



LUND UNIVERSITY
School of Economics and Management

“This is who I am, this is what I do.

This is the freedom I have”

A Qualitative Study of How Marketing Freelancers Perceive and
Practice Personal Branding

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how marketing freelancers perceive personal branding and how they practice it. Both offline and online environments for practicing personal branding have been included. The aimed contribution is to broaden the understanding of personal branding by adding the perceptions that marketing freelancers have towards this topic. Additionally, the attempt is to provide a practical contribution for other freelancers, individuals who wish to start their career as freelancers and organizations that wish to hire freelancers. Furthermore, this thesis has adopted a qualitative approach, where the empirical material was gathered by conducting nine semi-structured interviews with marketing freelancers who work in Sweden. The findings include five topics, which are divided into 12 most important themes that have been interpreted from the semi-structured interviews. Moreover, this study shows a discussion based on the interpreted analysis and concludes with the two modified theoretical frameworks, which include the perceptions that marketing freelancers have towards personal branding and the way marketing freelancers practice personal branding. Based on the empirical findings, it is interpreted that personal branding plays an important role in the marketing freelancers' lives. Most importantly, the personal brand needs to be authentic and stay consistent in all the different platforms online. Moreover, there should not be a difference between the offline and online personal brand. The most interesting finding was that offline personal branding practices were more important for marketing freelancers than online personal branding practices. As a matter of fact, online practices were seen more as a support for offline personal branding practices.

Keywords: Personal Branding, Freelancers, Freelance Economy, Liquid Modernity

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Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Background	1
1.2	Aim and Objectives	3
1.3	Purpose and Research Questions	3
1.4	Aimed Thesis Contributions	4
1.5	Delimitations	4
1.6	Outline of the Thesis	5
2	Literature Review	6
2.1	Freelancing	6
2.1.1	Working life in the Liquid Modernity	6
2.1.2	Freelancing as an Occupation	7
2.1.3	Freelance Economy	9
2.1.4	Networking	11
2.2	Personal branding	12
2.2.1	What is Personal Branding?	12
2.2.2	Why is Personal Branding Practiced?	14
2.2.3	How is Personal Branding Practiced?	15
2.2.4	Where does Personal Branding take place?	17
2.3	Theoretical Perspective	18
2.3.1	Personal Branding Process of Khedher (2015)	18
2.3.2	Theoretical Framework	20
2.4	Chapter Summary	21
3	Methodology	23
3.1	Research Approach	23
3.2	Research Design	24
3.3	Data Collection Method	25
3.3.1	Participants & Sampling	25
3.3.2	Semi-structured Interviews	26
3.4	Data Analysis	27
3.5	Ethical considerations	28
3.6	Validity and Reliability	28
3.7	Limitations	30
4	Findings	31

4.1	Freelancing	31
4.1.1	Freelancing as an Occupation	31
4.2	Perception towards Personal Branding	34
4.2.1	What is Personal Branding?	34
4.2.2	Authenticity and Consistency of the Personal Brand.....	35
4.2.3	Personal Brand Communicates Skills, Values and Services.....	36
4.2.4	Standing Out from the Crowd with Personal Branding	37
4.3	Creating a Personal Brand.....	38
4.3.1	Personal Brand is You.....	38
4.4	Managing the Personal Brand	39
4.4.1	Online Personal Branding Practices	39
4.4.2	Offline Personal Branding Practices	42
4.4.3	Networking.....	44
4.5	Developing the Existing Personal Brand	45
4.5.1	Protecting the Brand.....	45
4.5.2	Self-Development.....	46
4.5.3	Trial and Error.....	47
5	The Analysis and Discussion	49
5.1	Analysis.....	49
5.1.1	Freelancing	49
5.1.2	Perceptions Towards Personal Branding.....	50
5.1.3	Personal Branding Practices.....	52
5.2	Discussion and Contribution	56
5.2.1	How Marketing Freelancers Perceive Personal Branding.....	56
5.2.2	How Marketing Freelancers Practice Personal Branding	57
6	Conclusion.....	59
6.1	Theoretical Contribution	60
6.2	Practical Implications	61
6.3	Limitations & Future Research	61
	References	63
	Appendix A: Consent Form	71
	Appendix B: Interview Topic Guide.....	72

List of Figures

Figure 1 Personal branding process (Khedher, 2015).....	18
Figure 2 Theoretical framework.....	20
Figure 3 How Marketing Freelancers Perceive Personal Branding	56
Figure 4 How Marketing Freelancers Practice Personal Branding	58

1 Introduction

This chapter starts with introducing the background of this research for the reader. Secondly, the aims and objectives will be addressed together with the purpose and the research questions. Furthermore, the delimitations will be explained and to finalize the introduction chapter, the outline of the thesis will be presented.

1.1 Background

We live in a digital world, where technology is slowly replacing many traditional work tasks. At the same time, the short-term mentality has replaced lifelong, full-time positions in the work life (Bauman, 2000; Gandini, 2016). As a reaction to these transitions, freelancing as an option for the traditional way of labour has become a growingly popular choice for individuals, while it also works as a solution for companies who require more short-term labour force (Gandini, 2016; Gaile, 2014; Kazia, Yusoffb, Khana & Kazi, 2014). Where most projects are too small or infrequent to accept a full-time employee, freelancers are the flexible solution to work for a short period of time on a project and have the required skills for the arising new work tasks (Gandini, 2016; Kucharska & Confente, 2017).

The work of freelancers can be described as “short-term, temporary or project-based work relationships in particular occupational or industry settings” (IPSE, 2016, p.4). Additionally, multiple reports have confirmed what Malone & Laubacher (1998) hypothesized already in the late 1990s; the number of freelancers is rising rapidly around the world (Eurofound, 2017; IPSE, 2016; EFIP, 2013; Upwork, 2017). According to a report from IPSE (2016), every seventh worker in the UK, 4,8 million in total are self-employed in the UK workforce, out of which 2 million are freelancers. The report also reveals that the number of freelancers has increased by 43 percent between 2008 and 2016. Eurofound (2017) report states that a permanent and full-time contract for employment was the norm in the EU until the 1970s, and since then multiple forms of employment have appeared, including the diversified self-employment in a broad range of occupations and sectors. Furthermore, EFIP (2013) reports that the number of freelancers, grew by 45 percent between 2004 and 2013 in EU, from 6,2 million to 8,9 million. Upwork (2017) research reported the number of (US) freelance workforce to be 57,3 million and based on the growth rates in recent years, freelancers are expected to be the majority of the (US) workforce by 2027. These numbers reflect the fact that the number of freelancers is growing rapidly in the EU, UK and US, which makes them a relevant target group for this study.

Applications and different kind of platforms designed for job-seeking (for example Freelancers.com & Upwork.com) are proliferating online (Gandini, 2016). Thus, technology is an enabler for the growing number of freelancers. Technology makes it possible for the freelancers to enter new work markets around the world that were not accessible before (McKeown & Leighton, 2016). Therefore, as the global online marketplace for workers has emerged, everyone competes for the same jobs regardless of their location (Beerepoot & Lambregts, 2015). This is one of the reasons why freelancing is such a competitive field (Friedman, 2015). Therefore, many authors suggest that personal branding is the key for freelancers to stand out from the crowd and be successful professionally (Beals, 2008; Friedman, 2015; Gandini, 2016; Machaz & Shokoofh, 2016, Rampersad, 2008; Tikkanen, 2015). Furthermore, Friedman (2015) states that differentiating oneself in today's globalized world has become a great challenge because everyone in the society, one way or another, performs online personal branding practices. She states that most of us have a social media presence, we can write a blog and create a website for ourselves. We develop these practices in order to be unique, however, really standing out from the crowd is difficult, when everyone else has the same online tools for personal branding.

To assist freelancers to survive in this competitive market, there are numerous websites, books and consultancy services, which advice on how to build a strong personal brand (Khedher, 2014). Arvidsson, Gandini, & Bandinelli (2016) reflect on this in their study, which shows that personal branding has become an essential practice among freelancers. On the contrary, in the research by MBO Partners (2014), freelancers brought up word-of-mouth as one of the most important factors in finding work. According to their research, other important factors concerning the success of full-time freelancers were personal skills, the ability to deal with insecurity and networking, whereas sales and marketing were deemed important. Therefore, findings from previous research among freelancers show mixed results on the importance of personal branding for their professional success.

Freelancers are a group of people who work independently, being their own bosses or working as entrepreneurs (Gandini, 2016). If personal branding is as significant for professional success as previous literature indicates, then freelancers could be seen requiring it the most due to the volatile nature of their work. Therefore, the perceptions of freelancers towards personal branding provide richer information than the perceptions of people with permanent and long-term occupations. Due to the short-term nature of freelance work (Kazia et al., 2014) freelancers need to be active in the marketplace to continuously gain new tasks. Therefore, freelancers who practice personal branding might see major impacts on their career and improve their chances of finding new work tasks. As Gandini (2016) states, for those who wish to have control of their time and have gained enough professional skills to work independently, the career as a freelancer is becoming more popular and a preferred choice. Because the number of freelancers is growing continuously, the choice of focusing this research on freelancers and their perceptions toward personal branding is highly relevant.

To the best of our knowledge, previous research concerning personal branding of freelancers is limited. Therefore, this research aims to gain a better understanding of how freelancers perceive personal branding and how they practice it. Statistics prove that the number of freelancers in the workforce is growing rapidly; simultaneously personal branding seems to play an increasingly important role in general, to be professionally successful. Although we live in a

digital world surrounded by applications and platforms, Harris and Rae (2011) argue that to be professionally successful, it is highly important to manage networks and personal brand, not only online but also offline. Moreover, there is limited research on personal branding practices offline and according to previous literature; most of the personal branding practices are conducted online (Friedman, 2015; Gandini 2016). Since we do not know how marketing freelancers perceive offline and online practices of personal branding, we have decided to include both environments to this research.

1.2 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this thesis is to advance an understanding of how marketing freelancers perceive personal branding and additionally, how they practice it. Within the context of marketing freelancers, the objectives are to:

Explore the perceptions that marketing freelancers have towards personal branding and additionally, how they practice personal branding.

Evaluate the existing literature regarding personal branding and freelancing

Provide theoretical and practical contributions concerning the perceptions that marketing freelancers have towards personal branding and how they practice it.

1.3 Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how marketing freelancers perceive personal branding and how they practice personal branding in offline and online environments.

To investigate this, the following research question has been formed:

How do marketing freelancers perceive personal branding?

The research question is accompanied with the following sub-question:

How do marketing freelancers practice personal branding?

1.4 Aimed Thesis Contributions

This research attempts to contribute to the literature on personal branding by adding a deeper understanding of the personal branding practices conducted from the point of view of marketing freelancers. The type of research regarding personal branding is highly relevant since it is strongly connected with the visibility in social media, which according to Gandini (2016) is the main way for finding a job in the time we live in. Most previous research has been focused on one certain social media platforms like Twitter (Brems, Temmerman, Graham & Broersma, 2017; Gandini, 2016; Hanusch & Bruns, 2017). Additionally, there is a limited amount of research done regarding personal branding from the freelancers perspective.

The attempt of this study is also to provide practical contributions for freelancers in search for advice on how to practice personal branding and provide insights for individuals who wish to work as freelancers in the future. By creating the broader understanding of personal branding among freelancers, this study can show strengths and weaknesses of the practices. This gives freelancers and future freelancers' tools and a strong basis while building, and later on developing, their personal brand. Furthermore, the aim of this research is to give a practical contribution to organizations and managers who are considering employing freelancers for short-term projects. The outcome of this study can work as a manual to understand how to attract individuals who are searching for more flexible solutions regarding work.

1.5 Delimitations

This thesis is focused on investigating the perception that freelancers have towards personal branding and additionally how they practice personal branding. In order to narrow down the scope of the research, the field of freelancing has been narrowed to marketing. Therefore this thesis will not include freelancers from any other fields. Additionally, the focus on marketing freelancers connects this research with the field of studies of the authors.

As mentioned earlier, the number of freelancers is growing rapidly. To narrow down the scope of this research, it has been decided not to include freelancers outside Sweden. More specifically, the research target group has been narrowed down to marketing freelancers who are working in coworking spaces in Lund or Malmö. Besides these delimitations, we will not be looking at cultural or gender differences in this study, because the topic is little researched in the academia previously.

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

The first chapter of this study started with introducing the background of freelancers and personal branding, including the problem formulation explaining why this topic needs to be researched further. Furthermore, the research question and the following sub-question have been introduced. These questions have been addressed to investigate the perceptions that marketing freelancers have towards personal branding and the way they practice personal branding.

The first chapter continues with introducing the aimed contributions and delimitations of this thesis. The second chapter provides the literature review, which presents freelancers, personal branding and personal branding practices in the light of the previous research and ends with a theoretical framework that has been created to conclude the elements of the literature review. The third chapter presents the methodological approach and includes the research design, data collection method, data analysis method, ethical considerations and the validity and reliability of the research. Chapter four introduces the findings from the empirical research, which are analyzed in chapter five with the support of the previous literature that was introduced in chapter two. The two modified frameworks concerning perceptions towards personal branding and personal branding practices will be introduced at the end of chapter five. Chapter six will provide conclusions, theoretical contribution and practical implications. At the end of chapter six, the suggestions for future research will be provided.

2 Literature Review

The literature review chapter functions as a basis for our research with the aim of creating an understanding of the concepts, terminologies, theories and previous research linked with the research purpose. As has been highlighted in the previous chapter, there is limited literature and research treating the perceptions regarding personal branding and the practices around it (Fox, 2014; Gandini, 2016; Khedher, 2014; Tikkanen, 2015).

To start with, the authors of his theses define Bauman's (2000) Liquid Modernity and the way his theory can explain the modern world and the nature of the work life. As our study considers freelancing and personal branding, these topics have been divided into subchapters. Additionally, a theoretical framework about personal branding process by Khedher is introduced. This framework is used as a basis for the created theoretical framework, which guides the empirical research and has been used to structure the findings of this research.

2.1 Freelancing

2.1.1 Working life in the Liquid Modernity

To describe the rise of freelancers in this environment which some call 'Freelance Economy' (Gandini, 2016) it has been decided to take a look at the work of Bauman, a Polish sociologist and philosopher, as he captures the nature of this economy very comprehensively. In his book, called the 'Liquid Modernity', Bauman (2000) states that 'modernization' means compulsive and constant change, which is happening everywhere in our society. According to him, in order to be modern, need to modernize - continuously become something new and never settle down. Bauman (2000, p.2) explains the use of the term 'liquid' by stating that fluids do not keep to any shape for long and are constantly ready (and prone) to change. He adds that while the fluids travel easily, this mobility is what unites them with 'lightness' - which tend to associate with uncertainty. In this way, he concludes, it can be explained why 'fluidity' or 'liquidity' are excellent metaphors for modernity, and in our case describe well the work life of freelancers. Jay (2010, p.97) describes Bauman's theory of liquid modernity as following:

We now live in a world of precarious uncertainty, short-term planning, and instant gratification, the weakening of institutions, ephemeral relationships, and struggles to manage risk, volatile consumerist identities and the collapse of viable communities.

In liquid modernity, each individual is in charge of themselves and their actions. As Bourdieu (cited by Bauman, 2000, p.135) state “to design the future, a hold on the present is needed”. Designing the future can be a challenging task in the liquid modernity since contemporary individuals do not have a strong hold of their present - if we possess any hold of it at all (Bauman, 2000). In all aspects of the present; in our relationships, professions, and cultural identities and in the ways we present ourselves in public, we are under a great deal of insecurity (Bauman, 2000). The less control on the present one has, the fewer individuals can design their future; the time span between now and future has become shorter and the life has been cut into shorter episodes (Bauman, 2000).

Labour, as all the other parts of our lives, is according to Bauman (2000) split into short episodes, as individuals set for themselves short-term goals without planning much further ahead. Work no longer offers security for individuals or gives meaning in a way that it used to (Bauman, 2000). The situation, in general, has shifted from the long-term mentality towards labour to short-term one. The individuals who are capable and allowed to freely do their choices are a big development from the individuals who used to work in the factories, and whose mobility and choices were narrowed by leaving them without other options than long working days and long-term employment (Bauman, 2000). Individuals are now on their own and in charge of every decision in their lives, in a world full of possibilities to choose from (Bauman, 2000). We are used to this kind of state where nothing is finished or complete, where life is full of anxiety and risks because of its uncertainty, yet we do not have any desire to return to the way of life that was solid and permanent, since it would take away our freedom (Bauman, 2000).

2.1.2 Freelancing as an Occupation

The occupation of freelancing can be identified and ruled by the precept of flexibility within the work life (Bauman, 2000). In previous literature, multiple definitions can be found to describe freelancers, however, in this research, freelancers are described as individuals, who:

[o]btain the majority of their income from contract-based, independent and self-organized forms of work, and are not subject to a formally stable and continuous dependent relationship with a single employing entity (Gandini, 2016, p.16).

Freelancing can be identified as a short-term occupation; specifically, people going from one employer to another and never staying for a too long period of time in the same environment: “Job Hopper” Tams & Arthur (2010, np). The freelancers’ work as individuals who can administer independently their own temporary projects on an hourly basis and with their own flexibility (Tapscott, 1999; Van der Born & Witteloostuijn, 2013). Thereupon, freelancing plays an increasingly important role within the organisations to take over some short-term roles and to fulfil temporary needs with professional skills (Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007). Freelancers are professionals who have made the decision to work as their own bosses and are as a result of that in charge of their own destiny (Upwork, 2017). Therefore, freelancers are more aware of market trends and are willing to spend more time on personal-development than traditional employees in order to help flourish our economy (Upwork, 2017).

Whereas most projects are too small or infrequent to accept a full-time employee, freelancers are the flexible solution to work with the required skills, for a short period of time on (temporary) projects, rather than permanent structures (Kucharska & Confente, 2017; Tams & Arthur, 2010). Additionally, Tams & Arthur (2010) argue that the rise of freelancing is partly caused due to the changes in mobility, flexibility and the options of networking nowadays. According to DeFillippi and Arthur's (1996), the freelance career path is related to the independent individuals and has three dimensions. Those dimensions are competencies that individuals require to undertake successful career transitions, which are a foundation for the freelance economy.

First, DeFillippi and Arthur (1996) introduce the *knowing-why*, associated with motivational energy to understand oneself, the wish to explore different possibilities for work and having a clear idea of one's values. In this dimension, personal values are linked and identified with the work environment, which relates to the topic of personal branding in a freelance economy. Second, *knowing-how*, which refers to skills and expertise and involves career identity. Knowing-how has the aim to establish abilities to meet the expertise in career-related networks. This dimension likewise continues in personal branding in a career related environment. Last, DeFillippi and Arthur (1996) introduce the *knowing-whom*, which value relationships and reputation and the impact that they can have on the independent individuals' career path. The above-mentioned *knowing-why*, *knowing-how* and *knowing-whom* are aiming to build awareness and expertise to develop skills and competencies for successful careers in the freelance economy (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1996).

Van den Born and Van Witteloostuijn (2013) argue that because of the changing economy, the traditional career path is becoming rare in the 20th century and the non-traditional occupations are becoming increasingly popular. They believe that the reason for this is the growing popularity to work as a freelancer. Accordingly, Upwork (2017) argues that the freelance workforce in the US context, likewise all around the world, is growing faster than the overall workforce. As a result of this, they presented convincing arguments in their 2017 study report where they believe that in the year 2027 the majority of workers will freelance. Additionally, Upwork (2017) states that freelancers are predicted to become workforce majority within a decade, with nearly 50 percent of millennial workers already freelancing annually. Hoque & Bear, (2014, p.35) state that companies are nowadays "less committed to commitment", which means that companies do not value full-time employee relationships anymore, but hire rather freelancers. Therefore, it is increasingly important to raise awareness about freelancers and about freelancing as an occupational choice.

According to Upwork (2017), the reason for growing numbers of freelancers is that the online environment makes it easier to find work. They present in their "Freelancing in 2017" report that 71 percent of the participants state that the amount of work they obtained online increased this year. This is in line with Beerepoot & Lambregts (2015) findings concerning the importance of the Internet and online environments, which create increasing marketplaces for services and products. This environment empowers workers to be able to work always and everywhere. Additionally, Upwork (2015) presents in their report that the perception towards freelancing as a career has become more positive, which results in increasing numbers of freelancers.

Accordingly, there is more than only the Internet and the positive perception towards freelancers that creates the growth of work interest (Younger and Oliveira, 2017). Younger and Oliveira (2017) argue that flexibility and a more 'free' life- and workstyle, wherein individuals have more freedom to plan their own time, can be seen as an argument to start working as a freelancer. In order to understand the reasons behind starting a career as a freelancer better, Younger and Oliveira (2017) demonstrate the results of their study about what freelancers find important in their workspace, which presents the positive sides of freelancing as an occupation.

The outcomes of this study are distinguished by six motives, which are 1. *Advancement*, a freelancer find it important to face responsibility and seek status. 2. *Autonomy* refers to the level of independence, making their own choices and the level of flexibility wherein they can plan their own schedule, which results in 3. *Balance*. Wherein a worker can make time for what really matters and seek achievement and enjoyment. 4. *Service*, wherein the participants of this study explain that they find social contribution and the aim to make the world a better place. Most importantly, Younger and Oliveira (2017) point out 5. *Variety*, where development and new opportunities to learn and to grow from being influential. Ending with 6. *Affiliation*, where a workplace can be seen as a community. On the whole, those motives are researched with the goal to understand what is important for freelancers as humans in a workspace and the reason behind freelancing as an occupation. Moreover, by being a freelancer it is possible to respond to the motives by own relevance and importance (Younger & Oliveira, 2017). Reiss (2004) adds to this by explaining that freelancing, as an occupation is fun when you make it a good story, with paying attention and being curious about what is out there in the freelance economy.

Freelancing as an occupation is, as mentioned earlier, ruled by the precept of flexibility within the work-life (Bauman, 2000), which is applicable to the already mentioned freelancing as the flexible solution for companies and individuals (Kucharska & Confente, 2017). It is becoming more important than ever to realize what freelancing is, why it has rising importance and to understand why it is relevant (Upwork, 2017). Thence, these explanations generate relevance to this research, which attempts to understand the meaning of personal branding for freelancers. Therefore, knowledge of the terminology of freelancers and the significance of freelance as an occupation is pivotal, to apply it later on in this with personal branding and the freelance economy.

2.1.3 Freelance Economy

In line with the earlier explained importance of freelancing as an occupation, the freelance economy emerged out of the changing workstyle (Younger & Oliveira, 2017). This thesis adopts the terminology of Freelancing Economy as the economy that arises of the result of the shift from traditional full-time employment to the non-traditional short-term self-employed freelancers (Öberg, 2018; Janofsky, 2015; Satter, 2017). This way of working, where freelancers provide products or services to more than one employer at the same time, goes outside the traditional model of employment and is therefore seen as *the freelance economy* (Öberg, 2018; Janofsky, 2015).

Freelancing nowadays is well known in the creative industries, as for instance marketing and communication work (Upwork, 2017). Besides this, there is a growing number of freelancers

in many new sectors, such as development, sales, illustrations and IT, which bring new work-related opportunities for freelancers and increase the importance of the freelance economy (Öberg, 2018). The trends in the freelance economy emerged from the desire to be self-employed, rather than full-time company employed, which signifies flexibility created through and with independent individuals (Janofsky, 2015). Freelancers are the essence of the freelancing economy, where they construct a society to provide offerings to customers (Öberg, 2018; Janofsky, 2015). Manifold new platforms and websites are launching to respond on the freelance economy to provide services to network and create connections between companies and freelancers (Upwork, 2015).

Technology has fuelled the evolution of work in the digital environment and plays a fundamental role in empowering the freelance economy (ed. Handel, 2013). As a result of the online environment, 77 percent of the freelancers are able to find short-term work and projects within less than one week (Upwork, 2017). Additionally, technical devices like computers, robotics and artificial intelligence are displacing human jobs and therefore creating more technological employment and less full-time options, thus more temporary jobs for freelancers (Satter, 2017; ed. Handel, 2013).

Within the temporary jobs in the freelance economy, freelancers and gig workers are playing an essential role (Satter, 2017). Gig workers can be seen as a part of the freelance economy in which there are 1) independent contractors (Freelancers) and 2) gig workers (Kobie, 2018; Satter, 2017). The gig workers receive their name from individuals who accept 'gig' tasks (Alton, 2018). The work is divided into 'pieces' or 'gigs' and focuses on one niche or key performance at the time, which creates jobs like deliveries, driving passengers and cleaning homes (Kobie, 2018). Gig tasks have its core in the app-based platforms (Alton, 2018; Greenwood, Burtch & Carnahan, 2017; Kobie, 2018).

Randstad (2018) explains in their trend report that 61 percent of employers plan to replace up to 30 percent of their permanent workforce with freelancers, gig workers and independent contractors during the next year. This results in a more agile and flexible work sphere in the changing economy:

[c]ompanies are increasingly embracing gig workers, freelancers, and even robots, in their overall workforce to address the increasingly tight labour market in the US and around the world (Randstad, 2018, p.21).

Concerning the information above, and the changes in the economy, freelancing and the freelance economy are more relevant than ever (ed. Handel, 2013). Within the freelance economy, innovations, relationship, branding and knowledge are the key determinants (Kucharska & Confente, 2017; Tapscott, 1999). Along with those factors, freelancers are shaping the economy. This results in a job market that becomes stronger, which takes people out of independent work to accompany the freelance economy (Fox, 2014).

All things considered, changes in the traditional work model have created new opportunities for freelancers and formed the freelance economy (Öberg, 2018; Fox, 2014). Within the freelance economy, one can distinguish freelancers, which focus on short-term projects and gig workers, which focus on one skill or need only (Greenwood et al, 2017; Kobie, 2018).

Altogether, this allows us to understand the importance of changes in the economy and in the work models (ed. Handel, 2013).

2.1.4 Networking

Networking is explained as interaction with others to exchange information and develop contacts (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). In today's world, in research by MBO Partners (2014) networking, offline and online, is the third most important factor in finding work for freelancers. This is supported by Arvidsson et al. (2016), Briggs (2012) and Brems et al. (2017), who believe that networking forms the basis to create opportunities, to connect and build a network. Networking is the core basis that leads to a good reputation, which can result in job opportunities (Arvidsson et al, 2016; Briggs, 2012). Additionally, Tams & Arthur (2010) argue that the previously explained freelance economy as such is co-build on networking by freelancers that connect and interact with business and individuals.

Social networking is done online on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). The unique factor on these platforms is, besides allowing individuals to meet a stranger and keep in contact with their acquaintances, to facilitate users to articulate and make their social networks visible. Resultantly, this can lead to connections between people that would not have been made without the social networking sites (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Furthermore, offline and online networking can be the foundation of the coworking space (Moriset, 2014). Whereas social networking sites allow individuals to meet strangers online (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), coworking spaces provide a space to meet strangers' offline (Moriset, 2014). A coworking space is designed to host people, from entrepreneurs who want to step outside their comfort zone to freelancers who want to find a convivial, creative environment that favors meetings and collaborations (Moriset, 2014). Moreover, it is a place where the propensity for social interaction can be enhanced (Castilho & Quandy, 2017). Additionally, it is the potential environment for knowledge sharing and social interaction, which results in opportunities for business-related innovations (Castilho & Quandy, 2017; Uda, 2013), Fost (2008) points out more advantages in a coworking space environment, such as that workers are more effective there than when sitting home alone, besides it facilitates collaboration, characterized by the co-location of economic actors which leads to highly-collaborative communities (Castilho & Quandy, 2017). Statista (2018) reported the existence of 15,500 coworking spaces globally and made the projection of 2018 of 18,900 coworking spaces worldwide. Fost (2008) indicate people that are working in coworking spaces as people that are working by themselves, mostly on their own and independent but surrounded by other creative people in the coworking space.

For this reason, the researchers of this study believe that the knowledge about the phenomenon of networking of freelancers in coworking spaces is valuable information. Supported by Uda (2013) freelancers can be found in coworking spaces, wherefore we decided to approach freelancers in coworking spaces for our empirical investigation. In addition to this, what is significant to this thesis, the role of freelancers in the coworking environment has been researched before (Uda, 2013). The main outcome of earlier research shows that coworking

spaces are responding to the needs of freelancers, by providing a flexible and creative environment, full of networking opportunities (Castilho & Quandy, 2017; Moriset, 2014).

2.2 Personal branding

2.2.1 What is Personal Branding?

There are multiple definitions of personal branding that can be found in previous literature (Baker, 2009; Baumeister, 1997; Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Goffman, 1959; Peters, 2007; Rampersad, 2008; Shepherd, 2005) For the purpose of this research the definition of personal branding is drawn from Rampersad (2008):

[s]uccessful personal branding entails managing perceptions effectively, and controlling and influencing how others perceive you and think of you. Having a strong personal brand is an important asset in today's online, virtual, and individual age. It is becoming increasingly essential and is the key to personal success.... Your personal brand is the synthesis of all the expectations, images, and perceptions it creates in the minds of others when they see or hear your name (p.1).

Shepherd (2005, p. 67) explains that the principles of personal branding are success and 'standing out from the crowd', Rampersad (2008) adds to this that the most important factor regarding personal branding is to understand and to know oneself. To truly get to know oneself, Goffman (1959) wrote the book *'The presentation of Self in Everyday Life'* to treat face-to-face interactions as a subject of sociological study. He argues that an individual's behaviour will control or guide the impression that others have of him by changing or developing settings or appearance when an individual comes in contact with another person. The core of Goffman's theory lies in the connection of performance and life. Where other authors are selecting just one element to study, Goffman (1959) decided to consider all elements of acting. Therefore he covers the *front* stage and the *backstage* part, which are relevant in the context where people have the desire to control the impressions that other form about them in different environments. When in front stage, a person is aware of being observed and will behave and perform to those watching by observation (Goffman, 1959). While in the backstage part, the person will act different, like no performance is needed (Goffman, 1959).

In addition to this, different from when Goffman (1959) wrote his book, nowadays people need to distinguish between online and offline (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). According to Bullingham & Vasconcelos (2013), the *online* environment (non-physical) provide users with the potential to perform and present different identities. It creates a distance between the performance and the audience and therefore makes it easier to conceal elements of the offline self and embellish the online self (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). Bullingham & Vasconcelos (2013) are using online avatars as an example to show the mask that demonstrates

the role of its user. Avatars can be created as one wish, so they can look better, fitter and standing more out from the crowd. This could be considered as a reflection on what Goffman (1959) sees as “splitting” (p.117), a character of self during interaction and he refers to this as form of “identity exploration” (p.117). Therefore, the online stage could be seen as a ‘build on’ the offline stage wherein an actor strongly invest on their mask (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). The use of avatars can minimize certain aspects of the self as in the online environment there is the user and creator role wherein the self represents what wants to show in the foreground, rather than the background (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013).

In addition to the offline and online identity, Baker (2009) introduces the ‘blended identity’, through which the offline self-informs the creation of the online self. This can be applied to personal branding, whereas the platforms are leading the personal brand. Resultantly, this online self later re-informs the offline self in further synergy with the ones that have been introduced first in an online environment.

For this thesis the question of what is personal branding it is relevant to perceive an understanding of what it includes. Therefore, a further explanation and deeper knowledge of humans’ possessions and humans’ behaviour is needed. These possessions begin at an early stage in life, whereas an infant learns to distinguish him or herself from one other and the environment that may envy one's possessions. Continuing with the matter that material possessions tend to decrease with age, but in anyway keep on having a high importance throughout life. Accordingly, Belk (1988, p.160) state:

[a]s we seek to express ourselves through possessions and use material possessions to seek happiness, remind ourselves of experiences, accomplishments, and other people in our lives, and even create a sense of immortality after death. Our accumulation of possessions provides a sense of past and tells us who we are, where we have come from, and perhaps where we are going

For personal branding it is relevant to define who we are and where we are going. To define this, Baumeister (1997) adds on Goffman that there are different 'self's', including ones’ body, sense of identity and reputation. To raise more awareness about deeper insights of ‘the self’, it is necessary to create ‘self-awareness’ which will be explained in three phases (Baumeister, 1997). First, the self-concept is seen as the individual with the ‘belief about him or herself’ (Baumeister, 1997). Second, to reflect upon self-esteem one will have a deeper insight into how one evaluates oneself. As Baumeister state that: “self-esteem refers to the person's broadest self-evaluation” (1997, p. 248). Third, the possessions of the extended self of Belk (1988), describes the evidence of the general premise that possessions contribute to the self. These steps are aiming to truly find ‘the self’, one’s needs to be aware of their self-concept and self-esteem, and the way one individual perceives the world here and now around oneself (Belk, 1988). Correspondingly, Lair, Sullivan and Cheney (2005) clarify personal branding as more related to “self-packaging” with the possibility to create a positive effect on public opinions of a personal offline or online brand.

In conclusion, personal branding is all about getting to know yourself (Rampersad, 2008) Therefore, the famous self by Goffman (1959) is explained with the differences in front - and backstage, and more importantly for this research, the offline, online and blended identity (Baker, 2009). With the three phases of raising self- awareness, 1) self-concept, 2) self-esteem and 3) possession of the extended self from Belk (1988) the “self- packaging” of Lair et al., (2005) appears.

2.2.2 Why is Personal Branding Practiced?

The term personal branding has its origin by Tom Peters (2007), a highly respected management expert, who did not understand why companies do brand themselves yet individuals do not. With this idea in mind and the rise of the digital world, he stressed that individuals can market themselves as a CEOs of their own brand called, “You” (2007, p.32).

Peters (2007, n.p.) explains that everybody has a chance to stand out, but the importance of today is getting more in the niche what makes *you* different as a person and why does it still matters? Therefore, as mentioned earlier, the self-presentation and self-awareness are the starting points of personal branding (Baumeister, 1997). In addition to that, to raise awareness about daily routines, behaviour and skills that a person has helped to create understanding a personal brand (Beckwith, 2007). Hence, in order to construct the personal brand, there needs to be awareness (which can impact choices to create a personal brand), practice and expertise (Chritton, 2013; Pagis & Ailon, 2017). Additionally, to create this awareness, practice and expertise, McGee (2005) points out the importance of self-discovery, combined with ‘word-of-mouth marketing’. The combination of self-discovery and word-of-mouth marketing can set the tone for personal branding now, and in the future (McGee, 2005).

Interestingly, platforms like LinkedIn have built as a result of the big interest from businesses that use social media for online recruiting (Machaz & Shokoofh, 2016). In this case, recruiters are using platforms like LinkedIn to find prospective candidates who appear when looking for certain qualifications and skills. Accordingly, candidates are branding themselves in a way that can have a positive impact on finding tasks or projects (Machaz & Shokoofh, 2016). In line with this, there are websites where freelancers practice personal branding, like the most famous freelance websites Upwork.com, where freelancers can be found and freelance jobs can be offered (Upwork, 2017).

To conclude, work-life should not be the only reason to practice personal branding, it is beneficial for every individual to be aware of his or her values in life (Beckwith, 2007, Peters, 2007). First, it starts with awareness and daily routine (Beckwith, 2007), continues with satisfaction, personal success and word-of-mouth (McGee, 2005) and as a result, it can turn out in business or projects (Machaz & Shokoofh, 2016). Moreover, as a result of personal branding practices, people can find fulfilment in their private and work life (Beckwith, 2007). The reason why personal branding is practiced is valuable for this thesis because the sub-question of this research is *how marketing freelancers practice personal branding*.

2.2.3 How is Personal Branding Practiced?

As mentioned before, personal branding has become increasingly essential and is often the key to personal and professional success (Philbrick & Cleveland, 2015; Rampersad, 2008). The 'self-branding' of one has become important as a pervasive form of invisible labour in the society of information (Arvidsson et al., 2016). Therefore, freelancers are forced to sell themselves on the market (Arvidsson and Peitersen, 2016), which makes personal branding a necessity for every segment. Selling and promoting oneself in the market has become something of a defining characteristic of contemporary selfhood, a process that is seen as normal and necessary (Gershon, 2014). According to Arvidsson et al. (2016), personal branding can be something that one does invisibly and is not aware of. It is a matter of working on 'the self' and being conscious of what is out there in the crowd to be able to practice personal branding (Arvidsson et al., 2016). Interestingly, although Machaz & Shokoofh (2016) earlier mentioned that personal branding is a success factor for work life, no earlier research has been conducted that combines personal branding with freelancers.

Apart from practising personal branding in an offline environment, the online environment creates unlimited opportunities for Freelancers (Brems et al., 2017; Arvidsson & Peitersen, 2016). Online personal branding in the digital environment often relates to social media platforms like: LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter (Brems et al., 2017). Social media is increasingly adopted into the everyday communications, marketing and branding (Brems et al., 2017). Therefore, the rise and development of social media makes it possible for everyone to create a personal profile for multiple purposes such as publishing, sharing and interacting (Brems et al., 2017). Hochschild (2012) presents in *The Outsourced Self* that understanding to know the self is like a manual to personal branding on digital social media platforms. According to him, in the age of social media, personal brands are easily evolved into public entities, including values and contents of which are established in cooperation with others. This results in the self that becomes more popular, transparent and can be rendered by the public (Hochschild, 2012). Additionally, 'trends' within technologies as for example artificial intelligence and new digital technologies will permit the outsourcing (Arvidsson et al., 2016). Therefore, it creates other opportunities to outsource, which results in job opportunities.

Additionally, trends in technologies creating various opportunities on how to practice personal branding as a freelancer (Arvidsson et al., 2016). Brems et al. (2017) argue that freelancers use social media to fulfil their need for personal branding to gain a reputation. The image of the professional, together with the visibility of their contacts and online recommendations, resulting in a trustful source of reputation (Arvidsson et al., 2016). To create an image of the professional, personal branding is needed. Not only in the first stage of creating an image or brand but as well during the entire journey of getting followers, likes, comments and recommendations (Arvidsson et al., 2016). Therefore, actively participating and branding on social media can have a direct advantage regarding work opportunities (Arvidsson et al., 2016; Briggs, 2012; Brems et al., 2017).

According to Arvidsson et al. (2016), as a result of the changing and developing online options, there is no longer an easy ‘packaging’ of *the self*, as in; ‘this is me and this is what I am doing’. Therefore, the risk of losing the identity of the self while practicing personal branding arises (Arvidsson et al., 2016). Additionally, the diversity in the social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram can cause a misinterpretation of the self (Arvidsson et al., 2016). An online self can be misinterpreted due to the earlier mentioned avatars, wherein a person behave differently online than offline or the content can be not valuable for the platform.

By all means, online personal branding is not as simple as it was when social media just emerged (Arvidsson et al., 2016). Individuals need more insights and awareness on diverse platforms than before (Arvidsson et al., 2016). Personal branding can be practiced in different ways, but need a consistent basis to build on. When having a good basis, the opportunity to connect and build a network, to create a good reputation and to, for instance, receive job opportunities arises (Arvidsson, 2016; Brems et al., 2017; Briggs, 2012).

Offline personal branding, according to Arvidsson et al. (2016), needs a different approach from online personal branding. As a result of focusing to online environment nowadays, including the Internet, applications and social media platforms, people tend to forget that personal branding actually starts with individuals in an offline environment (Peters, 2007). In the offline environment, people can be considered as brands, which result in that every person has a personal brand (Khedher, 2014; Peters, 2007). Arvidsson et al., (2016, p.56) used the word “diffused connectedness” in combination with offline networking. This refers to members of a community who are not in direct contact or do not know each other directly. Yet, the members of the community might, however, seek out or trying to contact each other for temporary collaborations, sharing information and knowledge or creating job opportunities. There are notable advantages to have an offline network (Arvidsson et al., 2016). Examples of this are the coworking spaces, where freelancers can mingle, meet and divide jobs among members or with ‘gig workers’ who maintain diverse skills (Arvidsson, 2016).

For both offline and online personal branding, there is the importance of coherence and consistency of a brand (Hamerstone & Hough, 2013). When it comes to networking face to face, one can really show their values, however, this needs to be in line with the online appearance (Hamerstone & Hough, 2013). Hood et al. (2014), explain that offline personal branding strengthens the relationship and therefore helps to engage with others to find their needs, which result in personal awareness and can create job opportunities. Having a touchable product like a business card can support the success of networking, as it is easier for the people to be in contact and remember conversations that they had with the person behind the business card (Hood et al., 2014; Hamerstone & Hough, 2013). Altogether, there needs to be a right balance between offline and online personal branding to sustain a personal brand in the long run (Arvidsson et al. 2016; Hamerstone & Hough, 2013). For this thesis it is important to define the offline and online practices of personal branding for freelancers as the aim of this study is to understand how marketing freelancers perceive and practice personal branding.

2.2.4 Where does Personal Branding take place?

Personal branding takes place in offline and online environments (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011; Peters, 2007). According to Peters (2007), personal branding is practiced everywhere and always; the clothes people are wearing, the small components or accessories people are having with them, the tea or coffee mug they are holding and the way they appear in daily business and private life. Moreover, a personal brand is more visible in public spaces, events and meetings and therefore practiced mostly in environments where a person is surrounded by others (Philbrick & Cleveland, 2015).

Along with offline personal branding, there has been a rise in the development of online personal branding due to the rise of the Internet (Labrecque et al., 2011). As a result of the rising Internet, a shift has taken place from offline to online personal branding and made online personal branding practices as important as it is nowadays (Labrecque et al., 2011). People are able to practice personal branding limitless because of the online platforms (Labrecque et al., 2011). The most commonly used online platforms to practice personal branding are LinkedIn, which is a social network specifically designed for career and business (Friedman, 2015), Facebook and Twitter, which focus on connecting and networking with friends, business and family (Brems et al., 2017).

There has been made a distinction between offline and online, due to the earlier explained rise of the Internet. According to Hood, Robles and Hopkins (2014), online presence has become more important and therefore leads the personal brand. As a result of social media hypes and trends as for example blogging and vlogging, online personal branding is seen as a dominant factor and it mostly used when a person aims to extend reach, to reach out as far and wide as possible, something that is not possible with offline personal branding (Hood et al., 2014). Although online platforms are a powerful tool for personal branding, one should not forget about the importance of offline. Offline is most effective for deepening connections that have been made as it helps to build relationships on a deeper level and therefore can have a positive impact on the personal brand (Chritton, 2013).

Conclusively, sources (Chritton, 2013; Hood et al., 2014; Labrecque et al., 2011; Peters, 2007) place different emphasis on the importance of offline and online personal branding. Additionally, using the combination of offline and online personal branding empowers the personal brand (Kucharska & Confente, 2017). Having this said, the importance of where to practice personal branding for the purpose of this study rises, by reason of answering the sub-question how, and thus where, personal branding can be practiced.

2.3 Theoretical Perspective

2.3.1 Personal Branding Process of Khedher (2015)

To construct a better understanding of how personal branding is practiced, the authors of this thesis have decided to provide a personal branding process framework, presented by Khedher (2015). With this framework, he has formed a basis for further research in the area of personal branding, which still in academia has remained less researched. As personal branding practices are little researched in academia, this framework has been chosen to give a broader view of the practices compared to the other existing introduced processes behind personal branding (Rampersad, 2008; Labrecque et al., 2011; Philbrick & Cleveland, 2015; Rangarajan, Gelb & Vandaveer, 2017).



Figure 1 Personal branding process (Khedher, 2015)

Multiple authors suggest that personal branding practices should be seen as a process (Khedher, 2015; Rampersad, 2008; Labrecque et al., 2011; Philbrick & Cleveland, 2015; Rangarajan et al., 2017). Khedher (2015) states that as processes normally do, also personal branding constructs of an input, method and the from the intended outcomes. The following describes these steps in this process more specifically:

- (1) [c]reating a personal brand identity involves investing in cultural capital and social capital within established organizational fields, (2) managing a brand's position by actively seeking to manage impressions through artifactual, non-verbal behaviours, and verbal strategies; (3) developing a personal brand requires engaging in a reflexivity-in-action and reflexivity-on-action (Khedher, 2015, p.19)

When taking a closer look at the first step, Khedher (2015) draws on the theories of cultural capital and social capital, which have been made famous by Pierre Bourdieu in his book: *The Forms of Capital* (Bourdieu 1983, cited by Khedher 2015). With the help of these concepts, it is possible for the individual to stand out from the crowd in the competitive job market (Khedher, 2015). As Bourdieu (1983, cited by Khedher 2015) defined it, social capital means all the resources that have been gathered by the individual and includes individuals' connections and networks. Hereupon, networks can offer multiple benefits for the individual, such as career

guidance, information and employment and gaining social capital can enhance the possibilities for better jobs, higher earnings and better health for individuals (Khedher, 2015). Cultural capital is a combination of the knowledge, education, benefits and skills that individual has acquired and those individuals who have invested a great deal of time and effort to develop their cultural capital have higher chance to receive job opportunities and to be employed (Khedher, 2015).

The second step handles the way individuals maintain their position, which can be explained by applying to the theory of Goffman (1959) about impression management. In this framework, impression management is a combination of individuals “artifactual, nonverbal behaviours, verbal tactics, influenced by actor’s interaction motives” (Khedher, 2015, p.22). This means that individuals need to maintain the ideal expressions in front of the audience, possibly hide the actions that are inconsistent with the personal brand and control the information about them that is accessible by others (Khedher, 2015). Therefore, the goal of impression management is to regulate and control the access information to shape the impressions that others might have about the individual practicing personal branding (Khedher, 2015).

Furthermore, Khedher (2015) argues, artifactual displays can be seen as the scripts created by individuals for career management, which help them to brand themselves. Moreover, as he adds, the platforms online such as social media, blogs, online portfolios, professional websites provide more possibilities to increase individuals’ visibility and access to richer communication with others easier than ever before. Additionally, he states that personal appearance, the manners, nonverbal communication and verbal communication are other ways to influence the way others perceive the individuals conducting personal branding practices that should be taken into consideration.

The third step is to take a reflexive role, to monitor this created image, to develop the personal branding practices (Khedher, 2015). This stage draws to the reflective practitioner by Schön (1983), which highlights the importance of reflection as the crucial competence for professionals. Kheder (2015) adds that without the reflection, there cannot be improvements or development to the personal brand; reflection does not mean only taking into consideration the past actions but provides individuals with higher level of understanding and knowledge. Reflection-in-action means the reflections and changes that individuals can make already during the certain action in order to improve the outcome (Schön, 1983). In practice, this happens when individuals habitually seek the knowledge on how others see them, or when they seek for feedback towards their actions (Khedher, 2015). Reflection-on-action occurs when individuals seek information on how their knowledge during an action might have affected the outcome (Schön, 1983). According to Khedher (2015), when individuals create their personal brands, they easily tend to critically self-assess their own strengths and weaknesses since the brand building process often have a certain goal. He adds that reflection-on-action is a great tool for individuals to evaluate their behaviour, improve their performance, find the reasons for possible failures and enable them to build more successful strategies for future. Conclusively, for this study, it is valuable to understand how personal branding can be practiced. Through Khedhers (2015) framework a broad explanation for the process of personal branding has been

offered. His framework works as a base for the following theoretical framework, which is created to guide the empirical research and structure the findings of this study.

2.3.2 Theoretical Framework

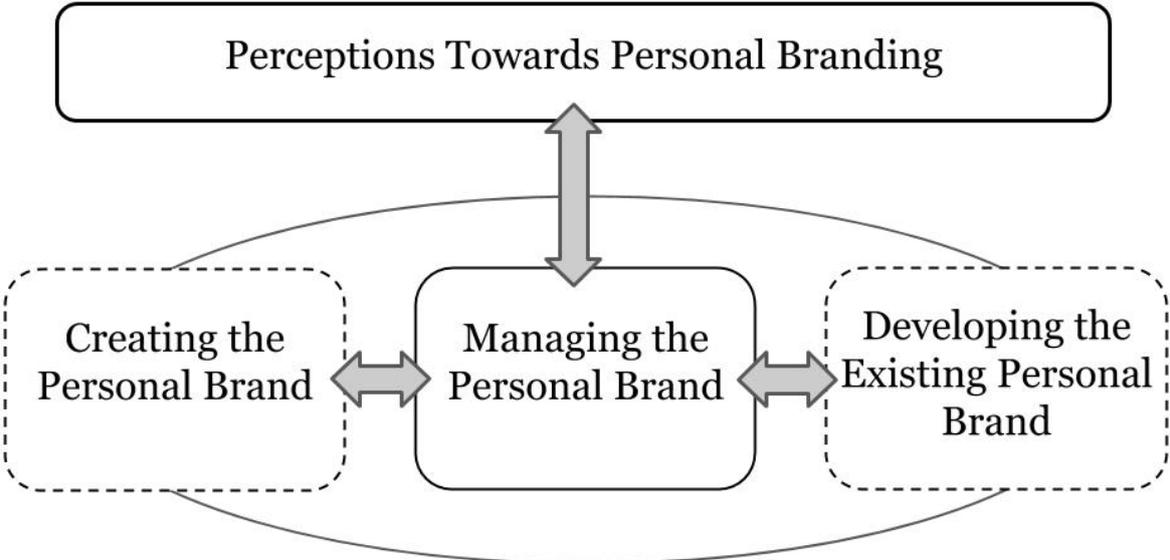


Figure 2 Theoretical framework

This created theoretical framework represents the research question regarding perceptions towards personal branding and the sub-question regarding personal branding practices. The framework is a result of the literature review and previous research regarding personal branding and the personal branding practices

The created theoretical framework illustrates the perceptions that marketing freelancers have towards personal branding and is supported by the personal branding practices, as the purpose of this thesis is to investigate both of these elements. Creating the personal brand and developing the existing brand have accompanied managing the personal brand. This part of the framework has been created based on Khedhers (2015) personal branding process, which has been introduced previously in this chapter (Section 2.3.1). The authors of this thesis have decided to simplify Khedhers framework by replacing personal brand identity with creating the personal brand, personal brand positioning with personal branding practices and personal brand image with developing the existing personal brand. In addition to Khedhers (2015) framework, element of interaction has been added between creating the personal brand, managing the personal brand and developing the personal brand, to highlight the importance of reflecting to the practices that have been done in order to make them more successful. This element has been borrowed from Rampersad (2008) who in his article, which also includes a framework for authentic personal branding, state:

[t]he more you strengthen, maintain, protect, and cultivate your brand, the more successful you will be. It needs constant updating to reflect the new challenges you take, the lessons you have learned, and your own growth and that of your brand (p.36-37).

The theoretical framework has been created to guide and structure our empirical research and findings of this research. As our problem formulation and literature review suggests, there is no certainty about how marketing freelancers perceive personal branding or how they practice it. Therefore, the authors of this thesis have consciously left the theoretical framework simple at this stage in order to leave space for the findings from our empirical research. The aim is to develop this framework further in the analysis part of this research, with the result of providing more specific information about the perception towards personal branding and personal branding practices of marketing freelancers.

2.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter summarizes the terminologies and concepts that have been used in the literature review with the aim to understand the concept of previous research linked with our research question, which is how do marketing freelancers perceive personal branding? Followed by a sub-question, how do marketing freelancers practice personal branding? Therefore, the focus throughout the chapter has been on freelancers and personal branding. The chapter started with the changing economy wherein Bauman (2000) explains the importance of the liquid world, where nothing else is certain except its uncertainty in modern life. Accordingly, liquid modernity describes the nature of the freelance economy (Gandini, 2016) with the focus on short-term, flexible work life and freelancing working as a flexible solution for companies (Kucharska & Confente, 2017). Freelancers are self-organized and do have a continuous dependent relationship with a single employing entity to find projects and work (Gandini, 2016). Technology has raised the opportunities to find work, with websites like Upwork.com and Freelancing.com, where employers can find freelancers, and freelancers can find new projects (Upwork, 2017). In conclusion, the Internet has increased the number of marketplaces that provide services and products (Upwork, 2017).

Concerning personal branding, first, it was discussed what personal branding is; a self-promotion of personal skills, interest and abilities with additionally the person's character, work ethics, education and professional image (Machaz & Shokoofh, 2016). Secondly, it was discussed why a freelancer should practice personal branding, which presents that with the result of practice, people can find fulfilment in their private and work-life (Beckwith, 2007). Third, it has been presented how a freelancer should practice personal branding, which starts with awareness of daily routines, continues in satisfaction and results in personal and professional success (Machaz & Shokoofh, 2016). Last, it has been discussed *where* personal branding takes place. This resulted in an equal importance of offline and online practice;

whereas they both have their strengths and when combined it might empower the personal brand (Kucharska & Confente, 2017). At the end of the literature review, Khedher's (2015) personal branding process (Figure 1) was introduced since it worked as a basis for the theoretical framework (Figure 2) which guide the formulation of the topic guide for the empirical research and structured the findings.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

It is important for the researchers to understand their philosophical position that underlies their decisions before designing the research (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Without philosophical position the researchers cannot have a reflexive role towards their research methods and clarifying their research design becomes more difficult. Therefore, being aware of the philosophical assumptions contributes to the quality of the study (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2015). Ontology is concerned with the relationship between reality and existence, whereas epistemology questions what is knowledge and what is the best way to constitute the knowledge required (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2015; Dudovskiy, 2018). Several qualitative approaches are based on the ontological presumption in which reality is understood as subjective; meaning that knowledge is created based on perceptions that each person has and which change over context and time (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Accordingly, Bryman & Bell (2015) state that constructionism is the subjectivist view towards ontology, which claims that social entities are social constructions built from individuals' actions and perceptions.

The authors of this thesis believe that knowledge is obtainable through social actors, which is connected with an interpretative approach (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Interpretative research has its foundations in “Weber’s notion of Verstehen, the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition and symbolic interactionism” (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p.29). The interpretative approach aims to understand the different ways of human behaviour and respects the differences between the perceptions of individuals (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Therefore, interpretative approach is an obvious choice for this research, as this research focuses on understanding the perceptions that marketing freelancers have towards personal branding and the way they practice personal branding. Interpretative approach is one of the four major approaches towards business studies and is related to socially constructed ontology (Dudovskiy, 2018) and subjectivist epistemology (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

When conducting research, the “nature of the relationship between theory and research” needs to be adopted (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p.19). This decision varies normally between two different options, where deductive approach means that the research is guided by theory, whereas in inductive approach the goal of the research is to create a theory (Creswell, 2014; Bryman & Bell, 2015) and is associated with a qualitative approach (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In this research, the Theoretical Framework (Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2) presents the main elements that need to be investigated to answer the research question and the sub-question. This Theoretical Framework was then used to guide the formulation of the interview topic guide and later on to

structure the empirical findings of the research. Following the inductive approach, themes were formed from the empirical findings, which were then developed into theories (Creswell, 2014).

3.2 Research Design

The research is designed around the question of how marketing freelancers perceive personal branding and how they practice it. Our view of personal branding is that it is a highly subjective and experienced differently by each individual. Therefore, and to follow the philosophical approach outlined earlier, the authors of this research have used a qualitative research approach, which has a general focuses on understanding the ways the social world is interpreted by individuals (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Characterization of a qualitative research can be difficult for two reasons; firstly because the different approaches towards the qualitative research between different researchers and studies vary and secondly since the connection between theory and research is more complex than in quantitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Moreover, a quantitative research seeks to confirm a hypothesis about a phenomenon and uses therefore a highly structured method to accept or reject the hypothesis (Burns & Burns, 2008). A quantitative research approach is not suitable for seeking insight information about individuals' perceptions towards a phenomenon (Burns & Burns, 2008), such as personal branding. Therefore, qualitative research is suitable as it concerns the perspective of individuals and its goal is to generalize to the theory, rather than to the populations (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

In order to explore how marketing freelancers perceive and practice personal branding, semi-structured interview method has been used. Talking to participants and noticing how they behave within their own context is a major characteristic of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). Gathering empirical primary data ensures that the study is more coherent and the data gathered is relevant to answer the research question (Hox & Boeije, 2005). By using the semi-structured interview method, we had the advantage to observe the participants' body language and facial expressions. As qualitative research has as characteristics that the researchers act themselves as the key instruments of doing research and are an inseparable part of interpreting the data (Creswell, 2014; Bryman & Bell, 2015).

The decision to choose semi-structured personal interviews has three reasons. Firstly, although semi-structured personal interviews requires more time than for example group interviews or focus groups (Bryman & Bell, 2007), there is no social influence from other participants (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). Therefore, semi-structured interviews were deemed suitable for gaining an understanding of the perceptions that marketing freelancers have towards personal branding and how they practice it. In group interviews and focus groups, the surroundings, environment and group effect can have an effect on the responses of the participants (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006; Bryman & Bell, 2011). Additionally, personal branding is a very sensitive

topic and therefore, group interviews and focus groups were not deemed the most suitable way of providing the participants with a chance of expressing themselves freely (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Secondly, Kovalainen & Eriksson (2015) point out that semi-structured interviews are often regarded as the best interview method when little previous research exists on the phenomena. Semi-structured interviews focus on how people “make sense of themselves and others” (Hox & Boeije, 2005, p.595) and provide meanings, experiences and the way people see their lived world (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Thirdly, semi-structured interviews offer the participants the flexibility to bring up own ideas and for the researchers the possibility to receive real insights regarding issues they might have not thought about in advance (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Holland, 2013). The choice of conducting a completely unstructured interview, in which questions are not pre-arranged, has the risk of receiving broad and unclear answers (Holland, 2013) On the other hand, a completely structured interview risks not receiving real opinions and just answers to the prepared questions (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Holland, 2013). This design enables us to advance an understanding concerning the perceptions that marketing freelancers have towards this phenomenon and the way they practice personal branding.

3.3 Data Collection Method

3.3.1 Participants & Sampling

The number of participants, i.e. the sample size, should be determined in a way that it helps to understand the phenomenon rather than being generalizable of a population (Mason, 2002). The chosen sampling method for this study is purposive and it is driven by the need for a specific type of information to answer the research question (Hox & Boeije, 2005). In purposive sampling, the researchers have the possibility to review and adjust the sample interactively throughout the research process (Mason, 2002). In this way of sampling, the researcher approaches the potential participants and assesses whether they meet the criteria that have been set to gather the right kind of data according to the purpose of the study (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). To get valuable and relevant information, this study included freelancers that worked in the field of marketing and were located in Malmö and Lund, so that semi-structured interviews could be conducted with them. To ensure that the participants had enough knowledge and experience, a minimum of 6 months as a freelancer was required. Two out of nine participants were male, whereas the other seven were female. All of the participants worked in the field of marketing as freelancers, with a varied experience from six months up to 12 years. The participants all work currently in Sweden, although they have different nationalities. Within the sample-size, the participants were from Germany, Iran, Mexico, Russia, Scotland, Sweden and the US. However, cultural differences are not a focus of this research. The participants were contacted face-to-face, through email and LinkedIn before they participated in our research. LinkedIn was chosen to be the best platform for contacting freelancers, because the profile page in this platform shows the profession, field and experience from freelancing, which made it easier to decide individuals who would fit our scope of sampling.

We decided to let the participants be in charge of the date, location and timing that suit best for them, with the attempt to have a relaxed and comfortable interview. We understand that all of the participants who took part in this research were using their work hours for meeting us and did our best to make this time as valuable for them as possible. Therefore, to accommodate the schedules of the participants, the interviews were conducted separately by the two researchers.

3.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews

By following a qualitative and interpretive research approach that perceives people's knowledge, interpretations and perceptions to construct the social reality (Mason, 2002), it is typical to choose a method that raises the participants' views on the world related to the topic of interest (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Therefore the empirical data of this research was gathered from semi-structured interviews, from which the first one functioned as a pilot interview. After this, we tailored a few of the questions in the topic guide to be more relevant regarding our research question. The interviews reached data saturation after nine interviews were conducted. The duration of the interviews varied between 33 minutes up to 51 minutes. The interviews were conducted between April 9th and April 17th, 2018, in Lund and Malmö, Sweden and all of the interviews were conducted in English. The interviews were conducted in different locations, depending on the participants' preferences. Some were conducted in the coworking spaces, few in cafeterias close to the participants working space and one through Skype. Our aim was to interview the participants on a location that was comfortable for them, as we wanted them to feel relaxed throughout the entire interview. Likewise, a quiet environment was necessary to record the interviews.

According to Laforest (2009), there are two other underestimated components of an interview protocol. Firstly, the initial meeting of the interviewer and the participant in person where it is important to create trust and rapport. In order to receive respectful and truthful comments and reflection from the participant, they need to feel comfortable in the interview environment (Laforest, 2009). Therefore, it was important to make a good first impression and start the meeting by making small-talk before conducting the interview. Secondly, it is important to give the participant a comprehensive introduction to the subject, the progression of the interview and follow-up aftercare (Cohen, 2006; Laforest, 2009). To ensure this, each interview started with providing general information regarding the research project, the estimated time and structure of the interview and by asking the participants to sign the consent form. The form included information concerning the voluntary nature of their participation and the possibility to withdraw their consent at any time.

Less-structured interviews risk leading to poor data as it might be difficult to interpret in the analysis phase of the study, and therefore a topic guide was used to give structure for the interviews (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). The topic guide used in this research was structured with the help of the Theoretical Framework (Figure 2) and refers to a list of questions that do not need to be addressed in a certain order. This, the interview has a clear purpose to gather relevant information regarding the research question (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). The topic

guide was structured to start with the opening questions, continuing with questions around the key topics and ending with closing questions (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2015). First, general questions about freelancing were asked, after which personal branding was introduced and the interview was concluded by asking whether there is anything that the participants would like to add.

3.4 Data Analysis

After conducting the interviews, the researchers listened to the recorded interviews and transcribed them separately, in order not to be affected by one another. To analyse the results that were interpreted from the empirical findings, the researchers have used the three steps suggested by Mayer (2015), which are: data reduction, data display and drawing and verifying conclusions.

At the beginning of the analysis, all the relevant data collected should be organized systematically and this first step serves already an overview of the material for the researchers (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2015). In order to analyse the data further, we followed the three steps suggested by Mayer (2015) suggests. The first part is data reduction, which takes place throughout the analysis and the goal is to continuously reduce the data without losing any important information on the way (Mayer, 2015). Furthermore, it was important for us not to take any information out of its context while reducing the data. The ways to reduce data may differ (Mayer, 2015). In this study the data reduction continued through the analysis, ending to the most relevant findings that are presented in Chapter 4. After transcribing the interviews by whole we started the second step, data display, by dividing the quotes that were interpreted most relevant to different categories in Excel. This was done to find patterns, similarities, and differences among the answers of the participants (Mayer, 2015). The categories were created from the basis of the interview questions; such as ‘how does the participant find new work tasks’ and ‘which platforms are used for personal branding’. Afterwards, we created themes and subthemes from the gathered data to a Word file. The file was structured with the help of the Theoretical Framework (Figure 2) presented in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2 to five themes: 1) *Freelancing*, 2) *Perception towards Personal Branding*, 3) *Creating a Personal Brand*, 4) *Managing a Personal Brand* and 5) *Developing the Existing Personal Brand*. Furthermore, the data was interpreted from this Word file to provide the most relevant insights to answer the research questions. The third step was drawing and verifying conclusions, even though some conclusions might occur already in the process of analysing and growing stronger throughout the analyses (Mayer, 2015). In the end, final conclusions will be provided, which is presented in the analysis and conclusions of this thesis (Chapters 5 & 6).

3.5 Ethical considerations

The research problem should be designed in a way so that it will not only provide meaningful information for the researchers but that it will also benefit the participants of the study (Creswell, 2014). We took this into consideration and wanted to provide interesting information regarding personal branding to all of the participants who took part in our study. During the interviews, the participants expressed that the questions were interesting and helpful for them regarding their personal branding. This showed us that the interview guide was planned in a way that provided us with the answers that we needed but also gave something in return for the freelancers.

In this research, we have taken into consideration the key principles provided by Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) regarding the protection of the interests of the participants and ensuring punctuality and lack of bias in the results of the study. Before starting an interview, the participants were asked to fill in and sign a consent form, where they confirmed that they were willing to participate, they had been informed about the purpose of the research and knew that they have a chance to withdraw from the research at any time. Thereafter, we asked for a permission to record the interviews but ensured that their answers will be kept anonymous throughout the study. Therefore, the names of the participants were not mentioned while quoting their views in the research. Throughout the study, we made sure that the participants' privacy is protected and the data gathered stays confidential by storing the data on password protected devices.

As we see it, personal branding is a subjective and sensitive topic that is present in the everyday lives of the participants, which is why anonymity is an important factor. The participants were also allowed to withhold from answering a question if they felt uncomfortable or if they did not want to share information that they considered to be private. As we conducted interviews with both female and male freelancers from different age groups and cultures, it was important to respect any cultural, religious, gender, or other differences (Creswell, 2014). To make the interviews beneficial for the participants, the findings were delivered to all the participants afterwards, since all the freelancers were excited to read what the research had found out regarding personal branding.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

For qualitative studies, the traditional concepts of validity and reliability do not apply in the same way as when conducting quantitative research (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2015; Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen, & Kyngäs, 2014). This thesis has adopted the terminology presented by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to produce a trustworthy research.

According to them, there are four criteria to cover: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To start with the four criteria, credibility is the first and probably the most important aspect that must be established (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member-checking is an important technique that qualitative researchers use to establish credibility, it is an aspect wherein the data will be shared and reflected with the participants again to give them the option to correct errors and provide additional information if necessary (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002; Bryman & Bell, 2011). This element is mostly covered by the introduction and evaluation part that has been given before and after the interview had taken place. Additionally, a short evaluation took place after conducting the interview. During the evaluation, the participants had the freedom to clarify, add-on or explain their intentions, excluding the opportunity to re-listen their answers or to re-record. An additional side of credibility concerns the matter that the researchers need to be familiar with the context (Kozinets, 2002). The researchers have covered this by familiarizing themselves with the literature concerning personal branding and freelancers. Furthermore, the quotes provided in this study are of high credibility, due to the recording, transcribing and listening to the recordings multiple times by both of the researchers.

The second criterion that has been covered is transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability involves the ability to apply the outcomes of the research in another social context (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Denzin, 2006). This research covers perceptions towards personal branding and personal branding practices in an offline and online environment. The online social context has been covered by social media and includes the platforms LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, and a personal website. In order to provide transferability, it is important that the research process is described in detail, which brings overall transparency. Therefore, the empirical data has been separated clearly from the analysis, to make it possible for the reader to distinguish between these two.

The third criterion is dependability and it refers to if the same results are achievable by conducting the study on another occasion (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). According to Denzin (2006), having a clear work process and understandable approach can help to accomplish dependability. Therefore, the research has been explained as clearly as possible and the interview topic guide has been provided in the Appendix. Concrete happenings and outcomes of qualitative studies are founded on the interpretation of the researchers. It is necessary to realise and have this in mind while processing and analyzing the data. Therefore, we have been aware of this and recorded the interviews carefully, along with carefully listening, discussing and summarizing the data.

The fourth, and the last criterion is confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability is hard to cover since the leading interest concerns interpretation rather than the facet of being objective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The aspect of confirmability, therefore, has been covered by the trust in the researchers and the belief they have conducted the data with care and patience. Additionally, this concerns the interview operation process with good faith and having the confidence of not actively influencing the participants' responses or outcomes. Moreover, it

strengthens the confirmability of the study to have the participants as co-producers during the interviews, by letting them lead the discussion.

3.7 Limitations

The first limitation lies in the qualitative approach of our study, as it takes a subjective opinion of the researcher and can result in affecting the credibility of the study (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). To reduce the bias of the researchers, we made sure that both researchers analysed the data independently from each other before validating. Additionally, we have been conscious of being reflexive in our role as researchers, which means that there is a constant awareness about the research process by challenging our own assumptions (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2015). The qualitative approach can be seen as a limitation, but for this study, we see it as strength. With our aim to understand the perceptions of participants it gave us the advantage of creating a new theory (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2015).

The second limitation is associated with the sample size of the semi-structured interviews. The goal was to get 12 participants, but nine interviews have been conducted. There is very little agreement on what a minimum sample size is (Baker, 2012). Adler and Adler (1987) advise a minimum of 12 participants for a qualitative approach. However, the point of data saturation was reached with nine participants. This means that after this number of interviews it was unlikely that by performing further interviews there would raise new insights, which had not already emerged in previous interviews (Glaser & Strauss, 2006). Additionally, one of the advantages of the saturation approach is that it can justify the size of the sample. Out of the nine conducted interviews, one interview was conducted through Skype. The participant, in this case, was by that time located in Stockholm and therefore a distance video call was selected as the best solution. We did not see any disadvantages of this way of conducting the interview. As this concerned only one interview, we agreed that this did not affect the study.

The third limitation concerns other types of research methods that were considered in order to gather data. One of the methods considered was netnography (Kozinets, 2010), which refers the marketing research method about investigating online communication (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Netnography concerns with the observation of online communities, which could have been interesting as the target of marketing freelancer is used for this research. However, with the goal of this study to both cover offline and online environments, we decided not to employ this method.

4 Findings

This chapter covers the most important and interesting empirical findings. The findings have been structured with the help of the theoretical framework (Figure 2), which we introduced in Chapter 2, Section 2.5. First, general background information about freelancing' as an occupation will be provided. The second part is focused on how freelancers perceive personal branding and is divided into four different themes: *What is personal branding? Authenticity and Consistency of the personal brand, Personal Brand Communicates Skills, Values and Services* and *Standing Out from the Crowd with Personal Branding*. The third part is focused on the creation phase of the personal branding process and includes a subchapter called *The Brand is You*. The fourth chapter is related to the personal branding practices and is divided into three themes: *Offline Personal Branding Practices, Online Personal Branding Practices* and *Networking*. The fifth part is concerned about the development of the existing personal brand and is divided to three themes: *Protecting the Personal Brand, Self-development* and *Trial and Error*. Altogether, 12 different themes were interpreted from the gathered data.

4.1 Freelancing

Our empirical research included nine interviews with freelancers who work in the field of marketing. Different kind of specialities differed a lot, but the most common fields were communications, campaigns, copywriting and different kind of creative marketing practices. The prevailing amount of the participants were working as full-time freelancers and two had a part-time job besides freelancing. The experience of working as a freelancer varied from six months up to 12 years.

4.1.1 Freelancing as an Occupation

The previous literature has suggested different definitions for freelancing and therefore we aimed to understand how the participants themselves perceive freelancing as their occupation. We started the interviews by asking them to provide us with a definition for freelancing. The answers from all the participants were relatively the same. The following quote illustrates these answers:

Participant 4: “When you are not having only one working contract, but you are working for several companies or within several projects and you are free to choose more or less when you are working and how you are working, depending of course on the project. It

is not that you are going to an office, fixed working time from eight to five and going back home.”

Besides these sorts of comments, participants thought that freelancing is about “deciding what kind of projects to do, instead of a boss telling what to do” (participant 1) and about managing their own time. The keywords that were mentioned when talking about freelancing as an occupation were flexibility and freedom. Besides the positive descriptions, four participants mentioned insecurity straight away while describing their occupation.

When we asked about the best qualities for a freelancer, networking skills, organizing skills, structuring skills and self-development were the keywords that came up during the interviews. The self-development was the most important quality and is accomplished this by reading books and articles, listening audiobooks and podcasts, watching videos (YouTube), taking online courses (Skillshare, LinkedIn), following other influential freelancers and taking inspiration from their work and asking for help from other freelancers. Interestingly, none of the participants mentioned education or university as a source for new information. Two out of nine participants emphasized this during the interviews. Here is a quote from one of them:

Participant 6: “I use LinkedIn as source, they have courses too (...), I am used to be looking like YouTube videos, reading a lot and taking inspiration from other people, from other copywriters. (...) You do not really have to go to University (...). I have been in a University for six years and it is fun to know now that you do not really need University.”

Seven participants mentioned that there have been projects that they did not know how to perform and had to learn new skills to fulfil these tasks. Still, they managed to succeed in these projects. Indubitably, this requires trust from the employers’ side. According to four participants, this trust has been earned with showing results of their previous work and by building trustworthy relationships with their clients. All of the participants agreed that they would not take tasks that they do not have enough time to complete, or which they feel like they are not capable of finishing. Here are few comments regarding this:

Participant 6: “I had not done translations before (...) communications and a little bit or journalism, but never translations.”

Participant 4: “When you are in a company you most of the time get training (...) or you have a supervisor who gives you information (...). As a freelancer you solve that (work tasks) by yourself or you find a solution for it, or find persons and people who have the knowledge about that. This is one of the qualities.”

When we asked about the positive sides of freelancing, the responses were genuinely happy and inspiring. It was very noticeable that the participants really enjoy their way of working. The following comment represents all the positive comments well:

Participant 4: “If you would have a physical office space where you are bound to work in certain office hours, you don’t have this opportunity to travel and experience (...). With freelancing this is not like this, you have the opportunity to travel. Only thing you need is a laptop (...) and that is amazing.”

As three of the participants brought up, freelancing as a career choice does not suit to everyone. Besides the positive sides, the flexibility brings also risks and insecurity:

Participant 2: “I get to see a hugely diverse set of people and business and it is really, really interesting from a self-development point of view. Yes, you have the freedom, if you can handle the insecurity.”

This quote leads to the other negative aspects of freelancing. The negative sides that came up during the interviews besides insecurity were related to the responsibility the participants have regarding the billing, paying taxes and being sure that everything is organized and structured. The keywords regarding the negative sides are defined as uncertainty, loneliness, responsibility and time-management:

Participant 4: “Finding the time to develop your own brand, business, website, all these things. It is like all up to you, because you are building your own freelancing business. (...) You need to work in order to get paid, if you are sick, if you take holidays, you won't get paid. (...) All this can be quite overwhelming, I would say.”

The responsibility that participants have about their time-management and scheduling was also seen as a negative side because they have to make sure that they meet the given deadlines for different projects. Seven of the participants are working on multiple projects simultaneously, so it takes a lot of effort to balance between these tasks and the private life:

Participant 5: “I work with multiple projects at the same time. Actually it is good because it helps you to be more creative. Since I split it and I have the opportunity to pause it, work in something else and then it helps me to come back with fresh ideas (--) for me multitasking is very important.”

The prevailing number of the participants are using coworking space besides their own home as their workspace. Coworking spaces were seen as locations where participants find the possibility to create networks, meet like-minded people, and get help with their own projects and as a way to keep themselves from being isolated and lonely. As a result, it is important for the participants to get out from home to “get some ideas and not just sit in your bubble” (participant 4). As a result, networking and cooperation with other freelancers is an important factor:

Participant 5: “I think that when you are working like a freelancer you can get very isolated. I think it is very important to get the energy of other people, it is very important to have the discipline to get out of bed and go to work and I think a coworking space

helps you to have this discipline. (...) You have to have a structure and I think a coworking space provides you that.”

Freelancing as an occupation is in general perceived as a good one if you wish to manage your own time, be the boss of your own decisions and to understand what is important for you, which can result in something you can work on. Flexibility and freedom are the main keywords that were brought up, together with the skills and competencies: networking, organizing, and structuring skills and self-development.

4.2 Perception towards Personal Branding

4.2.1 What is Personal Branding?

From the beginning, it was obvious that all of the participants were very aware of personal branding and excited to share their visions regarding this topic. We asked the participants to tell what personal branding means to them and how they would define it. All of the participants agreed that personal branding is very important:

Participant 3: “I think (personal branding) is really important since if you yourself do not know what you stand for, then how do you communicate to others what you do and how you can benefit them? (...) If you are not aware of it I am not really sure how you can convince somebody else of what it is that you can give to them.”

Participant 4: “Nowadays you have to have a personal brand, you have to do personal branding (...). What personal branding does is: you brand yourself, you brand your personality, meaning you put yourself a trademark, setting qualities, setting connections. (...) It is the way others are perceive you. This is personal branding to me.”

The participants, in general, perceived personal branding as: “how you want other people to notice you and see you” (participant 6). This type of definition came up during all of the interviews in one-way or another. Therefore, personal branding for marketing freelancers is the way others perceive them. Additionally, the participants mentioned that a personal brand needs to be authentic and consistent and that it is used to communicate values and services. Participants perceived personal branding as something that cannot be separated from them:

Participant 4: “It is like I am here and that is like my business card basically, me.”

As a conclusion, personal branding is a way to present yourself and therefore the most important way to find new clients and to be successful professionally. You are your brand:

Participant 5: “(Personal branding is) super important, because otherwise you will never have clients. Your brand is you.”

Having an idea of what personal branding means for marketing freelancers is necessary to answer the research question. It becomes clear that most freelancers use personal branding as a foundation to build on. Personal branding requires authenticity and consistency and is used to communicate values and services. According to the participants, you are your brand, which makes that everything lies in your hands to use it in the right way, to find jobs and to be successful.

4.2.2 Authenticity and Consistency of the Personal Brand

The main success factors of a personal brand according to the participants are authenticity and consistency. The way participants see the authenticity and consistency in the personal branding, came up mostly in the way they described how they had created their personal brand. For the participants, their personal brand is something that is always following them, wherever they go. Resulting in an essential part of who you are:

Participant 2: “It is vital to have personal brand. (...). You are always on duty. (...). It is a bit like being a policeman (...), you always have to engender respect and be respectful.”

Participant 2: “It is about representing yourself in truth and a honest light. (...) This is what I do, this is the freedom I have.”

Personal branding is, according to the participants, not something that they start to build by making a plan for the personal brand, but rather something that they have created naturally through their actions (in offline and online environments). This results in an authentic and unique personal brand. In order to create a successful personal brand, almost all of the participants mentioned that personal branding needs to be consistent. Therefore, the online actions need to be consistent with the offline actions:

Participant 3: “I think it means being consistent in who you are and what you can deliver (...). Making sure you listen to people so that you can understand what is their needs are so that you can make sure that what you are selling thought your personal brand meet their needs. That you are not just pushing your agenda down their throats. I think that branding, the image that you build up, the personal brand, it follows you when you walk into a room.”

Participant 5: “Wherever I go I build my brand offline, consequently. The person that you see online is the same person you will find at an event. I will use the same words, consequently. I am just myself, consequently.”

Four of the participants talked about the importance of being consistent especially in the online platforms. If the participants have multiple different platforms in use, they all need to be updated at the same time in order for the content to stay consistent. If the participants don't have consistent online behaviour, it can lead to a disorganized image of themselves and of their services or products:

Participant 4: "Have like an idea what your brand identity actually is, have your logo and everything in place and just have brand consistency in these different channels. (...) It can be lack if you have an old profile, or logo in some platform and you change to another platform. (...) You have to make sure that all the platforms you are using are communicating the same message, about your brand, about you."

4.2.3 Personal Brand Communicates Skills, Values and Services

Personal branding is seen by the participants as the best way to communicate their qualities, skills, values and services. Here is how participant 4 sees personal branding from a slightly more practical point of view:

Participant 4: "It is like how you present yourself, what are your qualities, what are your skills, what have you done, what services are you offering, how do you present your products, do you have a website, do you have a business card, all this kind of stuff (...) it is a lot."

As a result of personal brand being authentic, presenting "you" and simultaneously your services, it is important to keep this in mind during all the occasions:

Participant 5: "Since you wake up and you go to bed you are building a brand. You have to be conscious about that. If you want people to believe in you and hire you to have a service, then you have to deliver on time. You have to answer the phone, your emails, if you come to a meeting; you come on time, because you are your own brand and your own company. You need to understand you need to respect people's time and life. So if you give respect, then you will get respect. Think about what I am communicating and how people perceive this. It is about trust. If you have clear personal brand and strategy than it will work for you."

Four participants also mentioned that it is important to show their skills whenever it is possible or to put your name out there (participant 4). Therefore, besides the online and offline personal branding, it seemed important to participate in events to meet new people and build networks, to do e-learning courses or even teach others through e-learning platforms:

Participant 4: "In the end, when I am a freelancer and I do not have the company or employ someone (...) me as a single person, working for several projects. It is me who

is working, it is me who is doing the services, and so if I am doing the services for companies and different clients, of course I have to sell me. If the people do not trust me, if they do not like my way of working or communication or whatever, then most certainly these projects won't happen. (...) In the end it's the services you are selling.

The participants had a common view about the importance of personal branding for different occupations. There is not a certain field, like creative occupations, for which the personal branding would be more significant:

Participant 1: "I think that in any industry it is very important to set your own brand."

Participant 5: "For all occupations you need personal branding. If you are a doctor but you do not look like a doctor, I will never trust you to do a surgery. (...) Everything is branding."

In order to answer the research question, it is relevant to understand what a personal brand communicates. Therefore, this topic is discussed and presents that skills, values and services are the keywords that have been brought up. More specific, skills can be shared, developed and taught to others, but are absolutely important to be aware of.

4.2.4 Standing Out from the Crowd with Personal Branding

Standing out from the crowd was mentioned as one of the main reasons for practicing personal branding:

Participant 1: "I really see what makes me different in comparison to others and that is where I want to make it clear to people, that this is what I stand for. (...) I always want to develop my skills in order to stand out. That, as a freelancer is one of the most important things."

Personal-development, developing skills and standing out from the crowd are seen as key factors to be professionally successful and to get new job opportunities or projects. As participant 5 points out, she offers for the clients something that is different from the rest, either "quality of work or having the same culture, same ways to work or having the same interest". There is a lot of people working with the same work tasks and in the same field, so participants think that they need to offer something that is different from the rest to be successful. For three out of nine participants it was rather difficult to explain what it is that makes them stand out:

Participant 7: "I would say that it is having a personal style of what you do. Making other people understand that it is 'you' just by seeing your work and I do not know how to explain that, it is a kind of tricky."

For the other six participants, the way of being different from the rest of the participants varied notably. However, during the interviews they brought up things like: personal style of writing, personal style of creating visual material, clothing, personality, skills to network and to build relationships, trustworthiness and the overall quality of the work were mentioned as ways to stand out.

4.3 Creating a Personal Brand

4.3.1 Personal Brand is You

In the previous chapter, we already mentioned that most of the participants did not think about their personal brand or plan it much before starting to create one. It is interesting that only two out participants had thought about a specific target group for their personal brand. The most important element is to really show the authentic self and represent the values and skills you have. The foundations for the personal brand are the activities you perform and the way you are in front of other people. We have already mentioned the importance of authenticity and consistency of a personal brand. These factors were highly valued also when we asked how they had created their personal brand:

Participant 3: “I do not know how real you are then if you are only doing things to create your personal brand, if that is really you. How authentic are you? At some point I think, the real you come out.”

The participants actually built their personal brand around great set of different values and did not try to be anything that they are not. As Participant 5 mentioned: “more natural, my things and my thoughts, that is how I have been building my brand”. Therefore, the personal brand truly presents the identity and personality. What was also mentioned by four of the participants was that the brand actually just gets build on from your actions offline and online without planning it so much more:

Participant 2: “I actually think that personal brands develop from your activities. What do people trust in you? You can build on that. What do people see in you? Build on that. Not necessarily what do I see in myself and build on that.”

Participant 3: “I cannot say that I sit down and think a lot about ‘if I do this, how will it affect my personal brand?’ I just try to be consistent in what I do and instead of me saying ‘how can I affect my personal brand’ I just stay consistent on what my core values are and then my personal brand will get built on that. I do not necessarily need to build it, if you know what I mean. Even though it is me building it, it is not a conscious thing. I consciously follow my values and then my brand gets build from that.”

Concluding, the creation of a personal brand happens through the actions the participants perform in the online and offline environments. Authenticity and values were considered important, however, the personal brand itself has its foundation in who the participants are and how they act around others. The participants' personal brand represents genuinely their personalities.

4.4 Managing the Personal Brand

4.4.1 Online Personal Branding Practices

Almost all of the participants used social media channels and other online platforms for their personal branding practices. From the platforms that were in use, LinkedIn is the most popular professional channel since only one out participant did not use it for her personal branding practices. Seven participants used Facebook, five used Instagram, five had their own website, three used Pinterest and two used Twitter. Other channels did not come up during the interviews. Outside these platforms, it was mentioned that a good way to brand yourself online would be to give courses, if you have some certain skills and could share your knowledge to others. Online platforms for finding new work tasks, like Freelancers.com and Upwork.com, were brought up during the interviews with five of the participants. Their common attitude towards these sites was negative and participants said that they would never use these sites to brand themselves or to get new work tasks. This was due to the high competition on these kinds of sites.

A general finding is the importance of social media presence within personal branding, together with the crucial aspect of the way you present yourself online:

Participant 2: "If I meet someone, I will look at their LinkedIn profile and I expect other people to look at mine."

Participant 2: "If they (clients) are going to rent your time, if they are going to pay you, they are going to look at you. Right now, in today's world, it is very different from when I grew up. You have a social media presence, they will look at it. (...) You have to be very careful."

Instagram and Pinterest were brought up mostly in two interviews, namely since the participants worked in a more visual field of marketing:

Participant 1: "I use Instagram a lot as my personal branding cause I think being more in the creative industry it is more important in the way you visualize yourself (...) I actually got some freelance projects through Instagram, not LinkedIn."

Participant 4: “When you have visual products (...) put them on platforms that are focused on that, like Instagram, Pinterest, like all these kind of (...) where you find your target group (...), find your niche and put your product out there.”

Personal website as a topic raised a lot of discussion among the participants. This was because part of the participants did not see it as important as others:

Participant 2: “I thought you needed a website, I have to say, I thought everybody needed a website. But you do not. As a freelancer you do not need a website. But you do need a social presence and you do need a good word-of-mouth”.

On the other hand, four of the participants thought a personal website is the most important tool for them and three referred to it as their online business card. Here is how Participant 6 sums up well the importance of her own website:

Participant 6: “Website is a good thing to have for showing your services and of course your skills - and you should have a good portfolio there.”

To include some thought from participant 3, who had been present in online platforms earlier, but had come to the conclusion that it was not the right path for him. At the moment, he only has a website, which he said is more like a “brochure” for his services. Here are his thoughts about the change he has made:

Participant 3: “Last year I decided that social media was not giving me any kind of return on the amount and effort I have put into social media, so I said ‘or right, If I am spending five hours a week on social media, I could go to five one hour networking event (...) meeting two or three people and starting relationship with them. Once that got started it became less difficult to find new projects. It came out of my effort. ”

Even though the overall perception among participants towards the usage of social media is positive, there are also some negative sides. We are going to get back to these in the following parts of the findings, but shortly, the negative sides are regarding the *time-management* and about how many *channels* can be *managed and controlled* simultaneously by one freelancer, in a way that the overall quality of the content does not suffer.

Surprisingly, only two of the participants had a well-thought strategy for creating content to their social media platforms. As an example of a strategy, one of the participants was sharing her journey as a freelancer and engaged her followers this way to wait for the next turn. Although this was not a planned strategy from the beginning, she had realized that it worked and kept creating content this way:

Participant 5: “They (followers) are very engaged with my storytelling because they want to know what is the next episode in my life.”

The types of content the participants were creating online were for example blog posts, pictures, examples of their work (portfolio), articles and observations. When we asked how frequently the participants post content through their platforms, a common answer was: “when there is something interesting going on in my life.” Four participants told us that their goal in the beginning had been to post every day or even a few times per day. After they had started working, it had become clear that it felt almost impossible to be that active. One post per week seemed to be average frequency in order to create content like pictures and blog posts that were interesting and had high quality. It was important for the participants that all the content that they create reflects their values, is seen as professional content, creates following or interactions and attracts possible new clients. These issues, and the way the content changes within the experience comes up well in the following quote:

Participant 2: “I have spent three years on it now and it has changed dramatically. (...) I do think about it more and I do not think I realize how important it was to begin with. That is a big realization. I think the ad-hoc nature of brand-development to begin with, has been replaced with a much more consistent approach to things. I have decided who I am, I have decided what I am going to portray. It does not always work but I try. Whereas before It was more like: oh, nice picture of a banana. I can share that. Oh a really inspiring quote, let’s put it on.”

As mentioned earlier, three of the participants lean more to the idea that “my brand is me” and therefore actively post information that as well relates to their private life. Another approach is to separate the content to private and business platforms, but to share some of the most important professional occasions in both private and business profiles:

Participant 2: “There are a lot of lifestyle pictures, for example of my dog. Me out in nature, it is illustrating the freedom side of freelancing. Illustrating the fact that I am traveling or eating well or drinking well, just enjoying life. Because I do not have time restrictions. I do not have to be anywhere, anytime. But of course I need to balance that with making money as well.”

Participant 5: “I have fantastic group of friends and my friends are so important to me. So you will see pictures of me going out with my friends. (...) Because it is actually as well important for people to see that I have a life and I have friends. I am not just that monster that is working 24/7.”

Concluding, the participants were in general very aware of what type of content they want to post and how regularly. It was clear that creating certain type of content that displays the participants’ values is the most important way to practice personal branding online. The participants were also extremely aware of what kind of content should not be posted and concerned about how others perceive them in the online platforms. We will discuss the importance of protecting the brand later on in this chapter. As a conclusion, all of the

participants wished to post more frequently but had realized after a while that maintaining the short period between posts was challenging with their urgent schedule.

4.4.2 Offline Personal Branding Practices

A striking result that was interpreted from the data is that participants, surprisingly, find offline personal branding practices more important than online practices. Almost all of the participants feel that the personal branding practices and the networks that were built offline were actually more important than online personal branding. Two participants feel that online branding is more important for them, with the only reason that their projects are located in another country. However, in line with the findings, these two participants think that in some point the offline branding will become more essential for them as well. Here are few quotes concerning the offline personal branding practices:

Participant 3: “It is almost all offline.”

Participant 2: “Personal meetings, networking (...), I do not have a website, I do not have flyers, (...) I have business cards and I have me.”

Many of the participants put a lot of effort on the online practices since that is seen as inevitable part of personal branding. Here is a great quote from Participant 1 that illustrates the relationship between the offline and online personal branding practices:

Participant 1: “I actually think social media is great, but it is only a supportive aspect to what is happening offline. I think we cannot manage just online, I think we need to talk to people and be able to look at them in the eyes and then something like Instagram or LinkedIn can only be supportive, not anything that stands alone.”

However, offline was still seen as the foundation for the personal brand. The participants really feel that building genuine relationships with people around them (other freelancers, existing clients and other connections) is very valuable:

Participant 5: “People tend to forget that we are people and we need to connect with people and build relationships in order to get clients and have business opportunities.”

Attending to events, seminars and meetings designed for networking was mentioned by five of the participants as an important factor included to their personal branding practices:

Participant 1: “Going out to certain events and talk about where you stand for as a freelancer, people will recognize you as the girl who is doing this, and this, and this. It is actually only beneficial for your own brand.”

Other offline personal branding practices that were mentioned besides networking, were behaviour, language used, dress code and business cards:

Participant 4: “I like the leisure and rhyme (...) I do not like to be too official. (...) If I would be in a meeting with a company (...). I would see the dress code would fit my personal identity basically, which I would communicate. (...) Otherwise offline, dress code is a thing, how do you present yourself, then of course language, speaking, how you get received.”

In general, the participants want to look professional and want to present a nice appearance. Some thought about the way they dress more than others and what kind of message they want to give to people around them. One of the participants wants to represent herself as more sporty, few as more professional and for some, it is more important to appear as more relaxed. Here are few quotes concerning the dress code:

Participant 2: “My personal brand, you know, I do wear a jacket and a smart-shirt, and I do try and represent myself as I feel every day. I guess I do work on it.”

Participant 8: “We have business cards (...) I mean, we are the brand so in professional settings, we look good. We dress well and make sure to have nice appearance.”

As mentioned earlier, two of the participants have their clients abroad and they are looking for jobs from another country than Sweden. This is why they do not see the urgency of offline personal branding practices are needed at the moment, considering that they would like to focus more on that in the future. Here are few comments from them regarding offline personal branding:

Participant 6: “For now I am looking at jobs in UK and elsewhere in Europe so it is a bit hard.”

Participant 7: “Not yet because now I am here, and mostly my clients are far away from here.”

Overall, networking, behaviour, language, dress code and business cards were seen as the most important ways to conduct personal branding practices in an offline environment.

4.4.3 Networking

Participants emphasized the importance of networking multiple times during the interviews. This is why we highlight networking with its own subchapter, even though we already mentioned it regarding the offline personal branding practices. The participants argued that networking is a must for being professionally successful. As stated earlier in this chapter, for freelancers, networking is the main way to find new work tasks and clients. Networking is seen as highly important and as three of the participants stated, networking for them means “everything”:

Participant 1: “I do not think that people realize how important networking is for them. It is actually an investment you are doing not even on the short term but on the long term. I am going to events now, but that does not mean that I get something out of it right now, but it can definitely happen after a year or even two years.”

For the participants it was not enough just to build networks and meet new people, it was important to build long-lasting and strong relationships. Even though it will take longer to build strong relationships, it is seen more beneficial for the participants than having a large network. As an example, Participant 3 stated that it is more beneficial to start a discussion and a relationship with two or three people in a networking event, than to collect 30 business cards. For him, it made more sense to invest time in building stronger relationships with people, who remembered him afterwards. He feels that realizing how to build networks correctly has helped him to find new projects and clients.

Since freelancers are dependent on the connections and the relations that they build, trust is an important factor that was brought up during the interviews. As Participant 8 states: “You create closer relationships because they have to be good”. Participants find it easier to trust the people around them when they have met them in an offline environment and therefore preferred to have offline connections:

Participant 4: “I prefer offline connections, because for me it is more trustworthy (...). You see the person or you have been working with a person.”

Another interesting finding is that five out of nine participants mentioned that helping others is something that they are likely to do, especially because they have also received a lot of help from people around them. As a freelancer, it can get lonely and sometimes you might need help with a task or some other issues and therefore it feels natural to help people in return:

Participant 5: “Offering your time for free and mentoring people has helped me a lot. You get something, but you also give back.”

As mentioned earlier, two participants were searching for new tasks from abroad and for this reason did not see networking in Sweden at the moment as beneficial for them as it seemed to

be for the other freelancers. One of these two participants mentioned that she has received support and help from the Facebook groups that are targeted for freelancers:

Participant 6: “Facebook groups, that community, is very important. (...). I think that’s very good way to get to know more experienced freelancers (...) it is interesting to be in Facebook groups (...) I think it’s a place where people can openly talk about it. Facebook is more open than LinkedIn for example. (...) It is a more relaxed environment, LinkedIn is more professional. Facebook is more relaxed for discussion.”

To be professionally successful, networking seems to be crucial for the participants. It seems like freelancers as such create a community, wherein it is easier to get new work tasks and meet new clients. The participants prefer to build strong relationships with people around them to create trust between them and their networks. Two of the participants did not see offline networking as a current necessity for them, because they are searching for new job opportunities online and their clients are not based in Sweden. However, it still is important to maintain online communities. Overall, networking in one of the largest themes that were stressed by the participants during the interviews.

4.5 Developing the Existing Personal Brand

4.5.1 Protecting the Brand

All of the participants are aware that protecting their personal brand is highly important. They spend a lot of time thinking how other perceive their brand. In order to protect their brand, participants post quality material that suits with their values, are authentic and keep their personal brand consistent:

Participant 2: “Yes, I am aware of protecting my personal brand. So I do not rant on social media, I do not swear on social media (...). You know, I do not do any of those rookie error things. People are going to look at you.”

Controlling and protecting the brand is seen as important especially by those who are searching for new tasks online and for those who had their portfolio online to show their skills for future clients:

Participant 6: “I think about that a lot (...). I am really thinking how I want to be seen by clients and why they should hire me (...). So, that is why I really, really research my content and stuff like that so that it will look good and so that I will look professional. I really try to look professional.”

For two of the participants who worked together with their projects under the same company brand, there was no need to be concerned about protecting the brand as the other participants. All the content they published was in advance so well planned that they felt it did not represent them in particular, but more of their company brand. Five of the participants did bring up that it is not always in their hands to know how others will perceive their personal brand. Especially, if the personal brand is very authentic, there will be people who like you and people who do not:

Participant 2: “I would like to say (that I am in) control, but we think we portray one thing, but how people perceive you is in fact different. We think we have control, but I think they have control over us.”

Protecting and controlling the personal brand is seen as a necessity and therefore the participants try to be consistent with their content. Moreover, they are reflecting on their behaviour, posts and actively reflecting on their appearance by Googling themselves. As a concluding outcome, it does not matter how much effort and time you spend for protecting and controlling your brand, at the end there is no control over it, as the audience has the control.

Participant 5: “When you are becoming a kind of public person, you cannot control what people say about you. A lot of people like you and a lot of people hate you. You cannot control that and you just have to let it go.”

4.5.2 Self-Development

It was noticeable that all of the participants were very aware of self-development and all of them had made future plans to expand their skills and knowledge with different ways in offline and online platforms. Five participants mentioned that they would like to invest more time in creating more quality content to their online platforms and to assure that the content that they post is consistent:

Participant 2: “To continue with the consistency and to post more of the relevant content at the right times and more often.”

Four participants mentioned a new field that they would wish to enter after acquiring the needed skills to do that. The following quote illustrates this clearly:

Participant 6: “I will try to develop and become a copywriter and social media manager as well, those are two things that are my goals (...). Then I can have a lot more services and copywriting has always been interesting, so I’m just going to learn that.”

Five participants also mentioned that they would like to attend to more meetings and create their networks and meet like-minded people. Keeping their personal brand authentic and staying true to their values were also mentioned as goals for future development. As Participant 3 stated:

“The trends of honesty and openness of communications are trends that are never going out of style.” The greatest challenge for all of the participants to develop themselves and their platforms online was the time management:

Participant 4: “I do have plenty of goals (...) the overall goal with the freelancing is structuring and get the time management in place around the work. (...) Make time gaps for development, or make time gaps for getting new inputs and everything, meanwhile working. So, that you are not just stuck with work and get your head out from there anymore (...). Then you forget personal branding as well, when you get stuck in the process.”

As a conclusion, all of the participants were aware of the importance of self-development and all of them want to develop themselves and their personal branding practices in the future. Developing, both offline and online personal branding practices were seen equally valuable. The greatest challenge for the development is the difficulty of finding enough time for these activities. Overall, all of the participants were enthusiastic and imaginative with the different ways of developing themselves professionally. Self-development is an interesting element in the interviews to answer the sub research question, which focuses on the practice of personal branding.

4.5.3 Trial and Error

We asked the participants to describe personal branding practices that they had conducted, but which did not turn out to be as successful than imagined. All of the participants agreed that they had done mistakes and learned from them during their time of working as freelancers.

Participant 4: “Yes, of course, it is trial and error the whole time. You see with social media the response or not the response. (...) You have to change the brand, the brand is not that exciting or the brand message does not get along, or the product are not....(...) or I am not in the right niche for my products probably so I need to target in different way, or what tools can I use, how do I use hashtags, or whatever. Or probably another channel (...) It depends, trial and error the whole time.”

All of the participants stated that they had done experiments with certain kind of content that they had created to online platforms, but which did not get likes or create following. The best way to succeed was to get experience and find your own way of practicing personal branding. Therefore, one way of practicing freelancing does not suit for all. As an example, one of the participants had come to the conclusion that having a website is not a right way to practice personal branding for him:

Participant 2: “Having a website has not worked for me. Partially because I am not necessarily big enough (...). People ask if I will have a website coming up, but I say no.

I do not want to administer one and I think it is, you know, given my business is about word-of-mouth recommendations, what are you going to get on a website from me?"

Aligned with the personal brand, also the practices around it evolve continuously. All of the participants agreed that their personal branding practices have developed from how they started off. Three participants mentioned that they had tried first to narrow their niche too much before realizing that it can make finding new tasks harder in the beginning, whereas one of the participants thought that he should have niched himself earlier.

Two of the participants mentioned that age is probably a factor that affects the personal branding practices, since they felt that now when they are older, they also are more confident to be truly themselves instead of trying to be likeable:

Participant 5: "So, today I can tell you that, I feel extremely satisfied with my brand because I am communicating what I want, I think that people are getting the message exactly how I want. I do not feel like I have to pretend anything. And I think in the past I was more careful (...) I wanted to be more likeable. (...) And then one day I was like, 'no', I have to be as I am and when I switched it, it became my real self as a brand and I started to act as I am and dress as I wanted (...) then everything started to change to positive and I feel very happy and I feel very comfortable and my business is going even better."

As a conclusion, all of the participants thought that personal brand develops throughout time. Everyone had also made mistakes concerning the practices around personal branding but had learned from these mistakes. This way it is possible to develop the personal brand and practices continuously.

5 The Analysis and Discussion

The 12 previously presented themes, which were categorized into five topics, are analysed and discussed in this chapter. In order to lead the path towards the discussion, where two modified theoretical frameworks have been created to answer the research questions, this chapter presents these themes in three sections: *Freelancing*, *Perceptions Towards Personal Branding* and *Personal Branding Practices*. In this case, the section concerning Personal Branding Practices combines creation, managing and developing the existing personal brand. In the analysis, the perceptions of marketing freelancers are combined with the theory, presented in the second chapter of the thesis. The analysis will be followed by discussion and contribution, where we present the modified theoretical frameworks. These frameworks include the perceptions that marketing freelancers have towards personal branding and the ways marketing freelancers practice personal branding. Altogether, this chapter provides an answer to the research question and highlights the contributions of the thesis.

5.1 Analysis

5.1.1 Freelancing

Our empirical findings prove that Bauman's (2000) description of modernity captures the fragile and uncertain nature of freelancing as an occupation accurately. All of the participants were as Bauman (2000) describes, moving fast and bypassing obstacles. The participants emphasized the freedom to choose which projects to work for and how important it is that they are not bound to a certain office or certain hours to work.

Participant 4: "If you would have a physical office space where you are bound to work in certain office hours, you don't have this opportunity to travel and experience (...). With freelancing this is not like this, you have the opportunity to travel. Only thing you need is a laptop (...) and that is amazing."

Bauman (2000) describes how people are used to having freedom, and treasure it over the uncertainty that this state simultaneously brings to their lives. This description seems to be in line with the way the participants portrayed their lives. Participants in this study valued time-management skills and agreed that being a successful freelancer requires a great deal of personal responsibility. Bauman (2000) also talks about how individuals are prepared to change the direction of their lives and have a tendency to continuously renew themselves without settling down. All of the participants were keen on developing themselves and their skills, immersing

themselves in new areas out of their comfort zone while simultaneously working with existing projects. Bauman (2000) emphasized the short-term mentality regarding work life and future plans that individuals have in the modern society. This aligns with the participants' thoughts; most of them worked with multiple different projects and clients and searched continuously for new tasks.

Participant 5: “I work with multiple projects at the same time. Actually it is good because it helps you to be more creative. Since I split it and I have the opportunity to pause it, work in something else and then it helps me to come back with fresh ideas (--) for me multitasking is very important.”

On the other hand, there was an aspect of consistency and continuity in the way participants practiced personal branding, which will be analyzed in the next subchapter. The prevailing majority of the participants embodied Gandini's (2016) definition of a freelancer, who works independently, is self-organized and is not employed by only one employer. The participants were managing their own projects independently and highlighted the flexible nature of their work.

As introduced in the literature review, DeFillippi and Arthur (1996) have presented three dimensions that are related with being successful as a freelancer. The first dimension is associated with being aware of one's values and the importance of this was highlighted by all of the participants. It is important for the participants to know what their values are and what they stand for, in order to create a foundation for a successful personal brand and through that, be successful in their career:

Participant 3: “I think (personal branding) is really important since if you yourself do not know what you stand for, then how do you communicate to others what you do and how you can benefit them? (...) If you are not aware of it I am not really sure how you can convince somebody else of what it is that you can give to them.”

The second dimension that DeFillippi and Arthur (1996) mention is the skills and expertise that freelancers require. All of our participants were aware of the knowledge needed and also which kind of areas they should develop. The last dimension that DeFillippi and Arthur (1996) present, is the ability to create networks and build a reputation, which came up in the interviews as one of the most important aspect of working successfully as a freelancer.

5.1.2 Perceptions Towards Personal Branding

Marketing freelancers see personal branding as a needed process for them in order to receive new tasks, to network, to connect with individuals and organizations and to stand out from the crowd. Additionally, the perception towards personal branding is seen as the way others' perceive you. Moreover, a personal brand is always and everywhere and therefore the personal brand matters every day.

Participant 4: “Nowadays you have to have a personal brand, you have to do personal branding (...). What personal branding does is: you brand yourself, you brand your personality, meaning you put yourself a trademark, setting qualities, setting connections. (...) It is the way others are perceive you. This is personal branding to me.”

The personal brand is something that the participants take with them everywhere they go. Thus, it requires consistency and authenticity, in the offline and online environment. The personal brand communicates qualities, values, skills and services of a freelancer. Therefore the brand is personal and can vary for every individual. The participants are showing excitement and passion towards the perception of personal branding. They are conscious about their own personal brand and realise that; without a personal brand, they might not be as visible as they would like to be, which leans towards Rampersad's (2008) theory of the need to practice personal branding. In line with Shepherd's (2005) explanation that personal branding is about success and standing out from the crowd, the analysed data shows that participants are aware of the elements that make them different in comparison to other freelancers. Interestingly, standing out from the crowd is an often-used terminology in theories wherein they use a soft explanation of the need of personal-development (Tikkanen, 2015). However, according to the participants personal-development is highly relevant and important to practice on a regular basis.

Participant 1: “I really see what makes me different in comparison to others and that is where I want to make it clear to people, that this is what I stand for. (...) I always want to develop my skills in order to stand out. That, as a freelancer is one of the most important things.”

It is repeatedly unclear what standing out from the crowd contains in actions, therefore, the theory predicts to us that it is about social media presence, for instance having a blog and website (Friedman, 2015). The participants' thoughts about this vary; however, they use social media to communicate their values, qualities and success stories. Interestingly, the participants' perception of personal branding on social media can be described as valuable, in their opinion, it is not the most important.

That personal branding in an online environment is valuable, but not the most important is in line with Brems et al. (2017), who discuss the social media presence as a valuable environment that is open to the public, causing everyone can practice is. This makes it difficult to stand out from the crowd. Thus, it is important to show the true self and your real brand as well in an offline environment to stand out.

Participant 2: “It is about representing yourself in truth and a honest light. (...) This is what I do, this is the freedom I have.”

Accordingly, to stand out from the crowd, personal branding is perceived by the participants as a way others perceive them, which is in line with the theory of Rampersad (2008). He states that personal branding is all about expectations, images and the perceptions others have towards

you. Furthermore, two new aspects were interpreted from the findings are, first, the combination of communicating qualities, skills, values and services and second, being consistent and authentic. Rampersad (2008) explained that the most important factor for having a successful personal brand is to understand yourself and to show the authenticity; which is aligned with the empirical findings wherein the participants highlight the importance of authenticity and consistency of the personal brand (Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2). The collected findings demonstrate that marketing freelancers building their personal brand from their core values and being conscious of themselves. Continuously, a personal brand starts with themselves and in consequence follows them everywhere they go. Additionally, the participants provide the insight that the authenticity of oneself is the core of personal branding, when you practice personal branding not directly with the real self, at some point the real person comes out.

Participant 5: “Wherever I go I build my brand offline, consequently. The person that you see online is the same person you will find at an event. I will use the same words, consequently. I am just myself, consequently.”

5.1.3 Personal Branding Practices

All of the nine participants practiced personal branding actively. This is in line with the thoughts of Arvidsson et al. (2016) about the mandatory nature of personal branding practices in today’s society. The most important practices varied among the participants, but all of them were using online platforms besides their offline presence. Khedher (2015) argues that while conducting personal branding practices, the individuals use verbal, nonverbal and artifactual tactics in order for others to perceive them in a certain way. According to the participants, this was otherwise applicable, but the authenticity overcame the artifactual way of presenting themselves in public. For the participants, keeping the personal branding consistent was not possible without keeping the brand authentic. As an example, it was important for the participants that their offline and online presence stay consistent. Thus, it was important for the participants that others receive a genuine image of them, which does not in any circumstances differ from their real self. The empirical findings are in line with Khedhers (2015) argument that is highly important to control the information that can be found online. Additionally, the participants were very aware that their presence in offline and online environments should reflect their values and personality. The content the participants create online needs to be of good quality and professional.

Personal branding can be seen as a process, starting with the creation of a personal brand (Khedher, 2015; Rampersad, 2008; Rangarajan et al., 2017). The participants agreed that the personal brand has its foundation in the way the freelancers are as individuals, what their skills and values are - and how they act in offline and online environments. The participants did not feel that their personal brand is created through planning, as it might result in being artificial.

Participant 3: “I do not know how real you are then if you are only doing things to create your personal brand, if that is really you. How authentic are you? At some point I think, the real you come out.”

As Khedher (2015) states, the creation phase of the personal branding process includes investing in the cultural and social capital and our empirical findings confirmed this. All of the participants had spent a lot of time and effort to acquire the required skills and networks in order to be successful in their careers. A key finding regarding the creation phase of a personal brand was that the skills, presence and networks were not built with the sole purpose of creating a personal brand, but rather that the personal brand was built on the already existing skills, presence and networks of the participants. This was seen as the only way to make sure that the personal brand stays authentic and consistent.

Participant 3: “I cannot say that I sit down and think a lot about ‘if I do this, how will it affect my personal brand?’ I just try to be consistent in what I do and instead of me saying ‘how can I affect my personal brand?’ I just stay consistent on what my core values are and then my personal brand will get built on that. I do not necessarily need to build it, if you know what I mean. Even though it is me building it, it is not a conscious thing. I consciously follow my values and then my brand gets build from that.”

Participant 2: “I actually think that personal brands develop from your activities. What do people trust in you? You can build on that. What do people see in you? Build on that. Not necessarily what do I see in myself and build on that.”

As Khedher (2015) states, social capital includes the connections and networks of the individual and investing time and effort in accumulating social capital can offer individual benefits such as career guidance and new work tasks. The role of social capital was confirmed in the empirical findings as enhancing the networks and relationships of the participants was seen as an important factor in order to be successful in the career. According to Khedher (2015), the individuals who have acquired more education, knowledge and skills have higher chances to receive new work tasks and clients. The participants in our study, who valued self-development and had future plans to expand their skills and knowledge, confirmed this.

Participant 6: “I will try to develop and become a copywriter and social media manager as well, those are two things that are my goals (...) Then I can have a lot more services and copywriting has always been interesting. So, I am just going to learn that.”

Participants had also received work tasks that they had not conducted earlier if their clients trusted them. If they did not have the skills needed they acquired them concurrently while working. Therefore, the ability to be courageous, not giving up and solving problems independently were qualities that were highly valued by the participants.

Khedher (2015) argues that while practicing personal branding, individuals try to influence the impressions that others might have about them. During the empirical study, it became clear that the participants did not feel like creating an artificial image of themselves, but rather wanting to show the world who they are, what values they represent and what they can offer. Therefore,

the artifactual displays, or scripts, that Khedher (2015) argues to be the building blocks of a personal brand, were not part of the personal branding practices of the participants. The participants felt that the personal brand is created through their actions and that the most important factor is to keep the personal brand authentic. Therefore, the danger of losing identity discussed by Arvidsson et al. (2016) was not seen as a possible consequence by the participants.

All nine participants were using online tools to practice personal branding. As Labrecque et al. (2011) argues, the online platforms offer unlimited possibilities for practicing personal branding. The participants were aware of the limitless opportunities, but also recognized the difficulty of managing many online platforms. According to our participants, the personal brand needs to be authentic and stay consistent throughout the different channels that are used. This is why maintaining and controlling multiple online platforms was seen as a challenge. The downside of managing many online platforms is that they need to be updated constantly and simultaneously; otherwise the personal brand might appear fragmented.

Participant 4: “Have like an idea what your brand identity actually is, have your logo and everything in place and just have brand consistency in these different channels. (...) It can be lack if you have an old profile, or logo in some platform and you change to another platform. (...) You have to make sure that all the platforms you are using are communicating the same message, about your brand, about you.”

For the participants, the most important online platforms for personal branding practices were: LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Personal Website, Pinterest and Twitter. These platforms are in line with Khedher’s (2015) thoughts, but differ from Friedman (2015) in a way that Twitter was not as popular among participants as she suggests.

Even though Khedher (2015) states that the online platforms do offer more visibility and new ways of communicating with others, the empirical findings show that participants prefer building relationships offline over online. Offline relationships were perceived more trustworthy and valuable. Interestingly, the participants did not think that online platforms such as Freelancers.com or Upwork.com would be enablers for them while searching for new tasks, as Gandini (2016) suggests. On the contrary, the five participants who mentioned these sites had no intention to use them and the overall perception towards them was negative. This was due to the high competition on the sites, and the effort needed to make themselves visible on those sites did not seem like a reasonable investment of their time.

Labrecque et al. (2011) argue that the personal branding practices conducted online have never been as important as now. However, as the empirical findings show, online personal branding practices were seen as an important tool, but more as a support for the offline practices. Only two of the participants felt that online practices are more important for them, but this was due to their clients being located in another country than Sweden. But even they stated that offline personal branding practices would eventually become more important for them.

Participant 1: “I actually think social media is great, but it is only a supportive aspect to what is happening offline. I think we cannot manage just online, I think we need to talk to people and be able to look at them in the eyes and then something like Instagram or LinkedIn can only be supportive, not anything that stands alone.”

As Khedher (2015) states, the manners, nonverbal and verbal communication and personal appearance are the ways in which personal branding is practiced. According to the participants, the most important ways of practicing personal branding offline were networking, behaviour, language, the way you dress and business cards. Offline personal branding practices are perceived as essential, which is in line with Peters’ (2007) argument about personal branding starting in the offline environment.

Participant 3: “It is almost all offline.”

As Arvidsson et al. (2016) states, there are a great number of advantages in building an offline network, and the participants emphasized the importance of these offline networks while showing their personality, values and skills thus staying authentic in front of others. The consistency between the offline and online presence was highly important for the participants.

After creating the personal brand and managing it in the offline and online environment, the following step is to develop the existing personal brand. To do this, awareness and reflection are important. The empirical findings are in line with Khedher (2015); without taking a reflexive role, it is not possible to develop or improve the personal brand.

Participant 4: “Yes of course, it is trial and error the whole time. You see with social media the response or not the response. (...) You have to change the brand, the brand is not that exciting or the brand message does not get along, or the product are not....(...) or I am not in the right niche for my products probably so I need to target in different way, or what tools can I use, how do I use hashtags, or whatever. Or probably another channel (...) It depends, trial and error the whole time.”

The empirical findings confirm that participants are in general very conscious about their actions regarding self-development. The participants were well aware that protecting the image of themselves offline and online is highly important. However, the participants were somewhat skeptical concerning how much control they actually over how others perceive them and they can only ensure that their appearance in offline and online environments reflects their values and who they are.

Participant 5: “When you are becoming a kind of public person, you cannot control what people say about you. A lot of people like you and a lot of people hate you. You cannot control that and you just have to let it go.”

5.2 Discussion and Contribution

5.2.1 How Marketing Freelancers Perceive Personal Branding

As indicated in Chapter 1, this study includes one research question and one sub-question. The research question concentrates on the perception, whereas the sub-question focuses on practices (Section 5.2.2).

This study aims to answer the following research question:

How do marketing freelancers perceive personal branding?

As a result of the empirical data five topics with therein, 12 themes have been interpreted. The topics encompass a broad and diverse range of perceptions towards personal branding and therefore resulting in an answer to the research question. We propose a modified framework of 'How marketing freelancers perceive personal branding to integrate our findings with the literature. The framework highlights the most important findings from the empirical data concerning perceptions towards personal branding.

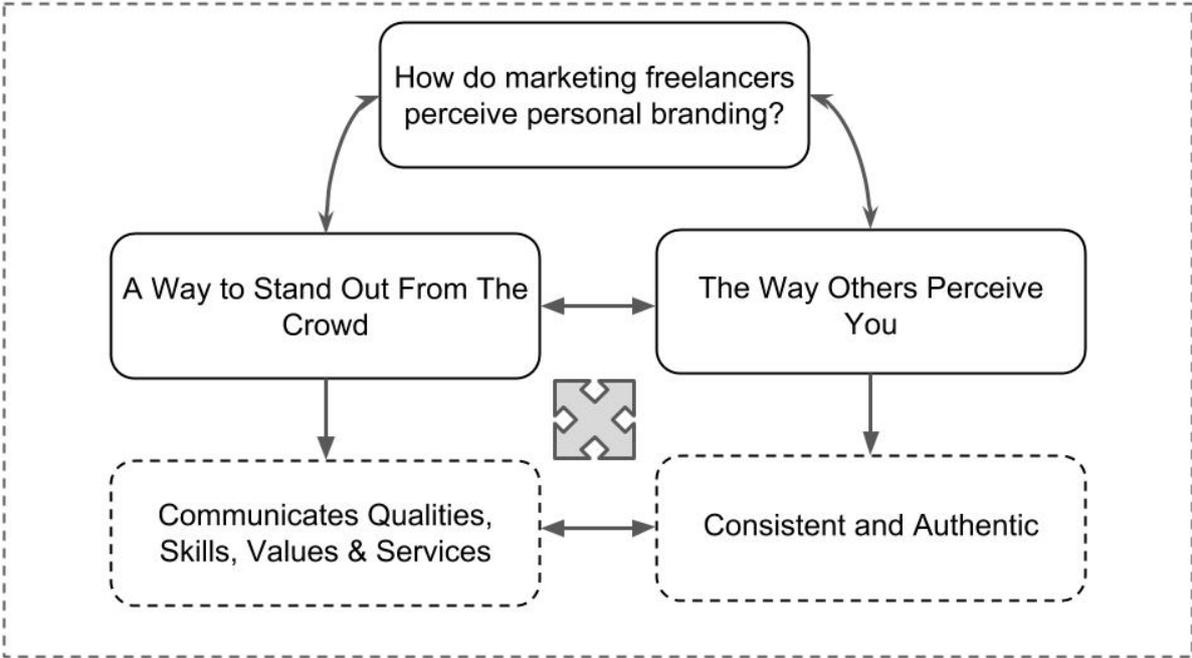


Figure 3 How Marketing Freelancers Perceive Personal Branding

Figure 3 has been created in order to give a clear view of the perceptions that marketing freelancers have towards personal branding. The perception is divided into two main topics (these are the two full-line blocks on top) and two sub results (which are located below and presented with stripe lines). These four blocks are closely linked to each other and therefore connected.

Two striking results that emerged from the data are that personal branding is perceived as a way to stand out; in line with this there is the perception of others towards you. First, personal branding as a way to stand out from the crowd can be done by communicating qualities, skills, values and services. The communication requires consistency and authenticity in an offline and online environment to show who you are. Additionally, when starting with the striking result of a personal brand is you, being yourself in a consistent and authentic manner, by communicating your qualities, skills and values is a way to stand out from the crowd.

Furthermore, the reasoning behind the two blocks on top and the two blocks below is that the perception of personal branding will not work with only the outcomes that are presented in the part below. As they cannot stand alone, the blocks are presented with stripes. To illustrate, messages need to be consistent and authentic, but what need to be authentic is *you*, which is the block on top. Authenticity and consistency cannot stand alone if there is nothing to show what is authentic and consistent. In addition to authenticity and consistency, communicating qualities, skills, values and services need have a character to show the skills from. Resulting in how others perceive you and therefore react in a way to stand out from the crowd.

Summarizing the previous views of the model, personal branding is perceived as you. By showing what your abilities, skills, values and what you are, you are the way to stand out from the crowd. A personal brand needs to be consistent and authentic everywhere in an offline and online environment.

5.2.2 How Marketing Freelancers Practice Personal Branding

As explained earlier in this chapter, this study includes one research question and one sub-question, whereas the focus of the sub-question lies in practicing personal branding.

This study aims to answer the following sub-question:

How do marketing freelancers practice personal branding?

The theoretical framework (Figure 2, Chapter 2, Section 2.5) has guided our empirical research, structured our findings and is also used as a base for this modified framework: How Marketing Freelancers Practice Personal Branding. Based on our empirical research and the previous literature (Khedher, 2015; Rampersad, 2008; Rangarajan et al., 2017) personal branding is seen as a process, which is why the same structure has been applied to the modified framework. The creation phase of the personal branding process is seen as a combination of the already existing offline and online qualities that the freelancer has. On the offline side, this includes acquiring the skills, knowledge and education and building networks, whereas on the online side it includes creating the digital profiles and joining online communities.

The practices itself are a combination of an offline and online presence that the marketing freelancer has. On the offline side, the presence includes the decision on how to behave, what language to speak, how to dress and whether there is a need for business cards. In addition, the offline settings include attending meetings, networking events and joining coworking spaces. The online presence of marketing freelancers is concentrated on being active on platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, a personal Website, Pinterest and Twitter. On the online side, the content produced includes blogs, portfolio, pictures, articles and observations.

For the development of the existing personal brand, the offline reflection includes building new networks and using appearance to stand out. Also, it is important to maintain an authentic and consistent presence and develop skills by taking courses, reading articles and learning from others in the offline environment. The online side of reflection includes the attempt to create more following for the online profiles, Googling own name to ensure that nothing negative can be found and to create quality content. Other important factors include creating authentic and consistent content to online platforms and develop skills by taking courses, reading articles and learning from others in the online environment.

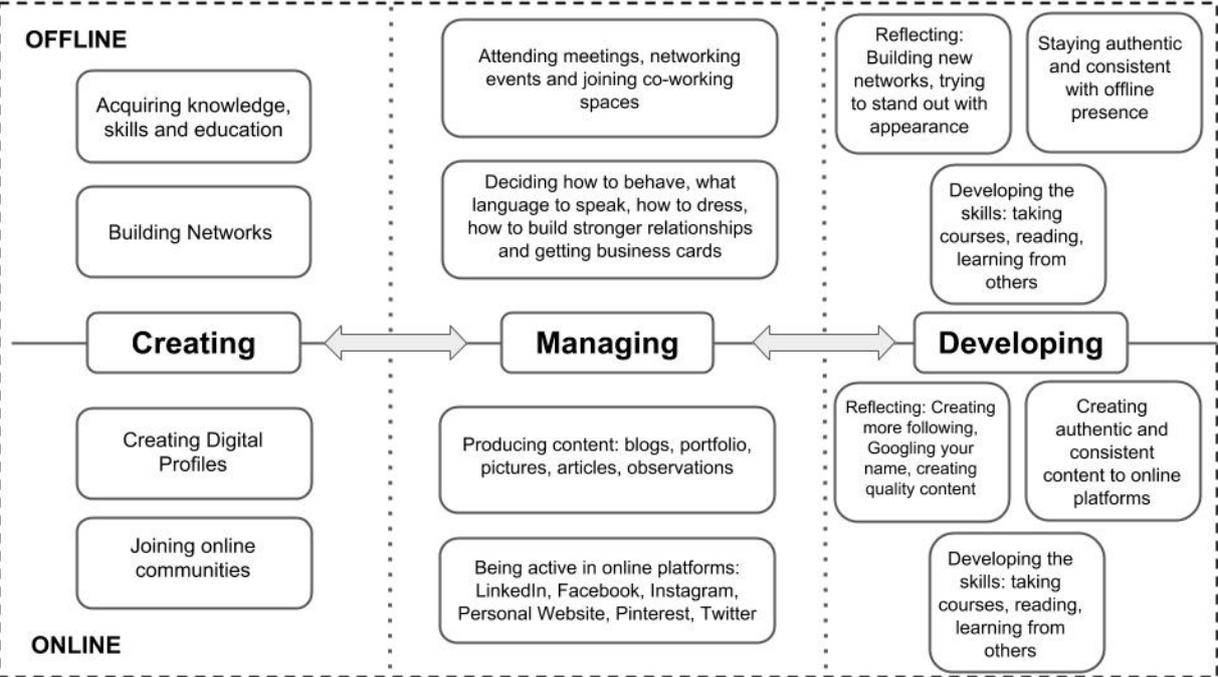


Figure 4 How Marketing Freelancers Practice Personal Branding

6 Conclusion

This final chapter summarizes the most important findings of this thesis and answers the research question and the sub-question. After this, we will provide the theoretical contributions, practical implications and suggestions for future research. As stated earlier, the purpose of this study has been to create a deep understanding of how marketing freelancers perceive personal branding and how they practice it. Both offline and online environments have been taken into account throughout this research. Hence, the following research question was addressed:

How do marketing freelancers perceive personal branding?

This research question is followed by the sub-question to understand how marketing freelancers practice personal branding:

How do marketing freelancers practice personal branding?

To answer these research questions, this study had identified themes that result in extended theoretical frameworks: *How Marketing Freelancers Perceive Personal Branding* (Figure 3) and *How Marketing Freelancers Practice Personal Branding* (Figure 4) that have been introduced in Chapter 5 (Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2).

Personal branding for the marketing freelancers means the way others perceive them. The most important factor in a personal brand is its authenticity and consistency. The marketing freelancers do not want to give an artificial image of themselves and therefore want others to perceive them genuinely as they are. For them, the personal brand is the best way to communicate their skills, values and services. As a conclusion, the overall perception is that it is difficult to stand out from the crowd without personal branding. However, you need to offer something different than others to practice personal branding in a way that it provides professional success.

To answer to the sub-question concerning the personal branding practices, we have divided the practices to three different phases following Khedher's (2015) original framework: the creation of a personal brand, personal branding practices and developing the existing personal brand. The first phase, creating the personal brand, was perceived by the marketing freelancers as something that happens naturally from the already existing offline and online presence. The main goal for them is that the personal brand is authentic and consistent the way they are and this cannot be achieved with planning and creating an artificial image of themselves. In other words, the creation itself was nothing that marketing freelancers had thought of before starting to practice personal branding since they are their own personal brand.

The second phase concerning the personal branding practices holds the most interesting finding of this study; the marketing freelancers perceived the offline personal branding practices more important than online practices. The offline presence, including the behaviour, language, networking, dress code and business cards was seen as the foundation that is supported by the online presence in different platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and personal website. The marketing freelancers preferred the offline networking over online since the relationships built offline were stronger and offered them more possibilities to find new work tasks. Online platforms were seen as an important addition, however keeping the different platforms consistent and providing high-quality material frequently were seen as challenges in the freelancers busy work schedule.

The third phase, developing the existing personal brand was seen as an important, which included partly the same strategies concerning both offline and online personal branding practices. To provide new services in the future or strengthen their skills in their specific field of freelancing, self-development was seen as highly important by the participants. The challenge for the self-development was for all of the participants the time-management. All of the marketing freelancers stated that their personal brand has developed over time and the best way to learn is through trial and error. Without trying new ways to practice personal branding, reflecting to it and then trying again, it is not possible to build a successful personal brand.

6.1 Theoretical Contribution

We aimed to investigate the way marketing freelancers perceive personal branding and how they practice personal branding. This thesis makes a contribution to the existing knowledge regarding personal branding (Shepherd, 2005; Peters, 2007; Rampersad, 2008; Gandini, 2016) by offering understanding about the perceptions that marketing freelancers have towards personal branding. Moreover, this thesis contributes to the previous research regarding freelancers (Tams & Arthur, 2010; Gandini, 2016; Arvidsson et al., 2016; Younger & Olivera, 2017) providing new insight concerning freelancing and their perceptions towards personal branding. Most previous research concerning personal branding has been focused on only social media platform, more specifically to Twitter (Brems et al. 2016; Gandini, 2016; Hanusch & Bruns, 2017) and therefore this thesis contributes to these studies by adding a broader view of the perceptions towards personal branding practices and different online platforms used in order to practice personal branding. Additionally, our findings regarding personal branding practices make a contribution to Khedher's (2015) Personal Branding Process framework (Figure 1) and Rampersad's (2008) personal branding framework, by providing a new framework (Figure 4), which explains how marketing freelancers practice personal branding.

6.2 Practical Implications

This thesis aimed to provide practical contributions to freelancers, individuals who wish to start a career as freelancers and to organizations and management. The modified frameworks introduced in Chapter 5, Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 can be used as tools to create awareness of marketing freelancers' perceptions towards personal branding as well as to understand the way marketing freelancers practice personal branding. For freelancers, this thesis provides practical tools for developing their personal branding practices and for a better understanding of the importance of personal branding for their professional success. For individuals wishing to start a career as freelancers, this thesis provides insights into what it is to work as a freelancer and what kind of qualities are required to be successful. The outcome of this thesis concerning personal branding practices can work as a basis for these individuals and lead the way to build a strong personal brand for them. For organizations and managers who wish to hire marketing freelancers, this thesis provides general information about freelancers, the way they work, and through which platforms they search for new tasks and how they practice personal branding.

6.3 Limitations & Future Research

As a result of this study, the authors of this thesis are providing two new created theoretical frameworks, which are useful for freelancers, organizations and future research. However, these frameworks are the outcome of the research about the perceptions towards personal branding and personal branding practices of marketing freelancers from nine interviews. Although all the participants are based in Sweden, they are presenting different nationalities. The findings are tied to specific timing and context. As well, the economic status, educational backgrounds, gender and age were not taken into consideration while making this research. For these reasons, further research is suggested to investigate this topic and expand the created frameworks in the future. Even though the authors of this thesis can contribute to personal branding and the research made among freelancers, the participants of this research include a heterogeneous group of marketing freelancers, which makes the findings of this thesis not generalizable.

While researching this topic, we noticed interesting suggestions for future research concerning freelancers and personal branding. First of all, even though this research focused on marketing freelancers, it would be interesting to extend the scope to freelancers working in other fields. Secondly, the cultural differences between freelancers and their perceptions towards personal branding would be interesting, particularly because our findings showed that the personality of the freelancers could correlate with the willingness to build the brand in a certain way. Additionally, it was noticeable that especially in Sweden, the networking plays an important role; therefore, it would be interesting to see the possible difference compared to other countries. Thirdly, the participants felt that their personal brand has developed over time and that it has become easier to keep the personal brand more authentic and consistent now that

they have become older. Therefore, it would be interesting to assess the influence of age in this study. As a result of the outcome that personal branding practice is highly important for business, but as well for a successful personal life, for further research it would be interesting to address the personal brand for individuals who are working in a company. The direction of the study should go, in the further research case, more into the influence of the company to their own personal brand. To give an example the personal brand needs to be consistent and authentic, but how does that work for individuals who are working in companies? The further study to perception and practice could employ other methods, for example, focus groups to discuss examples of the personal branding practice, to explore whether different perceptions emerge with the personal branding process. Opinions about personal branding practices may increase the value of perception and might evoke different reactions than when participants only talked about the ways of practicing it instead of the actions.

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Appendix B: Interview Topic Guide

Background

1. How would you describe freelancing as an occupation?
2. In which field and for how long have you worked as a freelancer?
3. Where do you work from? (CO-working space, home) / Why from there?
4. What are your best qualities as a freelancer?
5. How do you develop your skills?
6. Are you working on one project or with multiple projects at the time?
7. What is the best thing with freelancing? Is there some negative sides?
8. How do you find new work tasks?

Creating the personal brand

1. What does personal branding as such mean to you? How would you describe **your own** personal brand?
2. How have you created your personal brand?
3. Which **online** platforms do you use for your personal branding practices?
4. Do you also build your personal branding **offline**? How?
5. Have you set goals for yourself regarding your personal brand?
6. Have you thought about the audience target with your brand?
7. Are networks and connections important to you as a freelancer?

Managing the personal brand

1. What kind of content do you create to online platforms?
2. Do you actively think how others see your personal brand?
3. How do you develop and keep track on your networks and connections?
4. How do you control your personal brand online?
5. How do you control your personal brand offline?

Developing the personal brand

1. How have you developed your personal brand over time?
2. Have you done some personal branding practices that you have realized did not work out? How did you change these practices later on?
3. Do you actively measure the success of your personal brand?
4. Do you have any future plans for the personal brand?