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Master's in International Marketing Management

Master's Thesis

Exploring personal brand image formation through thin-slice judgements in an online environment

Mira Rossi, 2020

1st Examiner: Anssi Tarkiainen
2nd Examiner: Heini Vanninen

Abstract

Personal branding is getting a bigger role in the business world as the presentation of individuals' skills, goals and values is easier through social media platforms. Even as personal branding has been a known self-help topic for decades it is only now starting to be acknowledged in the academic literature in the last years. Many studies have shown how conscious personal brand management helps individuals to reach their goals and perform better in the professional and private life. Therefore, it is time to move the focus from proving that the concept of personal branding exists to how to actually manage a personal brand.

As the social media platforms allow people to present their own ideas publicly to possibly a huge audience, it is highlighting a hyper-individualistic view of career development. People do not need to get a platform from a company to present their ideas and expertise. They can do it independently. Conscious personal branding nowadays is done mostly online and therefore the context of this study is online environment.

This paper will gather theoretical literature around personal branding, impression management and visual communication. This research will examine personal brand management in an online environment in an explorative way. The research is done in a qualitative matter to gather in depth information and therefore future research paths around this topic.

The research will combine personal brand image formation with the fast-pace online environment as it is done with a practical approach acknowledging the fact that the online platforms are saturated with different information. Therefore, mental images are formed more quickly than in the real world. The theories used most in this study are the theory of thin-slice judgements, unconscious and conscious image formation and the traditional brand theories.

Tiivistelmä

Tekijä:	**Rossi, Mira Maria**
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Henkilöbrändäys on saamassa yhä suuremman roolin yritysmaailmassa. Yksityishenkilöiden saavutusten, tavoitteiden ja arvojen esitteleminen julkisesti on ennen näkemättömän helppoa sosiaalisen median alustojen avulla. Henkilöbrändäys on tunnistettu self-help -terminä jo vuosikymmenten ajan, mutta vasta viime vuosina termi on tunnistettu akateemisessa kirjallisuudessa. Lukuisat tutkimukset ovat osoittaneet, kuinka tietoinen henkilöbrändin johtaminen auttaa ihmisiä menestymään niin työelämässä kuin yksityiselämässä. Siksi on aika siirtää painopiste henkilöbrändäyksen olemassaolon todistamisesta siihen, miten henkilökohtaista brändiä todella hallitaan ja johdetaan.

Koska sosiaalisen median alustojen avulla ihmiset voivat esittää omia ideoitaan julkisesti mahdollisesti jopa valtavalle yleisölle, korostuu individualistinen näkemys urasta ja urakehityksestä. Ihmisten ei tarvitse hankkia alustaa yrityksen hierarkian kautta esitelläkseen ideoitaan ja asiantuntemustaan. He voivat tehdä sen itsenäisesti omien alustojensa kautta. Tietoinen henkilöbrändäys tapahtuukin nykyään enimmäkseen verkossa. Tämä tutkimus keskittyykin nimenomaisesti online-ympäristössä tehtävään henkilöbrändin johtamiseen.

Tämä tutkielma kerää teoreettista kirjallisuutta henkilöbrändäyksestä, vaikutelmajohtamisesta ja visuaalisesta viestinnästä. Tutkimus on eksploratiivinen. Tutkimus tehdään laadullisena tutkimuksena ja siten tutkimuksella pyritään keräämään perusteellista tietoa aiheesta ja ennen kaikkea uusia tutkimusaiheita henkilöbrändin johtamiseen liittyen.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Personal branding has been an academically silent, but admired topic in the professional world for many decades. A lot of self-help and self-improvement books have been talking about the topic of self-branding from many perspectives and presented how it can create success in the professional as well as the private life. In the last years more and more successful leaders and writers have started to talk about personal branding. The rise of social media platforms and for example influencer marketing has also taken personal branding phenomena more into the mainstream's interest. Because of the saturation in many markets, the company driven brands are not often seen unique and trustworthy enough to take advice from. Consumers are turning to influencers and other personal brands to look for trustworthy product and lifestyle promotions.

Only now in the latest years the concept of personal brand has been taken little by little from the self-help literature to the field of academic research. The concept that a person, not only product or service can be a brand, has been accepted in the marketing literature. Many research papers (Kheder 2014) (Luca, Ioan & Sasu 2015) have noticed that a strong personal brand helps with increasing social and financial status as well as it creates better opportunities to success in one's career. A strong personal brand can even be an occupation itself. Influencers have created a personal brand so trustworthy that people take product recommendations and information from their end without that much of a censor. Nowadays, it can be seen almost impossible for a product-based brand to create that kind of trust. When companies are seen as selling machines, influencers are seen as someone that they can trust, even as a friend to ask for advice.

Personal branding can be conscious or unconscious. Everyone has a reputation. The concept of personal branding is focusing on the conscious management of one's reputation, personal brand image. This is referred as impression management in literature.

First impressions of new people are often done in an online environment in today's world. Researchers have found that majority of people check individuals online, was it a case of recruitment or before meeting someone in a romantic matter. Therefore, it is highly important to understand the judgements that observers do when seeing content online. Before we have been taught to shake hands in a proper way and how to greet to leave a good first impression. Now, we need to learn how to create online content that leaves a good image. Appearance, behaviour, surroundings and even the smallest facial expressions create a certain image of a person. Why wouldn't it also be the case in an online environment?

1.1. Background of the study

Social media is the easiest place for a person to create and manage a personal brand due to its large audience. Social media offers a free platform to create content stream that resembles a public diary. It can also show the persons knowhow, values and personality. The amount of advertisement on social media is larger than ever and the possibilities are unlimited as the platforms are everchanging and the audience is still growing constantly.

On social media personal brands could be seen often as even a bigger phenomenon than company brands. The social media superstars, such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Ariana Grande and Kylie Jenner have close to or even more than 200 million followers. After Instagram's own page, Nike is the most followed product-based brand, with "only" 90 million followers. This itself proves that in social media personal brands are more followed than company brands. The audience is with the personal brands. Cristiano Ronaldo has almost three times bigger audience than Nike on Instagram, even though Nike is, according to World brand lab, the 6th most influential brand in the world in 2019. Soon, we could assume that individuals can be more influential than companies. Therefore, it is important to research the phenomenon behind the popularity of certain individuals, certain personal brands.

The existing literature and research on personal branding are strongly focused on proving that a successful personal brand does affect positively on different areas of life. As that is quite widely proven (Kheder 2014) (Luca, Ioan & Sasu 2015) (Amoako et al. 2018), it is time to move the focus on how to actually build a personal brand. How to manage a personal brand? The research will focus on the fast-pace online environment and the first impression formation of a personal brand. This study will research visual content of personal brands and the first impression formation through static images. The research findings will help individuals to create content to support their individual branding goals. The findings will also explain the success of certain brands.

1.2. The aim of the study & research problem

This study is aimed to research impression management in social media. The aim for this study is to explore the process of forming a brand image of a person through content, static images, in a fast-pace online environment. The context of this research will be social media, particularly the photo-sharing application Instagram and therefore the psychological theory of thin-slicing will be part of the research. Thin-slice experiences, short, under five minutes non-verbal experiences, are the core of social media nowadays, especially on Instagram.

There is endless stream of content on Instagram. How to create content that makes observers create positive feeling and create interest towards a personal brand? Are there differences in the emotional reaction between the types of visual content, such as with different facial expressions in pictures? The aim of the study is to find what kind of visual content creates the best possible reaction within the eight second attention span that consumers nowadays have. The study will mimic the thin-slice judgements made in an online environment. The research method will compare pictures with different traits and facial expressions such as picture of a same person smiling and not smiling. The study will also examine if a photo where a person clearly shows their brand (occupation, skills and accomplishments) will affect positively on the brand image. Each respondent will only see one photo of one person (brand) so that the first impression phenomenon can be examined.

RQ1:

How does a thin-slice judgement of a person form from a static image and what details such as facial expressions affect on the image formation?

RQ2:

Can facial expressions and traits in static photos be counted as impression management techniques?

RQ3:

What expressions or traits in a static image create interest towards a personal brand in an online environment (engagement)?

The hypothesis of this study is that static images allow observers to create clear first impressions of people in the photos. The hypothesis includes also that traits do affect on the impression made of a person through a static image. Also, positive traits that can be conveyed through a static image such as a smile or an open posture will effect on the brand image positively. The hypothesis of this study is supported by literature used in the theoretical framework. Authors own hypothesis is that pictures where a person (personal brand) shows their occupation clearly, will affect positively on the personal brand in a professional matter creating professional authority in the observer eyes. This part of the hypothesis has no previous evidence as this has not been examined before.

1.3. Preliminary literature review

The literature review of this thesis is based on the research and literature around personal branding, branding in general and social media marketing. The main focus in this literature review will be on personal branding as the research around that topic is the most important base to understand this research and its purposes.

The concept of branding is a widely researched topic. Keller (1993) (1999), Kotler (2005) (2014) and Hafren & Trout (2003) have been researching strong brands and their characteristics for decades. They have also researched the methods used to build a strong sustainable brand. Kamakura and Russel (1993) as well as Aaker

(1992) (1995) have researched brand equity widely. All these researchers have done ground-breaking findings from the different concepts of branding such as brand identity, brand image and brand equity. When we go back decades, branding was seen just as one marketing tool. Nowadays, after wide research and theoretical proof of creating money-making business through mental images, branding could be said to be the one, biggest way of differentiation for a company. (Grönroos 2015)

Literature on personal branding started to appear more in the 1990s as a self-improvement trend. Tom Peters with the article: *The brand called you* in 1997 introduced personal branding to the mainstream. Before that there were self-improvement books like Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow rich* published in 1937 that talked about the concept of personal brand, but without the term itself and the concept was not researched in an academic environment then. Think and grow rich is seen as the first personal branding book (Grzesiak 2018). There is, although some controversy as the book *The presentation of self in everyday life by* Erving Goffman (1959) has been said, in many occasions, to be the first one to present the idea of individual branding indirectly. This is a good example of the nature of literature around this subject as there are wide range of literature that talks about personal branding, but in an indirect non-academic way in the nature of self-improvement literature.

In 1980s Trout and Al Ries presented the actual term of individual branding in the book *Positioning: The Battle for your Mind*. In the 2000s the focus has gone to the employee branding. The topic of employment branding has been talked about by Arruda and Dixon in 2007 by addressing the personal brand management important if an employee wants to stand out. There are also many other such as Amoako and Okpattah (2008), Kleppinger & Cain (2015) and Luca, Ioan and Sasu (2015) who have researched personal branding from a career success point of view. All the researches mentioned have found out that personal branding actions can better the chances of success in a career. Also, top level executive personal branding has been researched. Labrecque, Markos, & Miln (2011) and Karaduman (2013) examined leadership and personal branding. One of the newest researches

done on personal branding is Chin and Chung's personal brand measurement research that is in the context of CEO personal brand in 2017.

Social media is a platform where personal branding deeds are often done, directly or indirectly. There is some research done on conscious personal branding on social media platforms. In 2011 Labrecque, Markos & Miln researched online personal branding. They found that most of the people are engaging personal branding but in an indirect way. In 2013 Chin researched personal brand formation in the context of Youtube, which is a highly popular online video platform.

There is definitely room for quality research around this topic. All these researches have shown that personal branding, according to their research results, does lead to improvements in career development and increased financial and social capital. The phenomenon of personal branding and especially personal brand development and personal brand image formation needs more examination.

1.4. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study will be combining two different fields: marketing and psychology. The base for the research will be taken from marketing theories such as brand theories, particularly the ones that can be taken into the personal branding phenomenon and also the concept of visual communication such as content marketing. From the view of psychology, we will be looking into impression management and more closely to thin-slice judgements and the science behind the phenomenon of the brain creating impressions quickly, in an subconscious matter. The platform of Instagram will be also explained, so that the reader will understand the characteristics of the platform and the environment of that online community.

The marketing theories will explain the overall concept of branding. The personal branding theory will explain why people should also differentiate themselves through brand management to create success. Doing business and selling on Instagram is all about content marketing. Visual communication theories will be

relevant to understand the tools of content creation on Instagram. The psychological part of the theoretical framework will be explaining the findings in this study.

Theoretical framework
Topic & Chapters

2. Personal branding
2.1. Definition of personal branding
2.2. Personal branding image
2.3. personal branding identity
2.4. Personal brand equity
3. Personal brand management
3.1.Strategic personal brand management
3.2. Personal brand and trust
3.3. Personal brand measuring

5. Visual brand communication
5.1. Visual communication
5.2. Content Marketing
5.3. Creating memorability and recognition through content

Personal brand | image formation | through thin-slice judgements | in an online environment

4. Impression Management
4.2. Impression management in an online environment
4.3. Attractiveness and first impressions
4.3.1.The halo-effect

4.1. Thin-slice judgements
4.2.1. Attention span

6. Building brand on Instagram
6.1. Instagram as a marketing platform
6.1.1. Features
6.1.2. Ways of engagement

Figure 1. Theoretical framework: Topic & Chapters

Figure 1 explains the structure of the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework is chosen to explain the new phenomenon as widely as possible by choosing topics and literature around the actual topic. The topic of personal branding will be investigated widely as it is the core of this study.

As the literature is quite limited on this topic, the product-based brand literature and brand development literature will be used to support the newer personal brand literature to create a stronger foundation on the research topic. Also, some well-known self-improvement and self-help literature by recognized authors such as

previously mentioned Goffman (1959) and Hill (1937) will be used as a research support with the full understanding of the lack of academic and theoretical proof that this kind of literature has.

Table 1. The Essential academic literature used in this study

Author Year of publishing	Focus	Theories used	Key findings
Walker Naylor 2007	First impression formation through exposure to static images	Thin-slice judgements Halo effect Impression formation	The impressions from static images can be surprisingly accurate.
Peters 1997	The concept of branding self (Personal branding)	Self-help Self-improvement	An article which brought the term "personal brand" to the academic field
Ambady 2006	Thin-slice judgements' effect on sales effectiveness	Thin-slice judgements Salesperson-customer relationship	Consumers make thin-slice judgements of salespeople in first 20-seconds that effect on sales effectiveness
Labrecque, Markos & Miln 2011	Online Personal Branding: Processes, Challenges and Implications	Branding Digital branding Personal branding	People engage in personal branding but often unconsciously.
Rangarajan, Geld & Vandaveer 2017	Strategic personal brand management	Brand management, Sales efficiency Impression management	Introduces a strategic self-branding process

The table 1. gathers the essential literature used in this paper. Walker Naylor (2007) introduced the idea of examining thin-slice judgements of people from static images. Walker Naylor's research is used as a base for this paper's research questions. The research from 2007 supports that static images create accurate thin-slice impressions of people unlike other literature of this topic suggests.

Peters article (1997) is the original paper that brought the term personal branding to the academic field. Ambady (2006) stated that thin-slice judgements of salespeople do affect on consumer's decisions. This is important as conscious personal branding is often linked with a professional goal such as increasing sales. Labrecque, Markos & Miln (2011) talk about how personal branding is often unconcious. Rangarajan, Geld & Vandaveer (2017) introduces a strategic personal branding process which is compared to traditional brand theories in this paper.

1.5. Definitions of the key concepts

In this chapter the key concepts will be explained with the context used in this study so the reader will understand the repeated concepts in the later chapters. Understanding of these concepts is important so the reader will be able to understand the different phenomena that the research will discuss.

Social media
Social media is a general term for platforms, websites and computer programs that enables communication and sharing content between users in the online environment. (Cambridge dictionary 2020)

Influencer
Influencer is a person who can affect on other people's purchasing decisions. Influencer must have an active and engaging audience. Influencer usually has a high social status*. The actual level of influence is difficult to prove as it is relative topic and the audiences are always different with each influencer. (Influencer Marketing Hub 2020)

Social status

Social status is a way of expressing the equity one has in society. Social status is not a concept that can be fully defined as a value of a person can never be defined by external source. Social status can be explained as the respect and honour one gets from groups in society. Factors such as sex, race, age, family and educational and financial situation affect in the relative rank of social status. (Britannica 2020)

Content (in the context of social media)

Content in social media refers to all published posts: articles, videos, photos or other that the platform enables to share to other users.

Engagement (in the context of social media)

Engagement means public shares, likes and comments on social media platforms. Engagement is a good metric to evaluate page performance and traffic. Getting engagement in itself is not a way of business: Engagement rate represents the audience the content reaches and possibly gets attention from.

Self-help/self-improvement

Self-help and self-improvement are an action or process of trying to better oneself. Self-help can be done towards any area of one's life. It is a process of working with self to go towards one's goals (Merriam-Webster 2020). Self-help is also a literature type where the books give the tools to do self-improvement practices.

Aesthetics

Aesthetic means a seen beauty and pleasure in an image. It can be said that a more aesthetic photo seems more pleasing to viewers eye. This is a subjective concept as beauty is always in the eye of a viewer. Still, usually certain colour combinations, facial features and body shapes are seen more aesthetically pleasing by majority of people. (Arnheim 1974)

Instagram

Instagram is a social media application that is focused on photo-sharing. Individuals often share pieces of their life through visual content. Instagram has also a lot of businesses advertising their products. (Meikle 2016, 39)

Traits

A trait can be explained as a certain behaviour, expression or act a person has or does, such as a big smile or intense way of looking (Merriam-Webster 2020). In this study we enlarge and fill the concept of only talking about facial expressions with the word trait as talking about facial expressions will exclude important details in the photo, such as posture and demeanor.

1.6 Delimitations of the study

This study paper examines mainly personal brand image formation and focuses on the formation through a static image. This approach was chosen to answer the growing popularity of social media platforms where sharing visual content is the main way to communicate. Personal branding will be therefore limited to brand image formation even though the concept of brand identity and brand equity are explained. The study will only research the first impression, so the respondents do not get information about a brand as a whole and only get to see the photo for a period of eight seconds. The research is limited to the application Instagram as the popularity of personal branding on Instagram is rising.

The qualitative approach will give in depth answers to the feelings and attitudes a static picture creates od a personal brand image. This approach will limit the number of respondents so the sample size will be too small to fully generalize the findings.

1.6. Research methodology and research plan

The study will be done as a qualitative research with semi-structured interviews. All data will be collected through interviews with respondents. The aim of this research is to explore and understand the impression formation and the process that happens in consumers' mind in a short amount of time and how it affects and forms after the visual exposure. The qualitative research type is chosen so that the respondents can explain their experiences and feelings more deeply and in a personalised way. Also, in this way the timeline of the image formation can be monitored.

The interview method will use the theory of individuals' attention span being eight seconds. The respondents will see a picture of a person for a period of eight seconds and after that they will be asked questions about how the picture and especially the person in the picture made them feel. We will do the same with different content and ask the same questions after each photo. Each photo will be of a different person so we will have factor of first impression is in the whole data.

In this study three different influencers' content is examined. The study will examine three different photo types: picture where the influencer smiles and a serious photo of the same person, picture where the influencers looks into the camera and one where they do not, the last photo is of a person showing their brand, such as skills and accomplishments.

The questions will be about the consumers' feelings, assumptions and judgements. The questions will lead the respondent to also think about the person in a professional matter and how the image effects on the image. The interviews will be semi-structured so that the answers are comparable and stay in the view of personal branding. The method of semi-structured questions still allows the respondents to explain their emotions and thoughts in depth and explain feelings outside the set questions.

1.7. Structure of the study

This study includes ten chapters. There are six chapters to explain the theoretical framework around the research topic. The theoretical framework will start from the core of the topic: Personal branding. The second theoretical chapter will go through personal branding subtitle impression management. In the later chapters visual communication theories and the platform of Instagram will be explained. The last three chapters will explain the research methodology, go through the interview process and then discuss the findings and how they can be used. Also, the managerial advice and ideas for future research will be given in the last chapter.

2. PERSONAL BRANDING

In 1997 Tom Peters introduced personal branding to the mainstream with the article: *The brand called you*. In that article he wrote the well-known statement *"We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You"* (Peters 1997). Peters' citation outlines the main idea behind the concept of personal branding. Personal branding phenomenon represents hyper-individual approach to individuals' career and to life in general (Lair, Sullivan and Cheney 2005). *"The personal branding movement to some extent relies upon the image of an independent, resourceful, creative, and aggressive professional. This person is expected to be agile in a fluctuating job market, responsive to any opportunities, self-motivating, and self-promoting."* (Lair, Sullivan and Cheney 2005)

This chapter will investigate the core of personal branding: the personal brand identity and personal brand image. The chapter will also discuss how the concept of personal branding is understood in different contexts. The difference between a company brand and a personal brand will be also looked into.

2.1. The definition of personal branding

A brand is a strategic approach to, always in some sense, sell a product: service, organization, cause or a person with the desires of the aimed target audience or a market (Cheney & Christensen 2001). The same terms and concepts within branding such as brand image, brand equity and brand identity are relevant when talking about a product-based brand and a personal brand (Rangarajan, Gelb, and Vandaveer 2017). We could say that the concept of a brand is always the same: it is a mental image of something. Branding as an activity is a cautious or incautious act of managing the image consumers have about a product or in this context, a person (Grönroos 2015).

Nowadays the academic literature has accepted the concept of brand being also a person, not only a product or a service. The literature is delimited as the personal branding processes differ in some sense from product brands. Especially the value creation differs in these concepts.

There are differences to product-based brand and a personal brand; A product-brand is created on demand while personal brand is formed on top of an existing person and on top of an existing reputation that could be called an unconscious personal brand (Rangarajan, Gelb, and Vandaveer 2017). The difference between these two brand types comes also from the complexity of a personal brand. A man-made product can never be as complex as a human-being. A personal brand is created on top of an existing complex entirety: a human-being with a personality and past, that cannot be changed, only the image of it can be managed. A personal brand management is conscious, constant, image and impression management - not running detached brand campaigns. The image management which is in the core of personal branding is a combination of self-presentation, storytelling and constantly creating trust (Grzesiak 2018).

When a company brand uses different theoretical models to create an attractive brand, personal branding is more about self-improvement: How to make a better impression and create trust (Lair, Sullivan and Cheney 2005). When we take personal branding forward and implement it to for example artist and politicians that are a product themselves, we can talk about self-packaging (Lair, Sullivan and Cheney 2005). This method is more like a product-based brand and is used to create a product for a certain audience. The product just happens to be a person.

When it comes to the exact process of personal branding, the personal brand literature is a bit divided. Harris and Rae (2011) demonstrated how authenticity to self is vital to building a personal brand. A person should communicate their true identity. Also, Gehl (2011) said that personal life is an important part of a personal brand. These two literature pieces support the later presented personal brand management process model and its steps (Chapter 3.1.). Lair (2005) again talked about personal branding being the exercise of self-packaging the qualities of self

as in gathering the best qualities and creating a brand. Hearn (2008) discusses personal branding being an act of creating an image of the self fully for market consumption.

All these approaches can be also seen as different stages of a personal brand management process and not fully as contradiction to each other. If these findings are taken to later presented (Chapter 3.1.) personal brand management model, Harris and Rae's and Gehl's literature would suit to the model already from the first step: identification of self. Lair and Hearn's studies findings and methods could be implemented to the later steps as the self-packaging possibilities and market demand are found only after measuring the personal brand. This study approaches the topic with an assumption that authenticity to self is important in personal branding, and only after that conscious image management can be done with long-term success.

2.2. Personal brand image

Brand image is the mental image, the conception, of a product, service, person or a company a consumer has. Customer experiences, marketing, word of mouth and many other factors create and modify the mental images constantly. The combination of all these images create a brand image (Aaker 1996, 180). There are endless ways to effect on these mental images, so it is not only in the hands of the company, how people see the brand. Word of mouth, the communication from customer to customer, is one of the most effective ways to modify the image of a brand (Lindberg-Repo 2005, 67).

The image is not in control of the brand owner (Aaker 1996). When talking about personal brand image, topics such as impression management and communication skills are in focus as they are linked to the image observers get of a person (Rangarajan, Gelb, and Vandaveer 2017). Personal brand image similarly as a product-based brand image is the image someone else has. In the context of personal branding, brand image could be said to be the reputation of a person.

2.3. Personal brand identity

Brand identity is the image that the brand owner has about themselves or their products (Aaker 1996). The company or a person will be trying to create a brand image (Chapter 2.2.) that is similar to the brand identity. Brand identity can be seen as the goal of brand image management. A brand communicates the identity in various different ways such as marketing communication and customer journeys. Brand identity is specifically the image that the brand has of itself (Aaker 2000, 71).

 When we are talking about personal brand identity, the focus is on self-awareness. Harris and Rae (2011) say that a personal brand needs to be authentic. Therefore, it is important to find own strengths that can be built to a selling brand. Understanding own brand identity might be the hardest part of creating a personal brand. The brand communication has to be in line and consistent with the brand identity for the brand to stay authentic and effective (Harris and Rae 2011). There are different strategies to building a successful personal brand identity. It can be a package that is built for market consumption (Hearn 2008) or it can be an image that reflects person's real life, even private life authentically (Gehl 2011). "A market product" might be more difficult to manage especially if a person's goals and therefore audience changes. Authentic brand can be built throughout life when it is based on skills, accomplishments and interests and not tied to a title and a current employer (Rangarajan, Gelb, and Vandaveer 2017).

3. PERSONAL BRAND MANAGEMENT

Every person has a personal brand whether they are willing to have it or not. The synonym for a personal brand could be reputation, but personal branding as a term is easier to link with goals and commercialising oneself. Everyone has a reputation based on their personality, past occurrences and for example the style of communication one has. Personal brand will exist and change on its own too, but it is also possible to manage through the everyday impressions. Personal brand management is conscious impression management. Conscious impression management is managing the ways of communication in all its ways, online and offline (Rangarajan, Gelb, and Vandaveer 2017).

Rangarajan et al. (2017) explains how managing a brand is a complex task. It includes brand image management, brand image development and measuring the effectiveness of the current strategy. A brand needs to renew constantly. When it comes to personal branding the renewing happens more naturally than a product-based brand as a person constantly grows, learns new things and climbs up the career ladder. Simultaneously to these changes, the personal brand evolves.

In this chapter we will go through the factors that are part of the brand management process in the case of a personal brand. The chapter will go through identifying the brand, developing the brand and discuss how to measure a personal brand.

3.1. Strategic personal brand management process

In 2013 Keller introduced a brand management process model which explained the different steps of building a brand. First, it is important to find the brand values and positioning in the market. After that a company needs to plan and then implement marketing activities such as marketing campaigns and by that start to create a brand image in consumers. The next step after that is to measure the brands effectiveness by different tracking systems. With the information from tracking a brand needs to renew and grow. In this chapter we will investigate

Keller's brand management model with the view on personal branding and how the steps differ according to personal branding literature.

The process of managing a personal brand always starts with identifying the brand. This step is different to traditional brand creation as the personal brand already exists. When a product brand is created, the brand team will choose brand values, find target audience and design an identity. With personal brand all of these exists but need to be consciously found, identified or even admitted as being part of one's self. Then so called public personal brand can be modified to suit the found target audience. It means creating a strategy to manage the personal brand image. Brand image management is managing the gap between brand identity and brand image. This will be done mainly by focusing on communication through impressions (Chapter 4.). (Rangarajan, Gelb, and Vandaveer 2017)

In the chapter 2.3. the concept of brand identity was explained. The personal brand identity is like said, self-discovery. It is the first part of starting to consciously manage a personal brand. "Who am I?". The next step would be mapping out the personal brand image, which was explained in 2.2. "What are the three words someone else would describe me with?" There are multiple ways to survey this. For example, one could ask a recruiter why they did or did not hire them. (Rangarajan, Gelb & Vandaveer 2017)

Strategic brand management process
Personal brand vs. Product-based brand
Based on Keller's Strategic brand management process model

Personal brand		Product-based/ Company brand
• Self-discovery • Determine accomplishments, skills and personality • Define own values	**Identify and Establish** *Brand positioning and values*	• Competitive frame of reference • Points-of-parity, points-of-difference • Brand values
• Conscious impression management online and offline	**Plan and Implement** *Brand Marketing programs*	• Brand marketing activities • Leveraging of secondary associations • Mixing and matching of brand elements
• Self-reflection ◦ Am I getting opportunities? • Social media engagement • Promotions	**Measure and Interpret** *Brand performance*	• Brand tracking • Brand audits • Brand equity management system
• Self-improvement • Educating • Networking	**Grow and Sustain** *Brand equity*	• Brand reinforcement and revitalization • Brand expansion

Figure 2. The Difference of personal brand management and product-based brand management

Keller's (2013) model of strategic brand management model is a good base for comparison on personal branding and product branding. In the Figure 2, is a comparison where on the right side is Keller's brand management process model steps and on the left side is the personal branding steps that are based on Rangarajan, Gelb and Vandaveer's article (2017). The personal brand management steps are also in line with personal branding literature such as Harris and Rae (2011) and Gehl (2011).

This research will focus on the second stage of this personal brand management model: "Conscious impression management online and offline". First impressions are a big part of impression management and they are often made on online platforms like Instagram in today's world.

3.2. Personal brand and trust

Developing personal brand is highly focused in the process of creating trust. Communicating about the values and goals, creating good experiences and impressions and behaving well, are all part of the trust creation that is vital in brand development. Trust is an abstract mental image just like personal brand image is. Trust is often linked to certain situations, for example two co-workers can trust that both obey a project deadline but might not trust their cooking skills (Thagard 2018). This is what brings us to the topic of unique personal brand development. A major part of personal brand image forms of the things people think they can trust or not trust the brand with. Creating trust in certain situations will modify the perception others have about a person and about their skills and interests.

There are many ways to create trust. Lewicki and Bunker (1996) state three different types of trust: knowledge-based trust, calculus-based trust and identification-based trust. Calculus based trust means that a person can trust that the disadvantage of doing something not planned or wished is not worth of doing, such as fear of punishments. This trust is often seen as the general guidelines of society. Knowledge-based trust is trust that is learned from previous situations where one has seen others behaviour. Positive experiences with a person or brand are the most effective way of creating trust. Also, the proof of previous good experiences will create knowledge-based trust. Identity based trust means that parties are convinced that they share common values, intentions and goals. Especially identity-based trust is highly important part of personal branding. (Vane-Ing, Yu-sum and Wai-Man 2018) On-going communication is a way of building trust between people. This is also the case when building trust between consumer and a brand. Communication increases especially identity-based trust. (Lewicki and Bunker 1996) Another explanatory theory in regard to trust in personal branding, or branding in general, is the halo-effect theory (Chapter 4.3.1.).

Understanding the types of trust is important when creating a personal brand and when evaluating a brand. The brand objectives should be tied to trustworthiness on a certain topic. In this research the brand image an observer, in this case the

respondent has will be examined by asking "what would you trust this person with?". This will explain effectively the core of the brand image a person has created.

3.3. Personal brand measuring

Measuring the effectiveness of personal branding management efforts is important, if a person wants to optimize their brand image. Rangarajan, Gelb, and Vandaveer (2017) researched how salespeople measured their personal brand. An effective personal brand was seen to have had advantages as customers answering their calls quickly, easier to trend on LinkedIn and having good sales results in general. Some thought that effectiveness of a brand can be measured by how quickly one gets a job. Also awards and compliments were seen as a meter of brand effectiveness.

When it comes to personal brand in social media, it is easy to measure the reach and effectiveness of a brand by looking to the number of followers, likes and other engagement such as the engagement rate. Also, the amount of collaboration enquiries one gets can be seen as a good sign of an effective brand. Social media metrics do not give a full look into the brand but can give good insight to the brand marketing effectiveness.

4. IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

Impression management means the process of trying to control the impressions of others. Impression management has roots in Goffman's (1959) literature. He talked about social interactions and people creating external impressions that create a reputation of a person. Impression management is seen as the most important theory that regards to reputation (Leary and Kowalski 1990). Therefore, it is an essential theory when investigating personal brand management as personal branding can be seen as a synonym for reputation management. Bolino, Long and Turnley (2016) researched that individuals are most motivated to use impression management strategies when their behaviour and image is public. Impression management in literature is often linked to the increased possibility of getting a new job or a promotion (Bolino at al. 2016).

Impression management means consciously trying to control the image others have of self. There are direct and indirect impression management techniques. With direct techniques, a person talks about their accomplishments, titles and skills. With these acknowledgements, a person proves what they have done and proves that other people or organizations trust them, so the listener should too. Undirect ways are talking about things that are already associated to one. (Cialdini & De Nicholas 1989, 46)

Another partition is to divide the techniques to assertive and defensive. One tries to create an ideal image or tries to stay away from undesirable image. The impression management literature often focuses on assertive strategies even though an effective management of personal brand includes both sides. (Tedeschi & Melburg 1984)

Jones and Pittman (1982) introduced five different impression-management techniques that individuals are likely to use. Jones and Pittman's model is widely used. The model includes ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, supplication and intimidation. *Ingratiation* is an act of using flattery or other acts to seem favourable. *Self-promotion* is showing one's abilities and telling about one's

accomplishments. *Exemplification* is an act of trying to seem extra dedicated to something. *Supplication* is an act of talking about their shortcomings, so that the viewer could be a helper. *Intimidation* is an act of trying to seem dangerous.

4.1. Thin-slice judgements

The theory of thin-slice talks about how an observer can make an accurate and long-lasting judgement about others by only a short period of observing (Albright & Kenny 1987). Thin-slices are the conclusions a person does during the first impression that are proven to be very accurate (Ambady and Rosenthal 1993). Ambady and Rosenthal (1993) found that individual's five-second impressions are just as accurate as five-minute impressions. Thin-slice experiences mean short usually non-verbal experiences that last under 5 minutes. Especially non-verbal communication is looked into in this research as it is focusing on marketing communication. It has been said that static images are not under the investigation of thin-slice theory, but there is evidence that also static images create the phenomenon of thin-slices being accurate (Walker Naylor 2007).

Thin-slice judgements can be done without an interaction and the non-verbal behaviour is the key to accurate thin-slice judgements. Non-verbal behaviour forces the observer to focus on other things than the controlled verbal messages. Facial expressions, voice, body language and other gestures are highly important when creating an impression of one's personality, intentions and emotions. These factors are harder to control when managing an impression. Thin-slice judgements are unconscious processes that the consumer creates when they see something for a very short time. Therefore, these judgements could be said to be done between both parties' unconscious acts. The conscious impression management, the suitable greetings and the learned behaviours come to the picture after and could be said to disrupt the unconscious minds work. The studies have shown that the immediate impressions are surprisingly accurate especially when it comes to evaluating personality traits. (Albright & Kenny 1987) (Albright, Kenny & Malloy 1988) (Albright, Kashy, Kenny & Malloy 1994)

First impressions are essential in consumer decision-making (Ambady et al. 2006). Marketing- and sales-related judgements can be done in an automatic, unconscious, manner in an observers' mind (Bargh 2002). As thin-slice theory suits to this unconscious process, it is a very important theory in consumer psychology as nowadays the saturation of markets creates consumers to experience unforeseen stream of advertisement and product placements. Raghubir and Krisha (1996) researched that consumer judgements are done in two stages. The first stage being an initial automatic stage and the second one being deliberate conscious judgement with a longer judgement process. Thin-slice judgements are part of the first, automatic, judgement (Peracchio & Luna 2006).

First impressions are often done subconsciously. Macro traits such as smiling, open posture or stiffness effect on the subconscious first impression an individual makes. An observer understands macro traits subconsciously. These traits might be difficult to remember later and therefore the first impression is often difficult to explain or even understand consciously. (Thompson 2012)

4.2. Impression management in an online environment

Often impression management is talked about when meeting people in real life, face-to-face. Nowadays one of the most popular personal brand management tools are the platforms of social media. This chapter will gather some literature on impression management in an online environment.

Nowadays managing social media platforms could be said to be the real first impression management as social media profiles are nowadays often the absolute first impression. A study with 1000 recruiters shows that 70% of recruiters research their candidate's social media (CareerBuilder 2017). 88% of people investigate their date on Facebook or another social media platform before meeting the person (Bustle 2018). These studies show that people look for validation of a real and trustworthy person before meeting them.

The phenomenon of first impression creation in an online environment is a topic that has only a little research literature (Walker Naylor 2007). Like stated in the earlier chapter, the thin-slice experiments have shown that individuals do create unconscious brand images also from static images (Walker Naylor 2007). When we combine the fact that a high percent of people searches individuals from online before meeting them (CareerBuilder 2017) (Bustle 2018) and the research findings that an observer can create an image of a person through a static image (Walker Naylor 2007), we have a clear evidence that online environment is highly important when creating a personal brand image.

There are different strategies to what is shown on an online profile. These strategies are the core of impression management in an online environment. Social media can be used in various ways to present individuals brand. The questions of what content to post in general, what to post in certain platforms and who are allowed to see it, are all part of impression management in an online environment. Different platforms allow a person to show different aspects of their life and within those platforms a user can choose what to share about their life. LinkedIn can be filled with career-related information, titles, accomplishments, interests etc. Instagram again can be filled with pictures from a hobby or it can be used as an online diary.

 A person can often choose what is public and what is private information. By this people choose what kind of impression they want to make. When a person first sees the profile, it can only show the accomplishments, titles or education and after a user is added to one's "community" such as accepted as a friend or a follower, a person can create a for whole image as they can also see the private content. A person might also accept different people to different networks. In social media, the impression can be created fully different between different platforms.

4.2.1. Attention span

Attention span means the time an average person can focus on a certain sight without losing focus or interest or without getting distracted. In the era of digitalization and fast-pace interactions, the average visual attention span is getting shorter (Lorenz-Spreen, Mønsted, Hövel *et al. 2019)*. Lorenz-Spreen, Mønsted, Hövel suggests that the increasing information flows create shorter attention cycles. Microsoft consumer study suggests that the attention span has dropped from 12 seconds (Microsoft 2000) to eight seconds (Microsoft 2015) in the last years and especially the younger generations have tendency to have a very short attention span. Prezi's report (2018) on modern attention span is suggesting that the attention span is not only decreasing but changing as people need to strictly decide on what to concentrate and possibly shift it quickly.

The decreasing or changing ability to focus, affects as a skill of skipping a lot of information in an online environment. These reports highlight the importance of quality content and for example downright user-experiences. This can be already seen in practise: 60% will change the shopping destination if the website or app is slow or not working (IBM 2017). The same goes with content. The same study by IBM found that finding products quickly is the most important part of shopping for a modern consumer.

Impression management in online environment is a bit different than the traditional theory of managing impressions as said in the previous chapter. The impressions are done much faster than face-to-face and with the control of the observer as they can control the time they look at something. The observer has to pause their scrolling at a certain content to create an impression. The decreasing attention span of people is making this pause to focus even shorter.

4.3. Attractiveness and first impressions

When it comes to social media and online first impressions, the impressions are mostly done based on one's looks. There are many studies done about how facial features and physical attractiveness effects on the first impression and the assumed personality traits. Therefore, it is an important subject to go through and take into consideration when researching the topic of first impressions in an online environment.

It can be explained by several reasons why people can make accurate and similar impressions from facial features. Wolffhechel et al. (2014) explains how the brain unconsciously reads things like testosterone levels from the facial features. Unconscious notice of high testosterone levels could mean an unconscious impression of more dominant personality. The study by Wolffhechel et al. in 2014 showed that facial impressions have an impact on first impressions in this matter.

Xiao and Ding (2014) found out in their study that consumers create different reactions to advertisement based on the facial features of the model on the advertisement. This is linked to the phenomenon of influencer marketing. Felix and Borge (2014) also found that an attractive brand endorser, such as an attractive celebrity, had a positive attitude towards the ad and therefore can lead to increasing the brand value. The same study also found that attractive endorser got more visual attention time. This could mean getting more time to create attitudes and in general, a bigger opportunity to get noticed and remembered.

From these studies, it can be concluded that attractive people get more attention time on social media and possibly in life in general. An observer looks at an attractive person's picture longer and therefore they remember the visual and the person more easily. If the attractive person is in the same picture as a product or a statement of some kind, the product or other source of information will get more attention time as well. Attractiveness can also create a halo-effect that will be explained in the next chapter.

4.3.1. The halo-effect

According to the halo-effect theory, if a person is seen performing well in one task, they will be trusted more easily with other tasks too. The halo-effect can also form from attractiveness. The positive image extends from one experience to another. When the "halo" is created, there is an emotional attachment to the person's reputation. The mind will create positive arguments for the person they knew once performed well or in other ways created a positive image. (Nisbett & Wilson 1977)

The halo-effect explains why people trust for instance influencers in so many different lifestyle advices and product recommendations, even though they would be primarily skilled for example in photography. This can also explain the formation of social status in some sense.

5. VISUAL BRAND COMMUNICATION

Instagram is based on visual content and the platform highly focuses on page and post aesthetics. As this study is based in this particular platform, it is important to understand the nature of visual communication and its relation to visual brand management and brand communication. It is important how visual communication can affect the viewer. In this chapter will cover some of the theoretical aspects of visual communication.

5.1. Visual communication

The brain can process information through pictures faster than through texts as the information formation happens more unconsciously than when reading a text full of information. This is due to pictures activating the part of the brain that deal with emotional connections and creative activities. This cognitive response makes it is quicker to create a "stable" mental image of a brand through visual images than text (Corballis 2014). A person can also use their imaginary more when getting information through an image than text. This creates a possibility to create a more positive and memorable brand experience. As the responses are more emotional and allow creativity, it is possible to create a more emotional attachment with a brand. It is also researched that visual content can create better recognition and memorability than other content because of the emotional reaction (Corballis 2014).

A great place to start investigating the topic of image reading and one of the most important factors of visual communication is that every viewer sees an image differently. Images always create a different reaction based on viewers culture, experiences, attitudes and for example social background. A viewer will always "read" the picture by detail and as a whole and through the personal factors mentioned earlier, the viewer creates their own mental image. The background of a viewer affects also on what they are focusing on when they investigate the image. The difficulty of visual communication is that the creator of the content will not know what details some other person will focus on. The creators view the picture from

their own view. Therefore, intentional and unintentional messages can be sent through pictures. (Choon-Lee 2019) (Jamieson 2007) (Smith et al. 2005).

For this particular reason the examination of this topic is a bit tricky. The answers and the reason behind the answers and reactions are different with each individual. An individual will not know even themselves why they feel some kind of way about a picture as it is a sum of so many components.

5.2. Content marketing

Brand visuals can affect to viewers beliefs of a brand (Mitchel & Olson 1981). As stated before, viewers always assimilate visual information differently according to several factors. Therefore, visual information can affect on the brand image also in an unwanted way. The visuals need to be created to interpret the right image into the target audiences mind.

When marketing through visual content, the brand image is created or modified based on the associations that the picture creates. A picture can recall memories, associate with a certain time or location or even inspire if it resonates with one's dreams and goals (Jamieson 2007). Therefore, when creating content for marketing goals it is highly important to analyse the target group and their goals, ideas and lifestyles. This will help to create content that will communicate in a right way and a similar message to the aimed one is received. Also, especially in this era, it is highly important to understand what can create negative associations or for example show disrespect through the viewers associations.

A creator can slightly effect on the viewers behaviour by image composition. A creator can try to build an image so that some things are more highlighted to draw the viewers' attention. The context of an image needs to be also taken into consideration when marketing. A photo on social media creates different emotions than the same photo as a billboard ad. The mindset of a viewer as in where they see the image, and the association of what the advertiser wants to accomplish by putting the image there will make a difference. (Michelle 2018)

5.2.1. Creating memorability and recognition through content

Psychology explains memorizing as a process. There is the fast, automatic, "familiarity" process and then there is the slower, conscious recollection process. The first one refers to remembering or being familiar with something on the first reaction as in the two first seconds, the second one means recall seeing something before when for example context is added. The difference between memorability and recognition are that recognition is a feeling to something being familiar. You recognise that you have seen it before. Remembering something means that you already know details about what you see and remember what it is. (Borkin, Vo, Bylinskii, Isola, Sunkavalli, Oliva et al. 2013)

Brand recall and recognition has a positive relation to purchasing decisions (Khurram, Sheeraz & Qadeer 2018). Therefore, creating recognition through visual content is important if a company is advertising their products and business online. Redundancy in visual content will make a person recognise visualization more easily as it helps people to grasp on the main message of the content. The researchers found that the relevance of topic to the viewer is highly important when contributing recognizability. (Borkin, Bylisnkii, Kim at al. 2016) This proves that the target-follower-based content optimization is highly important when creating memorability.

Memorability is a cognitive concept. Borkin, Vo, Bylinskii, Isola, Sunkavalli, Oliva, et al. noticed in a study done in 2013 that colour, visual complexity and recognizable objects increase memorability in visual content. Research found that visually distinct visualizations were more memorable. The science behind that is that the eye does not have to make so much movement as in it is less visual information that needs to be memorised. The same study found that text and titles help people to remember content as that is the first thing the eye catches as it is desperately trying to find explanation to the sight.

From these studies we can find out that the relevancy, simplicity and explanatory help viewers to remember visual content. When we take this to social media environment, relevancy can mean optimization of content in regards of followers and their interests. Simplicity can mean that the content should be focused on one topic at the time. Explanatory content does not leave question marks to the viewers head and the information is easier to recall.

We can assume based on the theories used in Chapter 5.1. and theories used in this chapter, that if a picture is simple and relevant to the observer, it is easier to "read" and therefore create a stable image in a person's memory and the image will from in a faster pace as it connects easily to different background factors such as experiences and culture. Therefore, the brain can create a faster emotional reaction. This will affect as better memorability and recognition.

6. INSTAGRAM AS A MARKETING PLATFORM

According to Khoros (2018) 74% of Generation Z spends more than 5 hours or more a day online. The Business insider's survey (2019), done with 1884 U.S. teens, showed that 62.42% of 13- to 21-year-olds check their Instagram daily. Instagram as a platform has over 1 billion active users. User accounts can be businesses or private accounts. Over 90 percent of users follow businesses on Instagram (Instagram 2020a). This explains how Instagram has commercialized during the past years. Instagram is based on social interactions with content: Engagement.

In this chapter we will shortly go through the different features and ways of engagement. What does liking, sharing and following mean? This will help the reader to understand the research method and the findings of the study.

6.1. Features

Instagram started as a simpler platform where the publishing was done by one kinds of posts only. Nowadays Instagram has different types of content publishing. This chapter will go through the different features that the Instagram platform has in September 2020.

Stories are a feature, where the users can post videos and pictures for 24 hours at a time. Stories can be then saved to Highlights where the posts can be seen when users profile is visited. Stories are a good place to show everyday life to followers. Also, marketing campaigns and product pictures suit well to be published in stories. IGTV is a video service where Instagram users can publish longer videos. On a normal post the video can be only up to one minute. IGTV has its own algorithm that will allow the user to browse videos based on users' interests. (Instagram 2020b)

One of the greatest features of Instagram is the Search and explore which is a page that offers new content to the user based on Instagram algorithm. It will offer

posts and pages that the user does not yet follow based on previous engagements. (Instagram 2020c)

Direct is a feature that allows users to chat, to have a conversation with each other privately. Direct allows users to send interesting posts to other users. Publishers will see the analytics for these shares even though they are private. (Instagram 2020d)

Instagram Shopping is one of the newer features that answers to the increased commercialization of Instagram. This feature will enable the users to create a product tag so that users can see where the specific product was purchased. This also allows to shop the product without leaving Instagram. (Instagram 2020e)

6.2. Ways of engagement

Engagement means different reactions made in online platforms. Engagement rate is a social media metric that explains the popularity of a page. Some users might have large following but low engagement rate which makes the page less valuable.

Liking is the least effort demanding type of engagement. It is a reaction given on Instagram where you impress you like to a post and other people can see that you and how many others like the post. The number of likes is one of the metrics on how popular a page is.

Following means that a user subscribes to an account. They will receive their posts to their feed, which is the post stream of people who they follow. The number of followers describes how big the audience of a page is and ambiguously describes the amount of people their posts can reach with ease.

Sharing means the deed of sending a post to other users or reposting it. A user often shares things that they want their own users to see. It is similar to referring in writing. Sharing will increase the audience beyond the page's followers.

7. FROM THEORY TO PRACTISE

In this theoretical framework we have discussed about multiple topics. The framework was divided into several divergent topics (Figure 1.) from personal branding and brand image formation to more psychological view on expression formation and visual communication. Also, the context of this study, online environment, was explained in the last chapters of the theoretical framework.

In the next chapters, the study will examine in an explorative way how different expressions in static images affect on the brand image and expression formation. The study method will combine different scientifically proven phenomena to mimic a person's behaviour and therefore rapid decision making in an online environment.

The empirical study will use thin-slice judgements as a base for the examination. This theory proves that a person can create accurate impressions in their subconscious mind with only a small amount of information. The theory is taken a bit further as Walker Naylor proved in 2007 that static images create the similar effect. We will be looking into impressions made from static images based on this literature.

The theoretical framework also talks about attention span. The theory of the attention time that people tend to have, will be used in the research method as the time respondents can see the photo. This is a way to create a real-life like situation of image formation online.

The psychological view to visual communication will be used to discuss and understand the results from the study. Also, the impression management theories will be used to create links between the traditional impression management techniques to the modern online impression management, which this study examines. The research will create actual steps to take in practise when implementing the presented personal brand management model (Figure 2.) into personal brand management.

The theoretical framework gives insight to the set research questions. Although, Walker Naylor and others have proven that thin-slice theory is accurate and even that thin-slice theory can be linked to static images too, there is no previous studies on how facial expressions in static images affect on the image formation. Only psychological studies on how first impressions are usually made and the presented impression management techniques can be combined to make a hypothesis that for example smile will make a better first impression of a person than a serious photo would. When combining the personal brand management and its goals to the controlled impression management, such as creating professional authority, the same fact occurs – there is no research on this. This experimental study will try to unlock ideas and future research paths to unleash the potential of effective online impression management.

8. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Based on the theoretical framework visual communication is a powerful way to affect on the mental images a consumer has of a brand. The framework also concluded that personal branding is an effective approach to one's success in personal and professional life. The literature on thin-slice-theory proved that people make impressions out of static images. In this empirical part we will explore the idea of how to control a personal brand image through details in static images. The focus will be on personal branding and therefore on expressions like smile and eye-contact with the camera. The research will explore the differences that different traits make within thin-slice judgement. The study will be done through interviews. The respondents will be shown a photo of a person they have not seen before for period of eight seconds and then they will be asked questions regarding to the photo, their interest in engaging to the person on social media and the personality of the person in the photo.

In this chapter the empirical part of the study will be represented throughoutly. The chapter will go through the characteristics of a qualitative research. The chapter will look into the research methodology of this study and how the components of qualitative research will be used in this study to understand the phenomenon of online impression formation.

8.1. Methodology and research design

This study is done as a qualitative research. This methodology is chosen as it suits well to the interest of understanding and finding new leading insights to the phenomenon. Topics such as brand image formation, associations and feelings are difficult to calculate and therefore the qualitative research method with its in depth investigating suits well into this research (Gordon et al. 1993, 5). The study is exploratory as it is explaining the process behind the image formation in a consumer's mind and it provides insights into the research topic's relation to the theoretical models linked to the topic (Hollensen 2015, 627).

The research will be conducted with interviews. Interviews will provide more in depth information which suit into the qualitative research purpose (Myers 2013). The empirical data will be collected with individual interviews where a person will be asked structured question sets with open and closed-end questions. The interviews will allow the respondents to answer most of the questions with their own words and express their feelings without strict limitation on topic. In this way the research will provide more in depth understanding on the research topic. Some of the questions will be closed-end, so that some parts of the findings will be fully comparable. The structure of the questions will be controlled so the respondent will start with answering more emotion-based and association-based questions and then later more personal brand related question. In this order the respondents will be able to express the feelings that are unconscious and form during the eight seconds they see the static photo. This concept of image formation and it's conscious and unconscious states are explained in chapter 4.1. and chapter 5.1. In the later presented questions the respondent has had time to process the information which changes the mental image more conscious and it is combined with more information within respondent's mind. This was also explained in the Chapter 4.1.

The research design includes three influencers with three different photos of each. This study examines the reactions to a personal brand, physical traits in photos and then discuss the links between them. The respondents will see a photo for eight seconds and then will be asked questions about that photo. This will be done three times with three different photos with each respondent. As there will be nine respondents the total number of answers will be 27. Each respondent will see one photo of each influencer and every photo will have a different trait. The respondents are not told what trait or expression the picture has.

The asked questions are similar after every photo. The interview questions are seen in the Appendix I. The aim is to analyse the differences within the different types of content and how they affect on the attitude towards the influencer. Therefore, there are three different influencers in the research so that the

examination can be done also excluding the brand characteristics that a certain personal brand shows in photos.

Table 2. Material used in the study

Picture	Influencer	Smile	Looks into the camera	other
A	Influencer A (IA)	Yes	Yes	
B	IA	No	No	
C	IA	Yes	No	visible occupation
D	IB	Yes	No	
E	IB	No	Yes	
F	IB	No	No	visible occupation
G	IC	Yes	Yes	
H	IC	No	No	
I	IC	No	No	visible occupation

The material in this study is named by the alphabet so that the explanation of the analysis is easier. There will be three photos of each influencer. Pictures A to C includes Influencer A's content. Pictures from D to F includes Influencer B's photos. Pictures from G to I are influencer C's photos.

Table 3. Respondents and material shown to each

Respondent 1 (R1)	R2	R3
A, E, I	A, E, I	A, E, I
R4	R5	R6
B, F, H	B, F, H	B, F, H
R7	R8	R9
C, D, H	C, D, H	C, D, H

Like mentioned earlier, each respondent will be shown three photos. Three respondents will see similar photos so that the reactions and emotions can be analysed with same material. The respondents will not know who they are going to see. The match of material set and respondent will be randomized.

8.2. Qualitative research

Qualitive research is most often conducted by interviews, surveys and observations. The data is gathered from people in different forms in this method. Qualitative research is often used as a research method when the researcher wants to know what individuals or groups think or feel about something. Qualitative research does not include measuring or counting. This method is suitable for researches where the study focuses on why people behave in a certain way. Qualitative research is suitable to topics that do not have a clear single answer. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 23) (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2008)

The aim of qualitative research is to understand, describe and explain a phenomenon (Gibbs 2007, 94). A research done in a qualitative way should focus on the interaction between the theoretical framework and the empiric study so that the in depth empirical findings can be linked to the theories. This means that there does not ned to be facts but links (Hirsijärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2000, 152). The research method must be structured in a way that the research material will be limited and so that the data will be focused on one phenomenon (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2008, 81).

In qualitative research the researcher can affect on the study findings by their interpretation and even their presence. It is important that in qualitative research the research situation would be kept as similar as possible within all the respondents, so that the situation does not create other social phenomenon that can affect on the results. It is important that a researcher studies the affect he/she can have on the research situation. (Bogdan & Taylor 1949)

8.3. Selection of research material

The research material has been selected from published material from three different influencers. The influencers were chosen as they already have a managed personal brand. The material was chosen to match the research questions. The material was taken from published posts, but some of the photos were cut or zoomed to present the examined physical trait better. The influencers have given their permission to use their content and personal brand in this study. In the next chapter the personal brand of each will be describer with the interpretation of the author from each influencer Instagram. This description is not based on influencers' brand identity and the descriptions only purpose is to explain the brand image shortly and superficially to the reader.

8.3.1. Influencers

Influencer A is Mikael Renwall (mikaelrenwall). Renwall is a Finnish social media personality and youtuber. Renwall works as an influencer and a model. Mikael Renwall has 35 100 followers on Instagram in November 2020. Based on his Instagram content, his brand is based around his looks: trendy outfits and his appearance. His brand could be described as youthful, trendy and colourful.

Influencer B is Sini Laitinen (Papananaama) who is an influencer and youtuber. Laitinen works also as a radio host with her own K-pop show. Sini Laitinen has 66 200 Instagram followers in November 2020. Laitinen has a unique brand: colourful and experimental with impressive make-up looks and unique outfits. The interest in East Asian trends can also be seen from the content.

Influencer C is Emilia Kujala (tunteellaemiliakujala) who is a psychotherapist. She is also an author and a writer and is highly active managing her brand on Instagram. She has 10 700 followers on Instagram in November 2020. During the process of this thesis, her follower amount has increased by approximately 3000. Her visual personal brand on Instagram includes colourful self-portraits and informative content. From a particular perspective her brand could be described as

experimental as she combines professionalism with standout content of herself. This is nowadays common on Instagram as professionals want to also present themselves and their style through their content to create a unique, comprehensive personal brand.

8.3.2. Pre-testing

The chosen material for the research and the interview questions were tested with three different participants to try out if the eight second period would be ideal with the research. Also, the questions were analysed and after pre-testing some modifications were made to create questions to create more in depth understanding to the phenomenon.

8.4. Respondents and analysis design

The data was collected from 15 20-30-year-olds. All the respondents are Finnish citizens and grew up in a Finnish culture. The education level and occupation differed within the respondents. All the respondents use Instagram daily and are very familiar with the ways of engagement in Instagram.

Table 4. The respondents' demographical factors

Respondent number	Age	Education-level	Occupation
1	25	Masters's degree	Account manager
2	23	Secondary school graduate	Student
3	23	Bachelor's degree	Restaurant manager
4	24	Secondary school graduate	Student
5	24	Bachelor's degree	Marketing assistant
6	20	Bachelor's degree	Student
7	21	Secondary school graduate	Retail
8	23	Secondary school graduate	Student
9	27	Master's degree	Office manager

All of the respondents knew exactly what liking and following means in the context of Instagram and they were able to talk about the environment of Instagram naturally as they have used the platform for years. Three of the respondents have been studying digital marketing and are more familiar with online branding. This might affect some results.

Table 5. The analysis structure

R1	R2	R3
A	A	A
E	E	E
I	I	I
R4	**R5**	**R6**
B	B	B
F	F	F
G	G	G
R7	**R8**	**R9**
C	C	C
D	D	D
H	H	H

3: Answers to similar content types

See Table 6

2: Answers to the same personal brand
a<->b<->c
d<->e<->f
g<->h<->i

The table 5 presents the structure of analysis of the data. The analysis will be done in three stages so that the phenomena can be separated, and the data can be analysed in the most effective way. First, the answers of the respondents who have seen the same material, the same three photos will be examined for similarities and differences photo by photo (R1, R2, R3; R4, R5, R6; R7, R8, R9). In this stage the attitudes towards one particular picture will be examined. There will be three answers to each photo.

The second stage includes analysis of the responses to different pictures by the same personal brand and the similarities and differences will be investigated (A, B, C; D, E, F; G, H, I). This stage will show the attitudes towards a brand, one brand at a time.

In the third stage the attitudes to similar picture types, expressions, such as all the answers to the pictures which had a smile, will be examined and similarities and differences will be investigated. This stage will examine the attitudes to different traits in photos and combinations of expressions in the photos. The table below will show the examination groups.

Table 6. Examination groups in stage three

Smile	A, D, C, G
Serious	B, E, F, H, I
Looks into the camera	A, E, F
Looks away	B, C, D, H, I
Visible occupation	C, F, I

8.5. Validation and reliability

In every research it is highly important to discuss the reliability and validation of the research design and therefore the research findings. In this study the reliability is increased by using the techniques Bogdan and Taylor (1949) presented to create a reliable research situation when gathering qualitative data.

The data that is collected through the semi-structured interviews will be analysed using qualitative content analysis. Qualitative study's reliability always differs from a quantitative study as the findings depend notably on researcher's interpretation (Eskola & Suoranta 2000, 211). The biggest critique that qualitative research gets is the effect that a researcher has on the data. A researcher can have influence in the research situation (Bogdan & Taylor 1949, 13). Because of the possibility of researcher's unique interpretation of data, the explanatory nature of presenting the findings is highly important in a qualitative study. This will create transparency over the analysis. This will increase the reliability as the reader can also process the data as it is (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008).

The author of this study has got familiar with the techniques Bogdan and Taylor (1949) present in their literature to affect as little as possible to the research findings as a researcher. The findings in this study are written in way where the actual finding is explained first and then the interpretation is made, so that the reader will understand the link between the data and the interpretation from the data.

The pictures used in the study will be from people who create content as their occupation. The pictures are quality content what it comes to for example photo quality and probably the picture set up is consciously chosen in each one. This might affect on the findings as the people in the photos might be seen more talented or create some kind on halo-effect (5.2.1.) as the content is probably assumed to be taken and design by the person in the picture. This is how it usually is on Instagram as the posts are often designed by the page owner. The approach to use content creators is still chosen to increase the comparability between the pictures.

9. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

This chapter will cover the empirical results of this study. The data gathered through the interviews will be presented and analysed using the analysis structure that was presented in the chapter 8.4.

9.1. Summary of the results

The structure of this chapter is explained in the table 5. First, we will go through the answers one picture at a time. The next analysis is one influencer at a time and the third part of the analysis is one physical trait, expression, at a time. The actual findings and conclusions made will be presented in chapter 10. and 10.1.

9.1.1. Analysis based on photos

Photos A, E and I

The respondent R1, R2 and R3 saw pictures A, E and I. The photo A was smiling photo of Influencer A. All the respondents said that this guy is easy-going. Two of the respondents has a clearly positive image of this person; one said that he seems like he is faking his smile in the photo and seems arrogant. All of the respondent said that they would like to work with this person. Two of them guessed the occupation right.

The photo E is a photo of Influencer B looking into the camera, not smiling. Influencer B has green hair in the photo and the photo has bright colours. Almost all of the respondents said that would like this photo. All of the respondents answered that she would be an entertainer or a make-up artist. All said that she would be good at what she does. Interestingly, everyone answered in some form that they would trust her to teach about how to be brave and trust in themselves.

Photo I is a photo of Influencer C looking fully away from the camera and clearly doing her job as a therapist. All of the respondents guessed what her occupation is. She was described boring and but that she is good at what she does. She was also described kind multiple times. This photo got the lowest average of the

estimated follower amount and the respondents answered shortly when compared to the other photos.

From photos A, E and I that respondents had more to say about A and E and the answers to these photos were more in line with each other. This might be because of the eye contact that the photo I did not have. Also, in A and E the colours more brighter and the photos were more youthful. This can create better identifying to the people and therefore, it was easier to create a mental image by the young respondents.

Photos B, F and G

 R4, R5 and R6 saw the photos B, F and G. The photo B is a photo of Influencer A not looking into the camera and not smiling. He was described shallow and artistic multiple times. All of the respondents would be willing to work with him but did not though that he would be expert on what he does.

The photo F is of Influencer B. She is showing her occupation as an influencer but not smiling and not looking into the camera. Everyone guessed her occupation and described that she would be good at what she does, because she seems different. This photo got the highest estimated number of followers.

The photo G is a smiling photo of Influencer C taken in professional set up. She is looking straight into the camera. None of the respondents would like this photo on Instagram. The young respondents were not too keen on working with Influencer B as she seemed "too brisk" and the photo was not seen as genuine.

The lack of interest towards the photo G is probably caused the fact that respondents do not want to see too serious content on Instagram. They see Instagram as a place of inspiration and where they spend their free time. As soon as more professional, especially professional in an old-fashion way, photo is shown, the respondents say that they would not like the photo or follow the person and describe the person in more negative way. A similar thing happened with photo

C with every respondent. The description of the person could be different if the context would be for example platform like LinkedIn, where people are prepared to see more professional and work-related content. This is a good reminder that the mental image is unconscious and therefore every factor, like the context, affects it strongly. Photo G and photo C are from similar Influencer, so this might also mean that the brand is just something they do not favour.

Photos C, D and H

R7, R8 and R9 saw photos C, D and H. The photo C is a professional(modelling) photo of Influencer A. He is not looking to the camera but he is smiling. All the respondents guessed his occupation. The answers were contradictory as there was thought on the photo being professional and therefore nice, and also it was seen as fake and too staged.

Photo D was a photo of Influencer B smiling, not looking to the camera with a nature background. All, the respondents would like this photo and she was described as bubbly and kind. The occupation was not guessed. The nature-like background affected on one of the respondent's answers as he stated he has a feeling that the Influencer works with animals. After saying that the respondent said that the background probably created that mental image.

The photo H is a non-smiling photo of Influencer C, not looking to the camera. She was described negatively. Her occupation was not guessed. She was guessed to be a student or an environmental activist. Even though she was described a bit negatively, she was still seen as good at what she does.

The photo C's responses were a good exhibit on how visual communication is always understood through observers own experiences, interests and lifestyle. Other respondent said that they like the photo and think the person is professional because the photo was clearly set up and the influencer had put a lot of thought on the scenery and his position. Another respondent said that they do not like the

photo and think that the influencer is not good at what he does because the set up was so clearly "fake" and the whole person seemed ingratiating because of that.

9.1.2. Analysis based on brands

Influencer A's (photos A, B and C) occupation was guessed the most times. He was described on a positive note as easy-going, open-minded and artistic multiple times. On the other hand, the words like arrogant, shallow and staged was included many times. All, except one of the respondents wanted to work with Influencer A. The photo where he smiled and looked into the camera got the most positive descriptions, but in that photo he was described not as professionally successful as in the other photos.

Influencer B got the highest number of estimated followers throughout the interviews. She was not particularly guessed to be an influencer in every photo, but she was guessed to be an entertainer or a make-up artist in most, which are part of her job as an influencer and part of her brand. She was seen brave and the style of hers was continuously admired even if it was not particularly the respondents' favoured style. She was also described multiple times as loud, not approachable and even as a diva. Throughout the interviews the respondents said that they would trust her with creativity, to help them gain confidence and to find their own style.

Influencer C was often seen as the most professional one but with that said she was described as boring and close-minded. She was also described multiple times as confident and goal oriented. Respondents were not so keen on working with her, but she was trusted with help in their career, discipline and grammar. She was guessed to be a real-estate agent, politician or a therapist. The higher educated respondents also guessed her to be an activist or an artist multiple times. This separation in answers between lower and higher educated respondents was interesting and suggests that the stereotypes of certain occupation groups differ within education levels.

It is vital to understand the overall picture the respondents made of the personal brands, so that these images can be used to accurately analyse the changes the expressions make. Therefore, this chapter of the analysis is important to keep in mind when moving to the stage three of the analysis.

9.1.3. Analysis based on expressions

In the photos A, C, D and G the influencers smiled. The smile did not affect in any specific way to the like and follow decisions. Most of the respondents were willing to work with the influencers after they saw a photo of them smiling. The most interesting finding from the photo with a smile, that differed from other photos was that every respondent answered that they think the person is good at their job but not an expert. So, they were not seen as superior in what they do, even though they guessed different occupations and saw different people. Like said this was seen on each of the respondents with no exceptions. This tells that smile can communicate that the person is nice and co-operative but probably people see seriousness as part of professionalism and are used to see experts in serious photos. Therefore, the smiling photos are not linked to being an expert in their field.

In B, E, F, H and I the influencers were serious. When looking at the answers to these photos it is difficult to find straight similarities. The answers where shorter, so maybe it is more difficult to describe a person that does not have a clear expression on their face. The combination photos' analysis might tell more about this. It seems like the photos that a person looks away and does not smile, creates the most negative image.

The photos with the influencer looking into the camera and looking away had some differences. It is clear that respondents had more to say about the photos where there was eye contact. Many of the respondents had difficulties to come up with personality traits in the case of the photos where the influencer looked away. When there was eye contact, it seemed like there was an instant story in their mind. We can see that it is easier for an observer to create an impression and a clear thin-slice judgement when there is an eye contact to the camera.

The photos with visible occupation, such as the influencer doing modelling, brand collaboration or the influencer C doing a therapy session were an interesting add to these other traits. It is clear that observers noticed the occupation from the photo. They were described more confident and experienced in these photos. What it comes to description of personality, these photos got more negative comments. The question about the influencer being an expert of their field did not get different answers from other type of photos which was surprising.

9.2. Conclusions

The main perception of this study is that static images do create strong first impressions. From the perceptions done in previous chapter, in the limits of this sampling size we can also conclude that traits do make a difference in how the thin-slice judgement is done by the observer and how the brand image forms. This highlights the importance of creating the right content to online platforms as the content does clearly affect on the personal brand image formation.

 It was also noticed that people create a stronger and easier-to-explain image when there is eye contact with the camera even though it did not affect negatively or positively to the formed image. This image was just stronger. This might be because of the observer can see the person's face fully and therefore the brain can make its unconscious decisions based on facial features (chapter 4.3.), or that the eye contact and eyes speak to the observer in itself.

Smiling had the biggest difference on the answers given in regards to the interest to the person. The photos where the influencers smiled got better rating with more positive words. The respondents also answered that they want to work with a person more in the case of a smiling photo.

Smiling photos: "Would you want to work with this person?

■ No   ■ Yes

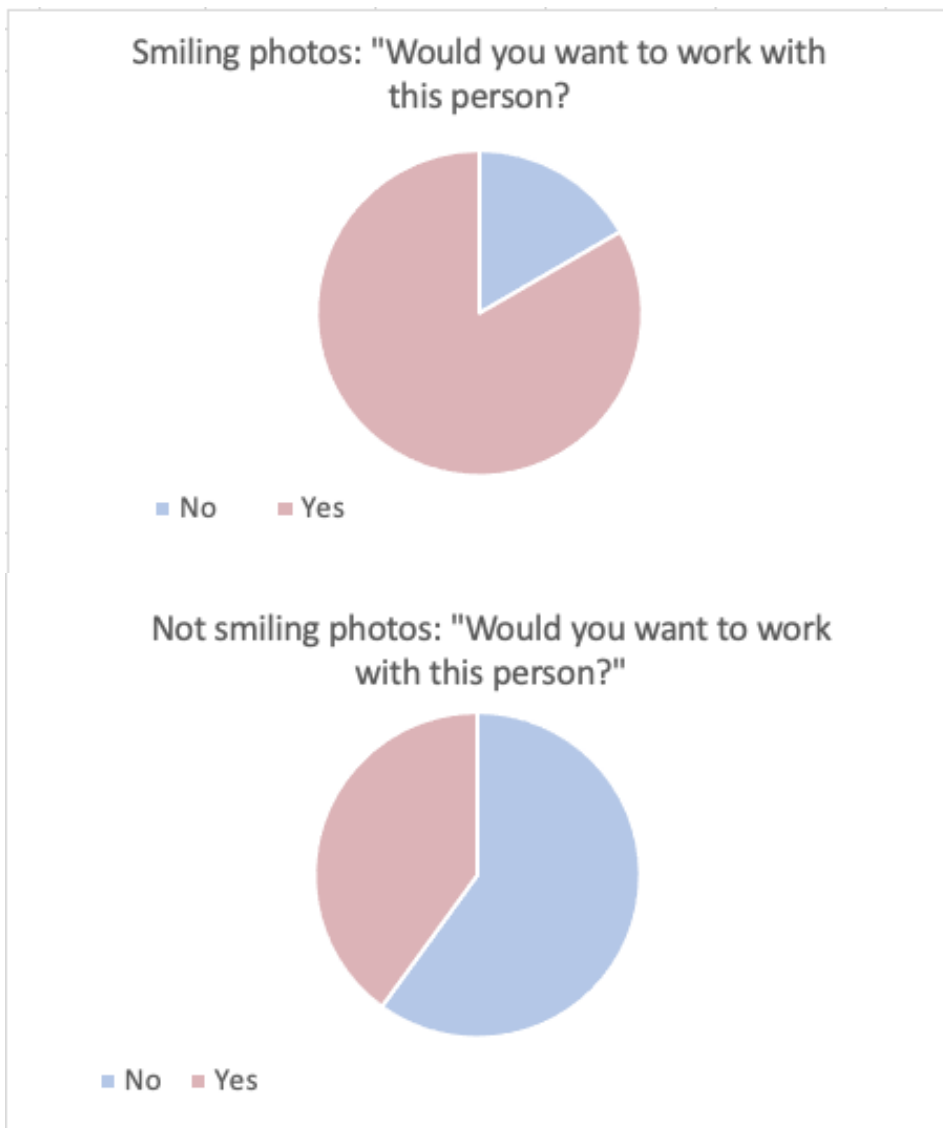**Not smiling photos: "Would you want to work with this person?"**

■ No   ■ Yes

Figure 3. "Would you want to work with this person?"/ Smiling vs. Not smiling

These figures show that a smiling photo will create more interest in working with the person. We can conclude that a person should use photo where they smile for example on their resume or in platforms where they are specifically looking to find new people to work with. Still, as mentioned in the previous chapter smiling in a photo did not create specifically a professional image of the person in the photo.

What it comes to behaviour on Instagram, the traits did not affect on the like and follow decisions. Probably the decisions of these engagement types are done mostly on the photo aesthetics, influencers' style and relatability of the person in the photo as the respondents engaged most with the photos with bright colours and strong looks, such as the influencer B had in all of her photos. This was also seen on the Influencer A's photos where the colours were brighter, and the style was noticeably trendy (pictures A and C). If the analysis is taken further we could say that the respondents did not make their like and follow decisions based on if they favoured the person, but if they admired their look. This can explain engagement behaviour on social media. Though, this is not fully proven by this study.

This study proves that observers create strong impressions of people through static images, which is as far as the academic analysis of the actual impressions can be taken within this research. It is impossible to analyse if impression is accurate or not as it is just one impression against another. Therefore, the next perceptions are done to describe the phenomenon and not presented as a finding of this study.

The author has not met the influencers personally but according to author's image from the wide range of influencers' content, also with verbal communication, the impressions the respondents made are quite accurate, except in the case of influencer C's personality, which was constantly described as displeasing and stiff based on the static images. The impressions of the respondents were very strong and exaggerated. This could be caused by the idea that the first impressions done by observers were probably done by generalizing the person in the photo to be in line with some stereotypical type of people and the stereotype was matched by the looks in the photo. This is something that is natural to the human mind.

10. FINDINGS

In this chapter we will go through the findings with the set research questions as this study does find answers to the set research questions. First, we will go through RQ2 and RQ3 and then move to the RQ1 which concludes the findings of this study: *How does a thin-slice judgement of a person form from a static image and what details affect on the image formation?*

RQ2: Can facial expressions and traits in static photos be counted as impression management techniques?

This study finds that traits such as smiling in a static image does affect on the first impression of a person. Therefore, based on this study and acknowledging the sampling size, it can be said that a person can control their personal brand through static images in some ways. A person will be seen in a more positive light when they smile in a photo and the respondents were more willing to work with the people who smiled in the photos. Therefore, smiling could be said to be an assertive impression management technique in online impression management.

We must still acknowledge the fact that the smile does not cover or erase the personal brand and the general attitudes a person conveys through static images. In every photo with certain influencers we can see similarities in answers of personality whether there was a smile or not smile. The smile only highlights the better qualities. Chapter 4 explained the theory of assertive and defensive impression management techniques. Like stated, we can say that smiling in photos is a way of practising assertive impression management through photos. Assertive techniques must be thought and chosen by the goals of a personal brand and like mentioned in the earlier chapter, smile did not increase the professional authority of a person.

RQ3: What traits in a static image create interest towards a personal brand in an online environment?

The traits did not clearly affect on the online engagement (like and follow) which can mean that traits in themselves do not create interest towards a personal brand in an online environment. The perception of engagement decisions not being linked to the traits, might mean that the impression of a person's personality does not effect on the engagement decision. The study suggest that photo aesthetics and influencer's style has a bigger impact on the engagement decision.

RQ1: How does a thin-slice judgement of a person form from a static image and what details affect on the image formation?

This research proves that observers create strong impressions of people through static images. Another finding is that an eye contact with the camera allows the observer to create a stronger first impression of the photo but does not clearly affect on the type of impression made. The hypothesis done in the beginning of this study is right as the traits in the photos do affect on the impression. The later part of the hypothesis, where it was stated that a visible occupation would affect positively on the personal brand in a professional matter is not supported by this study. The author suggests that the study did not fully examine this as the sampling was so small on this part of the hypothesis so the research on this was not effective.

10.1. Theoretical contributions

The goal of this study was to explore the image formation of personal brand through static images with the nature of fast paced online environment. Therefore, the goal was to find characteristics that affect on the image formation during the thin-slice judgement or in other words during the attention span an observer has. This study, with its explorative nature helps to find paths for future research.

This study creates new contributions to the research of personal branding and personal brand image formation online. This study is supporting and adding

certainty to the academic literature, such as Walker Naylor 2007, that prove static images create strong first impressions. Although, this study suggests that specific traits or expressions do not create interest (engagement) towards a personal brand online, it was noticed that style and aesthetics might be more effective way of creating interest through static images.

This study suggests that a person can control their personal brand image by traits in photos. In the theoretical framework, Tedeschi & Melburg's (1984) division of impression management techniques to assertive and defensive was presented. This study suggests that smiling in photos can be used as an assertive impression management technique in static images. Smile in photos highlighted positive feeling towards a brand in this research.

This study also suggests that a personal brand can be managed like a product-based brand can with some modifications. There are clear attitudes towards a personal brand that form through the observer's experiences and interests. A personal brand can be managed and measured. Figure 2 in chapter 3.1. is a new way of presenting the management process of a personal brand as it joins Keller's (2013) brand model with Rangarajan, Gelb and Vandaveer's (2017) newer research. This figure is one of the theoretical contributions of this paper and can be used as a tool when managing a personal brand.

This study highlights also the importance of the future study on this topic as so many answers were found with even a small sampling. As stated in the earlier parts of this paper, the personal branding literature lacks academic research as it is focused to self-help literature. It is important to understand the dynamics behind the engagement and image formation within personal branding as there is so many opportunities to influence through personal brands.

10.2. Managerial contributions

This study discovers multiple useful factors that influencers and other people with interest in their personal brand management in an online environment can use to

create a better and more controlled personal brand. This study shows how effective managing the brand through static images can be as the similar reactions were seen multiple times during the interviews. Therefore, these factors should be taken into consideration by everyone managing a personal brand.

This study discovered that a clear mental image of a person is easier to form by an observer if the person looks into the camera in the photo. Like mentioned in the theoretical framework, a clear mental image creates better memorability and recall. If the person wants to be more memorable and recalled more easily, this study suggests that visual content published should include a straight and even intense eye contact to the camera.

This study found that observers are more willing to work with a person who is smiling in a photo they base their impression on. Therefore, this study suggests that a person should smile in a photo, if they are looking for a new job opportunity or for example professional partners. On the other hand, if a person wants to be seen as a professional, an authority, specialist or an expert, the photo should be more serious.

This study suggests that the traits a person has in the photo do not affect on the interest to engage in an online environment by the observer. Therefore, a person who is looking to create a better engagement rate online should focus on aesthetics and style instead of physical traits in photos.

10.3. Limitations and recommendations for future research

This study is meant to be explorative research to a new topic. Therefore, the research questions are wide and the sampling was small so that the qualitative data is manageable. For the same reason the study was done in a qualitative matter – to understand more of the new phenomenon. These factors do limit the findings and their reliability.

The study is limited as the respondents were all Finnish and 20-30-year-olds. If the phenomenon would be examined more from a psychological point of view, the research should be done with all age groups and different ethnicities. Now, the study was focused more on the brand consumer side as 20-30-year-olds are active Instagram users. This research guidelines personal branding management in Finland as the formed attitudes could be different in different areas of the world.

This topic should be researched with multiple new researches with a focus on smaller factors, such as one physical trait at a time and with a bigger sampling, possibly in a quantitative matter. All the findings of this study could be researched in a wider range.

In general, personal branding and personal brand image formation should be researched more in an academic matter as the phenomenon is getting bigger and bigger due to the nature of social media. Topics from personal brand creation to personal brand equity should be examined more.

From the findings of this study we can draw multiple new research questions. It was noticed from the data that people did not do their engagement decisions based on if they favour the person's personality but more if they like the photo aesthetic. This could be researched more with a bigger sampling. Does the first impression have anything to do with engagement rate? This would be highly important information for businesses that are formed around a specific personal brands engagement for example on Instagram.

This study found that eye contact with the camera creates a clearer mental image of the person. This is also something to examine more. This study found that it did not affect on the mental image positively or negatively, it just made the image clearer. This could be possibly proven with a bigger sampling. Also, the correlation with memorability and recall and eye contact to the camera could be examined more even though some statements were already made in this study. This would be important for example to politicians or people that need to get memorability fast, for example with election or other marketing campaigns.

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Would you like this photo (on Instagram)?

Would you follow this person?

What kind of person do you think she/he is?
Why?

Tell me about this person's personality more.

What do you think this person's occupation is?
Why?

Do you think she/he is good at what she/he does?
Why?

Do you think she/he is expert at what she/he does?

Would you want to work with this person?
Why?

In what do you think you could trust this person?
Why?

How many followers do you think this person has?

APPENDIX 2: THE MATERIAL USED IN INTERVIEWS

Picture A / smile and looks into the camera

Picture B / serious, looks away

Picture C / smile, looks away and visible occupation*

(*visible occupation means the core of professional personal brand. In this case influencer/model)

Picture D/ smile, looks away

Picture E / serious, looks into the camera

Picture F / serious, looks away and visible occupation (Influencer)

Picture G / smile, looks into the camera

Picture H / serious, looks away

Picture I / looks away, no smile and visible occupation (Therapist)