

A Comparison Study on Personal Branding Among Academicians in Higher Education Institutions: A Qualitative Content Analysis

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Abstract

In this study, qualitative content analysis, specifically summative content analysis, was used to compare the study on personal branding among academicians in higher education institutions (HEIs). Personal branding was described for the main qualitative content analysis phases, from data collection to reporting of the results. To strengthen the foundation for future work, the author reviews the extant literature and offers an integrative model of personal branding. Google, Scopus, and Web of Sciences (WOS) were used to further search on the topic, specifically academics, case studies, and personal branding. A total of eight case studies were compared. The author establishes the construct's clarity by contrasting it with concepts that are comparable to it in its nomological network, highlights the construct's essential characteristics through the literature review, and offers definitions of personal branding based on the reviewed literature. In addition, the author summarizes the conclusions from the analysed publications in a theoretical model of personal branding. The suggested model describes the processes, results, and trends that support personal branding. The author concludes by talking about the moral consequences of personal branding and outlining a research agenda for future studies on personal branding as an important organizational behaviour and career activity in today's workplace.

Keywords

Content analysis; Qualitative research; Personal branding; Academician/researcher; higher education institutions

1. Introduction

People are increasingly inclined to expand their personal branding because of the benefits and services that technology offers. This began when Peters urged everyone to create a personal brand in 1997, and as more and more research on the subject was conducted, personal branding practices increased. Some argue that the development of personal branding is a step-by-step process that starts with the brand identity-building process, which considers the individual's strengths, values, personality, career objectives, and brand promise. From there, it moves on to the brand positioning stage and ends with brand image setting. To put it succinctly, there are numerous methods to build personal branding and strategic management [1].

However, not so long ago, surprisingly, there was a widespread misperception about "personal branding": seeing a person as a brand was seen as the "commodification" of people. Treating "personal

branding" as a "package" to promote the given services is another misconception. If we dig a little further, though, it really has to do with developing one's own professional identity and ideals that serve as constant guidance for that person in whatever career they choose. The primary component of this image is its personalization, which is based on the idea that a particular individual already has a brand and later develops their own brand. The person's trustworthiness, popularity, and reputation are what make this brand strong [2].

Malaysia started focusing on developing human capital in 1957 to help develop the nation and replace foreign workers. Higher education was therefore viewed as a highly significant and vital national agenda item. Prior to 1970, there was only one university in the area that offered higher education, and most of these students came from wealthy families that could afford to send their kids to further their education. There was never a problem with profitability, and there was very little marketing done to draw in students [3].

Higher education providers became "private business entities" when it came to survival and profitability, and the door to higher education was broadly opened. The education sector has now become a "commodity". Since Malaysian education rules have become more liberalized, an increasing number of private higher education institutions (PHEIs) have emerged to offer more space and chances to prospective students, posing new and more difficulties to 'actors' in the business. The same courses are being offered by far too many universities, and they are competing for the same few available spots. Therefore, the universities need to enhance their corporate image or brand and raise the caliber of their services in order to draw in and keep students while maintaining profitability [3].

Academicians now have an even greater challenge in the creative economics of education, which requires them to be competitive, skilled professionals who can advance their expertise in the field of information. Consequently, there are now new demands on academicians: they must focus on raising their level of achievement and competitiveness. The academic scientific environment had previously been passively waiting for the state to take notice of its vocational findings, but in the current educational services market, academicians should take an active role. They should be able to manage their vocational capital to the best of their abilities and identify the most lucrative areas of application, both within their own educational institution and in others [4].

Therefore, in this study, qualitative content analysis, specifically the study on personal branding among academics at higher education institutions (HEIs), was compared using summative content analysis. The primary stages of the qualitative content analysis were explained in terms of personal branding, from data collection to result reporting. The methods, outcomes, and developments that bolster personal branding were also emphasized.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A variety of qualitative techniques are currently accessible for evaluating data and deciphering its meaning, including qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis consists of a variety of meanings. Hsieh and Shannon [5] gave the definition of qualitative content analysis as "a research method for the systematic classification process of coding and theme or pattern identification through the subjective interpretation of text data content". Meanwhile, Mayring in 2000 defined qualitative content analysis as "an approach of empirical, methodologically controlled analysis of texts within their communication context, without hasty quantification, adhering to content analytic rules and step-by-step models." [6]. On the other hand, Patton [7] defines "any effort to reduce qualitative data and make sense of a large amount of qualitative material by identifying core consistencies and meanings." From this definition, it can be defined as the qualitative content analysis of speech and texts within their particular contexts. Examining meanings, themes, and patterns that may be overt or hidden in a given text is the scope of qualitative content analysis and objective content extraction from texts, which goes

beyond simple word counts. It enables academics to gain a subjective yet scientific understanding of social reality.

Current uses of content analysis demonstrate three different techniques, which are not a single method: conventional, directed, or summative. Each of the three methods follows the naturalistic paradigm by interpreting meaning from the textual material. Coding schemes, code origins, and trustworthiness threats are the main distinctions between the techniques. Coding categories are taken straight from the text data in conventional content analysis. A theory or pertinent research findings serve as the basis for the initial codes in a directed analysis. On the other hand, in a summative content analysis, the underlying context is interpreted after keywords or content are counted and compared [5].

In this study, the author provides an integrative model of personal branding after reviewing the body of existing knowledge. The author provides definitions of personal branding based on the examined literature, highlights the construct's key features through the literature review, and establishes the construct's clarity by contrasting it with concepts that are similar to it in its nomological network. In a theoretical model of personal branding, the author also presents a summary of the findings from the publications that were examined. The model also under consideration delineates the procedures, outcomes, and patterns that bolster personal branding.

BACKGROUND STUDY

Social media and computer-mediated communication have allowed people to utilize the internet to build and promote their own online personas, which has led to an evolution in personal branding. Currently, internet and offline self-presentation work together to support personal branding. The offline self-presentation and personal branding are thus not the same. However, personal branding isn't wholly unique and new, genuinely. Online brand-related word-of-mouth is significantly influenced by one's own self-presentation. Social media has given rise to a new platform for managing, performance, and identity development; technology by itself does not necessitate change. Technology, such as social media, plays a crucial role in personal branding. It describes the three key components of personal branding development: strategic, differentiating, and technology-based [8].

According to Tsiotsou [9], branding was initially employed as a tactic to set items, services, and businesses apart from one another in order to increase value for both parties. These days, branding has expanded to include people's personal lives in addition to other domains. "The need to define identities and stand out in branded landscapes is not limited to formal organizations" [10]. The idea of branding may be a powerful and useful tool for businesses as well as other establishments like cities and institutions. For instance, the Swedish city of Malmö has endured a reputation for having a "high unemployment rate" and "relative poverty." The municipality has branded itself in an attempt to address this issue and project a new, youthful, and international image for the city. The branding of universities is another illustration. "Universities and business schools are becoming promotional institutions and have adopted corporate managerial principles and strategies" [10].

As a result, branding is no longer only associated with big businesses; it may also affect other identities as well, such as those of individuals and institutions with a non-profit focus [10]. Tom Peters created the concept of the personal brand in 1997. According to the literature on personal branding, it is now essential given the conditions of the global labor market, which is known to be saturated or even more competitive than ever [10]. Furthermore, the idea of a personal brand has grown in significance over time, along with numerical advances like the creation of social media and changes to the macroenvironment [11].

Individual as a brand

According to Aaker [12], a brand is a name or symbol that distinguishes a product or service from those of a competitor. As a result, the early definitions concentrated on corporate brand management tactics. However, recent studies have expanded to consider "any well-known persona who is the subject of marketing communications efforts" [13] in addition to individuals as brands. Celebrities and athletes are not the only people who can be thought of as brands; the average person can also be thought of as a brand. With the advent of the digital age, which has made personal branding a vital tool for controlling and creating an online presence, constructing a brand identity has become crucial. Finding and showcasing a person's advantages and distinctive qualities to a target audience is the process of personal branding. This procedure might be comparable to that of product branding, which starts with creating a brand identity, positioning the brand, distributing brand messaging to consumers, evaluating the brand's effectiveness, and utilizing brand equity [14].

Personal branding can be defined in many ways (**Table 1**).

Table 1: Personal branding definitions

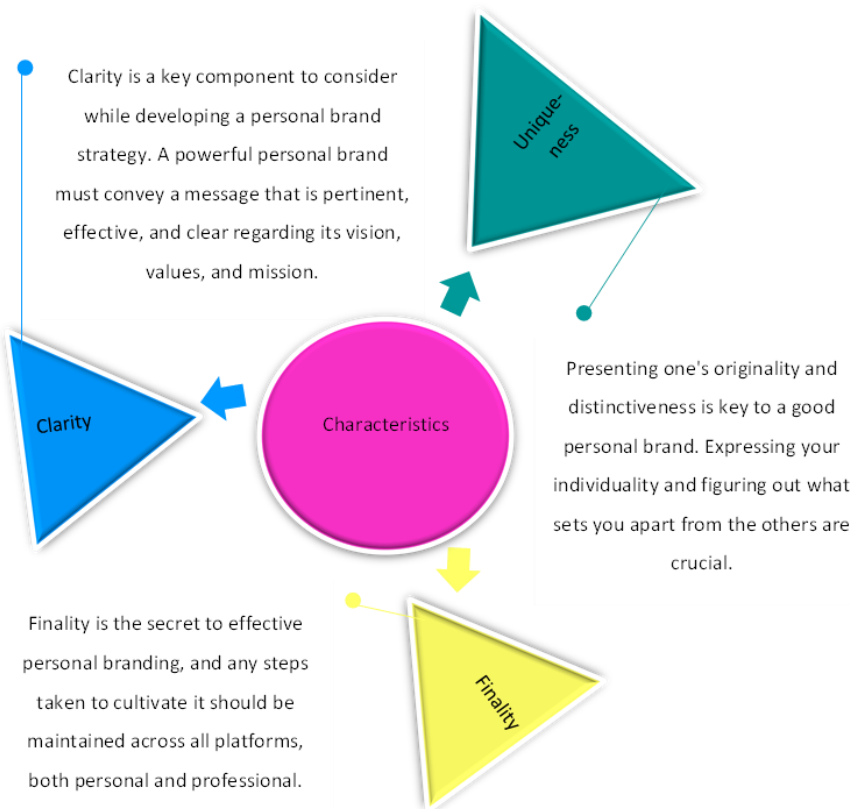
References	Definitions
[15]	A deliberate process of developing, presenting, and preserving a favorable image of oneself that is founded on a special blend of personal qualities that communicates a certain promise to the target audience through a distinct story and images
[16]	A proactive approach to work that makes use of marketing techniques in three different ways to advance one's career: strategically, differently, and technologically
[17]	Strategic personal branding refers to planned, goal-oriented efforts that are directed toward a particular audience. Second, personal branding makes the marketed self stand out from the competition or the frame of reference by highlighting important and distinctive individual qualities.
[18,19]	The conflicting demands for inclusion and assimilation and the requirement for distinction from the in-group, or ideal uniqueness
[20]	The main means of communicating visuals (such as a logo, pictures, and work samples) and associated narrative to the intended audience
[21]	Personas that are the focus of marketing, interpersonal, or interorganizational communications, whether they are well-known or relatively unknown

In short, personal branding refers to a collection of personal qualities (behavior, attitudes, beliefs, etc.) that are portrayed in a unique story and image with the goal of giving the intended audience a mental edge over competitors [22].

Personal brand characteristics

It is important to emphasize that successful self-packaging is the foundation for personal branding, which is the act of identifying people and careers. A personal brand can be characterized by the following three attributes: **(Fig. 1)** [23].

Fig. 1 Personal brand characteristics.



2. Methodology

The following keywords were used in a combined search of the search engines Google, Scopus, and Web of Sciences (WOS): academician AND case study AND personal branding. The following were employed as inclusion criteria: methodological publications with an emphasis on case studies within the social sciences that were published in English and had a time constraint of 2020–2024. About 11 methodological content analysis publications from databases and reference list checks were found during the search after considering 3 unrelated articles and 2 under review articles. When producing the review's synthesis, reference lists of the chosen papers were examined as well, and textbooks on qualitative and quantitative research methods were consulted. The author believes that reviewers of scientific articles will particularly

benefit from the discussion in this article, which clarifies how content analysis should be reported in a valid and understandable manner.

3. Results and Discussion

The literature search yielded results that indicated the sampling strategy, the choice of an appropriate unit of analysis, and the personal branding of the data collection process as the primary personal branding concerns during the preparatory phases. The author has created a checklist for researchers looking to enhance the personal branding of a content analysis study at each stage based on the findings (Table 1).

Table 1 List of articles on personal branding and academic university

Case study	Title	Methods	References
1	Personal Branding – A differentiator between successful and mediocre entrepreneurs in the South African education and training industry	Cross-Sectional Observation Research	[22]
2	Personal Branding of Professors in social media: A Choice or a Necessity in Our days?	Quantitative	[24]
3	Personal brand of university teachers in the Arctic regions in the context of digitalization of education	Content analysis	[4]
4	Personal branding for academic faculty: a new social phenomenon for Russian higher education?	Quantitative	[25]
5	Proposing a new framework for personal brand positioning	Qualitative and quantitative	[26]
6	Professional branding of a university lecturer	Content analysis	[27]
7	Academic Branding and Positioning through University's Website Profile	Thematic analysis	[28]
8	Personal Brand of University Teachers in the Digital Age	Qualitative and quantitative	[29]

Discussion

Table 1 shows eight articles studied on personal branding and academic university. All the articles are from international scholars and published in the year of 2020-2022. For each approach, there are various methods applied to analyse sample data derived from respective studies. In this section, the author will analyse and discuss the case study in terms of process, results, and trends of proposed topic and all the case studies will be compared. At the end of the discussion, the author will propose theoretical model of personal branding specifically for academic university that was derived from these eight articles for future reference.

Case study 1-8 except 6 represent the study on staff academic in the university with respective region specifically South Africa, Polytechnic University of Tirana, Russian University, Sokha population in Russia, UK universities, and another two with the study related to academicians and science field while case study 6 represents the framework of the study with professional profession. The comparison of the findings for every study provides futuristic view on personal branding among academicians in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia.

One of the most recent developments in branding is personal branding. It indicates that everyone may have a strong personal brand by taking into account their specific goals and employing effective techniques. Case 1 studies entrepreneurs who are operating training facilities in South Africa's education and training sector [22]. The author believes that the goal of promoting social entrepreneurship is to give academics another source of income besides teaching. Due to its growing recognition as a crucial element in promoting both social and economic well-being, social entrepreneurship and business entrepreneurship are almost similar. This is in line with the Malaysia Education Blueprint (Higher Education) 2015–2025 (MEBHE) and the National Higher Education Strategic Plan Beyond 2020 (NHESP) [30]. Therefore, the author includes case study 1 in the findings as well.

In the study, 50 entrepreneurs were focused on as respondents. From 50 respondents, 10% understood and practiced personal branding for their entrepreneurs in education and training; the other 90% did not. From this 10%, a total of 6% were answered by men, while another 4% were answered by female entrepreneurs. From 90%, approximately 20% are women, while 70% are men. From all respondents, about 80% have

accounts on one or another social media platform, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, etc. The findings showed that entrepreneurs are prepared to have vibrant, satisfying lives in both their personal and professional capacities [23]. This can be confirmed from the data that the researcher collected. It is also reported that the majority of entrepreneurs are not aware of the importance of consciously creating the image they want or how to do so without sacrificing their true selves or personalities. The author also included that the skills of self-awareness and identifying one's talents and the ability to apply them to all facets of life were absent from the entrepreneurs. Furthermore, there was a glaring ignorance of the techniques that could have assisted them in comprehending the perspectives of others and how they are viewed in various social circles. Additionally, entrepreneurs have shown a lack of ability to modify unfavorable behaviors and deficiencies. Although the majority of entrepreneurs are already acquainted with digital communications and social media, they are not well-versed in the ways in which social media can be employed as a tool for social branding [23].

The difference between cases 2 and 1 is the targeted respondents. Case study 2 involves professors from the Polytechnic University of Tirana, Albania. In the study, about 53 respondents responded to the survey. From the study, 77.3% said that personal branding is crucial for job success, 5.7% said it is irrelevant, and 17% said it is somewhat essential. From 53 respondents, 83% use social media, and 17% do not. Out of 83%, only 32.1% use social media for personal branding, and the other 67.9% do not. The reason behind this 67.9% is a lack of interest (38.8%), lack of time (25%), "work speaks for itself" and there is no need for online promotion (25%), and also a fear that materials may be copied (stolen) by others (11.3%). Meanwhile, 32.1% agreed to use social media for partnerships (35.8%), participation in scientific projects (29.5%), internships (11.6%), participation in scientific conferences and journals as reviewers, as members of scientific committees, or on editorial boards (23.2%). In terms of personal websites other than social media, 24.5% of the respondents have personal websites, and 75.5% do not. However, despite all the answers, 86.8% trust the direct impact of technology on the future growth of personal branding, and only 3.8% believe technology does not influence self-branding, as reported in the articles. The result also showed that just by adding one skill or quality, the impact of personal branding on career success increases [24].

In contrast, case study 3 reports on the personal brand of university teachers among the Sakha population in the Arctic regions in the context of the digitalization of education. Basically, the study is conducted based on the survey for 11 years, and the respondents decrease as the year increases. However, the results have mentioned that the opinion of Russians in the respective matter is that it is better not to work out because of the low payment system for teachers at the university. Instead, the researchers also stated that this population is also a bit reserved, has closeness, a propensity to place the responsibility on oneself while having a generally good attitude toward oneself, as well as an inability or unwillingness to recognize and disclose relevant information about oneself. The study then chose to have 92 teachers; 75% are female, with an average age of 44 to 51 years and teaching experience ranging from 9 to 26 years. From the 92 respondents, 66% of the teachers do not consider it necessary to develop a personal brand, and only 30.5% of the teachers believe that a university teacher should have his own brand. A total of 63% of respondents do not care about brand promotion, and 64% of respondents do not care about each other's performance. A total of 25% of those respondents do not have a clear idea of how to do this but believe that there is interest in such a brand. 63% of those surveyed said they primarily use social media for personal purposes. Instagram is the most popular social media platform among teachers, with 81% of users; Facebook comes in second with 35.4%; and users continue to choose VK, Telegram, and Twitter [4].

On the other hand, case study 4 studies a total of 131 social media accounts of academic faculty from a prestige university in Russia. From 131 studies, 23 Facebook accounts (32.4% of the total studied), 5 Instagram accounts (22.7% of the total studied), and 11 VK accounts (28.9% of the total studied), or an average of 29.8% of the social media accounts, were studied. Those percentages were presented to account for personal branding uses. From 131 as well, there are a total of 6 (Facebook), 1 (Instagram), and 2 (VK) accounts with strategic personal branding used by academic universities. From the study, it shows that brands can communicate and have their own consistency in order to grow strong [25].

On the contrary, case study 5 successfully retrieved a total of 32 indexes of personal brand positioning. The results obtained were considered after consultation with the experts. From the data, qualitative and quantitative studies were derived. Kolmogorov-Simonov was used to test all the data, and as a result, the data has a normal distribution. The study also consulted the framework of the research based on strategy-based dimensions, capability-based dimensions, differentiation-based dimensions, audience-based dimensions, and performance-based dimensions. Based on the qualitative analysis of research variables, it shows that strategy-based and performance-based dimensions have influenced personal branding among the identified dimensions (according to experts' and commentators' ideas responding to the questionnaire). According to the findings, the capability-based dimension has the lowest average, which results in the least

influence on personal branding. Instead, good-will, having perspective, personal mission, goals, and strategies were defined as effective criteria for the brand. It is also highlighted that philanthropic relations, social relations, accessibility for the audience, and using virtual networks are the main indexes for effective personal branding. Meanwhile, having talent, positive thinking, and proper relations and interaction with the audience are the most important factors in personal brands [26].

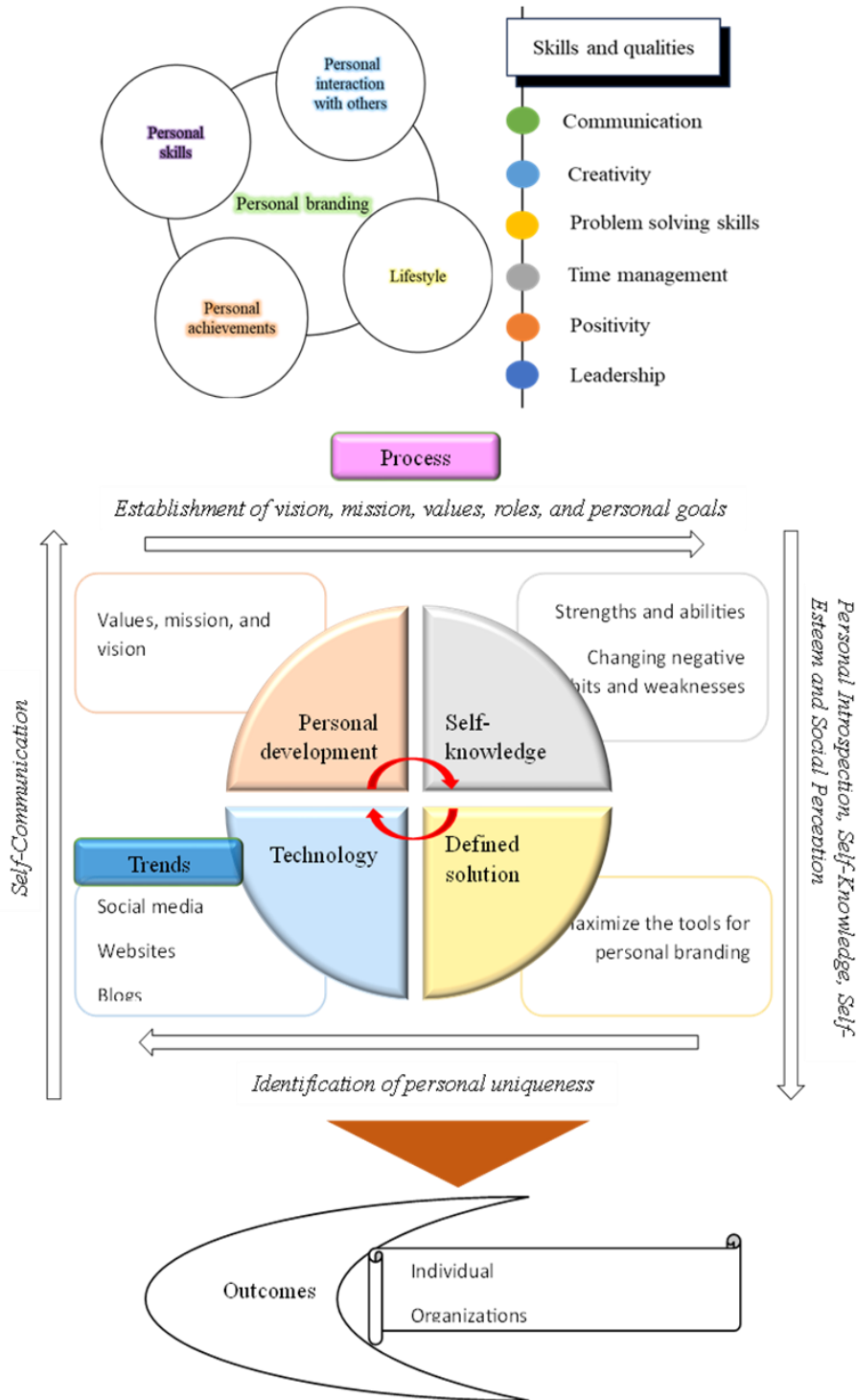
In contrast, different situations occurred for case study 6. Scientific literature, periodic articles, and publications on the topic were used to define academic personal branding. Successful academics with personal branding will have open interaction with stakeholders and audiences, expanding the network of professional contacts, including in a remote format, the formation of a lecturer's positive image, gaining prestige in scientific circles through participation in symposia, forums, and conferences, expanding the scope of activity and influence, developing alternative methods, courses, and distance programs, conducting your own master classes, trainings, and seminars for target audiences, as well as the promotion (including commercial) of their own products of intellectual activity. To study the level of competitiveness, 41 academicians were obtained as respondents. From the study, the average score in this group of interviewed lecturers' is 110 points. This shows that a person's level of competitiveness is above average. From here, it shows that the lecturers who participated in the study have the ability to prove themselves competitive in the labor market. In order to create a lecturer brand, five stages of steps were considered: positioning of the scientist and his work in the intellectual property market, development of a lecturer brand strategy, development of content, brand ideas, personality analysis, and brand name creation, as well as research and analysis of the attitude of the scientist toward the personal brand (brand testing). Higher education lecturers have the following options for promoting their own intellectual outputs: make their author's lectures and instructional materials in electronic format (including audio and video) accessible for download on tablets and mobile devices as a stand-alone Android and iOS application; to create an instructional website that you can use to plan your pupils' pedagogical activities; upload content that is protected by copyright to social media platforms and other scholarly websites for both free and paid access [27].

The difference between Case Studies 7 and 6 is that the research was carried out on academic profiles from 136 universities in the UK. From the study, 5 themes (personal information, education information, research information, industry information, and engagement) and 28 sub-themes (name, title, position/status, photograph, biography, contact details, social media accounts, language, awards and recognition, education, degree and qualifications, teaching, publication records, conference presentations, PhD supervision, research interest, research projects, research groups, keywords research, research statement, knowledge exchange, industry experience, installation and performances, memberships and affiliations, responsibilities with the universities, external engagement, media appearance as well as press expertise) were synthesized from webpage profile academic university. From the themes, the universities that are thinking about updating their staff profiles and enhancing the academic brands of their staff members can use this list as a model. Although a person's personal branding is a synthesis of many aspects of their professional life, employees and the university may need to choose the sections that best represent their brand [28].

On the other hand, case study 8 mentioned that about 70% of respondents gave affirmative answers to the question of whether a university teacher should have a brand. This is due to the fact that these people met teachers who they consider "branded" (66.7%) during their education. The responders who maintain that a modern teacher does not need a pedagogical brand rationalize their stance by claiming that they are ignorant of the purpose, duties, and functions of the brand. They further point out that "the brand should be at the university, and teachers should correspond to this brand." This 70% gives the answer to key characteristics by saying "being in demand", "wide fame as an expert, fame in the scientific community, outside the educational institution," and "professionalism, competence, experience, high qualification." The respondents also included creativity, uniqueness (a unique style or format of lectures), recognition, authority, readiness and willingness to develop, versatility, focus on results, and charisma as additional points of personal brand characteristics. His or her image is like a business card, not only of the university or a specific training course but also of the knowledge that students receive from him or her [29].

Based on the comparison cases 1–8, the author suggested that the personal branding model for academicians in higher education institutions is depicted in **Fig. 2**. In **Fig. 2**, personal branding was compiled from key points of personal branding, skills needed for personal branding, the process of personal branding, as well as key requirements for personal branding.

Fig. 2. Personal branding model for academicians in HEIs



4. Conclusion

The authors conclude with the following observations: first, there is a growing body of research on the topic of personal branding; second, a deeper comprehension of the development and maintenance of a personal brand is required in the contemporary labor markets, which are marked by project-based work engagements, frequent job changes, and rising job insecurity. Through the consolidation of previous research, the development of a conceptual personal branding model, the proposal of an integrative definition of personal branding and personal brand, and the discussion of potential future research directions that could further the field's understanding, this literature review advances the field of personal branding.

The authors highlight the potential for a closer integration of traditionally individual-driven career efforts and organization-driven human resources practices by demonstrating that personal branding is a distinct construct that crosses several disciplines. This will enable the employees to develop powerful personal brands that are advantageous to the company as a whole as well as the individual.

Suggestions

This paper found that eight case studies were compared and a personal branding model was created based on literature. Despite the eight case studies studied by the author, it is also recommended that future research be carried out for local reference, especially using a qualitative and quantitative approach.

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