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**PERSONAL BRANDING IN A DIGITAL WORLD**  
**THE CASE OF SIR RICHARD BRANSON**

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Reason for research

We live in a constantly changing world. The things that were new yesterday are already obsolete today. Trends come and go, and it's impossible to follow up on everything. In a Digital World, people find themselves competing with millions of other individuals around the globe, so it is important to stand out and not to lose yourself. In this increasingly competitive market, finding a way to differentiate yourself is becoming a must. By mindfully creating a brand one can become recognisable, even if it is a new term for an old existing thing, a relatively new phenomenon in marketing is the Personal Branding. Famous authors such as Dale Carnegie and Napoleon Hill wrote about the importance of self-awareness and self-positioning. Consciously or not, Personal Branding is something everybody has. It's not a strategy to impress people in an inauthentic way, but rather a long term process of personal improvement that becomes a lifestyle. The Internet offers an ocean of challenges and opportunities, which if correctly used can provide a lot of personal advantages. Some people do not know how to build their brand and because of lack of knowledge many are afraid or think it is not worthy of having one. Creating a Personal Brand is much more important than people think and it doesn't apply only to professionals and celebrities. In today's transparent and connected market where everything is monitored, it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that the digital and real world are two distinct phenomena. Being aware that the online reputation is like a lifetime resumé containing all the digital footprints left on the online platforms period. It is the first step in taking control of the way one in which one is perceived by people. By making the decision to build and develop a Personal Brand online and offline one can add value to his/her life.

### 1.2 Objective of the thesis

In this modern world the impact Personal Branding has is huge. Through this research I expect to explain this by using a case study on Sir Richard Branson, in how to build a powerful brand in the Digital Age.

Through the use of a Personal Branding framework, which is composed using various elements I want to understand the advantages and the necessity of behind being a brand. As well as underlining essential features of the digital world, online reputations and identifying which tools are necessary to build a brand.

The goal of this thesis is to explain the importance and the benefits of having a Personal Brand. Helping to understand all the necessary tools and elements in building a strong Personal Brand using Sir Richard Branson as a case study.

### **1.3 Structure of the research**

The thesis is structured in six chapters, wherein the first section 'The Introduction' summarizing the reasoning and methodology undertaken in the research, as well as outlining the research objectives and structure.

The concept of Personal Branding (PB) is developed in the second chapter. The concept of Personal Branding is defined by listing its essential elements, its importance, the benefits and a general picture of a new phenomenon in marketing world.

The third chapter focuses on building the Personal Brand. It provides a framework with all the necessary tools, from understanding and discovering the personal purpose/values, to monitoring the brand performances using advance digital instruments.

The fourth chapter looks to the significant changes in the rise of Internet, what that has introduced and how digital has changed the way the world works. This chapter analyses the switch from analog to digital and old rules of marketing to the new ones. It provides general information of digital identity, online reputation and the leading social media platforms.

The fifth chapter discusses the principal characteristics of a study case into Sir Richard Branson and the tips he has used for building the Personal Brand that allowed him to create a huge empire.

Finally the sixth chapter is dedicated to the concluding remarks and final thoughts.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Introduction to Personal Branding**

#### **2.1 Introduction to Personal Branding**

The area of Personal Branding has been emerging in the last years due to the ultra-connected and always-online world of today. Almost everyone knows the meaning of a brand and the concept of branding, thanks to large companies and corporations. Some of the brands are famous all over the world (Apple, Coca-Cola, McDonald's, etc.) and behind their notoriety is not good luck, but years of hard work, marketing strategies and continuous improvement. So, knowing some strategic tools that businesses utilize can help with building a Personal Brand. (Mark Cijo, 2014)

##### **2.1.1 Defining Personal Branding**

Brands are popular because they have created many positive feelings around their brand. "A brand is an emotional response to the image or name of a particular company, product or person. (Erik Deckers and Kyle Lacy, 2012) Similarly, people have an emotional response when they see other people. Personal Branding helps to create the right type of emotions online and offline. Whether one is looking for a job or is competing against other entrepreneurs, a strong Personal Brand is a key to influence opportunities and advantages. Not many people understand the meaning of Personal Branding and confuse it with something superficial, something external. There is a saying: "You can put lipstick on a pig, but is still a pig." Branding has nothing to do with talking in the third person and giving ourselves new names, changing style or clothes. Personal Branding is about building a reputation with the people around us that will allow cultivating and enhancing relationships that open up opportunities in life. (Coyote G. Cooper, 2014) David Aaker said:

"Every person has a brand, represented by a name and a face that has a host of associated characteristics, such as professional skills and assets, career paths, communication styles, appearance, personalities, interests, activities, friends, family and more. The brand influences all relationships by affecting how a person is perceived and whether he or she is liked and respected."

Personal Branding is not a quick strategy to impress people in an inauthentic manner. It is not a way to make them do something for ourselves. (Coyote G. Cooper, 2014) Quick fixes may work for a while, but they don't bring lasting results. Personal Branding is about making a commitment to living the right way, to make positive impressions and to add meaningful value to other people's lives.

### **2.1.2 The history of Personal Branding**

In today's online world everybody, consciously or not, is building their Personal Brand. It looks like a new concept, however, the first traces of Personal Branding date back to 1937. Introduced by Napoleon Hill in the book "Think and Grow Rich", it tells about how a person can achieve success and wealth. Hill underlines the importance of Personal Branding and positioning which are part of the plan for building a successful life. Then in the early 1980s, the importance of self-positioning was more deeply developed by Al Ries and Jack Trout in "Positioning-The Battle for Your Mind". However, the real pioneer of Personal Branding is considered to be - Tom Peters. In 1997 in his article on the Fast Company, named "The Brand Called You", emphasised how important it is that everyone should pay attention to marketing his or her own Personal Brand:

"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 companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You." A Personal Brand is built on a combination of known people, of knowledge, on the way the knowledge is shared and of the speed of knowledge communication (Vitberg, 2009), or as Tom Peters says: "It's that simple — and that hard. And that inescapable".

With the introduction of the Internet, branding has reached a new level. The online identities, even if called virtual, are now more than ever affecting the real world. With today's technology it is a lot easier to control one's brand than it was in the past. So creating a positive image is crucial for every facet of one's life. Like Tim Ferries said:

"Personal Branding is about managing your name - even if you don't own a business - in a world of misinformation, disinformation, and semi-permanent Google records. Going on a date? The chances are that your "blind" date has Googled your name. Going to a job interview? Ditto."

So the sooner it is realised that the everyday actions build reputation as a consequence of Personal Branding, the better. Because when one admits something he/she can have more control over that thing.

### 2.1.3 The basic elements of Personal Branding

To understand better the developments of Personal Branding, it is important to keep in mind eight essential elements:

#### 1. The Story

Personal stories are a great way to access information about a person. For people this is a way to show their uniqueness and their real face. So, the first thing to do in building a Personal Brand (PB) is to write the story. Personal stories can be published easily on personal blogs, websites, etc. This topic will be developed in the next chapter.

#### 2. The voice

First, in understanding the meaning of the voice, it's crucial to understand the existence of it, which has nothing to do with the sound. "Voice is the overlapping of the four parts of our nature: our body, our mind, our heart, and our spirit" Stephen Covey<sup>1</sup>. It means finding the special calling in life, something that makes you unique. Finding a personal voice is not an easy task. It can happen all at once, but usually, discovering it is an evolving process. As people grow up, they are exposed to different fields of knowledge and different experiences. They start getting involved. They start knowing what they're good at. They find out what satisfaction is. All these lead to a sense of their voice or what they love doing. For some people, it does come like a flash of light, due to some events in their lives, but for many finding the voice takes time and help from others.

#### 3. The Packaging

It might sound strange: "personal packaging" as a human is not a product to be sold. Packaging means the overall look and design of a Personal Branding. Having a good design is important today. Living in a digital world where everything is fast changing, where people make quick opinions or judgments about something or someone, it pays to take time and perfect the design. Because, as is well known: "you can only make a first impression once". When working on packaging, all the visual aspects of the brand have to be considered: the photos, the colours, the online platforms. Everything has to be uniformed and consistent from one platform to another and should reflect the best the person represents.

#### 4. The transparency

In building a proper brand, transparency is another key element. A recent study<sup>2</sup> has provided empirical support to the concept, leaders that are transparent are perceived as more successful and are trusted more by the followers. Jarod Kintz, author and blogger, said: "Your Personal

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.stephencovey.com/blog/?p=16>

<sup>2</sup> The impact of positivity and transparency on trust in leaders and their perceived effectiveness Steven M. Norman

Brand should be like water: not only clear but transparent to the public. People thirst for that, and they will drink you up.” Transparency is a rarity today, so being so can give a competitive advantage.

On the other hand, there is the risk of being too transparent by over sharing content on social platforms. Therefore, the content posted online has to be carefully chosen and balanced with the Personal Brand.

#### 5. The online platforms

We live in an incredible period, where it is possible to reach the entire world just by using a computer or the mobile phone (the new main screen). It is important to develop online platforms that will put the person in contact with those who need to know more about the brand.

Once the desired message to be delivered to the target is ready, it is time to choose the right platform such as blogging, Facebook, YouTube, etc.

#### 6. The self-marketing

It is not enough to have great content to be an interesting and talented person, equally important is to promote yourself. Not everyone likes self-promotion, probably because it can be perceived as a type of selfishness or as not being modest. By choosing right content, by writing interesting posts one can increase his/her visibility. The use of paid advertising (ex: Google Ads) is not always necessary and depends on the person. The best ads are the testimonials from readers, clients, employers and others. Human beings tend to trust more the opinion of other people, so getting positive feedback from others is the best form of advertising.

#### 7. The partnerships

Often the partnership element is not taken into consideration when building a PB. Instead, collaborations are a great way to expose the Personal Brand to new audiences. As said in the previous paragraph, due to an enormous amount of advertising, people tend to trust other people more.

#### 8. The products

Having something to offer makes a real difference with branding. Thanks to the technology, it's possible to offer products, such as videos, e-books, articles with almost no cost. The products offered have to be consistent with the Personal Brand and to give value to the customers.

## **2.2 The importance of Personal Branding**

To underline the importance of Personal Branding, next we will analyse the answers to the three main questions: where, when and why.

1. Where does Personal Branding take place?

*“Branding demands commitment; commitment to continual re-invention; striking chords with people to stir their emotions; and commitment to imagination. It is easy to be cynical about such things, much harder to be successful.”*

*Sir Richard Branson*

Personal Branding is not a short term investment, it takes time and hard work. It's a 24/7/365, full-time job that needs lots of dedication, attention and tenacity. But once a person understands how the branding process works, one gets into the habit, and it becoming easier.

Personal Branding is not something one needs only for his/her professional life, but also for the personal life. It gives confidence; it helps understanding yourself better and as a result it gives back to the world. There is not an optimal formula that fits everyone. The word itself says “personal”. It should be the most customised asset a human can have.

2. When should the Personal Branding process start?

*“The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now.”*

*Chinese Proverb*

When it comes to wisdom, Chinese are probably the best. The same as for the tree, the Personal Branding best moment to start is today unless one has a time machine and can go backwards (Colin Wright, 2009). Even if many don't realise it, or don't care about it, everybody has a brand. In fact, people have multiple brands depending on with whom they are interacting. It is crucial to understand that everyday decisions and actions influence the brand. If a person is willing to spend time in analysing, understanding and in planning for a personal strategy, most probably he/she will be able to reach his/her full potential and drastically improve quality of his life. (Coyte Cooper, 2014)

3. Why does an individual need a Personal Brand?

*“I don't think much of a man who is not wiser today than it was yesterday.”*

*Abe Lincoln*

As students, we perfectly understand that having a good reputation (regarding hard work, discipline) can bring better scores, a better perception by professor etc. Building a positive

reputation allows for spending less time in convincing or negotiating with someone. Managing a Personal Brand helps to create a kind of brand equity, which gives more value to personal products. The more the brand is defined and the personal message is shaped, the easier it is to go through life and pursue the vision. In the long run, the Personal Brand has the potential of changing life in extraordinary ways, making a person more fulfilled and happy (Coyte Cooper, 2014). The purpose is continuous improvement, day by day, as Abe Lincoln said.

### **2.3 Branding benefits**

Having a brand can make personal and professional life better. It can help to understand the personal self better. Finding something that one is the best in could help people to be more confident and to make them recognisable in the others minds. The following are benefits that a brand may offer:

1. Showing personal uniqueness

In the digital era we have to compete, not only with the people around us, but also with much more. The times we live in now are different from the time of our parent's period, for the young generation is much harder to stand out from the crowd because the crowd is represented by millions. Everyone is trying to differentiate himself and fortunately, every human has something that can make the difference: a story.

2. Controls others perceptions

People do silly things during their lives, especially then young. In a connected world, information and photos can last online almost forever. That's why it is vital to be aware of everything that can damage a personal reputation. By building a Personal Brand one can have control of "what," people can see when googling their name. Also, by being aware and having control one can have the possibility to choose the parts of his/her story that he/she wants to tell to the world.

3. Creates opportunities

Depending what the personal story is about, a person is going to attract certain opportunities and relations. The brand will show the personal skills, so only the right connections are going to be attracted, without losing time. Having a strong brand helps opportunities to arise such as: jobs, partnerships, projects and even friends.

4. Builds credibility

Everyone likes trustful people. So, when building a brand a person has to act specifically to build credibility. In a digital world, the photos one posts, the e-mails one sends, the comments one writes should be coherent with the brand one wants to create.

#### 5. Builds confidence

In order to build self-confidence a person should know what he/she is good at, what makes him/her different and should have a clear idea of what he/she wants to achieve in life. By living a desired brand people feel more fulfilled at work and in life. (Karen Kang, 2014)

#### 6. Gain a following

It may seem that only celebrities have and need an audience, but having a group of people following you can give more confidence. It is well known that people trust people, so the followers are the ones who spread the message of the brand and help building the networks.

#### 7. Increases personal visibility

Having a strong brand can help increase personal visibility. It is especially useful for writers and bloggers, but also for those looking for clients or for a job. Visibility means standing out from the crowd, and this is a competitive advantage in our days.

#### 8. Helps to understand what one wants

This is one of the most significant benefits. While working on developing the brand one can understand and shape what he wants in life.

The conclusion to the Personal Brand benefits is short and simple: life is better with a great brand!

## **2.4 Personal Branding myths**

Many people have a brand hindering belief system thinking that building a Personal Brand is not a good thing. The following five myths presented by Karen Kang in “Branding Pays” are:

Myth # 1: Doing a great job equals having an excellent reputation

People are not minded readers. They cannot know someone capabilities, unless that person lets them know. In order to be recognised for one’s personal values, one has to market his/her contribution. In a digital world, this is even more challenging. Unless someone posts on the web, the works he has done, the projects he has developed, etc., no one will know.

Myth #2 the boss markets the employee’s Personal Brand

In certain cultures, especially in Asia, the image of the boss is perceived as a paternal figure, which gives each worker a market value. In today’s economy, this is completely wrong, as everyone should be responsible for his destiny and brand. Leaving the branding process to others means losing control over it.

Myth #3 Self- promotion is boastful and wrong

From a young age, many of us were taught to be modest and humble and that marketing self-achievements is a sign of vainness. In some cultures even expressing personal ideas to elders is seen in a bad light. Self-promotion should not be considered an exercise in boasting, but rather as a tool for the target to recognise personal value. (Karen Kang, 2014)

Promotion is often thought as one-way communication (sender to receiver). In the digital world we can speak about two-way communication. For instance, when an interesting content is posted on social media and other people comment it, the communication flows both ways. In this case, a Personal Brand is being built without being boastful and it's more engaging and memorable. "Self -promotion is about educating the market about your value". (Karen Kang, 2014)

## **2.5 Personal Branding truths**

There are plenty of misconceptions about Personal Branding because it's still a new concept and there is little research and literature performed on this subject. The following are five truths provided by Peter Montoya and Tim Vandehey in "Brand called You" to help us understand more deeply the branding concept:

### **1. Branding takes time**

Brands are about trust and trust comes with time. Richard Branson is a perfect example of growing a brand over time with commitment, dedication and passion. He worked hard for years before becoming a global entrepreneur, famous all around the world as "Dr Yes".

The good news about Personal Branding is that in our days many Internet tools are available to build a brand. So, better to think long term and to start building a valuable brand.

### **2. Brands grow organically**

The brand is like a tree. First, it has to be planted and then to let grow. The development of the Personal Brand starts at the grassroots level and is based on relationships and the person behind the brand consistent with the message he wants to deliver. With the help of the community and of the personal network brands are perceived as trustful. There is no need to push the brand too much or too quickly.

### **3. Brands are not rational**

People tend to like logical and mature behaviour. However being irrational and unpredictable can find its place. Richard Branson, is one of the most admired brands even if he does extreme things and always pushes the borders. Millions around the world are fascinated by him, his courage and his personality. So, branding is about emotions. People will choose to like a person (or a brand) because he/she feels right, not because it's rational.

#### 4. Brands demand commitment

When it comes to building a brand there is no magic bullet, just a lot of work and smart decision making. The Virgin CEO Richard Branson said, “Branding demands commitment; commitment to continual re-invention”.

#### 5. Branding always has an effect

Branding always works. It can work for or against a person. When it comes to entrepreneurs, a strong, appealing Personal Brand can have a positive impact on the business and increase the company’s profits. For example, the Personal Brand of Steve Jobs has a positive impact on his businesses. An artificial or poorly supported brand can harm the business.

## **2.6 Personal Branding model**

According to Rampersad (2008) building an authentic Personal Brand is a process that consists of four phases:

1. Define and formulate the personal ambition
2. Define and formulate the Personal Brand
3. Formulate the personal balanced scorecard (PBSC)
4. Implement and cultivate the personal ambition, Personal Brand and personal balanced scorecard.

The first phase, starting from the top of the figure number one, involves defining personal ambition. This is the most critical and time-consuming step in the development of a Personal Brand. It is about identifying what makes the person special and unique, what kind of values he/she has, what are his/her dreams, his personal vision, mission and goals, but also to enhance self-awareness and self-knowledge. (Rampersad 2009) Identically states that as the planning of a Personal Brand commences, one should start simply by listing own strengths, interests, skills and personality traits to find out what their Personal Brand could include.

The second phase of the authentic Personal Branding model consists of creating a brand promise. This promise should be authentic, distinctive, consistent, meaningful, exciting, inspiring, clear, ambitious, memorable and in harmony with the Personal Ambition (first phase) as a headline to a good news story. The promise should be used as a base for future behaviour and actions. The creation of the brand promise should be done by performing a personal SWOT analysis, during which the person’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are identified. The SWOT analysis forms the basis for the next stages, as it gives a picture of the current situation and further direction to the person’s Personal Brand objectives. Based on the

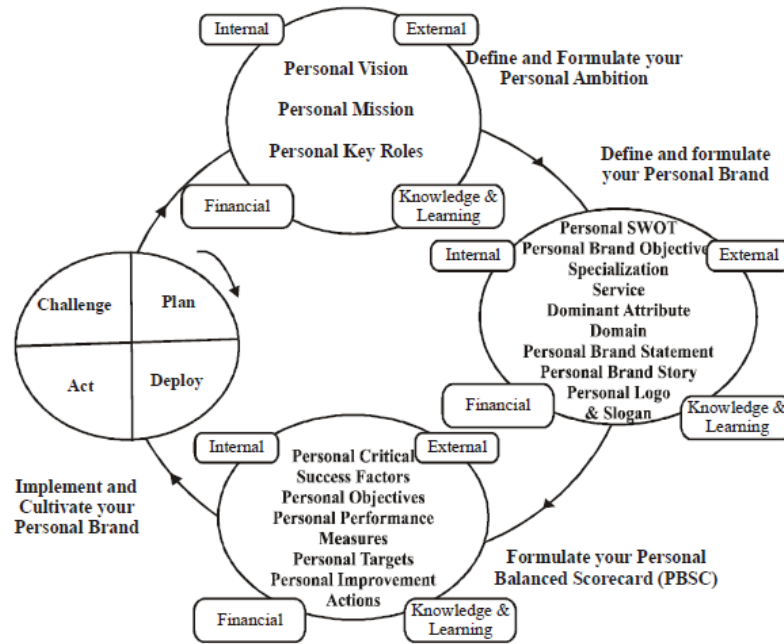
SWOT analysis, one should evaluate himself and define his personal objectives, the specialisation and the audience (domain). The essential part of the second phase is the formulation of the brand story. The brand story should summarise the main message that the Personal Brand is expected to communicate with the person, to create a positive reaction in the chosen audience. Finally, one should design a personal logo: a graphical symbol that represents all these actions and statements. (Rampersad, 2009)

Personal ambitions and Personal Brand are not valuable if no action is taken to make them a reality. The aim of the third phase is to create an action plan to reach the objectives that have been set up in the previous phase. The personal ambitions and Personal Brand should be translated into Personal balanced scorecard (PBSC)-concrete personal actions. The PBSC is related to the left half of the brain (having an analytical and logical function) is needed to improve and manage personal ambition and brand.

The fourth phase of the model is implementing and cultivating the personal ambition, Personal Brand and PBSC into reality. With the help of chosen media channels, one should be active, promote and deliver his brand message. Launching is an important part of the process, but as well is the maintenance and continuing improvement. An instrument introduced in the model to help the brand grow gradually is the Plan-Deploy-Act-Challenge cycle (PDCA), which should be followed and repeated to maintain and develop the brand.

In each phase of the model, there are four key perspectives that should be taken into account: internal, external, financial, and knowledge and learning. This whole process is a cycle, which needs to be continuously updated and improved to get the maximum result.

Figure 2.1 Authentic Personal Branding model



Source: Rampersad, "Authentic Personal Branding"

## Chapter 3

### Framework for Building a Personal Branding Strategy

After having analysed various books, articles and YouTube videos. I've generated a simple framework that combines marketing, self-improvement, offline and online techniques for building a Personal Brand.

To build a great Personal Brand a person needs a direction. It has to start from within, by understanding the personal values, passions and continue up to the desired positioning in the minds of the individuals they want to target. All these attributes are defined in the first part of the framework, which provides a complete description of how to achieve them. After understanding the direction, one can move on to the second part, which consists of formulating the Personal Brand by the building a story, an image and a following around himself. The last part of the framework consists of online and offline strategies for brand communication and monitoring.

#### 3.1 Analysing and defining personal identity

*“The one thing that you have that nobody else has is you. Your voice, your mind, your story, your vision. So write and draw and build and play and dance and live as only you can.”*

*Neil Gaiman*

##### 3.1.1 Self-worth

###### 3.1.1.1 Personal “ikigai”-the reason for being

*“In a small village outside of Osaka, a woman in a coma was dying. She suddenly had a feeling that she was taken up to heaven and stood before the voice of her ancestors.*

*“Who are you?” The Voice said to her.*

*“I am the wife of the mayor,” she replied.*

*“I did not ask whose wife you are but who you are.”*

*“I am the mother of four children.”*

*“I did not ask whose mother you are, but who you are.”*

*“I am a school teacher.”*

*“I did not ask what your profession is but who you are.”*

*And so it went on. No, matter what she replied, she did not seem to give a satisfactory answer to the question, “Who are you?”*

*“I am a Shinto.”*

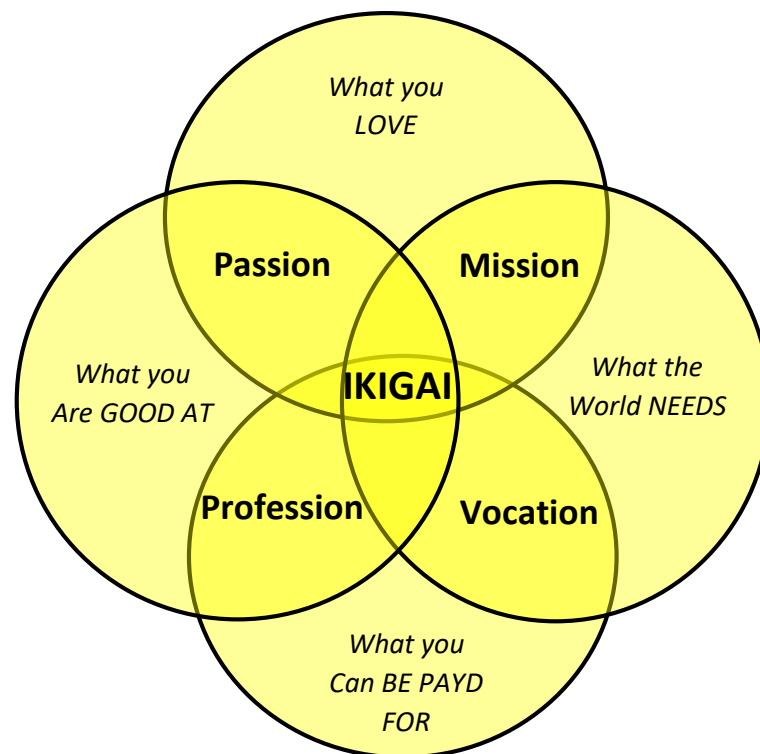
*“I did not ask what your religion is but who you are.”*

*“I am the one who wakes up each day to care for my family, and nurture the young minds of the children at my school.”*

*She had passed the examination and was sent back to Earth. The next morning she woke at sunrise, feeling a deep sense of meaning and purpose. She tended to her children’s lunches and planned fun lessons for her students that day. The woman had discovered her ikigai.”* This was the concept of ikigai from a Japanese short story.

Ikigai is a Japanese concept meaning "reason for being". In Japan, it is strongly believed that everyone has an ikigai, although not everyone has discovered it yet. Finding it requires a deep search of self<sup>3</sup>. The word is widely used to describe devotion, a deep passion. The diagram can easily explain the concept of ikigai. It lies in the centre of the four interconnected circles:

Figure 3.1: The Ikigai diagram



*Source: Traditional Japanese concept*

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<sup>3</sup> Wikipedia.com

“That which you love” - a combination of passion and personal mission. This circle should describe the aspects of life that bring excitement and make a person feel alive.

“That which you’re good at” - a combination of passion and profession. This circle should include the personal skills, talents, things that came most naturally to a person.

“That which the world needs” - which is the mix between mission and vocation. It is the change that one would love to make in the world.

“That which you can be paid for;” - is the combination between profession and vocation. It includes the services or the things that a person can be paid for because he creates value for other people.

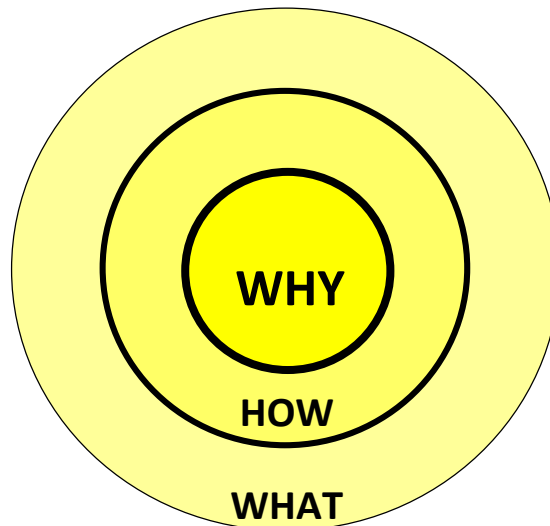
The combination of all these elements is the key, the ikigai-sense of purpose, of fulfilment, a thing that makes a person in harmony with himself, which is the first step in building a Personal Brand. The first thing that is important to develop is an understanding of the core elements of the Personal Brand to make an impact and to impress people around (Coyte Cooper, 2014). Even if it’s the most time-consuming, it’s important to take the time to think of what one wants, as no one else knows better than themselves what bring happiness and fulfilment to the personal life. People should keep in mind that they are born with a purpose and living is not working during the week, paying bills and waiting for the weekend to have fun. Everyone should give something back to the Universe, because by giving and by feeling useful one finds happiness and joy.

While the concept of ikigai can seem very spiritual, which may be the reason why it’s not so popular in the Occident, another tool that’s more practical and easier to understand but which mainly has the same principles, is the Golden Circle of Simon Sinek. Simon Sinek is an ex-advertising executive and author. He is probably best known for his speech at Ted (the third most popular talks of all the time<sup>4</sup>) where he explains the concept of the Golden Circle. The Golden Circle concept starts with the question “why?” and it’s a powerful leadership model utilised by some of the world’s most exciting leaders and brands. Sinek digs deep into the reasons why some companies and people achieve extraordinary things and others do not.

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<sup>4</sup> ted.com

Figure 3.2 The Golden Circle



*Source: Simon Sinek from Start with Why*

- Why – the life mission statement, purpose or belief or as just described above, the ikigai. The thing that inspires to wake up in the morning, things that a person actually believe in and as a consequence inspires others to follow.
- How – is the personality traits, the unique style, something that one can do best.
- What – are the actions, the services that prove the personal “why” and “how” and truly bring value to the world. Based on the personal actions people will choose to trust one’s Personal Brand or not.

Sounds simple, but what Sinek found, is that most companies and people do their marketing backwards, by starting with their "what" and then move to "how" they do it. Most of these companies neglect even to mention “why” they do what they do. More alarmingly, many of them don't even know why they do what they do! As Mark Twain said: “The two most important days in your life are the day you are born, and the day you find out why.”

People should not be afraid of having a “why” way out of the comfort zone or something far from reality. The greatest leaders such as Steve Jobs, Walt Disney and Richard Branson were all brave enough to think that their passion, vision and beliefs will change the world. (Coyte Cooper, 2014).

#### 3.1.1.2 Personal passions, vision and values

Passion is such a wide and deep argument that we need to describe it more. Passion is part of the ikigai, something that makes people dream, wake up with enthusiasm, something that feeds the creativity and imagination. Passion is the magical element of a great Personal Brand, but it doesn't have exclusively one formula. The best way to learn the things what one is passionate about is through continuously reading learning and reflecting. One of the common mistakes is

thinking that the passion is something that comes naturally. Well, it's rather something that must be cultivated in time. Putting yourself in different situations, going back to the childhood dreams, evaluating hobbies and asking for help are some of the ways one can use to find his/her personal passion<sup>5</sup>. People love passionate people. People follow passionate leaders because passion is what gives people that spark in their eyes.

There are so many unhappy people living their life with no passion, usually they are also great procrastinators, dreaming of something in the future (ex. retirement) that will change their life. Instead what usually happens is that the days slip into weeks, the weeks slip into months and the months slip into years. But instead of happiness, they are left with a heart filled with regret over a life half lived. Bernard Shaw was asked on his deathbed, "What would you do if you could live your life over again?" He reflected, and then replied with a deep sigh: "I'd like to be the person I could have been but never was." (Robert Sharma, 1999). So it's fundamental for a person to take time, to learn about themselves, then to create a vision that he is truly passionate about and to work hard for it.

It's difficult to find out a statement that will drive a person's entire life. It might seem scary, but a possible solution is to set a 5-10 years vision and then reevaluate. Change is like a wave in an ocean of time. In the short-term, the waves cause agitation and confusion. While in the long-term, the underlying currents are much more significant. To cope with change, one has to take a long-range point of view. So it's crucial to have a stable base, a vision and stick with it. (Al Ries and Jack Trout, 2001) Usually at the beginning ideas are fuelled by passion, the emotion that makes people act irrationally. Many things, good or bad can be created by passion, which leaves a high level of risk to fail when acting under passion. For the passion to survive structure is needed. (Simon Sinek, 2011)

Vision by itself doesn't mean anything as long a person doesn't take any action to achieve it. Vision is the end, passion is the beginning and the values are the framework in between. Values are the elements that help to put into action the "reason for being" identified earlier in this chapter. "Values are the core beliefs and philosophies that are most important in people's life" (Coyte Cooper, 2014). Values are the structure that Simon Sinek said is needed to be aligned with the passion for achieving great results. There are several steps one can take to identify personal values.

The first one is by studying successful people, people that inspire people that already have a brand. The following is a paragraph from the book with which I have started the thesis, "Think and Grow Rich". It is the evening practice of Napoleon Hill whom after studying the lives of

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<sup>5</sup> <https://passiontribe.com/find-passion-5-tips-get-started/>

some great minds, used to have deep conversations with them, to rebuild a person he wanted to be.

“I followed the habit of reshaping my character, by trying to imitate the nine men whose lives and life-works had been most impressive to me. These nine men were Emerson, Paine, Edison, Darwin, Lincoln, Burbank, Napoleon, Ford, and Carnegie. Every night, over a long period of years, I held an imaginary Council meeting with this group whom I called my “Invisible Counsellors.” The procedure was this. Just before going to sleep at night, I would shut my eyes, and see, in my imagination, this group of men seated with me around my Council Table. .. My purpose was to rebuild my character so it would represent a composite of the characters of my imaginary counsellors... I deliberately assigned myself the task of voluntary rebirth.”

The second step that can help to determine personal values are identifying what the personal target considers meaningful. As one of the purposes of Personal Branding is to impress the target, it would be very useful to understand what they value most.

The third way to cultivate values is through reflection. We analysed this at the beginning of this chapter. The digital helps with this, there are so many interesting videos on the web and so many books on how to understand your true values. The figure 3.3 represents a list of the most common values among humans.

Figure 3.3 Personal Brand Values

PERSONAL BRAND VALUES		
<b>STABILITY</b> certainly, predictability	<b>COURAGEOUS</b> standing up for beliefs	safe, risk free
<b>PERSEVERANCE</b> pushing through the end	<b>NEATNESS</b> tidy, orderly, clean	<b>HONESTY</b> sincere, truthful
<b>JOY/PLEASURE</b> personal satisfaction	<b>RATIONALITY</b> logical, clear reasoning	<b>FORGIVENESS</b> able to pardon others
<b>FAMILY</b> caring for, spending time	<b>PLAY</b> fun, spontaneity	<b>SELF CONTROL</b> self-disciplined, restrained
<b>AESTHETIC</b> desire for beauty	<b>APPEERANCE</b> dressing well, fit	<b>HEALTH</b> physical well being
<b>ACHIEVEMENT</b> successful competition	<b>COMMUNITY</b> connected to others	<b>PROSPERITY</b> flourishing, well-off
<b>CREATIVITY</b> new ways, innovative	<b>LEARNING</b> new ideas, understanding	<b>LOVE/INTIMACY</b> deep emotional
<b>SPIRITUAL GROWTH</b> higher purpose	<b>PERSONAL GROWTH</b> continual self-learning	<b>COMPETENCE</b> capable effective
<b>HELPING</b> taking care of others	<b>TEAMWORK</b> cooperation, common goal	<b>ADVENTURE</b> challenge, risk-taking
<b>CONSENSUS</b> can live with decisions	<b>COMMUNICATION</b> open exchange of ideas	<b>INTELLECTUAL STATUS</b> regarding as an expert
<b>TRADITION</b> respecting old things	<b>RESPECTFUL</b> honouring, considering	<b>PEACE</b> inner and outer harmony
<b>COMPETITION</b> winning other others	<b>SECURITY</b>	<b>FRIENDSHIP</b> close, on going relationship

Source: [righttojoy.com](http://righttojoy.com)

### 3.1.1.3 Personal Unique Selling Proposition (UPS)

It is similar to how businesses differentiate themselves. While building a Personal Brand, one has to make sure that the potential target knows exactly what makes the person different from the competitors, by identifying the personal Unique Selling Proposition. "USP is a factor that a business has, that makes it different and or better than others out there. It makes a business stand out from the rest in a market".<sup>6</sup> Without a USP, the personal message gets blended into the rest of the Internet noise, and the risk of being ignored and not heard is high.<sup>7</sup>

A big part of building a Personal Brand is given by the set of skills and qualities (USP) one possesses or is going to acquire in future (Colin Wright, 2009). Together with the passion and purpose, they built an entire package for the Personal Branding. For example, a set of skills for an entrepreneur is his ability to solve problems, to lead his employee, his expertise in the industry, his business operation in and so on.

It is important to build a robust set of competencies for the self-marketing, as it gives credibility and support to the vision. Redefining the skills can be costly (in case one decides to follow a course or to start a Masters) and time-consuming, but it's a must of growing.

The starting point is identifying the skills one already possess. Then the next step is to have a look at the position one wants to achieve, highlights the missing points, while the last step should be learning the missing skills and putting them into practice.

The great thing about learning new skills is the good excuse to tell everyone about, to update the LinkedIn profile, the CV, to meet people from the same sphere and so on. This way, people can have a win-win situation while learning new skills or updating the current, they can build the desired Personal Brand.

### 3.1.2 How the brand is perceived by others

*Your intentions don't matter. Perception is a reality. If people perceive you the wrong way, it doesn't matter what your intentions are. - Pinterest.*

#### 3.1.2.1 Personal and professional relationships

The Personal Brand is the way one is perceived by other people. This perception can be called your reputation. Reputation is defined as "an opinion about a person, typically a result of social evaluation on a set of criteria. It is important to business education, online communities, and many other fields."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Wikipedia.com

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.garyhyman.com/how-to-find-your-unique-selling-proposition-by-authentic-personal-branding/>

<sup>8</sup> Wikipedia.com

A reputation can be positive and negative. The Personal Brand is held in the hearts and minds of the people around. So understanding the people's perception of a Personal Brand is vital (William Arruda, 2012). Not always the way people see themselves equals the way others see them, many times is the totally opposite. This is due to the human incapacity of understanding themselves or to express properly their true nature.

A study<sup>9</sup> published by Carnegie Institute of Technology cited that "85% of your financial success is due to your personality, ability to communicate, negotiate, and lead. Shocking, only 15 % is due to technical knowledge". Perception plays a key role in both professional and personal life.

It's important to deliver the brand message in a positive and right way. The author of Just Listen Mark Gouston identified the ten cost common misperceptions that cause dissonance<sup>10</sup>.

Figure 3.4 Most common personal misperceptions:

<b>Belief They Are:</b>	<b>When Others Perceive Them:</b>
Shrewd	Sly
Confident	Arrogant
Humorous	Inappropriate
Energetic	Hyper
A Person with Strong Opinions	Opinionated
Passionate	Impulsive
Strong	Rigid
Detail oriented	Nit-picking
Quiet	Passive or Indecisive
Sensitive	Needy

Source: biospace.com

To know how a person is perceived the easiest thing to do is by asking. Seeking feedback by asking friends, relatives, co-workers and identifying the gap between self-perception and external environment it's crucial. In her book "Reinventing You" Dorie Clark writes about

<sup>9</sup> "A Study of Engineering Education" by Charles Riborg Mann, 1918, pages 106-107

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.biospace.com/News/do-you-really-know-how-people-perceive-you/190566>

organising a meeting and paying friends to receive a realistic opinion about how people perceive you.

The most common gaps between self-perception and external environment are<sup>11</sup>:

1. Blind spots - are things people usually communicate without realising. For example, the way one sits on the chair, the way he listens and replies, the way he dresses and so on.

2. Overuse - occurs when people are over-delivering their strengths and so transforming them into weaknesses, for example; being too precise, working too much and for too long.

3. Interpretation - is the nuance between delivery and interpretation, when a person thinks he is making a positive impact but in reality, he is not. For example being direct can be good quality but it can hurt as well meaning the balance is important.

Other ways for a person to understand how people perceive them is by listening to how they describe themselves when introduced to someone new, by reviewing the comments received or by conducting a survey (for example 360Reach by William Arruda).

### 3.1.2.2 Online reputation

Digital identity is bringing a whole new dimension to people's existing identities and reputation. We leave an enormous amount of digital footprints on the web: everything we say or do builds an e-reputation. The online reputation is not only what a person personally puts on the Internet, but it is also affected by what others say online and how others see that person.

If in real life a person might not care too much about what neighbours, colleagues, friends think about. Rather he/she should care about his/her online reputation and what people think about him/her online. The Internet has a larger reach than any city a person lives in. One's future can be affected by the companies he/she has worked for, by the groups he/she is member of and by the content he/she shares. The digital life reflects the professional success. Back in 2009, taking part in a question-and-answer session with a group of 14- and 15-year-old school students, President Barack Obama was asked by one child for some advice on becoming president. Mr Obama started with warning American teenagers on the dangers of putting too much personal information on the Internet: "When you're young, you know, you make mistakes, and you do some stupid stuff(...) I want everybody here to be careful about what you post on Facebook, because in the YouTube age whatever you do, it will be pulled up again later somewhere in

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.forbes.com/sites/williamarruda/2014/02/25/five-ways-to-learn-what-people-really-think-about-you/#4b52ac457d3b>

your life”<sup>12</sup>. From an young age we have to be aware and have control of the information available about us.

According to a study on recruitment methods carried out by the recruitment platform Jobvite, 55% of the recruiters questioned had reconsidered a candidate based on their social profile<sup>13</sup>. A study of over 1,200 hiring and recruiting managers conducted by Microsoft identified the types of sites the recruiters use in researching applicants. The results showed that 78% of recruiters check search engines (this catalogues everything from blog posts and press releases to social media updates) to find more about potential employees. Social media sites are checked by 63% of recruiters, then next come photo and video sharing sites with 59% and so on<sup>14</sup>. A good online presence can bring job promotions and respect instead a bad e-reputation can influence the people's opinion about a person.

The last issue about e-reputation is its absence. Being digitally non-existent, not having a social presence can bring the idea that the person is hiding something.

We have seen how important taking care about our online reputation is. The following are some steps a person can do in protecting it:

1. Creating a personal digital strategy and a strong positive online presence
2. Checking every time something personal appears online, by using for example Google Alert
3. Ensuring there is more positive than negative, and using an SEO(Search Engine Optimisation) strategy to place the desired articles on top
4. Securing the personal accounts by using complex passwords and not revealing all your personal details
5. Educating family and friends not to post compromising photos, posts and in case to remove them.

Everyone should protect his or her e-reputation for the professional, familiar and personal life. A useful tool to analyse and measures the strength of reputation based on social media is Klout. Klout analyses the brand's content, shares, retweets, and communication using a complicated algorithm. Then it assigns a number from 1 to 100, so-called Klout Score, which shows the level of influence. The higher is the score better is the reputation. From 2014, it repositioned itself to help people create and share great content. It does this by suggesting stories that can share.

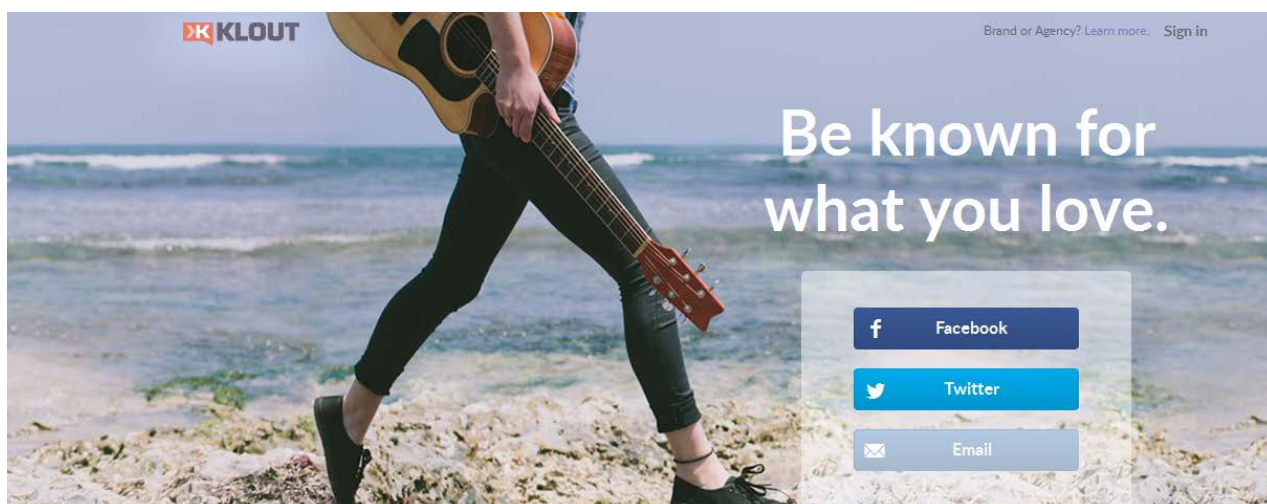
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<sup>12</sup> [www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/facebook/6159941/Barack-Obama-warns-US-teenagers-of-the-dangers-of-Facebook.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/facebook/6159941/Barack-Obama-warns-US-teenagers-of-the-dangers-of-Facebook.html)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.reputationvip.com/blog/social-recruiting-55-of-recruiters-influenced-by-social-media>

<sup>14</sup> <http://lifehacker.com/5532404/what-sites-future-employers-are-checking-when-looking-at-you>

Figure 3.5 Klout home page



Source: klout.com

### 3.1.3 Building a desired identity

Each strives to create a unique identity, but not everyone has the courage to make it real. In trying to impress someone, the first step is understanding who is the Personal Brand target, or the people to whom the brand is destined. After having identified the target, it's crucial to create a strategy to build the desired identity in the peoples mind.

#### 3.1.3.1 Identifying the target

*Nothing can add more power to your life than concentrating all your energies on a limited set of targets. - Nido Qubein,*

At this point before passing to the brand creation is crucial to understand to whom the Personal Branding is being addressed. This means to identify the target audience. The target audience is defined by the business Dictionary<sup>15</sup> as "A particular group of people, identified as the intended recipient of an advertisement or message." Regarding the Personal Brand, the target consists of the people who are in the best position to help to achieve the personal goals. William Arruda said: "Personal Branding is not about being famous. It's about being selectively famous". So the key to effective branding is to focus. It's important to identify a distinct audience because otherwise the positioning will be too general. There is no sense to try to sell sand to the Arabs. (Mark Cijo, 2014)

The target has to be aligned with personal values, as one of the aims in building an extraordinary brand is to add meaningful value to other people's lives. (Coyte Cooper, 2014)

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/target-audience.html>

The target is a subset of the Personal Brand's community and represents all the people whom already know the Personal Brand and the ones to whom the Personal Brand is directed to. The brand community is like several concentric rings: the people represented in the circle closest to the centre are the ones that know the person better. It's important to deliver the brand's value to all the rings and to pay more attention to the target audience. To become memorable and remain visible William Arruda suggests the practice and use of the "three Cs" of branding:

1. Clarity - expressing the unique promise of value
2. Consistency - sending content that has at the core the Personal Branding message
3. Constancy - achieved by communicating frequently.

The target audience can consist of many different groups and subgroups. They can be divided using different parameters such as demographic variables, which divide the groups by age, gender, marital status, etc. These are often used for traditional marketing while psychographic variables such as personality, values, attitudes, interests, etc. are more often used for digital and social marketing<sup>17</sup>. Different people act and perceive things differently in diverse situations. That is why it is important to communicate in the right way and use the right words.

#### 3.1.3.2 Creating a perception in the target's mind

*"People suffer from the same disease as products. They try to be all things to all people."*

*Al Ries*

After the target is identified, it's crucial to brand in the way that can appeal to it. It should be done at an intellectual level, showing the skills, the professionalism one possesses and at the emotional level by developing a story, an image. (Mark Cijo, 2014) Positioning is thinking in reverse. It should start from the idea that the target has to the person and not the opposite way. Changing minds is an incredibly difficult task, it takes time and effort. The most difficult part of positioning is selecting one concept that better represents the position in life. Most people aren't ruthless enough to choose it for themselves and expect others to do it for them. That isn't a smart approach, as the job market today belongs to the ones who can precisely define themselves and position as specialists. So it's important to take a position that no one else has and become a master of that niche.

It's typical for humans to compare everything and everyone. For this reason, the competitor's position should also be taken in mind. Even if everyone has a different story, a different experience, it does not mean they do not have competitors. "Owning a position in mind is like

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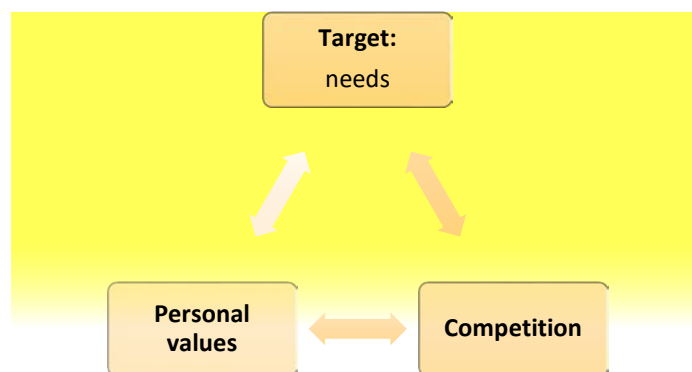
<sup>17</sup> <http://blog.brandyourself.com/how-tos/defining-the-target-audience-for-your-personal-brand/>

owning a valuable piece of real estate. Once you give it up, you might find it impossible to get it back again". (Al Ries and Jack Trout, 2001)

In Fascinate the author, Sally Hogshead, uses a metaphor to describe the targeting process comparing them to pistachio and vanilla ice cream. The vanilla ice cream - because liked by everybody, is used when the aim is reaching a huge target, that's usually for a high marketing budget. Instead, the pistachio taste-madly loved by some and disliked by other people is for engaging with few but very well. So the idea is choosing which taste to be when targeting: vanilla or pistachio.

We had already identified the definitions of personal values, of the target and the importance of the competitor's position. By combining them, it is possible to define the value proposition which is the way a brand can provide a solution to the target's needs, and the differentiation which means being the person that the best offer that solution. In Branding Pays, Karen Kang introduced this concept of positioning using a model. The triangulation model (figure 3.6) which helps to understand the dependability between the three elements.

Figure 3.6 Triangulation model



Source: Karen Kang 2013, Branding Pays

### 3.1.3.3 Seven personality profiles for a fascinating brand

*"To become more fascinating, you don't need to change who you are. You have to become more who you are". - Sally Hogshead*

The reasons why one has to focus on fascination while building a Personal Brand are various: for increasing the followers, for earning more traffic on websites or blogs (Sally Hogshed,

2016), or simply because fascinating brands can set higher prices and customers are willing to pay sometimes up to 400% more<sup>18</sup>.

The knowledge of the benefits of fascination is not a new phenomenon. Ancient culture realised that fascination holds people captive and like a secret force make them impossible to resist. (Sally Hogshed, 2016) This can be used in both good and bad ways. Celebrities have the power to hypnotise their followers and to transform them into programmed recruiters. This sounds a bit too rash and maybe unneeded for a person who simply wants to build his brand, but having a small group of "supporters" - people that follow, admire, love can be very useful in an age of oversaturated market. For example for a professional, having some followers who believe in his/her ability and skills can turn into a no cost advertising, and as commonly known word of mouth is more powerful than any other type of ad.

The following is a little guide introduced by Sally Hogshead in the book "Fascinate" to the seven forms of fascination: Innovation, Passion, Power, Prestige, Trust, Mystique and Alert.

1. The first is Innovation called by the author "the language of creativity".

It's the characteristic of always looking for new, pushing and challenging people. This is the most creative of all the advantages. That is why many times innovative people surprise, think differently, they are the ones who lead and almost never follow. The adjectives that differentiate this advantage are bold, forward-looking, surprising, visionary and entrepreneurial. Thinking of Thomas Edison, Richard Branson, Steve Jobs, these people fascinate by their extraordinary spirit, by their capacity to open eyes and their courage to make extraordinary things. If a person feels that his/her brand should be seen by others as innovative, he/she can work on inventing new surprising solutions, turn old ideas into new, instead of following the trends can do the opposite and as Arnold Schwarzenegger said "Break the rules. It is impossible to be truly original if you're too well behaved and don't want to break the rules".

2. The second profile of fascination is Passion - "the language of relationship".

Speaking with this kind of people give feelings and emotions that are impossible to forget. Passionate people are heart-warming and inspirational. They can truly connect and build healthy relationships. The qualities that differentiate passionate people are expressive (use vivid words and images), optimistic, sensory(able to engage with human senses), warm and social. Passionate people focus on emotions, creating compelling messages. The best examples of passionate people are Mother Theresa, Nelson Mandela those Personal Brands still keep inspiring and motivating people all around the world. To position a passionate brand, one has to create strong emotions and to use the five senses (sight, sound, taste, smell and touch).

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<sup>18</sup> [http://www.howtofascinate.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Vault\\_1115\\_The-Kelton-Fascination-Study.pdf](http://www.howtofascinate.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Vault_1115_The-Kelton-Fascination-Study.pdf)

3. The third profile is the Power - "the language of confidence".

It is the perfect advantage to make people obey. The key differences in promoting yourself as a powerful brand are confidence, authority and life purpose. Examples of powerful persons are Vladimir Putin, Barack Obama, and Angela Merkel who have the power to make important decisions regarding the entire world. The traits of power are assertive (competitive spirits), goal oriented, decisive, purposeful, opinionated (not afraid to express themselves). If Power is, the message one wants other to perceive, he/she should be and act with confidence, have the control, the authority and guts to stick to personal principles and goals.

4. The fourth is Prestige - "the language of excellence".

This profile gives admiration that makes people envy and compete. People with prestige characteristic aspire the idea of excellence of value they send a clear and loud message. Usually, luxury fashion designers are good examples: Giorgio Armani, Luis Vuitton, and Coco Chanel who are prestige icons, are like diamonds, which light shine on everything they have ever made. The adjectives that differentiate a prestigious brand are ambitious result oriented, respected, aspirational and elite. A person that wants to make Prestige characteristic his/her main advantage should use them to describe himself/herself. The tactics needed to be applied for a Prestige brand include: setting new standards, increasing the perceived value, limit the availability and develop emblems. Napoleon said: "Men will go to battle and die for a scrap of blue ribbon" this underlines the people's love and fascination for emblems- as they fulfil the need of being respected and recognised.

5. The fifth element is Trust- "the language of stability".

In a constantly changing world, stability is one of the characteristics that is truly missing. Due to too many people that fake, that don't maintain promises, that make things sound different from how they are, being trustful can make the difference. The adjectives that best describe the language of Trust are stable, dependable, familiar, comforting and predictable. Some professions need Trust as top quality. The Trust can be established by building authenticity, by repeating many times the same thing, by being consistent and by making others feel part of a family. So does Pope Francesco whom with his kindness, clearness and compassion have conquered millions of hearts around the globe.

6. The sixth is Mystique "the language of listening."

Mystique people know when to talk and then to be quiet, what to reveal and what to keep for themselves, these make people curious and captivate their attention. Mystique is one of the rarest profile. Mystique people don't share information. The adjectives that differentiate the Mystique profile are calculated, observant (prefers listening than speaking), private, curiosity-provoking, substantive (select what and when to say). The pillars in building a Mystique brand

are by projecting the information, by asking questions before giving answers, by sparking curiosity and by creating a mythology.

7. The last element is Alert "the language of details."

The people with this characteristic follow the rules, are very precise, and their main advantage is the clear communication with the audience. The five adjectives that differentiate the brand is organised, detailed, efficient, precise and methodical. The tactics to be used to create a sense of Alert are working hard to every detail, defining consequences and using rational facts.

The Personal Brand advantage gives a distinct flavour, an element of differentiation, but if it is not enough, is good to choose a second advantage. As it comes in the second place, this advantage is called tactic. A tactic is an advantage applied in a tactical way to achieve a particular outcome and reach a targeted audience. For example, Richard Branson has the 'innovation' advantage, but not only is he a passionate person so consequently passion is his tactic.

## **3.2 Formulating the Personal Brand and networking**

*"The cosmos is either moral or immoral; only people are. He who would move the world must first move."* – Edward Ericson

### **3.2.1 Elements of the brand creation**

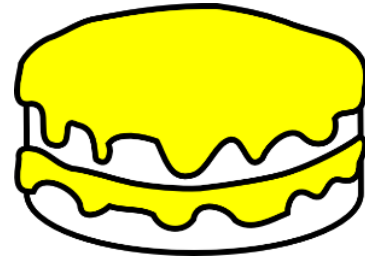
After have identified the purpose, the target and the way one wants to be perceived, it's time to craft the narrative, to write the story. The story has to fit with the brand's personality, to be authentic and true in order to convince the audience. As Richard Branson said: "Storytelling is as old as the campfire and as young as a tweet. What moves people is someone who is credible." A story should make a logical connection between past and present period. It must include both rational and emotional values. Karen Kang uses a metaphor to describe this mix in building a strong brand: "Bake the cake then ice it". The cake represents the rational value of the brand. The parts where the person is skilled have experience. The icing is the emotional value, personality, style and is how other people connect emotionally. A good story has to have both cake and icing. There are many people that are only icing, for instance, a beautiful woman can be all icing other times people are only cake. Nevertheless, strong brands have both, as Richard Branson (cake=entrepreneur and icing=inspirational), Bono (cake=rock singer, icing =humanitarian (someone who cares)).

Figure 3.7 Strong brand formula

*Cake-rational value. Functional benefits, expertise*

*Icing-emotional value. Personality image.*

***Cake + Icing= Strong Brand***



*Source: Karen Kang 2013, Branding Pays*

### 3.2.1.1 Emotions, message and storytelling

*“Great stories happen to those who can tell them.”- Ira Glass*

An important part of building a Personal Brand is telling a personal story. Because everyone has a unique background, telling a personal story can help to stand out from others.

People do business with people they like and the way to get to the customer's heart is through good storytelling. People love stories as it is one of the oldest forms of entertainment. The Greeks recited their stories, the medieval bards sang theirs, and then the printing press dominated for more than five hundred years. Less than a century ago, after the radio and television were invented people started to publish much more stories. Today people blog, vlog and tweet. Even if the channels we use to tell stories have changed, the golden rule of good storytelling is “qualitative content”. A qualitative content is the easily shareable post that is native to the platform they appear on and can easily touch people's hearts. (Gary Vaynerchuk, 2016). Strong brands are stories. They transform facts into a good memorable read. (William Arruda, 2012)

The structure of the story should follow the writing rules and be like stretching a rubber band. At the elementary stage, the band is normal, this part should introduce the character and establish some details to capture the attention of the audience. In the middle part of the story should come some drama, which stretches the rubber creating tension and giving more ins and outs. In the end, the band either returns to its normal state, either gets broken, this part includes the conclusion.

#### Personal Brand autobiography

All autobiographies are stories that help to build the Personal Brand in the public's eyes. Even if when hearing about autobiographies, the first thought that comes to mind is a book related to

a story of a celebrity, there is nothing to be scared of, as a Personal Branding biography can also be composed by one paragraph. Sometimes a person can have only a few seconds to impress an audience, to present himself, so he must be prepared for that moment. There are three different types of Personal Branding biographies can help to underline the most important characteristics of a person:

- Shortest (composed by one sentence)
- Shorter (composed of 100 words)
- Short (250-word bio).

Many people found it difficult to speak about themselves. The difficulty comes from insecurities, the incapacity of valuing themselves, unknowledge of personal strengths and lack of knowledge from where and how to start. The following are some elementary points that are useful when writing the autobiography. (Erik Deckers and Kyle Lacy, 2012)

1. Personal introduction - one sentence biography or what would one write in the section “about” on the social media platforms.

2. Professional position - then dealing with someone on the professional way it's important to tell people about the personal job, position, specialisation, all to simplify the communication.

3. Personal accomplishments - just as when preparing for an oral exam, a student usually is very prepared at least on one topic, in case the professor gives to the student the possibility to choose an argument. The same way one have to pick “his/her top three” accomplishments and introduce them as an important part of the Personal Brand.

4. Writing in the third person, talking in first - when writing the bio is better to use the third person, to make it sound like someone else is describing the person. Instead, in conversation the first person must be used.

5. Being consistent - the story is a continuing changing process. Achieving new goals, changing jobs, industries all these lead to changes in the biography, so it is important to update the info both in written and in verbal.

### 3.2.1.2 Getting a visual identity: Image, logo

One of the issues in writing a personal story is from where to begin. By writing the bio, a person has already started the story. Once the bio is written, the story is highlighted by adding other content: photos, blog posts, videos, etc. Everything should centre on building the personal story. Text-based content is always going to be an integral part of the personal story, but it should be taken into consideration that we live in a digital era. In order to set yourself apart it's

important to use visual content. People are incredible at remembering pictures since almost 65% of humans are visual learners. That says a lot about the importance of using images. This phenomenon is called: "Picture superiority effect" and refers to the phenomenon in which pictures and images are more likely to be remembered than words<sup>19</sup>. Writing long post blogs can be as well inefficient because our brain sees words as lots of tiny pictures, and we have to identify certain features in the letters to be able to read them. That takes time and in the Digital Age, time is a scarce resource<sup>20</sup>.

Communicating the Personal Brand requires a visual brand identity, which reinforces the story and makes the brand more memorable. Images and graphics help to communicate complex ideas in a simple way. (Arruda, 2012) The heart and the soul of the brand identity materials is the personal logo. It should be on everything a person uses or does: website, blog, email, PowerPoints, ads, etc. A good logo is composed of three parts:

- Name - even if the credibility doesn't come from the name, but from perception, it's an important part of the logo
- Slogan - reflects what a person does and for whom
- Icon - a single image that represents the Personal Brand.

Not all brands have an icon, many times a well-typed name and a slogan is enough. However, a right logo can make the difference. We had seen before the power of the image, so "an icon is a graphic element that enhances the logo by tying into the meaning of the Personal Brand". (Peter Montoya, 2009) The icon can be worth a slogan because an image is easier perceived by the brain than words. The icon should not be too complex or include the photo, but easy to understand and full of meaning. The elements like size and colour should be chosen with care, as they have the power to shape the brand perception, to appeal emotionally and to widespread name recognition. (Peter Montoya, 2009) Colour is powerful. Vincent Van Gogh wrote, "I have, just like everyone else, a feeling of the power of colour". The colour expresses the Personal Brand attributes, and it's an important part of brand identity. Together with logos, business cards, email signatures and colours are an important part of the personal marketing tools.

### **3.2.2 Building a following around the brand**

One can be the most skilled person in the world, but if the world doesn't know it, he or she doesn't make a huge impact. Connecting was just as important back then, as it is now. The commonly used phrase "it's not what you know, but it's who you know" is still valid. The only

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<sup>19</sup> Wikipedia.com

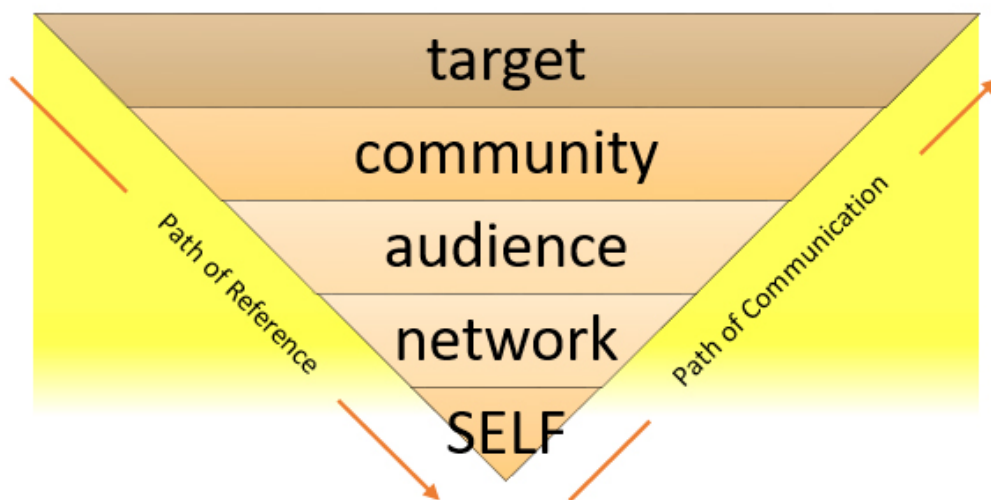
<sup>20</sup> <http://www.brainrules.net/vision?scene=>

difference is that most of the networking back then was done at conventions, over lunches and drinks, now to these are added the online networking. (Mark Cijo, 2014)

Times have changed. On top of old rules of networking and one-to-one relationship building are added the online tools which make one-to-many communication possible. As the time and resources are limited, a person cannot talk to everyone that's why building a model that allows one-to-many communication is crucial.

While building a following, it's important to keep in mind the goals one wants to achieve and then to start building an ecosystem. Karen Kang, the author of *Branding Pays*, proposed an ecosystem model. The model is represented by a pie slice with the pick called "SELF" and the upper bottom line represented by the target. In between, there are the groups of followers that can help in reaching the target. Dorie Clark, the author of "Stand Out" divides these group of followers into three categories network, audience and community. The figure 3.8 is the combination of Karen Kang's ecosystem model and the Dorie Clark's division of the group of followers.

Figure 3.8 Ecosystem model



Source: Karen Kang 2013, *Branding Pays*

The network section includes the closest people to the Personal Brand, usually represented by friends, family members, or colleagues. These people are also called influencers. Based on the rule 90/10, which means the 90 percent of the market is influenced by few 10 percent (called – influencers). (Karen Kang, 2013) They are "the brain trust of people who are eager to help to refine and share personal ideas". (Dorie Clark, 2015) On the Internet, the influencers can represent less than 1 %. Because such a small number can have such a huge impact, many brands use celebrities to promote their products. For example Oprah Winfrey, because people

trust her, every item she advertises creates an immediate demand for that item. Every person is a bit an influencer in his circle. Gary Vaynerchuk<sup>21</sup> calls an influencer "anybody with a public social profile".

A scale up on the reverse pyramid is placed the audience section, it is composed by the believers of the Personal Branding message. To make an impact one should build a larger following, not just people who already appreciate him/her. In the Digital Era, this is easier than ever to achieve, but it takes time and effort. Creating content, interacting by using blogs and social media is the way one-to-many communication is made. (Dorie Clark, 2015) As John Hagel said<sup>22</sup> "You can use the power of social media, in particular, to amplify the signal of what you're working on. What's your passion (...) You can put a light out to others: here is somebody we ought to reach out to". It's important to connect with people alike and individuals with the same interest. Thanks to the Internet it's easier the ever to read blogs, share content and connect with people. Blogging which is going to be explained later in this chapter is a powerful instrument which contributes to building an audience.

The last scale before reaching the target is the community. The idea is to bring people together in person and online by building a social community from whom everyone can benefit. Abraham Maslow at the top of his hierarchy of needs added the need "self-transcendence" (the need that goes beyond our individual experience), which consist of sharing and helping others later in his life. So building a tribe, providing great content and making an impact on people is the best way to leave a footprint in the human's hearts. (Dorie Clark, 2015)

As possible to see from the figure above on the right side there is the path of communication- from influencers to the target and on the left the path of reference- from the target to the influencers. This is a great tool for receiving feedback and then improving later.

Taking time to build a Personal Brand's following not only creates a more professional and reputable persona but also opens the door for new opportunities and success<sup>23</sup>.

### **3.3 Brand communication and monitoring**

At the end of the day, communicating with the audience is the number one thing that should be done after having identified all the previous elements. There are an enormous number of tools that help to communicate to the outside world in both real and online world.

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<sup>21</sup> In #AskGaryVee: One Entrepreneur's Take on Leadership, Social Media, and Self-Awareness

<sup>22</sup> <http://dorieclark.com/how-to-attract-the-right-people-to-your-life/>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.business2community.com/branding/5-ways-networking-can-help-personal-brand-0899167#btbP3Hzl2CtF7dsl.99>

### 3.3.1 Web-based communication

The rise of the web, the technology that every day becomes more advanced and more and more accessible, gives all the necessary conditions for self-expression in the most comfortable way.

#### 3.3.1.1 Blogging

Even if blogs have a relatively short history, when compared to the history of the Internet itself. Blogs have been a scene-stealer in the branding industry for the past ten years and have become an integral part of online culture. Recently they had become part of the most companies' marketing plans. It's recognised that the first blog was Links.net, created by Justin Hall in 1994, while he was a student. But, at that time they weren't called blogs, but just personal homepage. It was so until 1997 than John Barger called his site with the term "weblog", to reflect the process of "logging the web". Programmer Peter Merholz shortened "weblog" to "blog" in 1999. The original blogs were updated manually, often not very efficient, and with particular programmer skills needed. In 1999, Evan Williams and Meg Hourihan started the platform that would later become Blogger. Blogger is the platform that gave the possibility to everyone to write and publish about everything. From the beginning of 2000, blogging became a mass phenomenon with the launching of new platforms as WordPress e Splinder<sup>24</sup>.

There are many different types of blogs, differing not only in the type of content but also in the way that content is delivered or written.<sup>25</sup>

1. Personal Blog is an online diary, written by an individual. The vast majority of personal blogs are read only by few, which usually are friends and relatives, but a small number of personal blogs have become popular, to the point of earning a salary through blogging.

2. Collaborative blogs is a type of weblog in which posts are written and published by more than one author.

3. Microblogging is the practice of posting small pieces of digital content. When it comes to microblogging, many people think of Twitter, but there are other microblog platforms that allow posting more. Tumblr, for example was the first major site to offer a variety of different post types.

Everyone is blogging, from the huge companies as Google to simple writers. For businesses, blogging is kind of advertising. Instead, on the individual level it is more a reflection of the personal passions. Blogging is a powerful tool in Personal Branding. The blogger has the power to put out content he wants, and so building a desired Personal Brand. Blogs are usually available to everyone, so a good blog is a key element for PB. Colin Wright in his e-book

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.webdesignerdepot.com/2011/03/a-brief-history-of-blogging/>

<sup>25</sup> Wikipedia.com

“Personal Branding” gives some tips on how to make a blog memorable: first is the design. A nicely designed and an easy to use interface will leave a good opinion. The second is the content, which has to reflect the personality of the Personal Brand. The third is becoming part of the global blogging community. If the content one writes is interesting, it might be shared by organisations, influencers and in this way increasing the visibility of the Personal Brand.

Blogging is the easiest way to share the personal story, values, ideas and thoughts. All that is needed is a computer or a smartphone and an Internet connection. “A blog is an online diary that you are willing to let others read and comment on.” (Colin Wright, 2009) It should be like an anchor, at the centre of the personal promotional campaign.

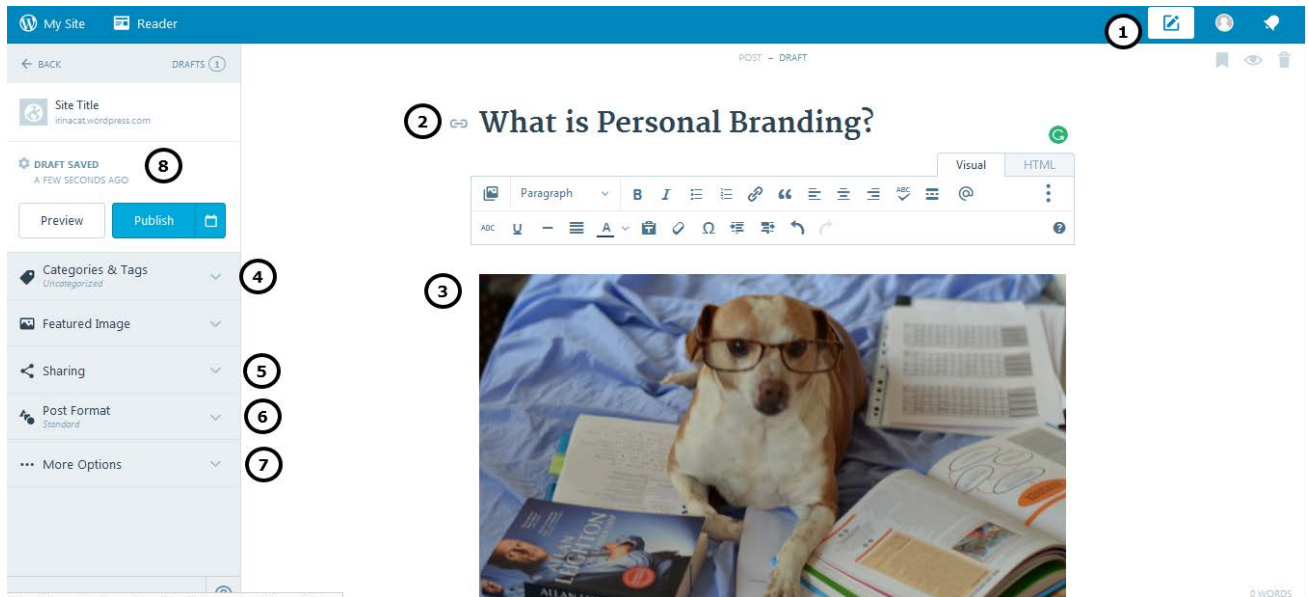
There are several blogging platforms and it’s important to choose the right one. WordPress is the most powerful blogging platform in the world.

It's easy to use and with only six steps in a couple of minutes is possible to create a blog or a website. It's also possible to choose among many types of free templates for creating the desired design. Among many things that the platform offers are:

1. The possibility to write and to organise the posts into categories (for example branding, travels, etc.)
2. The opportunity to add media and links that can be used later for posts
3. The possibility to change the themes, background and to edit the website or blog
4. To add members and manage the comments
5. The option to add plugins (a piece of software containing a group of functions that can be added to a computer program)
6. WordPress offers "The Stats," a page that tells everything about the personal site's traffic and visitors.

Once the account on Wordpress has created, it’s instantly possible to publish a post. The following is the representation step by step on how to write a post for the blog or website:

Figure 3.9 WordPress blog home page



Source: Wordpress.com

1. By simply clicking on the button on the right of the number one bullet, it is possible to start writing a post
2. In the top box goes the title of the blog and under there is the panel with the tools necessary for writing
3. The big box is the place for the content, which can be text, videos, pictures or a combination of them
4. Categories and tags. They are not necessary but is better to have everything organised. The tag helps to describe the post key idea
5. It's possible to share the content on other social media
6. Post format is the way the article will look on the blog wall
7. The other options are the opportunity to add the location, to allow or not the comments, etc.

A blog used in tandem with a strong website can be an even more powerful tool. Websites are an important part of marketing. It's impossible to imagine a company without a website, and soon the same will also be for the individuals. The website can be very simple or very complex depending on who the person is. (Colin Wright, 2009) In the next chapter are presented some of the Search Engine Optimisation techniques that can help to increase the visibility of the website in the search engines.

### 3.3.1.2 Social media networks: creating original content

The importance of social networking in building a Personal Brand today cannot be underestimated. Being an active part of a social network gets a visibility to the Personal Brand, exposing the work, ideas to a far larger audience than ever before. The way one behaves on the social media is just as important as acting in a real world. It's important to find and join the online the social networks that directly relate to the person's profession, interests, etc. Social network presence has to be diversified, and the profiles should be accurately filled. Because as said before, on Internet everything matters and every move is a message sent to the PB's target. While building content, it's important to keep in mind two things<sup>26</sup>.

The first is respecting the platform on which the posts are published. For example, Pinterest is the network where people look for inspiration and ideas so the content has to be in image or infographic form. On Facebook people communicate with friends, so posting short articles and photos is the best.

The second is respect for the audience. Good content is about what the audience wants. For example, Snapchat is a platform for young aged 13-35 so they would not care too much about the older generation stuff.

Posting great content- it's important, and the biggest challenge of social media is finding enough content to share, the process called by Guy Kawasaki<sup>27</sup> "feeding the Content Monster". Writing posts, taking pictures, making videos, or finding and sharing other's people stuff (so called content curation), can create content. The great thing about the web is the possibility see if people like the content or not. Many services provide good content as Alltop.com (Figure 3.10), which collects the headlines of the latest stories from the best sites and blogs that cover different topics and group them into aggregations<sup>28</sup>. For example, photography, branding, food, etc. By making an account on Alltop, is possible to register the personal blog or website and to create a customised collection of RSS feeds.

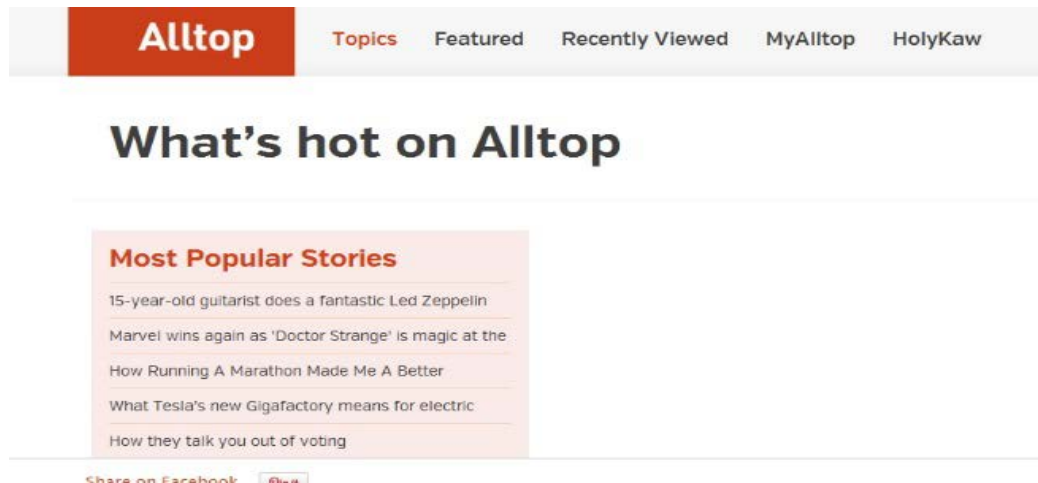
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<sup>26</sup> Gary Vaynerchuk (2016) #AskGaryVee: One Entrepreneur's Take on Leadership, Social Media, and Self-Awareness

<sup>27</sup> In "The Art of Social Media: Power Tips for Power Users" (2014)

<sup>28</sup> Alltop.com

Figure 3.10 Alltop home page



*Source: Alltop.com*

Another example of websites which enable to collect information are:

Buffer – enables to schedule posts on Google Plus, LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. Buffer also suggests stories to be shared.

Feedly- is an RSS-feed aggregator that collects information from blog and websites and present it in a magazine format.

A great idea to feed the "Content Monster" is by sharing what is already popular on one platform (for example Facebook) and not yet on others (for example Google+). One on the tools that can be used is Google Trends, which shows what type of information people are searching for, around the globe.

As we have seen before every shared post is a digital footprint on the personal reputation, so it's important to be aware every time a person publish something. To create a good impression, all the posts have to be worthy, as the time is a valuable asset and no one wants to lose it reading bad stuff. If possible is better to include images as this increase the posts views on average by 94%<sup>29</sup>.

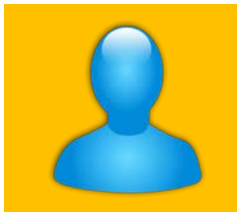
### 3.3.1.3 Online branding technics

On the web the branding tips, trends and techniques change frequently, that's why is important to keep being updated with everything. The following are several universal tips<sup>30</sup> that can help to communicate in the right way the real nature of the Personal Brand.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.skyword.com/>

<sup>30</sup> from "The Art of Social Media: Power Tips for Power Users" (2014) Guy Kawasaki and Peg Fitzpatrick

Figure 3.11 Eight tips for social media



### **Optimizing the profile**

The information in bio should contain the keywords of the personal area expertise, be interesting, tell the story and have the links to websites or/and blogs.

### **Being Consistency**

Being consistent by using the same photo on all the platform, in this way making easier for people to recognise the Personal Brand.

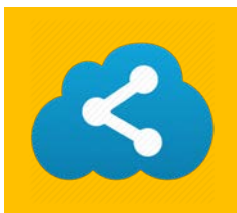


### **"Being a multi-faced jewel"**

Focusing only on one topic will get people tired, instead of by leveraging the right portion of professional content with personal will give people a full picture of the person's personality.

### **Empowering the social with positivity**

People love social media profiles that motivate and inspire, and dislike negativity and complaints. People love positive and successful people.



### **Thinking before resharing**

Every shared content leaves a footprint on the e-reputation, it's important to think before sharing.

### **Building a reciprocal network**

It's important to be generous on social media and to share the content of others.



### **Using popular hashtags**

Riding the trends by using the popular hashtags and being always updated on what is trendy on social media can make easier to build a following.

### **Answering to the questions and comments**

It is the best way to engage with the followers. People always appreciate then they receive answers on social media.



Source: *The art of social media* by Guy Kawasaki and Peg Fitzpatrick

### 3.3.2 Brand promotion in real world

*“Personally, I am very fond of strawberries and cream, but I have found that for some strange reason, fish prefer worms. So when I went fishing, I didn’t think about what I wanted. I thought about what they wanted. I didn't bait the hook with strawberries and cream. Rather, I dangled a worm or grasshopper in front of the fish and said: "Wouldn't you like to have that?"*

*Why not use the same common sense when fishing for people?"*

*Dale Carnegie*

In building a Personal Brand, a person needs to network in different situations both offline and online. Even if the research is focused on the online things. The world still offers offline interactions. (Mark Cijo, 2014) The reason one should also consider the offline communication is simple, part of the target might not be online. Meeting people in the real world is important after all, technology is just a way to help real life connection. People are the best real life communicators. On the web people easily engage and disengage, follow and unfollow, add and delete friendships. In real life it’s a bit different. In “How to Win Friends and Influence People” Dale Carnegie tells the best way to engage. One of his golden rules of building relationships is: "You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you." This rule was also confirmed by Erik Deckers and Kale Lacy<sup>31</sup> which says that the most important rule about the network is: "it is not about you". This is also known as "giver's gain"<sup>32</sup> philosophy, which means by adding value to someone's life the return of value is many times, but this doesn't mean every time a person does a favour he has to expect something in return.

The most common types of real world networking while building a Personal Brand are:

1. Networking groups - is the most common type and can be difficult for introverts or shy people. Many times the difficulty starts from where to begin as in this case there is no screen or desktop to hide behind. The laws of starting a conversation are as old as the world: smile, listen, talk, make eye contact, be positive, confident and never afraid of rejection.

2. One-to-one networking - is the most difficult, but it's the most effective as it gives the possibility to truly engage, by telling the personal story, dreams and so on. Another quote of Dale Carnegie always to keep in mind is: "People are not interested in you. They are not interested in me. They are interested in themselves - morning, noon and after dinner. "

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<sup>31</sup> in “Branding Yourself” by Erik Deckers and Kale Lacy

<sup>32</sup> Term introduced by Ivan Misner, the founder of Business Network International

3. The follow-up-networking - is a way of engagement with people after meeting them one-to-one or at an event.

In the real world, the brand promotion is done by people, by newly made connections every time and everywhere. While having a good story can help being memorable, remembering particular details (like the names, personal hobbies, etc.) about met people is crucial. Making connections, introducing other people to others and asking to be introduced it is a great way to network in the real world. It is important to focus on people with whom it is possible to build a strong mutually beneficial relationship. The connection should not stop at one industry, but it should be diversified. Everyone should have so-called "home base" which can be the coffeehouse or bar where their name is known. For example having a meeting with a client in a bar where the "everyone knows your name" (so typical for Italy) can make a suddenly good impression and as consequence helps with building the Personal Brand.

### **3.3.2.1 Listening and monitoring- Social media tools**

Depending on how popular and well-known the Personal Brand is, there may be few or many people knowing and talking about it. As the brand becomes more well-known, more conversations, more comments and more emails will be done around the brand, so it will need more time to listen and respond to blog posts, tweets, etc. If in the real world the person has to monitor by himself (or hiring someone) on the web there are many tools that make it easier to manage the brand. Usually, the most important suggestions, conversations about a brand don't involve it directly or are made behind the person's its back. In the real world, unless someone is complaining directly to the person, he is never going to know the truth. On the Internet, the things fortunately are different due to the so-called social listening. Social listening is a technique for monitoring social media conversations, it helps to monitor conversations about the brand and transform them into opportunities, by engaging directly with the users<sup>33</sup>.

Social listening is a way for the brand to monitor digital conversations at scale, saving huge amounts of time and effort. According to a study, "only 30% of tweets about brands, tag their official usernames."<sup>34</sup> So, it's important to monitor also the information that regards the Personal Brand, but it's not addressed to it directly. By listening to the real feedback, one can improve and correct the personal social media errors.

The following are some of the best tools for social listening and media monitoring:

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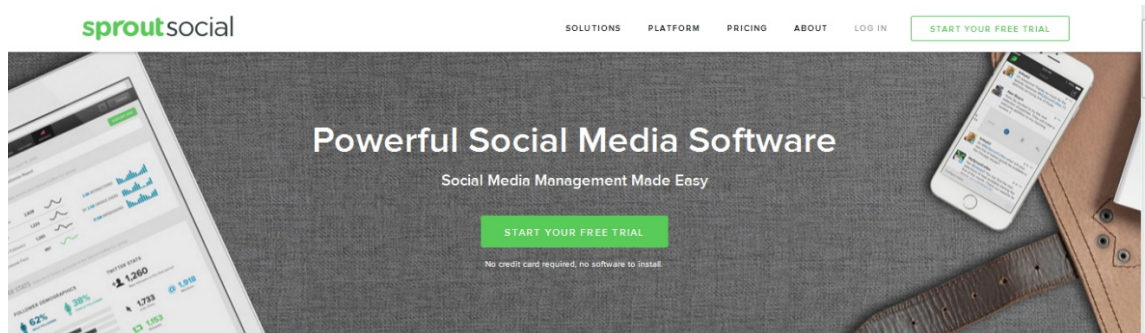
<sup>33</sup> <https://www.shopify.com/blog/195027209-social-listening-tools>

<sup>34</sup> <https://mention.com/blog/infographic-5-surprising-figures-you-need-to-know-to-improve-your-twitter-strategy/>

## 1. Sprout Social

It is a social media scheduling platform that centralises publishing, monitoring, engagement and analytics across the social networks<sup>35</sup>. With Sprout Social, it's possible to set up customised feeds of a specific keyword, locations and hashtags across platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and Google+. Opening up a wide variety of ways for the engaging audience.

Figure 3.12 SproudSocial home page

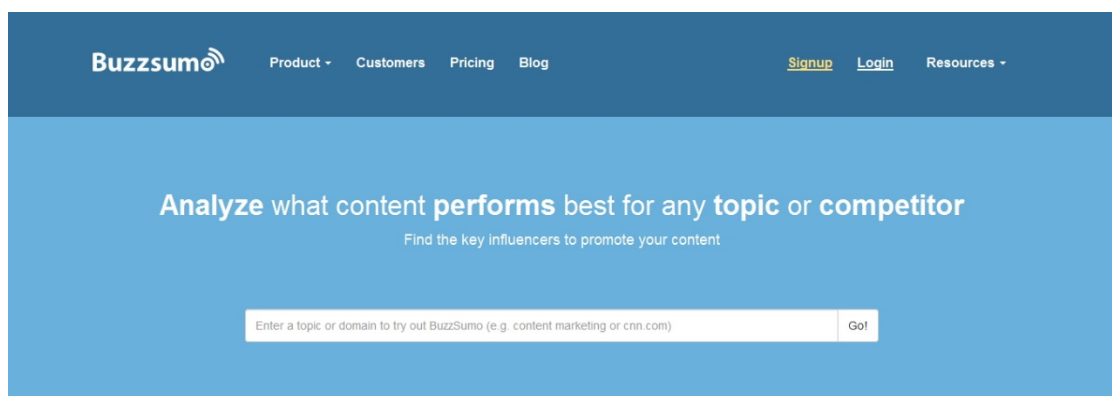


*Source: sproutsocial.com*

## 2. BuzzSumo

It is a digital monitoring platform for identifying the popular content and the influencers within the targeted niche. Buzzsumo excludes social media posts and shows content from websites. By typing the name into search section, it is possible to see the articles that mention or quote it, within a second.

Figure 3.13 Buzzsumo home page



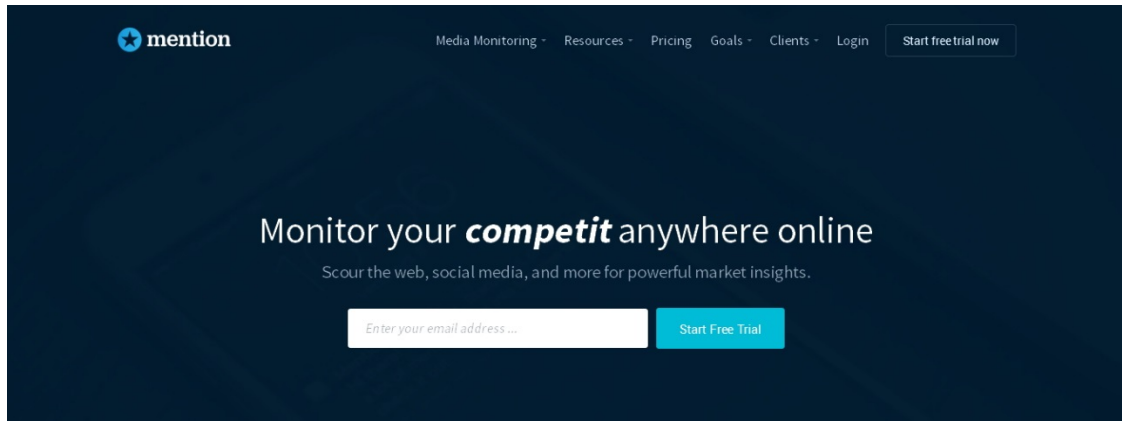
*Source: buzzsumo.com*

<sup>35</sup> <http://sproutsocial.com/integrations>

### 3. Mention

It is a social media monitoring platform that allows listening and measuring conversations around the brand and the competitor's websites and social media. If the social media accounts are connected to Mention, it's possible to reply to the mentions found on the Internet. It is possible to create an alert and to get email notifications when the personal name or the chosen keywords are mentioned.

Figure 3.14 Mention home page

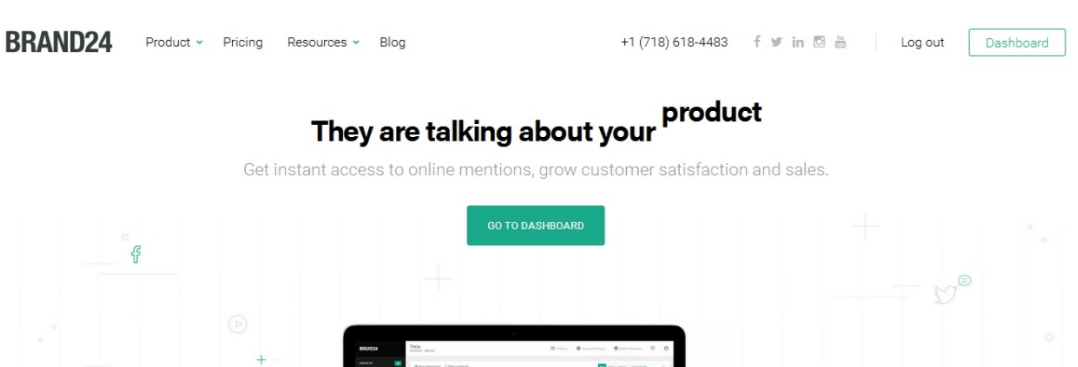


Source: mention.com

### 4. Brand24

It is an effective method of monitoring brands or products on the Internet. It is also a tool that measures the buzz around the brand, product or keyword. It's easy to use and allows the creation of different projects on different topics.

Figure 3.15 Brand24 home page

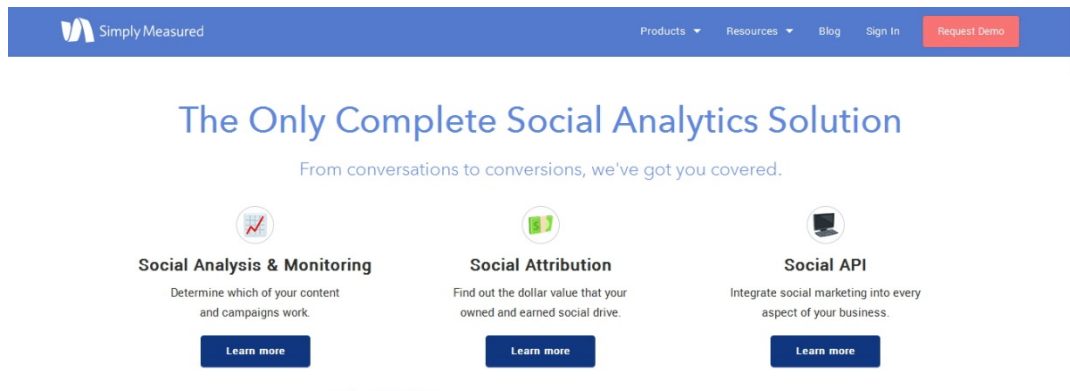


Source: brand24.com

## 5. Simply Measured

It has multiple free tools to measure the performance of the personal efforts on Facebook pages, Twitter, Instagram, Vine, Google+ page, and even on the website. It also suggests how to drive traffic to the personal website through social media channels. By using the data from Google Analytics, it shows detailed information about how each of the personal social platforms is driving traffic to the personal website<sup>36</sup>.

Figure 3.16 Simply Measured home page



Source: [simplymeasured.com](http://simplymeasured.com)

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<sup>36</sup> <http://www.delightfulcommunications.com/blog/personal-branding-tools/>

## Chapter 4

### Characteristics of the Digital World

#### 4.1 Introduction to Digital Age

Digital technologies are becoming increasingly important in our lives. Due to high levels of interconnectivity, the Internet has been linked to the wheel and the aeroplane regarding its ability to affect the future of human nation (Jobber & Ellis-Chadwick, 2012). “The Internet is among the few things humans have built that they don’t truly understand”. (Eric Schmidt, 2013) The Internet is the largest experiment in the history. For its users, the Internet has created an environment for building communities. Hundreds of millions of people each minute create and consume digital content in an online world, which is not bound by terrestrial laws. The emergence of social network sites such as Facebook, Google +, Twitter and LinkedIn have had a significant impact on global society. Never before in history so many people from all over the world had so much power using only their fingers. “The Internet is the world’s largest ungoverned space that makes it possible for everybody to develop a real-time content without intermediaries.”(Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen, 2013) In 1995 less than 1% the world population had an Internet connection. Now we have around 40 % (three billion and a half users)<sup>37</sup>. Global system for mobile communications has become the fastest-growing communications technology of all time. By 2020, 70 % of the world population will be mobile users<sup>38</sup>. If the current speed of technological innovation is maintained most of the projected eight billion people on the globe will have access to the world’s information through a device that fits in the palm of the hand, by 2025. (Eric Schmidt & Jared Cohen, 2013). To give some more numbers we can compare the Internet to the radio which took nearly 40 years to reach 50 million listeners, or to television - 13 years to reach the same number, but in just four years 50 million users had Internet access. (Tuten and Solomon, 2013) These numbers cannot be ignored. The world is no longer going to be the same. The connections are different. The relationships are different. The business is different. We live in a great age, full of unlimited opportunities. The important things are to adapt yourself to changes.

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.Internetlivestats.com/Internet-users/>

<sup>38</sup> <https://newsroom.cisco.com/press-release-content?articleId=1741352>

## 4.2 Defining online identity

The purpose of this paragraph is not to cover all the definitions and issues related to the digital identity but rather to give a general idea of it. The term digital identity has emerged with the evolution of the web. It is composed of two distinct words: identity which makes individuals the same today as they were yesterday, but it also what makes them different from one another; and digital which in the Webster's New Explorer Dictionary is explained as: "done with the finger or toe".(Ghazi Ben Ayed, 2014)

A good point in understanding better this term is the dictionary. "A digital identity is information on an entity used by computer systems to represent an external agent. That agent may be a person, organisation, application, or device."<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the critical point is the available data. This data include the information that a person itself puts on the web ("digital footprint"), the information others put about that person ("digital shadow") and the information collected from the person's actions such as purchases, etc., so-called ("digital trail").<sup>40</sup> Every time we visit a website, or we look for something to buy or somewhere to go we leave traces of our identity. By posting an article or a picture, by leaving a comment in a forum, by subscribing to a website we construct a digital identity. Even if sometimes we do not think the digital footprints left on the web can somehow influence us, is completely wrong. Identity has more importance online. Building a digital identity means establishing a community of trust, which becomes a requirement for conducting an online business. (Ghazi Ben Ayed, 2014). A good example can be a seller on eBay who has to establish a community of trust to sell better.

It's important to distinguish digital from the online identity. The definition of the online identity on Wikipedia tells: "Internet identity (also called IID), or Internet persona is a social identity that an Internet user establishes in online communities and websites. It can also be considered as an actively constructed presentation of oneself. Although some people prefer to use their real names online, some Internet users prefer to be anonymous, identifying themselves using pseudonyms, which reveal varying amounts of personally identifiable information. An online identity may even be determined by a user's relationship to a certain social group they are a part of online. Some can even be deceptive about their identity." An interesting point from the definition is anonymity. Back in 1993, when "nobody knows you are a dog", Internet users started using anonymous profiles, taking on any personality they wanted. Since then many things have changed and now the days when people were allowed to be dogs are coming to an

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<sup>39</sup> Wikipedia.com

<sup>40</sup> <https://paulgordonbrown.com/2014/07/15/the-difference-between-a-college-students-digital-and-online-identity-and-why-were-getting-it-wrong/>

end. According to Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook's chief operating officer, a critical mass of people only want online interactions supported by "authentic" identity<sup>41</sup>.

The online identity in is not a simple Facebook page. It's a constellation of profiles and online activities. 'In the world of media convergence, every important story gets told, every brand gets sold, every consumer gets courted across multiple media platforms.' (Jenkins, 2008) Convergence is a key element of the Digital World. It is the bringing together all content from different platforms. Facebook profiles are tied to a person's real name, friend and connections. More and more people use the Facebook and Google ID's to log in across the Internet. In the old web people's identity could remain separate from real life. Now this is no longer true. Companies such as Amazon, Zappos keep the personal data of their clients that go back more than a decade. Moreover, much information is being kept on the Internet concerning web users. Many people remain unaware of the quantity of information available online that in the long run could impact their reputations.

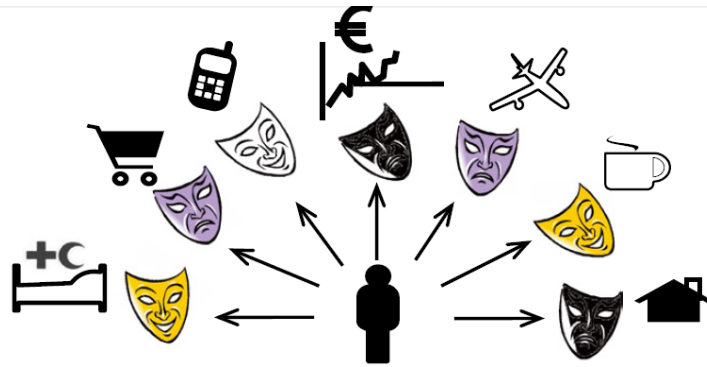
During the 2008 economic crash, several Wall Street bankers tried to save their online image. They hired online reputation companies to minimise their appearance online (paying up to \$10,000 per month). In the near future a new type of insurance will emerge. Companies will insure personal online identities against theft or damage. "Online identity will become such a powerful currency that we will even see the rise of the new black market where people can buy real or invented identities". (Eric Schmidt & Jared Cohen, 2013)

As mentioned before, online identity is the sum of characteristics and interactions. People interact differently with each website in this way building "partial identities". So each website has a different representation of the same person. For example, Amazon has a partial identity based on the purchases one makes. It looks like users enjoy having different identities on different platforms, depending on the context and the result is that a person doesn't have one true identity, but some certain partial identities. So even if we speak of identity in the singular, in reality, is plural because it encapsulates multiple identities, as shown in the figure 4.1.

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<sup>41</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2012/apr/19/online-identity-authenticity-anonymity>

Figure 4.1 Digital masks and partial identities



*Source: ISOC Internet Society Understanding your online identity 2011*

### **4.3 From analog to digital tools**

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the concept of Personal Branding was born in the analog world far before the digital one. In the analog world, the ideas and concepts created in human's minds were provided by books, movies, family or personal connections. With the digital revolution, people started to move away from the traditional. In today's world, the younger generation are aware of many things much sooner than their parents. The digital revolution changed as well the way of building a Personal Brand offering various tools and opportunities to connect with people. In the analog world, the tactics used for building a Personal Brand were speaking engagements, meetings, etc. Today the game has changed; digital Personal Branding includes new methods such as blogs and social media that are a must for building a successful identity. (Vitberg, 2009) In the figure 4.2 are represented how the analog tactics have changed into digital ones.

Figure 4.2 Analog vs digital personal branding tactics

Analog Personal Branding Tactics	Digital Personal Branding Tactics
Build personal relationships – social and professional	Podcasts
Speaking engagements	Video casts
Articles & white papers	Websites
Newsletters	Blogs
Business letters	Wikis
Collateral (brochures)	Social Media
Public relations	E-1
Community involvement	E-mail
Boards	Various ways and means to link and connect all of the above in an integrated fashion
Awards	

Source: (Vitberg, 2009)

The author of the famous book “How to win friend and influence people”- Dale Carnegie 80 years ago said, “Dealing with people is probably the biggest problem you face.” Even if in 2016 it’s still true – because people are still people. There is a little issue, as the Internet did not exist when Dale Carnegie wrote the book. In-person we know who we are talking to and how they feel about what we are saying. Online the audience is invisible. In fact, it’s more probable that in the today’s interconnected world interacting with people is an even bigger issue. As we can see from the table, branding yourself in a digital world has much more tools than the analog times where face-to-face, telephone, letter, newspaper articles were the main channels in the Personal Brand building.

#### 4.3.1 Digital natives and immigrants

Technology changes but people do too. In 2001 Marc Prensky, American writer and speaking on education introduced a new way to look at the gap that the introduction of the technology made between generations: “today’s students think and process information fundamentally different from their predecessors”. (Prensky.2001). He called the generation born after 1980 - Digital Natives. Digital Natives are the ones that have spent their entire lives surrounded by computers, smartphones and other tools of the Digital Age. Instead, the generation that lived in two cultures: the pre-digital and the digital are called Digital Immigrants. As Digital Immigrants, some adapt better than others do. Digital Immigrants who speak a pre-Digital Age

are struggling to connect with the young generation. (Prensky.2001). They have been exposed to the digital but find it hard to handle, and many have a little resistance. On his blog Mark Prensky underlined the importance of learning from the young generation: “instead of looking at our kids through their test scores, let’s see them as individual people, and partners in learning.” (Prensky, 2001)

Pew Research Centre identified that the only generation for which new technologies are not something they’ve had to adapt to are the Millennials<sup>42</sup>. The term millennial has first introduced in 1987 by Authors William Strauss and Neil Howe to indicate the generation born at the beginning of 1980.

#### **4.3.2 Old rules vs. new rules of marketing**

Over the last ten years, marketing has been transformed. Digital has truly changed the game when it comes to how to reach and engage with customers. Marketing has gone from appealing mass audiences to appealing audience of one. From large formats (TV screens) to mobiles screens. From working days to 24/7/365 marketing.

The introduction of technology not only gave a wide choice of new tools to reach the audience, but it completely changes the rules of marketing and PR. Today the customer faces more information and has the power to choose who they want to engage with.

The times when marketing simply meant advertising are gone, when it was done one-way (company to customer), when advertising was exclusively about selling, and advertising campaign had a limited life. To set the web has transformed the rules and the way people experience things: people want participation, people want authenticity, people want to receive content at a precise moment, etc. (David Meerman Scott, 2015).

To set themselves apart, brands use the new marketing tools to create a deep emotional connection. It’s about making the customer experience exciting, surprising, and delightful. By using new tools and techniques, brands are able to deliver better experiences. The use of technology does not imply the replacement of humans. It should be seen as an extra tool to help reach a much deeper and intense relationship between a brand and its customers.

When it comes to Personal Branding, the new rules of marketing are also valid. As we could see before, a huge amount of employers check their appliance on the web. So, it’s fundamental to be position in a solid way, which means not only a Facebook or LinkedIn profile but also a website or blog. In order to make it easier for the employers and future clients to find one on the web. The technology has to be used to facilitate the personal interactions. People love people

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood/>

and their personal stories more than they like brands. Recently, many marketing executives, CEOs, entrepreneurs cashed the opportunity to tell their personal stories by using technology. In this way, they bring success to their organisation. (David Meerman Scott, 2015). A great example of this is the CEO of Virgin, Sir Richard Branson, who is not afraid of being on TV or various YouTube channels, posting interesting content. He has led his company to a remarkable broad diversity of ventures under the name of Virgin, which is applied to everything from cellphones to airlines. Even if all the industries he operates in are so different. Consumers have the sense of identity, of “Virgin experience”. This is all the merit of Branson’s idea of branding is a two-way relationship which each customer, where each party gets exactly what they need from other. (Social media marketing, Eric Anderson 2010)

#### **4.4 Social media use by CEOs**

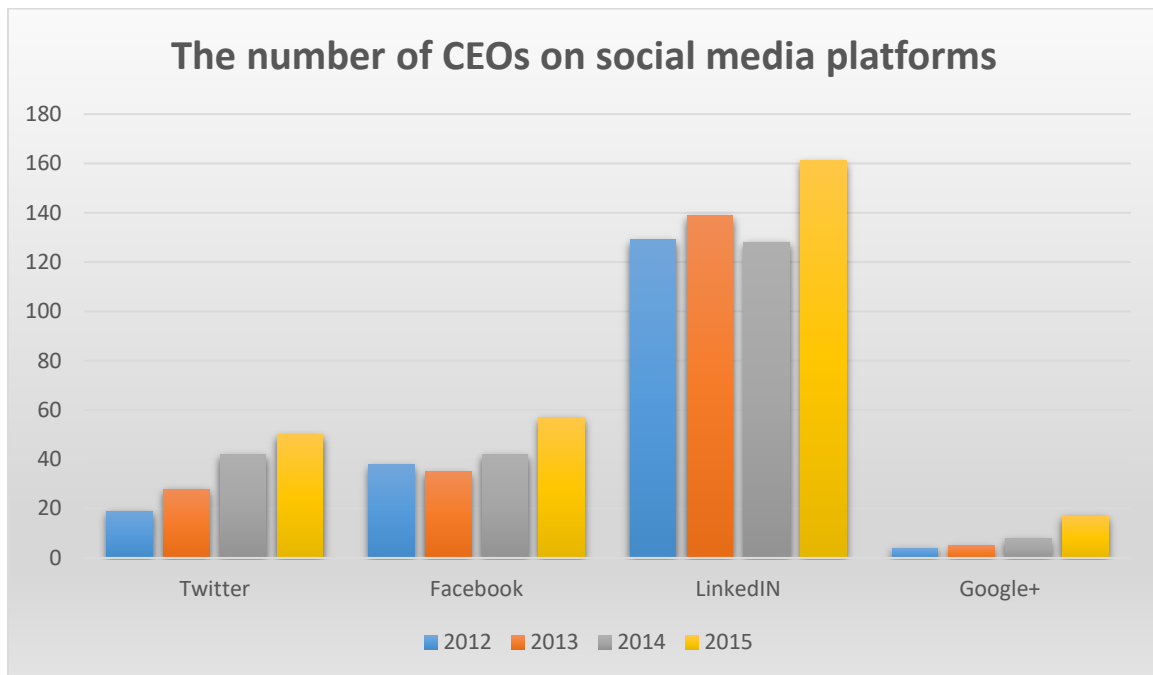
The social profiles of entrepreneurs are a gold mine for advice, motivation and inspiration. Businesspeople have a lot of stories to tell and advice to give<sup>43</sup>, but unfortunately, according to the Social CEO Report, only 39% of Fortune 500 CEOs had a social media presence in 2015. The common reasons for not having a social profile are the lack time and the fear that something may go wrong. Not being present on social media does not mean not having an online identity and reputation.

Among the CEOs present on the social media which number increased from the previous years, the majority concentrates on LinkedIn.

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<sup>43</sup> <https://www.imagination.net/blog/10-entrepreneurs-impressive-digital-footprint/>

Figure 4.3 The number of CEOs on social media platforms among Fortune's 500



*Source: Social CEO Report*

Due to a general increase in reporting about the economy and businesses, many CEO's are exposed to critical discussions of their actions that can influence on the company they work for. The CEO's reputation plays a vital role in determining a company's overall image, affecting the behaviours of customers, employees and investors. A chief executive officer with an excellent reputation represents a valuable figure for the enterprise. For example in times of crisis employers continue to trust the company because of the leader's personality<sup>44</sup>.

According to a study published by Harvard Business Review<sup>45</sup>, the impact of the CEOs misbehavior on company reputation is significant, long-lasting and can reverberate across the organisation by including loss of a major client, trust of shareholders and federal investigation. As the CEOs are the face of the company's reputation, is crucial for them to define and maintain it.

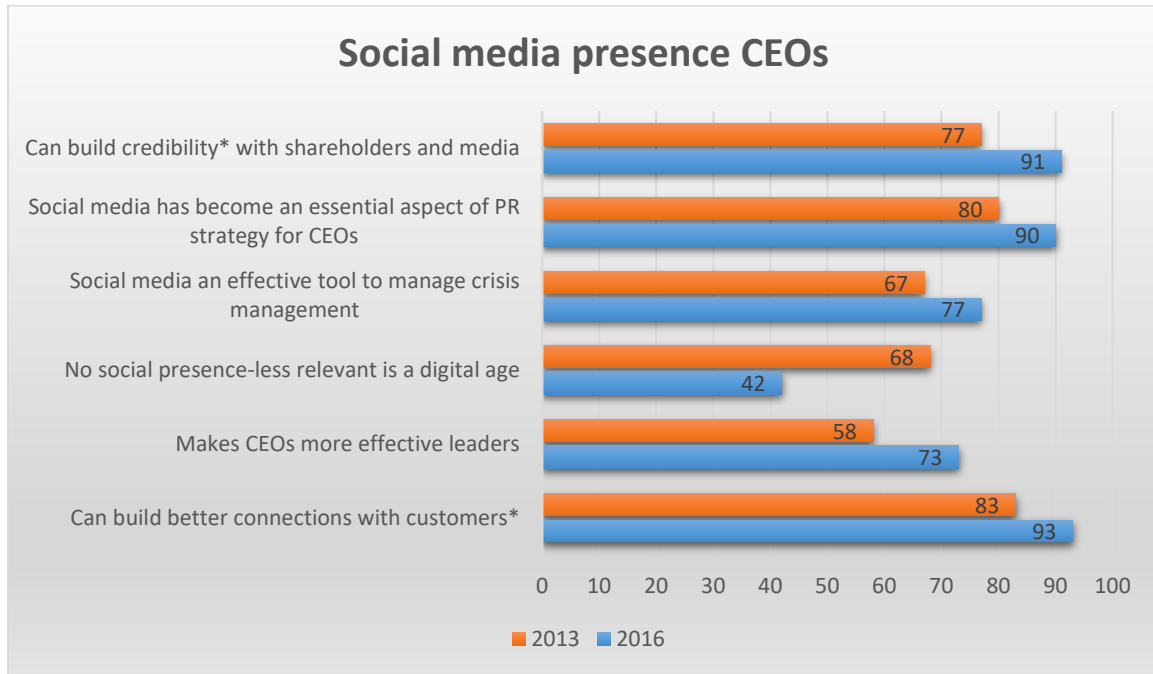
Social media is a great way of communication. In the last years, a larger number of people have expressed a high level of interest from hearing news and information from business leaders directly. People more than ever want to see personality in brands. The results of a CEO Social

<sup>44</sup> [http://issuu.com/burson-marsteller-emea/docs/b-m\\_info\\_ceo\\_study\\_engl\\_final](http://issuu.com/burson-marsteller-emea/docs/b-m_info_ceo_study_engl_final)

<sup>45</sup> Scoundrels in the C-suite, By David F. Larcker and Brian Tayan, may 10, 2016

Media Survey 2016<sup>46</sup> have shown that executive's engagement on social media reinforces the brand's reputation. The following table summarises the results of the survey with which people agreed that the social media presence of the CEOs can have lots of benefits.

Figure 4.4 Survey on the impact of the social media presence of the CEOs<sup>47</sup>



Source: BRAND fog's 2016 Social Media Survey

For a CEO having a social media presence is important and as the case of Sir Branson has shown can bring great results to the company. The digital world offers enormous opportunities. Instead of ignoring or being afraid of technology the CEOs should challenge themselves and jump into digital till not too late.

#### 4.5 The power of the Social media

Social media is a complex phenomenon, which means different things to different people. In analysing this phenomenon, we need to take into consideration three separate elements: social, media and network. According to Tuten and Solomon (2013) the "social" element involves thinking: "about social media as the way digital natives live a social life (...) it is all about a culture of participations; a belief in democracy, the ability to freely interact with other people, companies and organisations; open access to venues that allows users to share content from simple comments to reviews, ratings, photos, stories and more." (Tuten and Solomon, 2013)

<sup>46</sup> BRANDfog's 2016 Social Media Survey surveyed 500 US employees in diverse companies. The companies surveyed ranged in size from startups to Fortune 1000 companies, and spanned various industries.

<sup>47</sup> \*data refer to 2014

The “media” element in the technological context can have different forms. For example social community media, like Facebook and LinkedIn, allow sharing content and socialise; social publishing media, like YouTube or Pinterest, enable members to publish videos, distribute content, etc.

The last element: network can be defined as technology or as interconnections between members of a community. Together all these elements create the faster growing online phenomenon. Social media have given a voice to masses of individuals, businesses and communities around the world.

The term social media can be seen as an umbrella, which can have different uses. On the one hand, it's a tool for connecting people and on the other is a tool to communicate, exchange opinions and receive feedback. People use social media platforms for a different reason. It can be for a purely personal reason or for business purposes, to promote their businesses or themselves.

Social media has gained popularity in the past few years. Humans are social animals; they need to be social by their nature. The increasingly growing mobile technology helps people to be always connected with each other, share things, see how other are doing and make them feel part of a community.

In the social media age, the hashtag is the most powerful tool. “A hashtag is a type of label or metadata tag used on the social network and microblogging services which make it easier for users to find messages with a specific theme or content. Users create and use hashtags by placing the hash character (or number sign) # in front of a word or unspaced phrase”<sup>48</sup>. They connect posts from people all over the world. Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Tumblr, Google+, all support hashtags. In just a few years they have been incorporated everywhere. Mastering a hashtag is an important strategy digital marketing campaign and can help with brand recognition. Depending on the platform the optimal number of hashtags can vary. For example, Twitter officially recommends a number of two<sup>49</sup>, instead on Instagram it is better to use more than one hashtags. Using too many hashtags devalues the strength of the hashtag and makes each additional one more meaningless.

In the following table the most popular social media platforms are presented at the moment and the reasons why and individual should join them.

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<sup>48</sup> wikipedia.org

<sup>49</sup> twitter.com

Figure 4.5 Top social media platforms



FACEBOOK

**WHAT?**

It is considered the best social for the brands. It is easy to use, to update and to share content. It's possible to use also the paid advertising.

**WHY?**

It's a platform with a huge audience all around the globe. It's user friendly



TWITTER

**WHAT?**

It's a place where is easy to interact with the audience using 140 characters

**WHY?**

It works great at helping to interact directly with people and at receiving real time feedback. It has a huge audience.



GOOGLE+

**WHAT?**

It's for a more professional audience. It's a necessary platform for brands because it's linked to Google's SEO

**WHY?**

It's a must founding the name of the Personal Brand on the Google search



PINTEREST

**WHAT?**

It's an extremely visual platform. Great place for getting inspired and share great visual content, especially infographics

**WHY?**

It has a large female audience. Great for positioning in fashion, food and fitness.



SNAPCHAT

**WHAT?**

It's a great way to get a fun message across the brand Snapchat followers. The use of Snapchat Stories is good for personal advertising

**WHY?**

Snapchat's biggest market is millennials. If the targeted audience are younger people –this is the greatest place to tell the personal story.



PERISCOPE

**WHAT?**

It's a life video vlogging that allows to the brand to interact in real time with the audience.

**WHY?**

Livestreaming makes the brand more authentic. And the popularity of the videos is continually growing.



LINKEDIN

**WHAT?**

It's the platform where is possible to interact with recruiters. Building a professional part of the Personal Brand

**WHY?**

It's a place to interact with older generation  
Being on LinkedIn makes the brand look more professional



YOUTUBE

**WHAT?**

YouTube is the place where videos live. It's possible to upload content-heavy videos and to start a personal channel or vlog.

**WHY?**

It allows to the followers to see every time from all devices the brand's videos. It's crucial as people are watching video content more than ever.



BLOGGER

WHAT?

It's a powerful publishing platform that provides all the tools to start a blog

WHY?

Blogging is a great way to share ideas and opinions. It's easy and free



INSTAGRA

WHAT?

It's a beautiful visual platform. It's great for creating a visual identity to the brand. It allows the use of hashtags

WHY?

Most used at the moment platform. It's a great way to connect with the followers that appreciate visual content.



SLIDESHAR

WHAT?

Having an account on SlideShare allows to upload a presentation a to demonstrate personal expertise

WHY?

To show and to impress people with the personal knowledge.



WORDPRES

WHAT?

Allows the creation of a personal website where possible to share experiences, personal stories, etc.

WHY?

Having a personal website is a must. It's easy to use, even for beginners.

Source: Likeable Media

## 4.6 Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

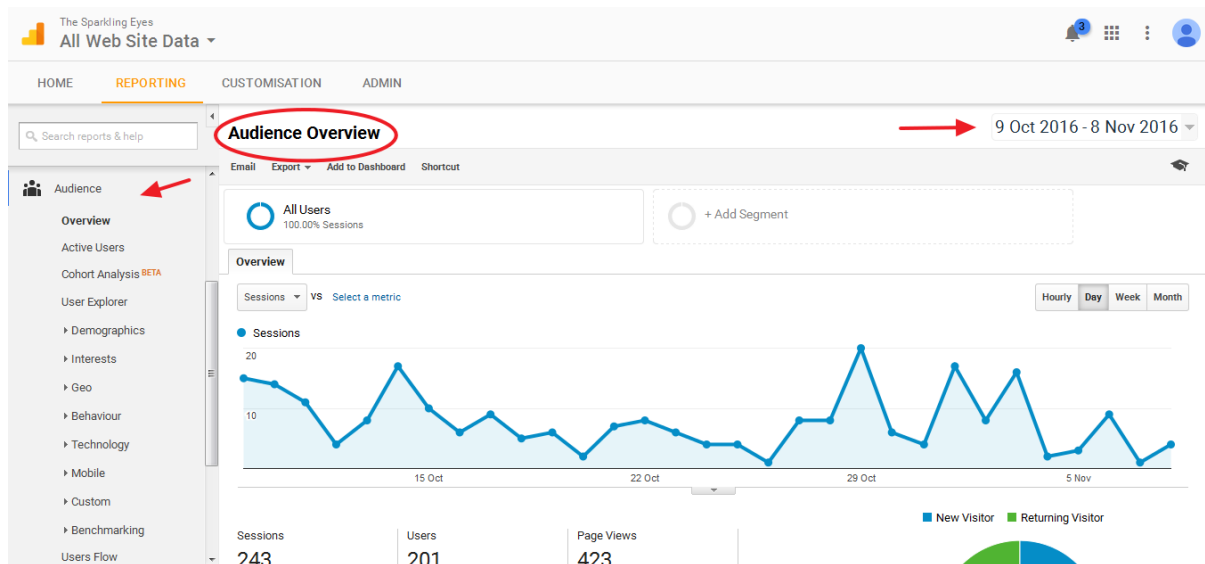
SEO is a method to increase the visibility on the search engines such as Google, Yahoo, Bing, and any other. To enhance the visibility by optimising the site and social network, a person should increase the page rank in the search engine. Around 75%<sup>50</sup> of people while searching for something on Google for example, look only on the first page, that's why SEO it so important. Monitoring the personal website rank is possible using tools like Alexa or Google Toolbar.

Driving traffic to the personal website or blog, having a certain amount of subscribers and followers is great. But for a better result and grow it's fundamental to understand what are the most read posts, more shared content, who are the readers of the blog etc. Google Analytics it's

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.imforza.com/blog/8-seo-stats-that-are-hard-to-ignore/>

an optimal tool that linked to the personal website gives an entire picture of the available data. The following is an overview of the audience that has visited my personal blog. On the right had side is possible to select the period of time of the analysis. On the left had side is placed the dashboard with all the tools. In this case I've selected "audience" so I can see all the details I'm interested in: geo localization, behaviour, age, device etc.

Figure 4.6 Google Analytics home page



Source: Google Analytics

The process of optimizing a website for search engines is a constantly changing field. Using old techniques may not work and can be considered spammy, so it's fundamental to keep up updated with the online changes. Apart from the creation of great content which is the main element of engagement with the target audience (commonly used expressed on the web is "content is the king"). There are many techniques used to optimize the online presence. Some of the most common are linked below:

1. Keywords. A keyword is a word or phrase that summarises topic of significance. They are usually the words that searchers type in the search box when looking for information. It's important to make sure that the used key words are appropriate with the personal site and brand. It's important to add the chosen keywords to the URL's (Uniform Resource Locator or www), to titles, opening paragraphs and images as well. Google uses Latent Semantic Indexing (an algorithmic principle built into search engines to process synonyms and understand topical

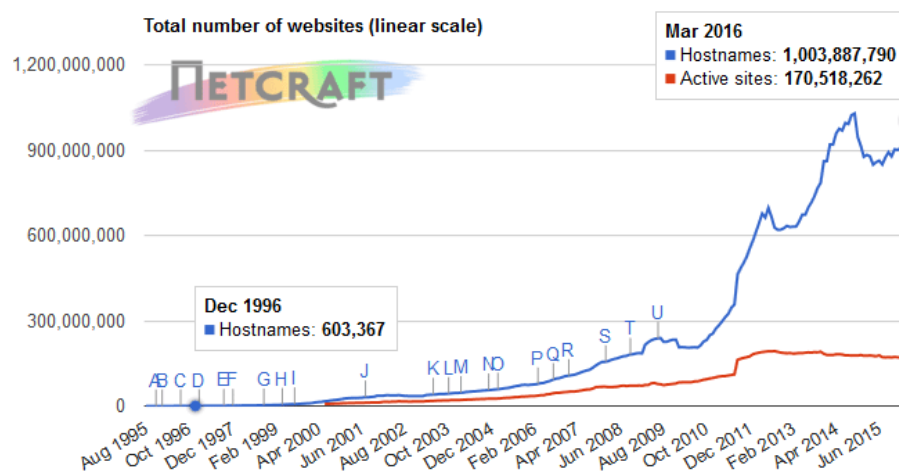
relationships between words<sup>51</sup>) to analyse the page and the keywords variations, so it's better not to repeat the keywords but instead using synonyms.

It is possible to use Keyword Planner which is a free Google AdWords tool for advertisers where is possible to search for a keyword and group ideas and see how a list of keywords might perform<sup>52</sup>, but it's important not to use keyword combinations that are largely used. There are mainly three core keyword strategies:

- Search volume- the average number of times people have searched for a certain period
- Competition- how easier or harder to be higher ranked than the competition given a certain keyword
- Relevance- the more relevant to a specific website topic the keyword is more like other people will find he website.

For a long time the first one was considered the most logical, but in our days according to Netcraft's<sup>53</sup> the total number of sites across the Internet is than a billion. It is possible to see in the following figure:

Figure 4.7 Total numbers of website (1995-2015)



Source: Web Server Survey

So, now the SEOs focus is on relevancy and competition. And instead on one keyword, so-called "head" it's better to focus on long tail keywords. The long tail consist of 3+ words and are easier to rank due to a lower competition<sup>54</sup>.

<sup>51</sup> <http://coschedule.com/blog/latent-semantic-indexing/>

<sup>52</sup> <https://support.google.com/adwords/answer/2999770?hl=en>

<sup>53</sup> Web Server Survey, March 2016

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.hittail.com/blog/the-hidden-value-of-long-tail-seo>

2. The keywords in post URL. It is necessary to change the post permalink if there is no keyword in the URL. It's possible to change it by changing the permalinks option.

3. Interlinking. Another way to increase the search engine ranking is by publishing the link to other websites, for example on personal social media profiles, or every time there is a new post to share, it's good to share it on social media. The statistic shows that 76% of marketers use Social Media to support and boost SEO<sup>55</sup>. Establishing relationship with influential sites or blogs is also a useful idea to drive traffic. The link building strategy has to be organic and not linked to spam sites.

4. Mobile friendly site. More and more research on Google is being searched using mobile phones. So it's crucial to make the website or blog mobile friendly as format and size. The distinctive element of the mobile users is that they don't want to wait for page loading too much. So the site load speed has to be quick. The posts don't have to be too long and it's better to have at least one image.

5. Subscribers and followers. In the old marketing world the “quantity” was extremely valuable. The more people are connected with the brand, the more valuable the brand becomes. In the new digital world it does make still sense, but more than quantity now the “quality” of the followers is more important. The quality is what moves the people from discussion to actions: sharing, following, engaging, etc. As said “Quantity opens doors. Quality opens wallets.”

## **4.7 Performing a social media audit**

A brand audit is a detailed analysis that shows how the brand is currently performing compared to the fixed objectives and how its position is perceived<sup>56</sup>. The typical criteria to measure an audit allows one to:

- Establish the performance of the brand- by using one of the various tools presented in Chapter 3 in analysing the social data
- Discover the strengths and weaknesses- by examining the data, by asking the friends and followers and by analysing the personal perceptions
- Understand the positioning compared to the competition- by visiting their websites, by using special comparing tools.

Regarding the measurement of the return on investment (ROI) for the Personal Brand, unless someone from the beginning has the objective to measure the amount of money, resources and

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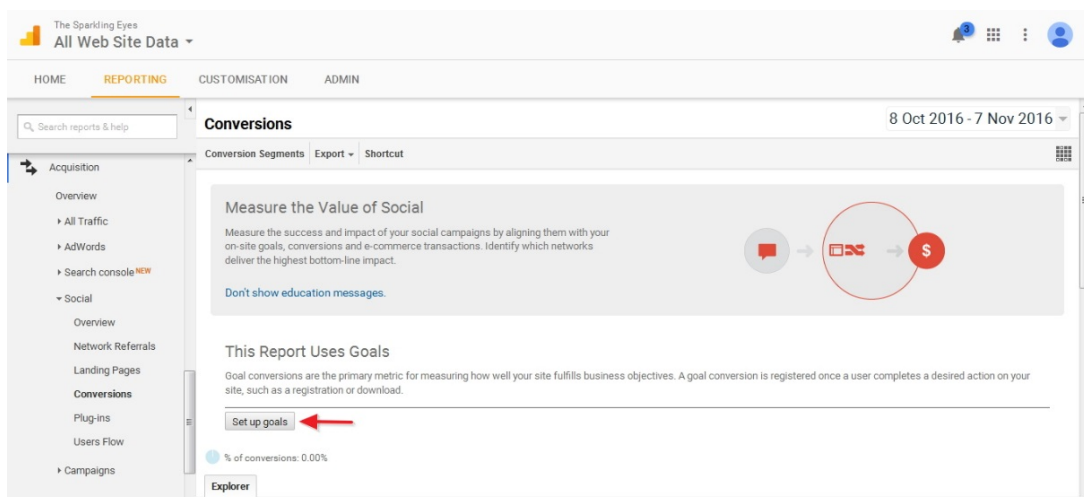
<sup>55</sup> <https://www.impactbnd.com/blog/25-seo-statistics-for-2015-and-what-you-can-learn-from-them>

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.brandwatch.com/blog/brand-audit/>

time invested and then to analyse the results, there is no a clear way of measuring it. The Personal Branding ROI results are less about money (at least in a direct way), and more about life changes: like more confidence, larger network, fulfilment, the new customers, a better job, etc.

The ROI depends on the initial objectives of the person. If from the start one wants to measure the inflow that the Personal Brand can bring, a suggested tool is Google Analytics. A possibility to calculate the ROI is by setting the desired objective/goals then track and measure them on Google Analytics. Depending on the person the goals can be different. For example, a goal can be the email list sing-ups, downloads, purchases, etc. The procedure is the following: from the personal Google Analytics dashboard, it's necessary to go to Acquisition > Social > Conversions then it's possible to set the goals (by clicking on the bottom indicated on the image above).

Figure 4.8 Google Analytics-Goals setting 1



*Source: Google Analytics*

After the goal was set are following the next steps:

Figure 4.9 Google Analytics-Goals setting 2

The screenshot shows the 'Goal details' configuration page in Google Analytics. At the top, it indicates 'Goal type: Destination'. A blue circle with the number '3' is next to the 'Goal details' heading. The 'Destination' section includes a dropdown menu set to 'Equal to', a text input field containing '/thankyou.html', and a 'Case sensitive' checkbox. A red arrow points from a circled '1' to the text input field. Below this is a 'Value optional' section with a toggle switch set to 'ON', a numeric input field with '5', and a currency dropdown set to 'US\$USD'. A red arrow points from a circled '2' to the currency dropdown. The 'Funnel optional' section has a toggle switch set to 'OFF'. A red arrow points from a circled '3' to the 'OFF' toggle. Below the funnel section is a 'Verify this Goal' link with a red arrow pointing from a circled '4' to it. At the bottom are 'Save' and 'Cancel' buttons.

Source: Google Analytics

1. In the box number one goes the actual destination URL that is triggered after the wanted user's action. It's important to make sure this page is not indexed in Google, in order not to mess up the data by taking in consideration the visitors that have entered on the website by accident and didn't provide any value

2. The potential value of the customer is given by the value of the customer multiplied by the conversation rate (for example average number of email subscribers who become customers)

3. It's not obligatory, but if the person has a particular funnel, it's better to add it there. Funnel has to be inserted in a particular order, and they give a visual representation of the conversion data between each step. For example, if there are three funnel steps, the funnel shows how many people exited the website after the first step, if the percentage of exit is high,

that part has to be optimised. The visitors that didn't exit the website after the first step funnel go to the next step, and so on.

4. By clicking on the number 4, it's possible instantly to verify the % of conversion rate based on the personal data<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>57</sup> <http://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-roi-guide/>

## Chapter 5

### Case Study of Sir Richard Branson

*“When I was starting out in life, things were more certain than they are these days. You lined up a career, often the same one your father followed. Most mothers stayed at home. Today nothing is sure, and life is one long struggle. People have to make choices if they are to get anywhere. The best lesson I learned was just do it. It doesn't matter what it is, or how hard it might seem, as the ancient Greek, Plato, said, ‘the beginning is the most important part of any work’.”*

*Richard Branson*

#### 5.1 Early life- Bibliography

Sir Richard Charles Nicholas Branson was born on 18 of July 1950 in Blackheath, London. He is the eldest of three children of Eve Branson, a former ballet dancer and air hostess, and Edward James Branson, a barrister.<sup>58</sup> Since childhood, his mother was determined to make him independent and teach him the importance of stamina by leaving him in the middle of the fields, and making him find the way home. Severely dyslexic he could barely read by the age of eight and was hopelessly lost with numbers. "School was painful, looking at the blackboard and wouldn't be able to understand anything"(Richard Branson) but the dyslexia was something that helped him to concentrate on things that interested him. From a young age, he was interested in entrepreneurship. He started his first business at the age of 13 together with his best friend Nik, by investing five £ in the seedlings, they hoped to sell 400 Christmas trees and gain 800£, but unfortunately, the rabbits had eaten almost all of them. The next business was with parrots that also ended after Branson's mum tired of cleaning the aviary left the door open, so they all escaped. At 15 he decided to launch a national student newspaper. The Student magazine was a real success with a circulation of 50000 copies. In the 70s, he started a mail-order discount record company to finance the magazine. It was the first business launched under the name Virgin. Five months after the shop opening, he was arrested for tax evasion because he figured out a way to avoid taxes. One year later, he opened the first Virgin Records store. In 1972, Branson founded Virgin Records and opened a record shop on Oxford Street, London. After building a recording studio, The Manor, the first Virgin artist was the unknown Mike Oldfield, whose debut album “Tubular Bells” sold 16 million copies and made Richard Branson a millionaire. He invested the money into new artists from the Sex Pistols to The Rolling Stones

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<sup>58</sup> Wikipedia.com

and ventures sometimes risking way too much.<sup>59</sup> By 1984, Richard Branson already owned an Island on the British Virgin Islands and Virgin Records was one of the most successful independent labels on the globe.

In 1984, Virgin took to the air for the first time with only one aircraft and only one route: London-New York. As an Airline company, Virgin decided to offer a mix between economy and business class fares, with emphasis on the non-stop fun. The only problem he had at that moment was advertising. He did not have the budget to compete with the biggest airlines companies, so he decided to do the advertising by himself. Starting a series of many record-breaking adventures including the fastest-ever Atlantic Ocean crossing, a series of hot air balloon adventures and kitesurfing across the English Channel. This way, he turned Virgin Atlantics into a big and famous brand. Media was fascinated about his adventurer spirit and uniqueness, so he ended up on the magazines, TV news without paying for advertising.

During the following years, Virgin endured a large expansion: Virgin Australia, Virgin America, Virgin Holidays, Virgin Limited Edition, Virgin Trains, Virgin Hotels and Virgin Galactic. This expansion has seen Branson become the only person to build eight billion-dollar companies in eight different sectors. He is also a record breaker online; he has been rated as the world's most social CEO and the world's most followed person on LinkedIn. Branson has also written six books, including autobiography *Losing My Virginity*.

In 1999 Branson was knighted by the Prince of Wales for his services to entrepreneurship.

In 2004 he established non-profit foundation Virgin Unite to deal with the social and environmental problems. At the moment he dedicates most of his time working with Virgin Unite and organisations it has incubated. He also serves on the Global Commission on Drug Policy and supports ocean conservation with the Ocean Elders and Ocean Unite.<sup>60</sup>

## **5.2 Sir Richard Branson Personal Brand analysis**

Branson's brand building started offline with youth culture magazine *Student*. During the years he has built his reputation of Dr YES, by challenging himself among many breath-taking adventures. At first, his fan base was formed by people who followed him on the news, magazines, etc. Then with the rise of the Internet, he spread his content on the social media platforms.

Branson is one of those persons that knows exactly what his "reason for being" is, his life's "why". The primary purpose that drives and directs all of Sir Richard Branson's choices,

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<sup>59</sup> virgin.com

<sup>60</sup> virgin.com

decisions, behaviour and actions are the act of making a difference in this world. With the motto, “Screw it. Let’s do it.” He challenges himself in one of the most interesting adventures of our times.

Called "Dr Yes" by the staff at Virgin due to his openness to new ideas, new adventures, and new experiences, he has this spirit in his blood. His mum managed to be a pilot during the war when only men were allowed. His grandad's cousin, Capitan Robert Scott was the second man to the South Pole. He does what he does because of his strong beliefs in this. In his Autobiography, he many times underlined that he didn’t become a businessman because of money but because of having fun, creating new things, making people happy and the world better. In one of his September blog posts, he wrote that life is not a journey to retirement but instead is like a dance, like a song that should be enjoyed while playing<sup>61</sup>.

The entire life of Branson is the “how” he pursues his reason of being. By being one of the best in the world at doing innovative business and going after new opportunities and new business markets with humour and style, as he said: "have fun and money will come". He is the rebel that creates new. His secret is to live life to the fullest and trying over and over, but also to be well prepared, asking for help.

The “what” of Richard Branson is composed of everything that stands behind the Virgin brands and Richard’s Personal Brand. Both are perfectly aligned:

- Virgin’s brands and new businesses
- Start-ups and young entrepreneurs support
- Inspiration for others
- Videos, public speaking, articles: everything that gets his message through to a larger audience
- Charity, peace and serving others activities.

#### Personal values and passion

Since a young age Branson learned to follow his passions. Starting with the Student magazine where he pursued his dream of giving a voice to young people until his last charity activities.

In Branson’s latest book: *The Virgin Way: Everything I Know about Leadership*, he explores, among other things, how passion has fuelled many of his and his companies’ successes. He’s sure that it's impossible to teach people passion “it’s either in their DNA or its not.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> <https://www.virgin.com/richard-branson/life-not-journey-retirement>

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.cityam.com/1413166197/richard-branson-how-passion-can-change-your-life>

The passion and purpose will keep people focused on the job at hand and ultimately separate the successful from the unsuccessful<sup>63</sup>. He gives some advice on how to discover personal passion: by trying different things, by listening to the instinct and the others.

"When it's time to decide whether or not to go ahead, I have always found that the best decisions come from your instinct or experience. If you pursue your passions, your visions will be more likely to become successful realities". (Richard Branson, 2013)

Branson has always been fascinated by Steve Jobs. In *Like a Virgin*, Branson has dedicated a chapter to Jobs. He found out that even if they had operated in different fields. While Jobs focused on design and technology, Branson founded his company on service and constant engagement with the customers and by providing great value and a sense of fun. But they did have something in common: passion. They both pursued their passion and their vision, overcoming obstacles and ignoring critics.

We have seen in chapter three the importance of personal values and how they help to direct our daily choices and decisions. Like everything in life, some values lie on top of the list and are considered to have more personal importance, while the values that lie at the bottom of the list are not that significant.

Richard Branson's values have helped to shape the circumstances of his life. Moreover, even if difficult to identify all his values and their hierarchy, the following is a list of values that are driving Richard Branson's actions and decisions<sup>64</sup>:

1. Family

The first value of Sir Branson is without any doubt his family. As he admitted in an interview with *The Guardian* "My family means the world to me, much more so than business"<sup>65</sup>. In the first chapter ("A family that would have killed for each other") of his autobiography, he tells how strong is the relationship between the family members and about the amount of love and support he received. Without any doubt, he became a person he is today because of his family.

2. Entrepreneurialism

Branson always strived to make the world better. He has the entrepreneurialism in his blood, as he many times says; this is not thinking that is taught in the school but rather something internal. This value is expressed in more than hundreds of companies that Virgin group owns. His business mission is "to be a good leader, always try to bring out the best in people. It's very simple: listen to them, trust them, believe in them, respect them, and let them have a go."

3. Adventure

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<sup>63</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-i-hire-you-cant-fake-personality-passion-purpose-richard-branson>

<sup>64</sup> <http://blog.iqmatrix.com/richard-branson>

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/sep/19/richard-branson-my-family-values>

The Branson's Personal Brand, and consequently, the Virgin brand stands for adventure. His mother and his Aunt Clare nurtured his adventurous nature. From a very young age, he was encouraged to push the boundaries and explore the local countryside<sup>66</sup>. Despite huge risks, so many times he accepted different challenges without being afraid of losing his life. His adventurous spirit is balanced with rationality, as he plans in detail every travel he is taking. He understands the risk, the possible consequences, but well prepared he "goes for it".

#### 4. Boldness

Tightly connected with the value above the boldness is a Branson's quality. As he wrote "When Virgin Atlantic launched, not one person thought it would survive for more than one year. Now they are all out of business. I am still there. I was bold, yes, but not foolish". (Branson, 2006) He has the courage to start different businesses and adventures because he is confident and he does follow his real purpose. He believes that life has to be lived and enjoyed in every moment. This leads to the next value.

#### 5. Fun

The mission statement that he shared in an interview to Motivated magazine was: "Have fun in your journey through life and learn from your mistakes." Fun has always been a synonym of Richard Branson, something that he truly believes in. In this case, a picture is worth thousand words.

Figure 5.1 Sir Richard turns stewardess after losing bet (2013)



Source: virgin.com

<sup>66</sup> <http://motivatedonline.com/sir-richard-branson-on-a-mission-to-mentor/>

## 6. Teamwork.

Branson is really good at attracting talented people. As he wrote in one of his blog posts "Almost nobody ever achieved anything worthwhile without help. To be successful in business, You need to connect and collaborate and delegate – you need teamwork"<sup>67</sup>. By being passionate, by encouraging team members, and having an overall sense of fun in the workplace, he has managed to build a huge empire.

## USP

Although he dropped school at only 15-year-old to dedicate himself full time to the Student, while having the support of his family who truly believed in him. His skills go beyond math and chemistry problems. By constantly trying, falling then trying again during his lifetime, he accumulated a huge amount of unique experiences and skills plus excitement for achieving goals and establish new objective. The set of skills that is constantly updated helped him to achieve great results in life. The following are some of the skills he possesses:

### 1. Flexible thought

As Branson says: "flexible working is smart working". By flexibility at work, he means: working from home, integrating work with technology, the famous unlimited leave policy that he introduced at Virgin, etc.<sup>68</sup>

### 2. Sales skills

Since working at The Student, he knew how to push companies, by selling them spaces for advertising in his newspaper.

### 3. Public relations

Branson is a master of public relations. As he wrote in his book, *Virgin Rebel: Richard Branson in His Words*. "Publicity is critical...You have to get your brand out and about, particularly if you're a consumer-oriented brand. A good PR story is infinitely more effective than a front page ad." He dressed in a space suit for a Virgin Galactic press conference and a wedding dress to promote his retail store Virgin Brides. Someone called him the king of PR<sup>69</sup>. This is one of the skills that helped him to build a strong Personal Brand.

### 4. Negotiation skills

The saying nice guys, finish last is not about Branson. Because of his charisma combined with surprising patience, he is a model of affability. As Tim Jackson, the author of *Virgin King* wrote

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<sup>67</sup> <https://www.virgin.com/richard-branson/my-top-10-quotes-teamwork>

<sup>68</sup> <https://www.virgin.com/richard-branson/flexible-working-is-smart-working>

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.cyberalert.com/blog/index.php/public-relations-lessons-from-richard-branson-the-pr-master/>

“(…) He had a street trader’s aptitude for negotiation, knowing exactly when to talk and when to stay silent, when to press his counterpart on a point and when simply to walk away.” One of the stories that reflects the negotiations skills of Branson is:

"In the early days of the mail-order record business, a man telephoned to offer the company some bootlegged Jimi Hendrix records. The caller was told to drop by at the company’s offices the next day to discuss the deal with a Mr Zimmerman. When the man turned up at 10 a.m., it was to be told by an earnest Richard Branson that Mr Zimmerman was at a café just around the corner. When the man returned some time later to report that Mr Zimmerman had not turned up, Branson expressed surprise and innocently asked what it was he wanted to see him about. The man explained that he was going to sell him some records for £1 apiece. “I’ll give you 50p each,” the artful Branson said, and a deal was struck. Within days, they were sold to devoted Jimi Hendrix fans by mail order at £3 each."

#### 5. Persuasion skills.

The founder of Virgin had and has the courage to think big, to believe in himself and his instinct, and to go for it. Branson’s enthusiasm is infectious. Because of his motivational and charming character, he is good to persuade others to get involved in his projects. (Deas Dearlove, 2007)

#### 6. Leadership skills

No one can deny the leadership skills of Richard Branson. Google search gives more than four hundred thousands of articles for Branson and leadership, and this says it all. He treats with respect his employees, he motivates people all around the globe, and he is one of the most successful entrepreneurs in the world.

#### 7. Good listening skills

According to Branson, it is vital for business leaders to be able to listen and learn. It is because of nobody (no matter how smart or how many degrees he can have) has a monopoly on good ideas or good advice<sup>70</sup>. He advised: "as a leader, you should always be listening. Be visible, note down what you hear and you’ll be surprised how much you learn".

#### 8. Good communication skills.

As Branson itself said, "Communication is the most important skill any leader can possess". When communicating with other people he often uses stories, metaphors that make it easier to understand his interpretation of reality and excite the listeners.

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<sup>70</sup> <https://www.roberthalf.co.uk/blog/9-leadership-skills-sir-richard-branson>

## Perception & Online reputation

Despite his wealth and his passion for often starting or acquiring new businesses Branson is not perceived as a dull city type of businessman, because he doesn't seem boring and his enthusiasm for new ideas is infectious. Sir Richard Branson is today known as one of the most iconic businessmen in the UK. As the founder of the British multinational company Virgin Group, Branson now has over \$5 billion to his name and received the knighthood from the Queen in December 1999 for his incredible "services to entrepreneurship."<sup>71</sup>

"Branson's is more a guerrilla warfare brand rather than something built up over generations of solid progress. His brand has people willing and wishing him to succeed," said Maureen Sutherland-Smith<sup>72</sup>. He has a unique style of marketing himself and his business as well. He always managed to grab the attention of the press with mad stunts. This is the main reason for his huge success. Thanks to his brilliant strategies, Branson never needed to buy big articles on newspapers to promote his business<sup>73</sup>. Being perceived as someone who stands out from the crowd of ordinary, helped to set Virgin apart from its competitors.

Branson has such a great success because of his team, and people that stand behind all his actions. He might seem crazy, but he succeeded in many of his adventures, not because of luck, but because he planned in single detail everything.

Thanks to Branson, Virgin is perceived as a well-trusted brand. As he said in an interview with Inc. magazine. "We would never let a Virgin company go bust. We have to stand by all of our companies." This commitment made the company spent tens of millions of pounds to prevent the collapse from destroying the rest of the Virgin brands<sup>74</sup>. Branson has always been convinced that "There is nothing more important than your reputation." Back in 1986 when Virgin was one of the largest private companies, bankers convinced Richard that going public would be a good idea. Around 70,000 people applied by post and many others lined up in the City to buy a share in person. They were saying: "We're banking on you, Richard". Branson has always made decisions based on his instinct, but with a board of rational directors that was impossible. Even if the group had doubled the profits, the Virgin shares started to slip due to a market crash. Even if it wasn't Branson's fault, he felt responsible and for the first time in his life, depressed. He had promised to himself that he would buy all the shares back, at the price everyone had paid for them. He raised £182 million needed but as he said: "it was worth it to keep my good name and my freedom"(Richard Branson, 2006).

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<sup>71</sup> <http://www.hifluence.eu/inspiration/2889/>

<sup>72</sup> <http://www.express.co.uk/expressyourself/284470/How-does-Richard-Branson-do-it>

<sup>73</sup> <http://www.hifluence.eu/inspiration/2889/>

<sup>74</sup> <http://www.inc.com/oscar-raymundo/richard-branson-reveals-why-virgin-will-never-go-bankrupt.html>

"What's your most valuable possession? When people ask me that, they often expect me to name some expensive artefact. However, my most valuable possession is also my most valued one. It costs nothing, and everyone has one: my reputation."(Richard Branson)

A bad personal reputation will extend to the brand's reputation as well. And will follow the person for a long time. He has gained his reputation during the years and each time by entering in new businesses he added more valuable assets to his Personal Brand reputation. For example, then he moved from music to aviation (Virgin Music to Virgin Atlantic) he enhanced a reputation of risk-taker and innovator. His strong principles had made of Virgin a globally trusted brand. He noted the importance in the Digital Age of being aware of all the chatter about himself and the business as well because any negative personal story could become a global event with the click of a mouse<sup>75</sup>. So the online reputation is crucial in our days. Some businesses will view 50,000 employees as nothing more than a cost to be managed, but at Branson see them as 50,000 passionate brand ambassadors. This is one of the reasons he pays attention to every person he employs, they should be trusted workers as they are public faces of the business<sup>76</sup>. He is always ready to put his face and to publicly apologise for the mistakes made by the company's members<sup>77</sup>. Branson uses his good reputation in different ways. For example, he used it to instil trust in Virgin Money after the banking sector has been held responsible for the financial crisis and global recession<sup>78</sup>.

According to a study carried out by an online reputation management company Veribo, which analysed several variables, including the value of their Google reputations and the sentiment around key entrepreneurs, had assigned a monetary value to the online reputation of some of the most important entrepreneurs of UK. Sir Richard Branson's resulted on the top, and his online reputation was valued at £263,692,472.50<sup>79</sup>. Rather than an amount of money in a bank account, this sum should be seen as a score that allows the comparison among entrepreneurs' online reputation. The company claims that higher figures indicate a positive, well-respected character, while lower value reputations either need profile building or damage control to manage negative or misleading search results. Veribo CEO, Roei Deutsch said that he was not surprised by the results, as Sir Richard Branson is more than a successful business magnate. Due to his humanitarian initiatives, he managed to become popular and an inspirational figure among many people all around the globe<sup>80</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> <https://underthemagtree.com/2013/05/01/richard-branson-a-bad-reputation-is-bad-business/>

<sup>76</sup> <http://www.cityam.com/1413166197/richard-branson-how-passion-can-change-your-life>

<sup>77</sup> <http://www.canadianbusiness.com/blogs-and-comment/a-bad-reputation-is-bad-business/>

<sup>78</sup> <https://underthemagtree.com/2013/05/01/richard-branson-a-bad-reputation-is-bad-business/>

<sup>79</sup> <http://www.businesszone.co.uk/delete/idiot-box/richard-bransons-online-reputation-valued-at-ps263m>

<sup>80</sup> <http://www.businesszone.co.uk/delete/idiot-box/richard-bransons-online-reputation-valued-at-ps263m>

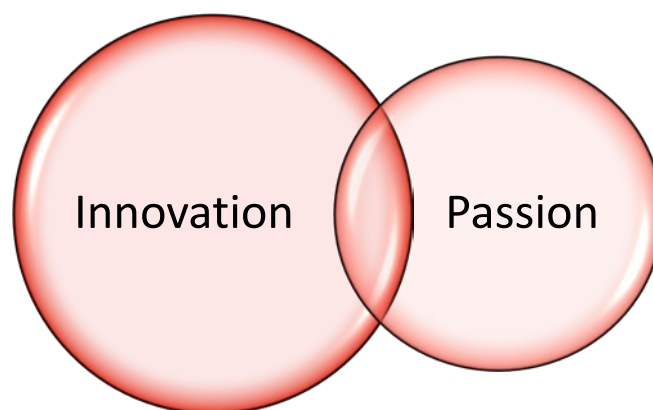
Figure 5.2 Ranking of UK's leading businessmen according to the value of their online reputations

NAME	ONLINE REPUTATION VALUE
Sir Richard Branson	£263,692,472.50
James Caan	£74,461,585
Peter Jones	£73,538,507.50
Philip Green	£24,892,323.25
James Dyson	£23,753,861
Lord Sugar	£21,171,118.15
Duncan Bannatyne	£9,907,698.50
Karren Brady	£6,923,081.25
Theo Paphitis	£6,000,003.75
Deborah Meaden	£5,446,157.25

Source: Veribo

No one can deny that Richard Branson is not an innovator. He invents surprising solutions, has turned old or ordinary things in something new and extraordinary, he does many times the opposite of what other do and he many times succeeds. He does have an Innovation advantage, which he successfully combines with the Passion. He uses the social media to spread his passion, to inspire other through his boldness and why not artistic.

Figure 5.3 Richard Branson's Fascination advantage and tactic:



Source: Sally Hogshead, in *Fascinate*

Branson encourages the Virgin Airlines passengers to tweet their love stories while boards on the company's planes. In this way bringing a Passion spark to the brand. (Sally Hogshead)

## Brand communication in real world and online

Branson had started building his network since a young age, some of his best friends, relatives later became his business partners. He understood the importance of building a network in both a real and online world. As known successful entrepreneur will begin networking early and continue networking as he or she grows the business<sup>81</sup>.

Branson tells that when he started networking at the beginning of the 70s by meeting agents, persuading musicians to sign on, everything was more complicated than today. In our days due to LinkedIn, Facebook, Google+ and Twitter it's much easier to connect with people who can help to launch a product, to grow a business or to find a job. The Internet offers a huge opportunity in building a network<sup>82</sup>.

He advises starting networking as early as possible. From the young age, making good friends, having a good relationship with the family members, then with colleagues at school and the university and so on, all these people can turn useful in being the advocates of the Personal Brand. Another step in building the network is by attending industry events, joining regional business associations, by going in clubs where the potential target can be and by being active on social networking sites like Facebook and LinkedIn.

A must for a successful networking is by connecting with peers, and competition. Branson does it often and motivates this by saying that is a great way of learning. "If you want to be successful in business, you need to welcome your competition with open arms - just don't let them walk all over you", Richard Branson explained in an interview<sup>83</sup>.

For example, Elon Musk's SpaceX and Branson's Virgin Galactic are two aerospace companies that have been working towards a global satellite Internet strategy. They can be seen as competitors, but Branson doesn't think so: "I have huge admiration for what Elon Musk and his team have done(...)" and even expressed interest in partnering up<sup>84</sup>.

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<sup>81</sup> <https://www.entrepreneur.com/slideshow/224672>

<sup>82</sup> <http://www.afr.com/business/richard-branson-network-your-way-to-success-20120815-kbbxx#ixzz4P7sNtJlk>

<sup>83</sup> <https://www.virgin.com/entrepreneur/richard-branson-how-to-deal-with-competitors>

<sup>84</sup> <http://www.greentechmedia.com/articles/read/no-richard-branson-and-virgin-are-no>

Figure 5.4 Elon Musk and Richard Branson



*Source: Washington Life*

In other fields, for example, charity and the finding innovative solutions to the world problems, he engages with experts in these areas as Bill and Melinda Gates.

Figure 5.5 Richard Branson and Bill Gates



*Source: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation/Mike Kemp*

Branson does as well many seminars and marketing training together with famous world influencers as Tony Robbins, Robert Sharma, Eric Worre, etc.

In March 2010, Richard Branson gave a start to Virgin Media Pioneers. Without the Virgin's promoting, 100 people started connecting and sharing ideas about their businesses. Branson wanted to understand how the digital generation network. As reported on the official website: "Virgin Media Pioneers is a community dedicated to inspiring, supporting and celebrating every small business founder and entrepreneur who wants their business to grow. Pioneers is a great place to meet like-minded entrepreneurs and potential business partners."

The following are some of the rules he follows on the social media that reflect his personality:

1. "Do it yourself"

Branson tweets using his smartphone. This is consistent with his leadership style and makes it authentic to the audience. People follow Branson, so they want him to post. It can be difficult to build and real relationships on social media when an outside resource is posting<sup>85</sup>.

2. "Have fun"

Branson is positive and good-humoured, he loves having fun and sharing his positive energy through his social media. As a good businessman, he knows what kind of content people want to see and what is more likely to be retweeted or reposted. His humour is classy. He never offends anyone and just makes fun of himself. As he says "(...) we are successful at Virgin because we engage with everyone in a positive, inclusive manner rather than in an aggressive, combative or negative way". No one wants to follow a negative profile<sup>86</sup>.

3. "Value followers"

Branson understands that time is money, so his blog posts are short and loaded with photos, these make them easier to read and remember. He frequently updates, by this stimulating people to push the button "follow". For example, through his hashtag #AskRichard, he engages in Q&A's with his followers about a range of topics. Branson has built a huge community of fans of different ages, and from various countries<sup>87</sup>.

4. "Listen and reply"

Social media is like a conversation, it should go in two ways. Branson understands the importance of the feedback "I enjoy reading through my social media feeds. It's a great way to get feedback about our goods and services, and a wonderful way to find inspiration for new ideas."

5. "Be Humble"

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<sup>85</sup> <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/275472>

<sup>86</sup> <https://www.entrepreneur.com/slideshow/224672>

<sup>87</sup> <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/275472>

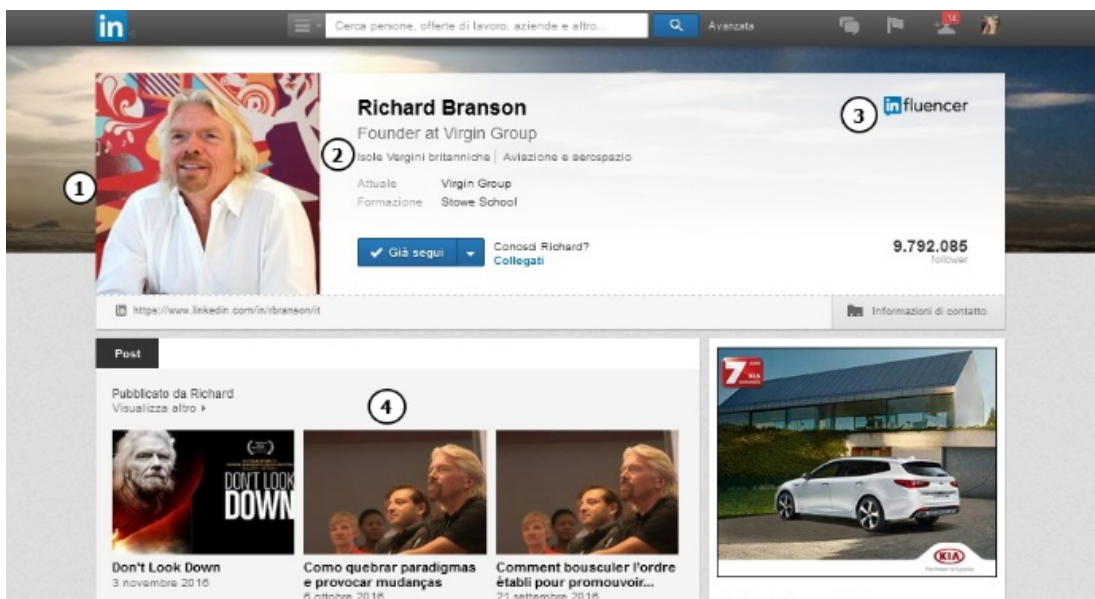
Despite the Social media trend of showing off a lifestyle that many times is far away from the reality, Branson is not afraid to post pictures that make seem funny. Even though Branson is very wealthy, he's also down to earth. His actions and humility "feed" his friends, employees and followers and made them ambassadors of his brand.

### 5.3 Richard Branson's digital footprint

Branson is one of the most prominent businessmen on social media. He understands the great opportunities the web offers and takes advantage of them. With millions of followers on the main social media platforms, he is a great source of motivation and inspiration. He acts strategically on every platform he is active on, promoting his Personal Brand in a great way. In the following paragraph, it's analysed the Branson's way of leaving digital footprints on Twitter, Facebook Instagram, Google +, LinkedIn and on his personal blog.

**LinkedIn:** <https://www.linkedin.com/in/rbranson>

Figure 5.6 Richard Branson's LinkedIn page



Source: [linkedin.com](https://www.linkedin.com/in/rbranson)

As of November 2016, Branson had almost 9.8 million followers. His followers get an automatic notification in their LinkedIn feed every time he publishes a blog post. That means he has a huge audience that has already signed up to read what he has published.

1. The profile picture can be one of the most important elements of LinkedIn presence. Branson has chosen a warm and smiling photo that reflects his personality.

2. At the top of the page, there is a short description of his current job: “Founder at Virgin Group” and nothing else. Then under the job, he indicated the place he lives: The British Virgin Islands and what industry the Virgin Group is in Aviation & Aerospace.

3. Branson is a LinkedIn Influencer, which means people can “Follow” him and subscribe to his LinkedIn posts. LinkedIn Influencers are selected by invitation only and comprise a global collective of 500+ of the world's foremost thinkers, leaders, and innovators<sup>88</sup>.

4. Under the number four, are the Branson's recent posts, by clicking “See More” then it is possible to see his 98 posts. One of the strategies he uses when writing is by translating the posts in other languages to reach not only English speaking people. He uses pictures and catchy titles to attract the attention of the public.

He lists only one skill: Entrepreneurship, without showing up his entire arsenal of qualities. In this case, as millions of people already perceived his brand he doesn't need to write anything. People already recognise him by reading his name or seeing his picture<sup>89</sup>. The same for the working experience section he has one entry: Virgin Group Founder, January 1968 to present (48 years 11 months). In his job description, he wrote the same sentence he uses on all his social media platforms: “Tie-loathing adventurer and thrill seeker, who believes in turning ideas into reality. Otherwise known as Dr Yes at Virgin!”

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/richardbranson>

Figure 5.7 Richard Branson’s Twitter page



Source: twitter.com

<sup>88</sup> linkedin.com

<sup>89</sup> <https://danaldrige1.wordpress.com/2014/12/24/richard-bransons-social-media-secrets-2/>

On Twitter Branson has almost 8.8 million followers and is following less than 4 thousand. Twitter is his favourite platform<sup>90</sup>.

He joined Twitter in August 2012, and since then he has tweeted 14 thousand times, which means he is a very active user.

1. He uses Twitter to share the links of his last posts, to share news and ideas. Without tweeting too much about himself, he prefers tweeting mostly about how Virgin is trying to change the world and how good are his employees at turning ideas into reality.

2. He has the link to his blog in order to drive traffic on it.

3. Branson had understood the importance of the visual content, as he had shared almost 6,600 photos and videos.

**Personal Blog:** [Virgin.com/RichardBranson](http://Virgin.com/RichardBranson)

Figure 5.8 Richard Branson's blog home page



Source: [virgin.com](http://virgin.com)

1. His personal blog is part of the official Virgin website.

2. For his personal blog posts, he uses high-quality images that attract attention and help in understanding better the post's message. The posts are not too long and many times contain more than one photo (usually, around 3) and sometimes videos as well.

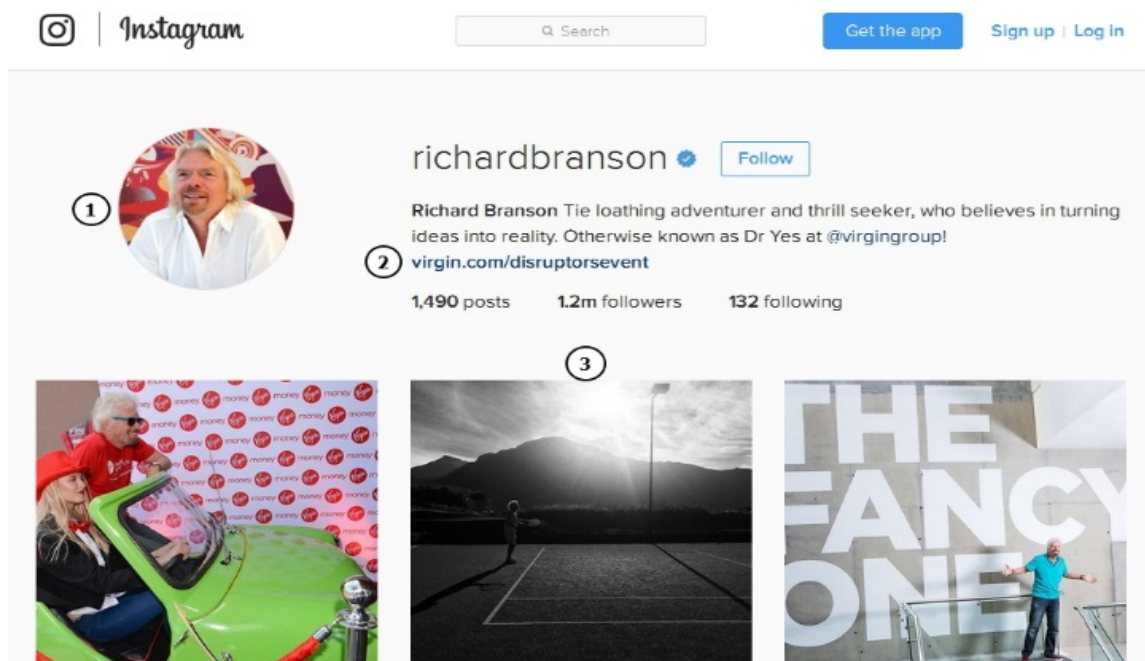
3. On the right corner of his blog, he has the links to other social media profiles.

<sup>90</sup> <https://www.virgin.com/news/65-things-youve-always-wanted-to-know-about-richard-branson>

4. The only kind of advertising (but is more the services Virgin's offers) he uses on his blog are the Virgin ones: The Virgin Mobile, Virgin Money and the possibility to buy a fly ticket with one of the Virgin companies.

**Instagram:** [www.instagram.com/RichardBranson](http://www.instagram.com/RichardBranson)

Figure 5.9 Richard Branson's Instagram profile



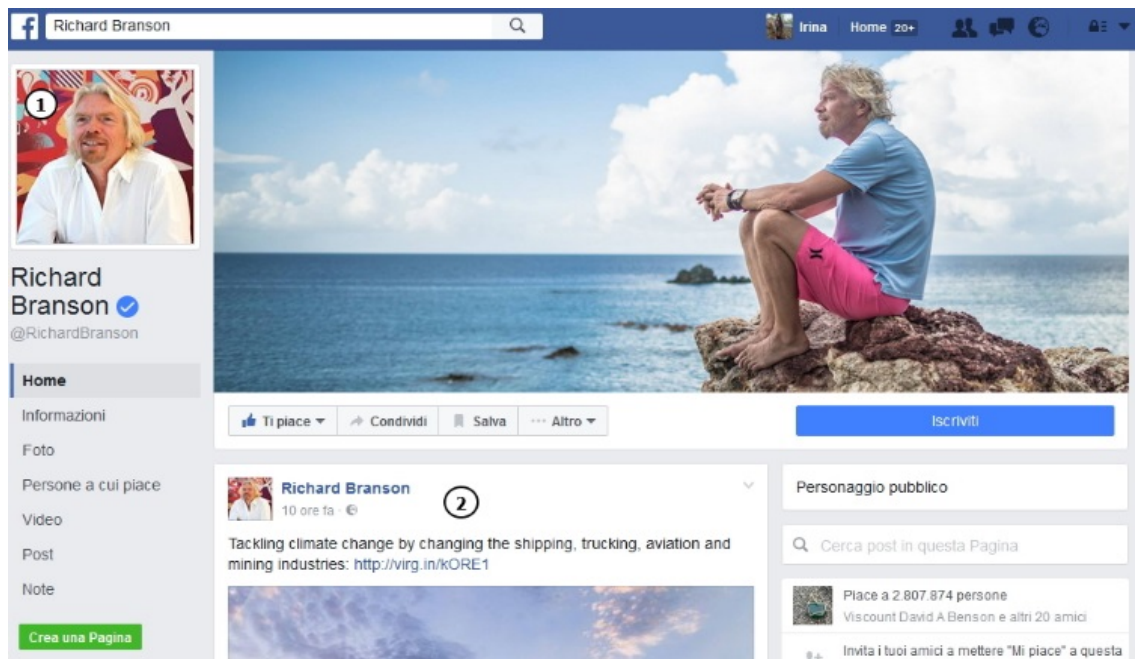
*Source: instagram.com*

With 1.2 million followers, and 1,491 posts Branson is one of the leading entrepreneur influencers also on Instagram.

1. He uses the same image again, as on other platforms.
2. As Instagram offers the possibility to share only one link, Branson updates this section every time he has a new link to share. So do almost all the Instagram influencers.
3. On Instagram Branson shares his personal adventures, his family events, his own and others quotes and his new ventures. All these using only images.

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/RichardBranson](http://www.facebook.com/RichardBranson)

Figure 5.10 Richard Branson's Facebook page



Source: *facebook.com*

On Facebook, Branson has more than 2.8 million followers.

In the section “about” he uses the same information, he wrote on LinkedIn and Twitter, plus the link to his blog.

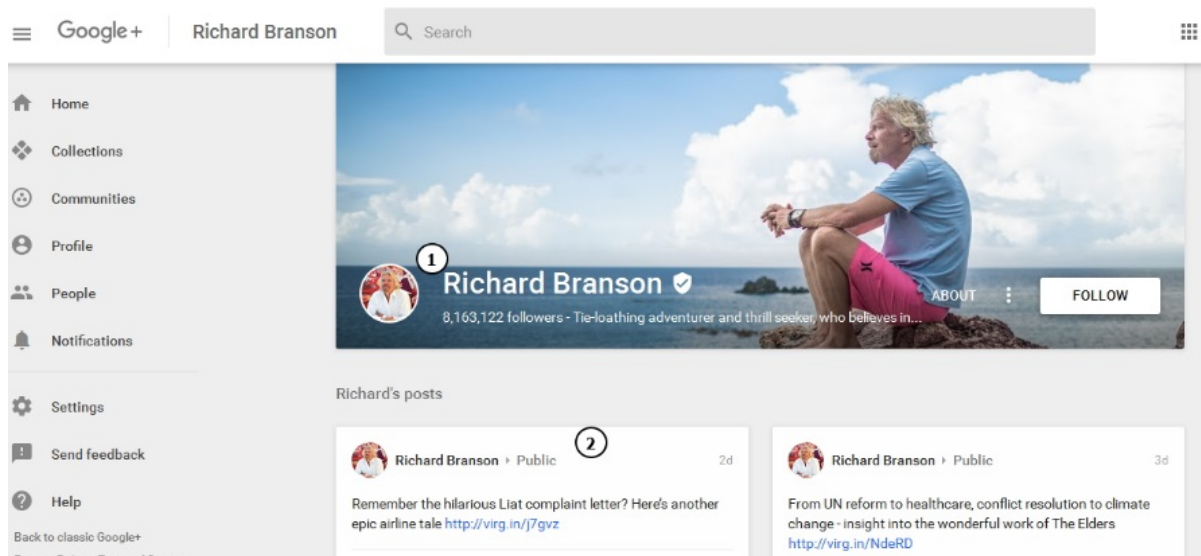
1. The profile picture remains the same as on the other platforms, and the wall photo is the same as on Twitter.

2. His Facebook posts are mainly made by a photo that summarises the idea of the post, a brief introduction and a link to the Virgin or his personal blog, where is possible to read the entire article.

On his diary, he had shared almost 5.5 thousand pictures, so a high index of visual content and activity also on Facebook

Google Plus: <https://plus.google.com/+RichardBranson>

Figure 5.11 Richard Branson's Google + profile



Source: [plus.google.com](https://plus.google.com)

On Google Plus, he has almost 8.2 million followers.

Branson uses the same information to describe himself and his job position and as well, the links to the Facebook and Twitter accounts.

1. As usual, he used the same profile photo and the same wall picture as on Facebook and Twitter.

2. All his post are "public" which means that can be read, shared and commented even by people who does not follow him.

To summarise his social media strategy, the subsequent are the common social media tips he uses on the analysed platforms.

1. Branson uses the same profile picture on all his platforms and where possible the same wall picture. In the photo he has chosen, is easy to recognise him by his smiley face. The use of the same profile picture helps to create a visual identity to the Personal Brand.

2. The information he writes about himself is short, precise and meaningful.

3. He uses social media to drive traffic to Virgin website. He doesn't post on social media just for receiving "likes". Instead he does it to send traffic to his blog and as consequence to the Virgin website<sup>91</sup>.

<sup>91</sup> <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/275472>

4. He creates great content and uses a lot of pictures and videos to make the posts more attractive to the followers.

5. He is active on all the platforms, posting at least once a day.

6. His posts evoke positive emotions and fun. A social media research has shown that positive posts are more liked to be shared than the negative ones<sup>92</sup>.

7. He engages with the followers by replying to the comments. In this way adding a personal touch to his tweets, photos and posts.

8. He doesn't publish the same post on all the platforms at the same time, as this can be annoying for someone who follows all his profiles.

## **5.4 Return on investment**

There are few organisations in the world where the leader's Personal Brand has a huge impact on the success of the company they lead. Bill Gates, Elon Musk and of course Richard Branson are great examples of PB's successful impact. Sir Richard Branson attributes his success to boldness, luck and passion. He is one of the most admired business owners, whose books and biography inspire and motivate. His extraordinary dedication to his employees and business helped him in becoming the most influential British entrepreneur.<sup>93</sup> As of 2016, Branson's fortune is estimated at \$5 billion<sup>94</sup>. He is now among the richest twenty in the UK. The Branson family's wealth depends on the value of the Virgin brand which is linked to Sir Richard himself. On the contrary to the common belief that Branson runs the entire business empire on its own, he manages very little. His Virgin Group owns stakes, (few of them majority ones) in a range of companies, but as an investor rather than a manager. A significant amount of the Virgin Group Holdings come from the fees it charges for lending the Virgin name to other companies<sup>95</sup>.

Branson has built a robust and remarkable Personal Brand that is becoming bigger each day. His charisma has guided Virgin to its position as one of the most recognisable brands in the world. Many people around the world become customers of Virgin because they admire Sir Branson. Branson's reputation serves as model of how essential Personal Branding is, when establishing customer loyalty and targeting market success. It is impossible to identify a monetary amount of the Branson's impact on the Virgin. His unique vision, passion, and leadership qualities have had an enormous impact on the success of Virgin Group. His style and

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<sup>92</sup> <http://coschedule.com/blog/social-media-content/>

<sup>93</sup> In 2015 Richtopic

<sup>94</sup> Forbes.com

<sup>95</sup> financialtimes.com

way to do things encourage a healthy relationship and cooperation between management and employees. He effectively uses his power and charisma to improve the brand's performance not only in business. He works now on finding solutions to existing global crises such as global warming and climate change.

In an interview, to the YouTube channel Think Big, Branson said that Virgin does work without him, due to the law of delegation. "When my balloon bursts, Virgin will continue to flourish" and to live without him. Even if Virgin stands for Sir Branson he made sure that even after his death his name will continue to influence in a positive way on the revenues of the company. Apart from being a great leader for his employees and a PR for Virgin, he is a source of inspiration for young people and aspiring entrepreneurs which like him, want to achieve great things. Richard Branson proved to be a very positive role model with a lot of wisdom to offer on how to succeed in life through hard work, team effort and positive thinking<sup>96</sup>. He not only shares his secrets of success in magazines, TV shows and social media but he personally meets college students giving them advice on leadership and entrepreneurship the opportunities to ask questions.

Figure 5.12 Sir Richard Branson speaks to Young Leaders at his UK home



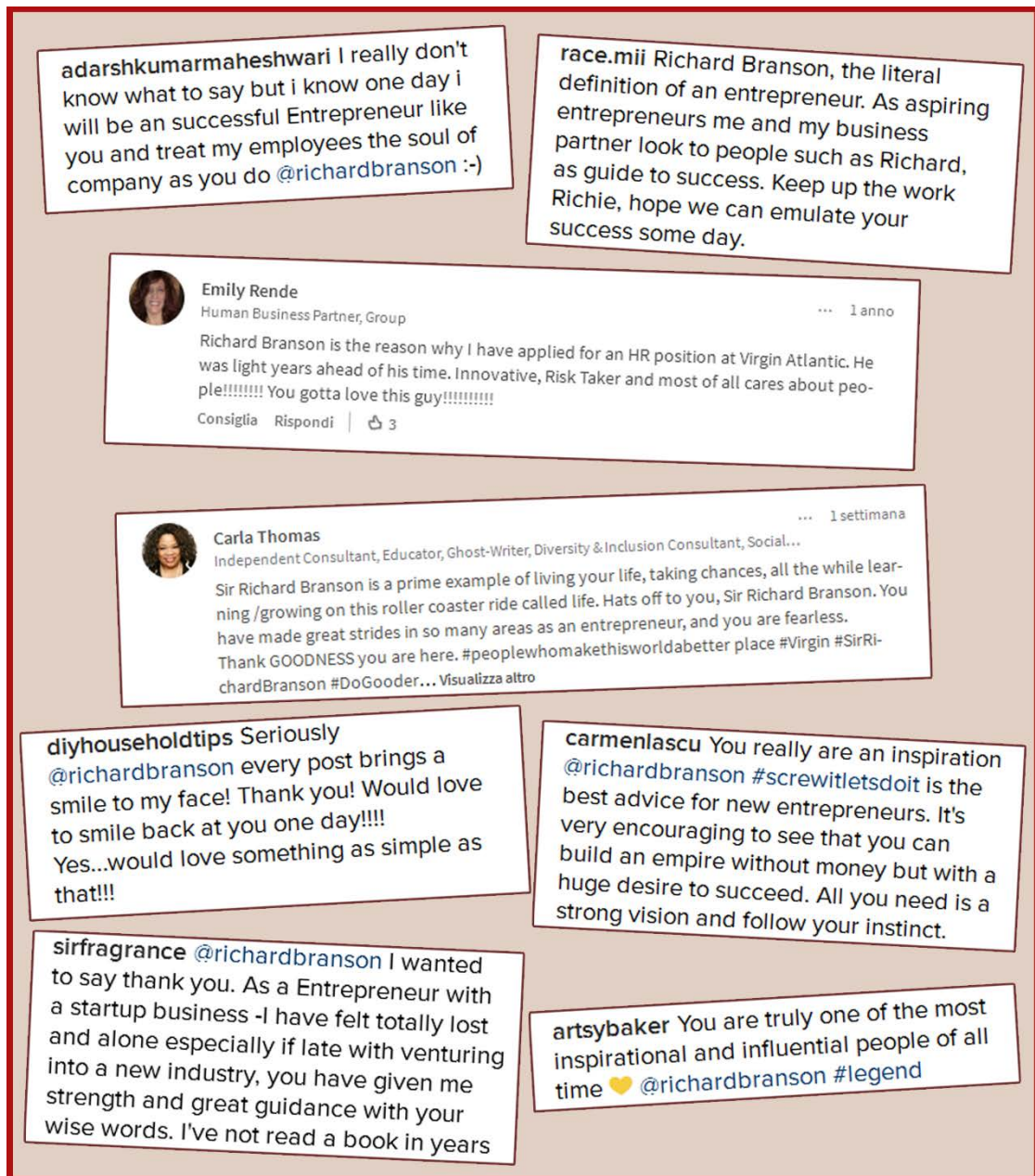
*Source: Renaissance Foundation*

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<sup>96</sup> <http://www.renaissance-foundation.com/blog/2015/5/20/renaissance-foundation-richard-bransons-secrets-to-success>

With over 30 million of followers across social media. Sir Richard Branson has and will continue to inspire many people from across the globe and from all different walks of life. Here are some comments from a few of his social media followers:

Figure 5.13 Social media feedback



Source: LinkedIn and Instagram

## Chapter 6

### Conclusions

The purpose of this thesis was to prove an understanding of Personal Branding by exploring everything, from the branding benefits to the specific tools and strategies for building a Personal Brand. Without any doubt, the introduction of technology has changed the way people manifest themselves and interact with each other. Hundreds of millions of people each minute create and consume digital content in a world which is not bound by terrestrial laws. “Never before in history have so many people had so much power using only their fingers.” (Eric Schmidt)

Nowadays an increasing number of people are more interested in their Personal Brands. The rise of social media platforms has helped to increase the awareness of the importance of being different, memorable and standing out for personal skills and personality. The young generation think and process information fundamentally different from their elders. They are digital natives, which have spent their entire lives surrounded by computers and smartphones competing against millions all over the globe.

The gap between digital immigrants and digital natives still creates a certain amount of doubt in regards to the ‘overuse’ of technology and their presence on social media. People should not be afraid of trying new things, learning new skills or realising that they themselves are brands. “Your reputation online in the new business world is pretty much the game. You can’t hide anything, and more importantly, you’ve got to be out there at some level.” (Gary Vaynerchuk) For many individuals words like personal branding, self-selling, self-positioning or people targeting may sound too commercial or too materialistic. They were taught to be modest, humble and that marketing self-achievements is a sign of vanity. Self-promotion should not be considered an exercise in boasting, but rather as “a way to educate the market about personal value”. (Karen Kang) However, like it or not there is no sense in ignoring the reality, as these are things that have always existed and interpreting them in different ways is not necessarily bad. The internet is a great tool, if correctly used it can give many personal and professional benefits. With more than 30 million followers, Richard Branson is able to spread instantly a message with just one click.

The analysis of Sir Richard Branson’s brand creation has helped to see a practical example of the Personal Branding benefits. Thanks to his brilliant strategies, Branson always managed to grab the attention of the press with mad stunts, without overpaying for big articles to promote his business. The main points resulted after an accurate analysis of his profile, firstly showed that the understanding of a person’s ‘reason for being’ is needed. “If you pursue your passions,

your visions will be more likely to become successful realities.”(Richard Branson) It can be difficult to achieve something without having a clear understanding of that is wanted to be achieved.

Secondly, is to be aware of having or being a brand by starting to build it step-by-step. It is crucial to understand that there is no universal way, no magic formula, to build a brand as it comes by trying different and alternative ways to suit each individual’s needs. “The lesson that I have learned and follow all my life is that we should try and try and try again - but never give up”. (Richard Branson). Finding the right tools, the right social platforms and what best fits in helping a person achieve their purpose is important. The Digital Age hasn't yet substituted human relations. Personal branding isn't bound to the internet, as both on and offline tools need to co-exist in order to create something great.

Finally, when building a brand it is important to be aware that it's a time-intensive process and the results will not come instantly. Branson’s brand building started offline with youth culture magazine ‘Student’, and over the years he has built his following by challenging himself among many breath-taking adventures. At first, his fan base was formed by people who followed him on the news and magazines. Then with the rise of the Internet he spread his content onto the social media platforms. Now he has 30 million plus followers across his social media, which is product of years of commitment and persistence.

To conclude, building a strong personal brand is a long-term and not particularly an easy process. It requires strategic planning, persistence and dedication in both off and online worlds. Just like Sir Richard Branson who has a passionate vision, a willingness to sacrifice, one should stay focused on mastering the best part of his or herself and by making lasting impressions on people. The idea is to leave a legacy that people will talk about one after one is gone

*“Branding demands commitment; commitment to continual re-invention; striking chords with people to stir their emotions; and commitment to imagination. It is easy to be cynical about such things, much harder to be successful.”*

*Sir Richard Branson*

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