Personal Brands

The Interplay of Offline and Online Scenes

by

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Abstract

Title:	Personal Brands: The Interplay of Offline and Online Scenes
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Keywords:	Personal Branding, Brand Essence, Online & Offline Channels, Interplay, Layers of Personal Brands
Thesis Purpose:	The purpose of this Master Thesis was to dive deep into the phenomenon of personal branding by answering the research question of how individuals interrelate online and offline scenes when expressing their personal brand.
Theoretical Perspective:	A conceptual framework was developed based on previous research, which displays the connection between the different personal branding environments.
Methodology:	To follow the philosophical view of the study, a qualitative study was conducted. The researchers relied upon interviews and snowball sampling strategies in order to collect the empirical material.
Empirical Data:	Seven individuals knowledgeable in personal branding and with personal brands of their own were interviewed. Criteria was developed in order for individuals to participate in this research, which included aspects such as residence location and age.
Conclusion:	The results of this study indicate that the interplay of online and offline channels in personal branding expression is of vital importance. This as it is impossible to communicate the personal brand in only one of the contexts in today's society. Several activities were identified and explored in relation to the personal brand interplay of online and offline channels. It was found that both spheres are needed to reach the aims and goals of personal brands.

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1   Introduction

This chapter will provide a brief overview of the history of branding before exploring the term of personal branding. By explaining the development of branding through time, the popularity and importance that personal branding has acquired will be highlighted. It is necessary to know the course of branding in order to understand the future implications that the personal branding phenomenon might entail. The problematization revolves around the online and offline context of expression in terms of personal branding and results in the research question of this study. After presenting the purpose and aim for this study, an outline of the remaining thesis will be given.

1.1   A Brief History of Branding

Modern branding started in the 1800's in America by burning marks on livestock as a way to identify which animals belonged to whom, with the main purpose to discourage thieves and simplify the task of returning lost animals (Snodgrass & Brucks, 2004). However, Belfanti (2018) claims that it was common to mark or brand products long before then. Craftsmen begun to use branding more consciously as a way of differentiation in Greece during the Iron Age (825-336 BCE) (Moore & Reid, 2008). Branding also had an important symbolic role in the Chinese society during the late Imperial Period of the Song Dynasty (1127-1279) (Eckhardt & Bengtsson, 2010). Brands were used as a sign of quality already in the early modern time (1500-1800) (Belfanti, 2018). It was further found that the term brand can have different meanings depending on the cultural context which shows that the roots of western and eastern branding are quite different (Eckhardt & Bengtsson, 2010).

In the 18th Century it became important for craftsmen to mark their products as a response to customers' demand of the added value in quality and status that came with attaching a symbol to products (Belfanti, 2018). The practice of registering trademarks in the United States of America started in 1870 (Duguid, 2018). There was, further, a boom in branding after the second world war with the focus on commercial products (Snodgrass & Brucks, 2004).

Since then corporate branding has evolved. The phenomenon was born in the 1970s as a managerial tool but has later on been substantially examined by scholars (Fetscherin & Usunier, 2012). Between 1969 and 2008, 412 authors have written 264 papers about corporate branding which have been published in 150 journals (Fetscherin & Usunier, 2012). However, over the past 25 years yet another aspect has appeared within the branding sector, namely personal branding. Personal branding was first coined by Peters (1997) and stated that individuals, in order to stand out, should think of themselves as a brand instead of a worker or an employee.

The main difference between a corporate or a product brand, and a personal brand is that the former ones are created and the latter one is developed (Rangarajan, Gelb & Vandaveer, 2017). This means that a corporate or product brand is created from nothing while a personal brand is developed from personal characteristics and altered to suit the setting around the individual. Other differences are that a personal brand is easier to change over time than a corporate or product brand, and a personal brand can be more focused on specific tasks (Rangarajan, Gelb & Vandaveer, 2017). Personal brands are able to grow with the individual as he or she take on different roles and evolves as a human being (Dolan, 2016). One aspect that is central for the personal brand to grow is communication.

1.2   Personal Branding

Since the beginning of times, communication has been a fundamental part of human behavior (Kimura, 1979). Interaction is identified as communication between two or more individuals, exchanging opinions and remarks about various topics (Capella, 1988). Face-to-face communication further enables the transaction of non-verbal information that is important in a context of social integration (Zahn, 1991). It is found that communicating in person will make the message emotional as it involves aspects such as body language, touch and facial expressions (Winger, 2004). These aspects are considered to be very important in conveying trust or truthfulness in what is being communicated (Winger, 2004).

As individuals became more aware of the importance of communicating credibility beyond the business environment, the phenomenon of personal branding started to take place as an ability to convince people about one's image (Grzesiak, 2018). The benefit behind creating a personal brand is that a greater personal brand value could be interpreted into greater efficiency in negotiations or directly transferred into increased profitability (Hill 2013 cited in Grzesiak, 2018). Personal branding is the action of consciously constructing a personal brand through image management, and the most relevant component is image personalization, which specifies *"that the brand is the given person - me becomes the brand itself"* (Grzesiak, 2018, p. 18). Personal branding involves advertising individuals' unique qualities and strengths to a particular public (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2010). Personal branding could be used to achieve a certain goal and it can be extra helpful in areas such as politics, social activism, advertisement, recruitment, business reputation and charities (Grzesiak, 2018).

It is claimed that the actual expansion of the term personal branding was possible due to the increased power of the internet, which highlighted the need of managing one's identity on a global computer network (Grzesiak, 2018). Personal branding in the digital environment is usually associated with social media actions, where an individual consciously aims to differentiate him or herself with the purpose of creating a unique online identity whilst reaching certain goals (Brooks & Anumudu, 2016). Social media, in this sense, has developed into a structure of social broadcast intermediator that displays information created by individuals themselves and not by institutions (Kaznowsky 2014 cited in Grzesiak, 2018). In terms of

content, individuals are encouraged to communicate personal aspirations, passions, objectives and interests (Grzesiak, 2018).

1.3   Problematization

Personal branding has been present for many years, although it has been titled with different names. However, with today's competitive marketplace, the personal branding phenomenon has become more important than ever before, as people are looking for novel ways to stand out. This means that building a personal brand has turned into a fundamental activity that individuals are developing with the purpose to access job opportunities and enhance their public and private image. Having a strong personal brand comes with several personal and collective benefits, which in the long term is very attractive to many people.

Individuals judge each other at a first encounter based on trustworthiness, competences and attitudes (Goffman, 1990). This is to access information about the individual that can be used when interacting with him or her. However, this also gives individuals the opportunity to influence the way people interact with them, as it is possible to choose what to express about one self (Goffman, 1990). What individuals express about themselves can be related to tangible objects, as objects become a part of people's identity (Belk, 2015). These possessions have a substantial role in the process of extending one's identity beyond body and mind (Belk, 2015). Self-extension includes tools and instruments that facilitate the extension of an individual's capabilities (James 1890 cited in Belk, 2015). The way a person incorporates such physical elements into the ideas of one's self, is seen as the extended self and mind (Belk, 2015). If such possessions are lost or damaged, an individual can feel this injury and loss to him or herself (Belk, 2015).

Objects that become part of an individual's identity communicate certain details about the individual. It is known that activities in the physical environment are rooted in the principles of human communication. As individuals learned how to articulate words through linguistic and grammatical dimensions, social interaction became more natural. The development of personal relationships implicated humans to send messages through communicative channels and artifacts. Face-to-face communication, according to scholars, implies two or more individuals, sharing the same physical space, exchanging information that creates mutual perceptions.

As technology lies in the heart of interconnectedness, individuals' activities are no longer bound to the physical environment. Modern technological advancements, such as the internet, have created a possibility to develop new skills, processes and communication methods that surround individual's way of life. One example of this is that face-to-face interaction has been replaced by communicating through technological devices (Aslaksen, 2018). It could be said that almost every human activity can be replaced, or assisted, by computer-mediated systems, which has generated an omnipresence of digital communication in societies around the world.

Phenomenon's such as personal branding, that were boosted in the digital era, have created a high dependency on internet-based systems and connectivity. The use of networking platforms has increased the productivity and efficiency of social relationships as well as time management skills (Serra, 2014). It is now possible for human beings to express themselves in multiple channels at the same time with the advantage of reaching a broader audience. As a result, individuals rely heavily on social media to communicate their personal brand in order to achieve either professional or private objectives. Applications such as FaceTime and Skype are becoming increasingly common to use both for distant conference calls professionally, and as a way to talk to friends and family privately (Gococo, 2018). Other professional and personal branding tools that are commonly used to promote and express oneself are academic blogs, LinkedIn, Twitter as well as social networking accounts (Kedher, 2013). It could be said that digital appliances have created a novel communication network by which individuals can develop long distance relationships and receive updated information from other individuals.

Digital technology can be seen as a double-edge sword. While it has opened many channels by which persons can express themselves, it has also created a dematerialization in the sense that individuals have lost control and ownership of what was once part of their identity (Belk, 2015). The extreme dependency on digital platforms have made it difficult for individuals to dispatch from this environment. Evidence suggest that being disconnected from digital access might provoke irritation and anxiety (Belk, 2015). Certain disorders are more common nowadays, such as "*FOMO (fear of missing out) and nomophobia (fear of no mobile access)*" (Belk, 2015, p. 50). Hence, it can be said that due to the prevailing circumstances human behavior cannot rely entirely on the physical world that the self-extension entails, as there is an actual need for digital interaction.

Even though the relevance of face-to-face communication seems to be fading in the digital era of today, where individuals can use technology as a tool for not physically interacting with other people (Ashton College, 2013), an emotional bond and trustworthiness can be lost when only relying on online communication. To convey trust is important as well as openness which counteract suspicion (Egan, 2017). Furthermore, technological interaction is less direct than face-to-face interaction, meaning that various versions of human interaction can be more or less direct (Aslaksen, 2017). It is also found that a way to stand out in today's digitalized society is to use face-to-face interaction (Egan, 2017).

In conclusion, it is found that individuals feel a need to use both offline and online channels when communicating their personal brand. Research has, so far, focused on the personal brand in either an online or an offline setting, but as individuals feel a need to incorporate both routes of expression in their brand management process, it is necessary to explore that relationship further. To obtain a deeper understanding of personal brand management it is essential to gather information about how people use different tools, and in which ways they portray themselves through various channels. The limited research regarding the interplay of the physical and digital sphere within personal branding and the absent research of the benefits that individuals could obtain from a deeper managerial understanding of these two routes of expression leaves a gap in the literature.

1.4   Research Purpose & Research Question

Based on the theoretical gap found in the problematization, the purpose of this study is to explore the interplay of activities between the offline and online context within personal branding. In other words, it is interesting to highlight the main actions that an individual can perform when combining these two spheres. Such activities are fundamental for further understanding of the expression and management of a personal brand in two interdependent settings. To fulfill this purpose, the following research question will be answered:

> **RQ:** How do individuals interrelate online and offline scenes when expressing their personal brand?

1.5   Aimed Thesis Contributions

This thesis aims to contribute with a deeper understanding of the personal branding phenomenon by exploring some of the activities an individual performs in an online and offline setting. As previously stated, both scenes are fundamental for the adequate expression of one's personal brand. By exploring the interrelation between the offline and online sphere, theoretical implications will be provided as it paves the way for further in-depth research. This understanding is important to gain as the physical and online environment exist side by side and allows individuals to be present in both simultaneously (Serra, 2014).

Moreover, an empirical description of the interaction between online and offline scenes could increase awareness regarding the phenomenon of personal branding. As more persons get informed about the significance of this interrelation, personal brands could be strengthened in terms of differentiation, trustworthiness and networking. Knowing in what manner those activities can be employed, could also create a more balanced and harmonious personal brand, which consecutively, could enhance the image of the individual in both: online and offline settings.

Even though the topic of personal branding has been in practice for many years, the phenomenon has gained more importance in recent times. The fact that previous studies have focused on the online and the offline scenes independently, adds the element of novelty to the present research. Having a clear understanding of the interaction between the virtual and physical activities within the personal branding phenomenon, could help the individual to communicate consistency and coherence when expressing the personal brand. As a consequence, the desired message could be successfully transmitted by integrating human sensitivity with digital platforms.

1.6   Outline of the Thesis

The first chapter of this thesis offers a broad background to the phenomenon of personal branding followed by the problematization regarding the interplay of online and offline channels in the expression of personal brands, which will function as a base for the remaining chapters of this thesis. The second chapter will provide more in-depth information regarding the area of research and offer literature streams from multiple researchers within the field. The literature review will cover the physical environment, the digital environment and the personal branding environment. It will also be summarized into a conceptual framework that will be used as a guiding tool in other parts of the thesis.

The third chapter will discuss the methodological choices made for this study and will provide a plan of how the empirical material will be analyzed. The fourth chapter will present the findings of the gathered data and lead up to the analysis of the collected data in the fifth chapter. Lastly, the sixth chapter will include a conclusion, suggestions for further research as well as theoretical and managerial implications.

2 Literature Review

This chapter will outline previous research within the field of personal branding. An overview of different environments will be provided to act as a foundation for the present study. The digitalization of the world is growing, but the physical state is still important and in order to answer the present research question both environments will be explored and connected to the sphere of personal branding. The chapter will end with the development of a conceptual framework based on the provided information in the literature review.

2.1 The Physical Environment

The physical environment is constructed upon external objects, persons and everything that surrounds the communication process; it is known as the primitive nature of humans' expression. In this section, aspects such as artifacts and impressions are considered essential to the precise development of an individual's message. Knowing the foundations of human communication and social interaction could serve as a guide to understand current activities that take place in offline settings. This is why social interaction will be developed further in this section after a brief overview of the history of communication has been provided, which shows the development of human's linguistics through time.

2.1.1 A Brief History of Communication

Humans' ability to communicate can be tracked down with the use of pointing and pantomiming (Tomasello, 2008). The former referred to humans' natural impulse to follow the contemplated direction of others to external objects, and the latter refers to the human action of interpreting the actions of others deliberately (Tomasello, 2008). Vocal language, thus, was a result of combining the naturalness of pointing and pantomiming with human's unique capabilities of cultural imitation and learning (Tomasello, 2008). It is important to notice that society's historical progress made it possible to construct the fundamental aspects of communication, namely grammatical and linguistic dimensions (Tomasello, 2008).

For many years, the study of sociology has been closely linked with communication (Silverstone, 2015). At the beginning of the twentieth-century, the role of communication was perceived as a social psychological concept in which it began and ended with the concern of the individual's ability to connect with others (Silverstone, 2015). It was further theorized and evaluated as a fundamental factor of humans' social life (Dewey 1958 cited in Silverstone,

2015). Erving Goffman (1990) defined communication as an individual's capability to give impressions, in which the expressiveness of the action appears to implicate two completely different kinds of sign activity. The first one includes verbal symbols that an individual consciously uses with the purpose to express the information that is adhered to these symbols; this is also known as the traditional form of communication. The second, is associated with a wide range of action that external individuals can consider as symptomatic of the actor, meaning that the action was executed with reasons other than informative (Goffman, 1990).

2.1.2   The Social Interaction

The development of personal relationships in a context of social interaction has made the interpersonal communication topic relevant (Berger, 2005). The term interpersonal communication entails the action by which people communicate their information, ideas, emotions and feelings face-to-face to one another (Communication Theory, 2009). This form of communication can take a verbal or non-verbal structure, in where the tone of voice, the body language and the facial expression are as important as the message (Communication Theory, 2009). In terms of setting, interpersonal communication is situated when two or more people are in the same place and knowledgeable of each other's presence (Communication Theory, 2009). This communication process involves six fundamental elements, namely the communicators, message, noise, feedback, context and channel (Communication Theory, 2009).

To understand human communication, one should note the different channels by which behavior and interaction take place (Ellis & Beattie, 1986). Aspects such as personal distance and appearance of the participants are described as relatively static (Ellis & Beattie, 1986). On the other hand, features such as the speech itself and vocal accompaniments are seen as more dynamic (Ellis & Beattie, 1986).

In face-to-face communication there are five ways to group the communicative channels (Ellis & Beattie, 1986). The first, the verbal system, consists of the speech itself, constructed by a set of words, clauses and sentences. Second, the prosodic system, entails rhythm, intonation and linguistic pauses. Third, paralinguistic, involves all the vocal behaviors that occur when an individual speaks. Fourth, the kinesic channel, include all the gestures, postures and facial and body movements that accompany the verbal message. Fifth, the standing features, that entail orientation, appearance, interpersonal distance and touch. It is pointed out that within this structure, there is a distinction between the verbal and non-verbal components (Ellis & Beattie, 1986). The verbal system is concerned with the words and sentences that are spoken via the auditory-vocal channel and implicates lip movements while non-verbal encompasses the rest of the features such as paralanguage, kinesic, prosody and standing features of interaction (Ellis & Beattie, 1986).

Another significant aspect of interpersonal communication is the role of artifacts. The information a receiver obtains from an individual during the process of interpersonal communication comes, not only from that individual's presentations as a compound interactor,

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but also from situational and external activities (Schiffer & Miller, 1999). There are four modes of performances that affect not only the receiver's interpretations but also their consecutive response (Schiffer & Miller, 1999). These interaction modes are based on the human senses and are categorized into: visual performance, acoustic performance, tactile performance and chemical performance (Schiffer & Miller, 1999). The importance of artifacts in human communication, thus, resides in the ability of a person to interact with space, perceptions, feelings and objects that are within the communication environment in order to successfully deliver the desired message. Another relevant aspect is external instruments or tools that appear in the physical world (Belk, 2015). The external elements are a part of the phenomenon of self-extension, which states that certain tangible possessions become so attached to an individual that it, in the end, constitute a part of the individual's self or identity (Belk, 2015). It is important to note that the phenomenon of self-extension is not limited to external objects and personal possessions; it also includes places, group possessions, persons and body parts (Belk, 1988).

Even though the physical environment is fundamental in the communication process, the noise that emerge from this setting could also harm the message (Nordquist, 2019). Four different types of noise which can interfere the message between the sender and the receiver have been identified (Nordquist, 2019). The first is referred to as physiological noise, which include the natural biological distractions that affect how an individual feel and think (Nordquist, 2019). The second one is named physical noise and entail the background interference produced by others or the environment itself (Nordquist, 2019). The third one constitutes what is known as psychological noise, which refers to mental and mind-related aspects that could affect the interpretation of a message (Nordquist, 2019). The fourth one is the semantic noise, which describes the situation in where words are not mutually understood (Nordquist, 2019).

The personal branding phenomenon relies substantially on communication and behavioral aspects of human development. Since the beginning of times, individuals have expressed their thoughts and emotions in various ways. Individuals have evolved from pointing and pantomiming to use a more structured language (Tomasello, 2008). As a result, humans could participate in social interaction contexts, where the idea of interpersonal communication was reinforced by elements such as the message itself, noise, audience and channels (Communication Theory, 2009). The face-to-face communication channels have been categorized as verbal, prosodic, paralinguistic, kinesic and standing features (Ellis & Beattie, 1986). In addition, artifacts play a fundamental role in the effective development of individuals in the physical environment (Schiffer & Miller, 1999).

2.2   The Digital Environment

Having discussed how the physical world influences an individual's message, it is now necessary to explain the course of the digital environment. Technological advances and methods in the human society created a new context which has influenced many human activities. The internet, for instance, has enabled new opportunities for individuals to express

themselves through digital platforms such as social media and online communities. As a result, new personality traits have affected individual's behavior and communication skills in an online setting. Therefore, the digital environment plays an important role to explore novel ways for individuals to portray themselves in front of others, this could later assist answering the research question in hand.

2.2.1   The Technological Development

Following the telegraph, radio, television and telephone, internet is considered one of the latest technological advancements in interpersonal communication (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). It certainly came to change every aspect of humans' lives including the social, private, political, economic and cultural phases that construct the essence of the human society (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). As more people around the globe gets access to the internet, it has become a natural aspect of everyday life to be a part of this interconnected network (Bargh & Mckenna, 2004). Even though the internet technology has reached all countries in the world with equal quality, there is a high probability that societies will soon take such connectivity for granted (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). One of the main reasons for people to use the internet is to communicate with others through email; and one of the fundamental reasons why people send electronic messages is to conserve interpersonal relationships (Hampton & Wellman 2001 Howard et al. 2001 McKenna & Bargh 2000 Stafford et al. 1999 cited in Bargh & McKenna, 2004).

As the world becomes more connected than before, societies experience a shift to a more digital structure of globalization (Manyika, Lund, Bughin, Woetzel, Stamenov & Dhringra, 2016). Nowadays, countries have left an individualistic behavior behind and rely massively on other countries in terms of resources, knowledge and technology. Digital platforms, in this sense, play a fundamental role in the new era of globalization (Manyika et al., 2016). Due to diverse public internet platforms, it is possible for countries, societies and individuals to enjoy constant connection with anyone placed all over the world (Manyika et al., 2016). Users of digital platforms such as operating systems, digital media, social networks, online marketplaces and e-commerce websites can efficiently access information (Manyika et al., 2016). At the initial stages of globalization, the interaction was limited to governments, major financial institutions and multinational corporations but with today's cultural integration, individuals can experience the benefits of digital platforms with global reach (Manyika et al., 2016).

The internet of things has changed the evolutionary nature of society, the idea behind this modern concept is that the world gets more interconnected through the development of new technologies such as cloud computing, big data, information centric networking and social networking (Atzori, Iera & Morabito, 2016). Because societies are embracing multiple challenges, the role of internet of things is substantial in creating new solutions and approaches (Atzori, Iera & Morabito, 2016). However, the fact that technological platforms are increasingly taking part of people's habits and lifestyles could generate fear for some persons (Atzori, Iera & Morabito, 2016). The idea of giving complete control to a digital system to command health

issues or private data while deceiving the real operations might seem too complex, which in turn could harm the reliability of technology (Atzori, Iera & Morabito, 2016).

Computer-mediated communication boomed with the proliferation of the internet (Kujath, 2011). It is argued that the internet could have a significant negative impact on social life (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). Several studies have disputed that the internet is a poor and unproductive form of communication compared to traditional face-to-face interaction, and it will certainly produce negative consequences in the social exchange context (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). Besides having weaker community and neighborhood ties, loneliness and depression are some of the negative outcomes that an extensive use of the internet could implicate (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). In contrast, others believe that computer-mediated communication could be seen as a positive tool by which individuals can maintain close relationships and create significant new ones (Kujath, 2011). It is said that the constructive effects are associated with digital platforms (Kraut, Kiesler, Boneva, Cummings, Helgeson, & Crawford, 2001). The internet allows individuals to become closer in circumstances where distance is an issue; as a result, people can increase and enhance their social network (Kraut et al. 2001). It is found that when computer-mediated communication is used as a replacement for face-to-face interaction, the results are negative and could lead to isolating experiences; however, when it is used as a complement to a face-to-face communication, computer-mediated communication ease the preservation of interpersonal relationships (Kujath, 2011).

2.2.2 The Digital Communication Channels

Digital communication management is referred to as systematic planning, monitoring, revision and executing of all digital channels a message could go through (Dua, 2017). Furthermore, digital communication could be seen as a revolution of how information is designed, managed and controlled across multiple digital interferences in order to get the best possible experience of using digital platforms (Dua, 2017).

There are eight different communication channels in the digital environment, namely social media, mobile marketing, websites, internet-specific ads and videos, microsites, online communities, paid per click marketing and e-mail marketing (Dua, 2017). Social media is referred to as the activity of sharing trending content, either public or private, on the web. Mobile marketing could be seen as an optimized version of desktop sites, as it provides a spider-web that could be used to gain different target audiences and find new information (Dua, 2017). Websites are an assemblage of interconnected web pages that display information and internet-specific ads and videos are visual representations created and uploaded to a site with the purpose to be streamed by a certain target group (Dua, 2017). Microsites are described to be similar to a website; the difference between the two resides in that microsites focus on specific aspects while websites provide more broad information (Dua, 2017). Online communities are groups of people that share common interest and experiences in a digital environment (Dua, 2017). Paid per click marketing is a digital tool by which advertisers pay a fixed priced to internet publishers when an ad is clicked on by a certain user (Dua, 2017). Lastly, e-mail marketing is

referred to as a commercial and communication tool by which an advertisement will be structured into a single format and sent to current and potential audiences (Dua, 2017).

Social network sites are considered some of the latest digital communication tools that grant users the opportunity to *"create a public or semi-public profile, create and view their own as well as other users' online social networks and interact with people in their networks"* (Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, & Espinoza, 2008, p.420). It is important to highlight that the number of social networking users has almost doubled since 2008 due to the fact that there is an increasing older population that participate in these sites (Hampton, Goulet, Rainie, & Purcell, 2011). Digital applications such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Myspace are believed to provide emotional support and companionship among the users (Hampton et al. 2011). Compared to older computer-mediated communication tools, a social network is more reliable in the sense that an individual can identify and corroborate another identity in a real-life context as the anonymity aspect is absent (Kujath, 2011). In fact, the reliability factor becomes more evident as a friendship can only take place if the individuals mutually agree to become friends online (Kujath, 2011).

2.2.3 The Digital Interaction

Social media is considered to be among the most commonly visited online platforms by which people, worldwide, interact with each other in a digital context (Zuñiga, Diehl, Huber, & Liu, 2017). Moreover, due to the high interactivity that these platforms provide, internal aspects such as personality have become more popular and is used to anticipate individuals' social media behavior (Zuñiga et al. 2017). Personality traits are reflected in the way people communicate and are thus, directly connected to consumption patterns. It is suggested that social media is controlled by a hybrid logic, in the sense that these platforms are both self-directed and interactive (Zuñiga et al. 2017). Due to this, social media is the center of a gradually personalized digital environment (Zuñiga et al. 2017).

The majority of personality traits can be classified into five categories according to Zuñiga et al. (2017). Firstly, neuroticism is referred to as a certain degree of emotional stability, which is the opposite of pessimism and depression. Secondly, openness is the need for a change and novelty to gain different experiences. Thirdly, extraversion is associated with feelings of adventurousness and talkativeness. It is also noted that people considered as extroverts tend to be more active in social media than introverts, as extroverts usually seek opportunities to socialize and interact with others online. Fourthly, agreeableness entails the tendency of one individual to comply with others at the moment of conflict; it also contains characteristics of trust and friendship. Lastly, conscientiousness is linked to the persons that are constantly looking for achievement, a sense of purpose and work ethic.

Another contribution to the topic of digital interaction is to place the extended self in the digital world. There is a sense of dematerialization, meaning that former tangible artifacts such videos, photos and data are now transformed into digital cyphers (Belk, 2015). However, simplicity and trustworthiness do not always go hand in hand. It is known that even though individuals

are continuously using these digital cyphers, they still make hard copies of them (Belk, 2015). The lack of control and trust originate the idea that some things might not be possible to replace with digital technology (Belk, 2015). In contrast to face-to-face interaction, individuals are currently experiencing what is called disembodiment, meaning that individuals are losing parts of their true self. However, the human being is also in a transition of re-embodiment through videos, avatars and photos available in social media, which connects back to the true self (Belk, 2015). Furthermore, nowadays there is a high possibility for individuals to work on the co-construction of the self because in the digital world, the feedback, comments and endorsements are more likely to appear than it is in face-to-face communication (Belk, 2015).

With today's technological innovations, digital tools have become essential for individuals to perform certain activities. The internet has changed the way people manage their lives and communicate with others (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). This network system has created close relationships between distanced individuals, which later results in a wide social network (Kraut et al. 2001). It is important to note that when digital platforms replace face-to-face interactions, the outcomes could be negative. However, when the digital environment is used as a complement to the physical environment, interpersonal relationships could be enhanced (Kujath, 2011). Digital communication channels can be classified into eight divisions which are: websites, mobile marketing social media, internet-specific ads and videos, microsites, paid per click marketing, online communities, and e-mail marketing (Dua, 2017). Social networking, however, is considered as one of the most frequently used channels among individuals (Zuñiga et al. 2017) as they are believed to create emotional support and a sense of companionship (Hampton et al. 2011).

2.3   The Personal Branding Environment

To be able to provide an answer to the stated research question it is vital to have an understanding of the personal branding environment, as it provides an information base regarding how individuals manage their personal brands in both an online and offline setting. It is known that the globalization has enabled many opportunities for countries as well as individuals to progress in different ways. The fact that countries are more interconnected than ever before, increases the desire of competitiveness among individuals and reinforces the idea of strengthening one's personal capabilities to stand out. This section will move into different aspects of how individuals are trying to stand out or in other ways conduct their behavior to portray and communicate a desired image of themselves.

2.3.1   The Perspectives of Personal Branding

The term personal branding has become more significant in the last few years. Personal branding was a phenomenon that emerged from marketing and is currently connected to other areas of social science such as sociology, psychology, communication and organizational

behavior (Gorbatov, Khapova & Lysova, 2018). Furthermore, personal branding is believed to have an important role in achieving career success in a professional context as well as in a project-based work system (Gorbatov, Khapova & Lysova, 2018). Likewise, it is believed that career transitions are critical situations by which behavior and relationships are being altered, and personal branding could be supportive to overcome those challenges (Schlosser, McPhee & Forsyth, 2017).

Personal branding is related with seven concepts that belong to the same category. The first, human brands, is defined by Close, Moulard and Monroe as a *"persona, well-known or emerging, who are the subject of marketing, interpersonal, or inter-organizational communications"* (2010, p. 922). Second, impression management is defined as strategies than an individual employ in order to control the impressions that others have over such individual (Kowalsky & Leary, 1989). Third, the term self-promotion is described as a different impression management approach, in which individuals are eager to highlight their achievements and take credit for the positive results (Bolino et al. 2016 cited in Gorbatov, Khapova & Lysova, 2018). Fourth, professional image is defined as the key elements and perceptions that a person has over his or her own competences and character (Roberts, 2005). Fifth, reputation is explained as a perceptual identity created from the group of perceptions of others (Zinko & Rubin, 2015). Sixth, fame is directly linked to reputation, but it does not provide the factor of predictability (Zinko & Rubin, 2015). Lastly, even though that employee branding is related to personal branding, it is agreed that the difference resides in the fact that in employee branding, employees have a desire to project the organizational image to stakeholders which is not the case for personal branding (Miles & Mangold, 2004).

Peters mentioned in 1997 that one of the reasons people get into the topic of personal branding is out of fear; individuals manage their personal brand to avoid that others would do that for them, resulting in an uncontrolled set of events (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2010). Another significant aspect about personal branding is the multiple conceptions that this phenomenon entails. Personal branding is described as all the features that make an individual unique; it is what a person leaves behind when leaving a room or an office; it is what people say about an individual when he or she is not present (Bentley 2015 cited in Collada, 2015). Personal branding is about letting people know about personal values, beliefs, experiences and reputation. On the other hand, there is self-branding, which refers to individuals thinking of themselves as products with the purpose to be marketed to a target audience and gain competitive advantage (Whitmer, 2018). The management of self-branding requires deep personal reflection and further evaluation to efficiently construct a personal brand (Whitmer, 2018).

One aspect that is prominent in other branding spheres is the way a brand is being communicated, in terms of emotion and reason (Keller, 2013). This could be connected to personal branding as well. Emotional expression is related to the physical and emotional needs of individuals and is connecting to the feelings of individuals (Keller, 2013). Further, emotional reasoning is a way to connect to the heart of the individuals that are close to the brand, as well as expressing a favorable image of the brand itself. Rational expression on the other hand, appeals to the logic thinking of individuals and allows decisions to be made by the brain rather

than the heart (Keller, 2013). Moreover, the rational reasoning is concerned about the judgement and performance of individuals (Keller, 2013). Hence, a way to improve the brand image is to use a combination of both rational and emotional reasoning (Keller, 2013).

2.3.2   The Layers of Personal Brands

Erving Goffman was one of the first authors that discussed different layers of personal branding, even if he, back in the 1950's, did not use the term personal branding. What Goffman (1990) call the performer can be translated into the personal brand, and the audience is the people surrounding the personal brand. It is claimed that individuals, or performers, adjust their behavior and the way they act according to the present audience (Goffman, 1990). There are three different regions that individuals take part of in everyday life, namely the onstage region, the backstage region and the offstage region. These regions will be further explained in this chapter.

The Onstage Layer

The first region is the front or onstage performance. The front is defined as:

> *"that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance. Front, then, is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance."* (Goffman, 1990, p.32).

In this setting the individual is surrounded with other people and, as a result, certain personality traits are accentuated while others are suppressed (Goffman, 1990). Different social fronts exist, and individuals are expected to adapt to these predetermined roles when entering a new performance (Goffman, 1990). In other words, if an individual begins a career as a medical doctor he or she is expected to act according to the stereotypes and expectations which colleagues and patients hold to that role. However, if the individual decides to start a career within an entirely new field, it is necessary to establish a new front that can represent that field, in this case there is a set of existing roles that can be chosen from (Goffman, 1990). This implies that even if new roles are created, they are adapted to already existing fronts (Goffman, 1990).

Further, fronts are selected by the individual according to the undertaken performance. As a considerable amount of time will be put into the expressions the individual gives off, very little time will be available for actions which means that individuals need to decide what is most important, giving off a certain expression or to do the action itself, regardless of the expression (Goffman, 1990).While conducting a performance onstage, it is custom to provide idealized versions of the situation (Goffman, 1990). Individuals will, when accompanied by others, present themselves in terms of societal rules and values. It is believed that the idealized versions of self are presented as a way to advance in the hierarchy and make sure not to risk becoming degraded (Goffman, 1990). By presenting the idealized version of self, the individual must hide the actions that are not in line with that appearance; this can include hiding economic benefits,

indulgence, the cover-up of mistakes, as well as the time and effort required to finish a task (Goffman, 1990).

Apart from underplaying certain aspects, individuals tend to exaggerate the aspects that are in line with the ideal version of a specific role (Goffman, 1990). One way to do this is to present an image of sincerity and devotion, meaning that the single thing that matters is the ongoing performance, which also shows the one existing version of the performer (Goffman, 1990). This portrayed image is often very believable for the audience. Another way is to portray a uniqueness in the encounter and the relationship between the performer and the audience, there has to be an illusion that there is something special about the personal interaction for a continued existence of the idealized image (Goffman, 1990). To keep this image of uniqueness, it is important not to act in the same manner with other people as it could damage the former relationship.

Another aspect to consider is the fragile state of the scene individuals portray. It is easy to convey an improper message by making minor mistakes (Goffman, 1990). It is further explained that while giving a performance, individuals are not supposed to show human traits such as making errors, they should be able to provide a homogenous performance every time in order to live up to their idealized image (Goffman, 1990). Individuals need to be mindful of their actions in the company of others.

The Backstage Layer

The second region is called the back region or backstage and it can be defined as: "*a place relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course*" (Goffman, 1990, p. 114). This is further explained as a place where the individual can be more relaxed and step out of character as there is no audience present. The backstage area is where preparations and hard work take place, and it can be done in a questionable way as other people are not observing the actions taken behind the scene; the actions taken backstage will further work as a foundation for the performance onstage (Goffman, 1990). The entrance between onstage and offstage could be open or closed depending on the performance and present context. If the backstage area is accessible to the audience due to poor environment conditions, embarrassing situations may arise, as the relationship between the audience and the performer is expected to leave out certain details that could be overheard due to the setting (Goffman, 1990).

The backstage area provides an opportunity to drop the mask that is put on every time an individual is interacting with others face-to-face, however, it can be very hard to put the mask on quickly if it becomes necessary to interact with people unexpectedly (Goffman, 1990). It is also stated that a physical location that serves for an offstage performance one time might be the scene of an onstage performance at another point in time, meaning that onstage and offstage are not always easy to distinguish between (Goffman, 1990). The environment itself also influence the way individuals behave, regardless of the people present, meaning that individuals behave accordingly if they are in a religious place or at a holiday resort no matter who surrounds them.

The backstage area is where people are feeling safe enough to show unpolished feelings such as irritation and it is custom to gossip and swear in this context (Goffman, 1990). For an individual to keep his or her reputation, it is useful to separate audiences of different performances (Goffman, 1990). This as the performer tend to have very dissimilar roles in each performance and it would damage the performers reputation to show an opposing side of him or herself to the audience (Goffman, 1990).

The Offstage Layer

The third and last region is named the outside or offstage. The offstage of a performance regards all other aspects than those covered by onstage and offstage interactions (Goffman, 1990). It further means that while being offstage the individual is neither the intended or wished audience nor actor of a specific performance. If an outsider enters the scene of a performance, the relationship of the present audience and performer will shift, as a more formal appearance will be displayed towards the outsider (Goffman, 1990). In other words, the relationship between the performer and the audience will be more relaxed than the one between the performer and the outsider (Goffman, 1990).

When an outsider enters an ongoing performance, the performer is often caught off guard and will have a hard time to decide in which direction to continue. The individual needs to quickly decide which front to display and conform to it in a smooth way to not create an awkward situation (Goffman, 1990). One way to tackle a situation like this is to ignore the outsider and continue with the performance as if the outsider was not present (Goffman, 1990).

The Professional, Personal and Private Layer

However, Goffman is not the only one who state that individuals play different roles depending on the situation. Shepherd (2005) claims that it is common for individuals to display different personas according to their different aspects of life, namely during personal, social and professional conditions. This could lead to difficulties in displaying a consistent brand image and the different versions of the personal brand are at risk to compete with one another in the marketplace, which is very undesirable for the individual (Shepherd, 2005).

The phenomenon of multiple personal brands is further elaborated by Foster and Oldenburg (2017) who state that there are three layers of an individual's brand. Firstly, there is the professional level of the personal brand. This is the version of the individual that is displayed most to others (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). This implies that the individual is constantly mindful of the image he or she portrays by taking certain actions. The most idealized picture of the personal brand is considered to be the professional layer and it is prominent once the individual steps outside the comfort of the own home (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). This layer comes as a natural response from the knowledge of constantly being observed by others both offline and online (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017).

Secondly, there is the personal level of the personal brand. This level is a bit less strict than the former one. The personal level allows the individual to show their personality traits, both good and bad (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). This layer guides the individual through different

situations and decides how they respond to those situations. In other words, this is the foundation for how individuals react to praise as well as hardship (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017).

Thirdly, there is the private level of the personal brand. The private level regards the essence of the personal brand, meaning the private details and thoughts of the individual (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). This is a level that is not comfortably shared with others and should only be displayed within the closest circle of friends and family, in a place that builds on trust.

There is always some overlap between these layers, meaning that the professional version of the individual can also shine through to the personal and private version of the personal brand (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). With the management of these different layers, it is suggested that the positive aspects of the personal brand should be mixed with the professional level as much as possible (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). This is to add a personality to the brand which is very important in creating comfortable relationships in the workplace, and individuals are often hired not only based on their skills and competences, but also their personality. Furthermore, the negative traits of the personal brand should not be mixed with the professional personal brand, but rather be set aside to the private personal brand (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). Otherwise it could have a negative impact on the professional career and work-related connections of the individual (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017).

2.3.3   The Personal Brand Offline

When it comes to communicating the personal brand in a physical environment there are multiple aspects to consider. Everything from writing a cover letter and CV to the impression's individuals give off in an encounter (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). Personal communication is one of the foundations of human lives, people will not survive without communicating with one another (Kar & Kar, 2017). This is important to understand when managing a personal brand in the physical environment.

First Impression Management

It takes no more than 30 seconds for an individual to leave a first impression in other people's minds (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). Others claim that it does not even take 10 seconds before a first impression has been made (Kar & Kar, 2017). This first impression will influence the remaining relationship between the individuals, which is why it is important to have an understanding of what impression is given (Kar & Kar, 2017).

One theory that talks about the lasting impression of a first encounter is the halo effect. The halo effect is defined as *"the influence of a global evaluation on evaluations of individual attributes of a person"* (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977, p. 250). If an individual has left a good impression at a first encounter it is easier for that individual to gain forgiveness for any mistakes made at a later point in time, compared to if the individual left a negative impression at the first encounter (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). The halo effect was first discovered as a phenomenon where managers rated their employees higher if they had a positive impression of them rather than only base the rating on independent characteristics of the employee (Leuthesser, Kohli &

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Harich, 1995). The halo effect can, to some extent, act as a shield in times of crisis, meaning that individuals might be less inclined to believe negative information if they have a previously positive impression of the brand (Coombs & Holladay, 2006).

However, the halo effect works in both directions, both the personal brand and the audience are evaluated with regards to the previous knowledge about their characteristics. This is explained in Goldman, Cowles and Florez (1983) study where a lecturer entered a classroom knowing that the audience was either warm, cold or neutral, while the audience also knew the mindset of the lecturer. This study showed that if the audience and the performer had the same perception of each other, either warm/warm or cold/cold, it directed the course of the relationship. The evaluation of the interaction was more positive if the setting was warm/warm and more negative if the setting was cold/cold (Goldman, Cowles & Florez, 1983).

Finally, the first impression individuals imply can be significantly improved if their body language is understood and managed in an appropriate way (Kar & Kar, 2017). Some suggestions for areas of improvement are to keep eye contact during conversations, smile, keep an upright posture and pay attention to what is being said in an ongoing conversation (Grand 1991 cited in Kar & Kar, 2017).

Verbal Communication

Other aspects that influence the way a relationship will develop is the language the individual uses (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). 38% of the impression individuals make when they speak counts for the way they express things and only 7% of the very words they use, attribute to that impression (Glaser & Smalley 1993 cited in Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). The words individuals use while speaking is defined as verbal communication (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017).

Individuals will gain a better connection if they display similar characteristics in certain aspects such as language (Willemyns, Gallois, Callan, & Pittam, 1997). It was found that individuals adjust the language they use depending on the person they speak to (Willemyns et al. 1997). More precisely, individuals participating in a job interview tend to adjust their accent according to the interviewer's accent, if the interviewer was using a broad accent it would generate a broader use of accent of the interviewees as well (Willemyns et al. 1997). It is also stated that the use of accents can be incorporated in order to create a distance between the interviewer and the interviewee, as an example, some interviewees tended to use a broader accent to distinguish themselves when the interviewer used a more cultivated accent (Willemyns et al. 1997). Many of the changes in use of accent seemed to appear unconsciously. This as the interviewees thought that they used the same accent as always throughout the entire interview, even though it was apparent for an observer that they made adjustments throughout the session (Willemyns et al. 1997).

Apart from the used accent, there are other factors that are central to consider when it comes to verbal communication. The words spoken and how they are received will influence the image of the personal brand. It is, therefore, important for individuals to understand how their voice works in terms of speed, volume, pitch and tone in stressful situations to be able to make the best possible impression (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017).

Non-Verbal Communication

Individuals are not only communicating with the words they speak but also the non-verbal cues they give off. It is said that an individual's body language show *"an implicated blend of his/her mental health, physical state, thoughts and emotions on his/her entire body in the form of postures, actions and expressions"* (Jain, 2016, p.36). Furthermore, when knowing how to use one's body language it is possible to influence others favorably to what the individual is communicating (Jain, 2016). Non-verbal cues expressed through body language include aspects such as body position, gestures, head nodding and shaking, facial expressions as well as eye contact (Forbes & Jackson, 1980). These aspects are important to consider as, the non-verbal cues count for 55% of the impact that individuals message covey (Glaser & Smalley 1993 cited in Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). It is suggested that 60-90% of communication between individuals is non-verbal (Kar & Kar, 2017).

Body position includes the way individuals angle their body when sitting or standing. People tend to lean towards other people they like, find attractive in some way, or that convey trust (Kar & Kar, 2017). It also includes individuals' posture, an upright position enhances breathing and enables individuals to feel more awake and releases positive emotions (Kar & Kar, 2017). The way individuals position their body communicates their emotions (Ekman 1969 cited in Forbes & Jackson, 1980). The position of legs and arms are also a part of the body position category and it is possible to communicate feelings with these body parts. Crossed arms in many cases suggest that the individual does not agree with a statement or that he or she feels unsafe in the environment, while constantly moving legs suggest that the individual is nervous or stressed (Kar & Kar, 2017).

Body movement and gestures are unconscious actions as 99% of individuals' focus is used to communicate the intended message verbally and not the attached non-verbal cues (Kar & Kar, 2017). By that, body movement and gestures speak a language of its own. Gestures are defined as:

> *"A gesture is the movement of the hand, feet or other parts of the body. Some are intended to communicate definite messages; others are involuntary social cues which may or may not be correctly interpreted by others"* (Argyle 1969 cited in Forbes & Jackson, 1980, p. 66).

Further, it is stated that it is hard to understand what different gestures and non-verbal cues mean; but once known, it is very easy to understand what an individual is feeling based on his or her body language (Kar & Kar, 2017). However, the same gesture can mean different things in different situations or cultures, which makes it all more difficult to decipher (Kar & Kar, 2017). That being said, if an individual expresses multiple gestures all indicating one specific emotion, it is easy to label what that individual is feeling at that moment (Kar & Kar, 2017). To use body language is a way to express emotions. The way individuals are moving their head is also a type of body gesture and by nodding or shaking the head individuals reinforce what is being said (Forbes & Jackson, 1980). It is further stated that a nod of the head signals that attention is being paid to the individual that is speaking (Kar & Kar, 2017).

Facial expressions are connected to the nose, eyes, eyebrows and smiles of individuals (Jain, 2016). Quick responses to what individuals are feeling are most prominent around the eyes and mouth (Kar & Kar, 2017). Micro-expressions are the feelings individuals are trying not to show, these are typically visible in people's faces for 0,04-0,07 seconds, micro-expressions can also be expressed through other parts of the body, such as legs or hands, but that is not common (Kar & Kar, 2017). The type of facial expression people portray is often dependent on the context of the conversation, meaning that certain facial expressions are more appropriate and connected to specific conversation topics (Forbes & Jackson, 1980).

Eye contact is an important factor of non-verbal communication. It is especially important when meeting people for the first time (Kar & Kar, 2017). This aspect is closely connected to verbal communication as it provides information when listening and feedback when talking (Forbes & Jackson, 1980). It is said that individuals keep eye contact for 25-75% of a conversation (Forbes & Jackson, 1980). Good eye contact shows respect for the individuals included in the conversation as well as an interest of what is being said (Kar & Kar, 2017). Too little eye contact indicates that individuals are not interested and too much eye contact communicates an uncomfortable sense of intenseness (Kar & Kar, 2017).

The relevance of non-verbal communication in the context of job interviews have been explored and it is suggested that interviewees are more inclined to receive a job offer if they behave in a certain way during the interview (Forbes & Jackson, 1980). Traits that are associated with a job offer are a higher level of eye contact, a high level of involvement expressed as head nodding and shaking as well as a high level of smiling (Forbes & Jackson, 1980). Candidates that were rejected, expressed other non-verbal cues such as neutral facial expressions, less involvement by keeping their head still and wandering eyes (Forbes & Jackson, 1980). Body language that did not influence weather the person was rejected or accepted was if the individual kept their legs crossed and still, had a straight posture, placed their hands together or if they kept their entire body still (Forbes & Jackson, 1980).

Lastly it has been found that non-verbal communication is a strong influencer of trustworthiness. The non-verbal cues an individual gives off will affect the minds of other people in terms of trustworthiness (Wood, 2006). All non-verbal cues are contributing to the trustworthiness of an individual however, a friendly smile and the pace of an approach is of especial importance (Wood, 2006).

Appearance

Another important aspect when communicating the personal brand is the appearance of the individual, which is often the first thing people notice about others (Richmond & McCroskey 2004 cited in Gupta, 2013). The appearance of an individual is important in person-to-person contact and influences the direction of the relationship between people (Schwer & Daneshvary, 2000). Further, people's appearance can help to establish and express their identity as well as influence their psychological health (Bowman & Hopper, 1991). The way individuals dress is also contributing to the amount of trustworthiness they portray to others (Wood, 2006). Aspects included in the appearance category are: clothes, accessories and grooming (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017).

When it comes to clothing it is important to dress in a manner that is appropriate for the role that is played at that time. If individuals are not dressed to fit the part, they might not be able to advance in their career in the desired way, as their appearance could hold them back (Bowman & Hopper, 1991). Different types of clothes come with different types of meaning and those meanings can be transferred to the individual wearing the clothes (Strubel & Petrie, 2016). Clothing can further decrease the gap between the ideal and real self and improve the self-esteem of the individual (Strubel & Petrie, 2016). The way individuals dress and groom, influence how they are perceived in terms of credibility and reliability (Bowman & Hopper, 1991). It is further stated that by having an attractive and well-groomed appearance it is more probable to have financial success, as attractive individuals tend to earn 5-10% more money than unattractive individuals (Hamermesh & Biddle 1994 cited in French, Robins, Homer, & Tapsell, 2009). It was also found that a well-groomed individual is more inclined to succeed academically compared to not as well-groomed individuals (French et al. 2009).

Furthermore, jewelry and makeup should be worn with caution (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). All accessories, meaning all details apart from the clothes covering the body, should be carefully thought through. This, as too many details and accessories can distract people from hearing what the individual is trying to communicate (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). It is further suggested that it is better to blend in and be neutral than to stand out from the crowd by using bright colors, at least in certain professional settings (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017).

Written Communication

Another way for people to communicate in the physical world is through writing. In connection to personal branding this is often regarded as the development of cover letters and CV's to promote oneself as a brand for possible employers. The CV and cover letter allow individuals to spread awareness about their personal brand and, as with any other brand, brand awareness is necessary to succeed (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). These traditional documents are tools that can be used for impression management regarding personal brands (Waung, McAuslan, DiMambro, & Mięoć, 2017). The impression management that comes with CV's and cover letters is only going in one direction, meaning that the individual communicates to someone without receiving any instant feedback, if any at all (Waung et al. 2017).

Cover letters can be designed in various ways and include different information. One definition of a cover letter is that it is:

> *"a professional letter that needs to be short and to the point, clearly describing why you are interested in that specific job and company and why you are a good match for them."* (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017, p.105).

However, it is also indicated that attention must be paid to the structure, language and layout of the documents not only the content, as all aspects contribute to the general impression of the job application which is essential in the selection process (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). The first step in structuring a cover letter and CV is to create a personalized letterhead where the brand name, meaning the personal brand, is stated in a clear manner (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). It

is also good to include contact information in this section and make sure that the same information appears in both documents to display unity.

The CV, also known as resumé, is a document that *"is your sales pitch or your professional story formatted so that it can be efficiently read by a potential manager, a recruiter, or even an automated computer system"* (Shapiro, 2018, p.15). It is important that the CV of the personal brand is clear enough to be read and understood without any additional information such as cover letters, as the CV is often a starting point for the recruiter (Shapiro, 2018). This does not mean that the CV should include all existing information about the personal brand, but just enough to catch the attention of the reader and make them interested to learn more about the personal brand (Shapiro, 2018).

The use of self-promotion in CV's and cover letters will have a positive influence on the evaluation process (Waung et al. 2017). This is only true to some extent, if the self-promotion becomes to prominent and intense, it will have a negative impact on the personal brand during the selection process (Waung et al. 2017). Moreover, in today's digitizing world the traditional way of writing CV's and cover letters are becoming replaced by more technically advanced methods such as application platforms and standardized templates (Waung et al. 2017).

2.3.4   The Personal Brand Online

Online channels are very important when it comes to expressing the personal brand. Online channels can be used as a tool to spread awareness about the personal brand and it is, therefore, important to have a basic understanding of which tools are commonly used within online branding.

E-Branding

Similar to traditional branding, e-branding is about creating a particular image through the use of tools and applications that the internet provides (Grzesiak, 2018). The distinction between traditional branding and e-branding is reinforced by mentioning some fundamental characteristics of the latter (Grzesiak, 2018). The element of constant presence refers to that communication is always available online. Interactivity is described as the possibility to communicate a message using different channels of transitions that could favor the receiver (Grzesiak, 2018). Speed can allow the sender and receiver immediate interaction via the net (Grzesiak, 2018). A constant group of receivers can be observed due to the increased amount of internet users (Grzesiak, 2018). Lastly, as more individuals are expressing their opinions online, any negative comments could affect the image of organizations and even individuals to a great extent (Grzesiak, 2018).

Due to evident technological changes in society's lifestyles, the idea of managing a personal brand online has become a need, in the sense that the current virtual age cannot be ignored (Gioia, Hamilton & Patvardhan, 2014). More people are willing to express their personal brand in an online setting and there are multiple motives for creating an online presence. Online experiences such as gaming, chatting and participating in virtual platforms provide an increased

broad communication through the elimination of the physical world boundaries and socioeconomic characteristics (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2010). As a result, individuals have an open environment to create multiple facets of the self and the opportunity to reflect upon them (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2010).

Individuals also rely on digital platforms to communicate their brand positioning. Since identity could easily be expressed and manipulated in online contexts, individuals have an impulse to highlight positive attributes that are valuable for the target audience in order to become different from the rest in the marketplace (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2010). Impression management could also be a way to position personal brands online. Maintaining a constant image through multiple computer-mediated sites, will create coherence within the branding strategy (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2010). However, there must be a certain level of caution when creating one's profile online, as some people tend to go too far and create fake realities just to stand out from others (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2010).

Another motive that drive individuals into online personal branding, is the ability they have to freely express and present the self to a digital audience while learning from other people's lives (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2010). Individuals beside building personal brands on the web, further incur into a self-realization process (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2010). However, there are also other non-social motives as individuals are driven by the need for power through development of competences and proper management of technology and the digital environment (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2010).

Communication Channels

Social media is one of the most important communication channels for personal branding (Grzesiak, 2018). Its relevance resides in the potential interaction between the brand and the users, but also in the possible relationships that could be created by those who are following the brand (Grzesiak, 2018). Following specific brands on social media is becoming more popular as users want to stay updated regarding the content and activities that surround the brand (Grzesiak, 2018). In fact, 31% of the total population of Generation X are currently using social media, 27% corresponds to Baby Boomers and four out of five persons within Generation Y prefer social media when it comes to obtaining information about a certain brand (Grzesiak, 2018). Personal marketers can also have presence in other channels such as content marketing, web pages and buzz marketing (Grzesiak, 2018).

Social media is useful to communicate a personal brand. Users of these platforms are constantly trying to market themselves as individual brands, with the purpose to acquire not only attention but also monetary and cultural value (Liu & Suh, 2017). Some bloggers become widely known to the extent that their fame is usually spread around both online and offline worlds (Liu & Suh, 2017). It is important to note that individuals participating in social media enjoy high levels of self-expression and creativity, as these platforms allow them to create public personas with empowerment and independence (Liu & Suh, 2017). However, the factor of authenticity is a very uncertain aspect in regard to personal branding (Liu & Suh, 2017). The definition of authenticity highlights aspects of remaining true and real, which could be hard to maintain during the process of building a personal brand in a market-oriented context (Liu & Suh, 2017).

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Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, LinkedIn and YouTube are among the most used social media platforms to create a personal brand and share content (Grzesiak, 2018). The success of the previously stated platforms relies on the self-disclosure factor, which refers to the reveal of personal information (Baccon, Chiarovano & MacDougall, 2019). One of the explanations behind the voluntary personal exposure, is the element of anonymity (Baccon, Chiarovano & MacDougall, 2019). Avatars, in this sense, are digital representations that reflect the real behaviors of a certain individual (Baccon Chiarovano & MacDougall, 2019). Avatars protect the anonymity element while expanding the level of communicative cues in the online context (Baccon, Chiarovano & MacDougall, 2019).

In conclusion it is possible to see that personal branding started off as performances where individuals displayed different fronts depending on the relationship they had with the surrounding audience (Goffman, 1990). Personal branding has since then evolved into a well-researched phenomenon within branding. It has been found that the impression personal brands establish in the minds of others, is dependent on the way individuals communicate, both verbally and non-verbally (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). The non-verbal cues stand for the largest portion of communication between individuals and are often expressed unconsciously (Kar & Kar, 2017). Over the past years it has become increasingly important to incorporate digital media into the management of the personal brand. The most commonly used online tools are, among others, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (Grzesiak, 2018). Social media is of vital importance when it comes to promoting personal brands and could lead to huge success for the individuals dedicated to this type of communication (Liu & Suh, 2017).

2.4   The Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework, Figure 2.1, was constructed upon the theoretical material previously presented in the chapter. It was created to visualize the question in hand regarding the interplay of online and offline scenes within personal branding. Each one of the components used illustrate a relationship that will be further explained in this section.
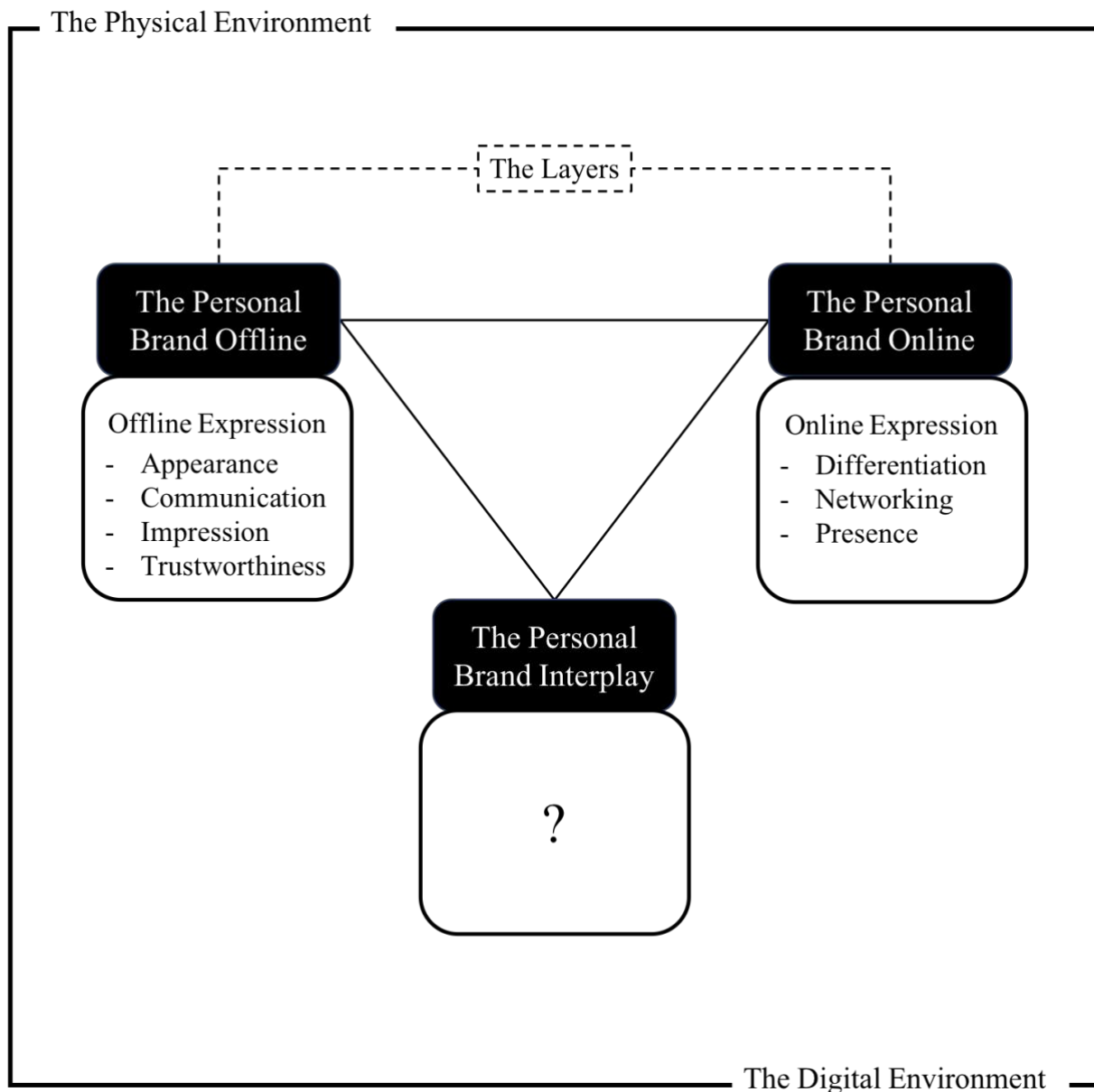
Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework

The outer structure of the framework is formed by the physical and the digital environment. Both environments are of great importance as they influence the inner section of the conceptual framework. It is important to know that the surrounding environment of the personal brand influences the managerial decisions, to fully understand the actions taken by personal brands. Both the physical environment and the digital environment are vital in this case. The physical environment sets the scene of how humans communicate with each other as well as how they express themselves in a physical meeting (Communication Theory, 2009). The digital environment enables communication and brand expression to not be bound to a specific location, but rather shared across the globe (Kraut et al. 2001).

2.4.1 The Layers

As found in previous research, there are multiple existing layers of personal brands. These layers come in play in different situations depending on the present circumstances (Goffman, 1990). The layers influence the way individuals are perceived by others as well as how they express themselves through different channels (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). The layers are present in both offline and online personal brands and the expression of the personal brand is dependent on the situational environment. Both the online and offline personal brand are influenced by the layers and as a result, the personal brand interplay will have a relation to the various layers as well.

2.4.2 The Personal Brand Offline

The personal brand offline includes aspects such as first impression management and appearance, which are both highly influential of how individuals are perceived by others and how relationships are evolved (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). However, an even more important aspect of the offline personal brand is the way it is communicated. Offline communication includes verbal, non-verbal and written communication. The importance of these types of communication is dependent on the context it is expressed in; but in general, the non-verbal cues individuals give off, generate a greater part of a message's impact compared to the words that are spoken (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). Further, the way that individuals communicate non-verbally strongly influences the trustworthiness of the person (Wood, 2006). Trustworthiness is a vital part of the core and values held by personal brands.

The listed components, appearance and impression will explore the image a personal brand gives off during an encounter while trustworthiness will focus more on the lasting image of a personal brand. The initial and lasting impression of an interaction is valuable to register as it can generate some amount of control to the brand manager. The offline personal brand is connected to the online personal brand as technological development have made it possible to transfer and simplify offline actions to an online setting.

2.4.3 The Personal Brand Online

With today's new technology, it is evident that individuals are choosing to portray their personal brand digitally. The online component is related to the offline component in the sense that lives outside the virtual world can be affected in real life. For instance, relationships can start through online platforms and become stronger once the individuals meet. Communication channels such as social media, also depict real life experiences into the web with the purpose to prolong memories and reach multiple target audiences at once, and by that extend the network of the brand. Thus, it could be said that the personal brand online impacts the activities happening within the offline component and vice-versa.

Online channels are great influencers when it comes to the way personal brands differentiate themselves from others (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2010). Differentiation must be considered as it is a strong motivator of personal brand management and could be a very influential factor of the personal branding interplay. Further, it is important to map the online presence of personal brands as the online channels used will enable different ways to portray the brand.

2.4.4 The Personal Brand Interplay

The interrelation of activities within the personal brand offline and online construct the interplay of personal brands. This interaction covers different activities happening simultaneously in both settings. It is important to mention that this interplay take place due to the level of dependency that both components have with each other, meaning that it is not possible to execute one on its own. It is the purpose of this thesis to further explore the personal brand interplay, as more knowledge about the component could strengthen the process of managing personal brands.

The conceptual framework will be used as a point of reference through the remaining part of the thesis. It will ensure that the researchers explore the aspects that are of importance in order to answer the research question, this by taking two precautions. First, an interview guide will be developed based on the components of the framework. Second, the empirical material will be analyzed in a way that it can fill out the question mark underneath the box of the personal brand interplay. The researchers hope to find out which aspects are of greatest importance when managing the interplay of personal brands. This to strengthen personal branding literature with a deeper insight to the phenomenon.

3 Methodology

This chapter will provide an explanation of how the primary data will be gathered. The reasons for why the chosen methods have been selected will be outlined and arguments for how this method will answer the research question will be provided. An outline of how the collected data will be analyzed is also included. Lastly, the quality of the study will be evaluated, and the limitations identified.

3.1 Research Approach

The aim of this study is to explore the interplay of offline and online channels in the process of expressing personal brands. In order to do so, information needed to be gathered from individuals that were aware of their personal brand. This data had to be collected in a proper manner according to the research philosophy and the research design of the present study. All of these aspects will be further discussed in this section.

3.1.1 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy includes aspects such as ontology and epistemology where multiple variances exist. It is important for researchers to have an understanding of their philosophical views in order to conduct research in a structured and consistent way (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Ontology regards the way researchers perceive the world, in other words how truths and facts are viewed (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). A relativistic ontological view indicated that there are many truths in the world and that what is seen as facts depend on the individuals view in that context (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). A nominalistic philosophy says that there are no truths at all and that facts are only created by individuals (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). This study placed on the scale between a relativistic and a nominalistic philosophy, however somewhat closer to a relativistic view. This since it was assumed that there are more ways than one to manage the interplay of a personal brand and further that it is dependent on the manager of the personal brand.

Epistemology is concerned about the way knowledge is gathered and understood (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). There are two main epistemological views in research, namely positivism and social constructionism. Social constructionism was followed in this study, which meant that the researchers could not be separated from what was observed, the aim was to provide a better understanding of the studied phenomenon and the data that was gathered had

to be rich and detailed (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). For this study it meant that the researchers were inclined to interact with the participants in order to understand them and it was of interest to learn about the detailed thoughts of the participants in regard to the personal brand interplay.

3.1.2   Research Design

Business concepts, such as branding, are often successfully evaluated with qualitative methods (Bryman & Bell, 2014). This argument was used as a fundamental base for the following choices made throughout the present research. Personal branding could be considered as a sensitive topic, and it could be difficult to get individuals to talk truthfully about their personal brand. Therefore, a qualitative method was considered to be the best research design, as it allowed the researchers to connect with participants at a human level with the purpose to learn how meanings are constructed through and within cultures (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Qualitative research is further in line with the research philosophy held by the authors. A qualitative approach also enabled the conducted study to be dynamic (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

However, it was still important to extract relevant information regarding personal brands in a structured manner, which is why the conceptual framework, developed in the second chapter of this thesis, was used as a guiding tool for the continued research. Multiple reasonings regarding theory development exist, and throughout this research an abductive reasoning was used. The purpose of an abductive reasoning is: *"related to the generation of new concepts and development of theoretical models, rather than confirmation of existing theory"* (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, p. 559). This imply that the research question was answered based on both previous theoretical research and empirical material (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). This imply that the results from this study was developed based on both previous literature and the empirical material.

3.2   Data Collection Method

The first step within the data collection process involved the development of a sampling strategy which communicated the selection of the potential respondents and the choice of method that was used (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Qualitative studies aim to describe in detail in what way data was collected and under which conditions. The researchers decided to apply a snowball strategy together with qualitative interviews, which is further discussed in this section.

3.2.1 Sampling Frame

The frame of the research question entailed participants to be enrolled into the personal branding phenomenon, individuals fulfilling those requirements were limited in terms of time, availability and geographic location. However, following a snowball sampling method was a strategy that allowed the researchers to easily reach key individuals with experience in the field of study and who, at the same time, had an interest to participate in the research. Snowball sampling begins with an individual that meets certain criteria for the inclusion in a research who is then asked to provide names of other individuals that could also be eligible (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). This sampling method was preferred over others as the recruitment strategy is time efficient and it helps the researchers to gather primary data that could be hard to collect with another method.

It is important to mention that the recommended individuals, resulting from the snowball sampling, needed to meet certain key criteria of this study, in order to be considered as participants. First, individuals needed to be aware of the personal branding phenomenon and, more specifically, they needed to have a personal brand of their own. Second, prospective participants needed to be older than 18, and be willing to participate in the research. Third, individuals were chosen based on their residence location, meaning that only people living in Sweden were considered. This because the recommendations that resulted from the snowball sampling method were individuals located in the same area as the primary interviewees in this case, within different regions of Sweden. Finally, it is significant to highlight that target individuals were not segmented in terms of occupation, level of education or gender with the purpose to give the researchers a broader base of potential individuals that had multi-disciplinary knowledge valuable for the collection of empirical material.

As a result, the participants included in the study were four males and three females. The youngest individual was within the age range of 18-29 and the oldest within the range of 49-60. In terms of occupation, elected participants were among academics, consultants, advisors, lawyers and managers. The participants were of mixed nationalities but were all, at the time of the data collection, residing in different cities in Sweden. An overview of the demographic factors of the participants can be found in Appendix A. Further, a more detailed description of each participant will follow in the next chapter.

3.2.2 Interviews

By conducting exploratory research, primary data was collected through interviews, in which the interviewees had the opportunity to provide non-restricted replies (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The choice of method was based on the fact that interviews are the most common data collection method for qualitative research as well as it is an appropriate method for gaining insights and understanding behaviors (Rowley, 2012). Interviews, further, make it possible for researchers to gather information connected to a context, which would not be possible to find with another method (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). In other words, it is fitting to use interviews when the researchers aim to understand the respondent's

world, as is the case for this study (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Because the aim of this study was to gather in-depth personal information from individuals that have an already established personal brand, interviews allowed the researchers to obtain the necessary data. Aspects such as appearance and language could be studied efficiently through interviews as the researchers could rely on observation techniques and interpretation of the interviewees' perspectives regarding personal branding (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

Preparation

Prior to the interviews, an interview guide was established in order for the researchers to make sure that the replies gathered from the questioning were steered in the right direction of the research and in line with the research question. The interview guide can be viewed in Appendix B. The questions included in the interview guide were based on the previously developed conceptual framework and were all developed to fit to the research aim. The first section of general branding questions was developed form the personal brand offline side of the framework with the intent to gather information about the individuals' values and principles, guiding their personal brand. The second section of the conversation contained questions that referred to the topic of trustworthiness, which was also developed form the personal brand offline side of the framework, in order to understand which factors were driving the confidence and belief of people around the personal brand.

The third section considered the topic of differentiation with the objective to collect information about the methods to increase and maintain credibility and distinction among others. This was developed from the personal brand online side of the conceptual framework, which is also the case for the final section. The last section revolved around questions about various online and offline channels used when expressing the personal brand, with the purpose to explore the interplay of activities through those scenes.

The interview guide was semi-structured, meaning that it left the interviewers room to ask additional questions related to the replies of the interviewees; in other words, the interviewees responses to some extent, guided the conversation. Further, the questions asked were open-ended, meaning that the interviewees were not provided with possible answers but rather had to come up with the answers themselves (Ellis, 2016). Open-ended questions were appropriate for this research as the main objective was to create an understanding of how individuals manage the interplay of different channels for their personal brand. In this sense, the researchers had the main goal to gain a deeper understanding, reflection and exploration (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015) of all the aspects that construct the interplay of the offline and online channels in terms of personal branding. This interview structure allows the respondents to give personal answers as it evokes confidentiality (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Confidentiality is especially important when talking about something private such as personal branding. The questions were evaluated by letting two individuals comment on the questions, regarding how understandable and relevant they were perceived (Rowley, 2012). After these external comments were gathered, the interview guide was updated accordingly to suit the purpose of the study in a clearer way.

Once the participants were selected, they were contacted, in most cases, via email but also through face-to-face interaction. Before proceeding to conduct the interviews, the participants were given a consent form, available in Appendix C, which entailed the primary objective of the research and the way the gathered information was going to be used (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The individuals had to read and sign the consent form in order to be part of the study; and due to location proximity, the participants sent a scanned copy of the form back to the researchers. The consent form further gathered general data about the interviewees demographic factors regarding age, gender and level of education.

Conduction

Once all preparations had been made it was time to conduct the interviews. Interviews usually last between 30-90 minutes; however, the exact length depends on the nature of the study, the respondent and the ease of communication between the interviewer and the interviewee (Ellis, 2016). It is also stated that interviews with questions regarding personal topics will take a longer time to conduct compared to interviews regarding impersonal topics (Rowley, 2012). Based on this, it was decided that the interviews of this research were going to last for quite some time as it regards a very personal topic and requires in-depth questioning and reflection. The conducted interviews lasted for 30-60 minutes per interview, apart from the two follow-up interviews which lasted for 15-20 minutes.

Considering that the participants of the present research reside in other cities than the researchers and due to a time-limited schedule, the interviews were conducted by using the digital communication tool Skype. This application allowed the researchers to interview individuals established in distant locations, providing more flexibility in the interview process (Easterby-Smith, Jackson, & Thorpe 2015). Moreover, the use of an internet-based application software enabled the possibility to digitally record the interviews, making it possible for the researchers to fully focus on the interview instead of taking notes (Ellis, 2016). Further, a video record made it possible for the interviewers to observe non-verbal cues, which was important to register for gaining an extra depth and context when analyzing the interview (Ellis, 2016). It is important to mention that the researchers developed a contingency plan in case that the application Skype was not going to work efficiently. If the video call was harming the quality of the conversation, the researchers were going to change the communication tool to a standard phone call to perform the interview. If the contingency plan had to be implemented the phone call would be audio recorded.

When performing the interviews, the setting was arranged based on best internet connection, lighting and privacy (Ellis, 2016). At the beginning of each interview, the interviewers greeted the individuals for participating in the study and briefly explained the purpose of the research (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). There was a small introduction to the topic with the purpose to arise the interest of the interviewees and to create a more comfortable and relaxed environment. By connecting the interview to a topic related to something ongoing in the interviewee's life, and/or profession, it will make them more talkative and engaged in the interview (Rowley, 2012). Before the questioning begun, the participants were asked if they had any questions regarding the topic. Any initial questions were answered before the researchers continued conducting the interview section by section. Before finalizing the

interview, the interviewers asked the participants if they had any comments or further questions that they would like to discuss (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). If there were no additional opinions, the researchers proceeded to incorporate the snowball strategy in order to obtain other interviewees that could be of interest for the research. Lastly, the researchers made sure to thank the interviewees for their participation.

3.3   Data Analysis

Immediately after the interview had been conducted, the researchers took notes of the highlights they could recall from the interview without any discussion taking place. This to get a broad overview of the gathered data while it remained fresh in mind. When the interviews had been conducted, the information was transcribed into text (Rowley, 2012). The transcription was done by using Google Doc Voice Typing, which helped to speed up the process of transforming the information from audio to text.

Interpreting qualitative data is closely linked to the research philosophy that has been employed (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Since the nature of this study is between a realistic and nominalistic approach, more inclined into the realistic perspective; the data was interpreted through a grounded analysis theory. Researchers that implement this type of approach into their study, aim to create theory from categories that are in some way grounded in the data that has been collected (Charmz 2014 cited in Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). In other words, grounded analysis targets to *"derive structure (i.e. theory) from data in a process of comparing different data fragments with one another, rather than framing data according to a pre-existing structure"* (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015, p.191). Previous studies describe grounded analysis as a more inductive reasoning, since it tries to understand the meaning of fragments of data in a particular context in which they were constructed (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). On the account of this and the fact that an abductive reasoning was used in the present study, the researchers considered that the grounded analysis approach was compatible with the research design and method previously stated.

3.3.1   Grounded Analysis

There are seven steps that need to be followed in order to conduct a study using grounded analysis (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The first refers to familiarization, which implicates to go through all available data including recorded and unrecorded information (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The researchers, during this stage, got engaged with the heart of the literature and empirical material with the objective to keep the connection between the grounded theory and the information that had been collected in mind. As a result, the researchers were strengthening the relationship with the people that were interviewed (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The second step is reflection, which involves the evaluation of the data considering previous academic research (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe &

Jackson, 2015). The researchers, in this sense, questioned the data whether or not the answers of the respondents provided something different to the study or in some way supported the existing knowledge (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

The third step entails the process of coding, which is achieved by creating links between cluttered and staggering data and categories (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). These categories are more systemic in the sense that they are developed from groups of codes that appear alike or related (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). For the purpose of this study, the researchers followed the first and second-cycle coding techniques in different steps of the analysis. The first-cycle coding was done by identifying differences and similarities within the text with the purpose to assign codes to sections. The development of codes implicated that the researchers looked for particular cues that could indicate where a code began to take place and where it ended. The fourth step refers to the process of conceptualization. This stage is characterized by discovering different patterns between the codes (Saldaña 2009 cited in Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The researchers identified themes, sub-themes and concepts that were relevant for understanding the sections of text. Once the codes were settled, the researchers proceeded to move forward to the fifth step, which is represented by conducting the second-coding cycle. This was done by organizing and incorporating the codes into a more analytical form (Saldaña 2009 cited in Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). This means that the codes were compared between each other with the objective to contribute with the theory-building process (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

The sixth step implies linking key categories with concepts and conceptualizing in what manner emerging hypothesis could be incorporated into theory (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The researchers, in this respect, created an excel document in where they compiled all the relevant categories, including important quotes, with the purpose to visualize the data in a clear way. The authors compared the material to identify patterns which could later be transformed into key concepts. This was done by color coding the patterns that were emerging from the comparison in the excel document. The developed patterns can all be placed in different categories of expression that are based on the conceptual framework. The categories are: the personal brand essence, the personal brand online, the personal brand offline and the personal brand interplay. Within these categories multiple themes and sub-themes emerged from the data. After understanding and identifying the most prominent concepts and categories, the researchers proceeded to incur in the last step of the grounded analysis, which is re-evaluation. With the help of external individuals such as colleagues and academic advisors, the previous steps were exposed to verification with the purpose to have constructive comments that could improve the study (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

3.4   Quality

To ensure the quality of the conducted research is a way to make sure that the research is useful and relevant to others (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). In order to establish the

trustworthiness of a study the following criteria need to be considered: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). These criteria will be developed further in this section.

3.4.1 Credibility

The credibility of a study refers to the truthfulness of the data, or how inclined people are to believe that the presented findings are actually true (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). To enhance the credibility of the study the researchers considered aspects such as prolonged engagement and persistent observation. Prolonged engagement concerns the time spent with and the range of people talked to within a setting (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Persistent observation regards the depth of the collected information and has the purpose to "*identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail*" (Lincoln & Guba 1985 p. 304 cited in Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

For the present study the credibility was ensured by conducting interviews with multiple individuals in order to find some consistency in the material. Further, it was important to convey trust between the interviewer and the interviewee by answering questions at all times and allowing the respondent to guide the conversation in terms of details about the private versus the professional part of the personal brand. Furthermore, details regarding the participants body language and surroundings were observed in order to form more descriptive portrays of the interviewees.

3.4.2 Transferability

Transferability of a research is related to the possibility to apply the findings to another context than the one present in the specific study (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The transferability of a study can be ensured by providing detailed descriptions of the context of the study (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). In this study the transferability was enhanced by providing a comprehensive description of the way the empirical data was collected, the participants included as well as how the researchers interpreted the data.

3.4.3 Dependability

The dependability of a study relates to the presentation of the collected data, which should be done in a way that it could be repeated and clearly showcasing the consistency of the findings (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The dependability of the study can be enhanced by including external audits. *"External audits involve having a researcher not involved in the research process examine both the process and product of the research study"* (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006, n.p).

External audits were conducted at several points in time during the present research by multiple individuals. The interview guide was looked through by two other researchers before it was put to use. Further, regular seminars have been held with a thesis supervisor who has been able to provide comments of the research aspects. During one of those seminars two other researchers also provided comments on the text. All of these external opinions have been valuable and contributed to improvements of this thesis.

3.4.4 Confirmability

The confirmability is connected to the naturalness of the study, meaning that the findings should be formed by the participants rather than the biased researcher (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). To conduct interviews without becoming biased is a difficult task, as it is very easy to unconsciously guide the interview in a specific direction, which could influence the respondent's answers. One way to decrease the chance of being biased is to provide open-ended questions, by letting the interviewee guide the discussion, his or her opinions will not be influenced by the researcher (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). This was employed by the researchers of the present study.

3.5 Limitations

There are some limitations connected to this study. As the interviews were conducted through Skype, the researchers were not able to control the setting of the interview on the interviewees side of the screen. As a result, the interviewees could get distracted by factors that were not within the scope of control of the researchers. It was not possible to conduct interviews face-to-face due to budget and time restrictions. Online interviews face challenges of immediate contextualization, depth and non-verbal communication of a face-to-face interaction (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). However, as the interviewees were in a place of their choice where they felt comfortable and familiar, the conversation was fluid and enriching which helped the researchers to collect abundant data. Moreover, this environment allowed the participants to easily access their personal objects and artefacts that could be relevant and beneficial to show during the conversation (Lo Iacono, Symonds & Brown, 2016). Conducting interviews through Skype also granted the researchers the possibility of scheduling follow-up questions with the participants as the meeting could be flexible in terms of time and place for both parties.

An internet-based application software such as Skype is highly dependent on an efficient connection to the network system, which means that if access to the internet is limited, the interview would not be efficiently performed, and data could not be collected. Having a contingency plan, in this sense, helped the researchers to be confident enough while performing the interviews as the second alternative could also be employed to gather the needed information.

Another limitation of the present research is the potential negative effects that snowball sampling might implicate. The composition of sample of targets that were selected by initial participants could lead to biased means due to characteristics and interests that the initial participants might have, in relation to the potential recommendations (Marcus, Weigelt, Hergert, Gurt, & Gelléri, 2017). As a result, the people interviewed could show a repetitive behavior pattern distinctive from a specific field, compromising the quality of the data collected. Nevertheless, the researchers developed key criteria that the recommended individuals needed to meet in order to decrease the possibility of biased data. The criteria, previously described, allowed the researchers to determine whether or not an individual could add enriching knowledge and information to the present study.

4 Empirical Data

The data collected from seven interviews will be displayed and sorted into categories based upon the conceptual framework. The information will be developed into various themes which will be referred to in the upcoming data analysis. The themes cover thoughts, opinions and statements that are similar across and within interviews. The themes that have emerged are: the personal brand essence; expression of personal brands in an offline context; expressions of personal brands in an online setting; the dynamic integration of scenes; personality layers in action; managing personal brands; transforming personal brands; reasoning of personal brands. Furthermore, a short description of each interview and interviewee will be provided.

4.1 Participant Profiles

In this section all participants will be introduced in order to set the scene of each encounter, to provide a better understanding of the motives and thoughts that guided the individuals through the conversation. In order to keep the confidentiality agreement with the participants, all names have been excluded from the empirical material.

4.1.1 Participant A

The first participant was previously known by the authors, as the researchers had participated in classes held by the participant. The male respondent was very eager and interested in talking about his personal brand and spoke openly about his values and opinions. Further, he asked questions during the interview and by that showed a true interest in the studied area. The phenomenon of personal branding has some similarities to the field of work the participant is dedicated to, since he works as a branding professor at one of the oldest universities in Sweden and as a branding consultant. His field of work is focused on corporate branding which means that he has vast knowledge about branding concepts as well as brand management. The interview was scheduled in the morning to fit with the schedule of both the participant and the researchers. During the time of the interview the participant was located in the comfort of his own home, which provided him with a relaxed atmosphere and enabled him to speak freely regarding his personal brand without any interruptions. The first interview with the participant lasted approximately 60 minutes and a second interview of about 15 minutes was also conducted. The participant helped the researchers with further data collection by referring them to two other individuals that matched the sampling criteria of the present study.

4.1.2 Participant B

The second participant was also earlier known by one of the researchers. The participant is a professor in branding and marketing at one of the universities in Sweden, he also works with student recruiting. The participant's research is currently focused on personal branding and he has developed a university course focusing on the same phenomenon. This makes him very knowledgeable in personal branding and incredibly valuable for this research. The participant enjoyed answering the questions and thought that they were really interesting. He was very open and provided detailed examples of the experiences that had influenced his personal brand. The interview was conducted in the morning and lasted for approximately 60 minutes, and the follow-up interview lasted for about 15 minutes. During the interview the participant was located at his office which provided the interviewee with a familiar and relaxed environment that enabled the participant and the researchers to develop a bond of trust. The participant contributed with several names of individuals that might be of interest for the study and as a result the researchers were able to reach out to two other participants.

4.1.3 Participant C

The first female respondent, work within career advising and teaches university students how to enhance their personal brand in the context of job applications. This gives her a hand-on experience of personal branding which was very valuable for the present study. The respondent was happy to partake in the study she further had a very positive and including demeanor. She managed to answer all questions but was not inclined to provide an excessive amount of details. This resulted in that the interview lasted for approximately 30 minutes, and it was conducted in the morning when the participant was at her office. The office atmosphere allowed the participant to stay focused on the interview without any distractions taking place. The participant offered to talk to her students about taking part in the study; however, this unfortunately did not generate any further participants.

4.1.4 Participant D

The fourth participant is currently studying for her PhD degree in branding and is thereby very familiar with the concepts used within the area. She has further paid attention to how she develops her personal brand and could by that provide insightful responses to the questions asked. The participant provided answers that were very on point and thought through. She was located in her home during the interview which was conducted in the morning and lasted for around 30 minutes. The interviewee was interested in the topic and was happy to talk about how she manages her personal brand. She was very reflective about the questions she was not able to provide an immediate answer to and organized her thoughts before providing an answer.

4.1.5   Participant E

The female participant is currently working as a communication manager at a global company and has a strong personality which she constantly expresses with her personal brand. Her practical knowledge in branding was very apparent in the interview and she provided the researchers with informative examples of how she manages her personal brand. There were some technical issues that occurred at the time of the interview which meant that it had to be conducted over the phone instead of utilizing Skype. The participant was able to provide valuable answers to the questions even though she had a hectic schedule with meetings and approaching deadlines. Even though the participant answered emails during the interview, she was able to remain focused on the conversation. With the hectic schedule of the interviewee, the final questions were asked while she was moving from her office to another meeting. The interview lasted for approximately 30 minutes.

4.1.6   Participant F

The participant is practicing corporate law at a small sized law firm in Sweden. He collaborates closely with a few clients over a long period of time which requires him and his personal brand, to be trustworthy. There were some technical issues during this interview as well, which meant that it was conducted over the phone. The participant was on his way to meet a client and therefore located at the airport during the time of the interview. This meant that the audio recording was, at times, disturbed by speaker calls. The environment of the participant was not the best location to answer questions about a sensitive topic such as personal branding since a lot of disturbing factors were present, which made the participant a bit uneasy. The participant found it hard to answer the questions and had to be eased into the questions in a softer way to get a bit more comfortable with the nature of the study and the researchers. The interview lasted around 30 minutes.

4.1.7   Participant G

As the researchers felt a need for one more interview, they reached out to the last interviewee which is previously known by one of the researchers. The participant is currently studying accounting at the oldest university in Sweden and work as a business analyst at a large industrial company. The male participant is the youngest of the interviewees and is at an initial stage of his career which took the discussion in a slightly different direction compared to the other interviews. The respondent was located in his home during the interview which was conducted in the evening and lasted for approximately 40 minutes. The respondent was very willing to answer the questions even though he considered some of them to be a bit tricky to reply to. He thought it was an interesting conversation and he enjoyed the opportunity to reflect upon certain aspects of his personal brand that he had not thought of before.

4.2   The Personal Brand Essence

All personal brands have a core, which is the essence that motivate individuals in their actions. When asked what the core of their brand was, some of the participants came up with an answer straight away, while others needed to think and discuss for a while before they could provide an answer. Some participants expressed that their brand core comes from their individual values and ideals. This has formed the way they manage and express themselves through their personal brands. One participant declared that his brand essence was freedom and his statement for this was that:

> **Participant A:** *The core of my brand, I would say is freedom. I don't want to be controlled by others. However, there is a time and a place where being controlled is needed.* (Interview, February 20th, 2019)

This shows that the participant is a very independent individual who is used to make decisions based on his own thoughts and opinions. Not having constraints in order to act, was one of the most fundamental principles that the respondent expressed. Moreover, the researchers could perceive that the individual had deep motives behind his choice of freedom as family and private stories came out in the conversation. This clearly indicated that the respondent was relying on storytelling skills, which is also closely connected to the core of his brand.

Another participant declared that his core value was trust, which was the result of making himself accessible to his clients when needed.

> **Participant F:** *My brand is being trustworthy and answering the phone whenever they want,* answering *email not in 24 hours but in 20 minutes If I'm not in a plane. I will say that that's part of the main reason for being somewhat successful in what I do; be on my toes. (...) That is quite of my branding, I make myself available.* (Interview, April 11th, 2019)

By this, he implied that it is very important in his profession to be present and accessible at all times. To always reply to clients instantly no matter what. This will create a bond of trust between the participant and his clients. The researchers could perceive from his tone of voice that the aspect of being reliable was fundamental for the development of his personal brand. He later indicated that trustworthiness could easily be turned into an asset for the companies he works for. This means that the respondent is convinced that his way of working will result in fruitful outcomes.

One of the other participants explained that the core of his brand was his reputation by explaining the following:

> **Participant B:** *The core of my brand is my reputation. I mean I think that's true for any brand whether we talk about products or companies. There is this cliché*

in, that has been around before branding, image is everything. (Interview, February 26th, 2019)

This shows that the individual feels very comfortable with drawing parallels between his personal brand and other types of brands, and he is of the belief that the reputation of a brand is what is most essential. Without a good reputation it would be impossible to perform well and have a strong brand. During the interview the participant often came back to family values, providing examples both from the past and the present. This made the researchers realize that family is very close to the brand core of the participant. In fact, he expressed several times that most of the decisions he has made were to ensure the welfare of his family. This indicates that family values are deeply rooted in his core without him consciously noticing as his brand essence.

Another participant declared that her brand essence consisted of openness, and she provided an example of her brand core in action:

> **Participant D:** *I will introduce people to my friends and (...) I say yes to most things and that's probably one of those things that are, sort of, my core values (...) I would not sacrifice my own personality just to make friends or I wouldn't say things to people to make them like me.* (Interview, April 4th, 2019)

By this, the participant inclined that she is open to share her contact network with others and she likes to invite people to be part of a conversation. She further likes to combine this with being a genuine person with a lot of humor that does not try to appear as someone other than herself. It is important to highlight that the participant showed strong emotions when she stated that being true to herself is more important than making friends. The researchers could perceive that the respondent was not afraid of showing who she really was in any circumstance, which demonstrates that transparency is also a part of her core.

Another way people show the essence of their brand is through the pursuit of personal or professional achievements. The remaining participants expressed more result-oriented core values, connected to what they as individuals achieve and the progresses that they make in their life.

> **Participant C:** *Quality, high quality! Do things with high quality, always. I have always believed that. If you're gonna do something you do it right.* (Interview, March 13th, 2019)

With this, the participant meant that she always wants to deliver her tasks to a certain standard. She further elaborated that if she will not be able to deliver tasks according to an agreement, she always makes sure to communicate that to the involved parties. This to ensure that the quality perception of her brand remains intact. Non-verbal cues indicated that the respondent was very comfortable throughout the interview as her hand gestures were used with moderation and the tone of voice was very natural and flexible. It could be said that the conversation was enjoyable not only for the researchers but also for the participant as she showed a friendly smile during the conversation.

Further, another participant focused more on diversity in her accomplishments:

> **Participant E:** *I think the core is that I'm a high-energy person that really can work together across a very broad spectrum of content, countries, people and really get things done.* (Interview, April 10th, 2019)

This implied that the participant is very adaptable to the prevailing circumstances and she makes sure to always deliver results. The participant further explained that she expects that things which have been agreed upon should be completed at all costs. She expects this from both others and herself; if she makes an agreement, she makes sure to keep the deadline and can at times be surprised that other individuals do not have the same expectations. The fact that she has moved between countries and companies several times, shows that she is very active and eager to learn from different environments. The researchers could perceive that the respondent was very efficient at multitasking as her busy schedule made her perform several assignments at once, during the interview, without compromising on the quality of the conversation.

Lastly, the final participant stated that his brand core was competitiveness:

> **Participant G:** *Being competitive. If it's a competition, it's not only about me impressing others. It's more like a game almost (...) For me it's a funny way to see it. (...) I want to be better than others, and like to turn things into a competition.* (Interview, April 11th, 2019)

The participant further elaborated that the competition aspect could be both outspoken or only appear in his own mind to guide his mentality towards the actions he takes and the tasks he accomplishes. The researchers could perceive from the conversation that the type of competition that the participant meant was not directly linked to the aspect of ambition. Instead, the respondent expressed that the competition he was talking about was a mental state that helped him to release pressure on himself and, hence, deliver the results expected of him.

4.3 The Personal Brand Offline

Individuals that express their personal brand in an offline setting usually do it with the purpose to demonstrate personal behaviors, values and principles that are difficult to display through online platforms. All the actions that take place in an offline environment are to ensure credibility and trustworthiness as well as connect with others at a human level.

4.3.1 Expression of Personal Brands in an Offline Context

When talking about the personal brand offline, most of the respondents agreed that even though we live in a modern and digital world, the use of face-to-face interaction and human contact is

still needed and used. Physical relationships and tangible activities remain as fundamental elements for the respondents.

> **Participant B:** *I haven't forgot the need to have face-to-face meetings, face-to-face lectures with students and I think that's a different dynamic so there's still a bit of strength in that too.* (Interview, April 25th, 2019)

The participant further clarified that there is a biological explanation behind individuals expressing their personal brand offline. According to the respondent's acquired knowledge, humans have a need of physical contact incorporated into their DNA. Human proximity such as hugs and handshakes are considered necessary for a proper development of an individual's mind. The respondent also added that even if there is no physical contact taking place, there is still a need to share the same three-dimensional space as others.

One of the participants highlighted that the extensive use of the offline channel will remarkably depend on the occupation or line of work an individual has.

> **Participant A:** *I think it's probably related to what profession you're in, if you're a consultant and what kind of consultant you are and so forth. (...) In my case, I would say definitely offline. I think it's probably part of the business I'm in. I mean the projects that I'm involved in.* (Interview, April 25th, 2019)

The participant further explained that even though the nature of his profession allows him to perform lectures practically from anywhere through the use of digital communication, his strategy process is directly linked to offline communication. In other words, the procedure that the respondent plans before performing lectures, is connected with physical interaction with people he knows.

An active use of the offline channel could be expressed in many ways. Participants agreed that expressing the personal brand on a daily basis through activities that are within the two-dimensional environment, comes along with multiple benefits.

> **Participant G:** *I think that's one of the benefits of offline: communication. Because that's when you're there with a person, he can look you in the eyes and you can ask follow-up questions and find what you're looking for. So yes, I guess, in general, you can find a better way. It's a more credible way or reliable source of information when it comes to personal brands.* (Interview, April 11th, 2019)

In this sense, the participant highlighted the aspect of trustworthiness. During the conversation, the researchers could note that the participant was expressing strong positive emotions towards the use of a face-to-face interaction. For him, the offline setting is the best way to gain trust as non-verbal cues could be observed and perceived.

Also, one of the respondents stressed the importance of meeting face-to-face with a client and the impact it has on his career.

> **Participant F:** *I learned from many years of experience that if they see you they will remember you, but if they do not see me they tend to forget (...) that's the best kind of promoting yourself: that they see you, so that's what I do.* (Interview, April 11th, 2019)

In other words, it could be understood that maintaining social interaction without technology interfering could be seen as one of the most efficient ways to improve brand positioning in the marketplace. The researchers were able to perceive that the participant was very clear and determined in his approach. The respondent later added that the achievements he has accomplished is due to his method of remaining visible.

Lastly it was found that respondents tend to adapt their appearance depending on the situation. This because the way individuals dress influences the way they are treated by others, and it is expected to dress in a specific way in certain situations.

> **Participant G:** *I think maybe how I dress, that's maybe one thing... That maybe sends signals too, and I try to think about it. I definitely dress in a different way when I work then when I am home or with friends.* (Interview, April 11th, 2019)

Appearance in this sense, was of fundamental value for the participant. It is evident that the physical aspect could be determined by the context an individual is in. During the conversation, the authors could observe that the respondent was dressing in a very comfortable way, which indicated that he was feeling relaxed to participate in the interview.

4.4 The Personal Brand Online

In today's society it has become vital to be present in the digital sphere both in a professional and personal context. The online environment enables individuals to communicate to large networks from a single location and digital tools are commonly used to enhance the personal brand and connect it to desired audiences.

4.4.1 Expressions of Personal Brands in an Online Setting

It is important to note that individuals have different perceptions of what type of posts are relevant or not to display online. The present theme was divided into three sub-themes with the purpose to clarify the difference between the collected findings, this refers to the various expressions of personal brands in an online context.

Channel Content
According to the participants it is necessary to think of the actions taken online, as all online activities taken by individuals directly reflects upon the personal brand image.

> **Participant E:** *Privately, I have Facebook, LinkedIn, not so active there, but I am active on Instagram. I do look at the things that I do so they do not damage my professional life. So, I'm not using social media in a way that undermines my professional personal brand.* (Interview, April 10th, 2019)

Hence, when expressing one's personal brand online, one must be aware that words, sentences and phrases could be interpreted in different ways as some verbal and non-verbal cues could be missing. The participant, in this sense, stated that being present in the digital world requires a certain level of precaution in order to avoid expressing a wrong image of the personal brand.

It is further amplified that the personal brand expressed online is not showcasing reality as individuals usually post a perfected image of themselves.

> **Participant B:** *I share the triumphs, the positive things and the more polished version of things. (....) online I try to manage things towards the more polished and positive me, I don't like sharing the negative stuff.* (Interview, April 25th, 2019)

The participant further clarified that his faults, imperfections and bad days were very personal for him and for that reason he prefers to keep them private. The moment an individual decides to share that negative side, that individual becomes more vulnerable he later explained. With this statement, the researchers could understand that the participant prefers having control of the image he portrays and avoids being vulnerable.

However, one participant was aware of this behavior and stated that it was important to show a more human side of reality on social media.

> **Participant D:** *If I take a picture and post it online that's my home, there're toys everywhere. I try to show real life. I try to be very open about that my life is not perfect, nobody's life is perfect or if I'm going through difficult times, I might share it because there could be lots of people that feel the same way, so I don't think we should hide that part of life.* (Interview, April 4th, 2019)

For the researchers it was very interesting to observe the communication cues from this answer. It was very clear that the participant wanted to share in which ways she was expressing transparency when communicating her personal brand. It could be perceived that both positive and negative events were important to show through online platforms.

Channel Usage

All participants incorporate some sort of online behavior in the management process of their personal brand. It is very common to use different types of social media such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram. However, a few of the participants have made an active choice of not participating in certain networks.

> **Participant A:** *I mean like Facebook, no! That's not for me. I think that it's probably more for when you're a private person. But maybe I'm wrong, but I think*

there's so much things that I find to be of less interest on Facebook but that's probably a part of my personal brand. (Interview, April 25th, 2019)

The researchers could perceive that the participant had a different idea of the use of social media such as Facebook. The respondent further expressed that for him, it was very important to choose where he wants to be seen as not having control over one's digital presence could be harmful for the personal brand.

Another aspect that was highlighted regarding the personal brand online is the amount of posts individuals create through social media. In this area results are differing slightly as some are more active than others on social media.

> **Participant G:** *I think my online brand is very weak to be honest, because I am not very active. I don't post very often on Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn. As I am not very active, I don't think too many go in to check that one. And I guess to really be showing, to be active you need to have references or competences. And I don't really rely so much on this. So even though that my profile is very good, I don't really have anyone to see it.* (Interview, April 11th, 2019)

The participant further highlighted that the reason behind his digital inactivity was that he prefers making friends and establishing relationships through face-to-face interaction. The researchers could observe that he felt more comfortable expressing his personal brand through physical interaction than through online posts.

Other participants were aware of having a certain amount of control when posting in social media as a lack of control could undermine their personal brand and image.

> **Participant A:** *I think when it comes to LinkedIn I don't bombard my friends or my network with a lot of stuff. A network like that would appreciate maybe two to three posts. I'm not an expert on LinkedIn but that's my gut feeling. I don't know what the algorithms on LinkedIn looks like but I'm sure if you post something, not everyone is alerted, it's probably much more advanced than that. So if somebody starts to bombard I think that's nuisance really.* (Interview, April 25th, 2019)

The authors could notice that for the participant it was very important to think about the possible reactions that the audience could have when reading his posts. This shows that the respondent is very serious and cautious with the amount of posts he intends to send. In other words, for him it is better to send few messages with meaning than several ones that could be ignored.

Other participants found it more useful to incorporate social media posts as a part of their job.

> **Participant B:** *YouTube is big, because I communicate my personal brand there. I'm starting to integrate it more into my teaching (...) you can turn your videos into YouTube videos, so with that and my coaching I have a few things on YouTube.* (Interview, April 25th, 2019)

In this sense, online channels such as YouTube could be seen as a useful tool to communicate one's personal brand. For the participant, it was evident that he was trying to look for innovative ways to portray his personal brand. Non-verbal cues indicated some amount of excitement when the respondent talked about the software's he was using to turn videos into YouTube videos.

One of the benefits that the online channel has is that it allows individuals to manage all the content that they want to make public. Thus, posts such as pictures and texts could be easily handled in a way that could be favorable for the users.

> **Participant A:** *I mean the online channel is very controllable, you could carefully think through what you're actually doing.* (Interview, April 25th, 2019)

The participant later explained that even with some small things like tweets, one must be careful with what is posted. Once the post is made, it could be easily removed but the reactions from the audience could not be changed.

Digital Perceptions

It was explained by some participants that online actions can build a more successful and mature image of the personal brand compared to what reality entails.

> **Participant E:** *I think you can build a brand online that is a bigger persona than I really am, but not that I do that. But people have this perception of all the things she achieves, she accomplishes, that is maybe one specific thing.* (Interview, April 10th, 2019)

The participant clearly stated that even though her intentions were not inclined to create a stronger or more interesting persona than she really is, her fascinating background and experience could not easily be ignored. The researchers perceived that the participant was more eager to show accomplishments as an activist than as a professional. In other words, her role as an activist implicates more contact abroad through online platforms compared to her actual job, where she gets physical interaction with her co-workers.

Lastly, individuals who have only been in contact with each other online create an image of the person they have been communicating with. This image could be very contradictory compared to the real person. This might result in surprised reactions in a face-to-face meeting, where the image that has been built does not match with the image of the actual person.

> **Participant G:** *I think people can be shocked when they see that I'm only a youngster, maybe they perceive me different based on my emails.* (Interview, April 11th, 2019)

It is not a surprise that individuals portray a different image online than offline, as some non-verbal cues go missing. It was very interesting for the authors to observe and understand that sometimes the true self cannot be entirely expressed in the online channel. Several images could be perceived through digital channels because every mind works in different ways. As a result,

there is a discrepancy between the actual personal brand and the one that is perceived by the audience.

4.5   The Personal Brand Interplay

When it comes to the interplay of the personal brand, the most prominent themes are the dynamic integration of scenes and the personality layers in action. Apart from this, it has also been possible to identify several other themes that influence the personal brand interplay. These influential themes are called managing personal brands, transforming personal brands and emotional/rational reasoning of personal brands.

4.5.1   The Dynamic Integration of Scenes

Nowadays, developing a digital and physical presence is perceived as a single activity rather than performing two different and independent actions. It was clear that the participants felt a strong need to incorporate both offline and online channels into the management of their personal brand. This was expressed by one of the participants in the following way:

> **Participant D:** *Your offline brand is everything that you do when you talk to people, when you meet people, it doesn't matter if it's on the bus or in a classroom with 300 students. But if you're not online as well, especially things like LinkedIn, it's difficult for your career and that's why I think you should have an online presence as well.* (Interview, April 4th, 2019)

Researchers could perceive that for this participant managing the two channels simultaneously was fundamental. It is true that the offline setting is of great importance when developing one's personal brand. However, the new generations emerging from today's society, are interacting more with digital appliances than with face-to-face contact. Hence, it could be said that in some way, current lifestyles are pushing personal branders to have both channels integrated.

It is important to mention that, when asked, the participants expressed that they find online and offline channels unequal in terms of trustworthiness. Most of the participants expressed that offline channels evoke more trust than online channels do.

> **Participant G:** *I think offline is, for me, more credible. I mean that you can really see the person you talk to and you can ask your own questions, you really understand him. But being online is a good way to get attention, to get close to people (...). I think online is a good way to attract people and the offline thing is to really show who I am and express who you are and really impress them.* (Interview, April 11th, 2019)

Even though some digital platforms can deliver almost the same results as face-to-face interactions, the participant stated that these channels serve different purposes. The authors could understand that the participant had made a clear distinction between the offline and online channel in terms of intentions. For him, the only reliable way to express one's personal brand is through the offline context while the online channel, could be used to strengthen previously established relationships.

Some participants stated that online tools and platforms can help an individual in the process of building trustworthiness. However, in order to actually inspire reliability, one should incur into physical interaction with others.

> **Participant A:** *I think that the online can support and kind of build and confirm and document trustworthiness. But true trust and true trustworthiness you gain by meeting people.* (Interview, April 25th, 2019)

With the previous statement it could be understood that even though both channels are needed, the online setting is perceived as an endorsing channel. In other words, digital platforms could be used to reinforce one's personal brand expressed in the physical world. Having the support of the online channel could create consistency throughout the communication of one's personal brand; and hence, build a more reliable image in the eyes of others.

4.5.2   Personality Layers in Action

Multiple interviewees state that they are adapting their personality and their behavior to different contexts, both in an online and an offline setting. This is often dependent on the individuals they are surrounded by.

> **Participant B:** *I think our personalities are a bit like chameleon skins, they adapt to the environment they're in. (...) In each of these personal, professional tags or environments you have slightly different versions of my personality, different parts of me come out. I can be more myself in front of some people, I have to be a little more polished and professional and maybe a bit guarded in other situations around other people.* (Interview, February 26th, 2019)

It was apparent that the participant had clearly registered that he was adapting to different situations, and that he recognized this behavior. Even though he states that he shows different versions of his personality, some of them come more naturally to him as he feels more like himself.

Participants recognized that some of their actions might not fit the situation or context they are in. For this reason, some of the respondents stated that they have to be cautious of what they say or how they act.

> **Participant C:** *I say what I think depending on the situation, I either tell people or I keep it to myself. But usually people know what I think.* (Interview, March 13th, 2019)

The participant indicated that it is not always important to speak her mind, but when it is, she finds it easy to do so, as she is comfortable in her own mind and have faith in that her actions are accurate.

Based on the fact that personal brands might be situational, participants believe that different environments and people require different versions of their personal brand to be on display.

> **Participant G:** *I have different personalities (...) I adapt based on the people that I'm in contact with at work or what I'm working on. When I talk to someone in the finance department I will not try to sound like an expert in finance since they have much more experience. But if I'm out in the production department I'm there for my finance expertise so I talk more about it and, you know, am more confident in the way I approach things.* (Interview, April 11th, 2019)

The participant further elaborated that he changes his behavior noticeably depending on the task at hand and the people he is around. This includes the way he dresses as well as the way he speaks and interacts with people. In some contexts, he feels free to joke around and be a bit goofy, which he feels is not appropriate in other situations. This indicates that he enhances and suppress certain aspects of his personality depending on the situation.

Nevertheless, one participant highlighted that even if individuals portray different personalities in different situations, it is important not to forget about all the beliefs and values that conform the personal brand.

> **Participant D:** *It's all about being true to your core values (...) if I'm in a job situation and I have 300 students in my classroom I have to consider certain things because they expect kind of a different side of me than my husband would at home (...) I'll always try to make sure that I remain true to myself with the values that I have.* (Interview, April 4th, 2019)

By this the participant meant that no matter what is expected of her, by her different audiences, she tries to stay true to her brand essence. She wants to always express herself in a way that is in line with her values and beliefs. This foundation makes her feel confident in her actions and keep her on track to achieve her personal goals.

Another participant stated that the inner part of the brand core should not be modified as a whole. Instead, the outer part of the core, which is more flexible, could be adapted to different contexts.

> **Participant E:** *I also think that (...) you have a brand core but the softer areas around the core are very much situational because you dial up and you dial down, so you change depending on where you are and what you need to accomplish in*

a specific situation. (...) And because of that I believe that I'll always stay relevant as a person, as a professional and as a brand. (Interview, April 10th, 2019)

The participant returned to the expression of dialing up and down her specific personality traits depending on the situation, multiple times during the interview. She explained that she adapts her personality, or the expression of her personality, dependent on the present stakeholder in order to match the situation.

4.5.3 Managing Personal Brands

Managing the perception of others regarding one's personal brand could be a difficult and overwhelming task. However, respondents explained that one of the aspects that facilitates the personal brand management is to make it a continuous and natural process.

> **Participant C:** *Brand management is an ongoing process. Might not be aware of an updating process. When you get older you might reflect a bit more than when you're younger.* (Interview, March 13th, 2019)

It was clear that the participant had changed her approach to her personal brand with time. She is more reflective than she has been in the past and frequently stop in order to think about the things she does and show with her personality in an entirely different way than she did in in previous years.

Some of the participants described the process of managing a personal brand as a daily life activity, that could be easily transformed into a routine of improvement by talking to other people. When asked about when the personal brand was managed the participant replied:

> **Participant E:** *I constantly think of it, maybe not as a brand but as what is needed. And of course my manager, the CEO, he expect me to be in control of these things (...) It's a way of strengthening your personal brand by getting it steered by the main stakeholders, so you allow that main stakeholders, in this case the manager or other people, to give me the input that actually helps me to strengthen my brand again. Because they try to steer which behavior I strengthen and empathize versus maybe all the behaviors that I do less. So, it's a constant process, basically an everyday process.* (Interview, April 10th, 2019)

This showed that the participant appreciates to receive external comments in order to strengthen her personal brand. She wants to continuously work with improving herself and want to check if the perception of herself is the same as other individuals image of her. If it is not a match, she wants to know that so she can work on the aspects that differ from her perception and her image.

Others stated that due to the fact that personal brands come from deep characteristics of the self, the management of one's personal brand should be an ordinary and flowing process that could be practiced on a regular basis.

Participant D: *I think it's something that if your personal brand is natural to you, you do it all the time because it manifests itself in kind of every situation. So it's not like I'm thinking daily that this is my brand and I have to think about it and think about what I'm doing it just comes naturally in every situation (...) However in certain situations you have to consider it a bit more, you have to think about it. If I go to a conference let's say that's probably when you have to put more effort into thinking; okay how is this perceived, and you know, trying to realize what is expected of me in this situation. And how can I show the best qualities and you know, whatever it is. But otherwise I think you do it kind of daily it's just less formal management of your brand.* (Interview, April 4th, 2019)

This provided a good example of that individuals might feel a bigger pressure to conduct themselves in a specific manner if the situation is not of everyday character. If something that is not considered to be ordinary take place it is easy to become more structured in the expression of self.

One of the participants mentioned that external factors are difficult to control, especially when it comes to people's perceptions. Nevertheless, one could focus on their own personal actions and thoughts that could affect others.

Participant B: *I can control what I think of myself but I can't control what other people think of me, the best I can hope to do is to influence attitudes and behaviors (...) I can influence the words that come out of my mouth and hopefully the brain and the heart that stands between those words or the actions I take around others.* (Interview, February 26th, 2019)

With this the participant wanted to demonstrate that it is not possible to directly decide what others think of you, it is up to the beholder to own his or her own opinion regarding the personal brand. However, all the actions taken by the personal brand will portray a certain image of that individual which will leave an impression in the minds of others and this could, to some extent, influence the given impression.

One respondent also stated that it is important to develop some actions and skills in order to keep control of and successfully manage the personal brand.

Participant D: *I wouldn't say I try to develop new skills just because they're fun, is more about to build on to the stuff I'm good at or that I know that I need to develop. Sometimes I think it's better to develop the skills that you already are good at because otherwise you might be spending time in something that doesn't really makes sense.* (Interview, April 4th, 2019)

This showed the participants strong motivator of being relevant. She gets frustrated if she wastes her time on irrelevant things. She always makes sure to have a purpose with the things she does and the skills that she develops to keep herself satisfied with her personal development.

4.5.4 Transforming Personal Brands

As circumstances change over time, so do people's choices and lifestyles. Participants expressed that due to the fact that society is rapidly changing towards new trends and digitalization, they had to modify certain characteristics of their personal brand in order to fit the demands and mindsets of the present environment.

> **Participant B:** *I think I'm going across a bridge for me right now. And I'm leaving the offline behind and moving more and more towards the online, which implies online is becoming stronger.* (Interview, April 25th, 2019)

The participant wanted to clearly illustrate that his personal brand was transforming in terms of availability with him using more digital channels. He further reflected upon that the digital channels are seen as obvious for a younger generation but for him it requires some more adaptation to get adjusted. In his opinion, it is a generation issue to include digital channels naturally or not.

Moreover, one participant highlighted that experiences play an important role in the development of a personal brand. In this sense, life events could change an individual's thinking and actions which could be reflected on the projection of the personal brand.

> **Participant D:** *Being a mother has made my brand different, I think it kind of evolves naturally (...) my experiences have created my brand and I try to show it.* (Interview, April 4th, 2019)

With this statement the participant indicated that she has transformed as a person since she became a mother and that she views the world in a different way compared to before she was a parent. Fundamental life-changes such as becoming a parent will change the way the personal brand is expressed according to the participant.

4.5.5 Reasoning of Personal Brands

According to the participants, the context is vital when it comes to whether reasoning should be done rationally or emotionally. Further, it is stated that it is difficult to only reason rationally or emotionally as they are interconnected.

> **Participant G:** *I think the rational side, this is my personal view, is more prevailing or suitable. It's a bigger impact when you work close within the department or in the same company. While on social media you really don't know the person, you probably don't know him. Or on LinkedIn and it's someone you want to employ, you can't really see him in action maybe the emotional side gets the upper hand.* (Interview, April 11th, 2019)

By this, the participant indicated that he believes that individuals with personal brands can benefit from both emotional and rational reasoning depending on the situation. According to

his reasoning, it is better to act with ration if the individuals have a strong, or at least continuous relationship. If the relationship is more superficial, it is beneficial to use emotional reasoning as it connects to others in an easier manner. To form and maintain a rational relationship with someone without physical interaction is very hard according to the participant.

One participant mentioned that combining rational and emotional reasoning could lead to differentiation and trustworthiness aspects. This could be achieved through sentimental connections with the audience and by incorporating logical thoughts into one's personal brand.

> **Participant D:** *It's a mixture of both because being a researcher is very science-based, facts, you're very rational in whatever it is you're doing. And it's a very big part my brand, being a PhD student and writing publications and you know what not, do research. So of course that has to be a big part of my brand but I think what makes my personal brand more exciting is the fact that I myself am being, you know, I'm genuine, I make people relax which is also you know, a way to create trustworthiness, it is a combination of both.* (Interview, April 4th, 2019)

This indicated that the participant needs to combine both emotional and rational reasoning in her role in order to be successful. She elaborated that emotional reasoning is closely connected to portray trustworthiness. She finds it very difficult to have trust for a person that is only using rational reasoning. The world is not as black and white as a 100% rational reasoning entails.

Emotional and rational reasoning, according to another participant, could not be applied independently since there are some logical actions that are connected to the emotional side of the human brain.

> **Participant B:** *I don't think that rational and emotional are mutually exclusive, my answer is you can't have one without the other because rational things connected to trust have an emotional component and those who are emotional have a rational component.* (Interview, February 26th, 2019)

The participant provided an illustrative example of this, which stated that individuals who have worked to reach an explicit goal and who have had clear figures of how to reach that goal but still not been able to reach it, have an emotional reaction to a rational situation. In other words, the objective was clear, but once the goal was not met the emotional feeling of disappointment appeared as the individuals believed they deserved to reach the goal because of their hard work the effort they had put into the project. This example further shows that one of the ways to reason might get the upper hand of individuals in certain situations.

In conclusion, individuals with an established personal brand are considering multiple aspects and in what way those are influencing their image throughout all channels they use. Further, individuals are controlling their actions in order to portray their personal brand in a desired way. The empirical findings will be analyzed and connected to previous literature in the following chapter.

5   Data Analysis

This chapter will discuss and analyze the empirical data of this study. The findings will be connected and compared to previous literature with the aim to add further knowledge to the already existing body of information. Lastly, the previously established conceptual framework will be evolved with the newly collected data.

5.1   Personal Brand Essence

The findings from this study indicate that individuals have values and principles that guide the decisions they make throughout the expression of their personal brand. The researchers discovered that there were other aspects closely connected to the core. It is important to mention that such aspects were actively influencing the participant's answers during the conversation, despite the fact that the individuals themselves were not aware of having those aspects as a part of their brand essence. As a result, the researchers could identify a primary core and factors influencing that core in some of the participants' personal brands. Furthermore, it could be inferred from the findings that individuals' moral compasses could be a great generator of consistency and reliability for the personal brand.

Considering that the core is what makes people unique and describes the aspects that influence what is being said about individuals once they are not present (Bentley 2015 cited in Collada, 2015), the importance of personal values and morals in personal branding is evident. Having the brand core fundamentally rooted in personal values will ensure that individuals stay motivated and continue to develop their brand in the same direction. As a result, individuals can enjoy a smoother path to reach their goals (Grzesiak, 2018). On the other hand, the fact that some individuals are more goal-oriented is related to previous statements about impression management. More specifically in terms of self-promotion, where it is important to highlight results and talk about accomplishments (Bolino et al. 2016 cited in Gorbatov, Khapova, & Lysova, 2018). Competitiveness is further about expressing one's strengths to other individuals (Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2010), which will leave lasting impressions of success in the minds of others.

After closely exploring the implications that morals and values have on personal branders, it is possible to say that the findings from this study support previous literature and contributes to new perspectives. Multiple studies focus on the core on its own; however, this research expand the knowledge of an individual's essence in terms of other factors that are actively influencing personal branders' decisions and behaviors. In other words, there are other private aspects, such as family values and transparency, that individuals unconsciously integrate into their core,

which have an important role in individuals' lives. It could be interesting to further explore the additional aspects belonging to the core, but which are not explicitly identified by the personal branders themselves.

5.2   Expressions of Personal Brands in Offline Contexts

The empirical material suggests that even though digital technology has revolutionized the world, there is still a need for face-to-face interaction and human contact. Moreover, empirical material shows that regularly participating in physical interaction with others, could be a useful way to enhance one's personal brand in terms of trustworthiness. It was interesting for the researchers to discover that individuals perceive the online channel as deceiving and less reliable when trying to build upon one's personal brand presence. Verbal and non-verbal cues were fundamental elements that were present throughout the entire conversation regarding this theme, which indicate that individuals are, in some way, skeptic in believing in a world without physical interaction.

Previous literature explains that face-to-face interaction is characterized by the factors of trust and reliability (Wood, 2006). This is reinforced by the findings of the present research, as discussed above. Moreover, it could be said that this study supports the claims that the appearance of an individual influences the image of the personal brand and that it should be adjusted according to the situation (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). This claim has practical implications according to the present research, meaning that individuals with a personal brand take an active choice when it comes to clothing and they adjust to different situations. The adjustment might be dependent on either expectation of others or expectations that come from within.

This theme has shown that the collected empirical material supports existing literature with valuable knowledge. The participants confirmed the fact that physical interaction is necessary to create strong relationships based on trust. It was further assured that by having face-to-face interactions, multiple verbal and non-verbal cues could be observed, which at the end helped the individuals to decide whether the communication was reliable or not. Aspects such as appearance contribute to the existing knowledge by confirming the idea that individuals adapt their appearance depending on the context they are in.

5.3   Expressions of Personal Brands in Online Settings

The empirical results indicate that individuals know that digital posts should be created with caution. It was interesting for the researchers to discover that some individuals are more comfortable with only posting the positive side of their lives; while others seemed to believe that sharing both negative and positive events could be a way of showing transparency. It is

evident that personal branders have an ideal image that they want to portray, which is connected to personal core values and moral compasses of the individual. Being active or inactive in social media could be interpreted as an activity that depends on the amount of eagerness an individual has to share private and emotional moments with the public. However, it is important to highlight that some individuals prefer to share those events in an offline setting, since it could be a way to display trustworthiness as previously mentioned. Surprisingly, findings suggest that even though personal branders can regulate the content that is shown online, the reactions of the audience cannot be controlled. Consequently, discrepancies could emerge as the image the individual desires to portray could differ from the image that is actually perceived.

Previous research has stated that individuals tend to portray different images of themselves depending on the context (Goffman, 1990). Several layers could be displayed or omitted depending on the level of comfort the individual has in that environment (Goffman, 1990). It is true that it is easy to polish the behavior to appear more accomplished and as a sort of super human in a professional setting as all diminishing characteristics should be suppressed outside the own home (Foster & Oldenburg, 2017). However, empirical findings suggest that some individuals prefer to show a more realistic profile online by sharing faults and triumphs with the audience.

This study not only supports evidence from previous research, but also contributes with additional knowledge. Individuals have demonstrated, from the present empirical material, that expressing the personal brand online could be a risky activity, as the audience could get a completely different message than the one that is aimed. Moreover, the researchers have found that being active on social media will depend ultimately on the conception that an individual has about social networking. For some, social media is meant to be used to share private and personal content while for others, it is a platform that allows the personal brander to expand his or her presence abroad. Hence, based on the empirical material collected, it could be said that even though the online context is perceived as a controllable environment, some personal branders decide not to incur actively in such platforms due to the nature of their personalities.

5.4   The Dynamic Integration of Scenes

The results of this study show that it is difficult to express one's personal brand in just one channel nowadays, as both of the scenes are essential in order to be noticed in the marketplace. Contrary to initial expectations, individuals affirmed that even though digital sites are being used consistently, they are still considered as supporting platforms in the creation of an individual's personal brand. In other words, individuals perceive the physical scene as the primary source to make the personal brand reliable, while the online scene could be employed to reinforce what has been built. A possible explanation for this might be that face-to-face interaction is always needed in order to avoid misconceptions that could harm the individual's image, since the meaning of a message could easily get lost with the use of digital appliances. The findings suggest that personal branders are convinced of the benefits that the modern world

provides. However, they are still reluctant to depend entirely on digital platforms to express their personal brand.

Empirical findings within the theme of the dynamic integration of scenes confirm Kujath's (2011) theory of using computer mediated communication as a complement to face-to-face interaction. Previous studies have stated that negative consequences can emerge if one channel replaces the other, as both of them have different characteristics that are essential for the effective communication of one's personal brand (Kujath, 2011).

Therefore, it could be said that the present findings are consistent with existing literature and contributes with additional knowledge. The present research identified the activities that could be performed in the offline and online context within personal branding. The results suggest that individuals usually perform activities in the physical context to establish a human connection with others. Having face-to-face interactions such as giving lectures, meeting clients or even greeting others on the bus are considered great ways to express one's personal brand. On the other hand, individuals also incur into online activities mostly to get closer to people that are not close by. Keeping in touch with others through social media and sharing personal posts are actions that support and enhance the personal brand. According to this data, it is possible to infer that each scene, within the personal branding phenomenon, have different activities that serve individual purposes; but when combined, personal branders could gain multiple benefits.

5.5   Personality Layers in Action

The authors have found that individuals with personal brands adapt their personality depending on the situation that is present and the people they are surrounded by. Individuals display different fronts in various contexts and are aware of this adaptive behavior. This is supporting previous literature regarding layers of personal brands.

Goffman (1990) have concluded in-depth research regarding the different fronts of individuals and found that the type of relationship individuals has with each other strongly influence the way they act. In other words, it is possible for an individual to have a relaxed encounter with other people if they are well-known to one another. If the relationship is less familiar, a more strict and formal approach is needed in the moment of interaction. The layers of personal brands were later investigated by Foster and Oldenburg (2017) who stated that there are three main layers of an individual which are expressed in various situations. These layers are more or less relaxed. In a professional setting it is required to be the most polished version of the self and in private moments the perfect façade can be dropped, and it is encouraged to show more human traits.

The findings of this study support the previous literature regarding displaying different fronts in various situations and further adds that the essence of the personal brand remain intact, no matter what front is being displayed. This means that no matter if the individual is in a

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professional or personal context, they still have their core values to guide them which makes them behave in a certain way. However, the way of expression is dependent on the context and that is where the different layers come in play. It is possible to state that the way individuals interact with each other and how formal or relaxed they are in a specific situation, is dependent on the trust they feel for one another in that moment.

5.6   Managing Personal Brands

It was found that personal brand management is an ongoing, continuous process. This as it is always important to evaluate and consider the brand image. The participants stressed that they believe that brand management is a natural process but that it does not have to be a conscious action at all times. Further, brand management is found to be a way to reach the expectations of others and have a fundamental understanding of what is being expected of the brand. This theme is broad and cover multiple aspects, however, the most central part according to the present findings, is that brand management is related to the impression of the personal brand. Further, the brand impression was found to be influenced by aspects such as clothing and the perceived trustworthiness of the individual.

Theory regarding impression management state that the first impression lays the foundation of the rest of the relationship and the first impression is given in a very short time frame (Kar & Kar, 2017). The appearance of individuals is further influential of the impression and the level of trustworthiness the individual gives off (Wood, 2006). This means that it is important to consider the apparel that is being worn as well as if it is appropriate for that specific situation. Another important aspect is the one of self-reflection which states that it is possible to strengthen the personal brand by profound personal reflections that identifies weaknesses of the brand (Whitmer, 2018).

The findings indicate that individuals with personal brands are more concerned about the continuous impression they give off rather than the first impression. This add an empirical element for further exploration, to the existing body of literature which has focused more on the initial impression. As theory and practice are not fully in-line with one another, it is interesting to further explore the relation and relevance of first impression versus continuous impression in the context of personal branding. This is interesting as it can add a deeper understanding of how brand management is conducted in practice and clearly establish the motives behind those actions. The collected material is further able to confirm the importance of dressing according to the situation; however, this is most evident when individuals are transitioning into different parts of their lives. In other words, individuals who are changing or starting their career are more concerned about this aspect as they face new situations and people that they are not familiar with. To face new situations where individuals feel uncertain is always daunting, which indicates that it is a confidence boost to dress in a way that motivates the individual and gives off an impression of confidence and trustworthiness. Lastly, it is possible to confirm that there are benefits attached to individuals reflecting upon their personal brand.

Reflection provides an opportunity to identify strengths and weaknesses which is all good to know so they can be improved.

5.7 Transforming Personal Brands

The findings state that it is inevitable to not transform the personal brand throughout life. If the brand is constant over time, it is impossible to stay relevant to the market. The transformation can be founded in personal aspects or in external evolutions. However, it is clear that the brand will evolve multiple times during an individual's lifetime. The most prominent factors of transformation are technological development which require individuals to adapt and family constellation that changes individuals' closest relationships. New experiences provide a slightly changed mentality for individuals which transform their personal brand. The transformation of brands further enables the brand to stand out from the crowd and differentiate itself from the rest.

A significant technological development has been present for the past decades and digital appliances have become important tools needed for individuals' everyday life to function (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). The digital tools are further used as a way of differentiation and often come in play to distinguish individuals from one another (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2010). An example of this is how various social media channels are used for different individual purposes, while the overall purpose is to gain attention. Moreover, Dolan (2016) state that as the individual grows so will the personal brand.

This finding supports small parts of the existing literature such as differentiation, however it adds another area in terms of transformation. The transformation aspect is not rooted in the literature, it is appearing form the empirical material which means that there is a possibility to explore it further. The findings indicate that transformations occur on different levels and that it might take time to go through a transformation and further, that it requires effort as well as adjustments of the individual to be completed. This as a transformation is a fundamental change of the way individuals conduct themselves or the way they communicate with other people.

5.8 Reasoning of Personal Brands

The participants of this study indicated that emotional and rational thinking is equally important however, more or less appropriate depending on the situation. It was indicated that rational reasoning is best to use in a professional context while an emotional reasoning is preferred in a social setting. Another point of view regarding this is the closeness of the audience the individual is communicating with. If the communication only takes place through digital channels, where the individual is not close with the audience, an emotional appeal should be used to keep the interest of the audience. However, if the relationship is close and takes place

in a physical environment it is important to demonstrate that individuals are staying true to their words, which is why a rational approach should be pursued. Lastly, it is found to be difficult to separate these two approaches from one another as they are not mutually exclusive.

According to Keller (2013) it is favorable to use both rational and emotional reasoning in order to create a strong brand. This as it is possible to connect to both the heart and mind of the intended audience (Keller, 2013). Further, it is expressed that individuals' emotional and rational thoughts could be expressed through non-verbal cues during a conversation (Jain, 2016). Winger (2004) is also stating that an emotional bond will develop through physical interaction where it is possible to observe non-verbal communication.

In this sense, the findings of the present study have been able to confirm the connection between the classic branding concept of rational and emotional reasoning, to the sphere of personal branding. This as, evidently, the participants are regularly expressing themselves in a rational or emotional way. This indicates that the border between branding and personal branding is very thin in some respects, further that certain factors are directly transferable from one of the individual spheres to the other. It is further confirmed that combining both ways of reasoning is beneficial for the personal brand as it displays different aspects of the individual's personality, which means that the personal brand becomes more relatable to others.

5.9   Conceptual Contribution

The themes that have been found within this research are connected to previous theory as stated in this chapter, but some of them are also empirically driven. The present findings will further enhance the knowledge regarding the personal brand interplay, and it is possible to add the findings to the formerly established conceptual framework to clearly display the contributions of this thesis. The adjusted framework is displayed in Figure 5.1.
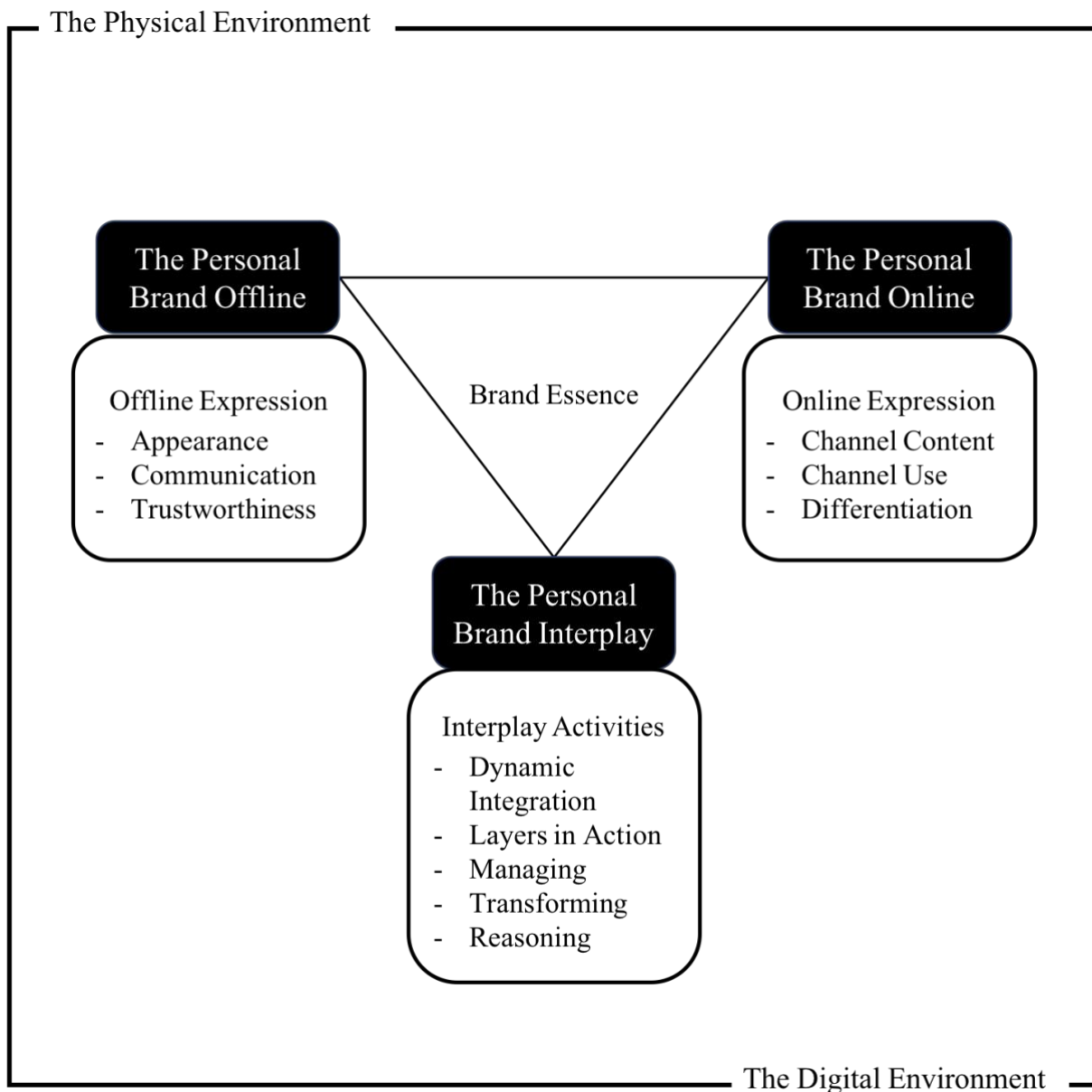
Figure 5.1 Adjusted Conceptual Framework

This figure provides an overview of the findings of this study and the identified themes have been added to the framework. This section will clearly explain the connections of the findings in terms of empiricism and theory as well as argue for why the various activities have been placed within that specific component.

5.9.1 Brand Essence

It was found that the brand core guides the personal brand independently of the context the individual is active in. It does not matter what individuals with personal brands do, their brand

essence is constantly a part of the self and guides the individual's behavior. It was possible to observe two different directions of the brand essence for the participants in this study, some were more value-driven while others were more goal-oriented. The brand essence is placed in the center of the framework to clearly illustrate its importance for the personal brand, independent of the active sphere.

5.9.2   The Personal Brand Offline

The personal brand offline is influenced by the offline expression. This includes the aspects appearance, verbal and non-verbal communication as well as trustworthiness. These factors have emerged from theory and it has been possible to confirm its relevance in a practical context. The offline expression factors are often taken into consideration in management decisions of personal brands. If individuals are aware of the impact these factors have on the impression of personal brands in an offline setting, they can use it to their benefit and strengthen their brand significantly. Impression is no longer included as a separate factor in the personal brand offline component, as the remaining factors are all strongly connected to, and thereby covering, the impression of a personal brand.

In terms of appearance, individuals usually follow patterns of behavior as well as verbal and non-verbal cues with the purpose to portray a desired physical aspect. The appearance will have repercussions on how an individual is perceived physically, which influences the impression an individual gives off. Once an impression is settled, certain characteristics will emerge from the personal brand, distinguishing its image from others. A stable image makes individuals trustworthy and reliable, which further improves the impression of the personal brand.

5.9.3   The Personal Brand Online

The personal brand online is also influenced by various factors. These factors are not found to be exactly the same as identified in the literature. This means that some of the factors are driven by the empirical findings even though they possess similarities with aspects included in the theoretical chapter of this thesis. The online expression relies upon the way online channels are being used as well as which channels are being used actively. Further, it revolves around what type of content is chosen to be posted in those channels. These aspects have emerged from the empirical material while the differentiation factor is anchored in the literature.

Online channels are found to be a factor of differentiation in the sphere of personal branding. This is further connected to the other factors within this category, as differentiation is expressed by the selection of channels as well as what is being posted in those media. Lastly, it was possible to observe that the online sphere has been included as an important part of individuals lives and their personal brand management process.

5.9.4   The Personal Brand Interplay

The themes identified and placed within the personal brand interplay are both empirically and theoretically driven. They have been placed within this component as they are all an important part of the interplay between online and offline channels in personal brand management. Each identified activity will be explained further.

Dynamic Integration

Since individuals combine offline and online channels, there is a great opportunity to enhance the personal brand presence through multiple means. As previously explained, both the offline and the online context have different channels that can be used to express one's personal brand. This means that if both of them are unified, one's personal brand could be easily noted, as it is possible to reach a broader audience than if only one sphere was included in the communication process. This theme has roots in theoretical aspects which state that online channels can support the personal brand image that has been built in offline settings, however the empirical material further adds the importance of combining online and offline scenes to enhance the personal brand.

Layers in Action

As it was found that individuals with personal brands are constantly adapting to different environments, or in other words displaying various layers of their personal brand depending on the setting, it was decided to remove the layers box from the top of the conceptual framework. The layer aspect was instead placed as an activity within the personal brand interplay component. The reason behind this is that it was very apparent that the participants adjust their brand layers in both the offline and the online environment depending on the specific situation. This theme is theoretically driven as previous literature clearly state that individuals adjust their personality, or the fronts they display depending on the people around them or the prevailing environment.

Managing

Managing personal brands is closely connected to the personal brand interplay as the individual must choose which channels to be present in, and which ones are the best to use for promoting the personal brand. The management process regards multiple other aspects such as clothing, how individuals try to differentiate themselves from others as well as how they portray trustworthiness. This theme is found to be both empirically and theoretically driven as it touches upon multiple aspects discussed in the literature but further provides a different approach to some of the aspects, such as the way to manage impressions. This activity was placed within the personal brand interplay as it is an ongoing process that take place independently of the sphere the personal brand is active in.

Transforming

The theme transforming personal brands, shows how a brand cannot stay still in one position; it needs to evolve with time. This means that some personal brands that have been existing for a long while and are used to only working in the physical world are beginning to learn about

the digital sphere and understand the importance of it. On the other hand, it is also about personal brands that have been developed in the digital world and find a need to be present in the physical world. These adjustments to different spheres might require some transformation of the personal brand to take place. Transformations can also be necessary if the individual go through major changes in their personal life. This activity is mainly empirically driven as previous literature have not explored the importance of personal brand transformation over time. However, it was very apparent that this was an essential aspect to the personal brand management process. Transformation often comes as a natural process as a response to changes of fundamental factors in individuals' lives, or as a response to external factors with massive impact on the individual.

Reasoning

Human reasoning usually follows the path of emotion or ration, and many times it is useful to use a combination of these two paths to formulate a decision or overcome an obstacle. By knowing if an individual is reasoning emotionally or rationally, it could be possible to predict how the individual will react in certain situations. This knowledge is very useful when individuals interact with others, as it means that the individuals can prepare their own response to the reaction of other people. In other words, if it is foreseen that a person will have an emotional reaction to an event it is possible to respond in an appropriate way to that reaction. This theme is theoretically driven as research has been conducted regarding the emotional and rational ways of reasoning in different situations. Further, it is known that it might be hard to separate these two paths from one another.

In conclusion, the conceptual contributions of this study are the identified activities included in the personal brand interplay. These activities are of major importance to the phenomenon of personal branding, as they add a different context that is up to date with the current society and further provides a deep understanding of the interplay of online and offline channels. The conceptual contribution of this study is focusing on activities of major importance for the personal branding interplay. Further, it provides benefits for both personal brand managers and branding researchers, as it can be utilized in practical and theoretical contexts. There is great potential in developing the framework further and enhance the phenomenon of personal branding with even more information in the future.

6 Conclusion

This chapter will provide the final research outcomes of the present study, which will explain the answer to the stated research question of the thesis. It will further discuss the contributions of the findings, both from a theoretical as well as a practical perspective. Lastly, some suggestions for further research within the phenomenon of personal branding will be provided.

6.1 Research Outcomes

This thesis has discussed multiple aspects regarding the personal branding phenomenon. The aim of the present research was to determine the interplay of activities between the offline and online context within personal branding. The main goal was achieved by answering the previously established research question of: How do individuals interrelate online and offline scenes when expressing their personal brand? The researchers incurred into a qualitative study supported by interviews in order to gather detailed and rich data about the personal brand management process. After all the collected material was properly organized and analyzed, the researchers could find themes and sub-themes that synthetized the essential findings.

This study has identified, through the development of a conceptual framework, the key activities personal branders can adopt in both the online and offline setting. As previously discussed, the interplay refers to all the activities that resulted from the offline and online expression of the personal brand. The findings confirmed that aspects such as appearance and trustworthiness have more significance in the physical environment, as verbal and non-verbal cues could be easily observed. Individuals indicated that in order to make their personal brand reliable, physical interaction with the audience was needed. On the other hand, individuals stated that one of the advantages of expressing the personal brand online was that they could have control over the channel content and usage. This means that the personal brander will have to decide to share either, both positive and negative fronts of their personality or only the positive side, which is a more polished version of the individual.

The results of this investigation show that the personal brand interplay can take place due to the existence of specific activities. First, the dynamic integration of scenes show that individuals rely upon both the online and offline channels when expressing their personal brand. However, findings reveal a clear distinction between both scenes in terms of purpose. Within the physical environment, personal branders could incur into activities that involve human contact with the main goal to create trustworthiness among the audience. The digital channel is rather used to support personal branders' activities happening in the offline scene. In other words, individuals make use of computer-mediated programs to reinforce the main image that they want to portray.

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Second, the personality layers in action indicate the way individuals can adapt their aspect and presence to different environments, more specifically the offline and online scenes. Third, the managing of personal brands exposed activities related to impression management, since individuals expressed great concern about keeping and enhancing their personal brand impression with time. Fourth, the reasoning activities are considered equally important in the expression of one's personal brand. Individuals shared that nowadays it is necessary to think logically while empathizing with others in order to strengthen the relationships that emerge from the personal brand. Fifth, individuals can experience life events that alter the course of their personal brand. Transformation activities can include actions that personal branders perform to move from one phase to another. Lastly, it is important to highlight that the core remains intact throughout the implementation of the previously mentioned activities.

6.2   Theoretical Implications

Since the aim of the present research was to explore the multiple activities that emerge from the interplay of online and offline channels, the obtained results add supplementary knowledge to existing theory. Further knowledge has been added to the theoretical database as the present thesis emphasizes the integration between the two channels through the employment of a conceptual framework. The authors, by identifying the activities that characterize the interplay of the digital and physical environment, have provided a broader understanding regarding the personal branding phenomenon. These activities, further explored, could serve as material in the process of building new theories. Moreover, the fact that previous literature has indicated a clear distinction between the online and offline setting, makes the present research more valuable. Hence, the uniqueness of knowledge provided in this study resides in the activities that make the integration of online and offline channels within the personal brand phenomenon possible.

6.3   Practical Implications

There are multiple practical implications that come along with this study since an overview of the interplay between the online and offline channel, in personal branding, has been provided. First, due to the nature of the present study, personal branders could obtain a deeper understanding of how to properly interrelate the digital and physical environment when expressing their message. Second, the findings of this thesis can increase awareness regarding the level of dependency that each channel has over the other, as nowadays both of them are equally needed. Third, this research contributes with valuable insights regarding the different activities' individuals can perform in order to enhance their personal brand presence. Fourth, empirical data from this study shows practical techniques and strategies that personal branders can adopt for self-improvement. Fifth, the findings of this study can be implemented in the management process of personal brands as several elements, within this process, have been

highlighted. Therefore, it could be said that individuals could gain competitive advantage by portraying their personal brand in both online and offline settings through the employment of the activities previously discussed in this thesis.

6.4   Future Research

It is suggested that future research should focus on other aspects that could be influential for the personal brand interplay, suggestion of such aspects are cultural settings and previous experiences of the personal brand. Furthermore, a quantitative approach to the management of the interplay of channels in personal branding could gather more extensive data, that could be useful to broaden the existing knowledge of the interplay and test which factors are contributing to a larger extent compared to others.

Furthermore, it could be valuable to conduct research focusing on each individual activity that has been identified in this thesis. Such an approach could provide and even deeper understanding of the activity's importance to the personal brand. Lastly, it is suggested that one possible approach to the interplay of online and offline channels in personal branding could be evaluated across different occupation categories. For example, how it differs between academics and influencers, or if there are similarities between CEOs and university graduates. All of these suggestions could provide interesting data to the area of personal brand management.

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Appendix A: Participant Overview

Participant	Age	Gender	Education	Occupation
Participant A	57	Male	Doctoral Degree	Branding Professor & Consultant
Participant B	56	Male	Doctoral Degree	Branding & Marketing Professor
Participant C	46	Female	Graduate Degree	Career Advisor
Participant D	30	Female	Graduate Degree	PhD Student in Branding
Participant E	52	Female	Graduate Degree	Communication Manager
Participant F	54	Male	Graduate Degree	Corporate Lawyer
Participant G	25	Male	Undergraduate Degree	MSc Student in Accounting & Business Analyst

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Thank you for participating in this interview. We sincerely appreciate the time you have taken to meet with us. Before we begin, we want to confirm that you have read, signed and returned the consent form? We will shortly introduce you to the topic and then begin with the questions.

First there was product branding that later turned into corporate branding. And in today's society it is possible to see a new form of branding, namely personal. Which is what this interview will be revolving around.

The interview is structured into four sections: General Branding Questions, Trustworthiness, Differentiation and Communication Channels. Do you have any questions before we begin?

General Questions

1. How do you believe others perceive you?
2. What is the core of your personal brand?
    a. How did you realize that was the core of your brand?
3. When are you managing your brand?
    a. In what period of your life did you realize that you can develop and manage a personal brand?
    b. Are you regularly updating your personal brand?
        i. Do you adjust to circumstances or different periods of time?
4. Do you believe your personal brand has an expiration date?

Trustworthiness

5. How do you manage the trustworthiness for your personal brand?
6. Do you try to establish trustworthiness of your personal brand by appeal emotionally or rationally?
    a. Is it important to evoke feelings or logic thinking?

Differentiation

7. How do you differentiate your brand to others?
    a. Do you tend to develop new skills in order to stand out?
8. Do you differentiate yourself in various ways depending on the situation?
    a. Clarification: By using different USP's (Unique Selling Propositions) depending on the situation?
    b. How?
9. How do you make sure that the differentiation factor does not affect the credibility of your personal brand?

Communication Channels

10. Do you combine offline and online channels when expressing your personal brand?
    a. How?
    b. Which online channels do you use?
11. Do you believe that your personal brand is stronger online or in person?
    a. Why?
12. Do you see any benefits of working with your personal brand through online and offline channels simultaneously?
    a. Elaborate please.
13. Do you believe that you portray different images of yourself offline vs. online?
    a. In what way?
    b. Why?
14. Do you believe that your message is perceived as clearer and more trustworthy in an offline or online setting?
    a. Why?

We just have one final question: do you have any recommendations of other individuals we can interview regarding this topic?

Do you have any questions or would like to add something before we finish?

Thank you for participating in this interview, it has been very helpful.

Appendix C: Consent Form

- I, XXXX, voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.

- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data collected from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded and visually-recorded.

- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be used for academic purposes.

- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

- I understand that the information I provide will be handled with confidentiality and that the information will be a part of a study published online.

- Gender

  ☐ Female   ☐ Male   ☐ Other

- Age

  ☐ 18-29   ☐ 46-60
  ☐ 30-45   ☐ 60+

- Education level

  ☐ High School Degree   ☐ Doctoral Degree
  ☐ Undergraduate Degree   ☐ Other
  ☐ Graduate Degree

Signature of Participant   *Place and Date*

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