The Myth of Personal Branding

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ABSTRACT

Although there has been a lot of work done in the areas of branding and positions. However very less focus on research work, articles, blogs and books have been developed on personal brands and personal branding. Especially from an academic literature view point, the so far work and books have failed to define personal branding and as a theoretical basis. Though in practice personal branding is being used by millions of professionals around the world as a primary tool to position themselves as a successful brand, however many of them are still not aware about its myths and dynamics.. This calls for defining personal branding as an academic theory that would give students and professionals the basic understanding of what is personal branding as compared to traditional commercial branding. The paper sets the theoretical basis based upon taking an understanding of how personal branding has evolved as a definition, as well as looking into the understanding the myths of impression management, personal brands and personal branding.

Keywords: Impression Management, Brand, Branding, Personal Brands, Personal Branding,

INTRODUCTION & HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF BRAND

"Brand", as the word is known to us today, comes from the Old Norse "brandr", meaning to burn, which made its origins into Anglo-Saxon. Livestock was labeled with ownership by early man by means of burning their mark or signature, which was used by traders in order to distinguish branded cattle from the ordinary (Blankett et al, 2003). Cattle were branded long before this; the term

"maverick", originally meaning an unbranded calf, comes from Texas rancher Samuel Augustus Maverick who, following the American Civil War, decided that since all other cattle were branded, his would be identified by having no markings at all. Even the signatures on paintings of famous artists like Leonardo Da Vinci can be viewed as an early branding tool.

Although connected with the history of trademarks and including earlier examples which could be deemed "protobrands" (such as the marketing puns of the "Vesuvinum" wine jars found at Pompeii), brands in the field of mass-marketing originated in the 19th century with the advent of packaged goods. Industrialization moved the production of many household items, such as soap, from local communities to centralized factories. When shipping their items, the factories would literally brand their logo or insignia on the barrels used, extending the meaning of "brand" to that of a trademark.

Factories established during the Industrial Revolution introduced mass-produced goods and needed to sell their products to a wider market, to customers previously familiar only with locally-produced goods. It quickly became apparent that a generic packaging of soap had difficulty competing with local competitive products. The packaged goods manufacturers needed to convince the market that the public could place just as much trust in the non-local product. Campbell soup, Coca-Cola, Juicy Fruit gum, Aunt Jemima, and Quaker Oats were among the first products to be 'branded', in an effort to increase the consumer's familiarity with their products. Many brands of that era, such as Mc Donalds's meal and Kellogg's breakfast cereal furnish illustrations of the problem.

Around 1900, James Walter Thompson published a house ad explaining trademark advertising. This was an early commercial explanation of what we now know as branding. Companies soon adopted slogans, mascots, and jingles that began to appear on radio and early television. By the 1940s, manufacturers began to recognize the way in which consumers were developing relationships with their brands in a social, psychological, anthropological sense.

From there, manufacturers quickly learned to build their brand identity and personality, such as youthfulness, fun or luxury etc. This began the practice we now know as "branding", resulting in the consumers buying "the brand" rather than the product. This trend continued to the 1980s, and is now quantified in concepts such as brand value and brand equity. Naomi Klein has described this development as "brand equity mania".

The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines a brand as a "name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of other sellers."

According to David McNally and Karl D. Speak in "Be Your Own Brand", "A brand is a perception or emotion, maintained by a buyer or a prospective buyer, describing the experience related to doing business with an organization or consuming its products or services.

BRANDING

Branding is a strategy that is used by people and organizations, Pickton and Broderick (2001) describe "branding as Strategy to differentiate products and companies, and to build economic value for both the consumer and the brand owner." "Brand occupies space in the perception of the consumer, and is what results from the totality of what the consumer takes into consideration before making a purchase decision" (Pickton and Broderick 2001).

So branding is a strategy, and brand is what has meaning to the consumer.

Therefore Laura Lake (About.com Guide) says that it makes sense to understand that branding is not about getting your target market to choose you over the competition, but it is about getting your prospects to see you as the only one that provides a solution to their problem.

To succeed in branding you must understand the needs and wants of your customers and prospects. You do this by integrating your brand strategies through your company at every point of public contact.

A strong brand is invaluable as the battle for customers intensifies day by day. It's important to spend time investing in researching, defining, and building your brand. After all your brand is the source of a promise to your consumer. It's a foundational piece in your marketing communication and one you do not want to be without.

PERSONALITY BRAND & PERSONAL BRANDING

What do Bill Gates, Peter Druker, Michael Jackson, Richard Branson, Oprah Winfrey, Sir Alama Iqbal, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Ghandi, Tiger Woods, Mother Teresa, Anita Roddick, Madonna and Shahrukh Khan all have in common? They all spent time, effort and energy creating their own unique personality brands. Personality brands are relatively a new phenomenon in the field of marketing management and there is still little research in this area.

According to Ron Desi (at rondesi.com), 2009, "Your personal brand tells the World about you. Your brand tells the World what you stand for, what your values are, what your expertise is, and ultimately why the World should even care".

PERSONAL BRANDING

Personal branding, self-branding, self-positioning and all individual branding by whatever name, was first introduced in 1980 in a book titled "Positioning: The Battle for your Mind", by Al Ries and Jack Trout. More specifically in chapter 23, Positioning Yourself and Your Career - You can benefit by using positioning strategy to advance your own career. Key principle: Don't try to do everything yourself. Find a horse to ride". On the other hand, it was indirectly introduced in Erving Goffman's – the presentation of self in everyday life in (1959) where he talked about impression management. Lair, Sullivan and Cheney (2005) argue that personal branding perhaps started earlier, in 1982 with Dale Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People.

Personal branding is a recognized word in contemporary management and the field of modern career planning. Consultants, managers, job seekers, psychologists, brand managers and even social scientists are all eager to learn and explore it.

According to Dan Schawbel, 2008 "Personal branding is more of a process and the personal brand is the individual who has to constantly sell itself and be judged based on what is observable."

Branding has been there for centuries but conscious efforts on marketing products as brands came quite late in entrepreneurial history of man. Since the advent of market economy Branding has been the most popular subject of corporate media, business tycoons and corporate circles. The market economy gave boost to product competition and hence the survival of the fittest and most attractive ones became the rule of the game to survive the onslaught of competitive products. Branding is a way of analysing a product relative to a market and chalking out the ways to increase a product's/ brand's potential. Here market analysis, the consumer needs and proposed features of a brand matter a lot for successful launching, popularizing and making a brand profitable. Marketability and unique brand preposition being the key features of whole effort.

These rules and scenario exactly apply to complex human interaction with society and can be used for and by humans aspiring to be saleable in career and job market. In recent decades, the economic crisis has tightened the job market and the competition to get suitable job that offer growth potential has also become tough. Surviving in such a testing time needs specialized skills; excellent display of positive personal characteristics and phenomenal potential that can attract the attention and leads the buyers of talents to decide in favour of the one who possesses these.

Personal branding is systematic approach which undertakes the manner with which people and their career are handled as brands. It is a deliberate effort made by individual to differentiate, become noticeable and remain distinct from others. It enables to recognize and express particular values, and taking advantage of it to achieve personal and professional success and gain satisfaction in both areas. Ultimately all efforts bring confidence and establish credibility of the person and bring acknowledgement of self-worth from stakeholders of this brand---the person.

Man being a social animal has always been looking for ways of self-promotion, making reputation and getting advantage of his repute to move further in life, society and career. Throughout human history we find aristocrats, kings, merchants and statesmen using some tactics to promote their lifestyle, documenting the events that propagated their achievements and portraying themselves as source of inspiration for others. Many of them have been successful in leaving a mark of their own in a positive way. The ultra-new concept of Personal Branding came in early 80's and has been growing in importance since then.

Personal Branding has a great impact on personal and professional lives of individuals. A positively built, successful personal brand proves to be a unique and valuable asset for the organizations and society at large. If a person is wise enough to use the strategies, apply tactics and exploit the opportunities to display his skills and worth; it leads towards goal attainment and reaching the pinnacle of career which is an inspiration for millions thriving for success.

There can be many attributes of success. Personal Branding is the main source to fortify all efforts of career planning. It is said that a person alone is responsible for career growth, with organization contributing very little to it. Steering the career towards the highway of success is the unique art of Personal Branding.

In last decade of 20th century, the concept got momentum due to stronger media interest. With the popularity of internet and information and communication technology (ICT) the idea of personal branding crossed the barriers of geographical limits, in the global village we live in. Today a person branding himself/ herself is not confined to one nation and territory. In fact he has global reach and a wider and brighter horizon.

THEORETICAL SETTING

Personal Branding is an issue that has appealed not only to career counsellors but marketing gurus and management theorists alike.

Yet there has been very little effort on part of the academicians and teachers to promote it and enable the next breed of budding managers to adopt this and refrain them from being the ''churn out of mill'' stuff, identify their uniqueness and use it to the fullest and remain unbeaten by the challenges in career.

In general it's getting tough to move ahead in life, society and career. With conventional methods and approach it is hard to get to the top slot and get the best out of life and career. Since everything

needs some strategy and action for successful completion, we cannot leave the most important aspect of life--- the person--- the career rider on his own pace and fate. It needs careful planning, applying strategies, taking action timely and adoption of modern techniques and methods to get his/her worth recognized and afterwards use it for career advancement. So understanding and adoption of personal branding is very important to be attractive for prospective buyers of talents and consumers of the skills. It is important for Pakistan specifically because the dawn of globalization and emerging trend of multinationals have given birth to global competition of talents and skills. To be successful in such intense competition one needs to be aware of techniques of putting oneself wisely before the world as to be able to win the competition.

There is dire need of such study that can guide the students and professionals in contemporary era towards presentation of their Brand ways to move ahead in life and profession, crossing the hurdles that are created by environment, restrictions, organizational environment, society and last but not the least the deficiencies on personal front. This research aims to help the fresh graduates and talent that is new to the job environment, so they do not make the mistakes that detract their efforts from career aspirations they have and dreams they yearn to realize.

Apart from the fresh graduates, the existing workforce in all spheres of life, in every imaginable sector and job will benefit from the study and its findings. It will enable them to find out the ways to best express their talent, exploit the opportunities and respond to the emerging trends and demands of job market to remain successful. Ambitious and aspiring people will always benefit from it.

The study aims to find out not the individual's approach towards personal branding, but also intends to find out organizational role and commitment towards growth and development of individuals as and when they have tagged themselves with a personal brand because this is the land where seeds of success can get roots, its organization and its environment that can help people grow and get great advantage from it.

There are two types of personal brands, internal and external. External brand is ornamentation to adopt a particular style and mannerism that can be deemed as guarantee of social approval and professional recognition. This sometimes is illusive and it's hard to prolong. On the other hand the internal brand is the display of true self, identity, and abilities. This has long lasting impact. Sensible combination and display of both brands is a must to get success.

Personal branding is a science and an art. It requires calculating and steering the perception of other people about oneself. The study will help in practical aspects to be expert enough to understand the potential, identify opportunities and use the tools that help to be the successful brand—the person that is attractive, saleable, and preferred over the others who may possess same skills, abilities and knowledge. The difference between the successful and not so successful is just one thing----personal branding.

The study will help the readers and the aspirants towards betterment, even if they have already adopted one way or other of personal branding. It will be comprehensive way to know the strategies and workable techniques in the professional and personal life.

The understanding about Personal Branding will help save the talent that gets wasted due to negligence towards personal branding phenomenon. It is important to get insight to Personal Branding because it will help to optimally utilize the skills, knowledge and abilities KSA and move wisely in direction of pinnacle of career.

It can greatly help the individuals on how to make one self-indispensable for organizations, remain valuable when get hired and keep personal brand image growing while remaining in the organization. Personal branding does not end when one gets to the desired position; it starts afresh

as the struggle is on-going. It will be helpful to have the understanding of the importance of personal branding and using it for personal satisfaction and fulfilment. Existing economic slump has made the job market tight, tough and difficult for everyone. Only those who know where they are, where they should be and how they can be there are successful. The method of getting to the desired place and position is all about personal branding. The study will help the employers to know the tactics that are in vogue and which among the personal brands are authentic selves and which are fabricated ones and eye wash. It will help them to identify the personal brands that delivered the committed quality.

Previous studies have a little Inner brand and outer brand concepts. this study will highlight the importance and proportion of both. Attitude mannerism and approach towards personal branding will be focused so this is helpful

Self-branding has its own demands. In today's dynamic world, to move ahead, to get success and to build one's image, one needs to do a lot more than just impression management. It is a modern concept of joining together the concepts of management and marketing to promote a deep need for building a successful career around one's abilities. It is self-presentation, self-promotion and self-management all combined to define the way that leads to success in the organization. Self-categorisation theory, self-efficacy, self-actualization and self-esteem notions have been long discussed. Many psychologists and veteran management scholars have been discussing it deeply and though a new discipline, with not in-depth research, the idea has been discussed in different dimensions.

This research is important as it aims to identify the features of success that people wish to learn, adopt during their life span to promote their own achievements, interests and how they think they can get the desired response from the people they aim to promote themselves among.

Self-branding with the view of managing one's career and life as organizations manage their brands. Study aims to identify what are psychological tools individuals use to influence the others when they promote themselves like any prolifiring brand. It will be interesting to compare the brands with the individuals and identifying the similarities between the success of both human and non-human brand.

Self-branding has deep psychological needs and roots. Research will be conducted with the view to identify those motives that drive individuals for the need of self-branding and promoting self as a brand.

Self-branding is somewhat taken as exaggeration of facts, painting larger than life picture, creating the need and importance of self in other's life and mind. It is to some extent a betrayal, deception or perhaps living artificial life, at a distance from true self because self–branding needs that. It may have deep psychological impact on people striving hard to achieve success, the point where a person's success becomes an organization's success. It is rewarding experience to be in such a commanding position, where successful individuals make a successful organization.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Personal branding describes the process by which individuals and entrepreneurs differentiate themselves and stand out from a crowd by identifying and articulating their unique value proposition, whether professional or personal, and then leveraging it across platforms with a consistent message and image to achieve a specific goal. In this way, individuals can enhance their recognition as experts in their field, establish reputation and credibility, advance their careers, and build self-confidence.

The term personal brand is believed to get more popular in the August 1997 issue of Fast Company Magazine, in an article by management guru and author Tom Peters, who wrote, "We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You."

A well-executed personal branding campaign creates a strong, consistent, and specific association between the individual and the perceived value they offer. Personal branding is common among entertainment, political, and sports figures. In business, individuals such as Donald Trump, Martha Stewart, and Jack Welch have created enormous personal visibility and success by actively promoting their personal brands. Donald Trump will show you how to get rich. Martha Stewart will show you how to look good. Jack Welch will show you how to manage a business.

Personal branding typically begins with establishing an inventory of core competencies, expertise, demonstrated abilities, and existing level of recognition, informed by market research or feedback. Questions to be answered revolve around who needs to know about you, what need are you best-positioned to fill, and what differentiates you from others in your field or space?

Personal Branding consists of three elements, Value Proposition (What do you stand for), Differentiation (What makes you stand out), Marketability (What makes you compelling).

It is the ability of individuals to market themselves like a product which has clear cut differential advantage over competing products i.e. other individuals. It's about managing your marketing mix over time and changing according to customer requirements and needs. It is also about having distinctive personality, ability to charge premium price and having positive customer based brand equity.

While I was trying to finalize this paper, I asked one of my ex-students to define personal branding. According to him "Personal Branding, is the ability of individuals to market themselves like a product which has clear cut differential advantage over competing products, managing their marketing mix over time and changing according to customer requirements and needs and having distinctive personality, ability to charge premium price and having positive customer based brand equity. So as I interpret this definition then I can infer three positioning elements in that i.e. having unique Skills/Attributes like Adaptability, Flexibility and rapport building.

So if we define personal branding in simple words then it would be "a process in which people make efforts to position and market themselves as a successful and unique brand for their personal and professional image/impression, career growth and development. It has been noted that while previous self-help management techniques were about self-improvement, the personal branding concept suggests instead that success comes from self-packaging. Further defined as the creation of an asset that pertains to a particular person or individual; this includes but is not limited to the body, clothing, appearance and knowledge contained within, leading to an indelible impression that is uniquely distinguishable.

I still remember the very lesson that I learned from my professor in MBA marketing class. He taught us that we business graduates (human being in other words) are also just like products/brands. God manufactures us through our parents,, they then up bring us like a trainee, and finally our community that includes relatives, friends and teachers help us make a better person in the world. On the other hand we also make many efforts in one way or the other to build on our strengths and skills so that we can have the benefit of a better impression, reputation and image called "our personal brand" in the eyes of the world around us and more importantly in the eyes of our target customer e.g. our employers/clients or prospects. Hence I believe that the need to build or have a strong personal brand has always been there and is associated with human behaviour in one way or

the other and all of us consciously or unconsciously try to brand and position ourselves in the minds of other people.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Future is about personal refinement, elegant personalities, enlighten minds and bright spirits. To help educate the masses about upcoming challenges and brace up for these, such researches are quite important.

Researches done, have identified some of the conceptual, practical and ethical problems Personal Branding poses. The researchers have also pointed to some of the challenges higher education faces in attempting to create a curricular framework within which professionals can learn how to market and brand themselves effectively.

Personal Branding is not just a new term coined to create hype, or new occurrence; it has been there since long and will stay and grow with the passage of time.

Personal Branding is a vast subject that needs to be explored from different dimensions. Individualistic view has been considered in this research. It is needed to be explored from societal view point.

How society views individuals having that successful brand tag with them. Does society promote, help the struggle of a person branding himself/herself.

What are basis of psychology that urge a person towards personal branding. Which traits are more helpful in this struggle? Do these traits come naturally or one can learn these things over time. Can there be any success in attempts to learn and adopt personal branding?

Choice of profession and setting the aims of life is a turning point in one's life. According to some experts there are six stages of career, (1) Assessment (2) Investigation (3) Preparation (4) Commitment (5) Retention (6) Transition

There should be more research to combine individual's efforts at personal branding with the career stage and define the way and intensity of efforts needed at each stage to maintain equilibrium of success.

Success rate and use of personal branding for late career starters and female career seekers also needs attention of future researchers.

Workplace diversity has called the attention of all scholars and theorists as it is a blessing as well as it can be a curse if not maintained properly and dealt wisely. In such heterogeneous environment, Personal Branding can be beneficial or not also should be focal point of future research.

Impact of religious beliefs and social values on personal branding choice and success should be studied. So it is hoped that future research should focus on some areas that remain untouched or cannot be covered in this research due to time and resources restriction

Within the personal branding movement, people and their careers are marketed as brands complete with promises of performance, specialized designs, and tag lines for success. Because personal branding offers such a startlingly overt invitation to self-commodification, the phenomenon invites a careful and searching analysis, that requires further research in examining parallel developments in contemporary communication and employment climates and exploring how personal branding arises as (perhaps) an extreme form of a market-appropriate response. The contours of the personal branding movement can be then traced, emphasizing the rhetorical tactics with which it responds to

increasingly complex communication and employment environments. Next, personal branding should also be examined with a critical eye to both its effects on individuals and the power relations it instantiates on the basis of social categories such as gender, age, race, and class. Finally more research can also be done by reflecting on the broader ethical implications of personal branding as a communication strategy.

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