School of Business and Management

Master's in International marketing management

Master's thesis

The role of personal branding in real estate business

Toni Räsänen, 2019

1st examiner: Professor Sanna-Katriina Asikainen

2nd examiner: Associate professor Joona Keränen

Abstract

Personal branding is gaining ground as a serious marketing tool for individuals. This relatively new marketing trend is emerging among students and individual professionals to achieve more favorable repercussions from own actions. This thesis aims to investigate how individual professionals understand the role of personal branding in their profession and how do they utilize this marketing tool to their advantage. This study concentrates specifically on the profession of real estate agents as the industry is experiencing major changes due to digitalization of services. The real estate market is also known for fierce competition and turbulent environment where uncertainty and professionalism prevail.

This study is supported with previous studies and academic literature on branding, personal branding, expertise branding and branding in real estate industry. The qualitative research includes interviews of four different real estate agents from three different real estate agencies. This study discovers the knowledge and exploitation of personal branding in the Finnish real estate industry. Personal branding is acknowledged as a vital part of modern real estate agent profession but the knowledge on how to harness it for maximum benefits is yet unknown.

Tiivistelmä

Tekijä:	Räsänen, Toni Valtteri
Tutkielman otsikko:	Henkilöbrändäyksen rooli kiinteistönvälityksessä
Tiedekunta:	Kauppatieteellinen tiedekunta
Pääaine:	International Marketing Management
Vuosi:	2019
Pro-Gradu tutkielma:	Lappeenrannan teknillinen yliopisto. 66 sivua, 12 kuvaajaa, 1 taulukko ja 1 liite
Tarkastajat:	Professori Joona Keränen
Hakusanat:	Henkilöbrändi, brändi, asiantuntijabrändi, online henkilöbrändi, brändi kiinteistönvälityksessä, kiinteistönvälittäjä

Henkilöbrändin merkitys uskottavana markkinointityökaluna on kasvussa. Tätä suhteellisen uutta markkinoinnin suuntausta voidaan nähdä erityisesti opiskelijoiden ja yksittäisten ammattilaisten käytössä. Henkilöbrändäyksellä tavoitellaan henkilökohtaista hyötyä tuomalla omaa toimintaa esiin. Tämä tutkielma pyrkii selvittämään miten yksittäiset ammattilaiset ymmärtävät henkilöbrändäyksen roolin työssään ja kuinka he hyödyntävät sitä. Tutkielma keskittyy kiinteistönvälittäjiin. Ala käy läpi muutosta palveluiden digitalisaation myötä ja ala on tunnettu myös kovasta kilpailusta ja turbulenttisista olosuhteista, jossa epävarmuus ja ammattilaisuus ovat hallitsevia elementtejä.

Tutkielman tukena käytetään aiempia tutkimuksia sekä kirjallisuutta liittyen brändiin, henkilöbrändäykseen, asiantuntijabrändäykseen ja brändäykseen kiinteistönvälitysalalla. Työn sisältämä laadullinen tutkimus on toteutettu haastattelemalla neljää kiinteistönvälittäjää kolmesta eri yrityksestä. Tutkielma osoittaa suomalaisten kiinteistönvälittäjien henkilöbrändäysosaamisen tason. Henkilöbrändäys nähdään oleellisena osana nykyaikaista kiinteistönvälittäjän työtä, mutta sitä ei osata hyödyntää eikä johtaa tehokkaasti.

Acknowledgements

This masters' thesis was one of the most memorable projects during my studies in Lappeenranta University of Technology. In total, this thesis took me three and a half years to accomplish as the process included switching topic twice and working in two different jobs. This process provoked a lot of good-natured mockery from my friends throughout the years and sadly we now have to find new topics to discuss and make fun of.

My studies in LUT are now coming to an end. I am grateful for these magnificent years filled with joy, new friends and experiences. I want to thank my supervisor Joona Keränen for his flexibility working with me on this thesis. I also want to express my gratitude to all professors and staff for their excellent and professional work.

But most of all hats off to my family, friends and loved ones. Without the patience and trust from my whole family, this master's thesis would have never seen the light of day. Thank you.

Toni Räsänen

Lappeenranta, December 5, 2019

List of figures

List of tables

Table of Contents

1 Introduction

This chapter is an introduction to the subjects of this master's thesis. First section concentrates on the background of the chosen topic and choices leading to it. After this follows the literature review where the past and present research is brought to discussion. Rest of the introduction chapter is about the thesis' methodology, research problems and theoretical framework sections followed by delimitations and definitions of the key concepts.

1.1 Background of the thesis

This study is relevant as companies' success relies on how its' employees generate, provide and capture value for the customers. The poor regulation and questionable practices leading to the crash of the housing market in 2008 still affects the whole real estate industry. (Cherif & Grant, 2014) The negative image effects have been hard to shake off and now the market is changing rapidly with the independent do-it-yourself websites. These websites make it possible for individual homeowners to create marketing materials themselves and sell their houses on their own. This is a threat to traditional real estate professionals (Richardson & Zumbano, 2012; Gay & Zhang, 2014).

The digitalized world has created pressure on real estate professionals to stand out from the crowd as the competition is fiercer. To match the increasing competition, traditional real estate professionals must also build and maintain an online brand presence in order to survive (Yuan, Lee, Kim & Kim, 2013). In addition to Internet threats, the pressure has increased the use of discount brokers and split commissions (Rutherford & Yavas, 2012). The home buyers today want quick access to information that supports their decision-making process. In order to answer to this demand, Gay et al. (2014) argue that professionals like real estate agents must improve their status as an expert in their field. This can only be achieved by effectively disseminating information to the clients.

Professional and individual personal branding is becoming a more common notion in today's societies. The phenomenon is emerging in various stages of life. Hood, Robles & Hopkins (2014) have found that students use personal branding to capture the attention

of potential employers and vice versa, employers could receive extraordinary number of new applicants with internal personal branding (Martin, 2009). In social life and for career advancement, personal branding is used to build stronger networks and create a flow of new opportunities. Personal branding is a necessity in todays' global economies. (Kang, 2013)

There is abundant research on how large companies can identify and target their chosen customer segment. Arndt, Harrison, Lane, Seiler & Seiler (2017) point out that so far, the literature lacks comprehensive guidelines for individual real estate agents to accomplish this similar task. In Finland, the concept of personal branding is still unclear for many professionals (Kurvinen, Laine & Tolvanen 2017, 13).

Research problem and questions

Derived from the literature review, the research gap exists in the lack of conducted studies on emerging personal branding of individual real estate professionals. In order to figure out the role of personal branding for real estate agents, the main research question is described as:

> *RQ1:*
> Why real estate agents use personal branding?

The supportive sub-questions are:

> *SQ1:*
> How do the real estate agents brand themselves?
> *SQ2:*
> What are the benefits of a personal brand to a real estate agent?

1.2 Literature review

For this study I have chosen to use articles from respected and reliable academic databases such as ProQuest, EBSCO, Emerald Insight, ABI/Inform Trade&Industry and Google Scholar. The books used in this study are either directly or closely related to the topic.

In the early 2000's Miles & Mangold (2005) and Martin (2009) have studied personal branding from the perspective of companies. Abimbola (2001) studied brands and branding especially from the perspective of SME's and how they build a strong brand to gain competitive advantage. This decade the perspective of personal branding shifted more towards employee personal branding and the benefits of it to both companies and employees (Karaduman, 2013, Vosloban, 2014 and Vallas & Cummins, 2015). Harris & Rae (2011) have contributed strongly to the demand of self-promotion in both personal and work life. The subject has been researched also in the non-profit organizations as Nolan (2015) studied the impact of executive personal branding to perceptions and communication of non-profit organizations. Castaldi & Giarratana (2018) studied how diversification by branding enhanced the performance of professional service firms.

Personal branding is not a widely studied concept from an occupational point of view. Gall (2010) studied the subject from the perspective of librarians and personal branding of students was studied by Wetsch (2012) and Stanton & Stanton (2013). Arruda & Dixson (2007, 7) opened the discussion on the benefits of personal branding in job markets in order to stand out from the competition. Several scholars (Amoako & Okpattah, 2018; Kleppinger & Cain, 2015; Khedher, M, 2014;) emphasize the importance of branding oneself in advance to stand out for employers and thus maximizing the possibilities of career success. Among others, Luca, Ioan & Sasu (2015) studied personal branding in the later career stage and proved that professional personal brands matter. They found out that doctors who actively promoted their expertise received more patients and trust than their colleagues did (Luca, Ioan, Sasu, 2015).

Hood, et al. (2014), Atwong (2015) and Lee & Cavanaugh (2016) continued on students as they studied students' effectiveness to get a job using personal branding skills. In 2015 focus of studies was on occupations traditionally known for high level of expertise as Luca et al. studied the importance of doctors' personal brands and Molyneyx concentrated on journalists. One of the latest studies on occupational personal branding is by Chen & Chung (2017) as they studied how the personal brand of CEO's is measured. In 2011, Labrecque, L., Markos, E. & Milne, G took personal branding discussion from offline context to online context. Karaduman (2013) continued where Labrecque et al. (2011)

finished their research and dug deeper as he studied the online personal branding of top-level executives in order to understand how modern leadership is changing. The process itself on how to build a personal brand is studied by Rampersad (2008) and Gall (2010) among others.

This research paper focuses on one specific occupational group – real estate agents. From an industry perspective, Gay et al. (2014) studied the effect of individual professionals' expertise in real estate business. Personal appearance is part of a personal brand. Salter, Mixon & King (2012) took a more superficial approach to the personal branding of real estate agents. They studied the physical attractiveness of a real estate agent and how it affects their wages. Amoako et al. (2018 in turn studied professional personal branding of sales force with a deeper agenda. Their research showed that building a personal brand is vital especially for salespeople such as real estate agents whose success depends highly on trust. Sharma, Tzokas, Saren & Kyziridis (1999, 603) found out that the personal brand of a salesperson affects directly the brand of the company the salesperson is working for as they usually are the first point-of-contact with the customers.

Social media has been a strong facilitator of personal branding in online context. So far, the phenomenon has been studied in the most commonly used social media channels like Facebook (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011), YouTube (Chen, 2013) and LinkedIn (Crant, 2014). Karaduman (2013) studied how employee personal branding in social media could benefit the company they work for. Overall benefits of personal branding in social media has been studied by Wetsch (2012). Opposite perspective is offered by Labrecque et al. (2011), Marwick & Boyd (2011) and Ward (2013) as they studied the negative effects of personal branding in social media.

1.3 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study concentrates on the concepts of branding and personal branding. Quick reviews on expert branding and personal branding as a competitive edge is conducted as well as short description of online and offline personal branding. These theoretical concepts are applied further in the context of real estate business. The personal branding efforts of individual real estate agents provide the contextual framework for this study. The complete theoretical framework is illustrated below in Figure 1.

Personal branding of real estate agents

Brand

Personal branding

Expert branding

Real estate context
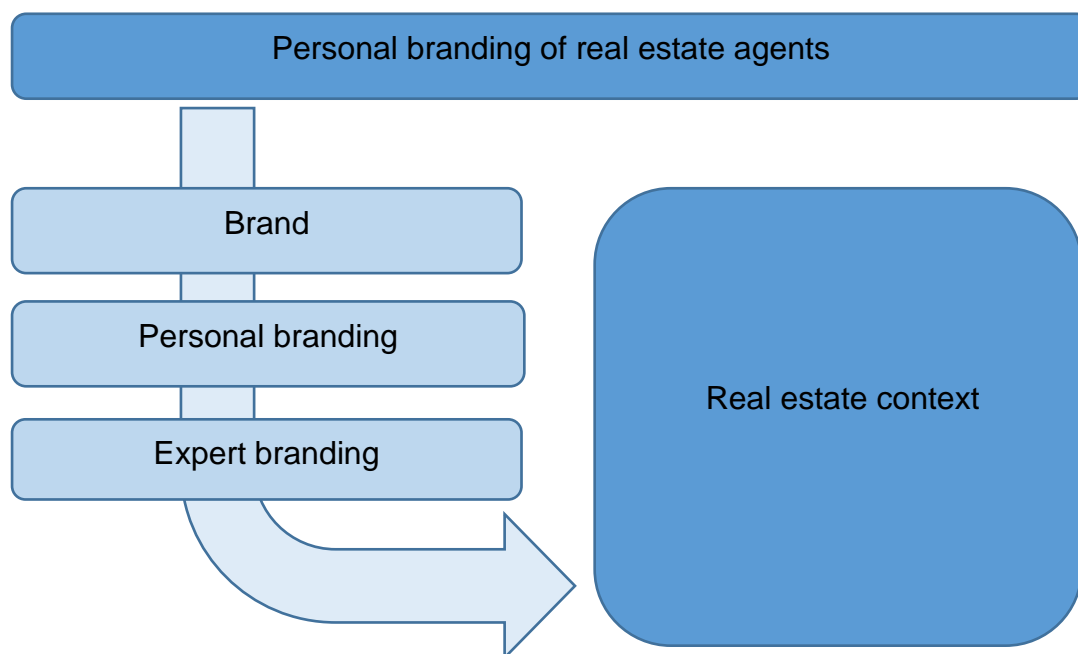
Figure 1. Theoretical framework

1.4 Definitions and delimitations

In order to clarify the conceptual framework used in this study, this section explains briefly the terminology used in this study. The main two concepts are brand and personal branding. Especially the term brand has been given several alternative explanations during its 30-year status as a popular topic. The researcher has chosen to use relatively new and most suitable explanation for this study.

Brand:

Brand has several different definitions subject to topic and research. In this study a brand is defined by Maurya, U. and Mishra, P. (2012). It is the end-product of company's strategies to create unity and fellowship in order to stand out from the competition. In legal terms, brand is the trademark of a company. Brand is a distinguishable name, symbol or packaging (Ghodeswar, 2008). A brand encompasses both intangible and tangible features like physical product and a certain way of customer service (Veloutsou, C. and Taylor, C. 2012).

Personal brand:

The ability of a person to imitate product branding. Instead of products, a person arranges, labels and makes his or her own skill set crystal clear for an audience in a crowded communications environment. Personal branding entails the individual's ability to become a thought leader for this audience and by doing so enhance one self's business or other relationships. (Lair, D., Sullivan, K., Cheney, G., 2005; Bliss, 2005; Khedher, 2014).

Delimitations

This study concentrates on personal branding in a specific area and in a specific profession. The chosen methods and data drawn from the empirical study provide rich insight of the individuals involved in this study. Yet, the empirical findings reflect on individual opinions and cannot be generalized. Therefore, the results of this study are not necessarily applicable to other geographical regions and professions.

1.5 Research methodology

This study consists of two main parts, theoretical and empirical. The theoretical part is based on a review of literature about brands, branding, and personal branding followed by a chapter linking them to the real estate markets. With the help of theoretical part it is more effortless to understand the subject.

This study has a strong focus on the personal experiences and knowledge of individual professionals. The aim is to get a deeper understanding what are the drivers for these individuals in terms of personal branding. Deeper understanding is commonly reached

with open ended questions such as questions starting with "how", "why" and "what". To achieve this, the researcher must discover other peoples' personal opinions by getting them to speak their minds, describe and explain the findings. Most suitable way for gathering this kind of data is to use qualitative methods. (Gordon & Langmaid, 1993, 6; Gibss, 2007, 94)

According to Metsämuuronen (2005, 198; 222) a qualitative research includes methods like interviews and using literature review. Both are essential methods in this study. The interviews carried out for the empirical part in this study are done using in-depth semi-structured interviews. This form of interview follows a pre-determined pattern but allows the interview discussion flow freely remaining in the control of the interviewer. This will lead to obtaining insightful and rich data from the interviewee. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 1991, 38) Hence, the chosen interview method suits well for the purposes of this study.

1.6   Structure of the thesis

The study begins with a theoretical section discussing the literature closely related to the topic. Literature review provides an intro to the previously done research around the main concepts of this study.

The second chapter introduces overall theories of branding and specifically personal branding. The chapter addresses the framework of brands which is followed by an in-depth overview on personal branding. The overview includes personal brand building process, how personal brands formulate, what are the phases of personal branding and the aspects of brand loyalty. As this study focuses on overall personal branding, the chapter includes a separate section for online and offline personal branding theories.

These theories are then applied in the third chapter which discusses these topics from a real estate industry perspective. The reader is first introduced shortly to the real estate brokerage process to understand the nuances of the job and what is required from the real estate agents. Next section constructs the understanding of the brand and branding effect on real estate agencies. This section is followed by the theory behind personal branding in real estate business. These theory sections will help the reader to understand

and follow the empirical research with a more thorough understanding of personal branding from a real estate agent point of view.

The fourth chapter consists of the chosen research methodology for the empirical part of this study. The following section contains the empirical research in which the interviewee backgrounds and results of the interviews are presented. The last section of this study is a summary on all findings from the empirical research. It discusses the contributions of this study for managerial and theoretical use. In addition, the implications for future research are presented and discussed. The chapter ends with the analysis of the limitations of this study.

2 Brand

"A brand is the value of which a customer is willing to pay extra in comparison to a product without a brand. Without a brand, a product is just a commodity and the price of a commodity is set by the market." – Gustav Hafrèn (Laakso, H. 2001, 23)

In 2009, The Economist book of brands and branding predicted that all firms and individuals need to brand themselves to keep up with the digital age or die.

Brands are the end product of firms' strategy to segment the market and to separate itself from the competitors (Maurya, et al. 2012). From manufacturing and product viewpoint, brand is a logo which purpose is to distinct itself from other sellers. More holistic view is that brands provide information about the product, its origin and manufacturer in order to protect both customer and the producer from the competitors. A brand can consist of one item, a whole family of items or all items of a particular seller. In legal terms, brand is called a trademark. (Maurya et al. 2012)

In 2001, Temi Abimbola specified brands to represent the firm's ability and effectiveness to successfully link its internal and external environment.   A brand is "symbolic embodiment of all the information connected to a company, product or service" as Olins (2003) describes it.

Ghodeswar (2008) sees brands as distinguishable names, symbols or packaging. In addition to Ghodeswar, McCartney (2012, 3) discusses brands unique personality as a mean to stand out. This is the main purpose of a brand. To differentiate company's products and or services from its competitors so that the customers can identify the source, features, benefits and quality of a particular product or service (Ghodeswar, 2008). These attributes are the building blocks for the value promise a seller gives to the customer (Lindemann, 2010, 5).

A brand encompasses both tangible and intangible features. Tangibles are more concrete like the materials of the product. Intangibles consist of more abstract components such as corporate culture and customer service (Veloutsou et al. 2012). Accoring to Lindemann (2010, 10) a brands intangible value formulates through company's relationship with the customers whose experiences and communication reinforce the brand image. Maurya et

al. (2012) call this intangible process brands' relationship management which has 80% impact on customer relationships but only 20% of the costs.

Already in 1955, Gardner and Levy saw brands as an attachment of society which evolves with it. In addition to its product associations, a brand is a complex symbol that has developed other more versatile associations over time and therefore has become a public object. The net result is the public image which might be more crucial for the general status and sales of the firm than technical qualities of the product.

Functional attributes of a brand are easy to emulate; therefore, brand needs a personality. American marketing association (AMA, 2017) defines brand personality to be "the psychological nature of a particular brand as intended by its sellers." Though, customers in the marketplace may still see the brand differently. Brand personality consists of unique way of communicating with customers and seller specific packaging (Maurya et al. 2012). Researchers (Alt & Griggs, 1988; Blackston, 1992; Goodyear, 1993) have shown already 30 years ago that people value brand personalities over functionality. Hence, brands appeal today is determined highly by its ability to imitate human personality. Consequently, brand loyalty thrives if a brand can position itself to conform customers' judicious mind. (Karampela, M., Tregear, A., Ansell, J. & Dunnett, S. 2018)

In the very core of a brand is an excellent product or a service, but this is not the essence of the brand. The essence of a brand relies in the value it brings and the problems it solves for the customers (Mäkinen, Kahri, A. & Kahri, T., 2010). A brand is built on emotions, not with facts and figures. These emotions stem from the company's core values and personality (Kurvinen & Seppä 2016, 47-48). Definitions of brands and branding vary but all scholars and business experts seem to agree on the purpose of a brand. The core purpose of a brand is to be different and therefore easier for target audience to find and engage (Lindberg-Repo, 2005, 57-58). The whole concept of a brand is very sensitive to the changes in its environment as Maurya et al. (2012) conclude. It is affected by the culture it exists in, changes in technology, legislation and politics as well as perceptions across the demographics.

Brands exist because of three different reasons. According to Steenkamp (2017), the reasons are as follows:
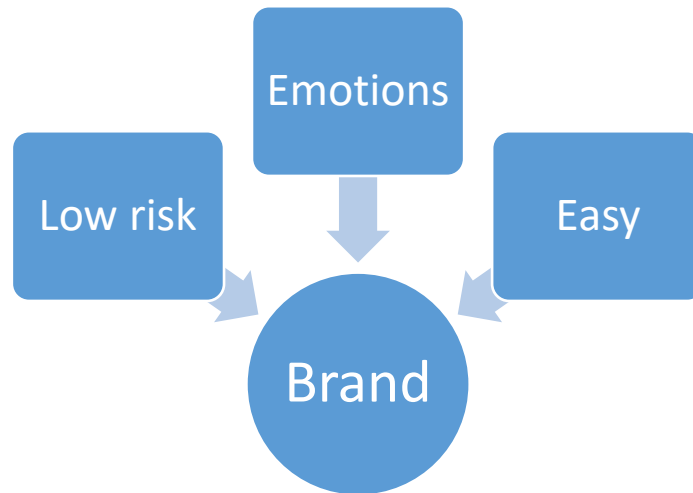
Figure 2. Three reasons why brands exist

Brands purpose is to ease the purchase decision of a customer. The knowledge concerning a familiar brand and its qualities help to make quicker decisions. This is convenient for customers since people usually do not want to invest time to study the features of an unfamiliar product (Brown, 1992). Brands can also act like a contract between the company and the consumer lowering the risk of poor purchase decision. When a customer buys a product of a particular brand, he or she can rely on the quality the brand promise withholds.

Third and probably, the most important reason in todays' price-war driven market is that brands fulfill emotional needs. Owning a Harley Davidson could bring out the rebel in you, having a business meeting in Starbucks might make you seem more international and using a specific detergent can make you feel a better caretaker for your family. Customers want to be part of something bigger than themselves and they seek sincere brands as a mean to fulfill this need. Therefore, todays' branding is all about share-of-heart. (Steenkamp, 2017, 6-9; Min, E.K, 2012) Sounio (2010, 24) emphasizes the importance of a soul in branding. Brands should also have a heart in the process, not just targeting the hearts of customers. Aforementioned emotional needs have a hierarchy as depicted below.
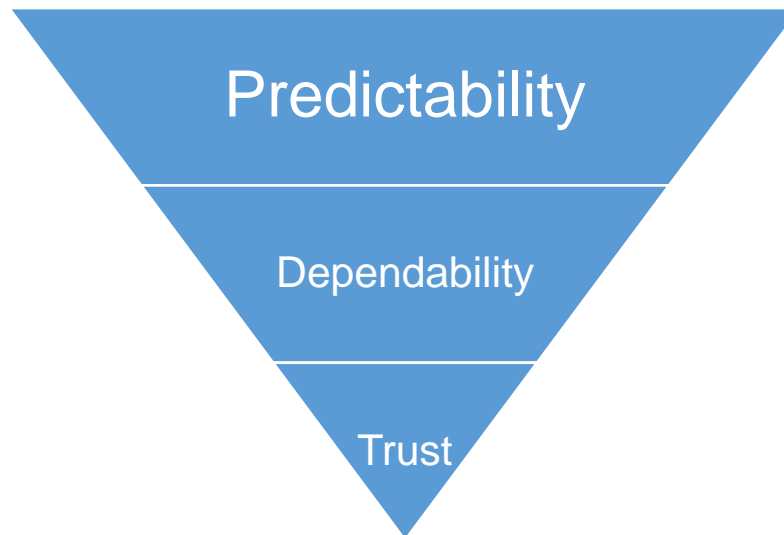
Figure 3. Emotional hierarchy

The least emotional part of the hierarchy is predictability where customers buying habits consist of consistency and knowledge about the product. Second stage is dependability where risk averse buying behavior occurs. Last stage is getting the customers to trust the brand, and this requires real emotional investment from the customers. (Musetescu & Chira, 2015). However, emotions are highly individual and therefore very hard to control by the brand owner (McCartney, 2012, 3).

From a pure business perspective, brands exist to help companies grow profitably. Especially in markets involving high level of competition, a strong brand can generate long-term relationships with customers (Ahto, O., Kahri, A., Kahri,T., & Mäkinen, M. 2016, 32). A strong brand consists of awareness, associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty (Aaker, 1992). These attributes can be achieved with ten building blocks for a strong brand by Aaker (1995).
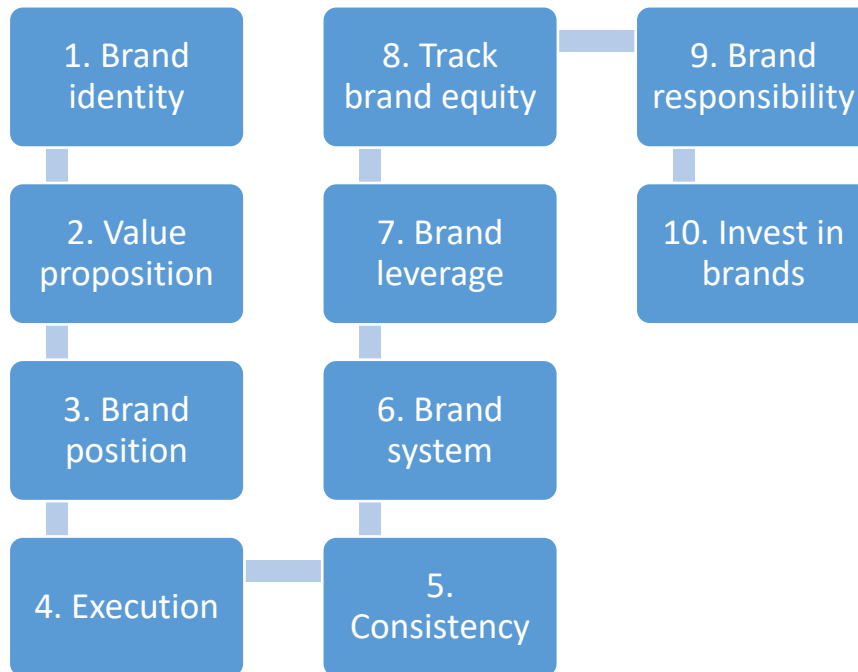
Figure 4.Ten guidelines for a strong brand

First of all, the brand identity must be identified clearly. Each brand should have its own identity. To identify the core identity, the brand should be considered from four perspectives; brand-as-person, brand-as-organization, brand-as-symbol and brand-as-product. The identity allows to be modified accordingly for different segments and markets. As Aaker (1995) said, the image is how the brand is perceived and identity is how you strive to be perceived. Second block withholds all the emotional, symbolic and functional benefits of the brand that create value for the customers. The third block, brand positioning is vital part of brand identity and therefore must be clear and constantly communicated.

Fourth block represents the well-defined communication methods of the brand identity and positioning. Execution must be on target with the attributes and strive for excellence even outside media channels. Consistency over time is important. A brand should keep using same or similar symbols, imagery and slogans that are proven to work. Any unnecessary change should be resisted. Consistency is also a key factor in the brand system block. In a brand system, the strategic qualities of the brands are exploited and reinforced with sub-brands. The seventh guideline for a strong brand addresses leveraging the brand. Brands gain leverage by brand extensions and co-branding

programs. It is common that brand extensions create new brand identities which also need to be attended appropriately.

Tracking the brand equity will help the brand to stay on track. Brand awareness, brand loyalty and especially brand associations are great ways to track the brand success. Tracking the brand helps to highlight areas where the brand identity, positioning and set communication objectives do not meet and require action. The final two guidelines point out that branding is a serious business and it should be managed responsibly by professionals. This in turn means that even though the financial goals are not met, hasty decisions to quit branding do not occur as often. On the contrary, investments in branding should increase.

Aaker's groundwork on brand building and management is supported by Baker, Rapp & Meyer (2014). According to them, the effect of branding and its ability to withstand the turbulence of markets depends on how solid the foundation of the brand is and how it is managed. Brand building entails two aspects. One is focused on external issues like the alignment of employee's behavior to increase customer satisfaction and the other focusing on strategies to implement brand internally.

In order to formulate a strong brand, it is necessary to execute an inclusive analysis of the brand's equity, customer promise and quality (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011). The main benefits of a strong brand for a company are presented by Musetescu et al. (2015). They are shown in figure 3.

Consumer loyalty → Attract new clients → Premium pricing → New market entry → Market barriers
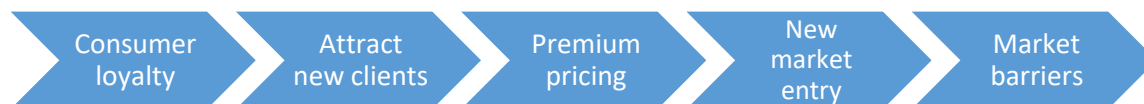
Figure 5. Benefits of a strong brand

A strong brand creates customer loyalty, which is discussed further in the next chapter. It also attracts new customers since it already has established customer base, therefore

lowering the threshold of purchase for new customers. A strong brand also enables premium pricing for companies as people are willing to pay more for value a brand holds (Aaker, 1992). Well-known brand opens more doors to new markets and creates barriers of entry for competitors.

2.1 Branding

Branding comprehends much more than just naming and labeling products or services to signal the outside world that it exists and is owned by a certain organization. Branding transforms the product category and therefore requires corporations' long-term involvement with high level of resources and skills (Maurya et al. 2012).

Unless your business is a monopoly, you need to be branding says von Hertzen (2006, 91). She is also determined that brands are an outcome of long and strategic building by a company in order to compete in a particular market (von Hertzen, 2006, 16). This is challenged by Rainisto & Moilanen (2009) who argue that brands form in the minds of the customers. The image of a brand can be affected with marketing efforts, but brands are born when enough people agree on the perceptions of the brand. Nevertheless, branding is the ultimate objective of marketing. When properly implemented it reciprocates favorable business endeavors. (Eshuis, Klijn & Braun 2012)

Malmelin & Hakala (2007) offer a more pervasive concept of branding in their book "A radical brand". They define modern branding to be a managerial mindset spreading through the whole organization affecting all levels of communication, services and decision-making processes.

Developing a brand identity creates unique companies, gives protection against competition and enables economic growth for the firm (Fomburn, C.J & Shanley, M. 1990). To utilize these benefits, brands need marketing to exist. In order to excel in branding, Stratman (2011) introduces a brand marketing fundamental framework to create distinctive and outstanding value proposition. The framework consists of position, relevance, consistency and support.
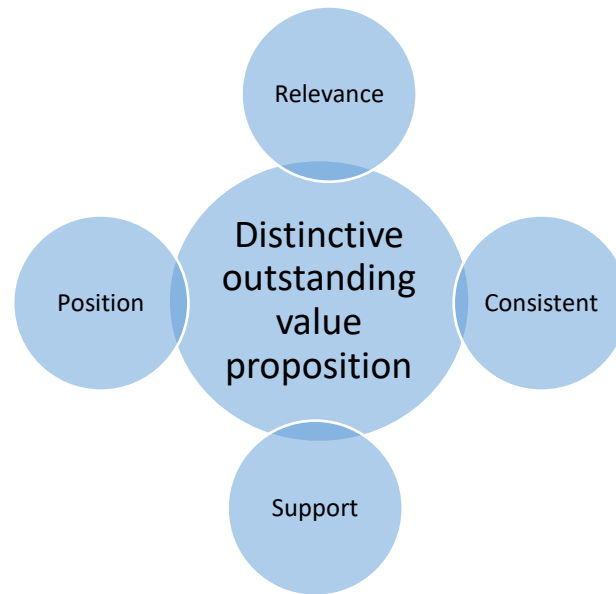
Figure 6. Brand marketing framework

The process starts with positioning the brand in a way that it occupies a unique niche in the target audience minds. The key is to be distinguishable and easily remembered. The marketing efforts of the brand must be relevant for the selected audience, ergo the brand owner must understand its' customers. Irrelevant marketing is often classified not confirming by customers and it may weaken their belief in the product benefit (Meyvis, T. & Janiszewski, C. 2002). Consistency follows successful positioning and relevant marketing efforts. It is the core of brand building because consistency in image, service and ads create long-term associations. To keep the brand alive, it needs constant financial and time-consuming support from the owner. Therefore, brand building calls for a serious passion towards the whole process. (Stratman, T. 2011) In addition, Leek & Chirstodoulides (2011) point out that the effectiveness of branding has great impact on the customer's perception on the differentiation of the brand, knowledge of the brand and confidence towards the brand.

Traditionally branding has been possible for only large companies, celebrities and politicians with sufficient funds and time, but the rise of social media has made branding possible for individuals in a relatively cheap and efficient manner (Karaduman, 2013; Labrecque, L. Markos, E., Milne, G. 2011). Since last decade, conventional marketing

and communication has been increasingly expensive. Hence investing in systematic brand building and - now in the era of social media – personal branding, is the only economically logical option (von Hertzen, 2006, 17).

2.2 Personal branding

"Personal branding is the art of consistently presenting online and offline, the essence of how you stand out from the crowd." – Paul Irish, Google Chrome Advocate (Harper. F, 2015, 5)

"Your brand is a perception or emotion maintained by somebody other than you, that describes the total experience of having a relationship with you" – David McNally & Karl, D. Speak, 2003, 4.

The modern concept of personal branding is relatively new in marketing. It emerged in 1997 when Tom Peters argued in his Fast Company article "You are the brand" that everyone is a brand whether we want it or not. In his article he depicted everyone as a walking brand because of the clothes we choose to wear or coffee mugs we carry with us. Peters (1997) suggested that people should perceive themselves as more than just a set of skills in favor of the employer. Since the early days of personal branding, the concept has been adapted, modified and enriched by other authors with different interpretations of the idea (Rangarajan, D., Gelb, B. & Vandaveer, A. 2017).

After its' introduction, personal branding became a managerial movement due to the ever-increasing complexity and chaotic nature of corporate communication and employment environments (Lair et al. 2005). Although personal branding has gained popularity in business literature during the past two decades (Peters, 1997; McNally et al. 2003; Lair et al. 2005; Harris et al. 2011 and Kleppinger et al. 2015), the idea of personal branding has been around over 80 years. Dale Carnegie (1936) introduced the self-managed self-

help concepts to improve one's position and success among family, friends and co-workers.

A more modern statement is offered by Lair et al. (2005) who argue that the self-improving methods to boost success have developed over time into self-packaging. This means the ability to arrange, crystalize and label, ergo brand one's internal set of skills to stand out from the crowded communication environment. Albeit this kind of self-packaging is nowadays highly recommended tool especially when doing business online, it can easily backfire if not managed properly. Rampersad (2010) warns that excessive use of image building, selling, self-promotion and fame seeking methods may create an egocentric and selfish perception of the person. In plain and simple; personal branding is at its' best, especially online, when the activities of a person transmit others the constantly developing mind- and skillset of that person (Aalto & Uusisaari 2010, 15).

Labrecque et al. (2011) agree with Lair (2005) and argue, "personal branding entails capturing and promoting an individual's strengths and uniqueness to a target audience" – a process similar to product branding. Bliss (2005) defines personal branding as a simple goal – "create a steady stream of original thought leadership that you can disperse to your chosen audience". Another straightforward approach to the topic is that the ultimate purpose of personal branding is to stand out from the crowd for a specific target group to enhance one self's business or other relationships as Khedher (2014) sums it up. Personal branding at best is art where it has a unique influence on the chosen audience. The audiences' perceptions and motivations are affected positively by associations and emotions (Klijn et al. 2012).

Ward and Yates (2013) define personal branding as "impression management". This means that the control of information and impressions formed by other people are consciously steered to serve one's personal or social goals. Impression management is reputation management in which people are more willing to take part in when their behavior is public (Thompson-Whiteside, Turnbull & Howe-Walsh, 2018). In an online context, impression management equals to brand positioning. A certain image is maintained through choices to give out small amounts of personal information in blogs or disclosures on social network sites and platforms. (Labrecque et al. 2011) Controversially

Karaduman (2013) argues that personal branding is something more than just impression management but agrees with Ward and Yates about the intended outcomes of systematic branding of an individual. He also argues that having a brand is not enough. To have a real impact, personal brands need proactive management and constant promotion to the target audience.

It seems that researchers all agree that the selection of a target audience is vital in personal branding. In addition to highly tuned target audience, Bergström & Leppänen (2003, 72) add that one should also focus on the most suitable channels and personal touch of doing things. Wetsch (2012) argue that the start and development of personal brands begin with a positioning pitch. This is drawn from the individuals' knowledge, comprehension and acceptation of particular information. Therefore, these attributes will become the foundation for the individual identity and real image. Saario (2016a) supports Wetschs' (2012) argument by pointing out that the personal touch consists of authenticity and uniqueness of a person. As a combination, these two forms the key to differentiation. Khedher (2015) points out that personal branding is a self-development tool and the copying of such authenticity and uniqueness mentioned by Saario (2016a) will lead to unrealistic and complicated image for the copier. Leland (2016, 4) describes the personal branding process to consist of steady stream of small efforts rather than "gigantic pushes". She also complies with the prevailing opinion that personal branding includes but is not limited in online environment.

The relevance of personal branding has been growing due to the arrival of social media. Wincci & Mohamad (2015) point out that social media has radically changed our way to communicate and it is the most useful tool for branding today. Social media has enabled a cost-effective way for lower level professionals to market their expertise, ergo brand themselves as experts in their field. In addition to the increasing numbers of scientific development around the topic of personal branding, Gayet, Van der Stigchel and Paffen (2014) note that the qualities and essential role of personal branding in business environment is becoming more significant as individual brands result in to endeavors in the business world.

McNally et al. (2003, 13) and Khedher (2014) align with Labrecque et al.(2011) that personal branding is indeed similar to traditional product branding, since the two processes include the same three general phases and take a lot of time, effort and planning according to Ylikoski (1999, 232). Ross (2015, 258) corroborates as he sees successful personal brands entailing same aspects as corporate and product brands. Understanding the audience and knowing your current and potential competition are essential for a remarkable brand.

The three general phases of branding, both personal and product branding, are presented in the figure below.

Establish brand identity → Develop brand positioning → Evaluate brand image
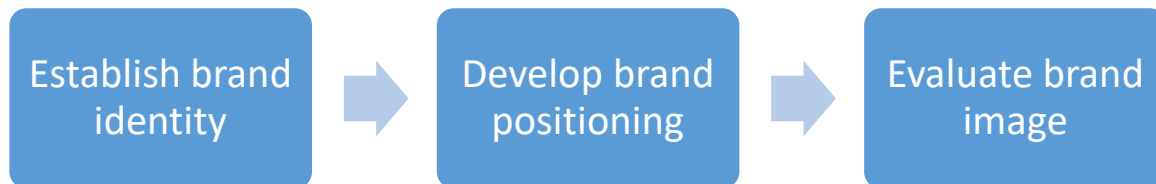
Figure 7. Process for personal and product branding

First block is about setting up the personal or product brand. In this phase, the differentiation and personalized communication strategies form (Khedher, 2014). Second stage is developing the brand positioning. It refers to the active communication efforts of persons or products identity to the specific audience (Labrecque et al., 2011). Last stage is the analysis phase where the collected data and efforts are taken into consideration and revised.

Laakso (2003) and Raatikainen (2008) chop the above mentioned three phases into more detailed process which builds the brand as a whole.

Brand
analysis

Image
creation

Brand
loyalty

Conspicuo
usness

Purchase
decision
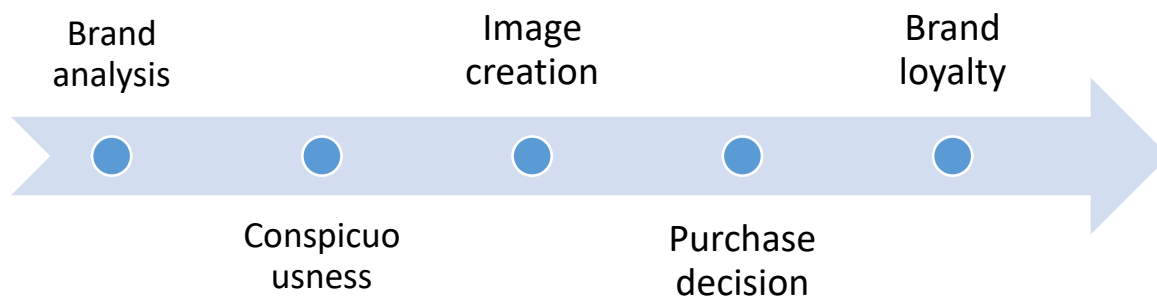
Figure 8. Brand formation

Formation of a brand begins with thorough analysis of customers and competition. Customer analysis helps the process of targeting a highly defined customer segment and discovering the prevailing trends, unfulfilled needs and buying behavior inside the chosen industry. Competitor analysis consists of identifying the other brands and what is their offering for the customers. (Raatikainen, 2008, 90-91,103.)

Building conspicuousness comes next. According to Raatikainen (2008, 104) this is achieved with differentiation, symbolism, marketing efforts and media presence. Spence & Essousi (2010) define this as the brand identity phase which later builds brand equity. These efforts help to create a certain image which is the next phase of brand formation. To create the perceived image, one must give attention and planning to authentic qualities and features such as personal skills and knowledge. These are the factors customers associate with when thinking of the brand. (Laakso, 2003, 160.)

The fourth step, purchase decision and especially first purchase is critical. Laakso (2003, 251) notes that at this point the brand image is either fortified or even ruined depending on the customer experience. If the experience has been a success, then the brand formation can be moved to the final stage which is brand loyalty. Customer satisfaction consist of excellent service, perks and benefits as well as customer centric actions. Taking care of the customer at all stages is a winning strategy to build brand loyalty. (Nam, Ekinci & Whyatt, 2011; Laakso, 2003, 254.) Musetescu et al. (2015) defined five major factors determining brand loyalty. They are as follows in the figure 6.
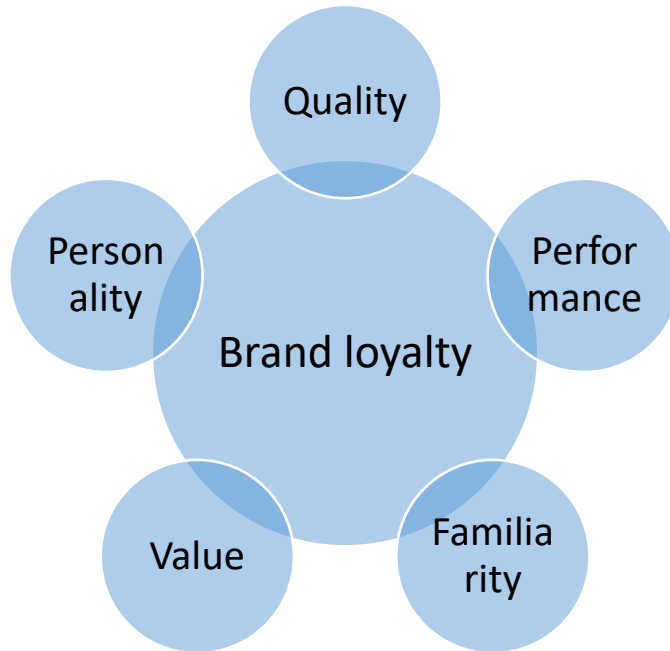
Figure 9. Brand loyalty factors

Musetescu et al. (2015) found out that 70% of customers are loyal if the product is of high quality and 61% if the product performance was consistent, ergo predictable. 33% required a familiar name, or brand identification (Nam et al. 2011), to become loyal and 26% placed good value/price ratio as the main reason for brand loyalty. Brands ability to mirror the customers' own personality, also known as self and lifestyle congruence (Nam et al. 2011), was considered important by 26% of customers. customer satisfaction all defines brand loyalty and can be measured (Nam et al. 2011). In the era of widespread internet and social media, customer loyalty is ever more important (Reichheld, Markey & Hopton, 2000).

Veloutsou et al. (2012) emphasize the intangible features of personal branding like one's consistency in personality, values, way of doing and saying things as well as how the customer relationships are managed. Saario (2016b) highlights such authentic qualities to have a straight impact on business since personal relations fueled with trust are paramount in business relationships.

Instead of building an image for products or services of different companies (Williams 2015), personal branding consists of planned efforts to market one self's expertise,

qualities and interests (Kleppinger & Cain, 2015). Nevertheless, just like in product branding, the small things make the difference in personal branding too. Even systematic use of specific colors and clothing is enough to reinforce the brand and create favorable associations towards the brand (Kortesuo, 2011, 17-18).

Harris and Rae (2011) point out that in order to have a strong brand, one must have a good mix of reputation, attention and execution. Building and maintaining a strong brand comes down to few crucial criteria. According to Keller (1999), Bliss (2005) and Corsi (2004) these are continuity and consistency.

To build a personal brand, one must first acknowledge own expertise and skill sets – which could benefit others – that are worth promoting (Bliss, 2005). According to Shepherd (2005) and Rampersad (2010), one of the most important basic principles of personal branding and a key factor for business or personal success is visibility. The importance of visibility in today's attention hungry society and economy is undeniable.

Kortesuo (2011) defined five different phases for personal branding. These phases consist of planning the personal brand to creating and establishing it. The personal brand can then be molded or even turned around completely. Like everything, personal brands sometimes need to be terminated. The phases are depicted and discussed below.

1. Planning

2. Create & solidify

3. Molding

4. Revise

5. Termination
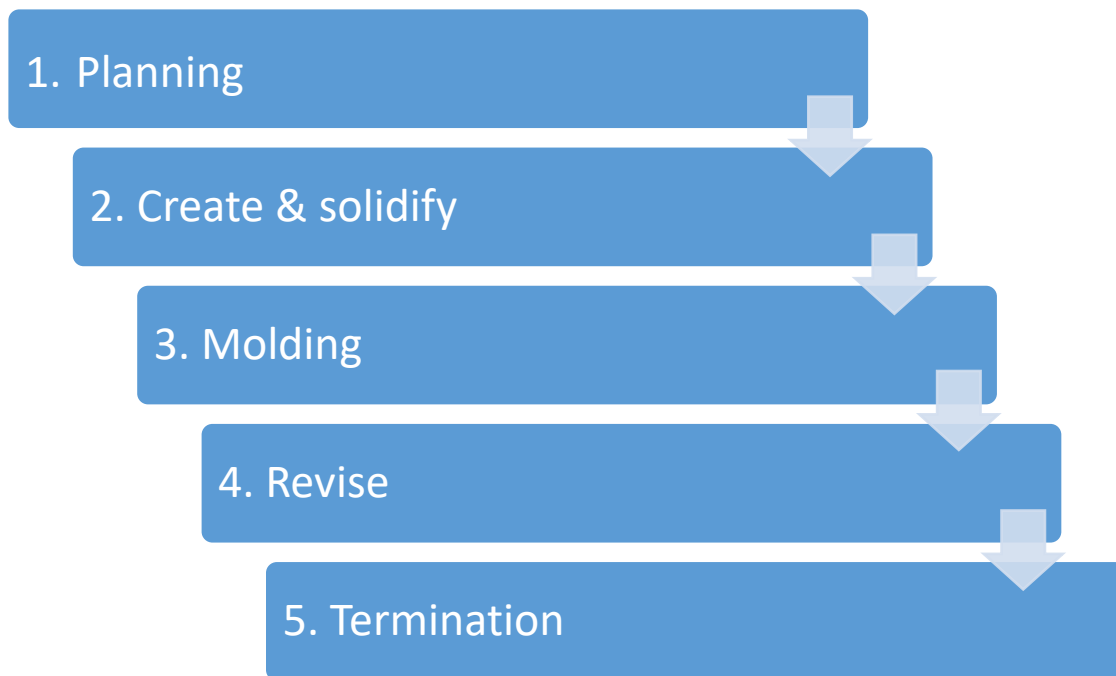
Figure 10. Phases of personal brand

As mentioned before, personal brands are built similar to product brands but after its creation, personal brands have some unique characteristics in its life cycle. When planning a personal brand, one must have a reasoned vision why it is built and to whom. Kortesuo (2011, 25-27) points out that having a personal brand is useless if the audience is not clear because personal brands exist only if they add value for a specific audience.

From the third phase on, the personal brand oscillates with the person. Changes in personal interests, behavior or even clothing inherently mold the personal brand as well. Kortesuo (2011, 29-30) considers this normal and necessary for the personal brand as it cannot stay stationary. It would ruin the authenticity of the brand. Personal brand can sometimes undergo a total revision. Such an event happens usually in the case of a career change or changes in the person's ideology. In this case, the whole target audience might change as well. (Kortesuo, 2011, 32.)

Terminating an existing brand can turn out to be difficult. The built personal brand might follow the person for the rest of his/her life even when the person would be retired and faded away from the possible publicity (Musetescu et al. 2015). Kortesuo (2011, 34) notes that in case of termination, the message for the audience must be assertive and stepping

away from the publicity needs to be quick and consistent. All branding activity must be stopped at once and actively inform relevant audience about the termination.

Personal branding as a competitive advantage

Gaining competitive advantage in today's communication crowded society is increasingly difficult. One solution, offered by Vosloban (2014), to gain competitive advantage for a firm is empowering personal brands of the employees. She argues that as the employees are the most valuable asset of a company, their knowledge and skills should be highlighted. These specialized attributes are extremely hard to copy by competitors. Vosloban also argues that an employee with a strong personal brand will attract more business, create credibility and new networks as well as more qualified applicants for the firm. The more employees exceed building strong personal brands, the bigger are the benefits for the company.

In addition to these external benefits, Love & Singh (2011) found out that strong branding within the company makes it easier and quicker for other employees to internalize organizational values. Other internal benefits of strong personal brand include better cooperation among colleagues, ability to sell ideas, likelihood of promotion and better relationships with superiors, subordinates and peers (Rangarajan et al., 2016; Kurvinen et al. 2017, 16). In the case of a plentiful workforce market individuals have indeed benefited from applicating personal branding as it brings their uniqueness forth. (Berkelaar, 2014) According to Cederberg (2017), especially in economic situations where employment is uncertain, branding one's career portfolio was found useful.

Businesses and professionals who create a decent personal brand will end up having the most customers, therefore immense success to business. (Brems, Temmerman, Graham & Broersma, 2016). Encouraged by enterprise models favoring personal branding, real estate agencies and agents would benefit adopting them as well.

Online and offline personal branding

The key difference between online and traditional branding is speed. Internet as a venue allows people to easily access information and quickly move from awareness to action. (Chiagouris & Wansley 2000.) The digital platforms have created a source for a new

brand identity conducted by an appealing and optimistic fame. The personal traits of self-esteem and need to be something more could simplify the engagement with people in personal branding. (Zinko & Rubin, 2015) On the other hand if the personal traits in branding are authentic, it will enhance the effectiveness and impact of the personal brand especially in a market environment. (Pihl, 2013)

Good online and offline branding tend to go hand in hand. To achieve that, one must connect with the right audience and build network with the right people online as well as offline (Broad, 2016). According to Frost et al. (2008), face-to-face situations are especially prone to cause failures in personal branding if the offline experience does not match the created online image. Rangarajan et al. (2016) agrees with Frost et al. (2008) as she discovered in her research that majority of salespeople consider face-to-face meetings to be far more important. However, the same study revealed the current opinion that without an online presence, you do not exist. Authors like Thompson-Whiteside, Turnbull & Howe-Walsh (2018) and Chen (2013) determine that in reality the only way to widen ones' audience and career opportunities is to use a combination of both. On top of an offline personal brand, one must develop the required digital skills to find new customers and opportunities.

Personal branding – Online

In the age of Web 2.0, personal branding tactics consist of creating and maintaining social and networking profiles. One must have a personal web page, write blog posts and drive traffic from search engines with search engine optimization techniques. Building a brand identity in an online context requires utilization of several different digital channels. Using channels like social networking profiles, blogs, apps and personal web pages it is all about self-presentation. As one's involvement with online platforms is inevitable, the need for building a personal brand is unavoidable. (Labrecque et al. 2011). The role of experts in the lives of people is essential. Their advices have importance and they are valued for their knowledge. Internet provides experts extensive channels to bring forth their in-depth knowledge about a variety of issues and allows people to find their knowledge more easily than just from an ordinary company website. (Aalto et al. 2010, 29, 64; Pääkkönen 2017,

87) Hajli (2013) sees social networks as a great way for service providers such as real estate agencies to enhance their brand popularity.

According to Rangarajan et al. (2016) especially LinkedIn has proven to be the best channel to promote own professional expertise. Hajli (2013) continues that active presence on social media creates trust which has significant positive effects on customers' intention to buy. To summarize, the activity of an expert in digital channels acts as a business card (Pääkkönen 2017, 87).

As mentioned before, in a constantly connected virtual world, customer loyalty has become crucial for all businesses for two reasons. The competition is fierce as internet and social media has lowered the entry costs to the market and customers who generate most of the profits are the most loyal. (Reiccheld et al. 2000.) In an online context, different techniques to find and keep customers apply. Branding has proven to be the most useful online tool to build customer relationships, ergo customer loyalty (Simmons, 2007).

As consistency is in a key role in branding, Wenham, Stephens & Hardy (2003) point out that internet is no exception. The distinguishable features such as logo, symbols and personal features should be found in any content published online. According to Seethamraju (2004), consistency does not limit to just logos, symbols or personality but also includes the consistency of a web site or channel image. Wenham et al. (2003) also underline the importance of acquiring knowledge about customers to target the right audience and involving them to create a personalized online community. These communities should initiate discussion, create new information and most of all, provide value for the audience. The value comes from the stories told and information discovered but the content should also be entertaining.

Creating an online branding strategy requires the use of the four pillars of i-Branding. (Simmons, 2007.) These pillars are presented and discussed below.
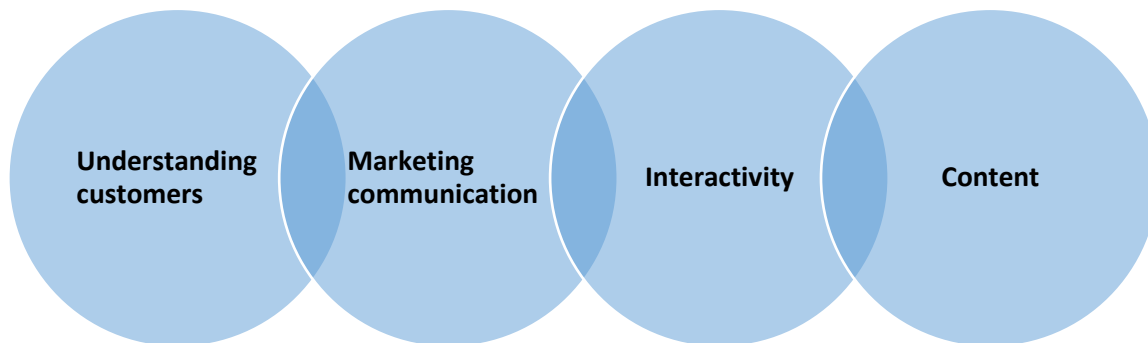
Figure 11. 4 pillars of online branding. Simmons, G. 2007.

Understanding customers

In order to understand customers in an online context, web site or channel admins must collect data. This can be done with web site cookies to identify user habits, with the help of online surveys or with large databases that store all functions to be analyzed for customer segmentation and experience enhancement.

Marketing communications

The web site or social media channels act as a brand experience themselves but with e-mail marketing customers can be engaged in a variety of ways. It can be used to provide information and confirmation, educate or guide customers to web site and channels. Main objective is to create strong brand perceptions through informative and entertaining content for commercial purposes.

Interactivity

Building an interactive web site and being interactive in chosen channels with the customers has a positive effect on the brand experience. The more personalized and identified user experience is, the more content the customers are.

Content

Content is king. It must be suitable to the audience and create the value customers have come seeking. This is a crucial pillar of online branding, hence the content must be quickly available, up to date and carefully designed, otherwise it might leave a negative impression. The content affects brand image. Ambady et al. (1995) note that the brand image building process starts with the information or content posted by a person. It is then affected by what content other people choose to post and how the target audience reacts to the original information or content.

Home buying process usually begins in the internet as people are more used to use search engines to get information beforehand (Seiler, Madhavan & Liechty, 2012). Visibility is considered to be key factor in personal branding success, therefore Huang & Benyoucef (2013) recommend social networking for its great visibility to offer real estate services. Through social networking channels, real estate agents and agencies can attract new customers which in turn create new sales opportunities (Hajli, 2013).

Personal branding - Offline

Even though the use of social media has provided the tools to build an online personal brand relatively effortlessly, face-to-face brand building must not be forgotten (Harris et al. 2011). People buy people and from the companies they trust. Rangarajan et al. (2016) stress the fact that offline sales situations are the best way to build trust. Ottovordemgentsschenfelde (2017) speaks also in favor of the face-to-face brand as the hyper-fluxed media environment makes it hard to distinguish oneself despite all the technological possibilities.

3   Real estate context

In this chapter the aforementioned theories of branding and personal branding will be considered in the context of real estate business. The sub chapter Branding in real estate will discuss why branding is important in this field of business and what kind of branding is commonly used. This chapter is followed by a closer look in the personal branding of individual real estate agents and how the subject is studied in extant literature.

3.1 Real estate brokerage process

The core purpose of a real estate brokerage process is to connect a seller and a buyer of a residential or other real estate property (Halila & Hemmo 2008, 159; Kasso 2011, 1-2). The real estate brokerage process begins when an owner of a real estate property wants to sell the property and creates a contract with an intermediary - a real estate agent. The contract conveys the right to sell and market the property to the real estate agent in exchange for a commission. The commission contract can work the other way around as well. A buyer can hire a real estate agent to find an appropriate real estate property. (Brastow & Springer, 2012; Kasso 2011,28.)

From the realtors' point of view, the process starts by acquiring new customers willing to sell their real estate property (Kasso 2011, 187). Customer acquisition is followed by marketing efforts to sell the property. Real estate agent continues to handle the bidding of the property and finally assist both parties in doing the contract of sale which ends the commission. (Halila & Hemmo 2008, 159)

Despite the emerging new possibilities for homeowners to sell their house on their own (e.g. Blok and Digibroker), statistics show that 85% of house purchases were done using a real estate agent in 2016. (Turnbull & Waller, 2018.) A survey conducted by National association of realtors (2018) revealed that people under 37 years old, also known as the millennials, were most likely to use the services of a real estate agent. This is an interesting discovery since millennials are widely known for their use of internet-based services. Similar statistics apply in Finland as well. According to Kasso (2011, 2), 80% of real estate transactions include a realtor. The statistic remains more or less the same regardless of the economic situation in Finland. The rising income around the globe has led to a so-called time famine. People have more money to buy and own for example properties but no time to manage them. According to Whillans, Dunn, Smeets, Bekkers and Norton (2017) this has created a need for services that save time. It is noteworthy that lack of time is one of the major reasons why people use services of a real estate agent (Stamso, 2015).

3.2 Branding in real estate business

Having a brand in real estate brokerage contributes to the overall success of the firm. Benjamin, Chinloy & Hardin argued in 2006 that brokerage firms can achieve an increase of 9% in net revenue if they invest in brand building. Same rules apply in property branding. Branding of a location or a property signals quality for tenants and may lead to even 8% higher rents. Kasso (2011, 169) highlight the importance of after sales services and follow ups with the customers to create goodwill for the real estate company. Eräsalo (2011, 13) agrees with Kasso and notes that consistent communication with the customers during all processes is as important as it influences the mental image of the customer about the quality of the service.

Rise of the internet and consequent increase of competition has been lowering commissions on several sold items such as airline tickets. Rutherford & Yavas (2012) found out that the commissions of real estate agencies did not drop if they had developed a brand. People are more willing to pay for a brand when dealing with complicated situations like selling a house.

As 90% of searches for a new home starts with an Internet search, investing in presentable and distinguishable photos of the property pays off. Effective property marketing in the Internet does reach new interested customers but the aforementioned tactic to do follow ups with current customers and contacts act as an information gold mine. With that information, real estate agents can quickly pair a new property and an old contact whose needs were unmet. This leads to a reduced time-in-the market of the property with less marketing efforts. (Kasso 2011, 197)

Brem et al. (2014) discussed internal and external aspects of brand building. In real estate industry companies should focus more in the external branding as they have to effectively compete in the highly competitive market (Leek et al. 2011).

Branding an expert service

An expert in a certain area has more knowledge and information about the industry than his/her colleagues. They have self-empowered drive to learn even the smallest nuances of their business field. According to Kurvinen et al. (2017, 32) expertise is molded by years

of experience around a specific subject. Real estate agents are experts when it comes to housing. Branding an expertise has its tweaks. Aalto et al. (2010, 35) note that experts need to have a trustworthy and an impressive personal brand. To achieve that, an expert must have relevant experience, vast in-depth knowledge of the industry and a stellar record of conducting business. This combination of skills and know-how must be then brought to attention of appropriate audience. Roberts (2005) sees professional image as creating an externally oriented public persona which is affected by how a person thinks other people perceive him or her. She notes that professional image creation plays an important role for achieving social approval, individual well-being, power and career success. Stamso (2015) adds that real estate agents' strong professional image is a major factor deciding whether a seller tries to sell a house on their own or use a realtor. Highly professional image reassures house owners that their home is in capable hands as they are usually too scared or ignorant to sell own their own. In addition, Välimäki (2000, 959) notes that using a real estate agent as an intermediary is a smart decision to avoid possible reclamations.

Rutherford et al. (2012) noticed that real estate agents and agencies with a brand were largely considered as experts in their field and most capable to satisfy the needs of homeowners. Consequently, an expert brand gives protection against discount broker services. Customer using professional services put great value on ethical behavior of their agent. In the long run, ethicality provides positive outcome on profitability and corporate brand equity (Nhat & Magne, 2017). Lee (2012) noted that the ethicality of professional services generates customer loyalty which culminates into more profits as Nhat et al. (2017) mentioned.

3.3 Personal branding in real estate business

The new technical solutions make it possible to cut out middlemen as Richardson et al. (2012) and Gay et al. (2014) discovered. In the real estate market, the common role of a real estate agent is to act as an intermediary between buyers and sellers (Allen, Cadena, Rutherford, J & Rutherford, R. 2015) With personal branding, real estate agents and other middlemen can balance out the seemingly unfavorable trend because people buy people as Sampson (1995) puts it.

This interpersonal trend has now led to a situation where the credibility of an organization as a communicator is in decline and customers rely more on their peer network. These networks consist of ordinary people and therefore rule out the presence of companies. This turns things upside down as the employees of an organization become the communicator on behalf of the company. They represent the values and qualities of their companies. (Kurvinen et al. 2017, 26)

In their research (2017) Arndt, Harrison, Lane, Seiler & Seiler studied the reasons behind how customers choose to hire a certain real estate agent. They discovered several reasons such as gender, age, attractiveness and use of pathos to be significant factors in the process. However, after the first contact the role of personal selling skills increases. Stamso (2015) studied also the reasons to use services of a real estate agent in the internet era. Even though it is now easier than ever to sell a house online without using a realtor, Stamso found out that lack of time especially among younger generations led to the use of real estate agents. Noteworthy in the research was that a critical reason to use a realtor was the personal skills and comprehensive service quality of the real estate agent. In the business of selling properties, real estate agents personal brand must seamlessly include comprehensive and vivid understanding of his or her strengths, weaknesses, personal values, passion and achievements. They all have an impact on the marketing of a real estate property (Wetsch, 2012).

In addition, there are some compelling reasons why personal branding in real estate business is a must. First, in real estate business it is common for property owners to expect increased value when selling or renting their property. In other words, they expect to gain profit from the deal and want someone who can make it happen. This leads to the second reason; people want to be a part of success stories especially when their own money is at stake. Due to these prevalent principles, a real estate agent should build a reputation of success and promote it vigorously. (Saavalainen, M., 2016, 129.) In addition, Haman (2017) argues that in real estate the future belongs to the agents who can produce the most relevant, interesting and valuable digital content. The skills to harness technology to have the widest and most relevant reach are essential for an agent to be successful.

Real estate agent's profession includes various expertise requiring tasks such as property marketing, contract negotiations, customer service and sales tactics to maximize the benefit for their principal. (Allen et al. 2015.) Before receiving any listing contracts from a customer, a real estate agent must sell him -or herself first to the customer. It is critical for the customer to feel that the real estate agents' personality is aligned with their own values. The safer, valued and respected the customer feels, the better are the chances to move forward with the selling process. There are also few qualities customers generally seek in a trustworthy personality. Overall habitus of a salesperson should be easy going and pleasant with the ability to avoid any incongruities. Even though positivity will help, customers only trust their assets in the hands of an assertive and esteemed individual. To close the deal to get the listing contract, a real estate agent must be able to convince the customer about his or her full commitment to the process and that the customers' needs and wants are sincerely understood. (Lundberg 2004, 50-52)

In addition to the previously mentioned qualities of a strong brand, Patron & Roskelley (2008) acknowledge real estate agents' obligation to be as transparent as possible. For example, exaggeration of the possible selling price in order to get the listing contract is highly frowned upon among customers (Kasso 2011, 42). Even though a broker should keep the clients' best interests in mind, Patron et al. (2008) advice brokers to provide third parties with bargaining advice. Doing so, real estate agents ensure that both - the seller and the buyer - receive the best possible service, which is vital for repeat business. To avoid collision of interests between all parties, real estate agents should provide an all-out informative listing of the property in an internet-based site. Hopper (1992) recommends that the information should withhold not only the general information about the house but also any material defects that might have an impact on the value of the property.

The most common way to attract new customers among real estate agents is to post their own picture and contact information alongside with the properties they have listed (Arndt et al. 2017). Barstow et al. (2012) discovered that more listings provide a great market exposure for an individual real estate agent which in turn enhances his or her motivation

and efficiency to a certain point. They note that too many listings lead to decrease in marginal utility as real estate agents' efficiency per property declines.

Due to the fact that real estate agents work in sales situations that require in-person negotiations, personal branding can be quite superficial for them. The unscrupulous reality of a salesperson is that attractive ones get more business (DeShields, Kara, Kaynak, 1996). Thinking in terms of a product, a house is androgynous. Lieves (2016) found out that in case of such products buyers tend to favor a physically attractive salesperson over less attractive one. This discovery consolidates Salter et al. (2012) study in which they state that attractive real estate brokers are more productive and receive larger wages than their less attractive colleagues.

Often underrated in sales and an effective tool to use in personal branding is building rapport. As people buy from people they like, rapport is the magic behind it. Successful human communication can be as much as 90% non-verbal. It happens on a non-conscious level and has little or nothing to do with what is being discussed. (Hollman & Kleiner, 1997.) Techniques to build rapport are presented in figure 9. below.
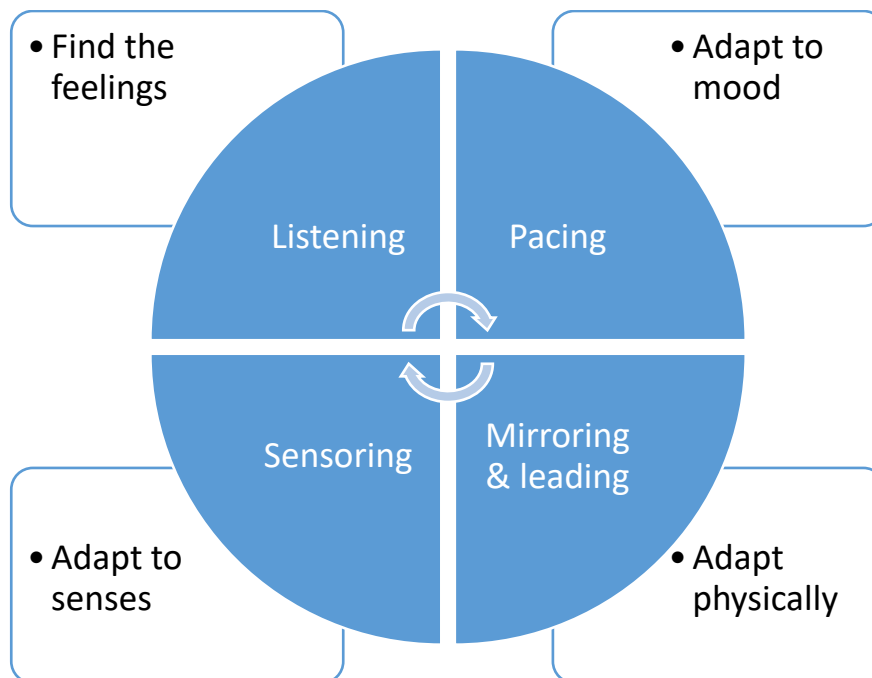

Figure 12. Building rapport - Hollman et al. 1997

First, a salesperson such as real estate agent should focus on listening to understand customers' feelings. People relax if someone can share their view of the world. Another factor in building rapport is being in mental and emotional alignment with a person. This is called pacing. Third factor is mirroring and leading where physical alignment is crucial. To build rapport by mirroring, one should match own breathing, posture and body language according to the other person. Leading can reveal if the rapport is established or not. If the person assumes same posture as the other, rapport is established. For example, a real estate agent in Hollman et al. (1997) article was able to get a listing contract by only using mirroring and leading with the homeowners. Fourth factor is about senses. Some people live emotions by seeing, other by listening or touching. People react positively if others can build images and emotions using similar words and descriptions as they do. (Hollman et al. 1997).

Brastow et al. (2012) underline the importance of real estate agents' geographical expertise. Thorough knowledge and familiarity of a particular neighborhood increase the likelihood of receiving new listings while reducing the costs to obtain them. According to Barstow et al., these kind of realtors' "service areas" proved to be the most efficient way to sell properties as time on market was shorter and selling prices higher.

4   Research methodology

This section of the study represents the empirical part and findings. The findings and methodology are based on qualitative research. The research theory discussed in this section linked to the established research questions resulted in choosing the semi-structured interview approach. This chosen approach was implemented to all individual interviews in order to formulate a comprehensive understanding of the personal branding phenomenon in the profession of a real estate agent.

4.1   *Methodology and research design*

This study is conducted by qualitative research principles. A qualitative study responds well to a phenomenon linked to intangible issues that are hard to grasp or calculate such as branding and personal emotions (Gordon et al. 1993, 5). As qualitative methodology requires, the interaction between the theories and the empirical data of this thesis are

studied and discussed. The purpose of this qualitative research is to create new knowledge and/or unveil emerging facts around the topic area of this thesis. (Hirsijärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2000, 152)

This study focuses on discovering how personal branding is understood, valued and utilized in the real estate industry by the real estate agents. The study was conducted based on four separate semi-structured interviews. The interviews took place during a time span of eight weeks and were all done in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The interviewees are all professional real estate agents working for three separate real estate agencies. The agencies are Huom! – Kiinteistönvälitys, KiinteistöKukot and Neliöt Liikkuu LKV. The interviewees age ranged from 28 to 54 years old and professional experience in real estate industry from over a year to almost two decades. The gender distribution of the interviewees in this study was one woman and three men. The interviewees were chosen with the aim of achieving viewpoints based on gender, employment status and size of the interviewees' company.

The total number of questions used in this study was 27 consisting of six different sections. The total amount of time spent on each interview ranged from 90 to 110 minutes. The interview questions adapt to the theoretical part of this study. The first section aims to reveal the knowledge around the topic, how they became familiar with the phenomenon and what kind of role personal branding plays in the interviewee's professional life. Second section questions help to build a framework for each interviewee's personal brand building process. The next section discusses how interviewees' build and manage their brand strategies followed by a section focusing on the brand building channels.

The fifth section outlines the interviewees' personal brand management. The questions focus on how consistently the personal brand is re-iterated, re-planned, executed and measured. The last section aims to uncover the external expectations, challenges doubts, hopes and beliefs regarding the personal branding process now and in the future. The interviewees were also asked to evaluate how personal branding will evolve in the real estate industry. All interviews are based on the same questionnaire and the questions were sent to the interviewees' beforehand for them to prepare their answers.

4.2 Qualitative research

The most used qualitative research methods are text analysis, focus groups, interviews and observation (Ghauri & Gronhaug 2005, 202). A qualitative research does not include counting or measures. Instead it consists of virtually any form of human communication such as visual, audio or written. It aims to understand, describe and explain a phenomenon (Gibbs, 2007, 94). This thesis was built on interviews, emails, various books and journals which are according to Metsämuuronen (2005, 198; 222) all labeled under qualitative methods of data collection. As the data collection of qualitative research is so versatile, the research must include well thought limitations. According to Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara. (2008, 81-82) this will make the study easier to follow and help the reader to have a better understanding of the intentions of the study.

Qualitative research is based on the interaction between theory and empiric study. The purpose of a qualitative research is to describe the research question by extracting new information, not just prove known facts. (Hirsijärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2000, 152.) As this study examines the personal experiences and opinions of individual professionals the chosen methodology is most suitable.

Conducting interviews is an effective way to collect information in a qualitative research. Interviews and questions are often planned beforehand. During the interview the interviewee opens the discussion and motivates the interviewee to discuss the topic in detail. Interviews can be categorized in four different categories: theme, semi-structured and open. (Eskola & Suoranen 1998, 85-87) This study is based on semi-structured interview.

4.3 Data collection and analysis

For this study I chose to use semi-structured individual interviews based on a theme questionnaire. The method is suitable for researching intimate or sensitive topics, or situations where the interviewee will cover issues that he or she is not conscious of. (Metsämuuronen 2005, 41) Semi-structured interviews usually follow a pattern. They have certain themes as a guideline for the interview, but all the conducted interviews take their own form. The amount of information is normally small and insightful. (Hirsjärvi et al. 1991, 38) Hence, the questionnaire built for these interviews included six different themes each

containing sub-questions. Although the questions defined the framework of the conversation, the interviews molded in a unique way with each of the interviewees. (KvaliMOTV, 2006.) This personal viewpoint of the interviewees is typical feature in a theme interview (Hirsjärvi et al. 2000).

According to Givens (2008, 422), semi-structured interview method is an efficient way to let the interviewee lead the conversation. Semi-structured interviews contain some control by the interviewer, but they are based on open-ended questions to help the interviewee discuss the topic in a wider perspective. As my purpose during the interviews was to lead the interviewees as little as possible, the semi-structured interview method with open-ended questions served this purpose well. The chosen method allowed the interviews flow freely and I was able to subtract in-depth information that could have otherwise been undiscovered (Gubrium, J & Holstein, J. 2001, 83-117).

4.4 Validation, data analysis and reliability

The collected data in this study is analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The analysis process is affected by the central concepts of the research as well as the assumptions emerging from the interviews. According to Eskola & Suoranta (2000, 211-212) the reliability of a qualitative research depends on the interpretation of the researcher. This makes the reliability more challenging than in a quantitative study. The researcher must depict the process of the study as well as possible. This will increase the reliability of the study. (Hirsjärvi et al. 1991, 115; Hirsjärvi et al. 2000, 14-15) Qualitative interviews often produce rich data imbedded in a large amount of excessive data. This rich data must be mined by identifying key concepts in the material linked to research questions. (Lee & Lings 2008, 233, 244) The author has followed these instructions to achieve best possible reliability of this study.

5 Empirical research

This chapter will cover the empirical results of this study. The data derived from the interviews will be presented to give comprehensive insight into the thinking process of the individual professionals.

5.1 Interviews

This section of the study is based on the conducted interviews. The interviews are transcribed using the audio recordings of the interviews. The answers of the interviewees are transcribed objectively from word to word but to avoid unnecessary ambiguity, the wording is generalized by the researcher. The transcription follows the structure of the questionnaire.

5.1.1 Real estate agent no. 1

The first real estate agent interviewee has been in the business for over a decade. She works for a Helsinki based real estate organization as an individual entrepreneur. Her guideline is to invest 10% of her income in marketing but her wish is to reduce the cost with more effective marketing.

Baseline of personal branding

According to her, personal branding is all about presenting her own personality to stand out from the hundreds of other realtors. She felt that main reasons for her to brand herself are increased competition in the Helsinki region and urge to outperform "the grey masses" who still rely on the organizations ability to attract new customers for them. Even though she has been in the business for a long time, personal branding wasn't a thing until 2013-2014. At this point her organization decided to market itself using the open-for-all evaluations of its realtors - a concept still used today. From there on all the realtors in her organization have been responsible for their own image. She feels that only in the recent years, personal branding has been identified as an integral part of strategy due to the arrival of young guns. Their social media skills have accelerated the change from corporations to individuals.

Building the personal brand

Personal branding is quite simple for her since it mirrors strongly her personality in general. Hence, she has a clear vision on how to build her personal brand. She wants to be seen as an easily approachable highly skilled, honest professional with vast knowledge about the industry, prices and construction. To enforce this image, she has taken courses to acquire the titles which she then presents in her personal information. In her words, the titles are handy in online presence and printed materials but tricky to articulate when she is face-to-face with customers. In these situations, she relies in her experience and knowledge to give the customer the professional impression she wants to present. Even though the overall perceived image is one of a professional, she considers in advance what kind of a homeowner she is going to meet and adjusts her behavior accordingly.

Strategic decisions

The interviewee affirms that her personal branding is strategic. She has a yearly budget for marketing and believes in strong visibility, especially in her own neighborhood. Her main strategic goal is to be able to do a job she loves well beyond retirement age. Business wise her goal is to be recognized and remembered to gain new customers and repeat business via word-of-mouth. For her, regional targeting is more important than demographic targeting. She also accepts all kinds of assignments rather than be profiled to only sell certain types of properties. To protect her own brand, she relies on being consistent with her brand personality and keeping her promises. She also believes that the regional brand work she has done carries her a long way at least in her neighborhood.

Marketing the personal brand

In her marketing, she uses a mix of traditional media and online media channels. The only place she uses flyers is in her own neighborhood to promote her localness. On a firm level, they have decided to do certain amount of advertisement in the biggest newspaper Helsingin Sanomat. As her main digital marketing channels, she mentions Facebook and Instagram. To reinforce the neighborhood visibility, she has had a large ad of herself on the back of a local bus. She admits she still prefers offline channels due to lack of time,

skills and trust in online channels. The effectiveness of these marketing efforts remains unknown to her since the measurement efforts are light or non-existent.

In all chosen channels, the message remains the same. The ideas for her marketing efforts comes from herself as she wouldn't feel comfortable copying someone else's personality. One of her personal brand qualities is to be an easily approachable person so she adds a more personal touch in her marketing. Taking her dogs for a walk in her neighborhood filled with other dog owners has proven to be a lucrative way to attract new business. This is a way for her to introduce herself as a professional without hidden agenda. The neighbors respond positively to the free advices and often become customers.

Personal brand management

The key for a successful brand in her opinion is to maintain the personality even if she is caught off guard for example in a grocery store. In her line of business, new customers can emerge from anywhere, so she needs to be constantly ready to jump into action and accept it as a part of the job description. Because the nature of the job is demanding and time consuming, she outlines the importance of a balanced well-organized life and an appropriate attitude. Mastering these attributes will help to manage the brand. Maintaining her image as an expert is important and she participates often in educative courses provided by her organization. The success of her brand is measured by the reviews she receives from her customers.

Personal brand in real estate

One of the greatest challenges she experiences in personal branding is how and in what kind of situations she should promote her brand. Another factor is measurability; does it pay off? She has also noticed that her knowledge receives appreciation coming from colleagues. They often rely on her expertise if they run into problems. She feels that her efforts in personal branding have brought her more business. As a professional salesperson, she is certain that in sales, people ultimately make the purchase decision depending on the chemistry with the seller. The role of personal chemistry in sales will

increase in her opinion as organizations move to the background and individuals take over.

If she suddenly would quit personal branding, it would most likely have a negative effect to her income. She thinks she would manage on some level with the help of her established network. In todays' sales, visibility and branding is the way to get new business. In the future, she would consider using professional personal branding services to boost her image and presence.

5.1.2 Real estate agent no. 2

The interviewee is a younger person, male 28 years old and has been in the real estate business for over a year. He has acquired the licensed realtor certificate. He chose the firm he is working for exactly on the basis that the firm markets itself outwards through the employees. The employee is the face of the firm not the company itself.

Baseline of personal branding

In his mind, image of a person is built through only few certain factors and requires only 2-3 channels to get the word out. The main factors for building an image are actions, promises and consistency in the way a person works. Investing in personal branding takes a lot of effort, hence the interviewee feels like the greatest investment to put in personal branding is time.

The most important thing in personal branding is to focus on the one thing that can differentiate yourself from others. He has noticed that most of real estate agents copy each other too much. The message is always the same, only the face and the company logo change. If you cannot match the image you have created in the personal meeting, you are quickly discredited. Personal charisma and chemistry are something that can't be copied. Copying is something he is trying to avoid himself.

Personal branding was a clear objective in his mind from the very beginning of his career. Now growing rate of sales efforts and overall learning of the industry have affected his brand building process negatively. He lacks time and plan to continue with the process. The real estate agency where the interviewee is working demands personal branding from its' agents. The company offers education on personal branding and sales tactics to the

employees. Megatrends like social media have a great effect on the way how marketing in real estate business is now done. Even though the average age of real estate agents is 40+, the new home buyers are much younger, 20-35 years old and they use different channels than before. Real estate agents must be involved and operate in these new channels in order to keep up with the customers.

Building the personal brand

The interviewee focuses on remaining true to himself. He does not want to give a false impression on himself in any channel. He mentions qualities such as trustworthiness, transparency and work moral to be his most valuable assets when building his own brand. Clients must feel they can talk to him about anything and at any time. These attributes are his brand promises to all clients.

In order to keep this image, the interviewee is willing to workday and night. He wants to leave the client as satisfied as possible to create positive feedback on his services. This in turn will lead to word-of-mouth and repeat-business.

Strategic decisions

The interviewee admits he had made strategic decisions before starting as a real estate agent. Currently he has been getting his real estate assignments through other channels than his own personal branding work and consequently the lack of time has interfered with the execution of his strategies. In the future Facebook will be the main focus for his professional display. Sharing, commenting and writing news about real estate business in Facebook will be his way of presenting his expertise on the industry. This has proven to be a highly time-consuming project but something he is determined to pursue.

As the Facebook posts will held his footprint, they are a good way to bring his personality forward. People who follow him on Facebook and would read his articles would feel like they know the interviewee. This would support his vision to be easily approachable expert. The interviewee is planning to enhance his Facebook marketing with videos in addition to the photo campaigns. His personality restricts himself on performing on the video as it does not come naturally to him nor does he like to watch such real estate marketing videos himself.

Visibility and local expertise is the key for building a personal brand according to the interviewee. He has focused on these two attributes by creating a direct mail campaign in a certain area. He believes that if the potential home buyers and sellers are exposed consistently to his face and message, people start to see him as the local expert. This geographical segmentation is one of his main strategies as it has been proven to work on several senior colleagues of his. The area is new, prices change rapidly and there are no other real estate agents with strong profile in the area. To solidify his local expertise, he has moved into the area himself.

Marketing the personal brand

The interviewee is still on a trial-error phase with marketing channels. He is trying a mix of traditional media and internet marketing channels. For visibility he uses local newspapers and internet for personal messaging. Actual footwork to meet potential clients he has not done at all even though he realizes the importance of it. The interviewee does not change his message in different channels as he prefers to give always the same impression to each group.

The interviewee mentions goal oriented personal branding to bring the greatest results. He believes that if you put your mind into something, it will happen eventually. Real estate agent must use tactics and channels that he or she is comfortable with. Due to his short time working in the industry, the interviewee could not clearly determine if his goals in personal branding have been reached. Nevertheless, the clients he has been working with, have been giving feedback on exactly the personal brand promises the interviewee focuses on.

Even though the interviewee does not use other than geographical segmentation, he has noted that most of his inbound clients are within the same age group than he is. He suggests that identification plays a big role when choosing a real estate agent.

Personal brand management

After learning the basics of the industry from his mentor inside the firm, the interviewee feels like now he is creating something more of his own. Nevertheless, he still searches

for inspiration and ideas from colleagues and following American real estate agents in digital media.

The most concrete example of matching online and offline brand personality the interviewee can mention happens during customer acquisition meetings. He spends hours preparing for the meeting and sends material beforehand to the possible client. To the meeting he brings substantial number of documents, marketing material and statistics to support his arguments and knowledge. This way the interviewee reclaims on the promise of being an effective and a trustworthy agent.

Measuring his personal brand at this point of his career would not give accurate data. He believes the brand value can be measured better after few more active branding years in the business. The interviewee mentions Andrei Koivumäkis' branding style to be a more easily measurable as it goes on in several digital channels. Current measurement of his personal brand success is returning customers and the increase of his sales performance. Currently the interviewee admits he doesn't manage his brand well enough. Long term vision is still in development, but the short-term actions have been completely neglected.

Personal brand in real estate

The interviewee will hold on to his original plan to build a personal brand as the real estate industry demands differentiation among the agents. He feels the most effective way to create, maintain and develop the personal brand now and in the future is to use digital channels. Main challenges in building a personal brand in the industry is connected to the beginning of the process. The time spent on determining own personal identity in branding and figuring out the most effective ways and channels is daunting. Another problem is that if you choose the battle proven ways of doing things, you end up like everyone else in the industry and end up spending a lot of money. The interviewee wants to find his own effective way spending as little money as possible.

The inputs to his personal branding have not yet resulted in great outputs. The effect will be seen in a few years. Nevertheless, he has already had some returning clients and second half of the year has been clearly better than the first six months in the industry. The interviewee believes that newcomers are not able to survive in the industry without

creating a personal brand whereas the experienced real estate agents with strong networks can still thrive without investing in their brand.

The interviewee sees that the digitalization will speed up the personal branding trend of professionals. Do it yourself digital services force professionals to specialize and bring their expertise forward to convince clients to use their services instead. Overall attitude towards his personal branding efforts have been positive and supportive. The interviewee would be ready to use professional brand building services as he lacks time and know-how. What he is not willing to outsource is his own personality for example in his Facebook strategy.

5.1.3 Real estate agent no. 3

The third interviewed real estate agent is a well experienced sales professional and an entrepreneur. Despite his relatively short time as a real estate agent, he is a co-founder in two separate small real estate agencies. His first co-founded agency, KiinteistöKukot is highly localized real estate agency concentrating on Munkkiniemi area in Helsinki. His latest project is a real estate agency called Neliöt Liikkuu LKV. This real estate company is more ambitious project as it includes one of the most recognized real estate agents in Finland as a co-founder.

Baseline for personal branding

The interviewee sees personal branding as a way to communicate his own identity and personality outwards. In real estate industry, the realtors have been and still are mundane and avoid expressing themselves too much. The interviewee characterizes this as a safe way to please as many customers as possible. He sees this to be an outdated way in real estate industry where competition is fierce. A modern real estate agent must bring his or her personality forward in order to attract customers who respond well to the realtor's personality. The image created must go hand in hand with the real-life personality. The interviewee mentions this match between image and reality to be one of the most crucial aspects of personal branding. If you fake your personal brand, you lose your credibility for good in the long run.

The interviewee started working consistently to develop his personal brand when KiinteistöKukot was opened back in December 2017. His personal branding process was ignited by the rejections he faced in a large real estate company. He could not present himself as he would have liked and most of his personalized campaign ideas were shot down in the company management. Hence, he quit the job and created his own real estate agency. The interviewee mentions using a camper as an office on wheels acting as a marketing trick at the same time.

The interviewee is more spontaneous with his personal branding as he does not schedule his personal branding efforts. Instead he has a clear vision in his head that drives him to do things in a certain way. This vision is strongly reliant on social media visibility and he focuses on few defects in society that are personally very important to him. In his case these are homeless people and animals. In the early days of his career, the interviewee sought ideas and inspiration from European real estate agents in social media channels. He explains that especially German realtors have made an impression on him as the style of the German realtors' suit better to Finnish mind set than for example the marketing style of realtors from the US. The interviewee chooses to follow only those realtors who he can relate to on a personal level. He does not want to take ideas from people who do not share his values and beliefs. This would make his own social media posts fake and transparent.

Building the personal brand

In addition to his ambition to be perceived as an expert, the interviewee consciously builds brands linked to him. He is referred to as the "Cadillac man" as he constantly shows his interest towards cars and posts pictures of his Cadillac Escalade. Consistent with his love towards animals, he manages also an Instagram page for his dog. These two personal interests which have nothing to do with his professional expertise have resulted in new clients and act as an ice breaker for many.

In the professional context, the interviewee wants to maximize the customer satisfaction for both, the buyer and the seller. This is often achieved by working out the best possible price for both parties. Another factor is time spent on the customer. He wants to create the feeling that the customer is valuable in any situation and he gives as much time to his clients as they need. As a concrete example of his urge to serve his client, he once put

his own commission on the line to serve the interest of his client. In addition to serving customers more, the interviewee is in the process of offering valuable information to customers via blog and video blog.

Strategic decisions

The strategic decisions to build a personal brand are based strongly on a gut feeling. The overall picture and vision where and how the interviewee want to be seen is in his head. He acts spontaneously on the ideas that he thinks will serve the overall goals. The strategic focus is on social media and for different channels he consciously modifies his messages. LinkedIn is the main channel and a way to enhance the expert image. For more conservative information the interviewee uses Facebook and Twitter as Instagram acts as a relaxed non-professional messaging. It is important to be present in all channels with a slightly different message to cover as many demographics as possible. Clear strategic goal is to have 100% of all new customers coming in through social media and non-paid internet traffic. Currently the percentage is roughly 90% social media and 10% paid-internet traffic, and he dominates effectively the organic Google searches on his name.

The purpose why the interviewee focuses strongly on social media and internet is to create the trust between him and the clients before ever meeting them. He believes that following him, seeing his face, hearing his voice and reading his opinions will create the impression that the customers know him personally making it easy to contact him. Focusing only on pictures will not create the accurate impression of a person and this might ruin the whole experience when meeting face to face. These personal encounters are the most crucial moments to solidify the personal brand.

The interviewee does not target any specific demographic group, but his digital analytics tools reveal that his posts and branding appeal especially to people over 30 years old. Geographical segmentation is one of the key strategic decisions to the interviewee due to time scarcity and the knowledge of a certain neighborhood. When it comes to protecting the personal brand, the interviewee suggests updating ones' knowledge and ideas to always stay one step ahead of the competition and remain different.

Marketing the personal brand

The interviewee does not believe in traditional media marketing in the case of individual personal branding. As discovered, the social media channels, blogs and video blogs are the most important marketing tools for the interviewee. He also believes in doing something exclusive and concrete for people. When branding himself offline, the interviewee wants to focus only on individuals. He handed out 500 red roses to passing women on the street and sent out 200 handwritten post cards for women on international women's day. On another occasion he was handing out pastries and having a chat with the locals. These actions resulted in phone calls from clients even after six months and selling of three different homes in that area.

New marketing ideas he draws from the European real estate professionals as the Finnish real estate professionals are too modest. He also likes to visit places and events that inspire him.

Personal brand management

In order to maintain the brand image, it is crucial to always take full responsibility of your mistakes. The interviewee mentions this to be one of his core values as customers hate people avoiding responsibility. To keep the branding consistent, he uses automated digital marketing tools and tries to learn from the analytical reports he receives. The interviewee measures his customer satisfaction by sending out customer satisfaction questionnaires via regular mail after each business transaction. He often uses these statements to his advantage in marketing. Social media reviews are non-existent at this point and the interviewee feels this need to be improved. The interviewee has been studying how the top 1-2% of real estate professionals perform and manages his own personal branding efforts accordingly. His customer satisfaction rate in the time of the interview was 4,94 / 5.

As a concrete example of his personal brand value, the interviewee mentions that in the beginning of his career, one house valuation visit cost him around 420 euros. With the help of his strong brand and experience in marketing channels the cost has come down to 42 euros per visit. Without a strong personal brand, he doubts a real estate agent could

achieve so low cost per visit. The power of digital channels is the quantification possibilities, offline personal brand is much more difficult to calculate. The interviewee believes that you still need a healthy mix of these approaches to personal branding.

At first, the monetary costs of his personal branding were 1300 euros a month. With organic traffic the costs have come down. Current monetary investments to branding are divided between marketing of the agency's' properties and to his own personal brand in social media. Time is valuable to the interviewee, so he uses a lot of automatic tools to support his brand building process. Most of his time in social media goes into liking, commenting and sharing customers' posts. This is something he has learned customers love. The interviewee hopes to save more time in the future by further automating the process and specializing in a certain area.

Personal brand in real estate

In Finland, the interviewee sees the personal branding of real estate agents to be in its infancy. He hopes to see development towards more European style not just with personal branding but the overall attitude and cooperation between real estate agents. The envious culture is still rooted in the Finnish culture and he has experienced this as they launched their new Neliöt Liikkuu LKV agency, although the negative talk is also free marketing for them. Big personal brands can also become a liability. One of the co-founders is a well know personality and his mistakes could cost the company's reputation as well. As they all are very visible in major digital channels, they have a crisis management plan prepared. Overall feedback in personal branding and company branding has been positive and it has resulted not only in new clients but also in cooperation projects.

The effect of personal branding to the interviewee's income level is tremendous. He could no longer go back to not branding himself. If he would stop doing it, he would be able to reach the same level of commissions for a while but in the long run the decrease of income would be steep. Without a personal brand in real estate, a newcomer might not even survive anymore. First two years are tough for anyone but with decisive personal branding, this running in time can be cut shorter. The interviewee feels like todays' customers want to get to know the person, not the company. He sees that the impact of personal branding of individual real estate agents will increase in the future and same will happen to skilled

agencies as well. As the personal branding skills are still lacking in the Finnish real estate, the interviewee sees a lot of potential for professional personal branding services.

5.1.4 Real estate agent no. 4

The last interviewed real estate agent is young and ambitious newcomer in the real estate industry. He is also a co-founder of Neliöt Liikkuu LKV.

Baseline of personal branding

In all essence, the interviewee sees personal branding as a way to create a certain pre-determined image of an individual professional in a specific industry to a chosen audience. His own personal branding started right away when he entered the real estate industry in 2017. The main reason behind personal branding was to differentiate himself from the crowd. He was worried he would disappear in the ranks of older more experienced colleagues due to his young age and lack of expertise in the business. His purpose in the beginning of his personal branding was to create the image that he was to be taken seriously. To show this hard-working attitude he chose to use social media. The interviewee was immediately noticed by other real estate agencies who started to contact him to offer him a job. This recruitment path led the interviewee to meet the current co-founder of Neliöt Liikkuu LKV and to be a part of this new agency.

Building the personal brand

Results, attitude and inspiration. These are the core values of the interviewees' personal brand on which he builds on. He mentions himself to be a humane person who has a genuine interest towards other people. He wants to inspire people the same way he is inspired by other people. The interviewee is an ambitious person; therefore, he wants to show that he brings results to the table. This result-oriented approach helps him to convince home buyers and sellers to use his services. Buying a home is one of the biggest investments a person does in his or her lifetime so choosing a realtor who understands this is the image the interviewee is aiming for. His personal goal is not only to bring his expertise and effectiveness in the open but to also modify the image of the real estate business industry to a more fun and trustworthy direction. He believes that sharing

personal life stories alongside with the professional content is a way to build the trust towards real estate agents and him especially.

Strategic decisions

The interviewee sees his personal branding strategies formulating on the go. His social media posts happen in a spur of the moment, sometimes even during the night. The vision to be a well-known and respected expert in his industry is the guideline he follows but is not afraid of trying something different if it feels right. He is still quite new to the industry, so the strategy is still seeking its course through trial and error.

He feels like his personal branding is already proven to be worth it as he was recruited, became a partner in a new agency and has received a lot of new clients with his strong social media presence. Although the interviewee has already benefited from personal branding, the process has only just begun. To fulfill his vision to become the well-known and respected expert in the industry, the interviewee accepts the fact that it is a long way down the road, and it requires mastering his own personal brand strategy.

At this point of his career, the interviewee does not want to be picky on the commissions he receives. Doing more will help him to become the expert he wants to be. It does not matter if the real estate is in a bad condition, the interviewee will do his best to help the client. Clear strategic decision for him is to focus on social media channels. These channels are the best and most cost-effective way to put his personal and professional life out there for the clients to see. The interviewee is not too worried about protecting his personal brand as he believes that concentrating on his own thing will always keep him one step ahead of the competition.

Marketing the personal brand

His marketing efforts nowadays are focused solely on social media channels. Instagram is the main channel to promote his personal and professional life. Facebook is a natural addition to the channels but his activity there does not match his Instagram activity. LinkedIn is mentioned as a least used of his chosen social media channels. The agenda for these channels is the same but because of his impulsive style, the content varies a bit.

During the first year of his career he wanted to do something different and get out from his comfort zone. He acquired the official documents of each shareholder in a few condominiums and started making cold calls to get house evaluation visits. 70% of these were useless valuations with the client having no intention to sell their home but it created a lot of word-of-mouth marketing for him. During the visits, the interviewee consciously gave the impression he was selling a lot of houses in that neighborhood. Eventually he ended up receiving several commissions from these condominiums. The interviewee has taken advice from his colleagues to find a charity project in line with his own values and to invest time and money to the project as well. Charity work creates trust and targets people with same values.

The ideas for personal branding marketing efforts the interviewee draws from other real estate agents, mostly from the US market but also from Finland. Other sources of inspiration and new ideas are books and brainstorming sessions with colleagues who are also focused on building a personal brand. With the experience comes also the ability to create his own content and he is more comfortable now using his social awareness in his personal branding. He adjusts himself according to the clientele personalities and has found this to be a useful tool in creating deeper trust. As trust is an important factor to his brand, the interviewee posts also bad reviews to demonstrate his transparency.

Personal brand management

The interviewee admits he has some improvement points regarding managing and measuring his brand. The interviewee does not manage his personal brand consistently. He keeps the vision in the back of his head but let's his creativity flow freely. His brand measurement is limited to customer feedback and it correlates with the value of his brand as it is measured by the returning clients both offline and online.

The personal brand building process is an everyday task for the interviewee as he continuously tries to think of some new content to be shared. Currently he does not feel comfortable investing money into the process as he feels that the free content is bringing the results he wants to see. The interviewee does not plan to slack off with personal branding in the future, on the contrary he is planning to increase his efforts on the process.

Personal brand in real estate business

The main challenges when building a personal brand in real estate industry is to create valuable content for the customers. The interviewee admits he is guilty of posting irrelevant content just to keep the content flow going or copying some other real estate agents too much. This is often the result of his inexperience and linked to the trial error phase. Overall feedback of his personal branding has been positive.

In real estate business, personal branding is a necessity. Customer acquisition and recognition are two of the most important things to be successful in the business. Without personal branding, this could take years to achieve but with consistent personal branding you can speed up the process like the interviewee has done. The importance of personal branding in the future can't be overstated according to the interviewee. He would most likely lose a tremendous amount of his income if he would stop branding himself. The interviewee mentions several occasions where the clients ask afterwards the company the interviewee works in. They chose purely him, not the company. The interviewee believes that professional branding services will become an important part of individual experts' tools to be successful. He has already taken part in such mentoring events and seminars and is happy to recommend them to all professionals who want to build a successful personal brand.

5.2   Summary of the empirical results

This section summarizes the results from the interviews of the empirical research. The table 1. in this section will summarize all viewpoints of each interviewee in each set of questions conducted during the interviews. The content of questionnaire theme is further discussed to compress the information. In the table 1. questionnaire themes are referred to as QT1, QT2, QT3, QT4, QT5 and QT6, similarly all interviewees are referred to as REA1, REA2, REA3 and REA4 in the same order as they appear in the interviews. In the text the real estate agents are referred to as real estate agent or the interviewee.

QT1	QT2	QT3	QT4	QT5	QT6
REA1 **Purpose**: *Stand out from the crowd* **Reason**: *External pressure* **REA2** **Purpose**: *Differentiation* **Reason**: *Internal motivation & external pressure* **REA3** **Purpose**: *Way to express Himself to a wider audience* **Reason**: *Internal motivation* **REA4** **Purpose**: *Differentiation Get an edge* **Reason**: *Internal motivation and external pressure*	**REA1** **Vision**: *Prestigious expert* **How?**: *Build on her Knowledge and values* **REA2** **Vision**: *Reliability* **How?**: *Build on his work ethic and morals* **REA3** **Vision**: *Locally specialized go to guy* **How?**: *Builds on his personal interests and values* **REA4** **Vision**: *Well know expert* **How**: *Builds on strong marketing efforts*	**REA1** **Strategic decisions**: *Clear, measurable & consistent* **Aim**: *Regional expertise* **REA2** **Strategic decisions**: *Formulating. In-consistent* **Aim**: *Regional expertise* **REA3** **Strategic decisions**: *Clear, measurable, In-consistent* **Aim**: *Automation Regional expertise* **REA4** **Strategic decisions**: *Formulating In-consistent* **Aim**: *Recognition*	**REA1** **Message**: *Professional & safe* **Channels**: *Traditional media 80% digital 20%* **REA2** **Message**: *Professional & safe* **Channels**: *Traditional media 75%, digital 25%* **REA3** **Message**: *Professional & personal, experimental* **Channels**: *Digital only* **REA4** **Message**: *Professional & personal, experimental* **Channels**: *Digital only*	**REA1** **Focus on**: *Expertise* **How?**: *Update knowledge* **REA2** **Focus on**: *Consistent service quality* **How?** *Structure & preparation* **REA3** **Focus on**: *Genuine* **How?** *No overthinking, trial & error* **REA4** **Focus on**: *Good content* **How?** *Consistency Trial & error*	**REA1** **Expectations**: *Importance will grow* **Personal branding services**: *Useful* **REA2** **Expectations**: *Importance will grow* **Personal branding services:**: *Useful* **REA3** **Expectations**: *Importance will grow* **Personal branding services**: *Useful to others* **REA4** **Expectations**: *Importance will grow* **Personal branding services:** *Useful*

Table 1. Questionnaire theme - summary of key findings

Questionnaire theme 1 key findings – Baseline for personal branding

Table 1. section QT1 addresses the main findings from the first set of theme questions asked from the interviewees. In the case of the most experienced real estate agent, the personal branding as a phenomenon is something to be reacted to. The reasons to start the personal branding has come from external sources like increased competition and new guidelines from the company. The real estate agent no. 1 sees personal branding as a tool to use to stand out from the professional masses. Personal branding comes naturally to her as she thinks she has been always doing it, now the process just has a name.

The interviewee no. 2. considers personal branding as a necessary aspect of his job. This can be seen as partly internal motivation to start personal branding but is also affected by external pressure as he mentions the need to be available in the channels where the future home buyers are. For him, personal branding represents a way to create something different professionally.

The real estate agent no. 3 considers personal branding to comprehend his personality both in personal and professional manner. It is a way for him to become familiar to his potential customers beforehand in digital channels so that the personal meetings would feel already natural for the client. The motivation to brand himself is internal.

Reason for personal branding in the case of interviewee no. 4 is also internal, although he describes it as a conscious competitive decision. The interviewee knew before starting as a real estate agent that personal branding is a key factor to expedite his career. The interviewee describes personal branding as a professional marketing tool to gain edge over competitors with visibility and creating valuable content.

Questionnaire theme 2 key findings – Personal brand building

QT2 addresses the questionnaires second theme findings regarding personal brand building. The real estate agent no. 1 states that her vision is to furthermore reinforce her status as the most resourceful and knowledgeable real estate agent in her area. She will use the years of expertise to her advantage in building her personal brand. She has also acquired the professional titles in real estate to demonstrate her expertise and professionalism. In face to face meetings her wide knowledge about housing markets, construction etc. will serve the purpose.

The real estate agent no. 2 visions himself to be a highly reliable professional among his customers. To achieve this status in the future, he commits to work hard for his clients all the time. Accompanied by his hard-working attitude, the interviewee uses data to state facts and support his own sayings.

The interviewee no 3. has a clear vision to become a dominant expert in a certain area in Helsinki. This he believes he can do by familiarizing himself to the locals not only in online but also on the streets. He builds his personal brand on his own personal interests and values rather than professional expertise.

Real estate agent no. 4 visions himself as a well-recognized real estate professional. He believes that with strong visibility in digital channels, he will achieve this status. To support this vision, the interviewee is willing to take action and constantly enhance his skills in marketing.

Questionnaire theme 3 key findings – Personal brand strategy

QT3. focuses on the main strategies of each individual interviewee in order to build the brand they have envisioned. Real estate agent no.1 has the clearest strategic decisions compared to other interviewees. Her annual marketing budget, localized marketing campaigns and neighborhood footwork are all aiming for one end result: local prestigious real estate expert. Real estate agent no. 2 had established strategic goals for himself but his learning curve on the job has been keeping him too busy to execute his strategies. All his currently on-hold strategies should help him to become the expert in his chosen area. He is finding the best solution for himself through trial and error.

Real estate no. 3 has set himself clear and measurable strategies. His strategy is to utilize automation to have all of his client acquisitions coming from the digital channels. Currently he is measuring the progress with analytical tools. He is consistently limiting his operating area to cover only a certain part of the city. Real estate no 4. did not mention any strategic processes being set to support achieving his vision. He is formulating his strategy in digital channels through trial and error. At this point, strong visible presence is used to become recognized expert in the industry.

Questionnaire theme 4 key findings – Personal brand marketing

QT4 consists of the interviewees chosen marketing channels and messages to support their brand building. The interviewee no 1. uses mostly traditional media for marketing purposes such as newspaper and flyers. She does use digital channels like Facebook and Instagram but due to the lack of experience and limited time to delve into it she does not feel comfortable using them. The message in her marketing is businesslike and to the point. In face to face encounters she brings her personality forward. The interviewee no. 2 is currently using mainly traditional media but will shift towards digital media marketing more in the future. The interviewee has chosen to use the same marketing channels and similar businesslike and to the point message as his colleagues. When meeting clients, he brings his personality more forward.

The real estate no 3. operates in several digital channels for marketing purposes and changes the tone of the message accordingly. In LinkedIn he represents his

professionalism and knowledge but in Instagram the message is about his personality and personal values. The messages can be emotional and occasionally even controversial to create discussion. The interviewee does not use traditional media for personal marketing purposes but would use it to get visibility for the agency. In personal meetings he hopes that he can be exactly who he is due to the fact that his personality can be reviewed in advance. The real estate agent no. 4 focuses on the visual side of marketing. He is consistent with creating new photos and videos to Instagram to give his audience a first-hand look into the world of a real estate agent and the person behind the profession. When meeting clients face-to-face, the interviewee matches his personality to the clients.

Questionnaire theme 5 key findings – Personal brand management

QT5 presents the ways how the interviewees choose to manage their personal brand in their everyday lives. As real estate agent no. 1 is focused on being an expert in all aspects of her profession, she consistently educates herself on the important news and development in the industry. Real estate agent no. 2 is keen on providing the same level of service to all clients. He ensures this by following the same structure with all clients and preparing well for each customer encounter.

The real estate agent no. 3 wants to remain as genuine as possible so that the clients know what to expect when they meet him. He does not overthink his publications and takes full responsibility on his sayings. The real estate agent no. 4 is focused on creating value and interesting content to his audience in the digital channels. This requires consistent content creation and the interviewee will jump on ideas even in the middle of the night.

Questionnaire theme 6 key findings – Personal brand in real estate business

The last section QT6 addresses the overall perception of the interviewees about the development of personal brands in real estate. All the respondents replied in a similar manner – the importance of personal branding will continue to grow in the real estate industry and the personal branding services would be something they are willing to try and pay for. The real estate agent no. 1 replied that without personal branding, she could still manage well with her established network, but new client acquisition would become a

challenge. She could consider using professional branding services to get assistance in solidifying her current brand. The real estate agent no. 2 sees personal branding as a necessary part of the job. Without it, especially newcomers cannot grow their client base. He would be willing to use professional brand building services due to lack of time and knowledge how to build it.

Real estate agent no. 3 is certain that personal branding will get bigger in the future as his experiences has shown that people always buy from people, not from companies. He sees that professional personal branding services would benefit most real estate agents in Finland where the skills are still lacking. Real estate no. 4 considers personal branding to be the only reasonable thing to do for all real estate agents. He has already used professional branding services such as seminars and books and will continue to invest in such services.

6   Conclusions and discussions

The final chapter of this study discusses the key findings of the empirical research and links it to the theoretical part. Purpose of this conclusion part is to provide answers to the research questions stated in the first chapter. For clarity and inclusive debate, the conclusions are presented by answering first to the sub-questions set in chapter 1. followed by conclusions on the main research question. The conclusions are followed by a discursive part in which the theoretical and managerial contributions are covered. The final section of this study addresses the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

6.1   Findings

This section will answer to the research questions starting from the last sub-question continuing to the main research question.

- SQ2: What are the benefits of personal branding to real estate agents?

The benefits of personal branding can be versatile. It can create a perceived image of a person which in turn can help the individual to reach a certain status or other intangible advantages in the minds of the audience. Using personal branding as a tool, individuals

can gain recognition in their field and generate vast networks. These networks can result in new relationships, opportunities and even business endeavors brining monetary benefits to the individual.

Based on the interviews, all the interviewees mentioned recognition and status being part of their personal branding benefits. This theory of personal branding was especially well reflected in the case of real estate agent number 3 who deliberately uses social media to brand himself as an easily approachable person and aims for a strong expert status in a certain neighborhood in the Helsinki region. Expert status was already established by real estate agent number 1, who had experienced situations where colleagues turned to her for help. Her ambition is to solidify the position and become more recognized in a certain area like in the case of real estate number 3. Theories of self-impression reflected mostly on the answers of real estate number 4, whose focus was on visibility in digital channels. This recognition had resulted in several new clients. Real estate agent number 2 benefits most of the offline personal branding. While meeting clients, he has been able to achieve the professional, transparent and knowledgeable status he aims for. These personal meetings have resulted in a repeat business and good reviews from the clients.

Surprisingly, none of the interviewees mentioned monetary gains to be the reason for their personal branding but all of them felt that without personal branding, they could not earn as much as they are currently earning. This supports the theories of personal branding being an abstract concept which is difficult to measure or fully fathom.

- SQ1: How do the real estate agents brand themselves?

Like in branding, personal branding consists of several different attributes and actions. The prevailing literature indicates that knowing one's audience and adjusting the message accordingly in a consistent manner is the key in building a solid foundation for a personal brand.

Authors cited in this study address importance of regional expertise especially in sales profession. The forerunners of regional expertise target the audience of the district providing them valuable and accurate information. Knowing the area, prices and development outlooks are all valuable information to disseminate to the audience by a

regionally recognized and respected real estate agent. These theories of successful personal branding are very well represented in the empirical part of this study. All but one of the interviewees have maid concrete efforts in finding their own specific neighborhood to brand themselves as an expert of that area.

The literature around the subject recommend that personal branding should be managed continuously and based on a strategy. The empirical findings of this study show that personal branding efforts and tactics of the interviewees are spontaneous and experimental rather than end-result of a clearly set strategy and goals. Measurement of brand value is more consistent than planning among the interviewees as all of the interviewees mention having at least some indicators to measure their brand. Building a strong personal brand requires consistency and selection of appropriate channels.

The reliance on traditional media was noteworthy in the case of a large company real estate agents whereas smaller agencies chose digital media outlets with a more experimental content. The message delivered by the large company real estate agents was less controversial and focused more on being professional. The personality of the real estate agents only surfaced in the face-to-face meetings with customers. Contradictory to the large company, the real estate agents of smaller agencies use their personality and personal lives as a marketing tool. Aligning one-self and building rapport with clients is crucial in the offline setting of personal branding. Only one of the interviewees mentioned this quality as their strength.

- RQ: Why real estate agents use personal branding?

This research has discovered that the emergence of technological enhancements and the growing use of digital tools have created the pressure for several industries and professions to re-discover themselves. Real estate agents are no exception as do-it-yourself websites such as Blok real estate make it easy for homeowners to cut out the middleman from the process. This technological trend has also created a so-called time-famine especially for younger generations. This lack of time has proven to be one of the major reasons why real estate agents are used. Researchers have also discovered that people buy people, not companies and the marketing power is shifting away from

companies to its employees. Social media and other digital channels have facilitated this trend as the people can choose what to see and who to follow.

It is peculiar that none of the interviewees mentioned these trends as their main reason to start branding themselves. The most consistently mentioned reason to brand one-self was to stand out from the masses. Competition was considered a second reason for personal branding in the industry. This can be linked to the technological trends but no concrete examples of direct competition were mentioned by the interviewees. The real estate agents 3 and 4 considered personal branding as the only way to be successful in the real estate market. Real estate agents 1 and 2 had the strong feeling that it is something they need to do but could not directly point their finger to the exact reason why they brand themselves.

In conclusion, the research shows that the role of personal branding in the profession of a real estate is vital and its importance will grow in the future. The decision to brand oneself comes from both internal motivations to benefit from it and external pressure such as competition and company standards. Most of all, real estate agents use personal branding as a tool to accelerate the process of becoming the professional they have envisioned themselves to be.

6.2 Theoretical contributions

The scientific goal of this study was to add knowledge to the personal branding of individual professionals. With the help from the empirical findings this study aims to produce new specific knowledge on how individual real estate agents have started to use personal branding and how the organization size and employment status affect the process. The previous literature has been lacking comprehensive studies and guidelines on real estate agent branding. (Arndt et al. 2017) Many of the findings in this study were found to be in line with the overall literature on brand building, personal branding and theories in the context of real estate business.

The empirical part of this study contributes to the prevailing literature on personal branding by shedding light on the personal branding of a particular profession, real estate agent.

This study improves on its part the research gap regarding real estate agents as it provides insight into the industry professionals with concrete examples.

By filling the research gap, this study helps also to produce new information about personal branding of one specific profession that has not been discussed in detail in academic literature. Hence this study helps for its part to understand the value of personal branding in real estate business.

6.3 Managerial contributions

The discoveries in this study revolve around the trend of personal branding and its practicality to individual professionals in real estate industry. This study will help managers and other individual practitioners as well as entrepreneurs to formulate a better understanding of the process and importance of personal brands. This study will benefit organizations and personnel working in any competitive market where it is hard to stand out. People with special knowledge and skills like different kind of experts and salespeople can draw valuable information from the study. The knowledge and doctrines of this study can especially be directed to newcomers of a certain industry.

Theory part of this study will provide new knowledge on the topic which has not been studied extensively before and according to Kurvinen et al. (2017) can provide an introduction to the topic for several professionals in Finland. The empirical part offers an insightful view on the practical side of personal branding as it discusses the everyday use of personal branding tactics by individual professionals. These empirical findings can create new ideas and opportunities for self-development in personal work as well as in organizational level.

From the basis of this study, different industry experts can see how valuable sharing information to customers is to own success and start the process of disseminating their own knowledge. Managers of different size companies are able to compare the differences between big and small company's employees' personal branding activities. Individual real estate agents can use this study to benchmark their own personal branding. Newcomers of a certain industry can learn from this study on how to start the personal

branding process and how to avoid the same mishaps mentioned by the interviewees in this study.

In addition, this study discovered a need for professional branding services. On the basis of this study, a thorough market research could be done to assess the full coverage of this particular need and on part help to develop new business ventures. However, it is important to acknowledge that all the findings in this study are centralized to the Helsinki metropolitan area and therefore can't be generalized to cover whole Finland.

6.4 Limitations and recommendations for future research

Even though this master's thesis studies the effect of personal branding in real estate business, its' focus is only in the individual personal branding of real estate agents, hence the branding strategies of the interviewees respective real estate agencies are not taken into consideration. All the interviewees are real estate agents working in the metropolitan area of Finland, therefore excluding the rest of real estate markets in Finland from this thesis. Non-native Finnish real estate agents were excluded to be chosen for the interviews as the study requires the interviewees to have the same cultural background. Limiting the language only to Finnish, the interviews are more reliable as there was smaller chance for language barrier.

I have limited the amount of big real estate agencies to one because two of the chosen interviewees represent the same company. For the sake of the relevance of this study, I chose two significantly smaller agencies. By choosing so the author hoped to have a better comparison and see if the size of the company and lower level of hierarchy influence the personal branding decisions and strategies.

The purpose of this study was to discover how real estate agents' personal branding is built in general. The interviewees in this study put great emphasis on building a personal brand online. Therefore, the offline aspects of personal branding received a minor role during the discussion's contradictory to the authors' original vision of the interviews. Own behavior is hard to describe so this study could be supplemented with another case study focusing more on observing the offline methods of building a personal brand. In future research, new information is needed how medium sized companies affect their

employees' personal branding efforts. It would also be important to study the effect of age from a wider sampling and expand the research to other areas of Finland.

This study also discovered a need for professional branding services. Researchers could draw inspiration from this study to evaluate the current knowledge about personal branding of individual professionals in Finland. Studying this knowledge gap, researcher could gain information which has monetary value to business consulting companies.

REFERENCES

Aaker, D.A. 1992, "Managing the Most Important Asset: Brand Equity", Planning Review. Vol. 20, No. 5, 56.

Aaker, D.A. 1995. Building strong brands. Brandweek, 10/95, 28-34.

Aalto, T. & Uusisaari, M. 2010. Löydy – Brändää itsesi verkossa. Helsinki. BTJ Finland.

Abimbola, T. 2001. Brand as a competitive strategy. Journal of research in marketing & entrepreneurship. Vol 3. No. 2, 97-106.

Ahto, O., Kahri, A., Kahri, T. & Mäkinen, M. 2016. Bulkista brändiksi. Käsikirja kasvuun ja kannattavuuteen. Jyväskylä. Docendo Oy.

Allen, M., Cadena, A., Rutherford, J & Rutherford, R. 2015. Effects of real estate brokers marketing strategies: Public open houses, broker open houses, MLS Virtual tours and MLS photographs. The journal of real estate research. Vol. 37, No. 3, 343-369.

Alt, M. & Griggs, S. 1988. Can a brand be cheeky? Marketing intelligence planning. Vol. 6. No.4, 9-16.

Ambady, N., Hallahan, M., Rosenthal, R., 1995. On Judging and Being Judged Accurately in Zero-Acquaintance Situations. J. Pers. Soc. Psychol. 69, 518–529.

Amoako, G & Okpattah, B. 2018. Unleashing salesforce performance. The impacts of personal branding and technology in an emerging market. Technology in society. No 54, 20-26.

Arndt, A., Harrison, D.M., Lane, M.A., Seiler, M.J. & Seiler, V.L. 2017. Real Estate Agent Target Marketing: Are Buyers Drawn Towards Particular Real Estate Agents? Journal of Housing Research. Vol. 26. No. 1, 39-52.

Arruda, W. & Dixson, K. 2007. Career distinction: Stand out by building your brand. John Wiley & Sons. New Jersey.

Atwong, C. 2015. A social media practicum: An action learning approach to social media marketing and analytics. Marketing education review. Vol. 25, 27-31.

Baker, T.L., Rapp, A., Meyer, T. & Mullins, R. 2014. The role of brand communications on front line service employee beliefs, behaviors and performance. Journal of the academy of marketing science. Vol. 42, No. 6, 642-657.

Benjamin, J.D, Chinloy, P. & Hardin, W.G. 2006. Local presence, scale and vertical integration: Brands as signals. Journal of real estate finance and economics. Vol. 33, No. 4, 389-403.

Bergström, S. & Leppänen, A. 2003. Yrityksen asiakasmarkkinointi. 8. Painos. Helsinki. Edita Prima Oy.

Berkelaar, B. L. 2014. Cybervetting, online information and personnel selection: New transparency expectations and the emergence of digital social contract. Management communication quarterly. Vol. 28, Vol. 4, 479-506.

Blackston, M. 1992. Observations: building brand equity by managing the brand's relationships. Journal of advertising research. Vol. 32, 79-83.

Bliss, J. 2005. How to build a personal brand. Consulting to management. Vol. 16, No. 3, 6-10.

Brastow, R., Springer, T. & Waller, B. 2012. Efficiency and incentives in residential brokerage. Journal of real estate finance and economics. Vol. 45, 1041-1061.

Brems, C., Temmerman, M., Graham, T. & Broersma, M. 2016. Personal branding on Twitter. How employed and freelance journalist stage themselves in social media. Digital journalism. Vol 5. 443-459.

Castaldi, C. & Giarratana, M.S. 2018. Diversification, branding and performance of professional service firms. Journal of service research. Vol. 21. No. 3, 353-364.

Cederberg, C. 2017. Personal branding for psychologists. Ethically navigating an emerging vocational trend. Professional psychology: Research and practice. Vol 48. 183-190

Chen, C.P. 2013. Exploring personal branding on YouTube. Journal of internet commerce. Vol. 12, No. 4, 332-347.

Chen, H-M. & Chung, H-M. 2017. A scale for CEO personal brand measurement. South African journal of business management. Vol. 48, No. 2, 23-32.

Cherif, E. & Grant, D. 2014. Analysis of e-business models in real estate. Electronic commerce research. Vol 14. 25-50.

Chiagouris, L. & Wansley, B. 2000. Branding on the internet. Marketing management. Vol 9. No. 2, 34-38.

Clifton, S., Clifton, R. & Simmons, J. 2009. Economist Books: Brands and Branding. London: Profile Books Ltd.

Corsi, S. 2004. Reinforcing your brand. Mortgage Banking. Volume 65, Issue 3, 68-72.

Crant, J. 2014. Using LinkedIn to boost top financial careers. The journal of corporate accounting & finance. 3/2014, 19-23.

DeShields, O, Kara, A & Kaynak, E. 1996. Source effects in purchase decisions: The impact of physical attractiveness and accent of salesperson. International journal of research in marketing. Vol. 13 No.1, 89-101.

Eräsalo, U. 2011. Palvelu ammattina. Restamark Oy. Helsinki.

Eskola, J. & Suoranen, J. 1998. Johdatus laadulliseen tutkimukseen. Jyväskylä: Gummerus Kirjapaino Oy

Eskola, J. & Suoranta, J. 2000. Johdatus laadulliseen tutkimukseen. Jyväskylä: Gummerus Kirjapaino Oy

Fomburn, C.J & Shanley, M. 1990. What's in a name? Reputation-building and corporate strategy. Academy of management journal. Vol 33, 233-258.

Frost, J.H., Chance, Z., Norton, M.I., Ariely, D., 2008. People are experience goods: Improving online dating with virtual dates. J. Interact. Mark. 22, 51–61.

Gall, D. 2012. Librarian like a rock star: Using your personal brand to promote your services and reach distant users. Journal of library administrations. Vol. 52, 549-558.

Gardner, B & Levy, S. 1955. The product and the brand. Harvard business review. Vol. 33, 33-39.

Gay, S. & Zhang, A. 2014. Expertise value added in the housing market. Housing law and policy. Vol 20, 1-28.

Gayet, S., Van der Stigchel, S. & Paffen C.L. 2014. Breaking continuous flash suppression: Competing for consciousness on the pre-semantic battlefield. Frontiers in psychology. Vol 5. 460

Ghauri, P. & Gronhaug, K. 2005. Research methods in business studies: A practical quide. Pearson education.

Ghodeswar, M. B. 2008. Building brand identity in competitive markets: a conceptual model. Journal of product and brand management. Vol. 17, No. 1, 4-12.

Gibbs, G.R. 2007. Analyzing qualitative data. SAGE Publications Ltd.

Givens, L. 2008. The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods. SAGE Publications Inc.

Goodyear, M. 1993. Reviewing the concept of brands and branding. Marketing and research today. Vol 21, No. 2, 75-79.

Gordon, W. & Langmaid, R. 1993. Qualitative market research. A practisioner's and buyer's guide. Aldershot: Gower Publishing Company

Gubrium, J & Holstein, J. 2001. Handbook of interview research. Sage publications. Thousand Oaks, CA.

Hajli, N.M. 2013. A study of the impact of social media on consumers. International journal of market research. Vol 56, No. 3, 387-404.

Halila, H & Hemmo, M. 2008. Sopimustyypit. Talentum Media. Helsinki.

Haman, K. 2017. Tech changes way luxury real estate marketed. Orange County Business Journal. Vol. 40, No.19, 13.

Harper, F. 2015. Success in programming: How to gain recognition, power and influence through personal branding. Apress.

Harris, L. & Rae, A. 2011. Building a personal brand through social networking. Journal of business strategy. Vol. 32, No.5, 14-21.

Hirsjärvi, S. & Hurme, H. 1991. Teemahaastattelu. Helsinki: Yliopistopaino.

Hirsjärvi, S., Remes, P. & Sajavaara, P. 2008. Tutki ja kirjoita. Keuruu: Otavan kirjapaino.

Hollman, W & Kleiner, B. 1997. Establishing rapport: the secret business tool to success. Managing service quality: An international journal. Vol. 7, No. 4, 194-197.

Hood, K. M., Robles, M., & Hopkins, C. D. 2014. Personal branding and social media for students in todays' competitive job market. The journal of research in business education. Vol.56, No.2, 33.

Hopper, B. 1992. The selling real estate broker and the purchaser: assessing the relationship. Vol. 4, 1-19.

Huang, Z. & Benyoucef, M. 2013. From e-commerce to social commerce: A close look at design features. Electronic commerce research and applications. Vol.12, 246-259.

Kang, K. 2013. Branding Pays. Branding Pays Media.

Karaduman, I. 2013. The Effect of Social media on personal branding efforts of top level executives. Procedia – Social and behavioral sciences, 99, 465-473

Karampela, M., Tregear, A., Ansell, J. & Dunnett, S. 2018, "When opposites attract? Exploring the existence of complementarity in self-brand congruence processes", *Psychology & Marketing,* vol. 35, no. 8, pp. 573-585.

Kasso, M. 2011. Kiinteistönvälitys- ja arviointi. Talentum media. Helsinki.

Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, Measuring and Managing Customer- Based Brand Equity. Journal of Marketing, 57, 1-22.

Keller, K. L. 1999. Managing Brands for the Long Run: Brand Reinforcement and Revitalization Strategies. California Management Review. Vol. 41, No. 3,102-124.

Khedher, M. 2014. Personal branding phenomenon. International Journal of Information, Business and Management, Vol. 6, No.2, 29-40.

Khedher, M. 2015. A brand for everyone: Guidelines for personal brand management. Journal of global business issues. Vol. 9, No.1, 19-27.

Kleppinger, C., A. & Cain, J. 2015. Personal Digital Branding as a Professional Asset in the Digital Age. American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education. 79, 6.

Klijn, E.H, Eshuis, J. & Braun, E. 2012. The influence of stakeholder involvement on the effectiveness of place branding. Public management review. Vol. 14, No. 4, 499-519.

Kortesuo, K. 2011. Tee itsestäsi brändi. Asiantuntijaviestinä livenä ja verkossa. 5.painos. Tammi. Helsinki.

Kurvinen, J. & Seppä, M. 2016. B2B-markkinoinnin & myynnin pelikirja: Yritysjohdon opas myyntiin ja markkinointiin. 1.painos. Kauppakamari, Helsinki.

Kurvinen, J., Laine, T. & Tolvanen, V. 2017. Henkilöbrändi – asiantuntijasta vaikuttajaksi. Alma talent. Helsinki.

Laakso, H. 2001. Brandit kilpailuetuna. Miten rakennan ja kehitän kilpailuetua. Kauppakaari. Helsinki.

Laakso, H. 2003. Brändit kilpailuetuna. 5. Uudistettu painos. Talentum Media Oy. Helsinki.

Labrecque, L.I., Markos, E., Milne, G.R., 2011. Online Personal Branding: Processes, Challenges, and Implications. J. Interact. Mark. 25, 37–50.

Lair, D.J., Sullivan, K., Cheney, G., 2005. Marketization and the Recasting of the Professional Self: The Rhetoric and Ethics of Personal Branding. Management Communication Quarterly. 18, 307–343.

Lee, C-C. 2012. Extended service quality model: Causes of agency problems and ethical sales behavior. Social behavior and personality. Vol. 40, No. 8, 1381-1400.

Lee, J. & Cavanaugh, T. 2016. Building your brand: The integration of infographic resume as student self-analysis tools and self-branding resources. Journal of hospitality, leisure, sports and tourism education. Vol.18, 61-68.

Lee, N. & Lings, I. 2008. Doing business research. Sage Publications. London.

Leek, S. & Chirstodoulides, G. 2011. A literature review and future agenda for B2B branding challenges of branding in a B2B context. Industrial marketing management. Vol. 40, No. 6, 830-837.

Leland, K. T. 2016. The brand mapping strategy: Design, build and accelerate your brand. Entrepreneur press. Irvine, CA.

Lieven, T. 2016. Customers' choice of a salesperson during the initial sales encounter. Journal of retailing and consumer services. Vol. 32, 109-116.

Lindberg-Repo, K. 2005. Asiakkaan ja brändin vuorovaikutus. Miten johtaa brändin arvoprosesseja. Helsinki. WSOY.

Lindemann, J. 2010. The economy of brands Palgrave MacMillan. New York.

Love, L. & Singh, P. 2011. Workplace branding: Leveraging human resource management practices for competitive advantage through "Best employer" surveys. Journal of business and psychology. Vol. 26, 175-181.

Luca, F-A., Ioan, C. & Sasu, C. 2015. The importance of the professional brand. The doctors' personal brand. Procedia economics and finance. No. 20, 350-357.

Lundberg, T.K. 2004. 101 ideaa asiakaspalveluun: Käytännön neuvoja ja positiivisia virikkeitä. Positiivarit. Lahti.

Malmelin, N. & Hakala, J. 2007. Radikaali brändi. Talentum. Helsinki.

Martin, B. 2009. An interview with William Arruda: Communicating your personal brand. Thunderbird international business review. Vol. 51. No. 5. 417-419

Marwick, A., & Boyd, D. 2011. To see and be seen: Celebrity practices on Twitter. The international journal of research into new media technologies. Vol. 17. No. 2. 139-158

Maurya, U.P. & Mishra, P. 2012. What is a brand? A perspective on brand meaning. European journal of business and management. Vol. 4, No.3, 122-128.

McCartney, S. 2012. 100 Great branding ideas. Marshall Cavendish. London.

McNally, D & Speak, K.D. 2003. Be your own brand. A breakthrough formula for standing out from the crowd. San Francisco. Berret-Koehler.

Metsämuuronen, J. (2005) Tutkimuksen tekemisen perusteet ihmistieteissä. Jyväskylä: Gummerus kirjapaino Oy.

Meyvis, T. & Janiszewski, C. 2002. Consumers' beliefs about product benefits: The effect of obviously irrelevant product information. Journal of Consumer Research. Vol. 28, No. 4, 618-635.

Miles, S. J., & Mangold, W. G. 2005. Positioning Southwest Airlines through employee branding. Business horizons. Vol 48. No. 6. 535-545.

Min, E.K., 2012. When a Brand is a Sincere Friend: Compensatory Response to Social Exclusion. Duke University.

Molyneyx, L. 2015. What journalists retweet: Opinion, humor and brand development on Twittter. Journalism. Vol.16, No.7, 920-935.

Musetescu, A. & Chira, R. 2015, "How to create a strong brand". Knowledge Horizons.Economics. Vol. 7, No. 2, 119-122.

Mäkinen, M., Kahri, A. & Kahri, T. 2010. Brändi kulmahuoneeseen! WS bookwell Oy. Porvoo.

Nam, H, Ekinci, Y. & Whyatt, G. 2011. Brand equity, brand loyalty and customer satisfaction. Annals of tourism research. Vol. 38, No. 3, 1009-1030.

Nhat, Q.L. & Magne, S. 2017. Determinants of repurchase intentions of real estate agent services: Direct and indirect effects of perceived quality. Journal of retailing and consumer services. Vol. 35, No.3, 84-90.

Nolan, L. 2015. The impact of executive personal branding on non-profit perception and communications. Public relations review. Vol.41, 288-292.

Olins, W. 2003. On brand. Thames & Hudson, London.

Ottovordemgentschenfelde, S. 2017. Organizational, professional, personal: An exploratory study of political journalists and their hybrid brand on Twitter. Journalism. Vol. 18, No. 1.

Patron, H.E & Roskelley, K.D. 2008. The effect of reputation and competition on the advice of real estate agents. The journal of real estate finance and economics. Vol. 37, No. 4, 387-399.

Pihl, C. 2013. In the borderland between personal and corporate brands – the case of professional bloggers. Journal of global fashion marketing. Vol. 4, No.2, 112-127.

Pääkkönen, L. 2017. Social selling – Henkilöbrändi, verkostot ja sosiaalinen media B2B-myynnissä. Noblea. Helsinki.

Raatikainen, L. 2008. Asiakas, tuote ja markkinat. Edita Publishing Oy. Helsinki.

Rainisto, S. & Moilanen, T. 2009. How to Brand Nations, Cities and Destinations - A Planning Book for Place Branding. Palgrave.

Rampersad, H. 2010. Step by step to an authentic personal brand. Training & management development methods. Vol. 24, No. 2, 401-406.

Rampersad. H. 2008. A new blueprint for powerful and authentic personal branding. Wiley interscience. Vol.47, No.6, 34-37.

Rangarajan, D, Gelb, B. & Vandaveer, A. 2017. Strategic personal branding – And how it works. Business Horizons. Vol. 60, No.5, 657-666.

Reiccheld, F., Markey, R. & Hopton, C. 2000. E-customer loyalty – applying the traditional rules of business for online success. European business journal. Vol. 12, 173-179.

Richardson, H. & Zumbano, L. 2012. Furhter assesments of the efficiency effects of Internet use in home search. Journal of real estate research. Vol. 34, 515-548.

Roberts, L. 2005. Changing faces: Professional image construction in diverse organizational settings. Academy of management review. Vol. 30, No.4, 685-711.

Ross, D. F. (2015) Distribution planning and control: Managing in the era of supply chain management. Third edition. Springer.

Rutherford, R. & Yavas, A. 2012. Discount brokerage in residential real estate markets. Real estate economics. Vol. 40, 508-535.

Saavalainen, M. 2016. Kiinteistönvälittäjän menestyksen salaisuudet. Kiinteistöalan kustannus Oy.

Salter, S., Mixon, F. & King, E. 2012. Broker beauty and boon: a study of physical attractiveness and its effect on real estate brokers' income and productivity. Applied financial economics. Vol. 22, 811-825.

Sampson, E. 1995. First impressions: The power of personal style. Library Management. Vol. 16, No.4, 25-28.

Seethamraju, R. 2004. Measurement of user perceived Web quality. ECIS 2004 Proceedings. 176.

Seiler, M., Madhavan, P. & Liechty, M. 2012. Toward an understanding of real estate homebuyer internet search behavior: An application of ocular tracking technology. Journal of real estate research. Vol. 34, No.2, 211-241.

Sharma, A., Tzokas, N., Saren, M. & Kyziridis, P. 1999. Antecedents and concequences of relationship marketing. Industrial marketing management. Vol. 28. No. 6, 601-611.

Shepherd, I.D.H. 2005. From cattle and Coke to Charlie: Meeting the challenge of self-marketing and personal branding. Journal of marketing management. Vol. 21, No. 5-6, 589-606.

Simmons, G. 2007. i-Branding: Developing the internet as a branding tool. Marketing intelligence and planning. Vol. 25, No. 6, 544-562.

Sounio, L. 2010. Brändikäs. 6.painos. Helsinki. Tammi.

Spence, M. & Essousi, L. 2010. SME brand building and management: An exploratory study. European journal of marketing. Vol 44. No.7/8, 1037-1054.

Stamso, M. 2015. Selling a house and the decision to use a real estate broker in Norway. Property management. Vol. 33, No. 2, 173-186.

Stanton, A & Stanton, W. (2013) Building "Brand me": Creating a personal brand statement. Marketing education review. Vol.23. No.1, 81-86.

Steenkamp, J-B. (2017) Global brand strategy. World wise marketing in the age of branding. McMillan publishers, London.

Stratman, T. (2011) Building your own brand. Supply chain management review.

Thompson-Whiteside, H., Turnbull, S. & Howe-Walsh, L. (2018) Developing an authentic personal brand using impression management behaviours: Exploring female entrepreneurs' experiences. An international journal. Vol. 21, No.2, 166-181.

Turnbull, G. & Waller, B. (2018) (What) do top performing real estate agents deliver for their clients? Journal of housing economics. Vol. 41, 142-152.

Vallas, S.P., & Cummins E. R. (2015) Personal branding and identity norms in the popular business press: Enterprise culture in the age of precarity. Organization studies. Vol 36. No. 3. 293-319.

Ward, C & Yates, D. (2013) Personal branding and e-Professionalism. Journal of service science. Vol. 6, No.1, 101-104.

Veloutsou, C. & Taylor, C. (2012) The role of the brand as a person in business-to-business brands. Industrial marketing management. Vol. 41, No. 6, 898-907.

Wenham, K., Stephens, D. & Hardy, R. (2003) The marketing effectiveness of UK environmental charity websites compared to best practices. International journal of nonprofit and voluntary sector marketing. Vol. 8, No. 3, 213-223.

Wetsch, L. (2012). A personal branding assignment using social media. Journal of advertising education. Vol. 16. No.1. 30-36.

Whillans, A., Dunn, E., Smeets, P., Bekkers, R. & Norton, M. (2017). Buying time promotes happiness. Proceedings of the national academy of sciences. 06541.

Wincci, S. & Mohamad, W. (2015). Social media strategies for personal branding – A case study of Malaysian celebrities on Facebook. American journal of economics. No. 5, Vol.22, 236-242.

von Hertzen, P. (2006) Brändi yritysmarkkinoinnissa. Talentum. Helsinki.

Vosloban, R. (2014) Employee's personal branding as a competitive advantage: A managerial approach. The International Journal of Management Science and Information Technology. No. 10, 147-159.

Välimäki, K. (2000) Ulkopuolinen asiantuntija ja ostajan selonottovelvollisuus käytetyn asunnon kaupassa. Defensor legis 6/2000.

Ylikoski, T. (1999). Unohtuiko asiakas? Keuruu: Otavan Kirjapaino Oy.

Yuan, X., Lee, J., Kim, S. & Kim. Y. (2013). Toward a user-oriented recommendation system for real estate websites. Information systems. Vol. 38, 231-243.

Zinko, R. & Rubin, M. (2015). Personal reputation and the organization. Journal of management & organization. Vol. 21, No. 2. 217-236.

ELECTRONIC REFERENCES

American marketing association, AMA. (2017) Dictionary. [Cited 17.10.2018] [Available: https://www.ama.org/resources/Pages/Dictionary.aspx?dLetter=B#brand+personality]

KvaliMOTV. (2006) Menetelmäopetuksen tietovaranto. Tampere: Yhteiskuntatieteellinen tietoarkisto. [Cited 7.11.2018][Available: https://www.fsd.uta.fi/menetelmaopetus/kvali/L6_3_3.html]

Peters, T. (1997) Brand called you. Fast company. [Cited 16.8.2018] [Available: https://www.fastcompany.com/28905/brand-called-you]

Saario, K. (2016) Rakennatko asiantuntija- vai henkilöbrändin ja mitä hyötyä itsensä brändäämisestä on? [Cited 19.10.2018][Available: https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/rakennatko-asiantuntija-vai-henkil%C3%B6br%C3%A4ndin-ja-mit%C3%A4-hy%C3%B6ty%C3%A4-saario/]

The National Association of realtors. (2018) Home buyer and seller generational trends report. Washington, DC. [Cited 12.11.2018][Available: https://www.nar.realtor/sites/default/files/documents/2018-home-buyers-and-sellers-generational-trends-03-14-2018.pdf]

Williams, J. (2015) The basics of branding. Entrepreneur Europe. [Cited 28.8.2018] [Available: https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/77408]

AUDIO BOOKS

Dale Carnegie. (1936/1998) How to Win Friends and Influence People. [Cited: 30.8.2018] [Available at: https://www.storytel.fi/books/80005-How-To-Win-Friends-and-Influence-People]

Julie Broad. (2016) The new brand you – Your new image makes the sale for you. Authors' republic. [Cited 5.9.2018] [Available at: https://www.storytel.fi/books/76535-The-New-Brand-You---Your-New-Image-Makes-the-Sale-for-You]

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1.

Miksi henkilöbrändäys?

1. Mitä henkilöbrändäys tarkoittaa sinun mielestäsi?

2. Mitkä tekijät ovat johtaneet päätökseesi brändätä itseäsi?

3. Mistä lähtien olet brändännyt itseäsi?

Brändin rakentuminen

4. Mitkä ovat sinun henkilökohtaiset bränditekijäsi?

1. Mikä on sinun brändilupauksesi asiakkaille?

2. Mistä osista brändipersoonasi koostuu

5. Millaista mielikuvaa tavoittelet?

Brändistrategia

6. Onko sinulla brändistrategiaa?

7. Mitä tavoittelet brändäykselläsi?

8. Jos olet määritellyt tavoitteet, minkälaisia ne ovat ja ovatko ne täyttyneet?

9. Mikä on kohderyhmäsi?

10. Miten suojaat omaa brändiäsi? Millä varmistat, että erottaudut jatkossakin?

Markkinointi

11. Missä kanavissa markkinoit itseäsi?

12. Miksi nämä kanavat?

13. Muokkaatko sanomaasi eri kanavissa?

14. Mistä etsit ideoita ja esimerkkejä brändäykseesi?

15. Millaisia konkreettisia keinoja käytät brändisi vahvistamiseksi

Johtaminen

16. Miten johdat omaa brändiäsi?

17. Mitä mittareita sinulla on?

18. Miten mittaat brändisi arvoa?

19. Mikä on brändäyksesi hinta (investointi ajallisesti ja rahallisesti)?

20. Mikä on suunnitelmasi jatkoinvestointien suhteen brändäämisessäsi?

Brändäyksen nykyhetki ja tulevaisuus

21. Mitä haasteita olet kohdannut brändäämisessäsi?

22. Millaisia asenteita kohtaat brändäyksen myötä asiakkailta, firmaltasi, kollegoiltasi, yhteistyökumppaneiltasi tai kilpailijoiltasi?

23. Miten brändäystoimenpiteet ovat mielestäsi vaikuttaneet ansiotuloihisi?

24. Mitä itse olet mieltä henkilöbrändäyksestä?

25. Mitä tapahtuisi, jos lakkaisit brändäämästä? Mihin se vaikuttaisi?

26. Miten näät henkilöbrändin kehittyvän kiinteistönvälitysbisneksessä?

27. Mitä mieltä olet ammattimaisesta brändin rakentamisesta