTblog, non-fiction books writing and viking swordplay. Connections: @aucor, @keskiaika, @rkesakoulu."

In the survey responses, Katleena was described as a person whose appeal is based on interesting combination of her amusing personality and tough competence. The

respondents valued her relevant and timely content, particularly in the field of communication. According to the survey, Kortesoja provided added value for her followers by keeping them up-to-date on the relevant topics in their occupational field, emphasizing the importance of communication in her postings, giving good practical tips and – just like Ville Tolvanen - forcing people to question the traditional ways of doing things.

4.2 Stakeholder perceptions of personal brand value

In this section, I discuss the value of personal brands from the stakeholder perspective. The findings represented in this section are based on the survey conducted to communication professionals in Finland, and thus, they reflect the perceptions of this particular professional field. The key finding represented in this chapter is that the stakeholder perceptions of personal brand value can be divided in three:

- a) the perceptions related to the person behind the personal brand
- b) the perceptions related to communication around the personal brand
- c) the perceptions of personal benefits related to the personal brand.

In the first category, the perceptions were divided in accordance to the three dimensions of personal brand value, introduced in Section 2.2: authenticity, points of differentiation and points of parity. The findings also supported the findings of prior research, discussed in Section 2.3, by indicating the prominent role of communication in personal brand value construction. The findings show that the value of personal brands should be perceived from the stakeholder perspective, and not solely from the individuals' own stand point.

Table 6: Value-determining components of personal brands as perceived by communication professionals in Finland

Category	No. of mentions	% of mentions
Perceptions related to the person	225	56 %
Authenticity	20	5 %
Points of differentiation	153	34 %
Communication skills	93	21 %
Substance competence	22	5 %
Technical competence	14	3 %
Innovativeness	11	2 %
Authority	13	3 %
Points of parity	52	17 %
Shared interests	52	17 %
Perception related to communication	206	46 %
Form of Communication (the way of interacting)	61	14 %
Self-marketing	7	2 %
Socializing (neutral)	13	3 %
Facilitating	11	2 %
Value sharing	27	6 %
Endorsing	3	1 %
Effectiveness of Communication	93	21 %
Frequency	28	6 %
Courageousness	20	5 %
Appeal	19	4 %
Credibility	12	3 %
Influence	7	2 %
Efficiency	7	2 %
Theme	52	12 %
Topicality	34	8 %
Relevance to self	18	4 %
Competence-based	2	0 %
Perceptions of personal benefits	13	3 %
Utility	11	2 %
Entertainment	2	0 %
Total	444	100 %

4.2.1 The perceptions related to the person

The survey findings support prior research, showing that the value of personal brands is evaluated by their stakeholders in terms of their authenticity and ability to “stand out” and “fit in”. The most of all, the valuable personal brands were seen as highly competent individuals, whose communication skills, in particular, enabled them to stand out from the crowd.

In the survey responses, the points of differentiation were most commonly related to the communication skills of the personal brand, further discussed in the following subsection. Many of the differentiating characteristics were also related to the cultural capital of the personal brands: the differentiating expertise was most commonly defined using words such as “expert”, “professional”, “knowledgeable”, “guru” and “experienced”. Many also brought up the technical competence of the personal brands, such as competence in using particular social media sites. Many described the personal brands not only competent but also as forerunners of development in their fields, the comments containing words such as “role model”, “innovator”, “exemplar”, “evangelist” or “trend setter”. These responses were categorised as innovativeness in Table 6. For example, Ville Tolvanen, the most frequently mentioned personal brand in the study, was described by one respondent as “*an inspiring thinker and a role model for digitalization and open dialogue*”. In addition, but not that frequently mentioned as one might expect, the respondents described the personal brands in terms of their formal authority and popularity. A few mentioned the person’s good reputation and brand awareness and a couple referred to the person’s formal position or professional achievements, such as “the CEO”, “the editor-in-chief” or “the inventor of web bank”. Thus, it seems that the stakeholders’ perceptions of the personal brand’s credibility are not that much determined by the person’s formal position as they are by his/her perceived competence.

Whereas the communication skills and other forms of cultural capital were identified as resources of individuals to “stand out” as valuable personal brands, the thematic context of their social media disclosure was identified from the survey responses as a resource to “fit in”. The majority of the respondents indicated that they share similar interests with the personal brand they value, and the value of personal brand is attached to the brand’s ability to provide value related to the particular field of communication professionalism. However, the list of resources under “Points of differentiation” can also be considered as a reflection of “Points of parity”: they represent characteristics that are considered valuable within the field of communication, in particular.

In addition, a frequently indicated characteristic of the personal brands was authenticity, drawn from the comments that defined the personal brand as “personal”, “genuine”, “sincere” and “open”. However, the responses related to the personal brands’ expertise could have been also considered as an indication of perceived authenticity of their personal brand value. For example, one respondent described her feelings towards Katleena Korteso, the personal brand that she perceived the most valuable and influential, in the following way:

“I don’t understand how this fumbling, pantyhose-breaking, Viking-enthusiast has managed to create herself an image of a real professional, whose word is counted on in media.”

Evidently, to be perceived as a credible personal brand, doesn’t require individuals to limit their social media disclosure in professional setting nor in “serious facts and figures”. Instead, as the survey findings show, revealing something personal – or even funny – about oneself may increase the perception of authenticity, and thus, the value of the personal brand. This finding supports the proposition of this research that the personal brand needs not to aim for a tightly managed, coherent brand image, and thus, the stakeholder participation in the branding process shouldn’t be perceived as such a threat, as it has been described in prior literature.

4.2.2 The perceptions related to communication

The survey findings made evident that communication is at the heart of personal branding. In this research, the discursive features and the effectiveness of communication were identified as resources of individuals for “standing out” as valuable personal brands, whereas the thematic context of their social media disclosure was considered to determine the field in which their brand “fits in”. These three aspects of communication activities assessed by the personal brands’ stakeholders are presented in the following.

The form of communication

All the survey responses indicated in one way or another that the value of personal brands stems from communicative activities. However, the personal brands' approach to communication was described fairly heterogeneously.

The greatest proportion of the respondents indicated that they valued the personal brands particularly for their contribution to others, classified in Table 6 as value sharing. The respondents described these activities as "sharing knowledge and new insights", "guiding", "helping", "encouraging", "increasing awareness" and even "forcing one to think and to question one's opinions and ways of working".

A great proportion of the survey respondents portrayed the activities of the personal brands in a neutral sense, classified here as *socializing*. In these responses the activities of the personal brands were described with words such as "communicating", "handling", "being present", "sharing content", "creating content" and "writing". Almost as many recognized the personal branding activities as facilitation of communication, telling that the personal brand they value eg. "awakes discussion", "provokes", "participates in dialogue", "comments" and "brings up issues to discuss". Fewer respondents described personal branding activities in terms of self-marketing, using words such as "content marketing", "promotion", "building one's personal brand" and "creating publicity". A few also brought up that the personal brands act as brand evangelists for other people, describing these activities as "speaking on behalf of" and "endorsing others".

As a whole, these findings show that the stakeholders often assess the discursive features of personal branding in relation to their contribution to other people. This supports the general claim of this thesis that the stakeholder-approach to personal branding activities can be considered more effective than the individualistic model, often supported in personal branding literature.

The effectiveness of communication

However, the survey responses showed that the value of personal brands is not just in the communication per se, but also in *how* the personal brand owners communicate. These findings, represented in Table 6 as “Effectiveness of Communication”, indicate that it is the way they communicate that enables the valued personal brands to stand out in social media. The effectiveness of their communication was identified as a sum of communication frequency, courageousness and other communication skills, summarized into four: appeal, influence, credibility and efficiency.

The vast majority of the respondents described the communication of their valued personal brand in terms of communication frequency. The most common words used in the responses was “actively”, and some also used words “frequently”, “visibly” and “committedly”. A few also brought up that the personal brands are present “in multiple channels”, which was considered here as an indication of communication frequency. These findings indicate that the quantity of communication around personal brand is related to its perceived value. This supports the proposition of this thesis that the stakeholders’ social media disclosure shouldn’t be considered primarily as a threat but as an enabling factor, increasing the amount of communication around the personal brand.

Besides communication frequency, another almost as prominent feature of communication of personal brands mentioned in the survey was courageousness. The words that were perceived in the analysis as an indication of courageousness were “courageous”, “daring”, “provocative”, “giving strong opinions”, “shocking”, “attention-seeking” and “loud”. Put another way, none of the respondents indicated that the personal brands they value would try to please everybody or to align their opinions with others in their professional field. Thus, rather than trying to “fit in” to the expectations and traditions in their field, the valued personal brands rather seem to question them, and use their discursive power to de-legitimize some taken-for-granted assumptions.

Other valued features of the personal brand owners' communication were appeal, influence, credibility and efficiency. Occasionally used descriptions such as "interesting", "refreshing", "inspirational", "energetic", "humoristic" and "fun" were classified as "appealing communication". The importance of credibility was indicated in the responses that described their valued personal brand as someone who "justifies his/her opinions", "makes deliberate statements", "is credible", "has comprehensive knowledge" and "is convincing". A few described the communication of personal brands with the Finnish word "vaikuttava", which can be translated either as "impressive" or "influential". The efficiency-related comments can be regarded as something embedded in social media environment in particular. For example, the respondents defined the quality of communication of the personal brand as "compact", "sharp", "gets straight to the point" and "skilful in capsulizing the key message". What we can draw from these findings is that the communications skills of individuals are paramount for creating the sense of value for one's personal brand.

Thematic context

In addition, the survey showed that the themes and the topics that the personal brands discuss in social media have a particular value in the minds of their stakeholders. The vast majority of the respondents mentioned either a specific or more general theme to which they related their valued personal brands. The most commonly used phrase was that the personal brand covers "current topics" but this was frequently attached to the phrase "related to my professional field". In general, "topics that are related to communication as a profession", as well as related, specific topics, such as "digitalization", "leadership" and "social media" were mentioned several times. Only few stated that the personal brand is "well-focused on his key competences". These findings support stakeholder-approach to personal branding, suggesting that the personal branding activities should be targeted to a specific professional segments.

All in all, the survey findings presented in this part indicated that the brand awareness and the perceived value of personal brands are associated with frequent and effective

communication that aims to fulfil the stakeholders' needs, and a central theme that connects the personal brands with their audiences.

4.2.3 The perceptions of personal benefits

Rather few respondents in the survey described the value of the personal brands in terms of their own individual benefits. However, a few respondents stated that they gain "good practical tips" and "new insights" from the personal brands. Similarly, the personal brands were told to "help me to develop myself", "keep me up-to-date", "make me realize" and "bring faith". A couple of respondents described the value of personal brands also in terms of entertainment. These responses can all be related to the perceived benefit of the actual content that the personal brands provide in social media.

However, the survey respondents who linked the value of the personal brand explicitly to his/her online content formed a minority. Instead, the value was often described in terms of the personal brand's excellence in creating and facilitating interaction, even though none of the respondents referred explicitly to the value-in-use related to interacting with other people in the personal brand's network. This is understandable, as the value related to something such a mundane activity as interacting with other people can be assumed to be something extremely difficult to recognize by individuals. Thus, within this research, it was considered necessary to gain better understanding of the actual communication around personal brands in social media.

In the following section, the value-determining components of personal brands are expanded from the stakeholder perceptions to stakeholder involvement, based on the content analysis conducted in Ville Tolvanen's and Katleena Korteso's Twitter accounts.

4.3 Stakeholder involvement in personal brand value construction

In this section, I discuss the five forms of co-constructive personal branding through which various participants in the personal brands' social networks participate in the

value co-creation of the personal brands: facilitation, self-marketing, socialising, evangelism and value sharing. The findings of this section are based on the content analysis conducted in the Twitter accounts of the two personal brands that were perceived as the most valuable by the survey respondents.

The key proposition of this section is that the stakeholders' perceptions of personal brands are co-constructed by various participants in the personal brand's social network. The five forms of communication, identified from the survey responses (Table 6), were found from the Twitter contents as well, all of which can be regarded as contribution to the personal brand value of Korteso and Tolvanen.


4.3.1 Personal brand owners as the facilitators of interaction

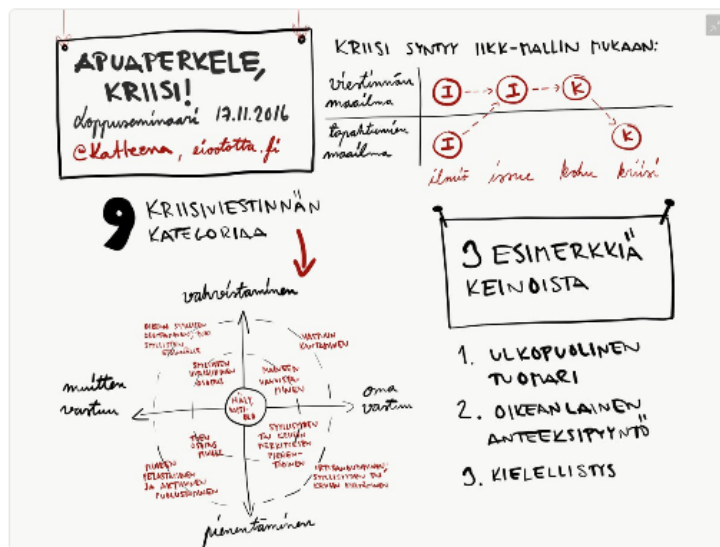
The content analysis showed that the personal brand has a special role in feeding and facilitating interaction in the social network. In fact, lively interaction seems to follow the communicative acts of the personal brand. The personal brand feeds his/her network with content that either takes place in face-to-face events, or online, in the form of tweets that are often linked to longer blog posts. From the following extracts, we can see the regularity related to Katleena Korteso's role as a facilitator of communication among her social network.

Nov 16: @katleena: "#EOT blog: You see everybody can never like you [link to the blog post](#)"

Nov 16: @katleena: "#EOT blog: Free crisis communication seminar in Hämeenlinna on Thursday [link to to the blog post](#)"

Nov 17: @katleena: "Here are my notes from the closing seminar. Thanks @University and participants! #crisiscommunication"

 **Katleena Korteso** @katleena · 17. marraskuuta 2016
Tässä mun loppuseminaarini luentomuistiinpanot. Kiitos @ osallistujat! #kriisiviestintä 3 ja




3 1 24

Nov 20: @katleena: "#EOT-blog: Male, stop reading my blog [link to the blog post](#)"

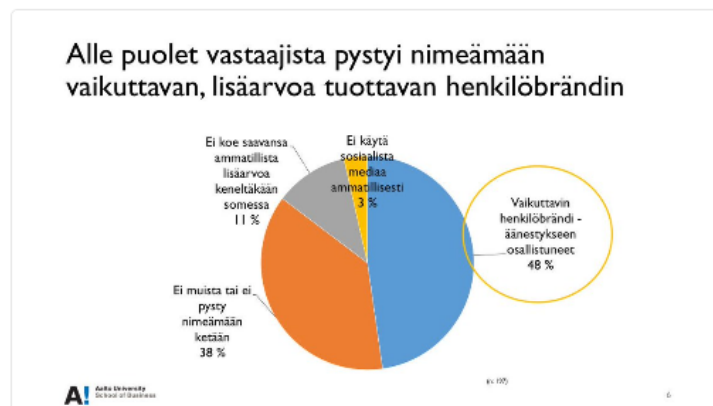
Nov 20: @katleena: "#EOT-blog: I didn't steal fuel from the gas station last night [link to the blog post](#)"

Nov 22: @katleena: "#EOT blog: Communication professionals use the route maps from the year before and the timetables from the last decade [link to the blog post](#)"

Nov 22: @katleena: "Survey for coms people. 3% don't use social media. 11% gain no value "from anybody" in social media. Aaaargh. Authored by @strmsholm"

 **Katleena Korteso** @katleena · 22. marraskuuta 2016
Kyselytutkimus viestintävälle. 3 % ei käytä työssään somea. 11 % ei saa "keneltäkään" somessa lisäarvoa. Aaargh. Tekijänä @strmsholm

Nov 23:




11 32 67

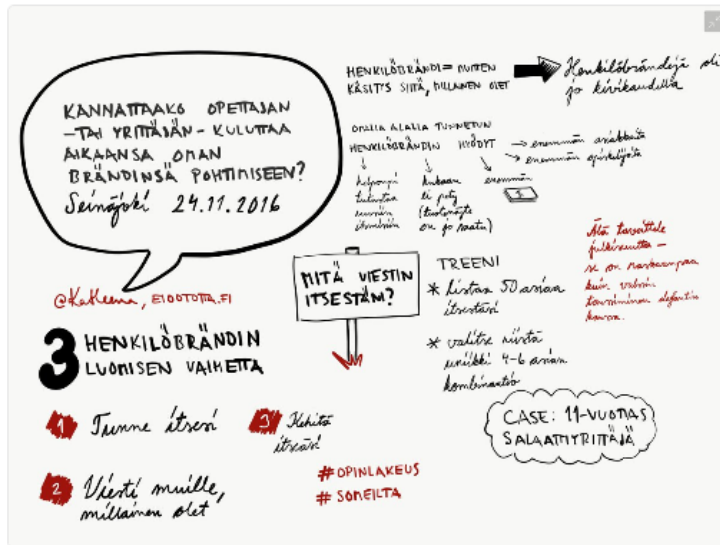
@katleena: "#EOT blog: Now it's time to study at [Company] décor school, as [News

Media] wrote an unbiased article... [link to to the blog post](#)

Nov 24: @katleena: “#EOT blog: Apparent step beats genuine progress #skipfive [link to to the blog post](#)”

Nov 24: @katleena: Here are tonight’s notes. Thank you @person1, @person2, @person3, @person4 and others! #opinlakeus #socialmediaevening #personalbranding”

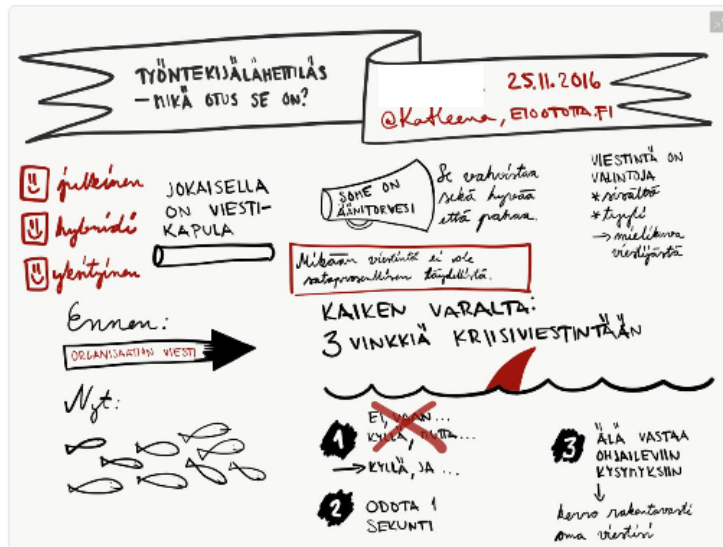
 **Katleena Korteso** @katleena · 24. marraskuuta 2016
Tässä illan muistiinpanot. Kiitos @ @ @ ja muut! #opinlakeus #someilta #henkilöbrändäys



← 2 ↻ 25 ❤ 47

Nov 25: @katleena: Here are today’s notes. Thank you @person1, @person2, @person3, @person4 and others! #employeeadvocacy #event”

 **Katleena Korteso** @katleena · 25. marraskuuta 2016
Tässä tämän päivän muistiinpanot. Kiitos @ @ @ ja muut! #työntekijälähettelys #



← 1 ↻ 9 ❤ 20

However, the content analysis revealed that the personal brand owners do not create their brand value by themselves but their role is to be considered more as the initiator and facilitator of valuable interaction. Thus, the value of their personal brands is in fact created by their stakeholders, who participate in conversations around their brands.

Typically, the personal brands provide phrases that are easy to catch and share within the limitation of 140 characters of tweets. The content often seems to consist of ideas or phrases that are shocking or tenacious enough to awake responses in the audience, who then either express their acceptance to the idea by sharing and supporting it, or criticize it and express their counter-arguments. Those responses then awake new opinions, and thus encourage more and more people to join the conversation. The personal brand often maintains the conversation, by responding to messages, asking questions, and providing more arguments for debate. The following extracts serve as examples of how Ville Tolvanen feeds and facilitates interaction in his audience:

Example 1: Tweets provoked by Ville as a keynote speaker of an event:

@person1: “The living rooms have already been digitalized, why aren’t you there? #event #digitalization”

@person2: “Social media is not a bulletin board @villetolvanen #event”

@person3: “@villetolvanen why digitalization is so invisible in associations? #event #V #digitalization”

@company1: “Wouldn’t it be better if 100 people communicates in associations instead of having 1 publicist... ? @villetolvanen #event #digitalization #V”

Example 2: Reactions provoked by Ville’s blog posts:

@person1: “Build a good and distinguishable #brand @villetolvanen [link to the blog post](#) #customer #internetofpeople #success #communication #digitalization”

@person2: “A Crusade for better images (the headline of the blog post) [link to the blog post](#)”

The following sub-sections will take a closer look into these different kinds of reactions in audiences, provoked and facilitated by the personal brands.

4.3.2 Stakeholder involvement as the source of quality and quantity of communication

Only a quick glance on the social media accounts of the valued personal brands reveal the prominent role of “audiences” as co-constructors of personal brand value: the accounts appear like crowded and lively market places, in which communication flows in all directions. A more systematic analysis shows that the majority of content related to the personal brands is created by various individuals in the social network, and the content created by the “personal brand owner” actually belongs to minority. From the tweets collected from Ville Tolvanen’s account during a ten-days-period, only 30% was authored by Ville, 65% was initially published by other individuals in his network, and 5% was published from company accounts. Similarly, of the tweets published in Katleena Korteso’s account, during the same time period, 39% was published by herself, only 1,5% by companies, and the rest, almost 60%, by other people. Even though Katleena’s percentage of contents in her account was higher than Ville’s, the conversations played even more significant role in her network. The vast majority of the tweets in Katleena’s account were interrelated to each other, forming long series of on-going dialogue in which Katleena took active role as one participant among others.

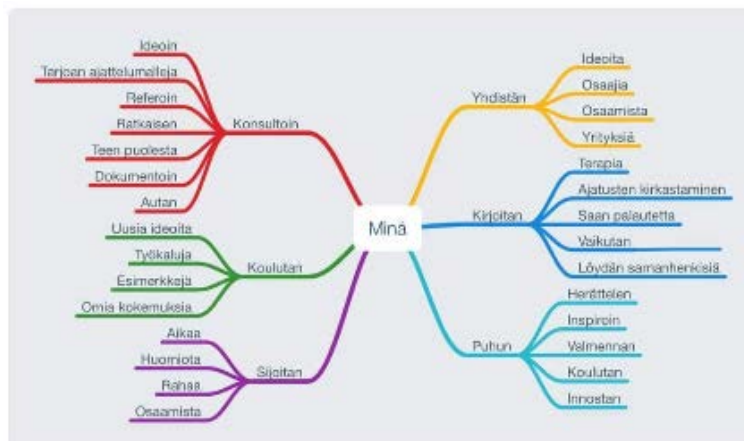
The significance of the different actors’ participation is easy to recognize by stripping the Twitter accounts off all the contents created by the personal brands’ audiences. What would be left without interaction, is like shouting alone in the woods – with nobody listening and nobody responding there would be no influence nor value what so ever.

Moreover, the content analysis showed that the value of interaction stems from collectivism, and not that much of any one and particular tweet individually. The majority of the tweets do not make much sense alone, if they are perceived and analysed as separate units, but together they form a meaningful whole. The value of interaction is thus created collectively and contextually: it is co-created and shared by the participants

in interaction. Thus, for people following the interaction from the perspective of “outsiders”, the value may appear rather modest.

The audience has a two-folded role in personal branding: the stakeholder involvement enhances both the quality and the quantity of interaction around the personal brand. This becomes evident in the conversation held around Ville Tolvanen’s publication that he then re-formulates and improves with the help of his audience.

@villetolvanen (with the visual image below): “What does your professional life and self consist of? #digitalist #V



@person1 (re-tweets the latter, increasing its visibility): “This can be of use for your development too by @villetolvanen”

@person2 (responds to both, acting as evangelist and improving the content): “@person1 @villetolvanen Excellent stuff! For me, I would add listening, as it tends to be forgotten”

@villetolvanen (responds, self-marketing): “True! I always try to be listening, both live and online. #V”

@villetolvanen (later, with the listening skills added to the picture): “Updated during the day. How’s your professional self? What do you do every day? #digitalist #V”

This example shows that not only does the audience participate in sharing and contributing content but it also acts as a mirror for the personal brand to reflect, and thus, to improve the quality of his contents. It also shows how the quality of the personal brand’s online content is co-created by various authors and participants. As the perceived quality further increases the willingness to participate in interaction, the

collectivism not only enhances the quality but also the quantity of content that adds up the perceived value of the personal brand (as shown in the survey responses).

Three forms of discursive features were identified within the data set of content analysis, based on the different approaches to interaction: self-marketing, socializing and evangelism. In one end, the data set in the content analysis contained tweets with purely individualistic, self-marketing purposes, and in the other end, there were tweets in which the purpose seemed to be genuine endorsement of other people, referred here as evangelism. However, in the majority of the tweets, classified as ‘socializing’, the purpose of participation was considered to be in the interaction in itself. All in all, regardless of the intent behind individual tweets, all of them together contribute to the value of Ville Tolvanen’s and Katleena Kortesoja’s personal brands, as discussed in the following sections.

4.3.3 Self-marketing

Self-marketing was defined earlier in Chapter 2.1.3 as “those varied activities undertaken by individuals to make themselves known in the marketplace, usually, (though not exclusively) for the purpose of obtaining employment” (Shepherd, 2005). The tweets that were classified in the sample as self-marketing were the ones in which the primary purpose was considered to be individualistic, the message consisting primarily of self-disclosure, and often coloured with promotional tone. However, the tweets with purely individualistic purpose were extremely rare in the sample, and instead, self-marketing often overlapped with either socializing or evangelism. Furthermore, it is important to note that despite individualistic purpose of the tweets in this category, they should still be considered as a source of collective value, as shown next and in the latter sections.

In social media, self-marketing often occurs as one-way communication, the focus of the message being in the message sender. Typically, the messages in this category appeared as promotion of one’s career, special knowledge or professional achievements.

An example of self-marketing would be the following tweet shared by Ville Tolvanen, through which he communicates his ranking to his social network:

(Re-tweeted by) **@villetolvanen**: “@villetolvanen Congrats, you’re #4 on this week’s Top 100 CMOs in the World. [link to an article](#)”

However, the tweets with purely individualistic content were extremely rare in the sample. More typical form of self-marketing was to co-brand oneself with others, by tagging oneself into a popular person (personal brand), to a company, or to another entity with a high amount of followers, such as an event. This was common particularly in Ville’s network, such as in these examples:

Example 1: Tagging oneself into another person:

@villetolvanen: “Guru *#person’sname* and the apprentice today at #digitalist #V @place [link to a picture](#)”

Example 2: Tagging one’s company into the community and to the personal brand:

@company: “Dreadful figures. I’m glad we @company are among the forerunners also in the light of these figures @villetolvanen @companyfounder #digitalist”

Example 3: Tagging oneself into an event and to the popular personal brand:

@person: “Soon it begins #digitalist @villetolvanen Jeeeeee”

@person: “@villetolvanen I will participate online at least for some part. Have an energetic digimorning!”

@person: “@katleena Tomorrow I’ll get to meet a real Viking @company training event. I can’t wait! :P”

Tagging, as the self-marketing tactic, increases the visibility of all the participants tagged in the message, and thus, not only benefits the message sender but also the others involved. However, it doesn’t provide much value for the wider audience of the message, and thus, can not be considered the most effective form of personal branding on its own.

Thus, the more efficient form of self-marketing identified from the data sample was to combine the self-marketing purpose with other discursive features, enabling the message sender to include the stakeholder-perspective in the promotional message. During the collection of data set for content analysis, the published survey findings served as an enabler for this form of self-marketing for the people, who were being named in the survey as valuable personal brands. Here, as an example, is presented the different approaches of Katleena and Ville to bring up the survey findings, with an obvious self-marketing purpose in their minds:

@katleena: “Attention, attention! I’m the most popular pantyhose-breaking Viking swordsman in Finland. Though, according to a bit un-valid sample. But anyway.”

@villetolvanen: “Ville Tolvanen the most influential in social media – personal branding quite unfamiliar for the members of ProCom [link](#)”

These examples show that even if tweets are being published with the self-marketing purpose, it can be done in a way that adds value also to other people. In fact, self-marketing, in the form of blog posts or other contents, often serve as a valuable resource for social brand value created in interaction, as further discussed in Section 4.3. By framing the survey findings with her personal style, Katleena combines entertainment value with informational value: the exact capability that she is valued for. Ville’s approach is not pure self-marketing either: he combines the favourable voting result with another, more general survey finding, simultaneously providing a link to additional information, targeted particularly to the communications professionals. With these approaches, Ville and Katleena not only promote themselves but provide value for their stakeholders, even managing to “hide” their self-marketing purpose into the other elements of the tweets.

4.3.4 Socializing

The tweets classified as ‘socializing’ formed a majority in the data set of the content analysis. Whereas tweets classified as self-marketing or evangelism contained

promotional elements either in favour of the message sender or other people or entities tagged in the message, these promotional elements were missing in the tweets in this category. Thus, this category of tweets was formed around fairly fragmented data set, containing tweets in which the purpose was either information sharing, commenting, criticizing, thanking, asking or joking. In practice, it was sometimes impossible to identify, whether one individual tweet was to be considered self-marketing, evangelism or socializing, and the researcher's interpretation played a significant role in the categorization process.

Even though tweets considered as 'socializing' may appear meaningless from the personal branding perspective, in fact, together they co-construct the social brand value, the central element of co-constructive personal branding (see Section 4.3), introduced in this thesis. Thus, evoking interaction, in general, can be considered a primary goal of personal branding, and the research findings demonstrate that the valued personal brands take active role in facilitating interaction in social media. The discussions in Katleena Korteso's Twitter account serve as a perfect example of personal branding activities formed primarily around pure socializing. The discussions often appear like "joking around" or chatting with good friends, the topics of the discussions being primarily everything else than occupational, varying from swordplay and camping to societal issues such as the women's rights. However, it is exactly these kind of topics through which Katleena engages her followers in lively discussion, which then builds up the social brand value of Katleena's personal brand.

The following extract from the discussion around my published survey findings serves as an example of 'socializing' in Katleena's network:

@comscompany1: "Ohhoh. Wonder if they gain added value from anyone, even IRL?"

@katleena @strmsholm Tells a lot about us coms people?"

@katleena: "@comscompany1 it was awful too that 38% *can't name * anyone. "Can't just recall right now." @strmsholm"

@Person1: "@katleena Confusing. Do they just push their own ideas or concentrate on their free time? @comscompany1 @strmsholm"

@strmsholm: @Person1, @katleena @comscompany1 Means also that this topic should be discussed more. Personal branding as a term can be misleading.”

@comscompany1: “Can’t understand. Social media is needed at least for dialogue. @Person1, @katleena @strmsholm

From this example, we can see that the purpose of neither of the participants is to promote either themselves or other people tagged in the conversation but just to share opinions about the survey findings. However, this doesn’t mean that this kind of conversations would be insignificant, but instead, they do provide value for the participants, as discussed later in the Section 4.3.

4.3.5 Evangelism

Even though critical views may sometimes be pursued as well, as will be discussed in Section 4.4, generally the goal in co-constructive personal branding is to drive positive word-of-mouth (WOM). The findings contribute to prior research, by showing how the positive tone in online conversations, and ultimately brand evangelism, stems from the perceived quality and relevance of the provided content. The perception of quality awakes positive reactions, leading to active distribution of content and endorsements that efficiently build up the credibility and authenticity of the personal brand.

Distribution of content

Distribution of content here refers to common discursive act in Twitter, in which the individuals share each other’s contents without contributing additional value to it. This form of WOM requires very little effort from the message sender, in fact, it doesn’t always even require the sender to actually consume nor internalize the original message. The most common and the simplest form of this form of WOM marketing is re-tweeting (sharing) another person’s content without adding anything to it, and thus, acting just as a distributor of the original message. The value of this form of WOM depends on the discursive power of the message sharer: the re-tweet of an influential personal brand may have a significant impact on the visibility of the message whereas the re-tweet of a

“regular person” with a network of couple of hundred followers cannot be considered equally valuable.

A more sophisticated way of content distribution is to add a little comment, showing that one has actually consumed the content and internalized its key message. This feature can be seen from the tweets related to blog posts but also from the tweets sent from the participants at events, such as in this example, with the imagined hashtag *#event*, and in which Ville Tolvanen seemed to be speaking:

@person1: “The living rooms have already been digitalized, why aren’t you there? *#event* *#digitalization*”

@person2: “Social media is not a bulletin board @villetolvanen *#event*”

Similarly, this discursive feature was seen in tweets related to Ville’s blog posts:

@person3: “Build a good and distinguishable *#brand* @villetolvanen [link to the blog post](#) *#customer* *#internetofpeople* *#success* *#communication* *#digitalization*”

@person4: “A Crusade for better images (the headline of the blog post) [link to the blog post](#)”

In these examples, the audience is simply repeating what they’ve heard or read, thus, making the content visible to others on-line, and adding up both their own and Ville’s brand value. However, their added value to the content is limited to increasing its visibility: they don’t explicitly express that they share the opinion in the original message nor do they contribute with any of their own views to the subject. Thus, even though this form of WOM can be considered valuable for the object of evangelism, the personal brand owner, it doesn’t add much value to other people in the network.

Endorsement

Even more valuable form of co-constructive personal branding is that in which the individuals contribute their own opinions or experiences in terms of the provided content, or clearly express their positive attitude towards the content or the person

behind the content. For example, in the following tweets, the individuals explicitly state why they value the content provided by Katleena, thus, acting as her brand evangelists:

@person1: “@katleena Great analysis and excellent openings for discussion, colleague!”

@person2: “@katleena @organization Thank you for an interesting lecture! My head is full of thoughts, and suddenly I’m in Twitter?! Shit, crisis!”

@person3: “@katleena could you please write worse or even less funny. Right now your blog draws me to read it.”

With this kind of comments, these individuals spread the word about Katleena as a person who is both entertaining and competent simultaneously, which, in fact, was mentioned in the survey, as the reason why Katleena is perceived a particularly valuable personal brand. Therefore, the tweets in this category make evident that the stakeholders of the personal brands should be considered as co-constructors of their value.

In some cases, the evangelism is not explicitly related to the person’s content but to the person himself/herself. For example, in the following tweets, the focus is in Ville Tolvanen, as a person, rather than in a particular content.

@person4: #wednesdaypraise @personX @personY @villetolvanen @personZ Guiding the tour with big hearts #sharingiscaring”

@person5: “If organizations won’t do what the members need, somebody else does Ville’s tricks and does it instead #punk #attitude #event #digitalist”

All in all, the findings clearly support the claims that providing value for the individual’s stakeholders is the most efficient form of personal branding, and positive WOM or evangelism represents a particularly influential discursive feature through which the stakeholders participate in co-constructing the personal brand value. However, it is not only the content provided by the personal brands that leads to positive WOM, but instead, the quality and relevance of the shared content is co-created by many different actors, as discussed in the following.

4.3.6 Value sharing

Value sharing here refers to the explicit content shared in social media: the cultural capital of individuals that they exchange with others. The data sample showed that the personal brand's role is not just to create content that is perceived valuable by others, but also to act as a platform or ecosystem, in which quality content authored by many different actors meet up. This finding supports Bourdieu's theory of social capital, by showing how cultural capital of people in one's social network represents a source of value for individuals.

Ville Tolvanen's Twitter account was a perfect example of value sharing, as he arranges events around digitalization for his living, which enables his brand to be associated with a plethora of public speakers and their contributions around digitalization theme. For example, in the data set of this research, a keynote speaker in Ville's digitalization event evoked dozens of commending tweets with his speech, which simultaneously built up also Ville Tolvanen's brand. This form of co-constructive personal branding can be witnessed in the following tweets:

@person1: "I could listen @keynote'sname forever, amazing stuff! #stream works great @villetolvanen #digitalist"

@person2: "@villetolvanen #stream #digitalist works like carbon monoxide and @keynote'sname is outstanding...feeling dizzy...enjoyable"

These examples show how Ville Tolvanen's social capital opens up a gate to informational value for people in Ville's network, and thus, acts as a source of his personal brand value. In other words, Ville's reputation as the forerunner of digitalization is not only based on his own skills and competences related to digitalization but largely on his social resources: the cultural capital in his social networks.

4.4 Social brand value as the motivator for stakeholder involvement

Drawing the findings of the content analysis together with the concept of social brand value (Dennhardt, 2014), I suggest that the interaction with other people in social networks provide value-in-use for the participants, by serving fundamental human needs. Thus, the social brand value that stems from interaction per se, can be considered a sufficient motivator for individuals to participate in personal brand value co-construction. The concept of social brand value, as introduced in Section 2.5, is based on the idea that social interaction provides the participants three forms of value: communal value, identity value, and informational value. By evoking and facilitating interaction in their social networks, the valued personal brands foster the accumulation of social brand value, which becomes an integral source of their personal brand value. In the following subsections, I discuss how social brand value motivates the people in Katleena Korteso's and Ville Tolvanen's networks to participate in their value co-construction in Twitter.

4.4.1 Communal value

Earlier in Chapter x, I suggested that individuals provide each other resources for "fitting in", and simultaneously co-construct each other's personal brands, by facilitating the sense of community in the social network. The research findings bear evidence to back up this proposition.

Supported by both the survey findings and the content analysis, it is reasonable to claim that Ville Tolvanen's brand is almost entirely based on the "sense of belong" to the community of "digitalists". Basically all the contents around Ville's brand are linked to digitalization, and all the public activities of Ville encourage content co-creation within this theme. Digitalization is at the heart of Ville's profession, and clearly, his enthusiasm is to spread the word of digitalization for businesses. Thus, he not only creates and spreads his own content both online and offline but he has also created an ecosystem in which business professionals, speakers and specialists from various fields meet up and share their knowledge and experiences. What unites these people is interest

towards digitalization – either personally or for the sake of their occupation or business. Thus, discourse around digitalization theme in Ville’s network, as a whole, provides communal value for the participants, and the activities of Ville, discussed in other parts of this section, all facilitate the co-construction of communal value.

Whereas people in Ville’s network must have something to share in terms of digitalization, in order to participate in discussion, the case with Katleena’s network is quite the opposite. The content analysis in Katleena’s Twitter account showed how the different participants create sense of belong by using a particular way of communicating, which appears like a common “language” shared by the discussants. This “language” seems to be based on common sense of humour, often coloured with sarcasm, making the discussion seem quite peculiar, sometimes even offending, from the perspective of an “outsider”. This humoristic, or sarcastic, style is enforced by Katleena throughout her tweets: she uses it in the headlines of her blog posts, in the responses to her readers, and similar humour seems to be a common denominator also behind her re-tweets (the other people’s tweets that she decides to share). Thus, other people aiming to participate in these “conversations” need to master the “language” used in this community. The following extract from the conversation around Katleena’s blog post (about gender in-equality in the book industry) demonstrates the typical way of Katleena to provoke interaction and shows how capably the people in her network responds to it, not only endorsing Katleena for her blog post but using a particular tone in the discourse that creates the sense of belong between the participants.

@katleena: “#EOT-blog: Male, stop reading my blog [link to the blog post](#)”

@person1: “@katleena Well written. While reading Ursula Le Guins’ A Wizard of Eathsea I didn’t even come to think about the author’s sex. How stupid was I.”

@katleena: “@person1 Yes, you sure were rude for not being a *sex-conscious * reader. You didn’t prioritize the book over the author, didn’t you?”

@person1: “Confusing but to me a good text has always been a good text, regardless of the writer. Now I see I’ve done wrong!”

@katleena: “@person1 You sure are a bad person!”

@person2: “I’m sorry @katleena. I happened to read it even though you told not to. And in my opinion, you had grounded and justified your arguments well.”

@katleena: “@person2 You’ve been forgiven. But next time first pay attention to the author’s sex, and only after that to the content.”

To strengthen the sense of closeness in her community, Katleena typically tags her friend(s) in her tweets, and starts “joking around” with them, thus, making the friends “well-known” in her network. Other people participating in these conversations express their belongingness to Katleena’s community by using similar kind of “insider humour”, as demonstrated in the following extract.

@katleena: “Soon I will start a strategy round of two people with @friend, the aim of which is to implement empowering culture as work tools in restaurants.”

@friend: “@katleena I thought it was supposed to be an in-depth crisis communication seminar.”

@katleena: “I would believe that’s where we’ll end up. Let’s attach some relevant hashtags in order to make some noise. #IOT #AI #digitalization

@friend: “@katleena #alcotalist #J”

@katleena: “@friend Now I’m #hungryalist. #K”

@person1: “@katleena @friend I wish you good luck with tonight’s project and stay here waiting for the presentation of the final report slides to the supervisory board.”

@person2: “@katleena @friend Just remember to behave while empowering the customer surface.”

@katleena: “@person2 Particularly important is to involve small operators. @friend”

@person3: “@katleena @friend You must apply ethnographic methods, especially participant observation from within the customer perspective?”

Typically, not only the discussants in Katleena’s network joke around together but also criticize others (both people and businesses) quite bluntly, such as in this example in which Katleena with her friend make fun of the business vocabulary used in the Digitalist community of Ville Tolvanen (who uses #V, as his online signature).

During the collection of data set for the content analysis, the published survey findings served as a resource for communal value in Ville’s and Katleena’s networks. In this case, the sense of community was formed around the discussants around the survey findings. The discussion seemed to form a confrontation between “us” (meaning the

participants in discussion) and “them” – referring to the communication professionals, who had expressed their negative attitude towards personal branding in their survey responses. The tone of the discourse is well represented in the following extract of the conversation:

@comscompany1: “Ohhoh. Wonder if they gain added value from anyone, even IRL?
@katleena @strmsholm Tells a lot about us coms people?”
@katleena: “@comscompany1 it was awful too that 38% *can’t name * anyone. “Can’t just recall right now.” @strmsholm”
@Person1: “@katleena Confusing. Do they just push their own ideas or concentrate on their free time? @comscompany1 @strmsholm
@strmsholm: @Person1, @katleena @comscompany1 Means also that this topic should be discussed more. Personal branding as a term can be misleading.”
@comscompany1: “Can’t understand. Social media is needed at least for dialogue.
@Person1, @katleena @strmsholm

This extract shows how the participants create sense of belong between each other and against the personal-branding-critical survey respondents. As a participant in the discussion (@strmsholm), I try to soften the tone of the discourse, by bringing up a mitigating viewpoint, but the other discussants still continue to strengthen the opinion they share. Understandably, the active participants in Ville Tolvanen’s and Katleena Korteso’s Twitter accounts cannot relate to criticism towards personal branding in social media, because they have created a habit of co-operation with the personal brands they value, and thus, represent an opposite view.

All in all, the research findings show how interaction in the personal brands’ networks provide communal value and serve the individuals’ need to belong. Furthermore, the content analysis reveal how the personal brands nourish the sense of belong in their networks, by feeding relevant content and facilitating interaction around particular themes through which they continuously develop the field-specific expectations, and provide resources for “fitting in”.

4.4.2 Identity value

The research findings demonstrate how interaction in Ville's and Katleena's network provide resources for the discussants to form their self-identities in relation to other people. In Ville's network, the "self-identity projects" are formed around digitalization, whereas Katleena's network seems to be more or less based on occupational similarity and professional interest towards corporate communication. As brought up in the survey responses, both Ville's and Katleena's ability to "force one to question the traditional ways of working" is a major source of their brand value, and directly linked to their ability to provide identity value for their followers. Their online activities show how they take active role in encouraging the people in their social networks in self-reflection, and in facilitating that process, by providing them various benchmarks.

The following Ville's tweet accompanied with a link to his blog post serves as an example of his provocative way of questioning the "taken-for-granted" truths, often linked to barriers for digitalization in businesses:

@villetolvanen: "In Finland customer takes care of the vendor's job. [link to the blog](#)"

The blog post, consisting of provocative arguments, is followed by multiple critical comments, particularly from the sales people:

@person1: "Vendor <> salesman. You must mean salesman? And more particularly salesman, who's not an entrepreneur? Vendor is."

@villetolvanen: "@person1 both and ☺ I generalized that vendor = someone who sells"

@person2: "Confusing conflict there that you feel sorry for customers doing all the work but you blame the sales people who provide the solution?"

@person2: "@villetolvanen I just borrowed an hour from other people, got 10x more time into the bargain, and things in the customer's side changed dramatically."

@person 3: "C'mon, I do sell and help. #sales @villetolvanen"

In this conversation, people seem to be provoked by Ville's blog post, and they feel a need to distinguish themselves from the kind of self-identity that Ville creates for the

salespeople in his blog. Similar phenomenon takes place in Katleena's Twitter account, initiated by Katleena's response to the published survey findings of my research:

@katleena: "Survey for coms people. 3% don't use social media. 11% gain no value "from anybody" in social media. Aaaargh. Authored by @strmsholm"

@katleena: "#EOT blog: Communication professionals use the route maps from the year before and the timetables from the last decade [link to the blog post](#)"

Her two tweets were followed by a number of responses expressing criticism towards communication professionals, through which the discussants were able to differentiate their self-identities from the perception they had formed about the survey respondents. This is demonstrated by the following examples:

@person1: "@katleena @strmsholm I would like to see the headline: "11% of lawyers gain no value from courts"

@person2: "Do people think that communication people's role is to stay at background, invisible? That only organization/management is visible?"

@person3: "Strange. As a marketing-specialist I perceive this quite the opposite way @strmsholm @katleena"

Katleena actively responds to the jokers, critics and wonderers, taking part in de-legitimizing the kind of professional self-identity that a part of the survey respondents represent. However, she's not left with blaming communication professionals for representing de-legitimate identity, but she also gives positive support for professional self-identity development.

@person1: "@katleena Huh. The only concern I share is that where to find enough time for social media. As this is one of the most influential communication tools that we have at hand."

@katleena: "@person1 Yes, lack of time is a real problem, and something that everybody struggles with."

@person2: "@katleena That is so true. I just need to raise up my social media courage and do some modifications in my schedule."

@katleena: "@person1 @person2 That's the spirit, well done Anni!"

Similarly, Ville frequently encourages his readers' in self-reflection:

@villetolvanen: "How would your pre-Christmas self-assessment look like?"

@villetolvanen: "Did you achieve what you dreamed of [link to the blog post](#) #V

@villetolvanen: "What does your professional work life and self-identity consist of?
#digitalist #V"

In these examples, Ville is using himself as the benchmark to whom his readers can "compare" their own self-identity. In the sources attached to the tweets, he provides "information products" based on his own self-reflection, such as information about what his work days and professional self consist of, as well as assessment of his latest achievements.

Similar to the conversations held in Katleena's network, also the discussion in Ville's network shows how the individuals reflect their identities with the help of the information provided by Ville, in the form of the survey findings.

@person1: "If one gains no added value from anyone in social media, does one live in one's own bubble? Ability to receive diverse, new insights is at level zero."

@person2: "@person1 Perhaps I've started so much from afar but I perceive I've learned and gained quite a bit from social media... @villetolvanen"

@person1: "The same feelings here. Excited that you can never know where and when you bump into something interesting @person2 @villetolvanen"

@person3: "@person1 @person2 @villetolvanen Or I think that if I want to bump into something interesting I always will, just with a little bit of effort"

@person4: "@person1 @villetolvanen There's no bubble. There's just meaningless chat."

In this extract, the first three people express their identities strongly against the proportion of survey respondents who had found no value from social media. However, the fourth person clearly identifies more with the critical view of the survey respondents but gains no response from the others. In general, the survey findings, particularly the

finding that only half of the respondents were able to name a valuable personal brand, awaked quite a critical response from the audience. Many were eager to express that their perception of personal branding is much more positive than that of communication professionals in general, the tweets collectively de-legitimizing the identity of a communication professional who's not eager to participate in personal branding practices in social media. Thus, the survey-related tweets formed a rather homogeneous view of accepted and legitimate identity of communication professionals in relation to social media and personal branding. Ultimately, as Ville Tolvanen and Katleena Korteso were attached to the conversations, both as the initiators of dialogue and as the key actors in the survey findings, the identity value created in interaction simultaneously supported their personal brands.

All in all, we can assume that Ville's and Katleena's intention is not to help people in their identity projects just for the sake of consulting people for free, but in fact, providing identity value in their networks is a strategy they use to share their own expertise. It is good to note that their profession is to provide consultation services for businesses. By providing resources for business people to reflect their self-identities, they create demand for their services. Similar purpose can be identified from the following examples, in which Ville not only encourages his followers in self-reflection but also provides additional resources in the form of solutions or direction for their identity development:

@villetolvanen: "From a specialist into an influencer – Ville Tolvanen" [link to blog post](#)

@villetolvanen: "Don't tell what you've achieved * [link to blog post](#)"

@villetolvanen: "How you'll learn the digital skills you need and become influential in the web? [link to blog post](#)"

These examples serve as an indication of how discourses in social media construct the public perception of the desirable professional self-identity. By facilitating the identity development needs in his social network, Ville is able to make use of his discursive power in defining the measures of professionally admirable competences and

characteristics in the digital age. Thus, he, together with his social network, continuously co-construct the expectations of “fitting in” in the changing economy.

4.4.3 Informational value

Providing evidence for the third form of social brand value, informational value, the research findings show how Ville Tolvanen and Katleena Kortesoja take active roles both as information providers and as facilitators of information sharing in their social networks.

The personal brands’ role as information providers seems to be two-folded. On one hand, they are experts in their fields who actively create and share their own knowledge and experiences, both online and off-line. The informational value of Ville Tolvanen’s brand is clearly focused on the various themes around digitalization, whereas Katleena Kortesoja’s Twitter account as a whole could be regarded almost as a handbook of crisis communication. These examples show how Ville provides information in Twitter:

@villetolvanen: “Five #tips to bloggers, specialists, entrepreneurs and influencers to make impact in web [link to the blog post](#)”

@villetolvanen: “How you’ll learn the digital skills you need and become influential in web? [link to blog post](#)”

With this strategy, Ville makes use of his own knowledge in terms of digitalization and his credibility in this field, simultaneously strengthening his brand, as the forerunner of digitalization. Similarly, Katleena Kortesoja shares her knowledge around various topics related to corporate communication. In her case, the information is often packaged into visually appealing and attention capturing “memos”. However, a systematic analysis of the discourses in her Twitter account shows that her tweets, as a whole, bear informational value for “how crisis communication should be managed”. It seems that Katleena uses her blog to provoke her readers to criticize her opinions, in other words, she consciously and frequently causes “crisis” that spreads into her Twitter account. Then, she makes a lot of effort to respond to criticism, enabling her to show how

capable she is to manage crisis. This is demonstrated in the following extract, in which Katleena first publishes her blog post, and then uses her crisis communication expertise in managing the critical comments.

@katleena: “#EOT-blog: Male, stop reading my blog [link to the blog post](#)”

@person1: “Everything’s fine if women can be successful by acting out as men?”

@katleena: “@person1 it was just one suggestion. Don’t have to follow. I succeed by acting out as myself.”

@person1: “.@katleena It’s a huge problem that it even occurs in one’s mind to suggest that “You should play a man if you want to succeed.”

@katleena: “Yes, but there’s a solution for that. As I mentioned, I know I have a different approach than the most feminists.”

@person2: “@katleena I’m not surprised that most of your readers are men. Your thing appeals to those who hate feminists and women in general. @person1”

@katleena: “@person2 There’s no way I can imagine that there would be numerous amount of female-haters among my blog readers. It doesn’t seem so in the comments. @person1”

@person2: “@katleena Because they don’t have to write it for you. You master that yourself. @person1”

@katleena: “@person2 Do you suggest I hate women? Naming other people’s feelings incorrectly is not part of my feminism.”

@person2: “Hm. The directions you gave sure were misogyny. To act out as men? To propose that there’s nothing wrong with determining what to read by the author’s sex > @person1”

@katleena: “It’s a pity that you define my emotions incorrectly without asking me. Probably I’m not able to turn your head. @person1”

Interestingly, this example shows that one could learn how to handle crisis in social media just by actively following Katleena’s blog. However, as “reading a blog” is generally not used by companies as a method to train employees, we can assume that Katleena’s communication strategy is more likely to increase than decrease the demand of her crisis communication services. In general, despite her apparently comical communication style, Katleena uses Twitter extremely strategically, to not only make her competence visible but to courageously test it all over again in “real crisis situations”. Obviously, the purpose behind this is to sell her particular expertise.

On the other hand, the role of personal brands as information providers is not only grounded in their own expertise but also in their general activity in searching for and sharing information in social media. Ville, for example, shares various kinds of publications related to digitalization, from news articles, job advertisements and other people's related tweets to research publications. By doing so, Ville is able to expand the informational value of his brand and simultaneously construct the perception of authenticity of his brand: with the continuous delivery of content around digitalization he shows how he continuously lives and breathes digitalization, and thus, actually *is* a #digitalist, and not just talks about it.

The discussion about digital skills, encouraged by both the survey results and related blog post by Ville, serve as an example of informational value of interaction. The following extract from the discussion includes only some comments around this theme but describes how individuals provide each other informational value by sharing their experiences, opinions and knowledge.

@villetolvanen: “#personalbrand as a hot topic. What are the most important #digitalskills for you? [link to the blog post](#) #digitalist #V”

@person1: “@villetolvanen excellent summary! My list would even more clearly bring up open dialogue”

@person2: “Get out of office > network with others, speak and listen, write and comment. Understand and learn, replace and repair. #digitalskills #personalbrand”

@strmsholm: “Letting go of shame is nice way to put it. Lack of courage is one significant barrier for personal branding. I recognize.”

@person3: “Here @DigitalistInfo crowd-sourced digital skills from last spring. What do you think? [link to the person's own blog](#)”

The discussants here provide additional information on top of the survey findings: something that can be of use for example to those communication professionals who responded in the survey that so far they hadn't found real value from other people in social media. In other words, the discussants co-construct the informational value of the personal brand. However, it is to be noted that the value of this “information”, often

formed around people's own opinions and experiences, is assessed by the individuals in the particular discursive contexts.

As a final point, the content analysis showed that not only does Ville act as an information provider, but he also actively facilitates the information sharing of other people in his network. As mentioned earlier, Ville also acts as a platform or ecosystem, in which information provided by many different actors meet up. A significant part of Ville's profession is to arrange events around digitalization, which enables his brand to be associated with information provided by a number of professional speakers. Often the information provided by others is being linked to Ville Tolvanen's brand by the people in his social network, thus strengthening the linkage between Ville's name and digitalization. Furthermore, Ville often re-tweets the tweets sent from his events, thus, making sure that online interaction around his events is fully connected with his personal brand. The following tweets serve as a demonstration:

@person1: "Digitalization is determined by "analogic" factors by @speaker'sname and @villetolvanen: ability to learn, (leadership) culture, ability to let go of the old." (re-tweeted by @villetolvanen)

@person2: "When you go back to your office, make sure your #data learns. All the time, repeatedly. #digitalist @speaker'sname" (re-tweeted by @villetolvanen)

All in all, information sharing is at the very heart of what Ville Tolvanen's brand is all about, as crystallized in this tweet sent from a participant from one of his events:

@person: "Nobody alone knows what digitalization brings – that's why we're here, to share and to learn collectively @villetolvanen #digitalist".

5. DISCUSSION

This chapter draws together the main findings of this research and evaluates its contribution in relation to prior literature. First, I will discuss how the stakeholder perspective taken in this study changes the way personal brand value should be assessed. Second, I will elaborate on the concept of co-constructive personal branding, introducing a paradigm change in this field of research.

5.1 Stakeholder perspective to personal brand value

To date, personal branding has been described in terms of positioning oneself and one's personal assets as someone who simultaneously "stand out" from the crowd and "fit in" to the field-specific expectations (Parmentier et al., 2013). It has been seen as "an inside-out process" (Khedler, 2014), in which people are advised to market "the ideal expression of the front" (Khedler, 2015) in an appealing "package" (Shepherd, 2005), without letting it being hampered by others (Gehl, 2011). In social media, other people's disclosure has been shown as a threat for personal branding (Labrecque et al., 2011), as the image built by others is beyond one's own control (Kaputa, 2006). Thus, personal branding has been seen as a strategic self-marketing activity (Peter, 1996) in which the primary goal is to communicate the desired self-image to various audiences (Khedler, 2015). According to this traditional approach, the value of a personal brand is determined by an individual's possession of culturally and socially rare and distinctive resources (Khedler, 2015).

In contrary, adopting the work of Vargo & Lusch (2004) and Schau, Muniz and Arnould (2009) into the context of human branding, this thesis proposed that the value of personal brand resides in the actions and interactions that their acquired cultural and social resources make possible or support. By participating in meaningful interaction in their social networks, individuals are able to accumulate cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1983), and thus, provide each other with resources for personal branding. Not only is the participation of social networks crucial for enforcing the visibility of

personal brand, by increasing the quantity of brand mentions, but it is particularly crucial for the perceived quality of the personal brand.

My research findings support prior research (eg. Harris & Rae, 2011) by emphasizing credibility and authenticity, as the determining factors of personal brand value. Above all, the valued personal brands were perceived genuinely competent and knowledgeable in their fields. However, where the mainstream personal branding literature (Peters, 1997; Kaputa, 2006; Rampersad, 2009) is based on self-marketing and promotion of one's personal competences and uniqueness, the way Ville Tolvanen and Katleena Kortesoja built their brands, didn't appear as self-promotion but they rather seemed to live and breathe their brand promises in social media. For example, Katleena, whose brand is tightly knit to her crisis communication competence, continuously tests and proves her crisis handling skills by responding to negative comments and personal attacks provoked by her own blog posts. Similarly, Ville not only speaks about digitalization but he "is digitalization": his professional work life is all about enforcing digitalization, something which he makes visible for his audiences. The examples of Ville and Katleena showed that individuals can strengthen the perceived quality, or in other words the authenticity and credibility, of their personal brands, not only by "telling" but by "showing". This means that personal branding shouldn't be perceived as projecting an ideal self-image but as increasing transparency and visibility of one's professional work life.

Contributing to the ideas brought up by Harris & Rae (2011), this research further elaborated that the credibility and authenticity of the valued personal brands was due to continuous delivery of value in social interaction. However, my research introduced a new angle to this discussion, showing that it is not just the explicit value, such as work-related news, tips and encouragement, that the stakeholders of the personal brand perceive valuable but the interaction facilitated by the personal brands is a source of value per se.

Extending the concept of social brand value (SBV, Dennhardt, 2014) into the field of personal branding, my research showed that interaction encouraged and facilitated by

the personal brands provides continuous value-in-use for the participants. By evoking discussion around topics targeted to people with common interests, the personal brands serve as “communication platforms”, which enables them to provide SBV for the people in their networks. SBV, divided by Dennhardt (2014) in communal value, identity value and informational value, then serves as inputs for the personal brands of the people participating in interaction.

By recognizing the audiences as active participants in the value co-creation process, this thesis turned the objectives of personal branding upside-down: in order to engage other people in meaningful interaction, an individual needs to be able to provide genuine value and personal relevance primarily to others, instead of him/herself. As the boundaryless and fast-paced employment environment (Arthur, 1994) increases pressure for all people to take care of their human capital and employment value (eg. O’Mahony & Bechky, 2006; Haverila, 2004), individuals have joint interest for personal branding. Thus, instead of focusing on self-marketing, the co-constructive approach in this thesis puts emphasis on cooperative value sharing, in which individuals strengthen each other’s brands in on-going interaction.

5.2 Co-construction of personal brand value

Whereas one-way communication has been promoted as an ideal and strategically manageable approach to personal branding (eg. Khedler, 2015; Rampersad, 2009; Kaputa, 2006), the research findings bear evidence that personal branding, just as any marketing activity today, should be seen as interactive, multi-way communication. Here, the survey findings revealed the prominent role of communication for the perceived value of the personal brand, and the content analysis made evident that the value of personal brands is co-constructed in interaction.

The research showed that the stakeholders contribute to personal brand value not only by enhancing other people’s perceptions on the brand but also by providing each other with resources to build their personal brand to.

As seen from the Twitter accounts of Ville Tolvanen and Katleena Korteso, the discussions in social media often include no specific components that could be directly transformed into personal value. Instead, a large proportion of interaction seems like unpurposeful socializing and “chatting around” among friends and strangers. However, even though these chats may seem meaningless for the outsiders, it should be noted that they not only build up the value of personal brands, but also serve fundamental human needs, and thus, provide value for all the participants. Drawing from Dennhardt (2014), who showed that SBV mediates the relationship between the perceived quality and stakeholder involvement in brand value co-construction, my research findings indicated that SBV can be regarded as a sufficient motivator for individuals to contribute to each other’s personal brands.

The stakeholders also have their hand in strengthening the perceived quality of the personal brand at least in three ways. First, drawing from Kozinets et al., (2010), we can assume that the endorsements and recommendations, provided by people in the personal brands’ social networks, have a significant part to play for their perceived value. Prior research (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Schau et al., 2009; Kozinets et al., 2010) has shown that WOM marketing is one of the most powerful means to increase the credibility of the brand messages and enduring brand relationships. My research findings showed that the brand evangelists not only spread the word in favour of the personal brand but also defended him/her for negative comments and attacks.

Second, by sharing their knowledge, opinions and experiences, the discussants in the personal brand’s network form a “learning-system” (Arthur, 1994), and thus, contribute to the accumulation of cultural and social capital associated with the personal brand (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). My research showed that not only does the personal brands provide relevant content for their audience but they act as the centre pieces of interaction ecosystems, in which knowledge flows in all directions. The active role of the personal brands enables them to be associated with informational value not only provided by themselves but also the one shared by other people in the network. Thus, whereas prior literature in personal branding has been criticized for leading to the lack of higher values such as learning (Gehl, 2011; Lair et al., 2005), this research suggests

that personal branding practices shouldn't be perceived separate from self-development but they, in fact, walk hand-in-hand.

Third, (as discussed in the previous section) the stakeholders also provide identity value, communal value and informational value to the personal brand holder, and thus, serve as a social resource for his/her own self-development. Prior research in the field of personal branding has ignored the social aspect of identity development that enables us to recognize personal branding not only as output of self-reflection but also as inputs for identity development. The extensive social networks and active interaction within it represents an invaluable resource for the personal brands for on-going self-development. Instead of encouraging individuals to reach for excellent performance and continuous development, the discourse around personal branding has focused on image building and other marketing efforts (eg. Khedler, 2015). In prior research, focus hasn't been that much on the "customer value" – referring to the value provided for the individuals' stakeholders – as it has been in the brand value for its holder (Shepherd, 2005; Lair et al., 2005).

5.3 Personal branding in social media – towards a new era

In prior literature, the major selling proposition for personal branding is its inevitability: if you do not brand yourself, others will do it for you (Kaputa, 2006). Other people are represented both as a threat and as competitors, who may take control of your personal brand (Kaputa, 2006; Rampersad, 2009). Social media sites continuously gather vast amount of data about most (if not all) of us, some contents published by ourselves and some shared by others, making the personal branding practices partly unconscious and uncontrollable (Labrecque, Markos & Milne; 2011). In addition, it can be considered that also the lack of presence in social media creates some kind of an impression - particularly if social media can be related to the person's profession, as it does for an increasing amount of people (Kleppinger & Cain, 2015). Therefore, the privilege of free expression in online environments can also become a burden for some, who are not so eager to express themselves publicly (Gehl, 2011). Thus, despite the potential

advantages and opportunities dominant in the personal branding discourse, one should also be aware of its personal costs and limitations.

The self-help genre that dominates personal branding literature has raised ethical concerns among scholars for extending the principles of marketing into humans (eg. Lair et al., 2005; Gehl, 2011; Way, 2011). Lair et al. (2005) have criticized the rhetoric of personal branding literature for encouraging and endorsing “the process of turning oneself into a “product-in-effect”, or “engaging in self-commodification”. The critics also argue that the discourse around personal branding only increases the expectations and requirements towards employees’ roles and flexibility without bringing them more pay or job security, simultaneously leading to distortion of social relations (Gehl, 2011; Way, 2011; Lair et al., 2005). In addition, Lair et al. (2005) have accused the self-help genre of personal branding literature for largely ignoring social issues, such as gender, race, age and class, and for using rhetoric particularly appealing to a target group of “white, male, professional class of middle managers and other dislocated professionals”. These accusations may seem legitimate, if one adopts the self-marketing approach prevalent in the personal branding literature. However, the stakeholder perspective introduced in this thesis shifts the focus of personal branding from serving the individuals’ self-interests into co-constructive value sharing, learning and continuous development.

These findings are significant for how we should approach personal branding, in general. First, by recognizing interaction as a prominent resource for identity development and continuous learning, it is obvious we can no longer perceive personal branding solely as an inside-out process. Personal brand cannot be considered solely as an output of carefully planned and strategically managed self-marketing effort. Instead, the interaction within social networks needs to be perceived as inputs - building materials - for the personal brands of all involved.

Second, and even more importantly, if we acknowledge that the value of personal brands stems from the social brand value co-constructed in interaction, we have to ask ourselves, whether we should pay more attention to strategic personal branding efforts

or to interaction per se. If we perceive personal brand as a side product for social brand value, it could make sense to put all our efforts in building the grounding and legitimacy for the personal brand to exist: the cultural and social capital. Thus, as an alternative to the individualistic inside-out model, this thesis suggests outside-in approach to personal branding, one focused on on-going self-development, enabled by participation in social interaction.

The co-constructive approach to personal branding forces individuals to think, what is it that they can provide for other people, in order to awake their interest and to engage them in continuous and meaningful interaction. The findings suggest that individuals shouldn't focus on self-marketing efforts but rather aim to provide genuine value for others, which in turn awakens positive reactions in the audience, who have the ability to conduct the "marketing" more effectively for them. The research revealed that personal branding is about orchestrating the responses and reactions of the audience that actively shape the perceptions of the personal brand value. The aim of this orchestration is to evoke interaction, in general, as well as positive WOM and brand advocacy, in particular. Thus, instead of self-promotion that may even evoke annoyance in the audience (Dennhardt, 2014), the co-constructive approach to personal branding encourages individuals to share content that is potentially valuable to the audience of the message (Turri et al., 2013). The customer-centricity was noticeable in both Katleena's and Ville's tweets: despite their tightly-bound personal branding purpose, the tweets often contained relevant and potentially valuable information for the people within the target group.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The concluding chapter provides a short research summary, elaborates on the theoretical and practical implications as well as the limitations of this study, and presents suggestions for further research.

6.1 Research summary

The purpose of this study was to expand the co-constructive approach to branding into the specific field of personal branding, in which the individualistic self-marketing approach has remained prevalent. The study was motivated by the lack of comprehensive research in this field, and by the ignorance of stakeholder perspective in prior studies. The research problem was to find out, how the value of a personal brand is defined by its stakeholders. This problem was addressed from two research angles. First, the study was set to determine how the value of a personal brand is described by its stakeholders. Second, the study aimed to reveal how and why do the stakeholders participate in the value co-construction of personal brands in social media.

The main finding of the study show that personal branding is a social process, in which the success derives from the individuals' ability to serve each other's joint interests of "standing out" - and in some cases, "fitting in". The study shows that personal brands are not built in isolation, but instead, are affected by individuals' various stakeholders. As the study demonstrates how individuals gain value-in-use for participating in co-constructive personal branding, it gives a firm ground to the claim that interaction in itself should be considered a direct value-determining component of personal brands.

These findings represent a paradigm shift into how personal branding should be studied. Whereas prior research has described personal branding as an inside-out process, in which individuals are advised to project an ideal, yet authentic, image of themselves through the acts of self-disclosure, these findings show that personal branding can be equally perceived as an outside-in process. In contrast to the dominant individualistic view in which personal branding is seen solely as an output of self-reflection, this research demonstrates that personal branding can also be used as inputs for identity

building and self-development. As a response to this need, this study introduces a new concept of co-constructive personal branding. In contrast to prior literature that underlines competition between people, I suggest personal brands should be built on cooperation. However, this requires individuals to turn the gaze from the self to the others, in other words, to provide genuine value that evokes positive response within the various stakeholders.

6.2 Implications of the study

The findings of this study indicate that too little attention has been paid on network engagement in the context of personal branding. The study shows that individuals not only determine the value of each other's personal brands but also contribute to the value exchange in social interaction.

From the theoretical stand point, the implications of this study are threefold. First, instead of perceiving personal branding as a solely individualistic, inside-out process, this research showed that personal branding can be equally approached from the outside-in perspective. Individuals contribute to each other's personal brands in social interaction and provide resources for identity work and self-development. Thus, individuals should perceive other people not as a threat or as competitors to their own brand, but as a valuable resource for identity work, self-development and personal branding. All in all, acknowledging social networks not only as passive receivers of branding messages but as input providers for identity work and self-development, this research showed that the accumulation of cultural and social capital should be seen inseparable from the practices of personal branding.

This leads to the second implication of the study, the finding that personal branding seems to be more efficient when it is focused on delivering value to the stakeholders and not to oneself. In practice, this means it is important not only to know one's own strengths and weaknesses but to identify the value one is able to provide for others. In other words, the study suggests that individuals need to pay more attention to the needs of their stakeholders, in order to serve their individual personal branding objectives. Besides this, individuals need to acknowledge that personal branding is an on-going

process of interaction, the effectiveness of which requires time and effort – not only in continuous self-development but also in compelling and credible communication.

Third, the study suggests that the on-going process of co-constructive personal branding generates other valuable outcomes for individuals - identity value, communal value and informational value - which should lead us to think, whether personal brand value or these other forms of value are more worthy to reach for. Some may find it alleviating that personal brand can also be considered as a side product of interaction, not only emerging from conscious and strategic brand positioning and self-marketing efforts. In contrary, by putting effort to value exchange in interaction, individuals are able to not only build their personal brands but to serve each other's fundamental human needs and expand their cultural and social capital, and thus, build the ground for their personal brand value to exist. Thus, the stakeholder approach perceives personal branding as multiway communication, in which listening and speaking – or input and output - are equally important.

From the organizational view point, the findings suggest that communication skills of employees are essential in building a valuable employer brand in social media. The survey findings indicated that there is a knowledge gap among the communication professionals in Finland, with regards to personal branding, which call for more research and public discussion around this topic. Increasing their understanding of communication as the primary value-determining component of personal branding, this study encourages communication professionals to adopt a more active role in facilitating the personal branding skills of the executives and employees in their organizations. As contemporary communication environment calls for a pluralistic approach to corporate branding (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011), the facilitation of communication skills of employees should be regarded as a part of communication professionals' work.

6.3 Limitations of the study

It should be noted that qualitative research like this bears limitations with regards to generalizability of the findings: basically, the findings are limited to the explicit context

in which the study takes place. The survey was conducted within only one professional context and within a geographically very limited area, which should be considered as a weakness of this study. As it is often the case with qualitative studies, this research leaves it up to the reader to decide whether these findings can be adapted into other contexts.

Furthermore, as the data set of the content analysis was solely focused on interaction around two individuals, during an extremely limited time period, and within just one social media channel, the implications of this study should be considered as suggestive. It is good to note that both of the individuals in this study were communication professionals whose daily job can be considered inseparable from social media. However, this doesn't mean that other people whose profession is not that tightly knit to social media, couldn't learn from their skilful use of this communication channel.

Moreover, as it is often the case with the new research areas that lack established standards, the reliability of the findings is limited due to the pronounced role of the researcher as interpreter of data. As a consequence, there are other possible interpretations of the same data.

6.4 Suggestions for further research

This research shows that personal branding is still an extremely new area of research that would benefit from other comprehensive studies that would open up new angles to this very topical phenomenon. More research attention should be given to the co-constructive approach to personal branding introduced in this study. This new concept paves the way for further research into the outside-in perspective for personal branding, completely overlooked in prior studies. More research is needed to understand how individuals in social networks contribute not only to each other's personal brands but also to their (professional) identities and self-development. Further studies in this field could, for example, concentrate on co-constructive personal branding within a specific organizational context or within a larger set of professionals within other industries.

Moreover, further studies could aim to capture, how co-constructive personal branding occurs not only in other digital environments but also within “live” contexts.

As both personal brands investigated in this study clearly did brand themselves very professionally, other studies could look at co-constructive personal branding from the point of view of “regular people”, who still lack extensive networks in social media. It would be interesting to investigate the differences between the co-constructive, stakeholder approach and competitive, individualistic approach, and verify their different outcomes. Future research could also investigate the differences of personal branding practices between people in different stages of their careers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The survey questionnaire

1. Sex: female male
2. Age: _____
3. Employer: publicly listed company
 other privately owned company
 state or state-owned company
 other public sector employer
 association or other third sector organization
 non, I'm an entrepreneur
 non, I'm currently unemployed
 non of the options above
4. Which of the following social media channels you use for professional purposes? (Please mark in the order of importance: 1= the most important, 2 =the second most important etc.).
 - Facebook
 - Own blog or web site
 - Twitter
 - LinkedIn
 - Google+
 - YouTube
 - Snapchat
 - Instagram
 - WhatsApp
 - Pinterest
 - Vimeo
 - Periscope
 - Non of the options above:
 - I don't use social media at all.
 - I don't use social media for professional purposes.

5. Name one person from the people you follow in social media that you perceive as professionally the most influential and valuable personal brand to you.

Alternatively:

- I don't consider getting any professional value from anybody that I follow in social media.
 - I don't recall or can't name any particularly influential and valuable person or personal brand.
6. Why did you choose this person?
 7. Please explain in your own words, what is the value you gain by following that person in social media.