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**THE POWER OF STORYTELLING AS A
MARKETING TOOL IN PERSONAL
BRANDING**

Tese apresentada à Universidade de Aveiro para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Mestre em Marketing, realizada sob a orientação científica da Professora Ana Estima, Professora Adjunta do Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração da Universidade de Aveiro.

This is for my parents, who made everything in their power to educate me into a decent human being.

o júri

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keywords

personal branding, branding, storytelling, personal marketing, self-marketing

abstract

We live in a world where brands and products are becoming partially human (regarding names, concepts and the message they transmit) and people are mostly seen as brands. The job market itself is saturated to the point that people must find countless ways to differentiate themselves from other millions of competitors. Thus, the main goal of this dissertation is to understand how regular individuals can build their own personal brand by using storytelling as a marketing tool. The power of telling stories and inspiring others through words has been going on for ages now, even before the digital came into our lives and shifted completely the way we see the world and people. Many centuries ago people used to draw on walls to tell about their day, now we take Instagram pictures.

In order to fully comprehend this matter, the concepts of personal branding and storytelling were described in detail on this dissertation. As a support to the literature review, 9 interviews were conducted to several people with different profiles and professions.

To conclude, the interviews and the literature review allowed to comprehend that storytelling is an important tool when building a personal brand with the following features: authenticity, consistency, charisma, purpose, strong personality, creativity, adaptation, convincing, memorable, distinctive and clear.

palavras-chave

personal branding, branding, storytelling, personal marketing, self-marketing

resumo

Vivemos num mundo onde as marcas e os produtos estão a ficar parcialmente humanas (nomeadamente nome, conceitos e a própria mensagem que transmitem) e as pessoas são mais vistas como marcas. O mercado de trabalho viu melhores dias e as pessoas também. O mundo de trabalho está saturado a um ponto que as pessoas têm que arranjar maneiras criativas para se diferenciarem da elevada competição que enfrentam.

Portanto, o objetivo principal desta dissertação é entender como é que pessoas comuns podem construir a sua marca pessoal através do uso do storytelling, como uma possível ferramenta de marketing. Contar histórias e inspirar pessoas através das palavras tem sido uma prática usada há séculos, mesmo antes da era digital que, ao surgir nas nossas vidas, alterou-as completamente. Alterou a maneira como vemos o mundo e as pessoas. Antes as pessoas desenhavam gravuras nas paredes para contarem o seu dia, agora tiram fotos para o Instagram.

De modo a compreender mais a fundo esta matéria, os conceitos de marca pessoal e storytelling foram descritos detalhadamente nesta dissertação. Para apoiar a revisão de literatura, 9 entrevistas foram feitas a diferentes perfis e profissionais.

Em conclusão, as entrevistas e a revisão de literatura permitiram compreender que storytelling é importante para a construção de uma marca pessoal com as seguintes características: genuína, consistente, carismática, com propósito, com forte personalidade, criativa, adaptável, convincente, memorável, distintiva e clara.

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I - Introduction

Brands have been telling us stories for ages now.

Coca-Cola conquers our Christmas with highly emotional and nostalgic family advertisement. Apple has been telling how sophisticated and edgy its' technology will make us feel if we buy it. Nike makes us feel like anything is possible, even if we do not feel like getting up from that sofa and going for a run. Porsche will transform us into kings and queens because their advertisement is almost no advertisement at all and who doesn't like a bit of mystery? But behind those highly successful brands are people. Creative, emotional, sophisticated, edgy, powerful people. People that tell stories through brands and products. At the very end of the day, we do not buy the products, we buy the emotions and the sensations that their stories make us believe in.

With people it is the same logic. The world is shifting – the way we work, live, love and are. Whilst products and brands communicate with very human language and techniques, individuals started looking at themselves and each other as brands and products. We are no longer just people, nor can we be, considering the time we live in. There is an urgency in self-management. The most important thought we leave behind on people's minds is the first impression they have about us. How long do first impressions take? Seven seconds – “Within the first seven seconds of meeting, people will have a solid impression of who you are” (Gibbons, 2018). Every entrepreneurial person knows that impressions are very important. Fortunately, those 7 seconds are just the first step in a very complex process called personal branding – “That isn't enough time to talk about your history, charm your new contact, or make up for any initial blunders” (Gibbons, 2018).

The truth is we are surrounded by highly talented and extraordinary people. With the technological progress that occurred in the last couple of decades, the possibility for people to have access to all kinds of knowledge became almost unlimited. We grew up being told that the sky is the limit but that is not true – the limit are people themselves. People achieve what they want to achieve. They stop whenever they wish to stop, and they do what they want to do. Unfortunately, achieving the desired professional recognition and personal satisfaction, in a society

where it is extremely hard to stand out, feels almost like an impossible task and demands approaching ourselves from a variety of different angles. Thus, it is becoming clear that personal branding is also a differentiator factor in an increasingly crowded marketplace – “With hundreds of thousands of organizational brands and millions of product brands already competing for attention, the tens of millions of individuals seeking to carve out a personal business niche in the marketplace face a daunting prospect” (Shepherd, 2005, p.596). If individuals aim to be in front of the pack, nurturing their brand will ensure that it happens (Arruda, 2003). As Shepherd (2005) mentions, personal branding is basically an attention-getting device and it is frequently used to help people gain a competitive advantage when achieving specific professional goals. Despite its’ evident powerful influence in our success, the truth is people should understand that personal branding does not guarantee immediate business success. In fact, there are too many people acting within one specific niche market and individuals should be able to manage their expectations in order to prevent disappointment.

There are many ways and instruments, thanks to all the technology and knowledge available to us, we can use when nurturing our brand. For this specific purpose, a more in-depth study was conducted regarding the basics behind storytelling, when applied specifically to the formation and maintenance of our personal brand. Although we often undervalue the potential of a great story, the truth is we connect quicker to those people with whom we much easier identify ourselves with. The main goal is to show that by telling an intimate, authentic and honest story about themselves, people can create a much more credible and genuine image in the head of their audience. By doing so, they do not influence others with their personality, but they can, eventually, open doors to new amazing opportunities, through a storytelling approach. That is why understanding the way our stories can affect others is half-way to success. By intimately knowing the core of the product called “You”, people are able to build attractive brand narratives that convince instantly consumers to buy the final product (Lund, Cohen, & Scarles, 2018).

The dissertation is divided into 7 practical sections: the study begins with a thorough analysis of the literature review. The first section follows an explanation of the term of personal branding, considering it is the primary term of this study. Before

understanding how storytelling can influence someone's brand, it is important to fully understand what that brand is and what it stands for. Afterward, this work moves on to the description of the concept of storytelling – what it is, why is it important in our lives and what specific methodologies people can apply when using storytelling to communicate their brand.

As soon as both terms are fully reviewed and analysed, it is presented the detailed methodology used to comprehend to the fullest extent the concepts of personal branding and storytelling and its correlation. In this section, it is indicated that the chosen methodology is the qualitative research. As soon as the methodology is fully described, this dissertation focuses on relating and analysing the achieved results. The chosen methodology was appropriate for this specific case, thanks to the guidance of the hints given by the literature review.

The results are presented and properly discussed, after the methodology. Here are stated the answers resulted from the conducted interviews and they are individually discussed, in order to give proper conclusions.

After the conclusions are mentioned the limitations of this dissertations, what contribute this research can have for management and suggestions for future investigations.

The next section of this study is the literature review. Therefore, the in-depth analysis of the concepts will begin on the next chapter.

II – Literature Review

Framework

In order to proceed with this dissertation, a literature review was conducted of the two main concepts mentioned and studied throughout the pages: personal brand and storytelling.

To begin with, it was important to analyse the personal branding phenomenon: what it is, how to build one, what are the advantages of having a well-managed brand and how it differs from traditional branding and marketing approaches. Next, the process dives-in into the concept of storytelling, by trying to understand its origin, techniques and advantages of having a well-guided narrative.

After, a connection between both concepts is made, explaining why storytelling can, in fact, be a powerful tool, outside traditional marketing approaches, to help individuals build a solid personal brand.

Hopefully, this study will be able to justify the expected results with the help of the interviews that will be conducted to a selected number of people.

2.1. Personal Brand

Nowadays we are just like those brands we see on TV. The difference between us and Apple, Mercedes or Facebook is that we are human, and our motivations are “individualistic”. Whether positive, negative or neutral, the fact is we all have our own brand. Rangarajan (2017) mentions quite accurately that literally everyone has a first impression of us, whether we are an MBA student, executive, freelancer, self-employed, or a housewife. It doesn’t matter how you have connected with them (online or offline) – the truth is people form an impression of who you are and that is partially considered as your own current personal brand. Your personal brand is, in fact, a result of many aspects gathered together, such as first impressions, personality traits, the way you communicate with other people and the way they communicate with you. It is “a mix of reputation, trust, attention, and execution. A personal brand includes the professional and personal qualities which

distinguish a person from their peers, colleagues, and competitors, and which imply or promise something of value” (Chen & Chung, 2016, p.308).

Branding was important back then in the pre-industrial times where companies used branding to develop and communicate a strong message and to establish a solid relationship with customers. Today, branding still offers the very same benefits, though on a slightly different scale - “A personal brand definitively identifies an individual and allows others to become instantly familiar with that person’s personality and values” (Chen & Chung, 2016, p.306), by using similar branding techniques used previously on regular products. Naturally, the process is not the same for both actions, especially because traditional branding and personal branding are slightly distinct: “company brands are created on demand while personal brands formulate throughout a person’s development” (Rangarajan et al., 2017, p.659).

As Gander (2014) mentions in her article, personal brand is composed by our biography, experience, knowledge, appearance, behaviours and even, name. Everything, from the way we talk to the way we keep our promises, tells a story about us. The one thing that sets up apart from the rest is our differentiator factor or, as Shepherd (2005) likes to call it: *a sign of distinction* – a skill, a feature or a specific knowledge that we have acquired throughout the time. Gander (2014) mentions that:

Your personal brand then will let people know what you offer above what your CV says – after all many people have degrees and skills training, but you need that *je ne sais quoi* that will differentiate you. You need a strategy to effectively manage your personal brand because this is about how people perceive you and how you can influence that perception. (p.99)

We need this distinctiveness to beat the existent competition out there, battling against us every day for the same recognition or status position. In our days, being an executive, a regular sales manager or a professional doesn’t cut it in the new world of work anymore (Rangarajan et al., 2017). The world needs more and

better. To complement this thought, Chen and Chung (2016) state that “a personal brand is not related to creating an image, but to understanding the combination of attributes that is unique to a person. Therefore, a personal brand comprises the personality, strengths, skills, values, passions, lifestyle, public image, and character that differentiate a person and guide their decisions” (Chen & Chung, 2016, p.309).

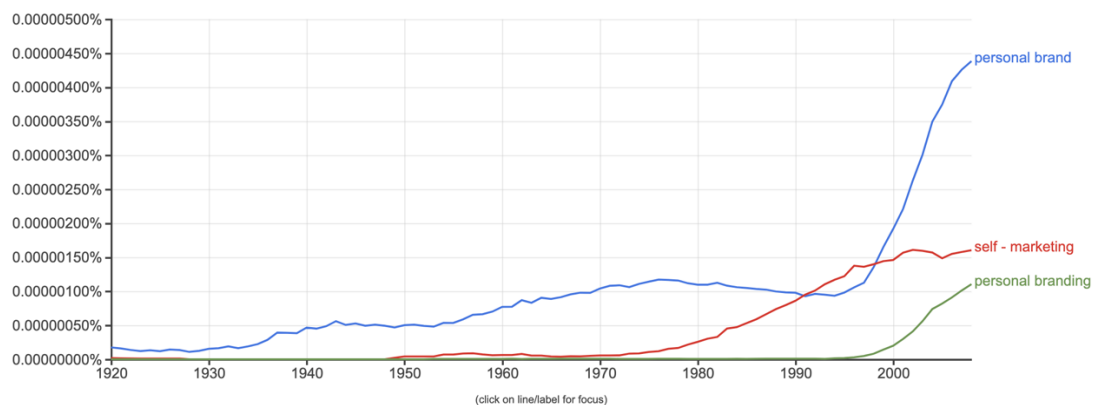
The term of personal branding first started with Tom Peters’ Fast Company article – “The Brand Called You”, where the author explicitly mentions that “regardless of age, regardless of position, regardless of the business we happen to be in, all of us need to understand the importance of branding. We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You” (Peters, 1997). Arruda (2003) stands side by side on Peters’ opinion: branding isn’t just for gigantic corporations or the grocery-store shelf anymore – “In the new millennium, everything is a brand” (Arruda, 2003, p.04). As an example of that we have the amazing Anthony Robbins, the father of motivation and self-development, Michelle Phan, the most professional guru in the beauty industry and many other individuals who transmit their talents and skills genuinely to the world out there. They are authentic and that is what people demand nowadays – authenticity. Arruda (2003), among many other authors, declares that “successful personal branding is authentic. That means you use your values, passions, and strengths to distinguish yourself from others so you can get the resources you need to advance in your career” (Arruda, 2003, p.07). A personal brand includes “the professional and personal qualities which distinguish a person from their peers, colleagues, and competitors, and which imply or promise something of value” (Chen & Chung, 2016, p.308). The opportunities we have now are nothing compared to the ones people used to have before. As Peter Drucker (1999) mentions in his Business Harvard Review article “If you've got ambition and smarts, you can rise to the top of your chosen profession, regardless of where you started out” (Peter, 1999, p. 100).

Without any doubt, the digital world opened new doors for us and gave us a million new ways to express our personality. People started using chats and gaming platforms to engage in a virtual reality and that phenomenon gave all of us new ways to explore unknown parts of self (Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011). According to

Turkle (1995) and Wynn and Katz (1997) “digital spaces allow increased open communication through anonymity and the eradication of real-world boundaries, such as appearance (e.g., race, gender), physical ability, and socioeconomic status, which may inhibit identity” (apud Labrecque et al., 2011, p.38).

To understand more about the evolution of the term “Personal Branding”, “Self-Marketing” and “Personal Brand”, throughout the years, was used Google’s Ngram platform, suggested by Steven Vallas (2015) on his article. This platform helps people to see with what frequency-specific words were used in a selected period of time, in the literature (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Representation of usage growth of the mentioned words, throughout the years, in the literature.



Source: <https://books.google.com/ngrams>, consulted on: 08.07.2019

As the graphic shows us, the terms related to self-development, growth and branding accelerated after the dot.com bubble. The dot.com boom phenomenon was registered between 1994 and 2000, a period of extreme adoption, usage and growth of the Internet. We can clearly see that the term “Personal Brand” grew drastically from mid-90’s. No doubt that the Internet opened new doors for our generation.

2.1.1. How to build a Personal Brand?

As Kaputa (2003) mentions in her article, individuals should act as their own marketers and do a self-audit. In Shepherd's article we conclude that "According to most advocates, the personal branding process mirrors the product or corporate branding process (Shepherd, 2005, p.590).

Initially, "the individual is encouraged to look inside themselves to discover their key identifying attributes" (Shepherd, 2005, p.590). People should understand very clearly their strengths and weaknesses. In other words, the most important step is to truly understand who you are. Begin with a purpose. Decide what guidelines and goals you want to achieve in the next few years. As Gander (2014) mentions "A starting point for managing your personal brand is to reflect on what messages your current brand is sending" (Gander, 2014, p.100) and it helps you to build a compelling personal brand statement. This will help you to know what exactly differentiates them from others – skills, abilities, knowledge, personality traits and so on. Only then, they can finally comprehend what kind of strategic marketing plan they are going to apply to themselves and how they will manage the brand behind the value. Success comes to those who truly know themselves, their own strengths, values and how they perform the best (Drucker, 1999, p.101).

Understanding the market and knowing the competition it is one of the keys to build a solid personal brand. Feedback is part of the process and it is crucial as in many other life situations. Once individuals, as brands, communicate a message, feedback is important to let people know where and how they can improve the image they are transmitting to their audience (Gander, 2014). Above all, it is entirely up to each individual to know when to change course. This ability comes to those that full understanding of their weaknesses and strong features and their values because "only when you operate from strengths can you achieve true excellence" (Drucker, 1999, p.101).

Most importantly, it is urgent to highlight the fact that there is no key to success, as many people might think in the beginning. Building a personal brand is not only time consuming but it also takes a lot of hard work, commitment and dedication. Building one's brand just as you would build a brand of a well-

established conditioner or washing machine, does not come naturally (Vallas & Cummins, 2015). Pure talent is not enough to reach the top of the Everest. As Peter Drucker (1999) highlights on his article, many brilliant people believe that just ideas have the power to move mountains, but the truth is “bulldozers move mountains; ideas show where the bulldozers should go to work” (Drucker, 1999, p.101).

Many authors agree with Gander (2014) when she mentions that “brands grow organically, the best personal brands develop as a result of strong communication, a sense of purpose, and the person behind the brand backing up the brand’s promise again and again” (Gander, 2014, p.101). One of our biggest flaws is to believe that just by simply having a brand, personal or otherwise, we have guaranteed success but as experience shows, many great brands fail by not being properly managed (Shepherd, 2005).

The difficult part of even managing a personal brand is that it demands a lot of self-awareness and critical thinking. Not everyone was born ready. Not everyone got out of the crib knowing exactly what to do with their life. A mistake people often commit is thinking they know for sure what they are good at, but they are usually wrong. Most people know easily what they are not good at, but you cannot build your Brand based on your weak points. As Peter Drucker (1999) states eventually in his article only a small portion of people realize what their destiny will be from an early age:

Mathematicians, musicians, and cooks, for instance, are usually mathematicians, musicians, and cooks by the time they are four or five years old. Physicians usually decide on their careers in their teens, if not earlier. But most people, especially highly gifted people, do not really know where they belong until they are well past their mid-twenties. (p.105)

Changing own way of thinking is not an easy task and we are still struggling to leave some habits behind:

Throughout history, people had little need to know their strengths. A person was born into a position and a line of work: The peasant's son would also be

a peasant; the artisan's daughter, an artisan's wife; and so on. But now people have choices. We need to know our strengths in order to know where we belong. (Drucker, 1999, p.101)

It is all good until we have to be fully and truly aware of our strengths. There are possible techniques to help people improve their own idea of self: feedback analysis, for instance. Peter Drucker did an experiment himself and has been practicing this method since (from 15 to 20 years) – “Whenever you make a key decision or take a key action, write down what you expect will happen. Nine or 12 months later, compare the actual results with your expectations” (Drucker, 1999, p.101). As he shares with us “Feedback analysis is by no means new. It was invented sometime in the fourteenth century by an otherwise totally obscure German theologian” (Drucker, 1999, p.101). By doing so, you are helping yourself and your brain to see where you are failing and how are you doing. Another extremely crucial thing to do is to consistently improve one’s strengths. It can be either improving or even acquiring new ones, depending on where you stand and on what you wish to achieve. Furthermore, overcome intellectual arrogance. Take pride on not knowing everything about people, life, technology, science and the world in general. People can only grow if they allow themselves to be ignorant.

An additional struggle that many individuals feel is realizing that times have indeed changed and that what was traditional 10/20 years ago, has now new variations, usage and so on. In an interview that Vallas (2015) conducted some people stated that they find it extremely hard to create a brand for a person and that they feel turned off by the usage of traditional marketing concepts when applied to people. Fortunately, or unfortunately, “everything is a product. I am a product to be sold with a brand. On the other hand, I am not a brand. I am not a product. I am a unique individual with skills and personality” (Vallas & Cummins, 2015, p.309).

Another obvious thing that many of us often forget are manners. Peter Drucker (1999) gets straight to the point when he says that:

Manners are the lubricating oil of an organization. Manners - simple things like saying "please" and "thank you" and knowing a person's name or asking

after her family - enable two people to work together whether they like each other or not. Bright people, especially bright young people, often do not understand this. If analysis shows that someone's brilliant work fails again and again as soon as cooperation from others is required, it probably indicates a lack of courtesy - that is, a lack of manners. (p.101)

A person's brand is also the way others see them. Being polite and respectful of others is not about changing oneself. In fact, people should not try to change themselves in order to succeed anywhere. People just need to work on improving what they have.

Throughout the literature, many authors mention that the message promoted by our personal brand must be consistent, clear and authentic, even if the digital era makes it possible and simple for us to express our multiple selves. After doing a social experiment, Labrecque (2011) states in her article that the participants of her study came to the conclusion that branding strategy should be authentic and that they harshly criticized those individuals who tried too hard to portray a brand identity that was far from their reality. Many of them declared that:

People want to know where you are, where you live, they want to see that you're a legitimate photographer that you're not just coming out of a shack somewhere—so it gives people more trust, they trust you more if they know more about you. (Labrecque et al., 2011, p.46)

In conclusion, “authenticity enhances message receptivity and relationship quality” (Labrecque et al., 2011, p.46), that is because since 1997, after Tom Peters' statement, the concept of personal branding has been adopted, enhanced and reinterpreted. An individual wants to be perceived more than just a set of highly refined skills (Rangarajan et al., 2017). Nowadays, branding for people is about finding the 'big idea', the core you, and putting it out in the universe to fulfil itself (Shepherd, 2005). Surely, we all have a different way to communicate our brand and that is the ultimate beauty of having a personal brand.

Each person has its own motivations, goals and language. Peter Drucker (1999) is absolutely right when he states that:

The first is to accept the fact that other people are as much individuals as you yourself are. They perversely insist on behaving like human beings. This means that they too have their strengths; they too have their ways of getting things done; they too have their values. (p.107)

Let's take LinkedIn as an example, for instance. We might find a LinkedIn profile that has a strategically structured profile that showcases the professional growth and merit, by also including its' employer's organization, values and communication. Another profile might use a different approach and will put all the focus on his/her craft. As Rangarajan (2017) mentions, "different users will vary in how they use their profiles to highlight their personal brands, as well as how much those brands will interact with the organizational brands of employers" (Rangarajan et al., 2017, p.659) and as he also clarifies that "of course, one's online presence is not the whole picture; living the characteristics of one's personal brand, not just conveying them online, is a necessity" (Rangarajan et al., 2017, p.659). Individuals must walk the talk. Confidence is a way to transmit trust.

Above all, whatever the message is, "buyers are loyal to the organizations of people they trust" (Rangarajan et al., 2017, p.660), thus merely having a brand is not enough to succeed. It must be properly managed and enhanced, when necessary. As it is also mentioned in his article "keeping it up to date given changing circumstances and measuring its effectiveness. We suggest that individuals measure the effectiveness of their personal brands and modify them when necessary" (Rangarajan et al., 2017, p.661). Trust does not build from one day to another. Kaputa (2003) mentions in one of her online articles, thinking and genuinely acting as a brand can create and maintain demand for the most important product of all – you.

To be more specific, our personal brand highlights our 4 W's: **who** you are, **what** impact you wish to make, **where** you want to be and the kind of **work** you aim for. Like any other brand, people must have their personal mission statement that

helps them to craft a proper branding strategy. When individuals think about who they are, it is important to understand that they are selling their background, experience, education and ambitions, all gathered in one single package that should be communicated concisely throughout several communication channels (Vanderford, 2017).

If we look at it from a big picture, personal brand is not, in fact, the real *you*. It is the perception *you* have created on the mind of *your* target audience through everything *you* do:

Express yourself and what you stand for to everyone you come into contact with – your professional target audience, your neighbours, your family, your colleagues, even the man on the street. Do this constantly and consistently. In other words, although it may not be the real you, branding is something you've got to live daily to reap the benefits. (Shepherd, 2005, p.599)

2.1.2. Why is Personal Brand important?

As Arruda (2003) mentioned in one of his articles:

Personal Branding is a way of clarifying and communicating what makes you different and special—and using those qualities to guide your career or business decisions. It's about understanding your unique attributes — your strengths, skills, values, and passions —and using them to separate yourself from your competitors or peers. In this sense, personal branding means clearly communicating the unique promise of value that you have to offer your employer or your clients. (p.06)

As it is already well-known in our society, competition is an everyday activity. There is no doubt whatsoever that business today is becoming more and more competitive. There is almost an infinite number of people who state that they offer the same thing as you do. Whatever someone's role is – be it a consultant, manager or entrepreneur – individuals should be able to stand out from “myriad others so that you can be in control of your business or career” (Arruda, 2003, p.08). We fight to see who a better marketer, designer, doctor, mechanic, wife, mother or daughter is. We compete over the best job position, better life conditions or just attention – it is becoming part of our DNA. If generations prior to ours were taught that family is at the centre of all things, now the society is turning those values around. Jobs, reputation, status and recognitions are our priority. Only then we are allowed to think about building a solid family and a healthy life. Millions of people live by this same motto, thus new ways of standing out started to appear. In fact “personal branding is becoming increasingly essential to professional success” (Arruda, 2003, p.06). As many point out, “self-knowledge that begins the personal branding process can offer a useful guide to career development, career rethinking, and career success” (Rangarajan et al., 2017, p.658). With new opportunities come great responsibilities, “companies today aren't managing their employees' careers” – (Drucker, 1999, p.101), so we should do it ourselves.

In fact, when looking from an academic point of view, self-marketing is the support tool provided by vocational specialists, when helping people find a job or to help them plan their career (Shepherd, 2005). Looking at a wider perspective, personal branding can be highly important when helping people to achieve professional performance, productivity and career success (Nolan, 2015). As Nolan mentions (2015) there are way too many qualified people for one job and the best way we all have to impress the recruiters is to stand out with the help of our “unique” and “authentic” selves. Many individuals are now trying to figure out how “personal brands can advance their own careers and those of the people with whom they work” (Rangarajan et al., 2017, p.658).

A huge advantage that personal branding brings, and many do not see is that it helps people to increase internal influence, within his or her organization. This helps to influence reputation, sell ideas, increase the chances of a possible promotion and, improve the relationship with superiors, subordinates, and peers (Rangarajan et al., 2017, p.658). Self-knowledge gives a chance to create genuine connections with others, “just as branded products can differentiate themselves from commodities via the emotional response they prompt in customers. Ideally, personal brands evoke favourable emotional responses from co-workers, superiors, professional connections, and, of course, customers” (Rangarajan et al., 2017, p.658).

Literature shows that after politicians, sportsman and celebrities, sales people were the first to recognize that “image and reputation matter for those who sell” (Rangarajan et al., 2017, p.658). Besides they also understood that more often than expected back then, certain personality traits lead to highly successful sales numbers (Labrecque et al., 2011). They had to understand how to practice it themselves and how to manage their own brand. Personal branding is becoming an important marketing task for everyday people (Shepherd, 2005). As Peter Drucker mentions in his article, people must be able to develop themselves and to place themselves where they can make the biggest and best contribution – “And we will have to stay mentally alert and engaged during a 50-year working life, which means knowing how and when to change the work we do” (Drucker, 1999, p.101).

The days of working 39 years in a company and wearing a suit all day are more than over. Creativity and differentiation define our success today (Arruda, 2003), especially now with all the opportunities given to us by digital platforms. Web 2.0. gave us new branding tactics such as creating and maintaining social profiles, personal web pages, blogs and implementing SEO in our lives (search engine optimization) (Labrecque et al., 2011).

All in all, we all have a footprint we leave behind, whether we want it or not – “Information found online provides a digital footprint that implicitly brands people” (Lampel and Bhalla, 2007 apud Labrecque et al., 2011, p.37). Labrecque, Markos and Milne (2011) mention that “as technological advances fuelled Internet growth, the personal Web site emerged as an important platform for self-expression and self-presentation, as well as a means to learn more about people” (Labrecque et al., 2011, p.38). Also, as it is mentioned by Karaduman (2013) “social media, with its ideological and technological structure, gives the opportunity to people to promote themselves as brands in a relatively cheap and efficient manner” (Karaduman, 2013, p.466). Vanderford (2017) says that “building your brand involves a variety of strategies that range from traditional resumé design to a more modern active presence on key social media platforms. In today’s digital age, managing how your brand is portrayed online is critically important” (Vanderford, 2017, p.119).

At the end of the day, the companies are looking for individuals that know how to leverage their strengths, in favour of themselves and the company (Nolan, 2015). That is one of the reasons why a fairly large self-help gurus ecosystem showed up around us. As Shepherd declares “during the past decade, a minor publishing and personal development industry has developed, especially in the USA, that encourages and advises individuals how to market and brand themselves” (Shepherd, 2005, p.589) and now this has transcended to all other forms of communication of the Web 2.0 era. Shepherd (2005) also mentions that:

In the traditional marketing approach, we produce items to meet customer needs. In the non-conventional approaches such as, personal marketing, many gurus tell us to discover our strongest features and to learn how to sell them to an audience that might be interested in them. There thus appears to

be an unavoidable conflict. On the one hand, individuals are expected to respond to consumers in line with the marketing principle, but on the other hand they are advised to construct a 'truthful' brand image rooted in their unique set of attributes and attitudes. (p.590)

After all, as Kaputa (2003) says:

Branding is mainly a process of analysing a product in relationship to a market and figuring out how to maximize the brand's potential. Branding is creating an asset out of something. It is a matter of satisfying a market need in a different way. And figuring out a plan of action - the marketing plan - to build awareness and trial of the brand. (p.01)

Self-marketing consists of looking at yourself as a marketer would look at a product and figuring out how to build a killer brand out of it. There is rule of thumb that all people should apply to their professional activity: when working for another person, one should see himself as working for their personal brand growth and not merely as an employee – “Don't think of yourself as an employee even if you work for a boss. Think of yourself as working for yourself, marketing your brand, YOU” (Shepherd, 2005, p.595).

The master question made by Shepherd (2005) is whether formal marketing principles can be easily practiced in personal branding, also seen as non-conventional marketing activities. We see an evident mix of self-help gurus, job recruitment specialists and career advisors practicing and promoting self-marketing without an evident strategy and basic marketing principles. Shepherd (2005) also makes a very good point by stating that it is very hard living only one brand for a long time, considering that people change and so does their story, in the long run.

The danger of personal branding is its management and lack of control. There is, in fact, an urgency to understand how to manage this fairly new occurrence because if you don't brand yourself, others surely will do it for you. To some people, the branding phenomenon feels like manipulating their image or personality. They have the tendency to go with the natural flow of their career growth or just give the

excuse that their marketing skills are not strong enough. By doing so, people give away their power to others to build it for them, as previously mentioned. Vallas (2015) quotes an excerpt from Andrusia's book:

A product's brand position is how people think about a product or service. Your brand position will be how people think about you! As we've stated before, if you don't decide how you want your brand to be positioned, others will do it for you: the industry you are in, your boss, your friends, and to a large extent, your enemies. Needless to say, it is better to position yourself rather than have others do it for you—which you obviously understand, or you wouldn't be reading this book. (Andrusia and Haskins, 2009 apud Vallas & Cummins, 2015, p.306)

Moreover, many authors alert people to the fact that we are not in full control of all the information that is, somehow, related to us – “Although people have some control over the brand they portray, their personal brand is also shaped by those with whom they associate (i.e., friends and friends' friends) and the comments and pictures they post” (Labrecque et al., 2011, p.38). Aside from the little control, the lack of content used to emphasize the desired message and the inconsistency of some communications are also considered factors that may weaken an individual's personal brand. An advice is given to all of us in Labrecque's article: “Branding literature recommends remedial actions in all these cases: reinforcement for optimal branding, augmentation for insufficient branding, and deleting or diffusing for misdirected branding” (Labrecque et al., 2011, p.47). Challenges are a natural part of any process, but people should be flexible enough to understand that their personal brand isn't written in stone. If some necessary changes are identified, those should be immediately analysed and, when possible, applied to the message being communicated to the audience. A final precaution to have when being rational and prudent with personal branding is becoming fully aware that there will always be pressure between information control and self-branding – “Online personal branding requires information be available to others; by the very nature of the online world, this availability puts people at risk in terms of misdirected and insufficient

branding” (Labrecque et al., 2011, p.49). At the end of the day, misdirected and insufficient branding has great implications for professional and social status (Labrecque et al., 2011).

Overall, many say that personal branding is oriented for those professionals who want to achieve goals while being true to themselves (Arruda, 2003) but we all know the truth: Personal branding is for all.

2.1.3. Is Personal Branding the same as traditional Branding?

YES and NO.

After analysing the necessary literature regarding this subject, it was concluded that both are apparently different concepts, although both are based on similar principles and thinking strategies. As in a matter of fact, they have different purposes and timings. Personal branding is more focused (individualistic) and flexible – “a personal brand is far easier to change over time” (Rangarajan et al., 2017, p.659). Also, “in a personal branding context, that adding value to others may be more effective than adding value primarily to oneself” (Shepherd, 2005, p.600).

Rangarajan states and well that “Similar to product branding, personal branding entails capturing and promoting an individual's strengths and uniqueness to a target audience” (Kaputa 2005; Schwabel 2009; Shepherd 2005 apud Rangarajan et al., 2017, p.659). When “following traditional branding practices, brand identity is defined as how the marketer wants the brand to be perceived; brand positioning as the part of the brand identity to be actively communicated to the audience; and brand image as how the brand is perceived by the marketplace” (Rangarajan et al., 2017, p.659). Just like in traditional product branding, personal branding refers partially to the active communication of one’s brand identity to a specific market (Rangarajan et al., 2017, p.659). Individuals position their brands in a way that it highlights all the positive attributes bringing additional value to their target audience, while simultaneously differentiating themselves from their competition.

As it is for many current authors, it is almost impossible to talk about personal branding and not to mention the influence that the digital world has on the term. It goes hand-in-hand. Nowadays, online solutions are the most used when talking about personal branding. People invest their time in having a consistent image through blogs, personal websites and social media. In the USA developed, as previously mentioned, a minor publishing and personal development industry and it grew to Europe with high speed. As Shepherd (2005) says, “This industry is based on the obvious logic of applying to people the same marketing and branding

principles originally developed for products and corporations” (Shepherd, 2005, p.589). Today (in 2019) it is not just a “minor publishing industry” – it is an industry that moves millions (people and dollars). It is an industry that positions itself as “how to make your dreams come true”. It is an industry that speaks through microphones and screens.

Concepts such as “self-marketing”, “personal branding” and so on are quite recent and still face some barriers when labelled in the same category as traditional concepts. As Shepherd (2005) says in his article, attempts to apply traditional marketing techniques to non-conventional activities is still being highly resisted and debated, especially by professionals in the field. Nonetheless, “intuitive and informal approaches often predominate” (Shepherd, 2005, p.592).

2.2. Storytelling

As Fisher would say (1984) “humans are essentially storytellers”. Storytelling “is the act of telling a story, in some type of chronological order, of fictional or real events” (Westby & Culatta, 2016, p.01).

When we think in-depth about our ecosystem, we realize that ours is the only species that is fully dependent on socialization. So dependent that we, in fact, created our own way of expressing thoughts, feelings and ideas. As a matter of fact, we are the only ones that actually speak with the help of a rational tool also known as “language”. Besides regular socialization, what people really need is to feel connected to their surroundings. As Whitley (2018) mentions in her Forbes article, storytelling helps people to develop a deeper connection with their audience. Sharing stories is part of our human experience. In fact, it was a method caveman used to communicate, educate, share and connect to each other. Kelliher and Davenport (2007) also say that:

Telling stories is a fundamental part of what makes us human, arising from the desire to transform the fragmented chaos of our daily lives into a patterned, coherent and shareable narrative. This process of testifying to our life experiences in a reflective manner helps us understand and convey who we are as individuals and as members of a larger, cultural society. (p.926)

Stories have been giving us meaning of life since we all can recall and it is truly the only way we know how to be people (Fog, Budtz, & Yakaboylu, 2005). We are learning that life, in its’ full beauty, comes to us in the form of stories, given to us through storytelling (Alasuutari, 1997).

Among many variations of *homo*, we are also *homo narrans*, as telling stories is a fundamental part of our existence (Fisher, 1984). We can say that stories are the foundation of human identity (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998). The ability of producing personal narratives is highly “important for social and psychological well-being because the sharing of personal events is a major component of all social

interactions and thus relates to the ability to function in natural contexts” (Schank, 1995, p.19).

When people share their content regardless of where and how they do it, they all automatically become storytellers. Especially now that technologies allow people to lose the sense of barrier and to communicate freely what is on their minds. As Lund (2018) mentioned, “social media are spaces of storytelling as millions of stories representing multiple identities, realities and brands are circulating within them, influencing values and perceptions” (Lund et al., 2018, p.274). After all, the 21st century is the century of the sharing economy, added value and reputations. In fact, reputation is considered to be today’s currency for transaction and it helps to build trust (Pera, Viglia, & Furlan, 2016).

For instance, when people connect to each other on social media and share several types of content with their virtual, almost forever platonic, friends they are all in essence storytellers, since sharing stories is how they communicate and become socially visible (Lund et al., 2018). Sharing compelling stories is a way to connect long-term with the audience and spread it beyond the network. In fact, the most genuine storytellers are “the disparate amateur photographers, home moviemakers and scrapbook enthusiasts who document their life experiences for their future grandchildren, an imagined posterity, or simply to keep a record of their life lived (Kelliher & Davenport, 2007, p.927).

In addition to all the mentioned above, storytelling is a very powerful method that allows people to engage and inspire others – all depends on the way a story is told (Denning, 2006). More than that, it is a way people have found to influence other’s behaviour and thinking. Marketers have understood that this kind of content is becoming imperative in the marketing sphere (Whitler, 2018). And it works just as well as when applied to regular brands. Therefore, if individuals have the right storytelling skills, the charisma and the potential to make their stories viral, they have the power to instantly influence millions of other people (Lund, Cohen, & Scarles, 2018). Our story will make sense to those people that highly identify themselves with one’s narrative (Buitelaar, 2014). Largely because someone’s life story is a highly effective tool for introspection and communication to others. Telling other people how one has come to this point, articulating in his/her speech fragments from

the past, present and future plans, helps him/her to create a powerful, genuine and trustworthy link to the audience.

Ultimately, “storytelling isn’t just a creative approach to marketing. It gives your consumers a totally different entry to your brand” (Whitler, 2018).

2.2.1. Why Storytelling is Important?

As in all brands and products nowadays, people do not buy the product – they purchase the story/moral that the brand tells. That is why many customers buy a BMW or Mercedes for class and prestige, an iPhone or Earpads for showing the love they have for tech innovations, and so on. Just as in traditional product branding, it is the stories people tell that will add value to their own personality, elevating them to a different level and differentiating them from their competition. Just as building a personal brand takes time, knowing how to share a personal story takes effort and commitment from an individual. Many companies, especially the ones that are focused on sales, offer their employees workshops and invest in their competences to tell stories properly.

2.2.2. Storytelling in Personal Branding

We are the stories we tell (Schank, 1995). We are the jokes we make and the attitudes we have. We are the help we give and the compassion we show. We are all our friends and family and the stories they tell. We are never an island. The stories are individual but never without the influence of everything that surrounds us. It is true that some stories might be significantly better than others, somehow more coherent and genuine, to the people and the world around it (Fisher, 1984). But we all have something to give, to show, to teach and tell our children and their children. It is a never-ending loop – the only thing that stays behind when we are gone.

It is accepted among scholars in the literature that storytelling plays, in fact, a very important role in branding a product or company and it is considered to be one of the most used marketing tools. As Lund mentions in his article, “stories come with many touchpoints to the lives of the listeners, facilitating an emotional connection (Lund et al., 2018, p.04), and communicating brand values but without a great story attached, there is nothing differentiating about a brand (Lund et al., 2018). Marketing is no longer about solely capturing attention, instead many marketers are now highly focused on engaging through dialogue (Lund et al., 2018), improving relationships and trust.

Like in all messages transmitted to us from big brands, our message should have a clear purpose and a consistent line of thought, evoking credibility and authenticity (Labrecque & Milne, 2011). According to Pera (2016), self-storytelling helps individuals increase self-understanding and also to inform others about their true identity.

Considering that we now in the 21st century, in such a highly technological and developed era, everyone has the chance to make their story visible to the world. Gary Vaynerchuck (one of the biggest motivational influencers of our times; maybe not as big as Anthony Robbins) wrote in one of his LinkedIn articles:

I'm only interested in one thing. The thing that binds us all together. No matter who you are or what your profession is – whether you're an entrepreneur or

in sales or a designer or a developer – no matter what you do, your job is to tell a story. And so, to tell a great story, the number one thing you have to do is evoke a reaction. The end. (Vaynerchuk, 2019)

Today we all lack time and, especially, patience. Not because we want to but because today's routines are transforming us in a little less than human beings. In addition to that, people are extremely overwhelmed with information coming literally from every single corner, so they chose to consume exclusively what they like and what makes them feel good. At the end of the day, what truly matters is if someone's message is interesting enough to invest some extra 5 minutes watching it. The trick is evoking the right emotions at the right moment. In a sea of a million stories, a great one is going to make someone react. People often stop communicating what they want because they believe their message is similar to others. Sometimes the problem is not the message, it is the room where you are talking. In traditional marketing, you do not only have to know in-depth your product, partners and competitions. Part of your job is to be incredibly familiar with your customer. Powerful storytelling allows individuals to position themselves attractively when compared to others and to increase one's positive reputation (Pera et al., 2016) but your knowledge of people guarantees all the rest.

Branding improves people's chances of being recognized – be it in a small niche market or in their local town. Guaranteeing that the brand and its message is coherent across several platforms ensures that the message an individual wants to share is being delivered and recognized properly. The key is assuring that everything matches and makes sense. It is expected that the job behind the scenes is always performed: brand management and maintenance.

Other than that, there is no evident science behind the act of storytelling. To complement this thought, Pera, Viglia and Furlan (2016) mention on their article that, "similar to product branding, storytelling is interpreted as a means to personal reputation that helps in promoting ones' uniqueness to an assumed audience" (Pera et al., 2016, p.45).

III - Methodology

How can, in fact, storytelling be of any help to develop a positively solid personal brand? That question was and still is at the very centre of this research and with the chosen methodology it was possible to come to some conclusions.

Although both concepts sound fairly familiar to most people, there is little explanation in the literature about how individuals can use storytelling in their favour, when working on their self-marketing. To further comprehend the meaning and the correlation between both concepts, a two-method study was implemented. The first one is the analysis of the literature review focused on the subjects being studied: personal branding and storytelling. Firstly, personal branding was decomposed: what it means, how it works and what influence does it have in our lives, be it in a personal or professional level. Afterward the same process was implemented to storytelling with similar questions. It was necessary to understand how this method can be of any use to personal branding.

Several articles that focused on these particular subjects were carefully selected and analysed in-depth, having revealed the already expected answers. By immersing in the literature, it was possible to withdraw a deeper and more complete understanding of the personal branding phenomenon, helping this way to find a connection to the concept of storytelling.

The literature gave the necessary inputs for the second stage of the research – the interviews. After a thorough read through the methods used by the mentioned authors in this dissertation, it was opted to implement the Qualitative Research Method (Table 1). This study focused mostly on the method of semistructured interviews with the support of a couple of structured interviews. As one of the purposes of this dissertation is to study and to understand the experiences, views, and beliefs of the respondents, the interviews were the best method to implement - “Interviews are appropriate in those scenarios where you have basic knowledge about the research topic and you want to establish a deeper understanding of it” (Bhasin, 2019).

Semistructured interviews give the possibility to be more flexible with the process, decreasing the distance between the participant and the researcher, which

allows withdrawing the needed conclusions but also to establish some personal contact. In fact, “it does maintain some structure, but it also provides the researcher with the ability to probe the participant for additional details” (Solutions, 2019). Because this method is fairly flexible, it allows the researcher not to conduct several rounds of the interview. With a good scripted guideline, it is possible to gather the necessary information in just one round. The script incorporated 10 questions. Six debated on the subject of personal branding, 3 focused on the storytelling concept and the last one was a generic question open to debate and free opinion statements.

Before moving onto the interview process, it was necessary to test the questions on the script. For this purpose, two test interviews were held. The answers given by those participants will not be included in this work. Both participants gave helpful feedback, but it was not necessary to make any changes to the script. Therefore, the work pursued its natural course of action.

Seven interviews carried with the chosen research method were held via Skype and lasted between 25 and 55 minutes.

As not every participant had the opportunity to meet in person or to have a call, it was suggested to them they answered the questions in a written form – Structured Interview. The script was sent to the participants and they answered all the necessary questions. Although it is a rigid method of research, the interviewees felt no difficulty at all when answering the questions because were very familiar with the concepts and the logic behind the questions.

In total, nine interviews were conducted to individuals that were carefully selected to share their understanding and knowledge regarding this subject. The interviewed people have different professional and educational backgrounds. Although marketing professionals and sales representatives have the biggest know-how and insight on the field of personal branding and storytelling, the goal was not to be too focused only on them. Nonetheless, they were also included in my research. It was crucial to understand till what extend other people – different activities, education and/or professional background - had a good understanding of personal branding represents and if it is indeed a concept that works easily for everyone.

Author	Article	Method	Kind
Rebecca Pera, Giampaolo Viglia, Roberto Furlan	Who Am I? How Compelling Self- storytelling Builds Digital Personal Reputation	Qualitative and Quantitative Research	Interpretative approach – Degrees- of-freedom (DFA).
Steven P. Vallas, Emily R. Cummins	Personal Branding and Identity Norms in the Popular Business Press: Culture in an Age of Precarity	Qualitative Research	Interview.
Deva Rangarajan, Betsy D. Gelb, Amy Vandaveer	Strategic personal branding – And how it pays off	Qualitative Research	Interviews.
Lauren I. Labrecque, Ereni Markos, George R. Milne	Online Personal Branding: Processes, Challenges, and Implications	Qualitative Research	Interpretative Orientation Research – investigate online behaviour and in- depth interviews with 12 participants.

Table 1 – Authors and research method

Source: Self-gathered data from the reviewed literature

The reason why this dissertation focuses on qualitative analysis is because many of the authors mentioned throughout this dissertation used similar methodologies in their researches and given the subject this is the best method to acquire all the necessary conclusions. For instance, Rangarajan (2017) conducted an interview to 33 respondents (consultants, attorneys, executives, sales and marketing managers), from Europe and USA, to categorize personal brands because distinctive factors may vary from job to job and country to country. Another author, Vallas (2015), made an interview with 53 job seekers and job counsellors that lasted closely to 45 minutes each. Both authors had a different percentage of female and male respondents, some of them had college or higher degrees but

others were awkwardly different from the rest of the sample. For instance, in a sample when most of the participants are managers, CEOs, IT, human resources, journalists, sales managers or lawyers, others were technicians or even unemployed people. This helped both scholars to extend their sample and to give them a much wider perspective regarding the subjects they were studying. As the term personal branding knows no gender, race, profession or passions, it gets much harder to select a rigorous pattern. The mindset followed throughout this dissertation is: there is no specific age scale, educational or professional background. The important thing to focus on is whether the people under consideration were solidly familiar with the concepts of personal branding and storytelling, whether by acting on it directly or just being familiar with the people who did.

The interviews are focused on understanding, first of all, the basics behind a personal brand – what it is, how can someone build one and if it applies, in fact, to every individual out there, no matter the social status, job title or age. Different people usually have different approaches to the same problems or circumstances. Thus, they might help to understand how anyone can build a brand that is strong and that stands out among all the others in the market. To finish off with the process, the selected questions on this script focus on the most important matter – storytelling and its' value to personal branding. Can storytelling be considered a personal marketing tool people can use to empower themselves? Can storytelling make our own brands just as impactful as the rest? Can this method help us stand out in our society? Can this help us be better professionals? These are the questions that need to be answered.

The main goal throughout this work is to find tools within storytelling that mundane people can use to their advantage when building their own personal brand. Considering that we are looking at people as brands, a great competitive advantage is crucial to succeed.

The names, job titles and the name of the companies of the interviewed people will not be disclosed as it was guaranteed that their identity would be as confidential as possible (Table 2).

Name	Age	Sector	Job Function	Research Type
Interviewee 1	26	Tech Sector	Project Manager	Qualitative
Interviewee 2	48	Video Industry	Video	Qualitative
Interviewee 3	35	Auto Parts Industry	Head of Digital Marketing	Qualitative
Interviewee 4	30 - 40	Personal Project	Copywriter	Qualitative
Interviewee 5	30 - 40	Personal Project & Automotive Engineering Software	Graphic Designer	Qualitative
Interviewee 6	39	Personal Project	Marketing	Qualitative
Interviewee 7	45	Personal Project	Recruitment	Qualitative
Interviewee 8	35 - 45	Personal Project	Storytelling	Quantitative
Interviewee 9	25 - 30	Corporate and Personal Gifts	Founder	Quantitative

Table 2 – Interviewee’s Profiles

Source: Self-gathered data

IV - Presentation and Results' Discussion

In this chapter, the focus will be on understanding the presented results by the participants during the Interviews and to understand to what extent they bring added value to the literature. To guarantee the process is easy to work through, it will be conducted an analysis for each question from the script, from 1 to 10.

The first question aims to understand what the respondents think of personal branding and what characteristics are important for them in a positive managed personal brand. Although the profiles of the participants are fairly different, they all ended up saying the same thing in different words. For instance, interviewee 8 says that personal branding is like a “fancy Anglicism that we use to describe the thing that sets people apart from one another as human, professionals and as dynamic integral parts of the society”. He also states that we want everything to look trendy, fashionable and stylish.

Many of them highlighted authenticity as being the most important feature for them. This characteristic was one of the most important ones in this dissertation, which also supports the thought that Arruda (2003) says in the literature - “successful personal branding is authentic. That means you use your values, passions, and strengths to distinguish yourself from others so you can get the resources you need to advance in your career” (Arruda, 2003, p.07). Besides Arruda, Labrecque also was one of the authors who highlighted the huge importance that authenticity has on a person's brand:

People want to know where you are, where you live, they want to see that you're a legitimate photographer that you're not just coming out of a shack somewhere—so it gives people more trust, they trust you more if they know more about you. (Labrecque et al., 2011, p.46)

Authenticity, in fact, enhances the message receptivity and the quality of the relationship that results from it (Labrecque & Milne, 2011).

Interviewee 1 says that “it is a very abstract concept, but it has a lot to do with the identity of each professional and I believe personal branding should be based on 3 components: authenticity, consistency and related-factor”.

Interviewees 4, 5, 7 and 9 believe that personal branding is what differentiates people from one another, especially when talking about professional activities.

Interviewee 6 says that “personal branding is similar to professional branding” and should be taken just as seriously as the traditional form of marketing.

Interviewee 2 said that our personal brand is like our DNA code. It is a footprint we leave behind, whether we realize it or not. He says “Any neighbour, any friend of ours or a family member has a brand, a footprint. A way of dealing with stuff”. Interviewee 3 says that there are no two human beings equal to one another and how incredible he finds that in such a technological Era the people are becoming more and more important and at the centre of many decision-making processes – “I think no one ever looked at people the way we look now”. He also added that companies go, but people stay. The participant 3 completed the thought of participant 2. She said that “Maybe right now you have a job that won’t be here in 10 years. You are not the job you do anymore. You are your own company. That is why our brand is so important because it stays with you”. Several interviewees agreed that besides all the efforts applied to manage their career and personal brand, it all grew very organically, and it was not too forced. They wanted to sound natural and some didn’t even recognize they had a visible personal brand until people started approaching them and inviting them to events and to give lectures. Besides, they did not want to look like some of the internet gurus or influencers who are trying very hard to get noticed in the digital world because it all looks and sounds very forced. Many of those people, unfortunately, think that posting something online guarantees them success.

This comes to support Gander’s thought “brands grow organically, the best personal brands develop as a result of strong communication, a sense of purpose, and the person behind the brand backing up the brand’s promise again and again” (Gander, 2014, p.101). Also one of our biggest flaws is to believe that just by simply having a brand, personal or otherwise, we have guaranteed success but as

experience shows, many great brands fail by not being properly managed (Shepherd, 2005). The interviewee also 3 states that:

I think Portugal, for such a small country, has way too many gurus. They show up at some events, take a picture and post it online. They think the job is done. Unfortunately, in Portugal is enough to access LinkedIn to realize that there are a lot of people like that.

This also happens because not everyone is fully aware of their protentional or capabilities. Some people are born aware of what they are going to do with their lives, while others just spend years trying to find their path. Drucker mentions that in his article:

Mathematicians, musicians, and cooks, for instance, are usually mathematicians, musicians, and cooks by the time they are four or five years old. Physicians usually decide on their careers in their teens, if not earlier. But most people, especially highly gifted people, do not really know where they belong until they are well past their mid-twenties. (p.105)

Regarding the importance of personal branding (question number 2), all of the interviewed seemed to understand the crucial importance of a well-work personal brand, especially from a point-of-view of work. Interviewee 1 said that the job market is highly saturated. Many people do what we do, and many people offer what we can offer. Nolan mentions (2015) there are way too many qualified people for one job and the best way we all have to impress the recruiters is to stand out with the help of our “unique” and “authentic” selves, which highly supports the opinions of all 9 participants on this research. Interviewee 8 had a very interesting point-of-view:

It's tremendous! Especially in a world that is permanently changing and adapting; where you have more consultants, coaches, freelancers, people who work from home. It becomes fundamental, for someone who moves

inside this ecosystem, to build a solid, congruent, coherent and a trustworthy personal brand. It is necessary to see and to be seen. But, more important than that, it is necessary to listen. A lot. Constantly. Understand what people want and need in order to adapt and to get the things they want to achieve. Today, we are what we say, what we post, what we criticize, what we do on the digital sphere. I can say, for instance, that LinkedIn – my favorite social media today – already brought me many good things. Job offers. Invitations. Work. Friends. And a lot of knowledge acquired throughout time. I am respected and considered for what I say and what I do, but mostly, because I am transparent, translucent, true and authentic. That is my personal brand.

Although we are all unique, we are not irreplaceable – “Personal branding is becoming increasingly essential to professional success” (Arruda, 2003, p.06). This confirms the statement that one of the authors mentioned previously on this dissertation said: “With hundreds of thousands of organizational brands and millions of product brands already competing for attention, the tens of millions of individuals seeking to carve out a personal business niche in the marketplace face a daunting prospect” (Shepherd, 2005, p.596). Working on a personal brand is particularly important for someone who is looking for a job or just thinking about shifting their career path. Shepherd (2005) also added that personal branding is basically an attention-getting device, which very often helps people to gain a competitive advantage when aiming for specific professional goals, for instance. Following the same line of thought, Gander – one of the authors – mentions that:

Your personal brand then will let people know what you offer above what your CV says – after all many people have degrees and skills training, but you need that *je ne sais quoi* that will differentiate you. You need a strategy to effectively manage your personal brand because this is about how people perceive you and how you can influence that perception. (p.99)

Also Arruda (2003) stated that:

Personal branding is a way of clarifying and communicating what makes you different and special—and using those qualities to guide your career or business decisions. It's about understanding your unique attributes — your strengths, skills, values, and passions —and using them to separate yourself from your competitors or peers. In this sense, personal branding means clearly communicating the unique promise of value that you have to offer your employer or your clients. (p.06)

A personal brand should have a purpose, to create awareness and be highly consistent. Both Shepherd (2005) and Gander (2014) highlight how important it is to begin with a purpose and introspection because individuals must have a clear vision of who they are, their weaknesses, strengths and the value they give. That helps to build a proper message to the right audience. Success comes to those who truly know themselves, their own strengths, values and how they perform the best – this was Drucker's (1999) opinion on this subject.

The Interviewee 1 adds that “Personal branding here comes as a way of standing out. Like a personal trait. Something that distinguishes us from others, instead of being just another well-formatted CV. That is the reason why people do not use Europass anymore. We stopped being machines”.

Interviewee 7 says this does not apply only to recruitment. It is transversal to all areas of people's lives. He states that “If we do not exist today, if we do not appear nor do we communicate who we are, we will find it very difficult to get to our goals”.

Interviewee 5 adds that “I think now more frequently than ever, people start managing their personal brand. No matter the job, especially in areas such as marketing and design and so on. There is a need to stand out and not just be Maria who does the drawing or João who is related to marketing”. She also mentions that “the question is: you have too many people doing the same that you are doing, and if you don't have that element of differentiation, you are not going to be able to sell your fish”.

On the other hand, interviewee 9 says that it is something we give too much of importance - “Having a hundred likes and a dozen of shares or having X followers

in a social media channel, does not make someone a personal branding guru. It is important to distinguish good communication from a personal brand”.

Interviewee 2 adds a very interesting point-of-view to this subject. Although he thinks that personal branding is crucial in our days, some people have different perceptions – “without hurting any feeling, I think there is a vulgarization of the term of personal brand. I feel like everyone wants to be known, famous, an influencer and a guru very quickly, without first building any foundations. That is the negative part of the personal brand”.

Interviewee 3 names professional reasons why people should work on their personal brand. He said that “we can change jobs and companies, but our strong brand allows people to like us no matter the place we are and the thing we represent”. Interviewee 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 mention the same reasons, especially from a professional perspective.

When the participants were confronted with the third question (if personal branding is a term that applies to everyone) they all gave a positive answer. No exception - “everything is a product” (Vallas & Cummins, 2015). Some of the interviewees gave examples of those people who wipe the streets, for instance. As interviewee 2 says “A street sweeper, even though he is not conscious of his personal brand – if he is a good professional, that gets along with all his colleagues, a good citizen, a good father, grandfather, husband, etc etc etc. His DNA transforms his brand and helps him in professional, social and relationship terms” – and the way the society sees him. The interviewee number 1 also mentions the same example. When we think of someone who cleans our streets, we do not give enough value but that does not mean that the person at stake doesn’t have that value. It might not be a profession most people post on LinkedIn, but the personal brand is much more than the trends we see.

Interviewee 3 thinks everyone without exception has a personal brand: “I totally believe in that. My 4-year old son has a personal brand. A strong one and we are talking about kids. So yes, of course, I believe everyone has its’ own brand”. He also adds that “it all has to do with what you live through – where you come from, the education you had, if you have brothers or sisters... it shapes people”.

Interviewee 4 says that “think about the circles you move in, your family, your friends. In those places, you have your personal brand because of the way other people see you. They can think you are a nice girl, a good friend, always ready to help... or it can be the opposite”.

Interviewee 9 also states that “I believe everyone has something that sets him or her apart from the rest and that is personal branding. All people are different”. A personal brand is how others see each other:

A product’s brand position is how people think about a product or service. Your brand position will be how people think about you! As we’ve stated before, if you don’t decide how you want your brand to be positioned, others will do it for you: the industry you are in, your boss, your friends, and to a large extent, your enemies. Needless to say, it is better to position yourself rather than have others do it for you—which you obviously understand, or you wouldn’t be reading this book. (Andrusia and Haskins, 2009 apud Vallas & Cummins, 2015, p.306)

Interviewee 6 says that “Marketing is everything and everything is marketing. This means everyone has a personal brand and we all work on it. Often without even realizing it, right? Because all our actions have consequences” and all those consequences say something about the person we are.

Truth is not everybody communicates who they are the same way. Some businesses or people have different approaches. The participant 1 also gave the example of a pastry shop: someone who works in a place like that might not feel the need for promoting its service 24/7 on social media. In many places their service – the value they add to the customer – is transmitted by word of mouth. For the customer, it might be enough to receive a little smile on their receipt or to be greeted on the door with a positive attitude. That is also a way of communicating who you are and what kind of work you do. This interviewee in specific followed the same thought of line of the author Peter Drucker who mentions that:

Manners are the lubricating oil of an organization. Manners - simple things like saying "please" and "thank you" and knowing a person's name or asking after her family - enable two people to work together whether they like each other or not. Bright people, especially bright young people, often do not understand this. If analysis shows that someone's brilliant work fails again and again as soon as cooperation from others is required, it probably indicates a lack of courtesy - that is, a lack of manners (p.101).

As interviewee 6 says "creativity is one of the most important factors of personal and professional marketing today because it allows us to share something from a different perspective. Content today is more of the same. A word here, a word there, but it is like that".

It is clear that working on a personal brand is not easy and that not everyone gets how to manage it properly. Interviewee 4 mentions that:

Today we lack purpose. I really think you need a purpose. People really need to know what they are doing, for what reason and to whom because if not, at some point, you are running everywhere. You don't serve anyone, and you're not happy either, right? Because you feel like something is missing. Another thing I find very important is consistency because it is easy doing something good once or twice and then stopping. This is a constant fight and I feel that not everyone gets it. A person that works on his/her personal brand is doing a job.

Following this thought, interviewee 7 says that:

I've realized that there is a very rooted pattern, not just from a cultural point-of-view but also from what others teach us to do. Very wrong. People are unable to communicate their brands. Individuals usually communicate a set of past experiences, but the truth is those experiences do not guarantee they get the job. Besides the experiences, we must understand what our clear skill is set, and people just can't simply communicate it. The pattern was: if I

communicate my experience then I am closer to getting a job. Wrong. Only if you are able to communicate a strong and consistent brand. The consistency of your brand gives confidence to the interlocutors. The people recruiting for a job fear of hiring the wrong person. Commit a casting error. The more consistent you are, the safer and stronger is the message you transmit. Then, I understood that many people thought that personal branding was just a buzz word, but the truth is in our daily interactions we are communicating our brand. What happens is that most of the times, we have awareness of it.

Interviewee 7 also adds that the vision is very important. Goals should be very clear, short-term but also long-term. Individuals must understand very clearly where they want to get and how they want to get there. Working this takes time and effort but it is absolutely worth it, especially for someone who is looking for a job. He says that “when you answer to a job offer, your probability of getting the job is 4%. On the other hand, if they come to you and ask for your CV, your chances rise up to 86%. It is huge! Personal brand plays a very decisive role in the job-hunting market”.

Interviewee 5 says “that is why it so important we develop our own personal brand, make our career management, our own marketing, our brand and online presence. We make sure the other person comes to us, and not the other way around. I am fortunate enough that people already come to me and I don’t have to be looking for a job. It finds me”.

She also agrees that personal branding “is not just putting content out there just because. Just to show other people you are there. No. It is about publishing content that makes total sense for everything you do in life. It doesn’t mean you can’t publish things that are not related to your work, of course”.

Considering we live in such a technologically developed time, when asking the participants to name the best ways to communicate a personal brand, the social media channels were almost intuitively included in the answer of all of them. Online is the obvious channel in our times but as some of them mentioned, it takes effort and a lot of commitment, which supports the thought of Labrecque: “Online personal branding requires information be available to others; by the very nature of the online

world, this availability puts people at risk in terms of misdirected and insufficient branding” (Labrecque & Milne, 2011, p.49). Besides, as Lund (2018) mentioned: “social media are spaces of storytelling as millions of stories representing multiple identities, realities and brands are circulating within them, influencing values and perceptions” (Lund et al., 2018, p.274).

It is extremely important to highlight the fact that many of the participants suggested how important it is first to understand the business and the people being targeted and just then to choose an appropriate communication channel.

Gander says that “A starting point for managing your personal brand is to reflect on what messages your current brand is sending” (Gander, 2014, p.100) and that is what helps people to build a compelling personal brand statement. This is also a way to fully comprehend what exactly differentiates them from others – skills, abilities, knowledge, personality traits and so on. Only then, they can finally identify what kind of strategic marketing plan they are going to apply to themselves and how they will manage the brand behind the value. Success comes to those who truly know themselves, their own strengths, values and how they perform the best (Drucker, 1999). This is a crucial point for not just knowing what to communicate but also how to do it. As we saw prior to this, people have different ways of showing who they are and what they do.

Interviewee 8 adds that “there is almost no doubt whatsoever at this point. I will not play predictions, but social media is really the only effective way to give exposure to ourselves. If a person wants to stay away from social media and still develop a personal brand, how are they going to do it? I mean they probably can, but I think it is a utopia. How can I be only offline and still desire to influence people?”

Although the interviewees see the full value of online resources for brand communication, most of them mention how important face-to-face communication really is.

Interviewee 1 says that “interpersonal contact is the best. Conversations”. Despite the fact that everyone agrees that social and public media gives visibility to people – as interviewees 3 and 7 say “it’s a stage and it gives us the chance to get to more people” – but the fact is everyone prefers real communication.

The technology is a support tool we have. It makes people's life easier and more convenient, but it is only face-to-face interaction that individuals can really see how genuine and true the person behind the screen is. That is what Rangarajan (2017) meant when writing the following: "of course, one's online presence is not the whole picture; living the characteristics of one's personal brand, not just conveying them online, is a necessity". The interviewee 8 also agrees with that: "Social media is very powerful to help us amplify the message we want to share with others, but also full of people who only talk about themselves, their own conquers, achievements, billing and sometimes shares very little of that what really matters. Digital egocentrism can blind people and, in many cases, it really does. However, I highly doubt that anything will ever be as impactful as personal contact. Simon Sinek says that *people don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it*".

Interviewee 2 also mentions that individuals should be careful with the forced push them to when communicating their brand or telling their stories. Today we talk about Inbound Marketing and that is what people want to consume nowadays. A communication that sounds too forced, scares customers away.

When moving into the topic of people who they see fit for a positive personal brand, the interviewees named several different people, from different working spheres and nationalities. Some mentioned Portuguese people and others went beyond borders.

When the participants were asked to describe their brand in 3 words, many of them felt struggles and found it challenging to put their own brand in just 3 words. As expected, they described their brand with the characteristics they named in the first question.

The mentioned characteristics are authenticity, consistency, charisma, purpose, strong personality, creativity, adaptation, convincing, memorable, distinctive and clear. These are the words that get repeated very often in this dissertation.

From this moment on, the focus shifted onto the storytelling subject. To begin with, the participants had to answer what they thought of storytelling and the relevance it has on personal branding. These answers are the ones that will add complementary value to the little literature that was found in the correlation of both

concepts. Interviewee 1 highlighted that “a client doesn’t buy a product, period. A client buys a story or an experience that he or she may have with a certain product”.

All of the participants gave examples of people who had a positive personal brand and a well-developed storytelling. Each person feels closer to people with whom they can relate to, be it in a professional way or just personal preference. They justified admiring those people and following their work for the same reasons they said personal branding is important when well-managed and with the right characteristics.

Understanding storytelling is also about understanding how to work with it and how to take the most advantage out of it. Because the participants in this research were all aware of the concept and that they all use it in their professional activities or daily regular lives, it was crucial to clarify what methods or tools they could recommend.

Interviewee 4 says that it is important for the reader to feel like a hero as if the story is about him and his problems and his situations. She tries to open up about problems, but she also leaves the stories open for further discussion – “I try to give space to dialog. Leave the thing open and allow people to interact with my story, to give their opinion”. This way, the reader feels connected and part of something. It also helps to create engagement and future relationships with the author. As it was mentioned in the literature, storytelling is a very powerful method that allows people to engage and inspire others – all depends on the way a story is told (Denning, 2006).

Interviewee 2 said that:

the first attempt people had with storytelling was painting on the walls. There are several studies about it. They would do a cartoon of whatever had happened to them that day. Storytelling is in our DNA, even before these last 100 years of technology. I have no idea how many years storytelling has. Over 100? Over 100 years we had radio and it was news. Then came the TV, the journal and then the Internet as a way of telling stories. Before all that, people would talk. I think storytelling is so old that not even the Greeks invented it. They structured it in 3 acts. We still use those acts in our lives.

Are you familiar with the The Hero's Journey? Basically, the Hero has a problem, that problem happens. Then the solution comes. Pixar and Hollywood use it. We use it.

Interviewee 3 also adds that:

I believe the impact of storytelling is gigantic because there is no personal brand without a story. This storytelling thing has to do with everything you are building in your life. If we are talking about professional aspects – where did you start; which were the first people who had an impact on you; what was the first action you had that had positive results, and so on. And whatever it is that you have learned from it. Storytelling has to do with what you go through – things that will build your personal brand with time until you become the person you are right now.

Interviewee 6 says that “we all have stories to tell. Creativity is present in all things, and I like to reinforce it. There are several ways for us to tell stories, right? I believe that emotional ones work the best. Today people like everything that is connected to emotion”.

Interviewee 8 also adds that:

I can't even imagine a personal branding strategy that doesn't involve the elements of storytelling. I can't even think that people can develop a personal branding statement without telling stories, without a narrative, without conflicts, without solutions and without lessons learned. It is a way to show to others that we are just like them. What keeps people near-by is precisely this touch of adventure, curiosity for the unknown, a fresh start, discovery and victory. A hero's journey inevitably assures interest and the attention of people. In fact, stories bring people together. Without the principles of the art of storytelling, applied in daily life, any personal branding strategy will look incomplete.

Interviewee 5 mentions that she creates a Persona behind the stories she tells and asks people questions; sometimes uncomfortable ones:

Engagement boosts your sales. You got to play a bit more emotional, indirectly and subtly. You end-up having the desired return. I tell my stories as if I had my alter-ego. I am not at all a person who likes the exposure, but I also understand that for my specific job (designer) and in order to get more customers, it is something essential. I had to show myself, thus I created my alter-ego. I am very shy, and storytelling helps me a lot.

Storytelling is a way of covering some fears, insecurities and also a way of finding people who think just like us. It allows the author (in written storytelling) to express some thought and the readers to feel connected. Eventually, trust is created thought engagement. As Whitler (2018) mentions in her Forbes article, storytelling helps people to develop a deeper and much stronger connection with their audience. Sharing stories is part of our human existence. Kelliher and Davenport (2007) also say that:

Telling stories is a fundamental part of what makes us human, arising from the desire to transform the fragmented chaos of our daily lives into a patterned, coherent and shareable narrative. This process of testifying to our life experiences in a reflective manner helps us understand and convey who we are as individuals and as members of a larger, cultural society (p.926).

So really, “storytelling isn’t just a creative approach to marketing. It gives your consumers a totally different entry to your brand” (Whitler, 2018) as it happens with the Interviewee 5.

Interviewee 9 says it is important to share real events that happen within the company or other personal stories that might motivate other people to take courage and to change their lives – “The fact I left from a multinational company at 23 years

old and started being an entrepreneur. The important thing is being true and real". He also adds:

I am not a storytelling lover, at all. Not that I do not use it with some frequency because I do, but because I think we've come to a point where we hear more fake stories than real ones. Storytelling is a good tool to get attention. Every day, we read stories about people who'd sleep in the living room, shared their life with friends for 4 years for not having enough money to open their business and so on. It's like a recipe for success. Storytelling, yes but balanced and always genuine. If your story has nothing emotional or positive, tell it anyways.

All their input supports what Lund says in the article - "stories come with many touchpoints to the lives of the listeners, facilitating an emotional connection (Lund et al., 2018, p.04). Marketing is no longer about solely capturing attention, instead many marketers are now highly focused on engaging through dialogue (Lund et al., 2018), improving relationships and trust.

Interviewee 9, a professional who works with storytelling, shared that he uses 3 classical and fundamental ingredients to tell a good story: characters, conflict and a clear message. As he also says:

In a story, the primordial goal is to get closer to the reader. I try to guarantee that the characters, the action and the message are as clear as possible. Another thing I try to do is to make the story easily perceptible. I try to use a language that is simple enough so that a 5-year old kid or a 90-year old person can easily understand it. This was the most important thing I've learned as a journalist, with the help of 2 people that occupy very important seats in television today – Rodrigo Guedes de Carvalho and Bento Rodrigues. Whatever we say should be clear. Simple. Easy to understand. Relatable. Pure. True. Something that is said with meaning.

People need stories to connect and to feel empathy. It generates trust and trust generates sales.

To conclude, the last question allowed the interviewees to discuss the two sides of personal branding: the authenticity of a brand and the need to adapt the brand to the needs of the market. This question was formulated with the biggest input of Shepherd (2005) who says that:

In the traditional marketing approach, we produce items to meet customer needs. In the non-conventional approaches such as, personal marketing, many gurus tell us to discover our strongest features and to learn how to sell them to an audience that might be interested in them. There thus appears to be an unavoidable conflict. On the one hand, individuals are expected to respond to consumers in line with the marketing principle, but on the other hand they are advised to construct a 'truthful' brand image rooted in their unique set of attributes and attitudes (p.590).

The participants all agreed that both being authentic and adapting to new realities is possible without affecting the performance of the personal brand.

The interviewee 1 actually mentioned that this was the most interesting question of the interview, considering it makes people wonder seriously about this matter. She also says that:

In my point of view, this is not a dichotomy and I will tell you why. You adapt to the timings. I do not consider that it breaks a person's authenticity. The authenticity should be clear in what that you are a person who will keep on learning and having challenges throughout different stages of life and you adapt to them. It doesn't mean you lose your content.

What really matters is the consistency of the message people tell each other and if the facts remain the same. She also adds that "I think it is perfectly possible for you to acquire new knowledge and experiences... because those are the experiences that will feed your storytelling. Otherwise, you will be telling always the

same things and you won't have new stories to share". This question was very important to show how learning new things and having new experiences allows people to work even better in their personal brand using updated storytelling.

Interviewee 2 says that there is no way for people to avoid learning new things and acquiring new skills – it is a long-life learning process. Individuals do not lose their authenticity just because they read 10 books in a week – “I see with very good eyes those people who are curious enough to learn the most about different areas. They can still be themselves”.

Interviewee 3 gives the example of a musician “the musician is a very peculiar artist. He has his own way of playing with an instrument and each artist has its own genre but whatever he sold 10 years ago is not the same thing you hear on Spotify or Apple Music today”.

Interviewee 4 also says that everything depends on the stage of our life we are at. If people are just beginning their careers, of course, they will feel the need to adjust and adapt themselves to others, in order to learn and progress. She also adds that “you have to reinvent yourself somehow. You have to because otherwise you end up being more of the same. You have to keep feeding your own book and creating a new chapter after chapter”. The rest of the interviewees highly support the ideas shared by the mentioned participants. The fact is everyone agrees that it is important to evolve because the world shifts very fast and it is necessary to feed our own storytelling, in order to stay valuable to the people we want to reach.

On the contrary to all the interviewees, Interviewee 9 believes that people should not always be worried about adapting and changing themselves for others:

I do not agree that you have to be constantly adapting or evolving unless personal branding is the most important thing for you. The concept of “market” in this case is very relative. People make the market. And the market consumes what we give to it. A good story or a good personal brand, does not choose a year, a day, a week or a month. The best will always be the best, no matter the rest.

Interviewee 8 reinforces all the opinions and says that “as professionals, we really must pay attention”. It is crucial to understand the market, the tendencies and the whole sector we act in. We must know the world, but people should always remember the thing that makes them unique, special and incredible. That is our true authenticity.

V - Conclusion

From the beginning of the work until the very end of it, little surprises were expected from all the research. As soon as the literature started to be analysed more in-depth, it became very clear that storytelling can play a relevant role when developing a personal brand.

No matter the age, sex, education or profession, all people have a brand they bring everywhere with them. Unfortunately, not everyone is aware of the power they have within themselves. As it was already mentioned in the very beginning of this work, personal branding is everything we are. Everything we do, from the way we talk to the way we move our body, builds a perception on people's mind about us. That perception is what we call a personal brand. Unfortunately, only a small percentage of people in this world actually invest their efforts, time and money into developing, improving and promoting their personal brand, generating engagement and trust.

People are just like regular brands. They must be studied, fully analyzed and properly developed. Communicating a personal brand implies the same efforts as in traditional marketing, only it requires people to be more open-minded and more focused on their personal goals. Everything people do, from the way they wear to the way they talk and communicate with others, says something about the person they are. Both verbal and non-verbal language are important parts in this process.

It is important to underline the fact that even if people do not actively work their brand, it will still exist and communicate no matter the efforts. Brands can be either positive or negative. It is all a matter of how people want to be seen in society.

Investing in improving a personal brand is allowing doors to be open. In such a crowded world like ours, where people are more capable of more stuff, it is necessary to stand-out in the eyes of the recruitment department and the customers. As many of the participants mentioned in the interviews, we coexist in a very saturated job-market. Thus, the need to be different is urgent and enormous, in order to be valued by others.

Another conclusion that was possible to take from this dissertation and all the results debated previously is that building one's brand is not an easy task and that

it requires much effort and dedication. Many people do not work on their brands because they feel like they are selling their image and services, and unfortunately not many people are great sellers or feel comfortable enough promoting what they do.

It was also possible to conclude that although we live in the digital era, the best way to communicate our brand is through personal contact: networking events, lectures and consistent real-world communication. Individuals must understand that there are no barriers between what is online or offline. The communication, message, idea and values should be consistent in both worlds. Whatever people are online, they should be offline.

With the help of the interviewees, it was also allowed to conclude what characteristics are the most valued and important in a positive personal brand. They are authenticity, consistency, charisma, purpose, strong personality, creativity, adaptation, convincing, memorable, distinctive and clear.

As it was already debated, a personal brand is something intrinsic to all of us, so is telling stories. People have been connecting to one another for centuries by simply sharing stories with each other, in several scenarios: painting the walls, Greek theater, scary stories around a fireplace and a guitar. As people, we have the ability to inspire one another through interesting narratives or teaching children to set apart good from evil by just reading them a book.

Although telling stories is something very natural to us, when developing a personal brand, it is necessary to build our story in a way that brings value to both parties: the storyteller and the target. Different people use different techniques, but all of them have something in common: emotion sells. Emotional stories that other people can easily relate to. There are several ways of doing that: sharing personal situations, difficulties and problems; allowing people to share their emotions with you in open questions; confronting real events and achievements; following the journey of the hero: problem, tension and solution.

Working in a personal brand demands time, effort and being always up to date. Professionals who value their job, they will constantly keep on sharing new information and knowledge. Thus, instigating life events, investing in new skills and trying different activities is part of creating new stories to tell and, therefore, to stay

valid and interesting to the rest of the ecosystem. It is important to share knowledge and to add value to those people we want to reach. When sharing something, people must do it in a way that feels intimate and personal to the reader or the listener. Therefore, it is possible to be constantly learning and evolving and also being true to the inner self because both factors play an important role in the way people see our brand.

Storytelling is, in fact, something we do every day. As people who live in the 21st century, we all share content online in a daily basis. We communicate with our peers; we come home to our families and share everything that happened with them. We have other part-time activities and we are constantly telling a story about us to society.

Being able to stay concise and balanced is crucial. Unfortunately, not everyone walks the talk. The digital came as a tool to make people's lives easier and to erase many barriers, but it also allowed many of them to pretend something they are not. In fact, the best way to interact with others and to let people get familiar with what you do and who you are is through personal direct contact.

It was possible to understand, from the points-of-view that the interviewees shared in this dissertation, that inevitably personal branding is something that we all have. We can either control it and work with it to our advantage or we can let other people do it for us. In the first scenario, working a personal brand brings many advantages, be it personally or professionally. Personally, it allows individuals to have a more conscious presence in society and, professionally it helps individuals to stand out in the recruitment activity.

It is expected this work helps people pay more attention to the things they say, how and when they say it because eventually everything we do becomes a part of our identity and, therefore, of our brand. Storytelling is, without a doubt, a very powerful marketing tool when properly and consistently used. The most important thing to have in mind is the message – being unique is all about being ourselves but we should be consistent throughout time and life.

VI - Limitations

The biggest limitation of this dissertation is the amount of the sample selected for the Interviews. Such amount is not enough to give numerical statistics nor to get to more precise conclusions. In spite of that, it was the right amount to begin the research and it allowed to get very specific answers from very specific people. Additionally, it is important to highlight that the results that were generated with the help of the participants are subjective and vary from person to person. The questions were made to people who are familiar with both concepts and that already implement both of them in their personal and professional lives.

VII - Contribution for Management

As Drucker mentioned in his article “companies today aren't managing their employees' careers” – (Drucker, 1999, p.101), so people have to do it themselves. Unfortunately, and as interviewee 7 said “the way people work is changing but the recruitment isn't”. It is urgent to start recruiting the right people for the position but, mostly, for the companies' culture. The people recruiting are afraid of hiring the wrong people and the candidates are afraid of not feeling well-fitted into the company. Management should start trying to understand the motivations their employees have when inside and out of working hours and allowing them to explore new opportunities – workshops, mentorships, qualification improvement and so on. A company that focuses on the well-being of its' employees is a company that many other people will turn to. Being able to teach individuals and prepare them for their future is something that not many companies worry about. Unfortunately, they overpromise and, more often than desired, under-deliver. It is important for companies to invest in future education so that the employees acquire new skills and expand their future possibilities. A well-trained, motivated and capable worker brings more value to the company than the one who's unmotivated, lacks the skillset and does not understand the purpose of his work.

When recruiting, it is important to give the right image about the company and not to overpromise or to over-compliment the company itself. Recruiters should give a realistic image of what working at a certain company is like. When being asked about career development, rewards, cultural organization, the managers must be true and genuine – just like a personal brand. Because it takes two to tango, and when one is ahead of the other, the dance does not flow.

VIII - Future Suggestions for Investigation

As a suggestion for future research it would be very interesting to conduct a focus group with different generations to analyze how the understanding of both concepts and its importance varies from generation to generation. Some concepts started to be applied and more valued with the huge influence of millennials and the technology that is so intrinsic to this generation.

Additionally, it could be interesting to conduct interviews with specific profiles: profession, social status, gender and so on. For instance, understanding the importance of personal branding and case storytelling in medicine, such as rhinoplasty, estheticians, dermatologists, among others. How does their personal brand, their inner core, influence their work and customer satisfaction?

There are several ways to approach this subject because it is not only interesting to explore, it is also a very current issue.

Because personal branding applies to most people and it is transversal to several professions, social statuses and genders, different professional industries could explore this concept closer to their field of work.

IX - Appendix I

Interview Script

Português - Enquadramento: Esta entrevista será executada no âmbito da realização de uma Dissertação de Mestrado de Marketing, com o seguinte tema: A importância do *Storytelling* na construção de uma Marca Pessoal. O objetivo desta entrevista é entender de que maneira pode o *Storytelling*, como ferramenta de Marketing, apoiar na construção e manutenção de uma sólida Marca Pessoal. Ao longo desta entrevista, iremos explorar o que entende por Marca Pessoal (*Personal Brand*) *Storytelling*, o seu valor e as possíveis técnicas que nos pode recomendar. Iremos explorar uma possível ligação entre ambos os conceitos e tentar chegar a algumas conclusões.

Esta entrevista garante toda a sua privacidade e proteção dos dados. Se me permitir, iremos prosseguir com as perguntas. Pode interromper-me a qualquer momento e dar todo o seu contributo. O seu input é muito valioso para a minha pesquisa e para me ajudar a tirar as devidas conclusões. Sinta-se à vontade para expressar abertamente as suas opiniões acerca do tema.

Noto que esta entrevista durará entre 30 e 40 minutos e será devidamente gravada.

Podemos avançar?

English - Framework: *This Interview will be held for Dissertation purposes in the framework of a master's in marketing, with the following theme: The importance of Storytelling when Building a Personal Brand. The main goal is to understand how Storytelling can be used as a Marketing tool, when helping individuals build and maintain their Personal Brands. Throughout this Interview we will explore what is your understanding of Personal Branding, Storytelling and figure out if there is, in fact, a correlation between the concepts.*

This Interview will guarantee your privacy as it will only be used for transcription purposes. Feel free to interrupt me any time and bear in mind that there are no right or wrong answers. All your input is valuable for me and my research. Feel free to speak up. This interview will last between 30 and 40 minutes and it will be recorded.

Csn we begin?

1 - O que entende por Marca Pessoal (mais utilizado como *Personal Branding*) e quais são, na sua opinião, os atributos de uma Marca Pessoal?

1 - What is Personal Brand and what are, in your opinion, the attributes of a Personal Brand?

2 - Qual considera ser a importância da Marca Pessoal nos nossos dias?

2 – What is the importance of a Personal Brand in our days?

3 – Existe um artigo de 1997, que foi escrito por Tom Peters na revista *Fast Company* que fala da evolução do Branding “tradicional” para Branding individual e pessoal. Ele tem uma frase que gosto particularmente: *It’s time for me and you to take a lesson from the big brands, a lesson that’s true for everyone who’s interested in what it takes to stand out and prosper in the new world of work.* E reforça com *You’re branded, branded, branded.* A minha questão é: acredita que *Personal Branding* se aplica de facto a todas as pessoas?

3 – There na article that Tom Peters wrote in 1997 in the magazine of Fast Company that talks about Personal and Individual Branding. He has a quote I particularly enjoy: “It’s time for me and you to take a lesson from the big brands, a lesson that’s true for everyone who’s interested in what it takes to stand out and prosper in the new world of work”. And he reinforces with “You’re branded, branded, branded”. My question is: do you really believe that Personal Branding applies, in fact, to everyone?

4 – Partindo da sua experiência pessoal, quais são os meios mais eficazes para comunicar uma Marca Pessoal?

4 – From your personal experience, what are the most effective ways and channels to communicate a Personal Brand?

5 – Dê-me um exemplo de alguém que tenha uma Marca forte na sua perspectiva e o porquê de achar que essa pessoa reúne todas as condições de uma Marca Pessoal?

5 – Give me an example of someone who has a strong Brand and why do you think that that specific person gathers all the necessary criteria.

6 – Se pudesse descrever a sua Marca Pessoal em 3 palavras, quais seriam?

6 – If you could describe your own Personal Brand in three words, what would they be?

7 - O ser humano é um ser altamente dependente de comunicação. Somos o único animal (conhecido até à data) que arranjou maneira de comunicar de maneira estruturada e racional. O uso da linguagem foi um fenómeno que levou muitos anos a ser aperfeiçoado. Neste contexto, a minha questão é:

Na sua ótica, qual pode ser o impacto de *Storytelling* numa Marca Pessoal? Pode fundamentar o seu ponto de vista?

7 – Humans are highly dependent on communication. We are the only animal known to date that found a structured way to communicate between each other. Developing the language how we know it today took many years to be improved. My question is: in your point of view, do you believe that Storytelling can have an impact in the phenomenon of Personal Branding? Can you please explain your thought?

8 – Para além da sua Marca Pessoal, consegue-me identificar algum caso específico de alguém que tenha construído uma Marca Pessoal distintiva, através do uso do *Storytelling*?

8 – Apart from the examples you gave me with Personal Branding, can you name someone who you think belt a strong Personal Brand through Storytelling?

9 – Que métodos ou técnicas é que usa, aquando da implementação do *Storytelling*?

9 – What methods do you use when you tell your own story?

10 – A literatura frisa que para se ter uma Marca Pessoal distintiva no mercado é necessário estar constantemente a adquirir novas competências e conhecimentos, de modo a ajustar-se às necessidades do mercado. No entanto, por outro lado, dizem que para uma Marca ser verdadeiramente boa, tem que ser genuína.

O que acha desta dicotomia? Por um lado, temos que estar em constante adaptação ao mercado e às suas exigências, mas por outro lado, continuar a ter sempre algo de nós.

10 – The Literature says that in order to have a distinctive Personal Brand it is necessary to acquire constant knowledge and new skills, so that the individual is properly adjusted to market needs. On the other hand, other authors mention that in order to have a truly positive Brand it should be genuine and authentic.

What do you think about this dichotomy? On one hand, people must be always adjusting to other's needs and desires, but on the other hand, they should still keep something true to themselves.

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