The Role of Social Media in Personal Branding

Master Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the Degree

Master of Business Administration (MBA)

Submitted to Dr. Marion Garaus

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ABSTRACT

The current world is a world where social media and personal brands are increasingly influential. This master thesis investigates the creation and phenomenon of personal brand in social media and how it helps create and alter people's identity. Online personal branding refers to communicating positive personality traits on an online platform to differentiate yourself from others, which will help achieve professional goals. Personal branding can be seen as a reinvention of traditional branding but at a completely different level of engagement and visibility (Tarnovskaya, 2017). The thesis aims to study different literature sources in various disciplines to develop a contextual framework for building personal brands on social media and investigate how they can be created in social media and their pros and cons. In the study, only online personal brand building is investigated, without research of personal brand building in real life. The author also studies the advantages and disadvantages of online personal brand creation for the individual. In the thesis qualitative study was used. There is a lot of articles and studies existing online that allow to conduct this research with literature reviews and semi-structured qualitative interviews.

The study goal was to find out how the personal brand can be created and developed in social media, the advantages and disadvantages of having a personal brand on social media platforms, and what strategies can be used. The literature follows the results of interviews at some point. Ukrainian personal brand holders did not consciously follow any strategy when building personal brand and indicate more advantages than disadvantages of having a personal brand.

This master thesis can be helpful for those who are trying to build their personal brand online, and they could find helpful information on what pitfalls they should avoid, what strategy is better to use, or how to make an online personal brand an additional resource and tool for professional growth and development. Those already building a successful online brand could find this work helpful in finding new personal online brand positioning. Building a personal brand in social media is a relevant topic for research due to its sizeable positive impact on an individual.

Keywords: personal branding, personal brand online, social media, online personal brand building.

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"The way to gain a good reputation

is to endeavor to be what you desire to appear."

Socrates

1. INTRODUCTION

A personal brand is a set of characteristics representing competence and character perceived by critical consumers – colleagues, clients, superiors, subordinates (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2005). More than 2400 years ago, Socrates said, "The way to gain a good reputation is to endeavor to be what you desire to appear" to emphasize the importance of such trend which contemporarily called "Personal Branding." (Petruca, 2016). Personal branding is a process when people build their brands, but it has a difference with reputation and image management with its purpose. There is a tendency when a personal brand becomes more recognizable in the modern world than a company brand. Mark Zuckerberg, Richard Branson, Steve Jobs all have a personal brand. Moreover, their brands have a significant impact on the opinion of others regarding their affiliated companies. Individuals influence the company brands and impact the value of those companies (Sitkins and Linne, 2013).

Today, a person engaged in a professional activity needs to promote themselves to remain in demand, get new clients, and increase his sphere of influence. A personal brand is becoming more exciting and attractive for specialists in different fields and directions. A personal brand becomes an additional resource and a tool for professional growth and development (Cynthia, 2019). Nowadays, many instruments exist for personal brand development. One of the instruments is building a personal brand by using social media. Social media has many advantages over more traditional communication channels. Due to its popularity, social media aggregate an active audience, ready to receive new information. Social media also allows to receive quick feedback, build close contact with other people, and positively affect personal brand development (Vitberg, 2009).

Building a personal brand in social media could be an exciting and relevant topic for research due to its sizeable positive impact on an individual. Personal branding is a process where people and their careers define as brands, and it is different from reputation and image building with its goal (Henderson, 2019). A personal brand is about creating an asset that belongs to an individual. Building a personal brand offline requires extensive financial support to create brand awareness and, subsequently, brand loyalty. However, with the help of social media, it has become more easy, cheap, and practical to promote a personal brand (Karaduman, 2013).

According to a CareerBuilder survey, 70 % of employers use social media to screen candidates during the hiring process, and about 43 % use social media to check on current employees (CareerBuilder.com). KBSD Digital Marketing research reveals that 48% of recruiters and HR professionals refer to personal websites when deciding whether to hire someone. Besides, 63% of recruiters check social media sites to find out more about potential employees; 8% of companies have fired someone for abusing social media (kbsd.com). Indeed, companies frequently use social media as a tool to check candidate professionalism. As a result, social networks have become an important part of the recruiting process. It is becoming more and more natural for employers to search for information online about potential candidates, which is not usually displayed on a CV (CareerBuilder.com).

A recent study on The Social CEO founds that 50% of high-performing leaders (from companies reaching above-average share price growth) have two or more social media accounts versus only 28% of low-performing CEOs. Conversely, 72% of low-performing CEOs had one or no charge (Oliver, 2019). Nowadays, manage personal reputation correctly in real life is not enough (Sitkins et al., 2013). A general personal brand consists of a digital presence and online reputation as well. As social media become increasingly obsessive, people realize that it could impact their careers if they do not manage their online branding. Social platforms were, from the beginning, a simple form of socializing. However, more and more employers are using them as an instrument to source and find out information about possible future stuff (Oliver, 2019).

Reputation online in the new business world could be challenging. It is almost impossible to hide anything from society nowadays (Vaynerchuk, 2021). The reason is

that online activity has a direct reflection in real life. Moreover, with the fast development of social media, many personal or private information becomes public, so ensuring that online presence is shown positively becomes essential. The best way to explain the importance of social media for the personal brand is the one that Jayson Demers said: "If the content is the fuel for your brand, social media is the engine." (Petruca, 2016).

This master thesis focuses on the various aspects and challenges of building a personal brand online. With the recent development of social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, developing a solid personal brand is vital to differentiate oneself from others. It is crucial for those seeking a new career opportunity and for politicians, celebrities, people who sell their unique skills or knowledge, and the managers and owners who run their companies. Studying the development and building rules of individual brands, one can use this information to control the perceptions of their target audiences of personal brands. The control over personal brand perception helps create a desirable image and translate it to the public. This master thesis focuses on the two main research questions:

Question 1: What is the role of social media in personal branding?

Question 2: What are the essential components of successful personal brand building in social media?

Answering these questions with the help of a literature review and support of the structured interviews, the author of the thesis will give a general overview of how social media is helping in the process of building a personal image. In addition, the author will describe the main components of the successful strategy of creating a unique online image and how one can use this knowledge when making a personal online brand. At the beginning of this master thesis, an author gives a general overview of personal branding development in the social media era. Supported with a further summary of the historical development of social media platforms and personal branding, it gives a general overview of how personal brand developed in connection with the development of social media platforms. In the following chapters, the author of the thesis will investigate the most important social network promotion strategies for personal brand development and critical components of unique personal brand positioning in social

media. However, this information will not be complete without investigating the risks and disadvantages of an online presence and how a person can be sure that the personal brand they are building online is successful. What instruments can be used to measure such a success? The end of the literature review chapter provides an example of creating an online personal brand for a politician by investigating Volodymyr Zelenskiy (current President of Ukraine). Also, the role of personal online brands in career development is discussed in the last chapter of the literature review.

To support the information obtained from the literature review, the author of the thesis decided to conduct semi-structured interviews with people who successfully built their careers and personal brands. In addition, the author decided to investigate whether they develop their private brands online, what instruments and strategies they use, and what advantages and disadvantages in building an online personal brand they could name. The analysis and results chapter describes the conclusions and main observations obtained from these interviews.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Personal branding in the social media era

In a modern world, personal branding has become a combination of self-offline and self-online presentation. Personal branding is the process an individual uses to market themselves to others (Jacobson, 2020). Social media has become a fast-growing trend and competitive tool for building a personal, professional brand in the current business world (Courtenay-Smith, 2019). The concept of self-branding scales this process down to an individual level. Rather than promoting one's skills and abilities, individuals construct and promote a consistent, marketable, and authentic self-image to develop relationships that can be leveraged for economic opportunities, thus instrumentalizing affective relations in the process of creating a "reputation" (Whitmer, 2019). All information that is possible to find online provides a digital print that influences the personal brand. Some information is almost impossible to control, for instance, what others write about the person. However, much of it is purposefully crafted and posted. (Labrecque, Markos, and Milne, 2011). The modern world is beginning to recognize the

importance of managing personal brands and present strategic advice on creating the desired brand identity through the different social media (Schwabel, 2009).

Gary Vaynerchuk is an excellent example of personal brand building with the help of social media, which is one of the most famous entrepreneurs in America. The modern world knows him for his strong entrepreneurial spirit and business success. He openly shares with the public that he was no one until his mid-thirties. He started his career at his father's liquor store. Using the power of e-commerce, he turned the family's wine business from $3 million a year to $60 million a year (Tucker, 2017). In 2006, he started a YouTube channel, WineLibraryTV, and produced a video almost every day for five years (Reddy, 2021). Figure 1 demonstrates the YouTube page of WineLibraryTV.
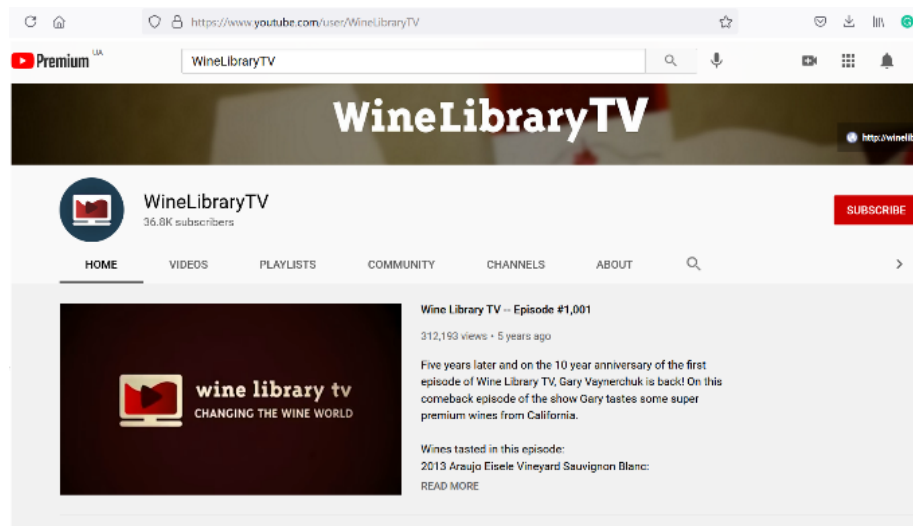
Figure 1. WineLibrary TV show by Garry Vaynerchuk (YouTube, 2021)

After developing family business with the help of "underpriced attention," (how Garry calls it), including the impact of content, e-commerce, email marketing, and Google AdWords, Gary started his career. By producing original business content as the voice of entrepreneurship online, in July 2007, he got an invitation to the Conan O'Brien show (Reddy, 2021). From this time, Garry becomes more and more public. Figure 2 shows that nowadays, Garry has more than nine million subscribers on his Instagram page.

Vaynerchuk builds his brand as a spokesperson for entrepreneurs and ordinary people who want to succeed in life. Garry Vaynerchuk is a five-time bestselling author, works as the chairman of VaynerX (media and communications holding company), and is an active CEO of VaynerMedia (full-service advertising firm). He presents on almost every

social media platform. He has more than nine million subscribers on Instagram, and his name relates to successful social media promotion for personal and corporate brands. (garyvaynerchuk.com)

Figure 2. Garry Vaynerchuk Instagram page. (Instagram, 2021)

The popularization of personal branding as a mode of presentation of self is a product of a particular set of economic, social, and cultural influences. Those influences led to the promotion of individualism, self-promotion, and self-governance (Whitmer, 2019). These factors were well known long before the current spate of self-branding experts began to capitalize on individuals' insecurities and aspirations. However, with the increasing marketization of public life and rising instability at work, self-branding has become more dominant as a framework for understanding the self (Whitmer, 2019). Yet, many people still believe that personal branding is a negative thing to do.

There is a misleading perception that personal branding is solely about branding, packaging, and selling, which is entirely not what personal branding is about (Courtenay-Smith, 2019). First, personal branding is self-awareness and self-preservation. For the proper personal, brand development is necessary to have online profiles set up. When someone can't find you online, they will think that something very unusual happened and will not trust you (Cynthia, 2019). A person has a personal brand online in the same way that makes an impression in the real world. Nowadays, it is hard to trust a person you can not find on the Internet (Courtenay-Smith, 2018).

The personal brand does not only consist of what a person does, but also of how, for whom, and why a person does it (Petruca, 2016). Most of the literature connected with personal branding suggests that branding yourself is the key to personal and professional success (Rampersad, 2008). The well-known argument "if you do not brand yourself, others will" (Kaputa, 2003, cited in Shepherd, 2005, p. 590.) has led to the increased interest in personal branding. The concept of personal branding, first popularized by Tom Peters (1997) in his article "The Brand Called You," has become increasingly important in the digital age.

In his article, Peters talks about the importance of taking responsibility for making a person stand out in the labor marketplace (Labrecque et al.,2010). He pointed: "We are CEOs of our companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You." (Peters, 1997, p. 3). Individuals who want to become more economically competitive should think about themselves as products to a broader audience. The self-branding creation instrumentally directs self-presentation by requiring self-reflection and constant evaluation to build a "strong brand" (Whitmer, 2019).

Once considered a tactic only for celebrities and leaders in business and politics, online tools have allowed personal branding to become an important marketing task for everyday people. The main idea of personal branding is that every single person has the power to build their brand and must be their marketer (Peters, 1997). Almost every person who has Internet access, time and wants to show others what they do best - can manage personal branding through social media. Social media help promote professionally, help open career doors, and bring new development opportunities (Petruca, 2016).

2.2 Historical development of social media platforms and personal branding

Personal branding has the same age as humanity because human beings always desire to show their achievements and abilities. "Self-packaging" is a primary goal of personal branding (Montoya and Vandehey, 2005). Personal branding deeply integrates into daily life. The unique brand of Cleopatra is synonymous with Ancient Egypt, and Julius

Caesar is for Rome. For many years personal brands have supported organizational brands. Individuals have become known for their talents, passions, knowledge and for what they do. Then, they have used that positioning to attract more opportunity and to exert more influence. The most prominent examples are Branson and Virgin, Bill Gates and Microsoft, Steve Jobs and Apple, and J.K. Rowling and Harry Potter.

However, the book "Think and Grow Rich" by Napoleon Hill, published in 1937, could also be mentioned. In chapter 6, Napoleon Hill wrote, "It should be encouraging to know that practically all the great fortunes began in the form of compensation for personal services, or from the sale of ideas."(Hill,1937, p.125). Hill was the first to connect financial results and the possibility of convincing people based on the individual's image. The value of building a personal brand translates into greater effectiveness in negotiations and even directly into more sales of goods and services (Grzesiak, 2018). Tom Peters mentioned personal branding in his article "The Brand Called You," published in 1997.

Peters accentuated creating a well-known personal brand by managers, which could help them get better results and develop their careers much faster (Grzesiak, 2018). The prerequisite of personal branding is that branding theories traditionally used for products and services can also apply to humans (Zidar and Marič, 2015). However, this idea is not new. The idea was already discussed in 1969 by Philip Kotler how marketing efforts could be applied not only to products but also to services, persons and ideas (Kotler and Levy, 1969). In early 1980 Al Ries and Jack Trout developed this concept further in their book "Positioning: The battle for your mind." They described positioning as a brand development process, which brings immediate benefits and positively impacts further career development (Ries and Trout, 1980). The Internet gave rise to the possibility of managing one's online identity. The result of personal branding was developing along with the advancement of social media. Social media created incredible opportunities for online identity development and helped sell products or services (Grzesiak, 2018).

Online experiences (chatting, gaming, and engaging in virtual worlds) give people free ways to investigate parts of the self that are difficult or nearly impossible to investigate face-to-face communications. Digital spaces expand open communication through

anonymity and the elimination of real-world boundaries, such as appearance (e.g., race, gender), physical capabilities, and socioeconomic status that may inhibit identity (Labreauque et al., 2011).

The history of social media has grown with growth in communications technology from the 19th century. Samuel Morse's first telegraph made the beginning. Nevertheless, that type of communication was not social media. The main reasons are that it was not taking place "online," and telegrams do not support any larger community. They only help to send messages between two people. That is why the natural history of social media starts in the 1970s with the emergence of the internet (Jones, 2015). It was a revolutionary idea that every person could enter the Internet and post about feelings, what they are doing, and other people could do it at any time and even respond. This helped people understand the full significance of the internet.

The first social media platforms were Six Degrees and Friendster (Jones, 2015). They do not exist anymore, even though they played an influential role in the social media revolution. The "first online social media" site was the creation of the Six Degree website. It received its name from the "six degrees of separation" theory, which states that all people on average are six social connections from each other. Also known as the six handshakes rule. SixDegrees is considered one of the first social networking sites, followed by other social networking sites based on the "social-circles network model," namely Friendster, MySpace, LinkedIn, XING, and Facebook (Ngak, 2011). Figure 3 illustrates the development of social media through the years.
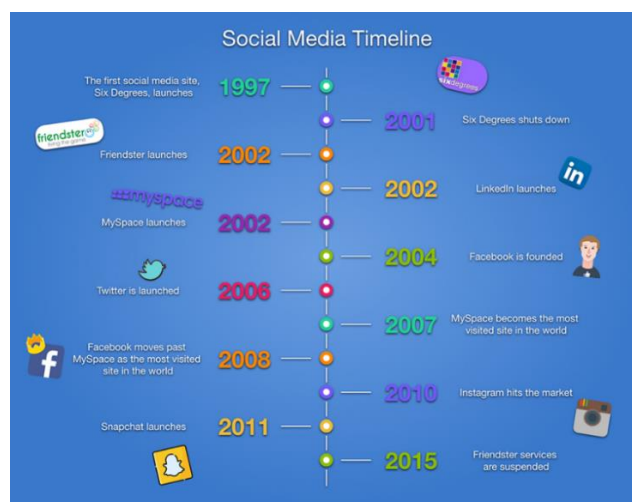
Figure 3. Social media timeline (cdn.broadbandsearch.net, 2021)

Because Six Degrees allowed people to sign up with their email address, create individual profiles, and add friends to personal network, it is considered the first social network (Jones, 2015). The official launch of the network was in 1997 and worked till 2001. Figure 4 shows the landing page of the Six Degrees website. It had around 3.5 million users. Moreover, YouthStream Media Networks bought it out for $125 million, but it was closed approximately one year later (Jones, 2015).

Figure 4. Landing page Six Degrees (sixdegrees.com, 2001)

In 2002 there was a creation of the Friendster. Figure 5 illustrates how the landing page of Friendster looked like in 2004. This social network also allowed users to sign up with email addresses, add friends, and create a personal network. However, what was new is that people could share videos, photos, and messages with other users and leave comments. A few months later, after a launch, Friendster added 3 million users, growing until it reached one hundred million users (Jones, 2015).

Figure 5. Friendster in 2004. (Internet Archive. Screenshot,2004)

In 2002 LinkedIn was founded by Reid Hoffman, Allen Blue, Konstantin Guericke, Eric Ly, and Jean-Luc Valliant. Initially, it was a site created for professional networking to connect with business contacts and companies (Jones, 2015). Nowadays, LinkedIn has more than 575 million registered users, and it is ranked number 285 on the Alexa Ranking for most-visited sites (Carlson, 2011). LinkedIn has one of the most outdated evolutions in social media. It uses algorithms and pulls data from individual sites to push the people's brand out to the market (Sitkins et al., 2013).

The following social media network MySpace was launched in 2003. Figure 6 illustrates the first version of the MySpace landing page. It was a file storage platform but quickly transformed into an online social network (Jones, 2015).
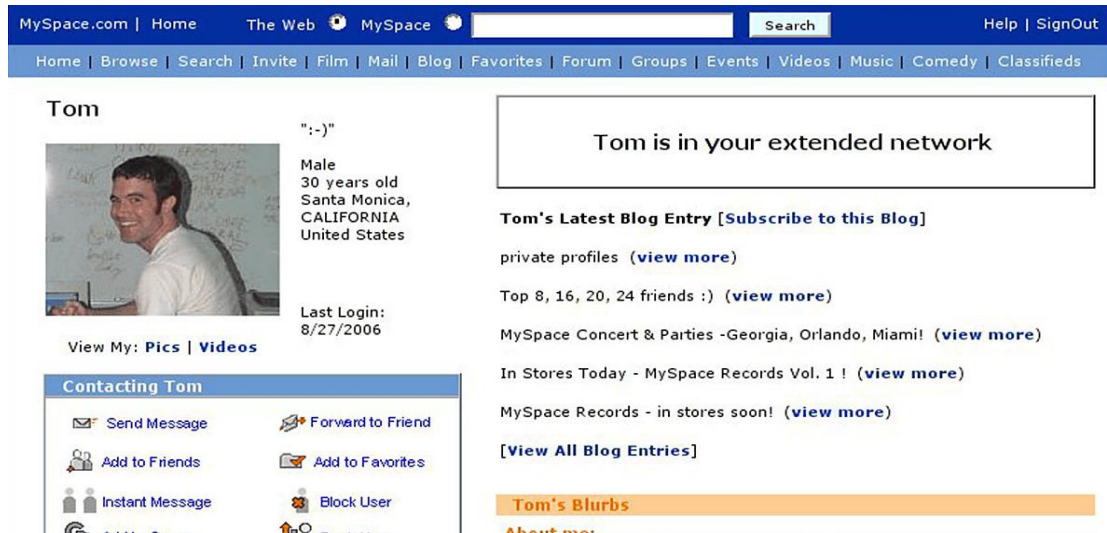
Figure 6. Landing page MySpace (crackmagazine.net, 2019)

Facebook was founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg. Facebook from the beginning was a social media site only for Harvard students, but it quickly spread to the rest of the Ivy League, as well as Stanford and MIT. After 2006, Facebook becomes available to anyone above 13, without affiliation with a university (Jones, 2015).

Figure 7 shows the most popular Facebook fan pages based on the number of fans.

Most popular Facebook fan pages as of June 2021, based on number of fans (in millions)

Page	Number of fans (in millions)
Facebook	214.62
Samsung	159.82
Cristiano Ronaldo	122.28
Real Madrid CF	111.33
Coca-Cola	106.96
FC Barcelona	103.35
Shakira	100.03
Tasty	97.91
Vin Diesel	96.71
Leo Messi	90.16
China Daily	87.69
Eminem	86.52
Mr. Bean	84.81
YouTube	84.35
McDonald's	79.85
Rihanna	79.01
Will Smith	77.08
Justin Bieber	76.3
Manchester United	73.26
Harry Potter	72.26

Number of fans on Facebook in millions

Sources
Trackalytics; Facebook
© Statista 2021

Additional Information:
Worldwide; Trackalytics; Facebook; June 2021

Figure 7. Most popular Facebook fan pages (statista.com, 2021)

In 2006, Twitter began as an idea of Jack Dorsey, Twitter co-founder, and was first designed as an SMS-based communications platform. Nevertheless, Dorsey discussed the idea with Odeo's co-founder Evan Williams. Evan and his co-founder Biz Stone gave Jack the go-ahead to spend more time on the project and develop it further (MacArthur, 2020). Because Twitter had its original design as an SMS-based platform, it imposes a character limit on tweets. In the beginning, 140 characters were the limit that mobile carriers charged with SMS protocol standard, so Twitter was simply creatively constrained. As Twitter grew into a web platform, the 140-character limit remained as a matter of branding. In 2017 Twitter decided that the 140-character limit was no longer a case, and it increased the limit to 280 characters (MacArthur, 2020). With the growth of user base, a funny thing started to happen users began to create a

new jargon and different ways to use the service (MacArthur, 2020). Figure 8 shows the most followed Twitter accounts worldwide.
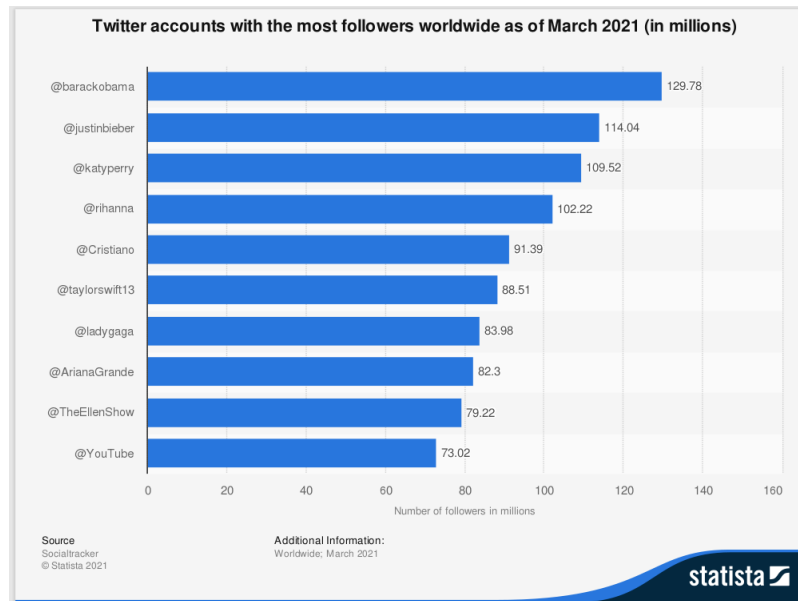
Figure 8. Most followed Twitter accounts worldwide (statista.com, 2021)

Instagram was created and launched in 2010. On the first day, twenty-five thousand users showed up. Figure 9 shows that the first Instagram photo uploaded was the picture of Kevin Systrom's dog Dolly. Instagram was launched by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. It diversified as a smartphone-only app focusing exclusively on photos and video sharing. In just two months, Instagram surpassing one million registered users (Jones, 2015). Nowadays, it has more than 1 billion active users, and it is the fourth most popular social media platform globally by the number of active users (statista.com).

Figure 9. First posted Instagram photo (Harrison,2020)

In April 2012, Mark Zuckerberg offered to purchase Instagram for \$1 billion with the obligation to remain independent and have its development strategy. A little while, Facebook acquired Instagram on the proposed conditions (Harrison, 2020).

Another social media platform Snapchat was launched in 2011 by Evan Spiegel, Bobby Murphy, and Reggie Brown. It was allowed users to send photos to one another that would disappear soon after they were opened. The network has around 186 million active users, mainly particularly popular among young people, but there are predictions that Snapchat's influence will grow in the coming years (Colao, 2014).

Social media history is short in terms of time, but in the meantime, it does not make it any less influential. Today, social media is an essential and significant part of people's daily connections. There are around 2.62 billion social media users around the globe, and this number expects to rise to be 3 billion by 2021 (Tankovska, 2021). Figure 10 illustrates the most popular social networks worldwide.
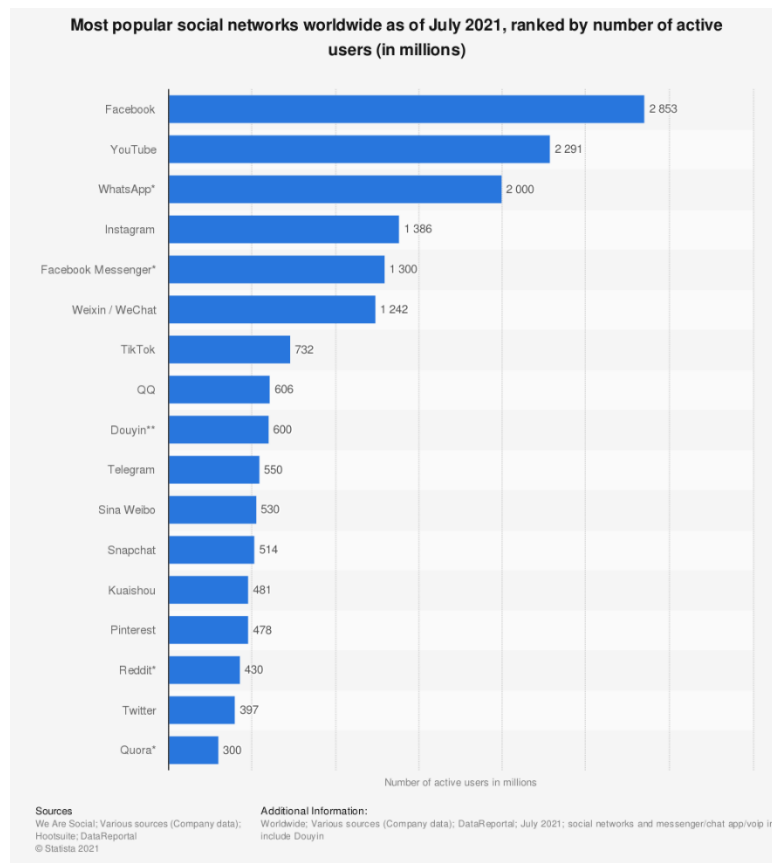
Figure 10. Most popular social networks worldwide as of July 2021 (statista.com, 2021)

Social media will continue to use methods that create interaction and connectivity. Proactively managing this information is critical for effective personal brand management (Sitkins et al., 2013).

2.3 Social network promotion strategies for personal brand development

Creating a relevant personal brand could be a complicated task, so it is vital to consider some critical aspects of building it through social media. Before deciding upon a strategy, it is relevant to determine how a personal brand is perceived through other people's eyes. It is essential to be very clear about the image that the person intends to project. To not confuse the audience regarding the personal brand, each photo must be carefully selected when posting on social media. The other important aspect is that every information shared online must have a purpose because every shared information, status, or picture contributes to the individual brand (Petruca, 2016).

Figure 11 shows the essential tools available today for personal brand promotion in social media described by Harris. Eight main components influence the success of a unique brand promotion campaign through social media. (Harris and Rae, 2011).
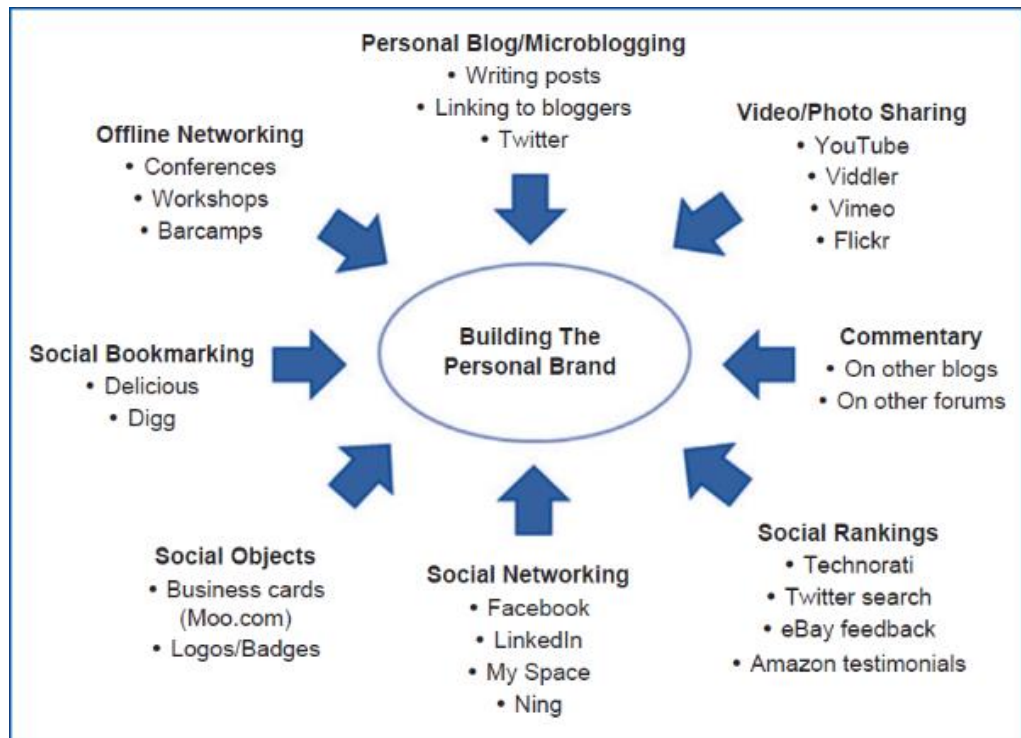
Figure 11. Essential tools available today to enhance a personal brand in social media (Harris, 2011).

To build a powerful personal brand requires two things: visibility and ability. It is equally essential that a person is a professional in what he is doing but not less important to show other people the results of their activities (Courtenay-Smith, 2020). 78% percent of people search for information about them on the Internet before meeting an individual. The tendency is that percentage will grow fast and eventually close to 100 percent (kbsd.com). Different professionals like attorneys, insurance providers, product distributors, and others will have a personal brand. Moreover, the cost of doing nothing with personal brand-building could be devastating (Sitkins et al.,2013).

The following benefits of using social media for a personal brand could be named: (Sitkins and Linne, 2013)

1. Ability to communicate with a large number of users.

2. Availability of the target audience.

3. The ability to advertise your services for free.

4. The ability to virally spread information among users of social networks.

5. Relatively low competition.

Before entering social media, a strategy for personal brand development needs to be created.

The strategy must answer the following questions (Gynn, 2020):

1. What values will the brand promote (how does it position itself)?

2. What is his target audience?

3. Through which channel does the brand share information (what social networks does it use)?

4. What content does the brand use?

5. How does a personal brand communicate with an audience?

An essential point in strategy creation is the definition of brand positioning. Without this, it is impossible to form a strategy for promoting a personal brand on social networks. Brand positioning is information about the target audience, main characteristics, competitive advantages, character, and brand values. The main goal of

positioning is to distinguish a brand from other competitors. The positioning also helps give the brand features relevant to the target audience (Ries et al., 2001). What people think of a person will influence their decision to work with them, buy something from them, and spend time or even listen to them (Sitkins et al., 2013).

It is vital to consider the factors such as consumer stereotypes, emotional values, rational values, country of origin, and target audience to create an appropriate brand positioning. Personal brands often must develop completely different positioning concepts for social networks, which, although they support the central brand positioning, do not entirely coincide. It is impossible to determine the positioning of a personal brand without analyzing its target audience. A target audience is a group of people united by a product and (or) service - buyers, consumers, potential consumers, and persons who can influence the purchasing decision (Schmidt and Cohen, 2014). The target audiences can be the direct and indirect target audiences. The part of the target audience that directly makes the decisions is called the direct target audience. The audience that plays a passive role and takes part in the decision to make a purchase, but does not initiate it, is called an indirect target audience (Ries et al., 2001).

After determining the target audience, it is crucial to define channels with which the target audience is most likely to be reached. Currently, different audiences can be the various social media channels:

• LinkedIn is the perfect channel for reaching professionals and executives

• Twitter is the best channel for reaching the media, politicians, and so on

• Facebook and Instagram are the best channels for reaching customers (Oliver, 2019).

Brand creation and following brand management is not a one-time event, and it will evolve through life. That is why it is essential to make it purposefully and consistently (Sitkins et al., 2013).

2.3.1 Critical components of personal brand positioning in social media

Creating a personal brand is relevant to gain value in customers' eyes to understand their needs and interests. Besides, those needs and goods must match with a person's strengths

and capabilities. The critical task is to know the target audience, segments, and what approaches to interact with them will be effective, which means to have significance for your audience. Positioning is another critical component in creating a personal brand. Brands represent certain qualities and allow becoming a leader in the niche. Therefore, it is vital to analyze the personality itself and all its possibilities and potential competitors.

The last but not minor component of successful personal brand development in social media is a sequence. People gain faith in relationships based on a series of actions they observe or direct experience (Sharkov, 2016). To build a genuine personal brand, one should be consistent with the information posted and comments. It is important to have values that are translated to the audience constantly. No one can build a personal brand in one day. Individual brand building requires making the proper steps and make continuous efforts. The most important part, to begin with, is to know goals, to define the reasons for building a personal brand. It is essential to understand the desired results to achieve, and it will help understand what social media channels would be better to use (Grzesiak, 2018). If the primary goal of building a personal brand is to get people to recognize professional skills and become known as professional in some field for this purpose is better to use LinkedIn (Johnson, 2017). The next step in personal branding on social media is to create a brand statement. Figure 12 shows how Richard Branson describes his brand statement on his Twitter page.

Figure 12. Richard Branson brand statement on Twitter (Twitter.com.2021)

A brand statement is a way to connect with an audience to define a personal brand briefly but clearly. It should highlight areas of expertise, values, mission people want to accomplish, and vision. All this indicated in social media profile descriptions will serve as keywords that will help personal brand appear in relevant search results when people search for such information (Tarnovskaya, 2017).

The personal brand must reflect a person's unique strengths, authenticity, and talents. A relevant example could be Richard Branson's brand, which exemplifies craziness, risk-taking, entertainment, and adventure. His values and personality are all over his Virgin companies (Karakas, 2020). People with strong personal brands are noticed because they share their passion for what they do and that is relevant to the people they want to serve (Dalla-Camina, 2016).

Richard Branson's brand is much more powerful than the Virgin companies. Now Richard Branson has almost 19 million followers on LinkedIn, and he is number one of the most followed professionals on LinkedIn. The best-performing Virgin company page on LinkedIn only has 216,000 followers (LinkedIn.com). Richard Branson's brand is so powerful that he influences every Virgin brand because of his iconic, entrepreneurial status. If you ask any professional about Virgin, they will say that Virgin is a fantastic place to work and that the brand is one of the most entrepreneurial (Reed, 2017). However, if you remove Branson from the formula, the picture will be the same as any other airline, mobile, financial, or fitness brand. Companies will lose the uniqueness that Richard Branson's brand put in it.

When building a personal brand online, it is crucial to establish a consistent voice. It is essential to stay consistent across all social platforms to obtain as much as possible from social media presence. Even such a small detail as a color scheme must remain the same on each forum. Another component is to engage with an audience with questions, discussion, or comments. It is relevant because it helps build a relationship with an audience and increases loyalty to a personal brand. It is crucial to share regularly high-quality content to be appropriate for search engines such as Google. Sharing content from other reputable sources could also be very helpful in personal brand promotion through social media channels (Lundberg, 2018).

Posting on social media is not the only way of building a personal brand. Everything could be communicated about a person through video by others (as everyone nowadays has a phone with a video camera in their pocket), like appearance, actions, and social environments. In the modern world, a personal brand is more public and more easily broadcast than at any time in history. With the growth of technology, personal brands become more evident to others (Sitkins et al., 2013).

2.3.2 Main risks and disadvantages of an online presence

Using social media for personal brand promotion could be beneficial and can have some risks. The primary risk is to manage social capital. Between private and public audiences and personal and professional space are very blurry boundaries (Grzesiak, 2018). Can colleagues also be friends on Facebook? What response should the person give to abusive posts? Will the comments on the position be relevant? It is crucial to be selective about the audience and build it slowly but on quality and not quantity basis to avoid that.

It is also essential to mention that managing intellectual capital is another risk. Everything that says online is challenging to erase. It is necessary to set guidelines about what information to disclose. Information that posts must be authentic and consistent across spheres, online and in other media. Private information should not be on social media platforms (Oliver, 2019).

Another risk is measuring success and progress in social media activities. The success of social media strategy depends on the resources, quality, and authenticity of messages. However, it is important to know if it is not a waste of time. The number of friends and followers will not fully picture how successful a person is in building his brand on social media platforms. It is also needed to consider social media monitoring tools (Dutta, 2010). Many social media monitoring tools exist nowadays, such as Hootsuite, Google Alerts, Talkwalker, and Reputology. They will help track how many valuable connections were made or progressive ideas because of social media interaction. Figure 13 shows what information Reputology can present. Reputology monitors and checks significant review sites such as Yelp, Google, and Facebook reviews.
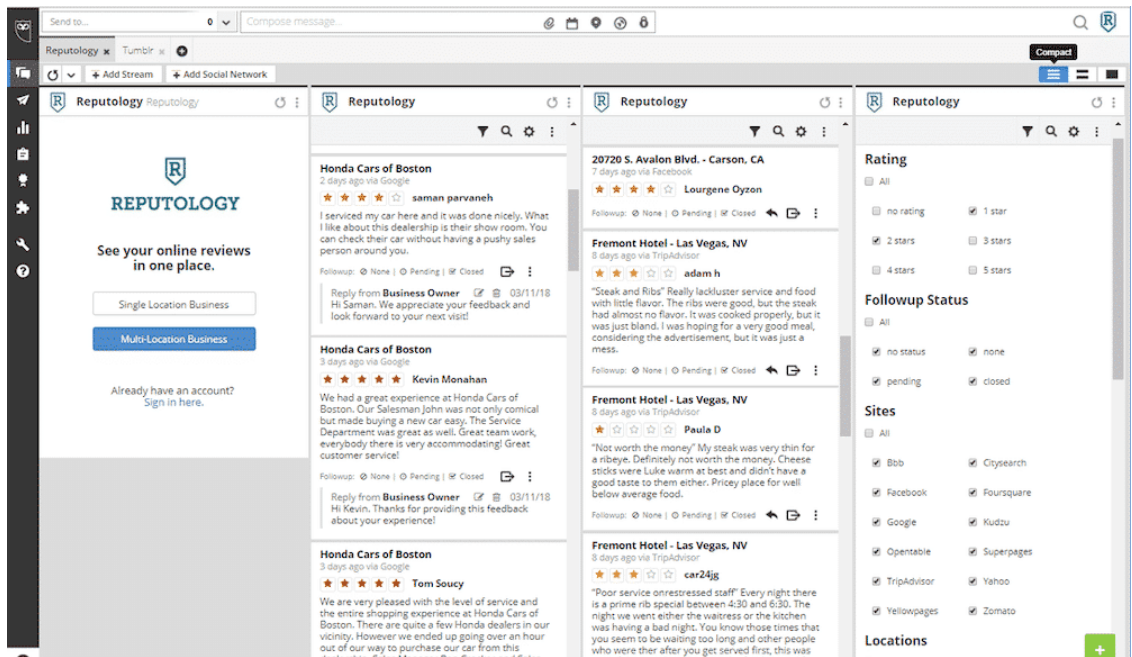
Figure 13. Reputology site (reputology.com, 2021).

Social media give a new, low-cost tool for personal branding, learning from unknown sources, and engaging in conversations with stakeholders. Defining individual and professional goals clearly defines a target audience and chooses the right social media platform to use correctly with minimum risk (Dutta, 2010). Social media demands attention all the time to build a successful personal brand. It is essential to constantly create new content, post content, and engage with the audience on social media platforms. It could be time-consuming. If you do not do enough with social networks because of time, personal brand-building campaigns will suffer. The other disadvantage of social media individual brand building is that it needs time before the first results.

2.3.3 The measurement of success of personal brand building in social media

Building an online personal brand could be not so fast but knowing if everything is going in the right direction is essential. The following vital metrics could help to measure the success of online personal brand creation (Courtenay-Smith, 2018):

1. The number of qualified leads generated for businesses (more leads of better quality) being the measurable critical objective.

2. The number of partners (customers/clients) in the pipeline on a rolling basis.

3. The speed of conversion – based on increased trust that an online personal brand has produced. This metric is very underrated but very valuable.

4. Reduced cost of client/customer/partner acquisition based on people coming to personal brand.

5. Increased referrals from a much deeper and broader network.

7. Valuable connections. A good personal brand will expand the network and contact people who can help raise higher and higher performance levels.

8. Staff recruitment is an often overlooked aspect of personal branding. The success of any business is down in large part to the quality of the people.

Micro wins are also significantly significant. Micro-wins could reflect something positive that happened because of done efforts. It could be a letter from a potential client responding to a published article, an invitation to participate as a speaker at some event, or even retweets, shares, or reposts of published articles. Such micro wins help to reach previously set big financial or business goals. Focusing on them, one could get a more prominent plan faster (Silva, 2018).

2.4 The features of building a personal brand for politicians.

The Internet has allowed anyone to distribute free and independent information in a modern world and has created a new form of information control. Due to its openness, the network assigned an active role to the third actor of political communication (the voters), previously assigned to a passive and observant role. The development of social networks has returned to the circle of political contacts voices that were not previously there or did not possess the tools to be heard and influence political decisions (Alberti and De Serio, 2020).

Recent research has shown that images can play a significant role in assessing politicians by public members. Voters look for certain qualities in political leaders, such as honesty, intelligence, sincerity, and reliability when deciding whom they will vote. Image management techniques are beneficial in the creation of the impression that politicians have these qualities. Almost every day, heads of government using social media to gain

public attention with impressive images or videos seems like a new norm (Silva, 2018). Social media like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter play a crucial role in modern e-campaigning. They help candidates communicate with voters in a more personal and dialogue-oriented manner, which can help improve the tight connection between citizens and politicians (Oelsner et al., 2015). In today's era of mediation, political action more than ever depends on constant public communication to explain and legitimize political decisions, which turns social media competence into a decisive factor in political power.

The businessman and Republican candidate Donald Trump, a 45th President of the United States, is well known for using Twitter to publish more unconventional political messages to his millions of followers (Lalancette and Raynauld, 2019). On many occasions, his tweets have allowed him to shape the way individual journalists and media report on him and broaden discussions about the political and political agenda in the United States. A review of his personal Instagram account shows that he also actively used the platform to engage in forms of political communication that can be confrontational and, in some cases, harmful (Lalancette et al., 2019).

Justin Trudeau's Canadian Prime minister's political use of social media is opposite in tone but similar to an expanded political communication strategy. Trudeau is well known for his positive attitude and approachability. Like Trump, his celebrity status permeated with every aspect of his political communication style. In particular, he is very active on Instagram to bypass traditional media intermediaries and connect directly with the public in Canada and abroad in very personalized ways (Lalancette et al., 2019). Politicians express different forms of connectivity by displaying belonging to a particular celebrity or international politician, mingling with ordinary people in other places, or demonstrating inner unity and solidarity within a party or coalition (Ekman and Widholm, 2017).

Over the past two decades, digital media and social media have become integral components of political communication in several countries. Politicians have begun to use e-communication tools to participate in a broad scope of image-building activities, from demonstrating strength, reliability, and prestige to capturing and sharing aspects of their private lives to present a more humanized and understandable version of

themselves (Lalancette et al., 2019). In the last few years, social media has become integrated into election campaigning and other forms of political communication. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter focus on the individual politician rather than the political party, thereby broadening the political arena for increased personalized campaigning (Gunn, Skogerbø, 2013). Thus, they give a new impulse to the personalization of politics, a returning theme in political communication.

The candidate focuses not on the party organization but election campaigns in candidate-centered political systems such as the American. Twitter and Facebook are well suited for candidates to directly communicate with voters and election officials and create their political image in this system. They are semi-public, semi-private spaces for self-presentation, where the boundaries between offline personal and online mediated relationships are blurred (Gunn et al., 2013). They allow politicians and voters to fulfill their public/private roles and switch smoothly and strategically between them. Personal traits and structural constraints can affect how candidates apply social media in their campaigns.

2.4.1 Reasons for using social media by politicians

It is crucial to mention three central motives for using social media by politicians. First, marketing, that is, candidates use social media to increase their visibility in the public sphere. In this regard, social media was another place to promote their policies and a place where they could connect more with other groups of voters, for example, young people, as compared to traditional media (Karlsen and Skogerbø, 2011). Most political candidates recognize the necessity of being present on social media platforms to reach young voters and attract journalists. The second motive mentioned by politicians is mobilization as a critical motive for a presence on Facebook and Twitter, most often together with the use of "conventional internet tools" (Nielsen, 2011) such as email, SMS, and mobile phone, as well as traditional media and an offline campaign. The third motive mentioned by politicians is the possibility of dialogue with voters. Several politicians said social media offers new opportunities to reach out to voters, get feedback on political issues, discuss politics more consistently, and attract more voters than previous media (Gunn et al., 2013).

However, today, politics try to move to the Internet, and more massive and effective use of social media leads to a more considerable political success. Social media has effectively turned the political scene into an ongoing election campaign. The media space remains in the hands of politicians who base their brand on emotions: a personality that attracts millions of potential voters who stick to their smartphones. (Alberti and De Serio, 2020).

2.4.2   The case of Volodymyr Zelenskiy (current President of Ukraine)

Alongside the Obama and Trump cases, the most illustrative example of the strategic use of social media for political purposes is the elective campaign of the current President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskiy. Compared to his opponents, his strategy led him to victory in the presidential election with colossal consensus.

Volodymyr Zelenskiy, the former comedian who played a role of a President in the movie "Servant of the people," became the President in reality. Zelenskiy has no previous experience in politics or public affairs and, perhaps also, for this reason, the Ukrainians have given him on Presidential elections 73% compared to the 25% collected by the outgoing President Petro Poroshenko. Zelenskiy, the comedian, transformed into the image of Zelenskiy the politic thanks to the media positioning he created through the wise use of social networks. Zelensky used exclusively social media and refused all confrontations with other candidates and meetings with the press. It allows him and his team to manage the messages and images that he created. However, he also uses social media as a virtual space to share information and opinions.

The team of Zelenskiy has combined entertainment and information to reach millions of Instagram users. Zelenskiy's Servant of the People party has shown that, unlike serious and "boring" Facebook posts, political posts in simple formats have great potential to turn "likes" and "subscriptions" into actual seats in parliament. Ironic videos, vlogs, selfies are all in line with what people want to see on Instagram.

The significantly higher value of interactions on Zelenskiy's posts indicates the success of the interactions he managed to establish with his followers. At the same time, the number of shares showed support for the content proposed by the Zelensky team. Claims

are essential to becoming viral as different online groups and audiences can see them. At the same time, it increases acknowledgment because the likes on the shared posts raise the number of likes on the original post.

During the presidential elections, Poroshenko's team (the primary opponent of Zelenskiy) did not feel the rapid development of Instagram. In contrast, Zelensky's team created video messages to the youth audience through this social network became one of the critical elements of the election campaign.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his party Servant of the People continued to use the potential of social networks after winning the elections. Since his election, the President has repeatedly called on Ukrainians for various flash mobs and posted his video messages on Instagram, Youtube, and Facebook. Moreover, the president said that the new government does not need journalists since it communicates with the people without intermediaries through social media. Zelenskiy launched an all-digital campaign that marks a further evolutionary step from the 2008 Obama and 2016 Trump campaigns: a disruptive approach that could introduce a new way of political communication, starting with the quality of shared content. With obvious narration based on entertainment experiences using a new social media platform like Telegram.

2.5 The role of online personal brand in the career development

The existence of digital technology means employers can easily find out information about candidates are and what their values are, sometimes without even talking. According to CareerBuilder, around 70 % of companies screen applicants based on their social activity. The brightest candidates take full advantage of the social media opportunities to overcome the first invisible obstacle in their job search. Companies realize that social media channels have become an integral part of people's lives, potentially putting both parties at risk (Seamus, 2020). Companies suddenly must deal with a costly public relations crisis with just one employee's mistaken comment, an offensive post, or a random post from a company's Twitter or Facebook page. For candidates, this means that your social media post can be a reputational risk factor. If you do not take any appropriate measures, it lowers your chances of employment.

The lack of an online presence can also surprise potential employers. If the person does not have a LinkedIn profile, some companies assume that he\she lacks digital experience and may even delete candidates from the hiring process based on this information. According to The Manifest, the reasons for disqualifying candidates are primarily because of the following findings: 98% of HR professionals disqualified candidates because of what they found on social media, 79% of employers conduct online candidate surveys, 90% view social media profiles as part of the candidate appraisal process (themanifest.com). When it comes to sharing content or shaping messages for your personal brand on social media, you should avoid these nine red flags (Seamus, 2020):

1. Obvious drug use or promotion of drug use

2. Illegal activity

3. Offensive content (racist, sexist, anti-Semitic) in all forms, including comments, memes, shared articles, videos, pictures, and posts

4. Regular use of profanity and other pejoratives

5. Extreme political views

6. Falsehoods

7. Wrong construe content as a poor judgment

8. Grammar and spelling issues

9. Unnecessarily negative or petty commentary

Unlike a company brand, a personal brand sells its expertise to employers or potential professional connections. Personal brand building helps people differentiate themselves from others with similar skills or qualities. LinkedIn probably is the best platform for job seekers to start building a personal brand on social media. The structure of LinkedIn profiles is the same way as resumes, and it could help job seekers use the platform to tell personal stories and detail professional experiences (McKeon, 2020). Job seekers must ensure that their LinkedIn profiles are detailed and complete. The impression that potential employers may have on the Internet is relevant, although it may take a while before you meet a recruiter in person. People looking for a new job opportunity must be

proactive when creating personal brands and displaying information on search engines. Almost half of the employers (43%) use Google to find potential candidates (McKeon, 2020).

People get hired for new positions, promoted, change their careers every single day. What is common for all these activities? Employers are online nowadays because all talents are there: exceptional, experienced, and passionate professionals. They position expertise, skills, and talent altogether, leveraging relevant digital opportunities (McKeon, 2020). With the help of social media and efforts invested into online professional brand building, the results will come from new career opportunities and successful career stories.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research questions

This thesis aims to investigate the process of personal brand building in social media from the view of a brand holder. The objective is to research the critical components of building a personal brand, specifically in social media. The research problem defines as "Is it necessary to use social media platforms to build a successful personal brand." To answer this research problem, the following research questions will be addressed:

Question 1: What is the role of social media in personal branding?

Question 2: What are the essential components of successful personal brand building in social media?

The thesis includes a literature review for the theoretical part and interviews with professionals who have a strong personal brand in different fields to answer this question.

3.2 Research design

During the research, qualitative research strategies are in use. The main goal is to systematically collect empirical data and examine data patterns to understand better and explain social life. It is appropriate to use quantitative approaches for data collection

techniques that differ from complex data (in the form of numbers). Qualitative studies are not trying to convert social life into numbers but to borrow ideas and viewpoints from the people and situate them in a natural setting. Instead of variables, qualitative studies examine motifs, themes, distinctions, and perspectives. Qualitative data was obtained with the help of recording what people say, such as words, gestures, and tone. In addition, specific behaviors were observed as well as visual study images (Neuman, 2002).

People chose the qualitative studies for such a thesis because it is about human identity and interactions between humans. Qualitative studies look directly at human behavior through interviews or any other forms. However, they all have in common the human behavior as their central part. Semi-structured interviews were the choice for the empirical part of the thesis. The semi-structured interview is a qualitative data collection strategy in which the researcher asks people a series of predetermined but open-ended questions (Given, 2008). The author of this thesis used qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is looking for similarities and differences by searching and making conclusions.

This thesis intends to explore how users of social media platforms develop their identity through it. To understand this, the primary source of data comes from qualitative interviews. Eleven people participated in the discussions. The choice of the interviewees was according to the desire to represent different position levels and spheres. The first three persons are private entrepreneurs who own businesses, the following three persons are executives from international or Ukrainian companies, and the last four are professional PR/Marketing Directors. The choice was in accordance to was made to have various views from professionals who evaluate their jobs and build a personal brand from different points of view. The interviews were conducted in the Ukrainian language with other translations into English. The primary goal of the discussion was to reveal some unknown or unexpected facts by asking open questions. Questions selected for the interview were composed to avoid assumptions and be as neutral as possible. The aim was to find new information or receive a confirmation of the thesis described in the literature review of this master thesis. The choice of the interviewees was prudent. After that, the interviewees received direct contact.

3.2.1 Interviews

Semi-structured and unstructured interviews are the primary forms of qualitative research (Bryman et al., 2004). The respondents were asked an open-ended question and were free to answer without limitations. The interviews were qualitative. The study includes eleven interviews conducted in the Russian/Ukrainian language and later translated to English by the thesis author. All the interviews were on the audio record and then transcribed. The interviews lasted between 35 - 45 minutes. The main disadvantages of interviews are that the interviewer may affect the respondents. Although, the advantages of the interviews are flexibility and the possibility of adapting the questions to the respondents' answers (Neuman, 2002).

The author chose the interviews because when people answer surveys, they can do it quickly without thinking about the context and question. Interviews as an instrument help avoid rapid answers, leading to unappropriated results. The author decided to conduct interviews when the answers came directly from people with a relatively personal brand to receive relevant information. The questions were the same for every participant. Then, the received questions were analyzed by going through the information received and comparing answers linked with research questions. After this, the author of the thesis search for the similarities in the different interviewee's responses.

Data were collected using an audio recorder during the interview and then transcribed into written notes to describe the experts' responses. Paraphrasing clarifies the context of the reactions to represent the interviews and the data most accurately.

The author asked the following questions:

1.   What type of job do you have? What are your primary responsibilities and goals at work?

2.   How would you describe yourself?

3.   What social media do you use?

4.   How active are you on social media?

5.   How do you choose the social media that you use?

6.   Do you build your online personal brand?

7.   Have your social media behavior changed because you decided to build your personal brand online? If yes, how?

8.   Do you use a personal brand strategy in social media? If yes, what kind of strategy

9.   Do you post according to some plan?

10.   What personal image are you trying to build in social media?

11.   How successful are you in building your digital brand?

12.   What are the advantages and disadvantages of personal brands in social media?

13.   Do you see any risks about a personal brand in social media? If yes, what risks?

14.   Can you share any examples of when your brand worked for your career?

15.   What is your general point of view regarding the necessity to build a personal brand online?

3.2.2   Description of participating people in the interviews

Names of the participants will not bring any additional value to this study. Not all interviewees gave their permission to show their names; that is why the author of this master thesis uses letters of the alphabet to mark the persons who participated in the interviews. The letters A-K were not connected and were a random choice (see Table 1).

In the survey, four CEO/Managing Partners are leading their companies and are responsible for their brand and its known brand. In the survey participated three PR/Communication Directors who are responsible for the brand creation and promotion. In their expertise, they have company PR and a personal brand building of CEO and political leaders. It was interesting to investigate how they work with their unique brand promotion on social media and see social media as a relevant instrument for building a personal brand. Also, the survey included four middle managers who have a successful career or recently radically changed their jobs. The reason to include them was to

investigate if they build an online personal branding and how personal brand building helped them in their career's development or career changes. One of them represents an NGO organization that allows HR professionals to build their career paths and develop professionally on the Ukrainian market. The organization also gives international professional certificates in HR.

As shown in Table 1, only three of 11 people answered that they are not investing time and effort in building their personal brand online. At the same time, they are active users of social media. They open Facebook at least couple of times a day, sometimes share content from friends, occasionally commenting post of other. These small actions and activities form an online personal brand even if they think they do not. Some of the responders who said they are building their personal brand do not do much online, but they realized that everything they post or comment somehow influences their personal brands.

#	Name	Occupation	Sector	Age	Gender	Residence Area
1	A	PR and Marketing professional	FMCG	45	Woman	Ukraine
2	B	Career development coach	Private practice	32	Woman	Ukraine
3	C	CEO	FMCG	43	Woman	Ukraine
4	D	Digital Marketing Director	Insurance	34	Man	Ukraine
5	E	Executive Search Consultant	Consulting (HR)	42	Man	Ukraine
6	F	Managing Partner	Consulting (law)	51	Man	Ukraine
7	G	CEO	Consulting (HR)	37	Man	Ukraine
8	H	Director of Association	NGO	47	Man	Ukraine

9	I	Data Scientist	IT	41	Woman	Ukraine
10	J	PR Director	Retail	42	Woman	Ukraine
11	K	CEO	Consulting (IT)	48	Man	Ukraine/ Austria

Table 1 The list of people who participated in the interview

Person *A* is a PR and marketing professional with over 20 years of experience within a large international FMCG company. Currently, she is also a lecturer at Business School and teaches Reputation and Crisis Management Course. She has a private consulting practice on building a communication strategy and assisting in creating images of leaders and politicians. She describes herself as a person to helps people and companies develop meanings. Also, she talks about herself as an opinion leader who loves to influence and create positive change.

Person *B* is a career development coach with personal practice and a former Human Resource Director within a large multinational BtoB company. She helps people to find their purpose in professional life and to build successful careers. She views herself as a professional who helps people to develop their careers.

Person *C* is CEO of multinational FMCG company which specialize on very niche product and is well known all around the globe. She is a former Marketing Director and Sales Director. Also, she teaches Marketing communication in a couple of Ukrainian business schools and having own book club. She pictures herself as a professional in marketing, a mother, and a person who, by example, inspires others.

Person *D* is a Digital Marketing Director with a successful career within an insurance company with former experience working in BtoB and BtoC companies. He does not have any additional professional activities, only his job. He defines himself as a digital marketing professional.

Person *E* is an executive search consultant with more than 16 years of experience who just have started to build his brand online during the last six months. He is consciously putting money, time, and effort into developing his online brand. His definition of himself is "I am a professional in my field and love my job."

Person *F* is a Managing Partner of an international law company with previous experience managing large BtoB companies. He is well known on the market and gained a trustworthy professional reputation among colleagues and partners. He answered a question about his description as "I am a professional manager who helps successful businesses find talents that will make their business even more successful."

Person *G* is a small but international consulting company that provides outplacement and HR consulting services to individuals and companies. She recently changed her career path from an audit consulting company to an HR consulting company, and she is at the beginning of her new career. She describes herself as a person who believes in opportunities and knows how to realize them.

Person *H* is a Director of Association for the HR professional. The main goal of the Association is to help HR professionals to obtain new knowledge, build a network and share best practices in the HR management sphere. He has a diverse career path, and many people know him in the HR society. He sees himself as a born leader and a good teacher.

The person *I* works as a Data scientist, but she was a Compensation and Benefits Manager within a large international company before that. She is not active in social life and prefers a job to communicate mainly with computers and not human beings. She changed her career, and now she is learning a new skill and building trade from the very beginning. Her description of herself corresponds to this. She says: "I can describe myself as a career changer, I completely changed my career at 40, and now I am learning a new profession".

Person *J* is a Communication Director at a large international retail company who is present worldwide. She has been working for the company for almost seven years and is known as an opinion leader and strong professional in PR and Marketing. She describes herself as a professional communication manager with 20 years of experience.

Person *K* is a manager, executive consultant, and book author, experienced in board-level positions in multinational firms like Siemens and IBM. CEO and Partner of two management consulting firms. He has recently established another consulting company in cybersecurity and IT Consulting. He works and lives in two countries Austria and

Ukraine. He describes himself as a manager, executive consultant, and book author, experienced in board-level positions in multinational firms like Siemens and IBM, and finished university studies in political science, banking, and e-government.

All responders are from Ukraine and have Ukrainian nationality. Only Person *K* has Austrian nationality but lives in Ukraine for quite a long time already.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

To get expert opinions about personal branding online, the author conducted the following interviews based on a questionnaire about the use and building of personal branding by different professionals from different position levels and different markets. During the interview, each interviewee had to answer the following 15 questions (which were the same for each participant):

The first two questions: 1. What type of job do you have? What are your primary responsibilities and goals at work? And 2. How would you describe yourself? The goal was to understand the professional level of each person, how they see themselves and how this view corresponds to another question 10. What personal image are you trying to build in social media?

Every online user had the opportunity to be whom they wanted to be. Each person on the Internet can choose and decide what characteristics of themselves they share with others. It is possible to create a portrait with desirable traits and personal qualities. However, if it will not correspond to the natural, offline person, it could lead to fast disappointment from the audience.

The general observation is that people most commonly describe themselves according to their professional status, and only two people added to this description their characteristics. Person *A* described herself as a person who has his point of view, likes to influence other people, and creates a positive impact. The common goal she told is to help people and companies develop meanings. Answering the 10th question, she said that she is building an image of a trustworthy professional.

Person *C* described herself as a professional in marketing and a mother who inspires others with her example. According to her answer, she is building the same online personal brand. She is creating an online image of a top professional manager who, at the same time, enjoys personal life and has hobbies besides work.

All other interviewees who were trying to build their online personal brand described themselves as professionals in their working sphere. It was directly corresponding to their answer to what is their unique image of interest to create online.

4.1 Advantages and disadvantages of personal brand in social media

There were many similarities in the answers to the questions above. Most of the responders named such advantage as a possibility to build your brand or even reinvent it, and for a no price or for a meager price, have extensive audience coverage. Person *A* named the main advantage of personal brand in social media a comprehensive audience coverage, a small investment, it is easy to form the needed personal brand. Person *B* sees the advantages in the ability to build your personal brand as a professional, stand out from other similar professionals, and do it for free or for very little money. Person *C* agrees with him and adds that advantages are building a vast network and presenting yourself as a professional. Be visible for the recruiters who might suggest exciting jobs. For Person *D* the main advantage of having a personal brand in social media is increasing value on the market. He states that when a person begins to be recognized as an expert in a particular field, he/she become an opinion leader. Person *H* sees it from a broader perspective. He says that the advantages are that when you have an online personal brand, you start to receive relevant proposals for cooperation, and having a solid personal brand on social networks makes it easier to build a network offline. Also, it helps to access other people's expertise and find experts who will be ready to share the expertise. Person *J* adds that it is faster to receive feedback from the audience when you build your professional brand online. It could help to test the likes and dislikes of your audience and adapt to them. For Person *K*, the main advantage of an online personal brand is that it allows you to reinvent yourself and change a career path easily.

Regarding disadvantages, the opinion of responders was more diverse, but most of them indicated a time-consuming issue as one of the most important disadvantages. Person *A* says that social media is a big responsibility. Online, the possibility of getting negative feedback is very high, and it requires an adequate response. Also, it demands a high degree of professionalism, it is easy to lose people's confidence by showing non-professionalism, and then it is tough to restore trust. Person *D* agrees with that and adds that online activity demands to enter an open dialogue and be ready for negative information.

Moreover, the translation of information online requires confidentiality. Person *C* adds that it is necessary always to be careful about the information shared online. "You must constantly prove that you are the best and be able to argue for this. It is dangerous to show a picture that does not exist because eventually, someone can reveal the truth". Person *I* agrees with other responders about time-consuming as one of the disadvantages. It is crucial to make posts regularly and demand time and emotional resources. "It can lead to the addiction to online brand, which can be an additional source of tension as you always need to match the online and offline image." For Person *J*, one more disadvantage is that the audience is very changeable in their preferences. They could easily switch their attention to another person. Also, people do not profoundly analyze an online personal brand, they only see the picture of a person he/she wants to show to the public, and sometimes it could not be what a person is. Person K agrees with other responders that the main disadvantage of building an online personal brand is that it requires constant online presence and update checks.

When people talk about the risks of building a personal brand online, they usually connect them with the disadvantages they named before. Person A said that the chances are that it is hard to control the post's feedback and the comments they will cause. Person *B* agrees and says that a person who builds his/her personal brand online can quickly get criticism from others, or if they said something is wrong, it would stay with for a long time. Person *C* indicated a very uncommon risk, but it could relate to a specific personal experience. Person *C* says that when the person is very successful on social media, there may be some fear from direct managers that person becoming more critical than the company's brand. For Person *D* the main risk is to lose public loyalty. Plus, it is not easy

to build an online personal brand without a unique offer and positioning. Person *E* mentioned another exciting threat, who sees quitting to make the online personal brand in the middle of the road. It is easy to get disappointed at the beginning of the road when you invest much time and emotional energy but do not get any results. The main thing here is not to break down and keep going forward. Sooner or later, the results will come.

For Person *F,* the risk is that the virtual online picture will not coincide with the offline image. In addition, according to Person *G*, there is a chance of accidentally associate your brand with the wrong events or people. There is also a risk of criticism and negative comments. Person *I* indicated another significant risk: small mistakes or abusive comments can quickly destroy professional brands. The person could spend months on building a personal brand and lose in in few minutes.

Moreover, Person *J* supports this opinion by saying that people must always be sure about their online information. It is elementary to lose professional perception in the audience's eyes. It is enough to have one post in which someone convicted of incompetence loses the audience's trust. The results obtained from personal interviews correspond with the advantages and disadvantages of building an online personal brand and information about risks from the literature review. Table 2 represents the main advantages and disadvantages that interviewees named.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Little or no cost for building a personal brand online	Time-consuming
Possibility to create a desirable image	Negative comments or feedback that require a response
Extensive audience coverage	Requires precise selection of information posted
An online personal brand helps to attract clients, recruiters and quickly build a network	

An online personal brand helps to increase a person market value	

Table 2. Advantages and disadvantages of online personal brand building

4.2. Online strategy for building a personal brand online and social media behavior

A solid personal brand requires a conscious building process, confirmed people who responded to the questions (Rampersad, 2008). One way to build a recognizable personal online brand is to continually create and develop original and new content for your target audience (Grzesiak, 2018).

The author of the master thesis also wanted to investigate how people's behavior changed when they started to build the personal online brand constantly as it can be seen from the answers below, each person who consciously makes online personal brand has changed his/her behavior to more deliberate behavior and began to evaluate the information that they post from the point how it will influence their brand and what the information they post will talk about them as a person.

For example, Person *A* said that when from 2002 she began to use Facebook as a tool for personal promotion, she started to think about information posted, how it will affect her audience, how the audience perceives her, and what she wants people to think of her after this post. Person *B* said that before building an online personal brand on purpose, she posted chaotically and without any purpose, just for fun. However, when she realized the necessity of building an online personal brand, she began to carefully choose the topic for posting on social networks. She began to use LinkedIn much more actively.

Person *C* came to the question of building an online personal brand more strategically. She says: "After I decided to build a personal brand, I chose Facebook as the leading social network. I have created a publication plan in my head. Besides, I decided on the purpose of building my brand and how I want the audience to see it". Person *G* gave not a standard answer to this question: "When I started to build my brand, I began to pay attention to who tag me in their posts. I do not want anyone to tag me without my approval, as I do not always agree with the position of the post author who tagged me".

All responders said they build their personal brand name on their post or posting frequency as a strategy. For example, Person *A* said her strategy is to create an online professional brand, expert brand and focus only on three main topics crisis management, reputation, and communication. Person *C* describes her strategy as professional brand building, emphasizing inspiring others through her example. She also was the one who said that her strategy is also not to repost posts of other people to be associated with original content only. Some responders like Person *G* is building her strategy according to the global company strategy where she works. Person *H* has an exciting approach. He said he posts only high-quality images, always posts links to copyrights, and comments on socially significant posts. Person *K* has a strategy to post in English, with local language content in Ukrainian or Russian, depending on the target audience he wants to reach. Regarding the standard frequency of the posting, responders usually post from 2 to 7 times a week on Facebook and 1-2 times a week on LinkedIn.

4.3 Instruments to measure success in building a personal brand online

To find out what tools responders usually use to measure their success, some additional questions were asked on how they understand whether they are successful or not.

Person *A* responds that she thinks she is not very good at building her personal brand online. In her opinion, if you successfully make a personal brand on social networks, people start to write to you privately, comment on your posts, share and like your posts. Person *B* thinks she successfully builds an online personal brand because she receives her clients mainly through LinkedIn and requests recommendations and advice in private messages. Person *C* measures her success by the number of comments under her posts, likes, and how many people contact her personally via social networks with entirely different questions. By these criteria, she considers herself successful at building a personal brand on Facebook. Person *H* says: "In my opinion, I am not successful enough because there is not enough time for systematic and regular postings." Person *K* considers himself very successful. Hundreds of people contacted him and purchased his books. In addition, such postings derive new business.

4.4   The most popular social media in Ukraine

All interviewees are active users of Facebook, and they enter this social network a few times a day, post there or share. LinkedIn is the second popular network among responders, although it is used mainly for finding contacts and have correspondence with colleagues or clients. In Ukraine, LinkedIn is in wide use for finding a job, potential clients, and partners. Less than half of interviewees post there regularly. The third social media was Instagram. However, all responders who indicated it said they use it only to share photos with friends and families and look at the lovely picture. Instagram is not an instrument people use for building a personal brand as well as YouTube. Only one person named it as social media that he uses. Person *I* indicated it as a social media he uses but could not explain further how he uses it for online personal brand building. Therefore, it can be concluded that YouTube is not social media for online individual brand building.

All interviewees answered that they choose social media according to the most prevalent in Ukraine, which corresponds to the Research & Branding Group (rb.com.ua). According to this survey at the beginning of 2021, the most popular social networks in Ukraine are Facebook (58% of all respondents), YouTube (41%), Instagram (28%). Only Person *I* mentioned that he also tries from time to time different social media like ClubHouse or LunchClub. However, still, he did not find any alternative for Facebook and LinkedIn due to the number of people registered there and worldwide coverage mentioned on social media.

4.5   General perception about the necessity of building a personal brand online

Having a network filled with professionals in the desired field can help differentiate an individual from their competition (Schawbel, 2010). Whether they build their personal brand online or not, all responders agreed that it is crucial in a modern world to have an online personal brand and even vital to specific categories of professionals.

Person *A* insists that building a personal brand on social media is a must. "When we meet a person, the first thing we do is search for him on social networks. In the digital

age, the easiest way to understand a person is to see what they post and his interests by looking at his page on social networks.

Therefore, it is essential to thoughtfully post and understand what kind of image you want to build on the social network". Person *I* thinks this is a must but only for those who promote their services or companies. Then it makes sense to spend time and energy on it. In her example, Person *C* says that building a personal brand on social networks should be done when a person wants it and must be visible. Otherwise, it is difficult and turns into a duty that will lead to a disastrous result. "It is more important to build your personal brand on social networks when you are owner, and together with your brand, you are promoting your business." Person *D* also agrees that it is important but only for a particular category of people. It is worth it for a businessperson or a top manager. Nevertheless, the personal qualities of the person who does this are also essential. It will be challenging for introverts.

Person *F* agrees with him: "This can be effective when you clearly define the purpose for what you are doing, what tools you use in this case, and if you have a professional team that helps you to do it. However, even here, there is a problem. A good example is the electoral campaign of Vladimir Zelensky, our president. His image formed online is difficult for him to maintain offline because he lacks knowledge and skills. Online it is straightforward to build the image you want to be. It is much more difficult offline to match it with the image you created online". Person *G* is sure that building a personal brand on a social network is a powerful tool to influence individuals and society.

Furthermore, that online brand is becoming more critical than the offline brand, and an emotional deposit forms according to our online image. Person *J* says that it is vital that companies CEO. In our digital world, if a person is not online, it does not exist and looks unsuccessful in other people's eyes. The company is always associated with the first person of the company. Also, he thinks that politicians need to build a personal brand online because any professional who has reached a certain level of success is using online branding. Nevertheless, almost all responders agreed that you do not exist if you are not online in a modern world.

4.6   Main findings

According to the interviews, building an online personal brand has its advantages and disadvantages. According to the response, advantages are a more significant and essential factor than disadvantages. All the interviewees named much more advantages than disadvantages of personal branding in social media. According to the interviews, the main advantages are slight or no cost for building a personal brand online, creating a desirable image, extensive audience coverage, new client attraction, finding a new job, and increasing the market value of a person. The list of disadvantages is shorter than the list of advantages. The main burden of building an online personal brand is very time-consuming—the other named disadvantages are negative comments or feedback that require response and privacy. In most reactions, the risk of having an online personal brand was quite the same as disadvantages named before. Table 3 shows the main risks named by responders.

Person	
A	Careful consideration of posts and images transferred to the audience—the loss of control on post's feedback and comments. To minimize risks, you need to follow specific rules while working with social networks.
B	If a person said something wrong or unprofessional, it would stay long and influence other people's perceptions.
C	Direct managers could fear that a person's brand becomes more important than the company's brand.
D	Easy to lose public loyalty. Plus, without a unique offer and positioning, it is not easy to build a personal brand.
E	Lose interest in building an online brand and quit.
F	The online picture will not correspond offline person.
G	One can be associated with the wrong events or people.
H	Personal information may leak through social networks. Should be a strict line between what is truly personal and what can be openly discussed.
I	The risk of criticism and angry comments.
J	Easy to lose professional perception in the audience's eyes
K	The risk is that criminals are misusing them for their own purpose (personalization of other identities).

Table 3 The main risks about a personal brand in social media

A solid personal brand requires constant efforts into its building (Gall, 2012). The unexpected result was that people who positively answered the question if they were building their brand online did not consciously follow any personal brand-building strategy. The interviews show that every responder created their personal brand without a clear plan and was still successful. Every one of the interviewees mentioned one common thing: uploading and creating content to social media every day and uploading it on the favorite social media platform as a strategy for building an online personal brand. Martin (2009) emphasizes that personal branding perception's biggest illusion is that personal brand is precisely made. This illusion is not true because personal brands develop and grow through genuine, authentic, and natural (Martin, 2009). This study's results are in line with this.

It was interesting that even a responder said that they are not building an online personal brand, however, she/he founds it helpful and agrees that having an online personal brand is already necessary in the modern world and can influence your career and business. Table 4 shows the aggregate results received during the interviews.

PERSON	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
Does an online personal brand have an impact on a career	*NO*	*NO*	*YES*	*YES*	*YES*	*NO*	*YES*	*YES*	*NO*	*YES*	*YES*
The necessity to build a personal brand online	*YES*	*YES*	*YES*	*YES*	*YES*	*YES*	*YES*	*YES*	*YES*	*YES*	*YES*

Table 4 The impact of online personal brand on a career and general view about the necessity of building an online brand

The following points summarize the main findings of interviews:

- None of the interviewees followed any strategy on building an online personal brand
- According to the interviews, there are more advantages than disadvantages
- Risks are usually associated with disadvantages
- Its familiarity often chooses the social media platform
- The main social media selections were Facebook and LinkedIn

- People create different personal images on different social media platforms
- Even those who do not build an online personal brand is sure that having one is useful

5. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This thesis aimed to investigate the influence of personal online brands on individual brands in general. To do these, two main research questions were asked:

Question 1: What is the role of social media in personal branding?

Question 2: What are the essential components of successful personal brand building in social media?

The answer to the first research question could be a statement found in the literature review and later supported by interviews that in a modern digital world, when most information people find online, the role of social media in building a personal brand becomes enormous. An online personal brand is necessary for politicians, celebrities, professionals, and CEOs of companies. However, other categories of people, despite the fact if they recognize that they build their personal brand online or not, do it regardless of if they are active on social media, post regularly or comment on other people's posts. With the help of social media, users can communicate in real-time; also, the number of users in social media is increasing, and new applications appear constantly.

The second research question was about the essential components of successful personal brand building in social media. According to the interviews, even though the literature shows the opposite, there are no specific components for building a personal brand in social media. The interviews show that the personal brand becomes a by-product rather than a strategy. One of the critical elements of personal branding in social media that responders named necessity to be active in social media and the need for two-way communication to attract followers. The thesis also proved more advantages than disadvantages to having a personal brand on social media. The literature review is in the same line as the result of the author's research and interviews. The most important advantages are new contacts and the possibility to quickly and with little investment

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create a desirable personal brand and job opportunities. Personal branding in social media is trending at the moment. However, disadvantages of having a personal brand online exist as well. They are safety issues, comments, substantial time investments. Destructive content can spread fast, and it is hard to slow it down. It is also crucial to carefully select social media channels considering the goals of the personal brand creation, the audience, and the features of different channels.

This thesis shows that anyone can build a personal brand on social media or develop an existing brand. Activity in social media and interaction with followers have essential roles in the personal brand development in social media.

Future research can be about possible impact when people with a solid personal brand who currently use only a few channels will start to use multiple social media channels. Another topic could be studied when a person creates two unique brands on two different online platforms and how it will influence his brand offline. Alternatively, two other social media platforms make similar personal brands because social media channels have their design for different purposes. This type of research could further investigate social media channels as a part of online brand creation. There are already many articles and studies about individual online brand creation. However, as a possible research question, it would be interesting to investigate personal brand creation collectively, creating a personal brand as part of the group.

There are already many studies and researches about online personal brand creation and how social media platforms could help. Yet, there is still room for further research that could help a better understanding of the processes and benefits of online brand building.

6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE THESIS

This thesis aims to improve how people create and change their identities through social media images. Individuals and organizations have increased their usage of social media dramatically in recent years. Therefore, it can be interesting both in the private life of individuals and for professionals and organizations, mainly concerning personal

branding. Because social media is not a new topic, however, not broadly researched, there is plenty of room for further researches.

According to Cynthia (2019), a personal brand becomes an additional resource and tool for professional growth and development. Moreover, social media is one of the crucial instruments for building a personal brand because social media aggregate a significant audience due to its popularity. The significance of this master thesis is that building a personal brand in social media is a relevant topic for research due to the large amount of positive impact it could bring to an individual. It could help build a professional brand, help bring new clients or partners, and even boost a career.

In a new digital world manage personal reputation correctly in real life is not enough. Nowadays, the personal brand comprises a digital presence and online reputation (Sitkins,2013). Persons' online activities have a direct reflection in real life. Today personal brand is a combination of self-offline and self-online presentation. It is a new tendency that is extraordinary and probably not trustworthy if no one can find you online or at least any information about you (Cynthia,2019). Building your personal brand online is the key to personal and professional success (Ramperstad, 2008).

The findings of this master thesis could be helpful for people who actively build an online personal brand or are searching for developing his/her brand through social media. However, observation from this thesis can be beneficial for young graduates who want to increase their employability or people who want to change their career paths.

7. LIMITATION OF METHODOLOGY

There are potential limitations of the chosen research methodology. One of them is the possible lack of objectivity; it is hard to disregard previous researcher experiences when generating theory through this method (Bryman et al., 2008). Another limitation, Bryman and Bell (2008) describe as time-consuming recording and transcribing interviews and that this in return can influence the work with collecting the data and analyzing it. In general, many people question the qualitative research for not being

applicable to a greater population due to the differing ways of sampling compared to quantitative research.

As a suggestion for further research, these results can be extended towards quantitative testing further to explore the relationship between identity creation and social media. It may also be appropriate to add a gender perspective to this study to see and explore possible differences between female and male users or to investigate the difference in online behavior between different age groups. This thesis did not investigate a cultural difference in online behavior because it focused mainly on Ukrainian responders. Future research would be helpful to add responders from different countries and regions to have more diverse information about online behavior. A text mining approach is also a good suggestion for further research. The primary purpose of text mining is to extract useful information from unstructured textual data by identifying and exploring exciting patterns (Radovanovic and Ivanovic, 2008). Text mining incorporates and integrates the tools of information retrieval, data mining, machine learning, statistics, and computational linguistics (Rai, 2019).

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9. APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1 Transcriptions of the interviews

PERSON A

1. What type of job do you have? What are your primary responsibilities and goals at work?

I am a former Director of Communications of the Coca-Cola Company. Currently, I am a lecturer at L'viv Business School, Reputation and Crisis Management course. I am engaged in private consultations on building a communication strategy and managing crises, helping people create images of leaders and employers' brands.

2. How would you describe yourself?

My goal is to help people and companies create meaning. I can describe myself as an opinion leader who loves to influence and make positive changes.

3. What social media do you use?

LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram.

4. How active are you on social media?

I post on LinkedIn once a week, and there I have 1500 contacts. On Facebook, I post 1-2 times a week, and there I have about 4000 friends, Instagram I only use for personal photos, and there I have only my close friends, about 285 people. On Facebook, I post information that describes me as a professional, that would inspire confidence in me. Trust bases on authenticity (personal stories) + your logic (comments on books, lectures, and seminars), and the ability to listen to your audience and understand what they want. On Facebook, I want to have the image of a human and a professional. On LinkedIn, I always post only professional posts, no personal topics. Instagram only has personal and family photos.

5. How do you choose the social media that you use?

I will choose it by the principle of popularity in Ukraine since other social networks are not well developed.

6. Do you build your online personal brand?

Yes, but only on Facebook and LinkedIn. Instagram is for personal purposes.

7. Have your social media behavior changed because you decided to build your personal brand online? If yes, how?

Yes, it has changed. I had started to use Facebook when it first appeared in Ukraine to play games and chat with friends. And then, somewhere in 2002, I began to use it as a tool for personal promotion. After this post, I started to think about what position I post, how they affect my audience, how they perceive me, and what I want people to think of me. I did not use LinkedIn as a tool to develop my brand until I lost my job and was forced to look for it, including using this social platform. For the last few months, I have been posting according to the schedule and understanding what personal brand I am trying to build with such posts.

8. Do you use a personal brand strategy in social media? If yes, what kind of strategy

My strategy is to build my brand as a professional, an expert who changes society through corporate business. Now I am positioning myself as an expert who helps companies and people find meaning in what they do. The second strategy is to build your brand as a teacher. I have three main professional topics on which I mainly post: crisis management, reputation, and communication.

9. Do you post according to some plan?

Yes, LinkedIn once a week, Facebook 1-2 times a week, Instagram whenever I want.

10. What personal image are you trying to build in social media?

I am trying to build a trusted image of a professional.

11. How successful are you in building your personal digital brand?

In my opinion, not very good yet. I started developing my personal brand in the social networks only a year after leaving the Coca-Cola company. Before that, all my efforts were to create a corporate brand, not my own. If you successfully build your brand on social networks, people start to write to you privately, comment on your posts, share and like your posts. You give people helpful information on social networks, convince, and motivate people to act. If this action happens, then you have completed your communication in the social network.

12. What are the advantages and disadvantages of personal brands in social media?

Social media is a big responsibility. You can always get negative feedback, and you always need to respond to it adequately. Also, these networks take much time if you deal with them correctly. In addition, you must be sure about what you are writing and only rely on trusted sources. It is elementary to lose people's trust if you show your non-professionalism, and then it is tough to restore confidence. Speaking about the advantages, I can name an extensive audience coverage, a small investment, it is easy to form the personal image you need.

13. Do you see any risks about a personal brand in social media? If yes, what risks?

The more famous you become, the less personal you have and the more you must think about what you post and what image you transfer to the audience. The main risks are that you cannot always control your post's feedback and the comments they will cause. To minimize risks, you need to follow specific rules when working with social networks.

14. Can you share any examples of when your brand worked for your career?

Unfortunately, in my case, I do not have such examples yet.

15. What is your general point of view regarding the necessity to build a personal brand online?

In my opinion, building a personal brand on social media is a must. When we meet a person, the first thing we do is search for him on social networks. In the digital age, the easiest way to understand a person is to see what she/he posts and their interests by looking at his page on social networks. Therefore, it is essential to thoughtfully post and understand what kind of image you want to build on the social network.

PERSON B

1. What type of job do you have? What are your primary responsibilities and goals at work?
I am a career consultant for the last few years. Before that, I worked as HR Director in a large international company.

2. How would you describe yourself?
I am a professional who helps people to build their careers.

3. What social media do you use?
LinkedIn, Facebook.

4. How active are you on social media?
Facebook I use mainly for personal purposes and personal photos. Most of my activities are on LinkedIn, as I use this social network to promote myself as a professional. I post there at least once a day. I also comment on the posts of others and share what I found interesting. I have over 10,000 friends on LinkedIn. I only have about 1500 people there.

5. How do you choose the social media that you use?
LinkedIn is a network created specifically for professionals and to find valuable contacts. That is why I chose it as the primary platform for communicating with potential clients and partners. All my personal friends are on Facebook.

6. Do you build your online personal brand?
Yes, I am building my professional brand on LinkedIn.

7. Have your social media behavior changed because you decided to build your personal brand online? If yes, how?
Until I started to work for myself, I did not actively use social networks to promote my brand. The posts were chaotic and without any purpose, instead just for fun. After I started working for myself, I began to choose to post on social networks more carefully. I began to use Linkedin much more actively to build my professional brand online.

8. Do you use a personal brand strategy in social media? If yes, what kind of strategy?
My strategy is to post 1-2 times a day on LinkedIn and involve my followers and contacts on LinkedIn in communication and discussion.

9. Do you post according to some plan?
Yes. I answered this question in the previous question.

10. What personal image are you trying to build in social media?
If we are talking about LinkedIn, here I am building the image of a professional consultant who understands the issues of building a successful career. If we are talking about Facebook, then I am more likely to post about my trips, gifts, or events I have visited. I can say that I barely use Facebook for building any personal brand.

11. How successful are you in building your personal digital brand?
It seems that I am successful. I receive my clients mainly through LinkedIn and receive requests for recommendations and advice in private messages.

12. What are the advantages and disadvantages of personal brands in social media?
I see the advantages in the ability to build your personal brand as a professional, stand out from other similar professionals, and do it for free or for very little money. The main disadvantage for me is that it is very time-consuming.

13. Do you see any risks about a personal brand in social media? If yes, what risks?

The risk of being criticized or saying something is wrong will stay with you for a long time.

14. Can you share any examples of when your brand worked for your career?

It helps now when I am building my personal consultant brand. Before, I did not see that a personal brand would help me a lot in my career.

15. What is your general point of view regarding the necessity to build a personal brand online?

In my opinion, this is a must for those who promote their services or their companies. Then it makes sense to spend time and energy on it, but if you are a hired employee, then maybe it makes sense if you just want to be famous and be recognized on the market.

PERSON C

1. What type of job do you have? What are your primary responsibilities and goals at work?

I am the CEO of an international FMCG company in Ukraine. My area of responsibility includes developing the company and its brand on the territory of Ukraine, building a solid team, and increasing the company's profitability.

2. How would you describe yourself?

I am a professional in marketing, a mother, and a person who, by example, inspires others.

3. What social media do you use?

Mainly Facebook, occasionally LinkedIn и Instagram.

4. How active are you on social media?

I open Facebook every day and try to post there every day or every other day. I go to LinkedIn every two or three days and rarely post something there. I post on Instagram from time to time. I have 5000 friends on Facebook, but I do not know how many I have on LinkedIn and Instagram.

On Facebook, I post about business or personal reflections, posts about my family with a funny tone. I never repost or share other people's posts, and this is my strict position. I only want to generate original content. I use LinkedIn for correspondence with potential partners or recruiters and rarely post anything there.

5. How do you choose the social media that you use?

By the extent to which the following social network is well developed in Ukraine.

6. Do you build your online personal brand?

Yes, and I have been working on my personal brand online since 2013.

7. Have your social media behavior changed because you decided to build your personal brand online? If yes, how?

After I decided to build a personal brand, I chose the leading social network where I will do it (Facebook). I have created my publication plan and have decided on building my brand and how I want the audience to see my personal brand.

8. Do you use a personal brand strategy in social media? If yes, what kind of strategy

My strategy is to build my brand of a professional who inspires other people to professional accomplishments and shows by example what you can achieve in a career. As I said before, I do not repost the texts of others because I want my personal brand to be associated with originality.

9.   Do you post according to some plan?

On Facebook, yes, 2-7 times a week, on LinkedIn, Instagram – no.

10.   What personal image are you trying to build in social media?

I am trying to build an image of a top professional manager who, at the same time, enjoys his personal life and has hobbies and interests in addition to work.

11.   How successful are you in building your personal digital brand?

I measure my success by the number of comments under my posts, likes, and how many people contact me personally via social networks with entirely different questions. By these criteria, yes, I consider myself successful at building a personal brand on Facebook

12.   What are the advantages and disadvantages of personal brands in social media?

Advantages are the ability to build a vast network and present yourself as a professional. Be visible for the recruiters who might suggest exciting jobs. Disadvantages are that you need to spend time and effort building a brand on social networks. It would be best if you always were careful about what you post.

13.   Do you see any risks about a personal brand in social media? If yes, what risks?

When you are very successful on social media, there may be some fear from your direct managers that you are becoming more important than the company's brand, and they might be afraid that you will outshine your colleagues.

14.   Can you share any examples of when your brand worked for your career?

Thanks to my Facebook activity, I was able to find my dream position at my current company. People saw me as a professional in the market, which helped recruiters to find me faster.

15.   What is your general point of view regarding the necessity to build a personal brand online?

Building a personal brand on social networks should be done when you want it, and if it is crucial for you to be visible, tell the world about your successes, and build your professional network. Otherwise, it is difficult and turns into a duty that will lead to a disastrous result. In the same way, you can achieve career heights or get to know the person you need without building your brand on social networks. Perhaps it will be more time-consuming. It is more important to develop your personal brand on social networks when you are a business owner, and together with your personal brand, you are promoting your personal business.

PERSON D

1.   What type of job do you have? What are your primary responsibilities and goals at work?

I work in the field of digital marketing. I help companies promote their brands on the market using digital communication channels.

2.   How would you describe yourself?

Digital Marketing Professional.

3.   What social media do you use?

Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn.

4.   How active are you on social media?

I do not use LinkedIn as a social media. I consider it an instrument for direct communication with representatives of recruiting agencies and partners. Instagram is my photo album, where I save my photos. I do not communicate with my subscribers. Facebook is just for news and sometimes for photos.

5.   **How do you choose the social media that you use?**

Based on the extent to which they are developed in Ukraine and by the purpose of use.

6.   Do you build your online personal brand?

I do not develop my personal brand; this is my choice because it does not correspond to my personality. The issue is that I do not want to sell myself. However, I understand that this can increase my value as a specialist.

7.   Have your social media behavior changed because you decided to build your personal brand online? If yes, how?

I do not build a personal brand online.

8.   Do you use a personal brand strategy in social media? If yes, what kind of strategy

N/A

9.   Do you post according to some plan?

N/A

10.   What personal image are you trying to build in social media?

N/A

11.   How successful are you in building your personal digital brand?

N/A

12.   What are the advantages and disadvantages of personal brands in social media?

Disadvantages: be able to enter an open dialogue and be ready for negative information. You must always be confident in the information that you give. You need to be able to answer it correctly.

You must constantly prove that you are the best and be able to argue for this. It is dangerous to show a picture that does not exist in reality because eventually, someone will reveal it. You offer your life to the public. Advantage: increasing your value on the market. People begin to recognize you as an expert in a particular field. You become an opinion leader.

13.   Do you see any risks about a personal brand in social media? If yes, what risks?

The risk is that it is elementary to lose public loyalty. Plus, without a unique offer and positioning, it is not easy to build your personal brand.

14.   Can you share any examples of when your brand worked for your career?

A recruiter suggested my current job via LinkedIn.

15.   What is your general point of view regarding the necessity to build a personal brand online?

It is worth it if you are a business person or a top manager. Nevertheless, the personal qualities of the person who does this are essential. It will be challenging for introverts. Furthermore, it is very time-consuming to build it correctly.

PERSON E

1. What type of job do you have? What are your primary responsibilities and goals at work?

I am a Senior Executive Search Consultant.

2. How would you describe yourself?

I am a professional in my field and love my job.

3. What social media do you use?

Facebook, LinkedIn.

4. How active are you on social media?

Now I have hired a company that places posts on Facebook for me, and they also do it on LinkedIn at regular intervals. I am entering Facebook every day to find out the news about my friends.

5. How do you choose the social media that you use?

These are the most common networks in Ukraine.

6. Do you build your online personal brand?

Yes, over the past six months, I have been purposefully building my personal brand.

7. Have your social media behavior changed because you decided to build your personal brand online? If yes, how?

I have hired a professional who built my personal image and created a promotion strategy in social networks for me. I completely trust his expert opinion and do what he tells me to do.

8. Do you use a personal brand strategy in social media? If yes, what kind of strategy

My strategy is to talk about my professional successes on social networks, post with famous personalities and professionals to be associated with them. All posts that are posted on Facebook are duplicated on LinkedIn.

9. Do you post according to some plan?

Yes, every two days.

10. What personal image are you trying to build in social media?

I am trying to build an image of a professional executive search consultant specializing in agro and pharmaceutical markets.

11. How successful are you in building your personal digital brand?

It has only been six months since I purposefully built my brand. I started getting more incoming inquiries from potential customers. In my opinion, we are moving in the right direction.

12. What are the advantages and disadvantages of personal brands in social media?

The advantages are that you advertise yourself to a large audience for a small amount of money and get an extensive reach of potential customers. The disadvantages for me are that you need to constantly shape content, come up with exciting posts and invest a lot of time and effort in creating a personal brand, even though professionals help me with this.

13. Do you see any risks about a personal brand in social media? If yes, what risks?

So far, for me, the main risk is to quit what I started. Sometimes it seems that I am wasting much time, and there are no significant results from it. The main thing here is

not to break down and continue what you started, and then I believe that the results will come.

14. Can you share any examples of when your brand worked for your career?

Instead, I have examples when I found people through social networks because I do it regularly. In addition, social networks are an excellent source of information about candidates, their hobbies, and, to some extent, even their life values and principles.

15. What is your general point of view regarding the necessity to build a personal brand online?

I am putting much effort into it now, so I believe that it is necessary, especially for professionals like me who sell their services and want to present themselves as recognizable professionals in the eyes of their potential clients.

PERSON F

1. What type of job do you have? What are your primary responsibilities and goals at work?

I am the owner and managing partner of a company that provides top management search and appraisal services.

2. How would you describe yourself?

I am a professional manager who helps successful businesses to find talents that will make their business even more successful.

3. What social media do you use?

Facebook, LinkedIn.

4. How active are you on social media?

Not active at all. I enter Facebook a couple of times a month, and sometimes I post photos from events I attend. I use LinkedIn as a messenger for communicating with potential candidates and clients. I do not post anything there.

5. How do you choose the social media that you use?

By their development in Ukraine.

6. Do you build your online personal brand?

I only build my personal brand offline. Too much time will be spent on online brand building. I better spend it on live communication with my potential partners.

7. Have your social media behavior changed because you decided to build your personal brand online? If yes, how?

N/A

8. Do you use a personal brand strategy in social media? If yes, what kind of strategy

N/A

9. Do you post according to some plan?

N/A

10. What personal image are you trying to build in social media?

N/A

11. How successful are you in building your personal digital brand?

N/A

12. What are the advantages and disadvantages of personal brands in social media?

Perhaps when you are a media person or a politician, you should spend your time and effort on social networks, but when you are a professional in your field, your real work and projects help you build your personal brand much more effectively than any other social networks.

13. Do you see any risks about a personal brand in social media? If yes, what risks?

Risks that your virtual online picture will not coincide with what you are.

14. Can you share any examples of when your brand worked for your career?

I do not have such examples.

15. What is your general point of view regarding the necessity to build a personal brand online?

This can be effective when you clearly define the purpose for what you are doing, what tools you use in this case, and if you have a professional team that helps you to do it. However, even here, there is a problem. A good example: the electoral campaign of Vladimir Zelensky, our president. His image formed online is difficult for him to maintain offline because he lacks knowledge and skills. Online it is elementary to build the image you want to be. It is much more difficult offline to match it with the image you created online

PERSON G

1. What type of job do you have? What are your primary responsibilities and goals at work?

I run the Ukrainian representative office of an international company providing services in outplacement and organizational consulting.

2. How would you describe yourself?

I am a person who believes in opportunities and knows how to realize them.

3. What social media do you use?

Facebook, LinkedIn.

4. How active are you on social media?

I open Facebook every day. I post about family events, vacations, or sometimes about events that I organize. I am on LinkedIn every day, but I post every two weeks. Facebook is my personal life, and LinkedIn is my professional life.

5. How do you choose the social media that you use?

I chose LinkedIn because, in Ukraine, it is the most widespread social network of professionals, which also covers the whole world. In addition, it is the main channel of communication with my partners in other countries. Facebook is more of an emotional choice, I have all my friends there, and for me, it is more about personal expression.

6. Do you build your online personal brand?

For me, building a personal brand on social networks is more about posting on an everyday basis. You need to constantly post relevant information, be there, comment and discuss. So yes, I can say that I am building a personal brand on social networks.

7. Have your social media behavior changed because you decided to build your personal brand online? If yes, how?

When I started to build my personal brand, I began to pay attention to who tag me in their posts. I do not want anyone to tag me without my approval because I do not always agree with the author's position.

I do not want to be tagged without my approval, as I do not always agree with the position of the author of the post who tagged me. If to talk about LinkedIn, I instead just began to use it more and more strategically because the company I work for now has an effective strategy on how to promote on LinkedIn, and I try very hard to adhere to this strategy.

8. Do you use a personal brand strategy in social media? If yes, what kind of strategy

My strategy is to post information on social networks according to a professional brand I am trying to build.

9. Do you post according to some plan?

I post on LinkedIn every two weeks in line with my company's global strategy.

10. What personal image are you trying to build in social media?

I am moving in the direction of the description of myself that I gave earlier.

11. How successful are you in building your personal digital brand?

In my opinion, I am still at the very beginning of the journey. Building a personal brand is a very time-consuming and prolonged process.

12. What are the advantages and disadvantages of personal brands in social media?

Pros: You can scale your brand very quickly and influence large audiences.
Cons: Time-consuming.

13. Do you see any risks about a personal brand in social media? If yes, what risks?

The risk is that you may be associated with the wrong events or people as people could freely and tag you in posts without your knowledge. In addition, the risk of criticism and nasty comments.

14. Can you share any examples of when your brand worked for your career?

Instead, social networks help me develop my professional brand and get new clients, which never helped my career development.

15. What is your general point of view regarding the necessity to build a personal brand online?

Your online brand is becoming more important than your offline brand, and an emotional deposit is formed from our online image. The digital image is developing its significance because we can only show the good and hide the dark side of ourselves. In my opinion, building a personal brand on a social network is a powerful tool to influence individuals and society.

PERSON H

1. What type of job do you have? What are your primary responsibilities and goals at work?

I am leading an HR Association to help HR professionals develop their careers and become professionals in their field.

2. How would you describe yourself?

I am a born leader and a good teacher.

3. What social media do you use?

Facebook, LinkedIn, Youtube.

4. How active are you on social media?

On Facebook and LinkedIn, I post and check them daily, and I try to add new contacts to my network every day whenever possible. I visit YouTube every day and sometimes re-post content on my Facebook.

5. How do you choose the social media that you use?

I used to use such a social network as Odnoklassniki, but then this social network was closed in Ukraine, and all my friends moved to Facebook and LinkedIn. Sometimes I test new social networks like ClubHouse or LunchClub, but I have not found any alternative to Facebook and LinkedIn yet.

6. Do you build your online personal brand?

Yes. I deliberately select publications and choose the language to post, promote posts, focus on those posts significant for my work, do not allow inappropriate comments concerning myself and others, periodically clean my network from contacts who show xenophobia and intolerance. I am building my personal brand online that combines three main parts: an expert, a leader, and a teacher.

7. Have your social media behavior changed because you decided to build your personal brand online? If yes, how?

I can say that the beginning of building my personal brand online was in 2011 when I began to use LinkedIn actively. When I began to think about my personal brand, I identified the most effective principles of online behavior for myself, and I use them to this day. These principles are based on common sense and my practice of using social media.

8. Do you use a personal brand strategy in social media? If yes, what kind of strategy

I post only high-quality images, always post links to copyrights. I post about my personal life and professional life, and I always comment on socially significant posts.

9. Do you post according to some plan?

Yes. I plan to post personal and professional, but I do not stick to posting frequency.

10. What personal image are you trying to build in social media?

The same as I described in your second question.

11. How successful are you in building your personal digital brand?

In my opinion, I am not successful enough because there is not enough time for constant postings, and this should be done systematically and regularly.

12. What are the advantages and disadvantages of personal brands in social media?

The advantages, in my opinion, are that you start to receive relevant proposals for cooperation, and having a solid personal brand on social networks makes it easier for you to build your network offline. You get complete access to other people's expertise. If you are open on social networks and ready to share your expertise, then with a high degree of probability, you will find experts who will be ready to share the expertise you need.

13. Do you see any risks about a personal brand in social media? If yes, what risks?

The risk is that some of your personal information may leak through social networks. Should be a strict line between what is truly personal and what can be openly discussed.

14. **Can you share any examples of when your brand worked for your career?**

In November 2020, recruiters found me via LinkedIn and offered me the job I am currently working.

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15. What is your general point of view regarding the necessity to build a personal brand online?

It is necessary to build a personal brand for those interested in expanding the network and increasing their value in the labor market.

PERSON I

1. What type of job do you have? What are your primary responsibilities and goals at work?

I am a Data Scientist working with automation, extraction, processing, and analysis of data.

2. How would you describe yourself?

I can describe myself as a career changer, I completely changed my career at 40, and now I am learning a new profession.

3. What social media do you use?

Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn.

4. How active are you on social media?

Usually, just see what others post, put likes on the posts, rarely post or share something.

5. How do you choose the social media that you use?

According to their popularity in Ukraine. Facebook is interesting for me because there is a lot of information and news. I get exciting insights from there and find out the news there. Instagram, for me, is more of a visual content that contributes to aesthetic enjoyment.

6. Do you build your online personal brand?

Not for purpose.

7. Have your social media behavior changed because you decided to build your personal brand online? If yes, how?

N/A

8. Do you use a personal brand strategy in social media? If yes, what kind of strategy

N/A

9. Do you post according to some plan?

N/A

10. What personal image are you trying to build in social media?

I do not build any personal brand. I am not interested in creating my brand for a purpose.

11. How successful are you in building your personal digital brand?

N/A

12. What are the advantages and disadvantages of personal brands in social media?

The advantage is that you make yourself famous. For example, I often find a professional that I need to complete a particular task through Facebook and recommendations there. If I see professionals on the Internet and read their professional posts, I trust them.

The disadvantage is that you must do it regularly and invest time and emotional resources in it. You become addicted to your online brand, which can be an additional

source of tension as you always need to match the image you are building online with your offline image.

13. Do you see any risks about a personal brand in social media? If yes, what risks

If you make a mistake, your potential subscribers will find out about it, and you can lose the professional brand you have been building for a long time. It is elementary to destroy your personal brand with a tiny mistake.

14. Can you share any examples of when your brand worked for your career?

I do not have such examples.

15. What is your general point of view regarding the necessity to build a personal brand online?

In my opinion, people of certain professions need to build a professional brand on a social network. For them, technical skills are essential and personal qualities for which customers choose them. For Top managers, this is important because it is how they sell themselves and their companies. However, building a personal brand on social media requires certain qualities of character, a particular joy of publicity, and some amount of exhibitionism. It would be best if you were prepared for the fact that your personal life will be shown on public display

PERSON J

1. What type of job do you have? What are your primary responsibilities and goals at work?

I am Communication Director at the international retailer. My responsibilities include building brand awareness, company reputation, and risk management.

2. How would you describe yourself?

I am a professional communication manager with 20 years of experience.

3. What social media do you use?

Facebook, LinkedIn, from time to time Instagram.

4. How active are you on social media?

Periodically, I disconnect from all social media to give my brain a break from the information overload. I usually visit Facebook every day, LinkedIn in a day or two, Instagram maybe once a month.

5. How do you choose the social media that you use?

I choose social media by what network is developed in my country and among my audience and friends. Everyone uses Facebook. Instagram, for me, is a youthful, meaningless network in which people flaunt their lives. For me, Facebook is the only possible alternative to develop my brand, my company's brand. LinkedIn, for me, is the network that we use at the corporate level. In it, I am more involved in promoting the brand of my company than my personal one.

6. **Do you build your online personal brand?**

I am just at the beginning of my journey; I have been purposefully doing this for no more than a year.

7. Have your social media behavior changed because you decided to build your personal brand online? If yes, how?

Yes, I started to think more about the content I post or what and how I comment. Now I think about the proportion of personal and professional content. I have entirely removed political topics from my content.

8.   Do you use a personal brand strategy in social media? If yes, what kind of strategy.

I cannot say that I have any strategy. I do not have a posting plan; I do not have a content plan thought out for a month in advance. Most likely, I do it intuitively, without a strategy. Nevertheless, I think that soon I will start thinking about the strategy.

9.   Do you post according to some plan?

No, I post occasionally. Still, I post much personal information on Facebook and LinkedIn, more professional and more connected with my company than my personal achievements.

10.   What personal image are you trying to build in social media?

On Facebook, I build my personal brand as a human being. On LinkedIn, I build my professional brand.

11.   How successful are you in building your personal digital brand?

Since I do not have a goal to build my personal brand, I do not have any indicators by which I would systematically evaluate my effectiveness. Nevertheless, I receive requests for cooperation from other people and requests from people interested in my expert opinion, which means that even my non-systematic work on building a personal brand online is bearing fruit.

12.   What are the advantages and disadvantages of personal brands in social media?

Disadvantages: The audience is very changeable in their preferences; people can easily forget you. People do not deeply analyze your personality. They only see a picture you want to show them.

Advantages: fast feedback from the audience. Also, you can test what the audience likes and dislikes very easily and quickly and getting feedback from the audience.

13.   Do you see any risks about a personal brand in social media? If yes, what risks?

The risk is that you may start to translate your own opinion into your company's general opinion and will not always agree with it. Besides, you have to be sure of what you are writing. It is elementary to lose professional perception in the audience's eyes; one post where you will be convicted of incompetence is enough to lose people's trust.

14.   Can you share any examples of when your brand worked for your career?.

Yes, I am often offered potential job opportunities based on what recruiters read about me on social media

15.   What is your general point of view regarding the necessity to build a personal brand online?

When you are the CEO of a company, it is necessary when your brand is connected to the company. In our digital world, if you are not online, you do not exist, and you look unsuccessful in other people's eyes. The company is always associated with the first person of the company. Also, I think politicians need to build a personal brand online. In general, I believe it is necessary for any professional who has reached a certain level when you already have something to share and understand yourself as a professional and a person. If you are not online, then you do not exist for the professional community.

PERSON K

1. What type of job do you have? What are your primary responsibilities and goals at work?
CEO and Partner of two management consulting firms. My primary responsibilities are sales activities, providing advisory services to clients, hiring staff, and steering the operational activities of the firms.

2.   How would you describe yourself?
I am a manager, executive consultant, and book author, experienced in board-level positions in multinational firms like Siemens and IBM, and have finished university studies in political science, banking, and e-government.

3.   What social media do you use?
Linkedin, Facebook, Instagram, XING.

4.   How active are you on social media?
Once per day, I check my accounts and post at least once per week.

5.   How do you choose the social media that you use?
I use the leading social media channels.

6.   Do you build your online personal brand?
I build my online brand around my books (they focus on information society, cybersecurity, compliance, and economic crime).

7.   Have your social media behavior changed because you decided to build your personal brand online? If yes, how?
I am thinking more carefully about the content I could use for my social media presence while reading news and research papers.

8.   Do you use a personal brand strategy in social media? If yes, what kind of strategy
I developed my brand as an experienced manager with vast digital change management competencies to protect enterprises from cybercrime, fraud, and corruption.

9.   Do you post according to some plan?
I post in English, with local language content in Ukrainian or Russian, depending on the target audience I want to reach.

10.   What personal image are you trying to build in social media?
I answered it in question 8

11.   How successful are you in building your personal digital brand?
Very successful. Hundreds of people, whom I do not know, contact me and purchase my books. New business is also derived from such postings.

12.   What are the advantages and disadvantages of personal brands in social media?
Advantage: You can re-invent yourself if you want to change your career path. Disadvantage: You must always be in some way online and check what is going on.

13.   Do you see any risks about a personal brand in social media? If yes, what risks
The risk associated with such brands is that criminals are misusing them for their purpose (personalization of other identities).

14.   Can you share any examples of when your brand worked for your career?
I am invited to big conferences as a speaker because of my social media presence.

15.   What is your general point of view regarding the necessity to build a personal brand online? It is helpful to use modern technologies to promote the own image.