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Competing on the job market

- a study of the relationship between product- and personal branding

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Abstract

Title:	Competing on the job market - a study of the relationship between product- and personal branding.
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Authors:	Miriam Alster, Roger Persson and Josefin Svensson
Supervisor:	Ingmar Tufvesson
Key words:	Personal branding, business students, résumé, product branding.
Purpose:	The purpose of our thesis is to analyze the application of models from product branding on job-seeking business students as a way to establish a personal brand.
Methodology:	Our study is based upon deductive reasoning. We further used qualitative research, mostly based on interviews.
Theoretical perspectives:	Our theoretical chapter is divided into two main themes: brand building and brand positioning. We have used theoretical models taken from product branding. These models, combined with literature from personal branding make up our theoretical framework.
Empirical foundation:	Our empirical chapter is based on a series of interviews. The interviews we conducted were with three business students, two employers at recruitment companies and a career coach at Lund University.
Conclusions:	We found that the principles of product branding closely resembles those of personal branding and are therefore applicable. The models that build a products brand can do the same for a business student. Thereby we can conclude that personal branding does derive from product branding.

Sammanfattning

Uppsatsens titel:	Konkurrens på arbetsmarknaden – en studie om relationen mellan product- och personal branding.
Seminariedatum:	2006-01-19
Ämne/kurs:	FEK 591, Magisteruppsats i marknadsföring, 10 poäng
Författare:	Miriam Alster, Roger Persson och Josefin Svensson
Handledare:	Ingmar Tufvesson
Nyckelord:	Personal branding, ekonomistudenter, resumé, product branding.
Syfte:	Syftet med våran uppsats är att analysera applikationen av modeller tagna från product branding på arbetssökande ekonomistudenter för att etablera ett personligt varumärke.
Metod:	Våran uppsats är baserad på en deduktiv ansats. Vi har använt oss av kvalitativa undersökningar, huvudsakligen intervjuer.
Teoretiska perspektiv:	Vårt teorikapitel utgår ifrån två teman: varumärkesuppbyggnad och varumärkespositionering. Vi har använt teoretiska modeller ifrån product branding. Det är dessa modeller, tillsammans med personal branding litteratur som utgör vårt teoretiska ramverk.
Empiri:	Vårt empirikapitel baseras på en rad intervjuer. De intervjuer vi har utfört är med tre ekonomistudenter, två arbetsgivare inom rekryteringsbranschen samt en karriärrådgivare vid Lunds Universitet.
Slutsatser:	Vi hävdar att de principer som utgör product branding är likgiltiga med dem som utgör personal branding och kan därför tillämpas. Modellerna som bygger en produkts varumärke kan göra det samma för en ekonomistudent. Och därmed konstaterar vi att personal branding har sitt ursprung i product branding.

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1 Introduction

This chapter opens with a brief background of our subject. We will then proceed to give some information about the different forms of branding and how they have developed. That will lead to our problem formulation followed by the purpose of the thesis. The chapter will then be concluded with our delimitations and a short summary of what is to come in the thesis.

1.1 Background

The world is enduring vast changes in the form of technological advance, increased knowledge and globalization. The notion of globalization is no longer just a cliché, it is here and it is all around us. Organizations as well as individuals have to adjust to fit into the global market place that has emerged. This phenomenon means a lot of opportunities, but also an increased competition.¹ As a result of this there is an increased awareness and a constant rise of expectations. Companies are continuously struggling with the eternal battle of peak performance. A few decades ago company value was measured solely in terms of tangible assets, but in the 1980s brand awareness revolutionized mergers and acquisitions thereby bringing attention to the intangible assets. Since then, branding and brand management emerged as leading strategies and are more or less seen as invaluable ways of maintaining long-term success. The idea of branding is age old, but with the increased focus it has spread onto other areas of interest. Today, branding principals are applied to products as well as corporations and even cities. But how far can it be stretched?

The idea of branding individuals is not as far fetched as it might seem. When branding is applied to people it becomes more intimate, transforming from simply a statement into a relationship. Celebrities such as David Beckham have, through years of performing, built up an image known as a personal brand. This is truly valuable, not only for himself, but also for his owners, at least from a merchandising point of view. His licensed products alone are believed to have regained his acquisition fee of forty one million euros.² Other celebrities have earned recognition through turmoil and controversy, such as: Michael Jackson and Paris Hilton. This shows that the idea of building a personal brand is the same, irregardless of means. The ultimate goal, much like product branding, is recognition, which in turn leads to success.

¹ Coulter (2005), pg. 41.

² Kapferer (2005), pg. 2.

But how does the process fit a “regular” person, like a business student, in everyday situations? Can they too benefit from the phenomenon of personal branding? Naturally, the recognition is far less than of David Beckham, but in situations pertaining to them, it is necessary to show both abilities and strengths. As competition on the job market grows tougher, the search for a competitive advantage does too.

1.2 Problem formulation

The building of a personal brand encompasses numerous steps. The fact that there exists such a concept is apparent and will not be disputed throughout this thesis. It is something that has been used for years by celebrities, as a way for them to define and position themselves. However, the parts that remain vague are the origin of this phenomenon and how it is applied. The most common definition of personal branding is: a clear, powerful, positive association other people recognize when thinking of you. It summarizes what you stand for. It is values, abilities and actions that come to mind when you are mentioned. It is a “professional alter ego” used to influence others perception. It encompasses three main issues: “who you are, what you do and what makes you different, or how you create value for your target market.”³

There is a clear trend towards a hardened job market, and having a university degree no longer implies that almost certain job guarantee it once did. The students entering the work force today need new ways of making impressions. Here lies the problem that, for us, remained unclear. There are countless manuals and various written literature on the subject of personal branding, but they are simply “how to” handbooks lacking in substance. The question is what makes up a personal brand and how does the creation process look?

Several experts claim that the idea of personal branding is built on the foundation laid by branding products. This implies that the same type of reasoning is applicable when branding individuals as well as products. In other words, the criterion that makes a product’s brand strong should, in fact, hold true even for individuals. Despite this, the common literature written on the subject of personal branding has lacked theoretical models and thereby origin. This leads the reader to a degree of confusion and also questions the validity of personal branding’s academic contribution on today’s society.

³ Montoya (2005), pg. 11-12.

The above discussion leads us to formulate two main questions:

- 1) *Can models, taken from product branding, be used to build a business students personal brand?*
- 2) *Does personal branding thereby derive from product branding?*

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of our thesis is to analyze the application of models from product branding on job-seeking business students as a way to establish a personal brand.

1.4 Delimitations

Since the subject of personal branding concerns people at different levels, we considered the amount of restriction crucial. There are also roles that individuals hold that need to be considered. We decided not to limit ourselves to simply studying the students whom personal branding affects, but also the employers and career coaches who influence and evaluate them. We realize that our choices have consequences and as such we are able to affect the results. The idea behind using the three different roles was to gather a complete picture of the application process, in order to see the impact of personal branding.

Concerning the choice of students, we restricted ourselves to only using business students at Lund University. Using a more diverse group could have compromised our results and we felt comfortable studying only them. The employers were chosen based on the fact that they represent recruitment companies, not only single-company employers. The career coach was chosen based on the fact that he coaches economic students.

1.5 Disposition

In chapter two we will discuss the methodology used in researching the subject. The third chapter contains our theoretical framework upon which our thesis is built. Further, in chapter four we will account for the empirical foundation which we uncovered during our research. Chapter five consists of an analysis of the theoretical models applied to our empirical foundation. In the concluding chapter we will conduct a discussion of our results and a presentation of our suggestions for further research.

2 Method

We have now described the background of the subject personal branding. In this next chapter we will continue by describing the methods we used to perform our research. We will start with an introduction to why we chose the subject followed by an account of the types of reasoning we used. Then we will list and motivate our choice of empirical subjects, followed by discussing the validity and reliability of the thesis. To summarize, we will have a section devoted to our reference criticism.

2.1 Subject choice

We first came into contact with the subject of personal branding while attending a master's course in brand management. Then we discovered the amounts of publications on the subject, and it drew us deeper. We initially wanted to research both the negative and positive aspects of personal branding, but realized that this idea lacked substance. We then stumbled upon the idea of studying the application of product branding theories to individuals, more specifically business students; this by not only looking at individuals and related models, but also at potential employers and guidance agencies to gain all-around knowledge about the subject. Further, we wanted to see how the concepts of product- and personal branding co-existed and how they relate to each other.

Our choice of studying the subject of personal branding therefore stems from several different factors. There has been a great deal of research done of the subject of branding, but we wanted to take the subject further and apply it to business students applying for a job. Recently there has been several articles as well as theses published on subjects pertaining to the extension of branding, for example the concept of city branding. This combined with an increased competition on the job market fueled our interest and resulted in our wanting to research the subject.

2.2 Deductive reasoning

When describing the process of research there are different reasoning methods to choose from. We found our study to follow deductive reasoning. The deductive method is the most common used; by using this, the researcher formulates hypotheses for an empirical study by applying information already known or portrayed by theoretic models as a basis. The hypotheses should include ideas

taken from these models that can be used to perform research on a subject.⁴ The reason we choose to follow this type of reasoning was because we based our empirical questions and thereby thesis on different theories pertaining to our subject. As our empirical foundation is based on interviews of both business students, recruitment companies and a career coach the deductive reasoning is the most appropriate match.⁵ When deciding upon the questions to asked, both for the business student interviews, employer interviews and the career coach interview, we were aided by models pertaining both to personal branding and product branding.

Even though we consider our study to be deductive, we do find that we have some inductive traces in our research. This method opposes the deductive in that by using it the researcher formulates a theory based on the empirical findings. In other words, the researcher through observation is able to draw general conclusions.⁶ The reason why we feel that we have traces of inductive reasoning is that we did have a preconceived notion of the subject of personal branding that did in fact affect our questions causing us to be somewhat subjective which is in line with inductive reasoning.

Some criticism that can rise from using deductive reasoning is that the researcher has a tendency to only gather the type of information that only confirms the hypotheses, so it is important that a thorough research is done.⁷

2.3 Qualitative method

In our study, we found that the qualitative form of information gathering was more appropriate to the type of information we were seeking, as opposed to the quantitative method. When pondering the information search done on subject we put a lot of emphasis on the type of collection method we should use. The choice between the two depends on the type of research that is to be done. Though there are similarities between the two, they are adherently different. The qualitative method is more open and allows the respondents to elaborate their answers. We believed that this would allow us to find out their actual thoughts and to dwell deeper into the subject. This method is usually performed individually or in groups of subjects in interview form and is believed to be a more open method, and, as mentioned before, allows elaboration. The purpose is to describe, analyze and understand the response with focus on the subjects. The researcher is thereby not interested in what the actual

⁴ Bryman & Bell (2005), pg. 23.

⁵ Lundahl & Skärvad (1999), pg. 187.

⁶ Bryman & Bell (2005), pg. 25.

⁷ Jacobsen (2002), pg. 34-35.

answer is, but in what the subjects believe the answer to be.⁸ Another reason is that the qualitative method works better on case studies, which we performed during our study.⁹ Also, a qualitative method is preferred when there is a need for increased knowledge, this was appropriate for our thesis due to the fact that there was a limitation of knowledge.¹⁰

The quantitative method of research is basically used for measuring purposes. The measurements in turn are used to explain or describe the problem at hand; in short its usage is to test possible hypotheses.¹¹ We believe that this method does not fit our study.

2.4 Primary data

Primary data is information gathered first hand by a researcher.¹² When performing our research we found that a interview was a logical tool to use. Interviews are, along with question surveys, a typical form of primary data gathering.¹³ When performing interviews the respondents can elaborate the answers and encompass all aspects, as compared to surveys. This also allows us to ask follow-up questions if necessary, should something be unclear. This form will be used on all of our respondents and will hopefully grant us further knowledge on the usage of personal branding.

2.4.1 Interview

The interview is the most commonly used method of research when performing a qualitative research. The interviews can be structured in different ways, varying from not structured at all to detailed forms.¹⁴ The interviews we decided to perform fit the not structured form. We did have pre-decided questions, but we left plenty of room for own interpretation. The questions varied from the interviews we conducted, this due to the fact that we wanted information about different parts of the application process and picked respondents and questions accordingly. One positive aspect of performing the interview according to this format is that there is always the possibility of varied opinion about the topic. In accordance to this, we left the possibility open for the respondent to influence our research. We repeatedly asked follow-up questions in order to fully grasp what they were implying. However, some of the questions are less open and to some extent leading, these are

⁸ Lundahl & Skärvad (1999), pg. 101.

⁹ Ibid, pg. 185.

¹⁰ Jacobsen (2002), pg. 145.

¹¹ Ibid., pg. 94.

¹² Ibid., pg. 52.

¹³ Ibid, pg. 152.

¹⁴ Ibid, pg. 159.

questions pertaining to the values of the students. It is therefore very important to be careful in the way these questions are asked.

2.4.1.1 Choice of respondents

The choice of respondents was made strategically. We based our criteria on the theories we intended to use and thereby initiated our search. Our intentions with this thesis were to search all levels of the application process in order to gain a better understanding of the importance of personal branding. We thereby decided to look at three segments: students, employers and career coaches.

We considered the choice of students to be most critical, and thereby the most time consuming. We initiated the search with only two prerequisites: the level of study must be equivalent to master's status and it must be at the school of business. The fact that we choose business students is that we had experience working with them and are in fact a part of them. With this in mind, we started to search our friendship circle and came up with three names. The students were not chosen based on any other criteria, but were randomly selected. The fact that they turned out to be all male was not a conscious decision, but the result of random selection. We chose people that we considered to be friends for two main reasons. The first reason is that they would feel more relaxed and help create a non-hostile environment, and this would lead to them being able to elaborate their answers. The second reason was that, if needed, it would be easy to contact the individuals with follow-up questions. The choice to limit the study to only three individuals was made for two reasons. The first was that this would be optimal in a sense of treating the data. With too many respondents it would be quite time consuming treating their elaborated answers with the same carefulness. The second reason was that this allowed us to limit our margin of error and not introduce more reason for skepticism. With additional respondents we would be forced to sort them into categories according to their background.

We wanted to interview a career coach also, as a way to understand the middle ground between these two dominant groups. We had only one prerequisite when deciding upon whom to choose. The prerequisite we did have was that the person in question was a career coach at the school of economics. Not solely, but had experience with business students.

As mentioned earlier, the employers were chosen due to the fact that they were not single-business employers, but instead recruiters. The fact is that we wanted to interview employers with a prominent role in the company, which in turn had the experience of treating demands from several different companies. We believe that this allows them to have a more objective and all around view of what is required of the applicants in the application process. The interesting part is that we found both employers by chance meetings. Fredrik Andersson, CEO of Nova 100, was conducting a seminar on the subject of personal branding at the school of economics. We were contacted by the host of this seminar and asked if we wanted to attend. And our second employer was mentioned as a reference by the supervisor of this thesis, Ingmar Tufvesson. The reason for limiting ourselves to only two employers is because they both represent, or have in the past represented a large amount of companies and as such have experienced several application processes.

2.4.1.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was based on the two dominant models pertaining to product branding. We constructed three separate questionnaires based on the three segments we were interviewing. In this section we are not going into great detail of which questions were asked, instead we direct the attention to the attachments at the end of the thesis: supplements 1-3.

The questionnaire pertaining to the students was divided into three themes: background information, brand building and brand positioning. The first theme was established so that we as well as the readers were well informed. This theme allowed us to put them into categories based on their choice of studies. It also gave general information in the form of: name, age and gender. To end this theme we asked them to describe the position a future job would hold in their life, this to grasp how meaningful this process would be to them. The second theme, brand building, was a way for us to better understand what they had done to prepare themselves for the application process, in other words: built their brand. During this segment, we tried to find out if they exerted energy into thinking about their qualities and, along with this, searched information about writing a résumé. These questions served as a base for us to understand if they had correctly matched the two into a correct representation of themselves, and if they purveyed this to employers. Here we also asked questions about their meeting with the career coach. The third theme, brand positioning, was meant as a way for us to understand how the students positioned themselves against each other. During this section we wanted to find out what made them unique in comparison to others, and which qualities they focused on when in an interview. This would allow us to make an assessment on how

they managed the process of building a personal brand. During each interview we also asked them to freely speak about the subject personal branding in order for us to see how much information was in circulation, more about this in the concluding chapter.

The questionnaires pertaining to both the career coach and the employers looked quite similar. The difference being that the questions for the career coach were intended to find out what qualities were considered important; while the employers were asked to elaborate about the application process and how they evaluated the applicants. They also had themes; however, they looked similar to those of the students.

2.4.1.3 Interview process

The interviews all took place in December 2005 and January 2006 in Lund. The student interviews took place in different cafeterias belonging to Lund University. The choice of conducting the interviews in cafeterias was made in order to create a calm environment where all involved felt comfortable. The environment in which the interview is conducted can affect the answers given; it therefore has to be as neutral as possible.¹⁵ The interviews with Malin Olsson and career coach Sven Eriksson were conducted in a similar manner as the student interviews, but the locations differed. Sven Eriksson was interviewed in his office and Malin Olsson in a conference room located in the same building as her office. The only interview that did not follow this theme was the interview with Fredrik Andersson. As his company, Nova 100, is located in Stockholm and he would not visit Lund for quite some time, we conducted a phone interview with him from the home of Roger Persson.

The interviews with the students were conducted individually and took approximately 30 minutes each. They were conducted in a way to make the students feel as comfortable as possible. Therefore they were conducted in a cafeteria setting with all involved sitting as a group. We decided upon meeting the individuals face to face as a more complicated line of questioning was made. We did not use a tape recorder, but instead had specialized roles. We appointed one questioner who conducted the questioning while the other two recorded all the answers. This in order to fully grasp what the respondent was saying and keeping them from being confused. With only one person asking the question, the respondent only has to focus on that person. The same process was implemented on to both Sven Eriksson and Malin Olsson, only the location differed.

¹⁵ Jacobsen (2002), pg. 162.

The interview with Fredrik Andersson was carried out differently. As we had already met with him during his seminar we felt as if we had made a personal contact. Because of this, we reasoned that a phone interview would still allow for the personal feeling needed for the line of questioning used. Not being able to use a speaker phone, it was only Roger Persson that conducted the interview and thereby also him who wrote the responses to the questions.

2.4.1.4 Treatment of data

The empiric material that we gathered through our interviews consisted of both the factual answers and reactions by the respondents. As we did not use a tape-recorder during our interviews each of the group's members comprised a summary of what was recorded during the interviews. After this, the notes by all members were comprised onto a single document.

After each of the interviews, we shared our opinions of what was said. Then, after the final document was created, the group met and discussed the implications of the answers. The interviews were sorted into themes; these are the same as the themes that served as a basis for the questionnaire. Through this, we finalized the layout of the empirical foundation chapter, and further how the analysis was to be structured. We feel that this process was crucial for the continuance of the thesis because it lessened the risk of misinterpretation, and it allowed us to share a common base in regards to the interpretations that were made.

2.5 Secondary data

During the initial process of our research we used primarily secondary data. This form of information is one that is not gathered by the researcher, but instead taken elsewhere.¹⁶ Throughout the early stages of writing and researching we relied heavily on articles and literature. This information came to be used as the basis for our theoretical framework as well as inspiration sources when structuring interviews and research material. The main sources for our secondary data gathering came to be the book by Kapferer: "The new strategic brand management," as well as several academic articles from both the internet and Lund University student search webpage. These sources gave us a basic understanding of the subject and allowed us to continue our research with adequate knowledge.

¹⁶ Lundahl & Skärvad (1999), pg. 52.

2.6 Validity and reliability

When performing research the individuals have to overcome certain problems that can cast doubt on the believability of the work. One such problem is validity, which, in short, means the absence of systematical faults.¹⁷ The next problem is with reliability, which means the absence of random mistakes in measurement.¹⁸

2.6.1 Validity

Validity is dependent on, and is affected by, the type of methodology used. When conducting research the researcher always needs to be focused on the type of methodology used. The literature on the subject of methodology differentiates between internal and external validity.¹⁹

The concept of internal validity is used to examine whether the research tools used, for example questionnaire or interview, measure what they are supposed to.²⁰ That is to say, does the method of research contribute to the reliability of the thesis? We feel confident in the fact that we reached a high internal validity. As we aimed to search whether product branding theories could be applied to business students, we managed to capture both answers and feelings with our line of questioning. As we used personal, face to face interviews and allowed the respondents to elaborate as they saw fit, we managed to include their true feeling about the subject. We also feel confident that the results will profit from us using a qualitative reasoning, as we feel that a quantitative method would miss the personal aspect of our thesis; by this we mean that a standardized questionnaire with pre-printed answers would not have allowed us to go deeper and incorporate the respondents inner feelings about the subject, nor would we have been able, to the same extent, observe their facial expressions when answering the specific questions.

The external validity, on the other hand, questions if the results of the research can be generalized onto other studies.²¹ We believe that our line of questioning is quite simple and easy to understand. It would not be difficult to apply it to other studies in the same field. However, the results of our thesis will be very narrow and pertain only to a very small segment. We have drawn sharp lines as

¹⁷ Lundahl & Skärvad (1999), pg. 150.

¹⁸ Ibid., pg. 152.

¹⁹ Jacobsen (2002), pg. 159.

²⁰ Lundahl & Skärvad (1999), pg. 150.

²¹ Jacobsen (2002), pg. 266-268.

to the type of respondents we should include. We limited ourselves to business students at Lund University, and as a group they are very unique; we believe that this affected our external validity.

2.6.2 Reliability

The reliability of a thesis is defined as the absence of random measurement errors.²² There are several ways in which this can be affected throughout the entire writing process. Several errors in judgment can be made. Naturally, the fewer mistakes performed implies enhanced and more believable work. During this discussion the so called “interviewee effect” can become relevant. This shortly implies that the interviewee was, in some way, influenced by the interviewers or the surroundings.²³ Considering our initial want to conduct a thesis with high reliability, we feel comfortable in that we did just that. We had a well thought out questionnaire, which was very open to the interpretation and elaboration of the interviewees. We were very careful when conducting the interviews and listened eagerly to the respondents. We believed, through this, that we captured the respondents’ real thoughts and feelings.

2.7 Reference criticism

We made conscious decisions concerning our choice of subject and respondents, however, the amount of students we interviewed could be considered too few. We did question this throughout the writing process; however, we believed that this would not have altered our decried results. Another item of concern, considering the respondents, is our maintained objectivity. We come to question this due to the fact that one of our group members did know all of the respondents before writing this thesis. Yet, all the group members were present during the interviews, so in that regard we believe that we side-stepped that issue. The last source of concern is the phone interview with Fredrik Andersson. During this interview, only one of the group members conducted and recoded the interview. This could lead to some of the information being lost in translation.

²² Lundahl & Skärvad (1999), pg. 152.

²³ Jacobsen (2002), pg. 269-274.

3 Theory

The purpose of our thesis is to analyze the process of applying models from product branding on job-seeking business students as a way to establish a personal brand, which is why we have chosen theories about product and personal branding. We will begin with a short introduction followed by a model that describes the different aspects included in developing a strong brand; product attributes, brand identity, core values, positioning, market communication and internal brand loyalty. Thereafter, we will focus on one of the above factors: brand identity, and explain it in more detail. As this is a thesis about personal branding, related to product branding theories, we felt that the two theories (Brand-Building Model and Brand Identity Prism) are applicable to our discussion about personal branding. To help the reader understand what personal branding is, we will further have a section solely devoted to this concept.

3.1 What is a Brand

Selling, marketing and branding are all dependant on each other. Selling is the act of creating a need where it does not or barely exists. Marketing is a term for the collective activities that companies use to generate business: ad campaigns, buying commercial time, market research. It is the act of creating a market by sending specially designed messages to the right target market, through multiple channels and over a long period of time. Marketing aims to build awareness and create interest in its customer. Branding happens before marketing or selling. It is their source. Without a strong brand, marketing is generally ineffective, and selling will be even more difficult.²⁴

A brand is a company's most important asset.²⁵ It adds value to the product by giving the product meaning and defining its identity.²⁶ Companies use branding to differentiate their products from their competitors. The definition of a brand is "a set of mental associations, held by the consumer, which add to the perceived value of a product or service." These associations should be unique, strong and positive.²⁷

Beyond mental associations, the power of a brand depends on the emotional relationships it develops with its customers. A certain brand can evoke different feelings in people, for example

²⁴ Montoya (2005), pg. 24-27.

²⁵ Kapferer (2004), pg. 1.

²⁶ Ibid, pg. 5.

²⁷ Ibid, pg.10.

trust, disgust, liking and loyalty. These feelings will influence consumers to buy or not to buy the brand. A strong brand needs to promote certitude and trust in the product. If the brand is mismanaged in comparison with the competition, its power will be lost.

To have value, brands must produce economic value, and part of this must be attributable to the brand itself. A brand that does not make it possible to create a profitable business has no value. Value is created by brand assets such as brand awareness, patents and rights, brand personality, brand preference. These assets lead to brand strength, which is a measure of the present status of the brand. A brand's strength depends on market share, market leadership, growth-rate and how loyal consumers are to the branded product.²⁸

3.2 Brand-Building Model

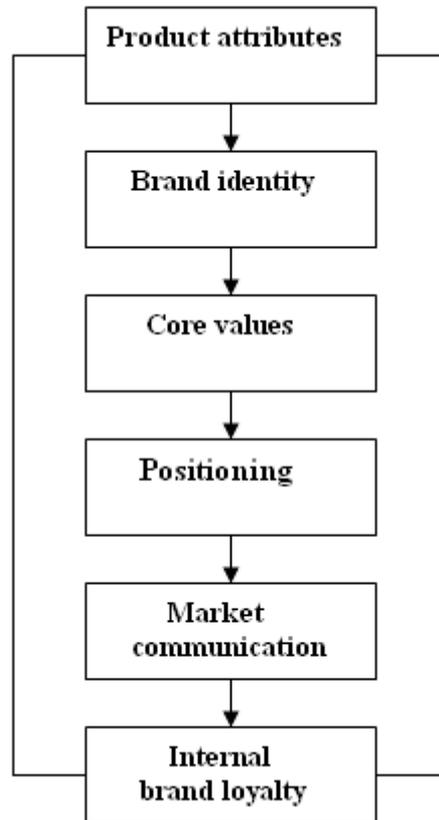
For a brand to develop into a strategic competitive tool, it needs to create value for both the brand owner and its customers. Both parties should benefit from the brand. Building a strong brand can therefore be illustrated by a value-creating process that takes place internally: in the organization, as well as externally: in the minds of the consumers.²⁹

The brand-building model describes the brand-building process seen from the brand owner's perspective. The model is built up of six dimensions: product attributes, brand identity, core values, positioning, market communication and internal brand loyalty. These are all critical activities in building, developing and maintaining a strong brand.³⁰

²⁸ Kapferer (2004), pg. 10-15.

²⁹ Melin (1999), pg. 206.

³⁰ Ibid, pg. 125.



Model 3.1 The Brand Building Model. Melin (1999), pg. 125.

3.2.1 Product Attributes

Brands are built on products, and it is only in combination with a product that the value-creating process begins. A product and its attributes can be developed into a competitive advantage connected to a certain brand.³¹ The attributes can be related or un-related to the product. A product-related attribute refers to the product's necessary ingredients and optional features. These characteristics create value for the customer by offering something extra or something better than its competitors. Non-product-related attributes are the associations linked to the brand, which are not directly related to product performance, such as the look of its package, price and brand personality.³²

The most important attribute for a branded product to be successful is that the product stands for consistent quality. Consistent quality creates trust in the product. Other attributes such as the design, logos and packaging of the product are also important attributes. These external characteristics

³¹ Melin (1999), pg. 208.

³² Keller (1998), pg. 93-95.

contribute to a customer's first impression of the branded product, since they are the first thing one notices about it. A distinct visual identity can be created by developing a unique packaging design.³³

3.2.2 Brand Identity

Product attributes are in general relatively easy to imitate, which is why many companies have started focusing on developing more sustainable competitive advantages like brand identity.³⁴ Where product attributes primarily add functional benefits to the customer, brand identity adds more of an emotional value.³⁵ A brand identity provides a brand with direction, purpose and meaning. It refers to what the product brand stands for and what makes it unique.³⁶ When an identity is considered unique, it becomes a stronger tool for competition.³⁷

Important factors in developing a strong brand identity are the name, personality, usage and heritage.³⁸ The brand name is one of the most powerful sources of identity. Names are chosen specifically to capture the central theme or key associations of a product. Brand names can be an extremely effective means of communication. The brand name is noticed and its meaning registered or activated in a person's memory within a few seconds. The brand name is therefore closely tied to the product.³⁹ Brand personality is described in more detail in the chapter dealing with the brand identity prism. The last important factor is a brand's heritage, which refers to its roots.⁴⁰

As mentioned above, in order to become competitive over a longer period of time, a brand identity needs to be unique, as well as distinctive.⁴¹ The more distinctive a brand is, the better defined it will be. A good distinctiveness protects the brand from being imitated by competitors since it will be harder for them to imitate the brand without copying it. For the brand to become a sustainable competitive tool, it is also of great importance that it is seen as credible. People have to trust the brand or they will not purchase it.⁴²

³³ Melin (1999), pg. 209-212.

³⁴ Ibid, pg. 126.

³⁵ Ibid, pg. 212.

³⁶ Aaker (1996), pg. 68.

³⁷ Melin (1999), pg. 212.

³⁸ Ibid, pg. 219.

³⁹ Keller (1998), pg. 135.

⁴⁰ Kapferer (2004), pg. 102.

⁴¹ Melin (1999), pg. 212.

⁴² Ibid, pg. 221-222.

A brand's image is based on its identity. The brand's identity is seen from the sender's point of view, while the brand image is seen from the receiver's point of view.⁴³ A brand's identity is the signals which are sent out, whereas a brand image is defined as "consumer perceptions of a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer's memory."⁴⁴ Questions that are important for a company to answer are: what associations do consumers link to the brand? What benefits do customers feel they are getting? What visual imagery does the brand evoke in them?⁴⁵ A brand owner can not control how people perceive the brand, since it is almost impossible to control how people think, but they can influence, and to some extent guide these perceptions.⁴⁶ Although a brand's image is important, an obsession with it might lead them to focus too much on appearance, and not enough on the essence of the brand.⁴⁷

3.2.3 Core Values

The first steps, talked about earlier, in the brand-building process deal with finding factors that will lead to attractive product attributes and a strong brand identity. These factors represent a brand's functional and emotional added value. The next step is for the brand owner to analyze which of these factors that will lead to a long-lasting sustainable differentiated advantage. These advantages are the brand's core value.

A differentiated advantage should be valuable, communicable, unique and hard to imitate to classify as a core value. A prerequisite to compete against other brands is that the brand has to be considered valuable in the eyes of the customer, and if the brand is able to communicate its values to them. The brand will become a sustainable competitive advantage if it is hard for competitors to imitate. In building a strong brand, all of the above factors are important. A brand's core values are the foundation on which the positioning strategy is built.⁴⁸

3.2.4 Positioning

Positioning refers to the process in which the company tries to achieve a certain position in the minds of the consumers. A company does this by emphasizing the unique characteristics of the

⁴³ Kapferer (2004), pg. 98.

⁴⁴ Keller (1998), pg. 49.

⁴⁵ Aaker (1996), pg. 196.

⁴⁶ Ibid, pg. 251.

⁴⁷ Kapferer (2004), pg. 99.

⁴⁸ Melin (1999), pg. 229-234.

brand that make it different from its competitors and appealing to the public.⁴⁹ It is important that the chosen position will give the company an advantage over competing brands.⁵⁰

Positioning is built on four main questions:

1. A brand for what?
2. A brand for whom?
3. A brand for when?
4. A brand against whom?

The first question refers to what the brand could do for the consumer, in other words, the brand promise and the benefit the consumer would achieve from buying the product with this specific brand. The second question refers to the decision of which target market the brand should focus on. The third question refers to the occasion when the consumers will buy the product. And the last question refers to defining which competitors the brand has in the competitive context.⁵¹

A company can not rely on the fact that customers will make an effort to find out what makes a brand better than another. Among the many choices that are available for customers today, this would be too time-consuming. Positioning is a competitive tool. A positioned brand makes it easier for customers to compare and choose among the vast supply of products that exists on the market today. The brand must therefore communicate to their target, what it stands for, in order to facilitate the comparison of brands for the consumers.⁵²

3.2.5 Market Communication

Brands can only exist if they communicate with their target market. If they do not do this, people will not know what the brand is and what it stands for, and see little reason of why they should purchase it.⁵³ It is not the brand as such that creates value, but all the marketing and communication done by the firm. Firms inform, persuade, and remind customers about the brands they sell, through market communication. Market communication represents the “voice” of the brand and is a way of

⁴⁹ Kapferer (2004), pg. 99.

⁵⁰ Aaker (1996), pg. 176.

⁵¹ Kapferer (2004), pg. 99-100.

⁵² Ibid, pg. 102.

⁵³ Ibid, pg. 111.

establishing a dialogue and build relationships with consumers.⁵⁴ The message sent to the target customer should be compatible with how the company wants the brand to be seen.⁵⁵

Advertising, promotion and personal selling are all tools related to market communication.⁵⁶ Advertising provides customers with a reason to buy the branded product, whereas sales promotions offer consumers an incentive to buy.⁵⁷ Personal selling involves face-to-face interaction with one or more prospective purchasers for the purpose of making sales. The main advantage of personal selling is that a detailed, customized message can be sent to customers where feedback can be gathered to help close the sale.⁵⁸

3.2.6 Internal Brand Loyalty

The brand-building process' overall goal is to attract a large loyal customer base. To achieve brand loyalty in customers, the brand owners themselves have to be loyal to the brand. Being loyal to a brand means being true and loyal to the brand identity; people should know what to expect from the brand, which will lead to people easier feeling trust in the specific brand.⁵⁹ This does not mean that brand identity is a fixed identity. Brand identity building is a constant evolvement process.⁶⁰ A company has to be aware of market changes, and adapt to these.⁶¹

3.3 Brand Identity Prism

“Brand identity is a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain. These associations represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers from the organization members.”⁶² For a brand to sustain strong turnover over time, the brand has to be true to its identity. Brand appearance is as important as brand essence.⁶³ The brand identity prism demonstrates these different dimensions.

⁵⁴ Keller (1998), pg. 218.

⁵⁵ Kapferer (2004), pg. 99.

⁵⁶ Keller (1998), pg. 218.

⁵⁷ Ibid, pg. 239.

⁵⁸ Ibid, pg. 253.

⁵⁹ Melin (2001), pg. 246-251.

⁶⁰ Ibid, pg. 227.

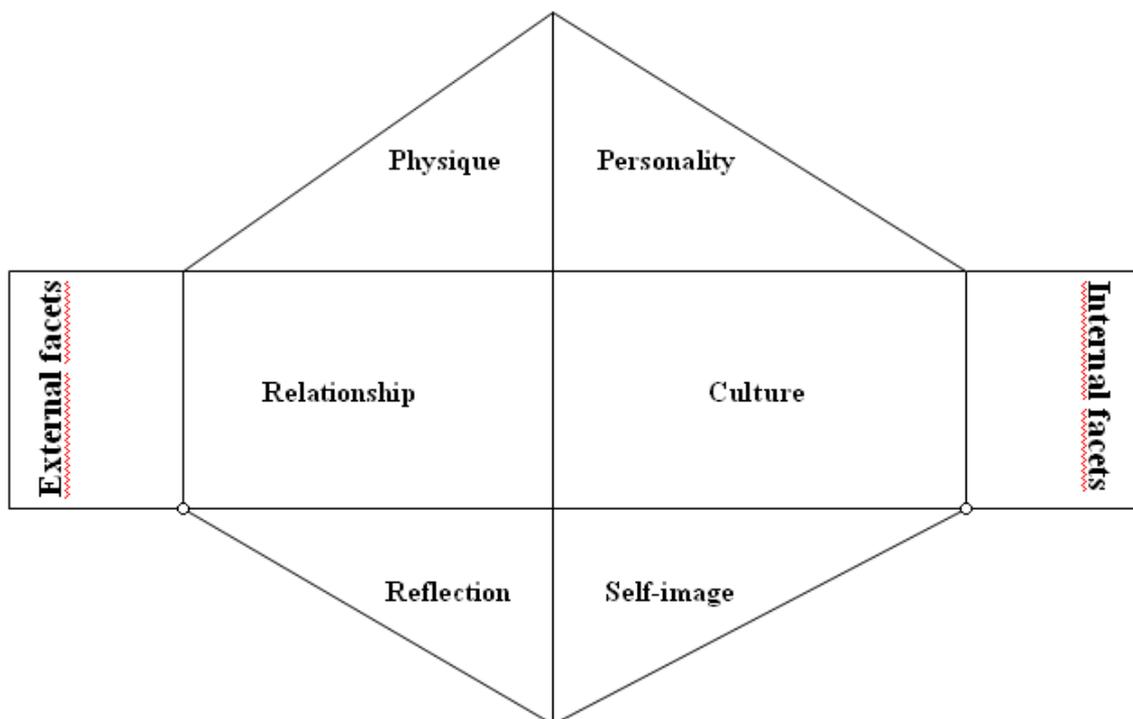
⁶¹ Ibid, pg. 254.

⁶² Aaker (1996), pg. 68.

⁶³ Melin (1999), pg. 126.

The brand identity prism is built upon six facets:

1. Physique
2. Personality
3. Culture
4. Self-image
5. Reflection
6. Relationship



Model 3.2 The Brand Identity Prism Model. Kapferer (2004), pg. 107.

The six facets of the brand identity prism are all interrelated and contribute to a well-structured entity. The prism can be seen from two different angles: physique, relationship and reflection give the brand an outward look and can be seen as social and visible. The other three facets: personality, culture and self-image are the internal facets of the brand identity.⁶⁴

A strong identity prism is defined when there are few words to each facet, the words are not the same on different facets, and all words have strength and are not ordinary. Identity is what makes a brand stand out. Consumers and prospects are often asked how their ideal brand would be and what attributes it would need in order to get universally approved. Consumer expectations are very often

⁶⁴ Kapferer (2004), pg. 106-112.

incompatible with each other. In seeking to resemble the ideal brand described by the consumers, brands can begin to downplay their differences and look average. As a result they will lose their identity. Naturally, a company has to stay attuned to the market, but without at all costs pursuing the ideal set up by the customer.⁶⁵

3.3.1 Physique

When building a strong brand identity, it is natural to begin with the physique and personality of a brand, since these are the dimensions in the prism that the brand-owner controls.⁶⁶ A brand's physical appearance is important. Appearance is a way of expressing the character of the brand. Its physique is a combination of both visual and emerging features. The visual ones immediately come to mind when a customer thinks of the brand, while the emerging ones are shown later on. The physique of the brand consists of for example its logo, color and shape. They are the brands tangible assets.⁶⁷

3.3.2 Personality

Just as the perceived personality of a person is affected by nearly everything associated with that person- including their neighborhood, friends, activities, clothes and manner of interacting- so too is brand personality.⁶⁸ Like a person, a brand can be characterized as being for example "old-fashioned", "cool" or "elegant". By communicating with their target market, the brand gradually builds up character. The easiest way of creating instant personality is to attach a spokesperson or a figurehead, real or symbolic, to the brand.⁶⁹ A brand with the right personality can contribute to a consumer feeling that the brand is relevant and "my kind of product". A consumer may be more willing to invest in a relationship with that brand as a result.⁷⁰

3.3.3 Culture

A brand has its own culture from which every product derives. Each brand is affected by the company behind the product; the company's norms and values.⁷¹ A product is not only a concrete representation of this culture, but also a means of communication. Culture is the set of values on

⁶⁵ Kapferer (2004), pg. 112-113.

⁶⁶ Melin (1999), pg. 88.

⁶⁷ Kapferer (2004), pg. 107.

⁶⁸ Aaker (1996), pg. 145.

⁶⁹ Kapferer (2004), pg. 108.

⁷⁰ Keller (1998), pg. 97.

⁷¹ Melin (1999), pg. 87.

which a brand's inspiration is built on. For example; Mercedes embodies German values. Countries of origin are great cultural reservoirs for brands. Coca-Cola is for instance driven by the American culture.⁷²

3.3.4 Relationship

Since a brand's product attributes are relatively easy for competitors to copy they are weak bases for creating customer loyalty. Strong brands therefore move beyond product attributes to a brand identity based upon a brand personality and a relationship with customers. Product attributes are still essential though.⁷³ Many brand-customer relationships emerge when the brand is considered as an organization or as a person, rather than a product. Personality types with whom you have relationships with can be young, outgoing and energetic etc. A strong personality evokes positive feelings in the customer, towards the brand. One important relationship for many brands is a friendship characterized by trust, dependability, understanding, and caring.⁷⁴

3.3.5 Reflection

Consumers use brands to build their own identity. The customer wants to be seen in a certain way by others as a result of using a specific brand. A brand is thus a reflection. When asked for their views on certain brands, people immediately answer in terms of the brand's perceived client type: "that's a brand for healthy people!"⁷⁵ For the brand owner it is important that the brand identity is a reflection of how the targeted consumer wants to be perceived.

3.3.6 Self-image

Reflection is the target's outward mirror whereas self-image is how the target sees and feels about itself when purchasing a certain brand. The brand's identity should correspond to the consumer's self-image.⁷⁶

3.4 Personal Branding

Brands can extend beyond products and services. People and organizations can also be viewed as brands. They often have well-defined images which are liked or disliked by others. This is true

⁷² Kapferer (2004), pg. 108-109.

⁷³ Aaker (1996), pg. 51-53.

⁷⁴ Ibid, pg. 158-161.

⁷⁵ Kapferer (2004), pg. 110.

⁷⁶ Melin (1999), pg. 86-87.

when considering public figures such as politicians, entertainers or professional athletes. All of these different public figures compete for public approval and acceptance and benefit from conveying a strong and desirable image.

But people do not have to be well-known or famous to be thought of as a brand. Anyone trying to build a career can be thought of as trying to create their own brand. One key to a successful career is that certain people; co-workers, superiors, or even important people outside the company know who you are and what kind of person you are in terms of skills, talents, and attitude. By building up a name and reputation in a business context, a person is creating his or her own brand.⁷⁷ Branding is a part of a marketing strategy and in the case of individuals, the marketing strategy that will help a person to be more than just a name.⁷⁸ A personal brand can be seen as a professional alter ego⁷⁹ but can also be applied to personal life.⁸⁰

Although everyone in a way has a brand of their own, few are aware of the advantages or disadvantages of using this phenomena as a marketing tool. If the concept should become successful and useful, the person behind the brand needs to have a unique and differential advantage in the competitive environment. Otherwise the person and the brand will only become a commodity. The brand has to have something that the consumers or the market needs and wants, and at the same time it has to be unique and different from its competitors.⁸¹

A personal brand is a perception of an individual maintained by somebody else. How do you want others to see you, and does this corresponds to how they in fact think of you? Since people can not look inside us, they get to know and judge us based on what we do and how we do it. One can not control how other people perceive you, but through your actions you can guide them in how you want to be seen.⁸² A perception of somebody grows stronger the more the two people meet, allowing a relationship to start forming.

Since a brand reflects a perception or emotion maintained in somebody else's mind, the success of a personal brand does not exist on its own. It is dependent on the relationships we have with the people around us: at work, at home, in the different communities we belong to. One wants your

⁷⁷ Keller (1998), pg. 16-17.

⁷⁸ Montoya (2005), pg. 10.

⁷⁹ Montoya (2005), *Business growth through personal branding*

⁸⁰ McNally & Speak (2003), pg. 5.

⁸¹ Ibid, pg. 30.

⁸² Ibid, pg. 32.

family, friends, employers and co-workers to truly understand and fully acknowledge who you are and what you do.⁸³ A valuable relationship is a two-way communication. Both parts should benefit from it.⁸⁴

3.4.1 Building a personal brand

Building a personal brand is a process. It takes time to develop one.⁸⁵ The process starts internally with having a vision; a purpose in life.⁸⁶ What drives and inspires people in building their brands are their values and what they stand for.⁸⁷ Our values guide us in the choices we make and how we act in life. We are judged by others on these actions and decisions.⁸⁸ We are also branded on our characteristics such as: personality, skills, appearance, accomplishments, interests, lifestyle, profession, possessions and friends.⁸⁹ It is recommended that a personal brand be built around a person's characteristics and passions. People rarely form an emotional connection to a list of degrees and awards, but when a person tells a unique personal story, they will make meaningful contact with others.⁹⁰

3.4.1.1 Personal Brand dimension model

The brand-building process continues in an external manner. A personal brand's dimension model is built up of three parts: roles, standards and style.

The roles dimension is the foundation on which a personal brand is built. It refers to satisfying the basic needs and desires of the person with whom you want to establish a specific relationship. For example, a dentist has to be able to fix your teeth. This is a requirement in order to practice dentistry.⁹¹ It is not enough though. Since all dentists know how to fix teeth you have to differentiate yourself to be able to compete against them in your target market.⁹² Success lies in standards and style.

⁸³ McNally & Speak (2003), pg. 4-5.

⁸⁴ Ibid, pg. 61.

⁸⁵ Montoya (2005), pg. 18.

⁸⁶ Runebjörk (2004), pg. 77.

⁸⁷ Ibid, pg. 45.

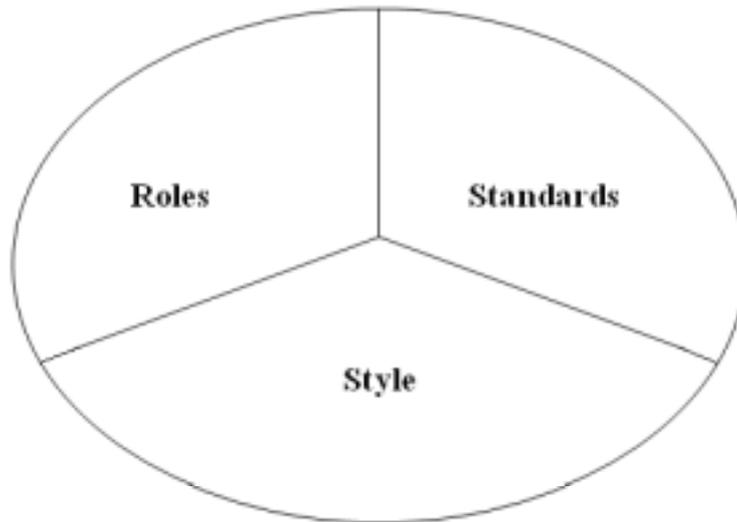
⁸⁸ Ibid, pg. 50.

⁸⁹ Montoya (2005), pg. 52.

⁹⁰ Ibid, pg. 55.

⁹¹ McNally & Speak (2003), pg. 31.

⁹² Montoya (2005), pg. 58.



Model 3.3 The Personal Brand Dimension Model. McNally & Speak (2003), pg. 26.

The standard part of the model deals with how the job is done. In the case of the dentist, it is important that the hole is well-fixed, that the filling doesn't fall out. Style is the brand's personality. It is the dentist's attitude towards his patient. He might be gentle and kind, or strict and more focused on getting the job on. It is the right combination of roles, standards and style that makes your brand successful.⁹³

Appearance and grooming are the packaging of a brand. It is the first thing people notice.⁹⁴ It has been proved that people judge others on what they wear and how they look. It is therefore important that a person's style reflects the values they have and want to communicate to others.⁹⁵ Body language is also a major business tool. Gestures and facial expressions that hinder a person from giving a positive image should be avoided.⁹⁶

The building of a personal brand is a rhetorical activity, in the sense that it is planned communication. One wants to be perceived in a certain way and what you say and how you say it affects the image that other people have of you.⁹⁷ The most important in building and sustaining a personal brand is to act in a way that clearly and consistently reflects the values you stand for.⁹⁸

⁹³ McNally & Speak (2003), pg. 30.

⁹⁴ Everett (2005), *Taking control of your personal brand: what your delegates really see*.

⁹⁵ Baas (2005), *Rätt styling bra för karriären*

⁹⁶ Everett (2005), *Taking control of your personal brand: what your delegates really see*.

⁹⁷ Runebjörk (2004), pg. 73.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, pg. 123.

”Actions speak louder than words.” If your actions are inconsistent with what you say, people will stop to trust and count on you.⁹⁹

3.4.2 Strong Personal Brands

A definition of a strong brand is not that it has to appeal to everybody. It is impossible that one’s values will be shared by everyone else, since everybody is different. What makes a personal brand strong is that it appeals to the people that matter to the person branded.¹⁰⁰ It should evoke strong emotions in your target market; warmth, confidence, admiration etcetera.

A strong personal brand needs to be authentic,¹⁰¹ distinctive, relevant and consistent.¹⁰² Personal branding is not about being somebody else. It is important that the brand is authentic for it to be successful in the long run and for that person’s own well-being. A genuine personal brand should reflect a person’s true identity.¹⁰³ If what is demanded of a person at work, in their career, in business strongly differs from that person’s own values, it will be hard to build and maintain a strong personal brand. It will be hard to be true to oneself if you aim at satisfying their demands which are not in line with who you are.¹⁰⁴

People judge you on your actions. The more distinctive the actions they see, the better defined the brand becomes.¹⁰⁵ When building a personal brand, first identify who the target market is,¹⁰⁶ and then find out and satisfy what they want, need, value and expect from you and your profession. When you succeed with this, you become relevant to them. The fourth success factor to a strong personal brand is consistency, which means that you behave in the same way all the time and according to what you say your values are. This makes it easier for people to know what to expect from you, and therefore feel that they can rely on you.¹⁰⁷

Personal branding gives the individual an opportunity to differentiate themselves in a competitive environment. It also gives that person a chance to position their focused message in the heart and minds of the target market. By positioning yourself, you become aware of how people perceive you,

⁹⁹ McNally & Speak (2003), pg. 94.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, pg. 38.

¹⁰¹ Montoya (2005), pg. 38- 41.

¹⁰² McNally & Speak (2003), pg. 13.

¹⁰³ Runebjörk (2004), pg. 78.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, pg. 1.

¹⁰⁵ McNally & Speak (2003), pg. 14.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, pg. 78.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, pg. 15-17.

and you are thereby able to check that the strengths you think you have match those that are perceived by others. If done correctly, personal branding attracts the right people and opportunities. It also adds perceived value to what a person is selling.¹⁰⁸

3.5 Theoretic framework

We conclude this chapter with a section about how we will use the theories above in our analysis.

We began the theory chapter by describing what a brand is and how it creates value for a company and its products. The authors we refer to in our section about product branding; Aaker, Kapferer, Keller and Melin, all mention that the theories about product branding can be applied to people as well. They give examples of actors, athletes and politicians that can be branded. The authors dedicate only a few paragraphs of their books to this phenomenon, and do not elaborate more on the subject, which is why we searched elsewhere and found several books and articles specifically about how to build, develop and manage a personal brand.

Even though the literature we have found about personal branding is not written by the same authors that wrote about product branding, Aaker et al., we found many similarities between the two. This leads us to the fair assumption that they are compatible. In our analysis we will take key aspects from personal branding theory and apply these factors together with our empirical findings, into the product-branding models discussed earlier in this chapter.

Brands are built on products. In order to apply product-branding theories on people, we begin by assuming them to be products. “A product is anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use, or consumption and that might satisfy a need or want.”¹⁰⁹ Business students who are applying for jobs can be seen as products in the sense that they are offering their services to an employer for a price; a salary. We therefore presuppose that the applicant is a product. But since people are more complex products than regular consumer goods and different demands are placed on them, we will adapt the models to better fit our subject in focus: the job-seeking business student. This allows us to answer the purpose of our essay; *to analyze the process of applying models from product branding on job-seeking business students as a way to establish a personal brand.*

¹⁰⁸ McNally & Speak (2003), pg. 32.

¹⁰⁹ Armstrong & Kotler (2000), pg. 6.

4 Empirical foundation

The empirical chapter will follow the same line of reasoning as the previous chapters. In accordance with the problem we aim to study as well as the purpose of this thesis we conducted a series of interviews in order to gain further knowledge of the usage of personal branding. Our basis throughout our thesis has been to use product branding as a foundation, we did just that when formulation questions and deciding who to interview. We conducted the interviews on three separate segments: students, employers and career coaches. The purpose for these interviews was to assess the amount of personal branding that is taking place, analyze the build up of personal branding and tie it in with the views of employers and career coaches. All references from this chapter are taken straight from the interviews.

4.1 Background

The students that we interviewed were in relatively similar stages of their studies, varying only in which semester of their senior year they were attending. As our target group was business students, we picked two students studying Accounting (Martin and Niklas) and one studying International Marketing (Christoffer); as mentioned earlier, the choices were not based on subject, but randomly. The first student, Christoffer, is twenty seven years old and is studying International business on a master's level. He does not belong to the economics program, but is instead taking free choice classes. His intentions are to write the master's thesis next semester. Niklas and Martin had quite similar backgrounds. They were both twenty four years old studying accounting on a master's level as a part of the economics program. They are both currently writing their master's thesis.

The two employers we interviewed had leading positions at similar firms. The first employer was Fredrik Andersson, he is CEO of the recruitment company Nova 100. Nova 100 is a unique network set up to intertwine the country's leading students in economics and technology with top enterprises in order to set up a long lasting network of opportunities. Nova 100 has a long list of highly respected enterprises that want to be associated with the students that are recruited by Nova 100. The individuals representing Nova 100 make up less than one percent of the total amount of students.¹¹⁰ Fredrik Andersson conducts several lectures on the subject of personal branding each year, and is a believer in that it is of much use to all individuals. The second employer interviewed was Malin Olsson who at the time of our interview worked as project manager for the Executive

¹¹⁰ http://www.nova100.se/public/stud_about.asp (2005-12-12)

Foundation Lund (EFL). EFL is foundation set up to cooperate with and further educate companies in the fields of economy, organization, marketing and leadership.¹¹¹ Malin Olsson has worked there for four years, but has, prior to her employment at EFL, worked as a recruiter, and has subsequent to our interview returned to a similar position.

The last person interviewed was Sven Eriksson, a career coach at Lund University. Sven Eriksson works, partly, at the center of career guidance at the School of Economics at Lund University. The career center is meant as a bridge between students and employers. Students can go here and receive guidance and help as an aid in their job application process. The main objectives for the career center is to build a functioning network, help develop a list of merits and also find potential work opportunities.¹¹² Sven Eriksson's function at the career center is to advice and help the students in the choice of careers and steps leading up to interviews.

4.2 Brand building

In order to build a successful personal brand the individual has to lay a solid foundation. When interviewing the students we asked specific questions in regards to their thoughts leading up to the writing of their résumés, as well as various job interviews they had been called to. As mentioned earlier, all references can be made to the attached list of questions. To initiate the thoughts we asked if the students had, in fact, given much thought to the type of job they would like to apply to. The two students studying accounting, Niklas and Martin, were very clear when asked this question. They had early knowledge and applied to major accounting firms that they had discussed with their career coach. Christoffer, however, did not have a clear choice of firm, just the feeling of wanting to work within the field of marketing. All the students had therefore made the decision of working in a field closely related to their choice of studies. To get a better understanding of the position of a future job in their life we asked them about their priorities, and unanimously they claimed that a job would have a significant part in their life.

After gaining some basic information about the students we wanted to know more in depth about their procedures of building their résumé. The process looked surprisingly similar in the case of all three students. The process of building their résumés is a lengthy and trying one, it involved great thought and soul searching. The process began with the search for information. The steps involved in writing a résumé are complicated and by no means obvious. The students first gathered

¹¹¹ <http://www.efl.se/OmEFL/default.asp> (2005-12-12)

¹¹² <http://www.ehl.lu.se/karriarcenter/student.asp> (2005-12-12)

information about the process from different sources. Martin searched the internet as well as written books about the subject, while Niklas looked at a friend's version for comparison. However, all three of the students then made appointments with Sven Eriksson at the career center. This is where they received most of the knowledge about the process, and Christoffer told us he rewrote the entire document after his coaching. After having gathered all the appropriate information the students put together a résumé and then began looking for positions to apply for. Christoffer, however, has yet to apply for a position in his field. Martin and Niklas on the other hand searched for the career that they wanted and decided to apply. Before applying and being interviewed they both did research on the internet as well as other company listings in order to be well prepared for the initial meetings. Christoffer did, however, tell us that his process would look the same when the time came to apply to a job.

Somewhere in the middle of the résumé writing process all three students made a visit to Sven Eriksson. When attending the meetings with the career coach, Sven Eriksson, he gave the students advice about what to include and what to remove in their résumé. The meeting with Sven Eriksson begins with a personality test, which he then uses to develop a profile that fits the student. After the test he discusses the résumé with the student and gives advice on what is good and what needs to be replaced. Then he discusses the personality test with the student and asks questions about their lives to match those with the test. The discussion about the personality test is done in order to arrive at what the student should and should not point out in an eventual interview. They discuss their strengths and weaknesses to allow the student to have a better understanding of what they should promote.

After gaining further knowledge of what happens during the meeting between the students and their career coach we wanted to know more about the planning that went into developing their thoughts included in the résumé. Each of the students had made a conscious effort to develop a good résumé, but we wanted to know if they had actually found out what kind of information they portrayed through their résumé. The students were unanimous when it came to lying. They all agreed that when writing lists of merit and résumé one should enhance the skills that directly fit the position they are applying to, not lie. The students believed that they searched who they were and when applying for the job (except for Christoffer, who will do it) they applied the skills that they possessed in accordance with the position. Christoffer and Martin claimed that they enhanced their skills and the third student tried to match his skills with prior accomplishments.

4.3 Brand positioning

Brand positioning is very important in a competitive environment, such as the employment process. In this section we asked the employers how their application process looked and tried to match that with the students. We wanted to know the value placed on the individual, and then in turn see if the students had knowledge of this and if they used it in their own application process.

4.3.1 Fredrik Andersson

The application process for Nova 100 is quite demanding and consists of three separate steps. The vision with their process is to find applicants who are perfectly fitted for the situation. Their internal philosophy is to run the business like a soccer team, players for each position. They have high thoughts about their application process and has had it tested several times. It builds on experience, not only grades gained through academics.

Firstly, the potential members send in their application along with a personal letter and a résumé listing their experiences. Fredrik Andersson assured me that all résumés are read and evaluated.

Secondly, the first evaluation process is made centrally by Nova 100, here they evaluate the applicants résumé and personal letter and sort out the ones who do not meet their qualifications.

Thirdly, this stage consists of three quotas, namely: Academic quota (AQ), Business quota (BQ) and Emotion quota (EQ). This stage is performed by an objective third party, usually a recruitment company. During the AQ evaluation the company judges the applicants academic records. However, this evaluation also contains a part judging the applicants common sense conception. Nova 100 stresses the fact that the student's grade point average is not the decisive factor, they also need to have awareness of common known and accepted principles. The second evaluation is BQ, during which Nova 100 tests the applicants drive and motivation. At Nova 100 they value continuous growth and performance. They only hire applicants with the potential and drive to further themselves along with the company. In other words, the applicants need to have a business sense. The last quota is EQ. During this evaluation the applicant's emotional skills are tested. This part pertains solely to personal branding and the importance of knowing yourself and your qualities. This part judges the applicant's social competence and self awareness. During this they aim to find out if the applicants truly know who they are. They stress maturity, and want to find applicants who have "both feet on the ground".

Fredrik Andersson mentioned that it is a continuous process and that members who do not fulfill the specifications are asked to leave. Point being that it is not enough to be adequate for a certain period, but instead find out who you are and stick with it.

4.3.2 Malin Olsson

Malin Olsson has a long experience in the field of recruitment. Her process looks a lot like the process made by Nova 100, except for the fact that they are the recruiters asked to evaluate applicants for other companies. The process of recruiting deals with matching two customers, applicant and employer. The most important task is to sort through the superficiality and get down to what it is the company is looking for and what it is that the candidate stands for.

The process begins with a demand from the company that they are hired by. They receive a list of demands for the position that is to be filled, and it has to be matched to the individuals looking to fill it. The most important part in this process is to find out all the facts so the correct match can be made.

Next step consists of receiving résumé and personal letters from all the applicants. It is important to always be honest to both parties, so she is very open in her process. She assured us that they read all applications, in order to remain objective.

After this she sorts out about twenty applicants that fit the frames of what the company is looking for; these applicants are then called for an initial interview. To her, the résumé and personal letter shows who the applicant is and the purpose of the interview is to see if it balances in real life. The interview is the first time that the skills are put to a test. She is very open and always keeps in mind that applicants can be nervous during an initial interview. Appearance is a key factor that contributes to the complete picture of the applicant. The last control she does is to check the references. The purpose of the interview is to sort out about five applicants that she then recommends to the company that hired her. The final decision is up to them.

She believes that personal branding is perhaps a new name for something that has existed for quite some time. The idea of being true to your self and having a great self awareness is very important to

her when she is judging the applicants. She believes that it is not easy for first time applicants, but it is always important to know who you are and be yourself.

4.3.3 Students

Throughout this section of questioning we asked about the students, as individuals, how they perceived themselves. The idea behind it was to find what makes them special and how they would position themselves on the job market. Another interesting fact we noted when asking the questions was the hesitation that may or may not have occurred, this being a sign of uncertainty. As mentioned earlier, all students had or would search for information about the company they applied for before a possible interview; this to make themselves more knowledgeable and be able to see how they could fit into the organization. This was the initial question we asked and it sparked some ideas among the students, we used this to ease into the more specific questions pertaining to their individual qualities and perceptions.

The second question of this part was for them to list their values and reflect on if they believe others agree. Christoffer hesitated a while before listing some things he believed to be values. He was a golfer and had during several years competed in the sport. He was a traveling individual who had been to many places, broadening his views. The values he believes that he could share with an employer are just those: competitiveness and adaptability. Martin was more direct in his answer and it was clear that he was well rehearsed. He started right away by listing his values as being a team player, gained through many years of organized sport, and adaptable to different situations. He believed the questions to be easier as he had been to interviews before and taken a personality test in accordance with Sven Eriksson. Niklas was as prepared as Martin. He had well thought out answers for all the questions, gained through experience of both previous interviews and personality tests. He believed well formulated values were very important and knowing your own self and your personality is the first step. He also believed himself to be a team player and easily adaptable in many situation. All of the students believed that their values were easily recognized by others. They all thought that they would show their true self in an interview and that it would be appreciated.

To further understand the students we asked them to describe their qualities. Also this question posed some difficulties for Christoffer, simply because he had never been asked to recite them in an interview situation. However, as mentioned earlier, he had experiences in competitive sports and traveling leading to the fact that he believed himself to be adjustable to most situations and tolerant.

Martin, whom by now was developing a pattern for rehearsed replies, thought about it for a few seconds and answered that he saw them as being calm, methodical and very careful. He further explained that these were stereotypical when describing accountants and believed they suited him as well. He explained that these were the same qualities he listed during the interviews he had been on, and believed it to be favorable to enhance them instead of others that might not be as suitable in his future career. Niklas, whom also had now been spotted as an experienced applicant, replied very similarly to the second student. He believed himself to be a very secure individual, who does not have to change personalities to fit in, but instead is very comfortable being himself. He did admit to having both a professional side as well as a leisurely side, but as would most people.

The next question was challenging for all the students, it was a very direct question asking what makes them unique. Christoffer thought about it for some time until reaching his answer, stating that he didn't believe himself to be unique. He instead believed that he was very comfortable being the person he is, but hesitates from being too honest. Martin believed that he does have some unique qualities. He is very adjustable and can adapt to most situations. He does not feel the need to be a leader, but could see himself in a similar position if all goes well. He accredits most of this ability from his practicing team sports as a child. Niklas believed himself to have some unique qualities. He claimed that he is very flexible and that he works well with other people. He is easy going and can adjust himself to almost any position. He works well with others and has a positive outlook on team work from his extensive experience as a handball player. These are naturally an extension of their qualities as candidates, but the students believe them to be strong enough to be classified as unique.

The last two questions pertained mostly to superficiality. The students were asked if they spend a lot of time thinking about how others perceive them and how important they believe appearance is when going on an interview. Christoffer did not give it much thought, but instead believed that the most important thing is being true to yourself. He believes that the people in his surroundings agree with the type of individual he appears to be. Concerning the appearance, he believed that he would adjust to most situations. He thought it was very important to make a first impression, but he still would not go as far as wearing a suit and tie. Martin also believed that his qualities would be accepted as true if his surroundings were asked. He claimed that he almost never thinks about what others are thinking of him, he always tries to be himself in all situations. As far as appearance goes, he believes that it is very important to come off as professional, and in the business of accounting a suit and tie is needed. It is important to make a good first impression, but one does not have to go

all out every time. Niklas also claimed that he is very confident in the person he is, and feels that people recognize that. He does not spend a lot of time thinking of how others perceive him, it is instead important to be comfortable with whom you are. In the case of appearance he, much like the others, believes that it is important to make a good first impression and to always look professional without losing who you really are.

We did ask one additional question pertaining to the respondents views on the phenomena of personal branding, but this was to validate our own opinions and not relevant to the empirical foundation. This question will be accounted for in the reflection section of the concluding chapter.

5 Analysis

This chapter will provide the readers with an analysis of the matching of our empirical findings and the theories presented earlier in our paper. We aim to analyze the process of applying models from product branding on job-seeking business students as a way to establish a personal brand. First we will begin by looking at the Brand Building Model and apply the concepts from personal branding, as well as what we learned from conducting our interviews, on to the model. We will later do the same with the second of the two models described in the theory chapter, the Brand Identity Prism.

5.1 The Brand Building Model

This model shows the different steps in how the brand creates value for both the brand-owner and the customers.¹¹³ In our study, the brand-owner is the business student applying for a job and the customer is the potential employer. We will go through all the dimensions of the model, starting with product attributes.

5.1.1 Product attributes

In order to create a brand you need a product to build it on. When it comes to personal branding, the product is the individual. Like a consumer good is bought because it fulfils a need in the customer, a person applying for a job is hired to provide certain services to the company. The product related attributes, the ones connected to product performance, are seen as the knowledge and experiences that the individual needs in order to perform a specific job. The diploma that the students achieve from Lund University is a product related attribute. For an employer this certificate proves that the individual has the basic knowledge needed to do a specific task.

For a product, the brand personality is a non-related product attribute since it does not affect the product performance directly. For an individual, the case is different. The individual's personality does indeed affect how that person will perform his job task. Niklas stated his ability to be tolerant and adjust to most situations as his two main qualities. Martin saw himself as being calm and methodical. A person's attributes should be put in connection to the work, meaning that the person's qualities should bring benefit to the job and the employer. Otherwise the attributes become quite meaningless, in this situation that is. A consumer has to gain some sort of profit by purchasing

¹¹³ Melin (1999), pg. 206.

the product. One student confirmed the fact that he during one interview listed those qualities that he found could have relevance to his future career.

Appearance as a non-related product attribute depends on the kind of job you are applying for. A model's looks are certainly important to how well she or he will succeed in the modeling business. It is a model's biggest asset. For the business students interviewed and the jobs they are applying for, looks are not important in the same way, since it does not directly affect product performance. Yet, both the students and the recruiters agreed on the importance of appearance. In today's image-conscious and visual world, people judge each other in a split second, mostly based on appearances. It is the first thing you notice about a person.¹¹⁴ How you take care of, dress and carry yourself reflects who you are and what you want. Christoffer, Niklas and Martin all made sure to dress well when called to a job-interview. Malin Olsson says that she even looks at the shoes a person is wearing because she feels it says something about the individual.

Another important product attribute and a key to succeeding is that the product stands for consistent quality, which in turn creates trust in the product.¹¹⁵ Credibility is also an important factor when talking about personal branding. Trust is created when a person acts according to what he or she says.¹¹⁶ The students we asked were aware of the importance of this, and made sure to be honest in their résumé. They know that they have to be able to fulfill what they say they can do. For example when Malin Olsson reads a résumé where the student describes him/herself as thorough, and then finds plenty of spelling mistakes in the application, she sees that there is a miss-match in what that person says and how they really are. Authenticity as a means of creating trust is thus a key factor in building a personal brand.

5.1.2 Brand Identity

Companies have an overall vision, in which their products are tools. When building their personal brands, the students need a vision, a direction to go, purpose and meaning in life. The brand identity is what the product and the person stands for and what differs them from others.¹¹⁷ To get a job, a person's identity is as important as the knowledge and experiences he/she has. Having a university degree is not enough in today's society. Social skills are also important. This becomes evident in the

¹¹⁴ Everett (2005), *Taking control of your personal brand: what your delegates really see*.

¹¹⁵ Melin (1999), pg. 209.

¹¹⁶ McNally & Speak (2003), pg. 15.

¹¹⁷ Aaker (1996), pg. 68.

recruitment process of Nova 100, with their three different quotas, Academic Quota, Business Quota and Emotional Quota. Here they look at different aspects of the person, ranging from academic records to his/her drive and motivation, as well as their emotional skills. The emotional quota reflects a person's self-knowledge and social competences. Malin Olsson also points out the importance of knowing oneself. The carrier coach Sven Eriksson provides students with personality tests to help the students achieve a better understanding of his/her strengths and weaknesses.

A big difference between products and individuals is that branded products can be protected from competitors imitating the attributes connected to the products, whereas people in general can not protect themselves to the same extent.

5.1.3 Core Values

When asked about their values, Martin and Niklas could immediately name them. All people have values that guide them in the decisions they make and how they act. But in a résumé and during an interview, the applicant can not mention all his/her values. There is not enough time, and half of the values would not be relevant to the customer. So in the situation of a job-interview, it is important to stress the characteristics, skills and knowledge that an employer could have advantage of. A personal brand can be used in professional as well as in personal life.¹¹⁸ This means different target markets and different "customers" that could value different traits. We could tell from Martin and Niklas's fast response on what their values are, that this was a question that had been brought up during the job interviews they had been to. For Christoffer this took longer time to answer, and his response wasn't as thought through. If he had a better idea of what position he was looking for, he would easier see what was relevant for this job task, and how he could match these demands. The student's core values are of help when developing a strategy for positioning.

5.1.4 Positioning

When choosing to study business at university level, the students interviewed, had started to position themselves. Business is a pretty broad concept. In the latter part of their business education, the students are given a choice in which field to study more in-depth. The students are thus profiling themselves even more. Two of the students interviewed chose to study accounting, whereas the

¹¹⁸ McNally & Speak (2003), pg. 5.

third studied marketing. They will therefore not address the same target market when applying for a job.

After the target market has been chosen, it has to be studied in order to learn the wants and needs of this market. What does the customer value? Once this is learned, an applicant could know which of his/her characteristics to emphasize to match the needs of the market and make him/herself more appealing to the presumptive employer.

Christoffer, Niklas and Martin did research of varying types when applying for jobs. They learned how to write résumé, went to career-coaches, looked up companies they were applying to on the internet, talked to friends who had been through the procedure of applying for jobs etc. They did this because they wanted to learn what factors to stress to become more beneficial and valuable to their customer; the employer. Career-coach Sven Eriksson does a personality test on the students that go to him to find out which personal traits that should be pointed out and promoted when applying for a certain job. .

At times, an employer has to look through hundreds of applications that have been sent in as a response to a position advertisement. Both Fredrik Andersson of NOVA 100 and Malin Olsson say that all applications are read through. For an application to “make the first cut”, the applicant’s skills and experiences mentioned have to be relevant to the customer. The student looking for a job can not list everything he/she has done in life, since this will become too much for the employer to read through. It will be too time-consuming. An application of one to two pages is enough. It is up to the individual to, in these pages make him/herself attractive to the employer, so that among the hundreds applying, he/she will be called to an interview.

Positioning is about differentiating a product from the competitors. In order to be able to do this, one has to know who the competitors are. This is hard when it comes to applying for a job. There is no way of knowing exactly who else is applying for the same job. Yet it is not impossible to position against them. In the section of personal branding we talked about the importance of being unique. Being unique is setting oneself apart from competitors. Although most of the students have similar experiences and education skills, the uniqueness comes within the mix of all the skills of an individual. Martin, for instance put his former handball experiences together with his education skills and claimed that he now could see himself as very flexible and a good team player. Even though people have similar experiences and skills, there are no two exactly the same.

In the section about personal brands, found in chapter three, the theory chapter, we brought up a model called the Personal Brand Dimensions Model.¹¹⁹ This model brings up the notion of how to succeed in the competitive market. It talks about roles, standards and style. Roles, in this case, refer to the student applying for a job, offering the required skills based on education and experiences. As mentioned earlier, so many people today have a university degree, and they can therefore not compete only on this.¹²⁰ Standards and style are equally important; standards refer to how the person can perform the job. Style deals with the brand personality, for instance the attitude the applicant has; his/her drive and motivation. A good and powerful combination of these three factors contributes to the success of a personal brand.

5.1.5 Market communication

Communication is about conveying a message to a recipient. A brand that does not communicate with its target market is useless. Why will people buy the branded product if they do not know it exists, what it stands for or what benefits they will achieve from purchasing it? Being able to communicate with target customers is thus crucial for a brand-owner. A personal brand is a communicative personality.¹²¹ One chooses how he/she wants to be seen by others and then try in best way to get people to perceive him/her in this way. A person applying for a job has to communicate with the presumptive employer in a way so that he/she sees what the applicant has to offer. This gives the employer a reason for hiring that person and taking advantage of his/her skills.

A positive first impression gives the opportunity to further strengthen a relationship with somebody. In our case, the student wants to establish a relationship with is the prospective employer. Their résumés give away the first impression of them. An application is a means of communication. Through it, the student is sending a message to the employer stating who he/she is, what they stand for and how they can be of contribution to the employer. The employer will not call everyone for an interview. It is therefore up to the applicant that his/her résumé is written in such a way that it shows a clear and relevant picture of that person. The employer should understand what they could benefit by hiring this person.

¹¹⁹ McNally & Speak (2003), pg. 25.

¹²⁰ Veres (2005), *Vårda ditt varumärke*

¹²¹ Runebjörk (2004), pg.34.

We are judged by others on our appearances.¹²² Once called to the interview, it is important to dress well. Christoffer, Niklas and Martin all put on suits or shirt and tie for the interview. As Christoffer said, "you can not come unshaved and untidy." If the interview is important to the student, they have to show they have made an effort. Dressing well is an easy way of showing a level of professionalism and will positively add to the impression an employer builds of the student. Body language is another important aspect of one's "packaging." Malin Olsson says that during an interview she looks at how a person sits, how he/she shakes her hand, if they look into her eyes or if they avoid eye contact etc.

It is important to be prepared for an interview. One rarely gets a second chance. During just a few hours one has to make the employer realize that he/she is the right person for the job. It is proven that best jobs go to the people with the ability to openly and uninhibited market their competences.¹²³ Both Martin and Niklas had been through a few interviews and said that it helped to know yourself well. "Know your strengths and know your weaknesses." They stressed the qualities that they thought the company would value the most. They made themselves needed! All three students had looked up information about the company they were called for an interview to. By gaining knowledge about the company they learned how they could fit into the organization, and they could better market themselves during the interview. For a personal brand to become successful it has to work in a two-way communication, meaning that both the employer and the applicant should benefit from using the brand.

5.1.6 Internal brand loyalty

Malin Olsson talked about the importance of being honest and being yourself. This is important for two reasons. First, the student's own happiness is at risk if they are not being true to themselves. There are always some adjustments that have to be made, for instance maybe the job requires you leave your personal clothing style at home, and dress in suits for work. "Hopefully your identity is not rooted just in the clothes you wear, so leaving your jeans at home and adapting to the dress-code will not be such a sacrifice." says Malin. But if they have to adapt too much, it probably wasn't the right job for them.

¹²² Baas (2005), *Rätt styling bra för karriären*

¹²³ Bird (2004), *Selling yorself*

The potential employer has to count on the applicant to be truthful in what they say they can and can not do. They have to act accordingly to what they say and what they stand for. None of the students we interviewed had ever lied in their résumés in order to get a job. However, they admitted to at times bending the truth a little; enhancing some characteristics.

As a recruiter, Malin Olsson has two customers; the student and the employer. She does her best to match the right student with the right job. For both parties to be satisfied she stressed that the student should be completely truthful.

5.2 The Brand Identity Prism

Brand identity is what the brand stands for, what gives the brand meaning and what makes it unique. It is the source of brand positioning.¹²⁴ A student's brand identity is not the same as the student's identity. Brand identity is the communicative personality; how one wants to be perceived by others.¹²⁵ We will apply personal branding thinking, together with the data our interviews resulted in, on the Brand Identity Prism. Some adjustments have been made.

5.2.1 Physique

The physical dimension of the brand identity focuses on the appearance of a product, and in our case the person. For a consumer-good it could be the logo, colour, its name. When talking about a person, the physical aspects are the person's looks, clothing style, body health, hair, makeup etc. The student's physique will be apparent first when the employer meets him/her for an interview. The physical aspect is thus not the primary reason for getting a job. Other criteria, such as the student's education, emotional and social skills, are more important. Neither Malin Olsson nor Fredrik Andersson said that they did not judge the students on their looks and appearances, more than that the applicants needed to be clean, and appropriately dressed. The students we interviewed found it important to make a good first impression, and all put on suit or shirt and tie for the interviews.

¹²⁴ Kapferer (2004), pg. 106.

¹²⁵ Runebjörk (2004), pg. 54.

5.2.2 Personality

The personality dimension refers to finding out the character of a brand. Product brands sometimes have spokespeople that represent them. It is an easy way of tying characteristics to a brand. A personal brand is already based on a person. The brand personality is the student's personality with all the strengths and weaknesses that come with it, what values the student has, how he/she relates to other people etcetera. Nowadays, it is common that the person applying for a job also has to take a personality test as part of the interview process. These tests are done in order to make sure that the most suitable person for the job will get it, says Fredrik Andersson. At Nova 100 they value qualities such as maturity, willingness to grow and "down to earth"- personality. This facet of the prism is therefore of great importance in the job-seeking process.

5.2.3 Culture

A brand's cultural background is the values and norms of a company. They are reflected in the products the company wants to sell. When it comes to a personal brand, the cultural background is built upon the values and norms that the student's family and friends have, as well as the society they live in. All students interviewed were from Sweden, and had studied at Lund University for several years. We assume that presumptive Swedish employers easier identify with those students than the ones coming from abroad. Mentalities are different in different countries, which in turn affect the company culture. There will be different levels of hierarchy, different views on the amount of individuality in a working environment etcetera. The demands put on employees can therefore differ a great deal among the countries.¹²⁶

5.2.4 Relationship

The goal of building a brand is to gain customer loyalty; to get the customer to purchase, and repurchase a company's products or services.¹²⁷ Hiring somebody on the other hand, can be seen as a "one-time" purchase. It is therefore very important for the applicant to establish a strong connection with the presumptive employer immediately. Some companies have a trial-period for new employees, where at the end of this period, the employee will either get permanent employment or will have to go. During the trial-period it is important not to worsen the relationship with the boss as well as the co-workers, but rather improve it. Even if the applicant gets permanent

¹²⁶ Ghauri & Cateora (2005), pg. 74.

¹²⁷ Melin (1999), pg. 44.

employment, he/she still has to maintain and if possible improve the relationships with people at work in order to keep the job, or for future promotion.

A strong personal brand does not exist on its own. It is built on relationships with the people that matter; a person's target market. A healthy relationship is based on trust and understanding between two parties. The interviewed students thought that it was important to make sure that what they wrote in their résumés could later on be proved in an interview. According to Malin Olsson, during an interview she checks whether a student's application is consistent with their behavior in the interview situation. If there is an unbalance between what they say and how they act, the application will be rejected. There is no foundation to build a relationship on if there is no trust.

In order to build a strong personal brand, one has to meet the other party's needs and desires. For a person applying for a job it means that he/she has to match a company's demands and add value to them. The focus should lay on the recipient and how the applicant will be perceived by them.

5.2.5 Self-Image

Since the purpose of our essay is to see how adapting product branding models on students will benefit them in a job-seeking situation, how a customer sees him/herself, which in this case is the employer representing a company, is not as relevant. What is important is rather how the student sees him/herself in the particular job-seeking situation. We have switched the focus from the customer's self-image to the student's self-image.

Since we built our self-image facet around the student, the last facet of the prism; reflection, will also center on the student. We will rename this facet into perception, because it will deal with how others perceive you.

5.2.6 Perception

A personal brand is a perception of an individual maintained by somebody else. How do you want others to see you? And do they in fact think of you this way? People are judged on everything they say, wear, how they talk, how they dress, what school they go to etcetera.¹²⁸ This facet can be seen

¹²⁸ McNally & Speak (2003), pg. 32.

as the brand image; customer perceptions and the associations others connect to a brand. How the presumptive employer perceives and judges the applicant will decide if he/she will get the job.

5.3 Closing words

We have now applied product-branding models onto the job-seeking business student and by doing so, the models can be used for developing their personal brands. We will develop these thoughts in the following chapter.

6 Conclusion and discussion

In this last chapter we will draw some conclusions based on the analysis we performed. The results will answer the two main questions that have been asked through this thesis: Does personal branding derive from product branding? Can models taken from product branding be used to build a business students personal brand? Further we will lead a discussion about the knowledge contributions that we believe are achieved from this study. After this, we will provide the readers with further reflections drawn from our thesis and then finish up by giving some suggestions to future research within this topic.

6.1 Introduction

The idea behind this thesis was the attempt to apply product branding models on business students. This led us to formulate our purpose: to analyze the application of models from product branding on job-seeking business students as a way to establish a personal brand. After conducting our research, with this purpose in mind, we were able to draw two general conclusions:

1. It is possible to apply models from product branding onto business students in order to create a personal brand.
2. The concept of personal branding does in fact derive from the reasoning of product branding.

Both will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

6.2 Results

We found that there is an apparent lack of adequate literature and thereby theoretic models in the field of personal branding. This questions the validity of the concept. Our study on the subject of personal branding was therefore conducted in order for us to see a connection between personal- and product branding. We found that even though the theories do not look the same, their main reasoning is built on a similar premise. The brand-building model and the brand identity prism provided the means for this.

Factors included in the brand-building model, such as positioning, market communication and product attributes are equally important factors when branding a person. The process of branding a

product begins with researching the targeted customer. A business must know what the consumer values and then try and match these needs in order to become more attractive to the target. A positioning strategy is chosen based on results from the conducted market research. Product attributes such as appearances and personality all play a part in the positioning strategy. Thereafter, the company communicates with their customers through ad campaigns, commercials, personal selling etc. This is done to make customers aware of the branded product and what it stands for.

The same principles can be used on people competing against others; i.e. politicians who want to be elected by the public, artists who want to sell records, job-applicants who want to be selected for a certain position etc. Much like a product, in order to appeal to the target market, a person building a brand must conduct customer research and then formulate a positioning strategy. In this strategy, attributes such as looks and characteristics must be taken into consideration. Upon which communication with the target is done; this can be in the form of résumés and interviews.

Discussed above were factors from the brand-building model, which we concluded are of relevance when building a personal brand. We believe that the Brand-Identity Prism is also helpful in creating a personal brand. A brand's physique, pertained to both products and people, contributes to the customer's initial judgment. Another facet of great importance is personality. When establishing a relationship with someone, personality is often the decisive factor to whether or not the relationship will be a lasting one. The strength of both product- and personal brands are dependant on the relationships they manage to build with their customers.

Based on the many similarities among branding product and people, we draw the conclusion that people, in the same way as products, can be managed as brands. The principles and concepts of the product-branding models were compatible with those related to personal branding. It therefore allowed us the possibility to establish a personal brand for the business students, by using factual models developed by Aaker, Kapferer, Keller and Melin. This leads us to the conclusion that personal branding does in fact derive from product branding.

6.3 Knowledge contribution

We will now clarify the knowledge contribution our results provided after conducting our research. We believe that we made two overall knowledge contributions. The first is academically based and

can be used for further research on the subject of personal branding and the second is student oriented and will help the readers in their future endeavors.

The contribution made towards academics is a clarification of the concept personal branding as well as an explanation of its heritage. We believe that we were able to transform personal branding into an academic tool instead of a loose concept used to sell “how to” manuals. We were able to draw associations between personal and product branding and thereby determine what kind of models could be used to explain this relationship. Through finding the appropriate models and then applying them onto business students we showed that personal branding is based on product branding.

The second contribution is towards the future student readers of this thesis. As mentioned earlier, the students entering the job market are facing harsh competition. People in general have higher education today than twenty or thirty years ago, so having a university degree is no longer the decisive factor between applicants, demands such as social competence and personality now also factor into the equation. A personal brand can be used as a strategic competitive tool. Personal branding is a process, and does not end when the business student has been hired. The student has to maintain and develop the brand. We believe that by providing the business students with appropriate models, and highlighting the phenomena of personal branding, they will not only sustain a better chance of getting a job, but also achieve a greater self-awareness that could become an advantage in their future careers as well as in their personal life.

6.4 Reflections

When reflecting on the thesis and our findings we can not help but to point out a few thoughts we came up with during this process. The first concerns the validity of the term personal branding. Almost all of the respondents we interviewed were confident that this concept is a new term for an already existing idea. All things that personal branding stands for are in themselves quite obvious, but the connections and parallels between them make them unique. We believe that there has always existed something that resembles personal branding, but the recent literature on the subject has highlighted it. One thing that the authors of this literature missed though was to associate it with anything substantial, they never drew the parallels with product branding, and that separates the old way of thinking from the new. So in our minds it is not a new way of thinking, but instead a new set of parallels and terminology.

The second reflection we came across is closely related to our thoughts about future research. Throughout the thesis we tried to make it seem like this is not the only way in which to get a job, but we do see the possibility of misinterpretation. We want to clarify this by saying that it most definitely is not the only way, but instead an opportunity to greatly improve the chances of succeeding in the job application process. There are no guarantees; jobs are rewarded through hard work and integrity. Other circumstances, such as for example less work experiences could most definitely affect the chances of getting a job.

6.5 Future research

The thoughts we had concerning future research are summarized in the following paragraphs. We realize that we picked a very slim amount of respondents, and we limited ourselves to only studying business students, this could be greatly adjusted. Performing a larger study and attempting to generalize the concept that we laid out on a heterogeneous group of people would be most interesting. By studying students from different areas or in different fields, one could achieve interesting results connected to different views on building a personal brand. The attempt to apply the theory to people in general would also be interesting to study.

Another thought that we had was to use different models when studying the substance of a persona personal brand. We did use product branding models, but these could be changed or altered. Even models from corporate branding could be brought into the mix, which might alter or improve the results formed in our thesis.

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Supplement 1

Students:

1. Background information?
 - Name?
 - Gender?
 - Age?
 - Education?
 - What kind of job are you applying for?
 - Have you written a resume before or is it the first time? Have you seeked information about it?
 - Have you consciously built up a good resume, experiences? For example? When did you start thinking about building your résumé?
 - Have you been to an interview before?
2. Do you search for information about the job and the employer where you're applying for a job before sending them your resume? How?
3. What are your values? Do you think others agree that they are your values?
4. What kind of qualities do you especially point out in your resume/interview?
5. What makes you unique?
6. Do you think a lot about how others may perceive you or are you just being yourself and think that others should adjust to that?
7. When going to an interview, how important do you find your appearance? How do you dress?
8. Have you exaggerated/lied in your resume/interview? If so, why and about what?
9. How important is the job for you? A part of your life or your life?

Supplement 2

The career coaches

1. What's your name?
2. What is your role, what do you do?
3. What kind of relationship do you have with employers?
4. What are the most important factors for employers? How do you know this?
5. What is your main advice for students applying for jobs when it comes to writing a resume and going to an interview?

Supplement 3

Employers

1. What 's your name and occupation?
2. What qualities of a job applicant are the most important to you?
3. Do you read all résumé's?
4. What stands out? Who is called to an interview?
5. During the interview, what qualities are the most important?
6. How important are the appearance?
7. Does the person's name matter?
8. Do you have personal tests for the applicants?
9. How important are experiences beside the education?