Building a Personal Brand in Social Media Environments

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Abstract: *The main objective of the paper is to identify social media channels which can generate a considerable number of online followers and draw attention to the concept of personal brand, through which a best-practice guide for possible future personal branding projects can be extrapolated.*

Key words: *brand, personal brand, social media, site, visualization metrics*

1. Introduction

This paper examines how people manage online personal brands in a Web 2.0 context. In this paper, it will also be emphasized the importance of personal brands in 2018 in the online environment and how it reflects in the offline environment. In the first part of this paper, we will explain the concepts of brand and personal branding, and identify a common area of these two concepts. In order to explain how personal branding works, two notorious figures, who each have created a brand using social networking platforms available in the virtual environment, will be compared.

2. Terms & Definitions

Brand: The brand in general can be defined as a brand, a product or service that can be distinguished from other products in the same category, since they will be easily associated with a certain company. The brand or trade mark has a unique design used to sketch the company image in an attempt to differentiate it from competition. It gives rise to the communication processes by which are transmitted some attributes associated with the concept of quality and satisfaction in the minds of those who buy and use products. The consumer has more confidence in a known brand and is comfortable to repeat the interaction, thus forming a connection with the brand. When a customer is familiar with a brand (a registered trade mark), that brand gets an advantage over its competitors; this is the moment when a corporation has reached a high level of brand equity.

Personal brand: The concept of personal brand has been presented to the general public in the year 1937 by Napoleon Hill, and subsequently has been promoted by Tom Peters, the latter being the author of the book "The brand called you", thus creating a new branch of branding. A personal brand can be defined as an idea that creates an identity, as a strategic process to control what those around you perceive when you interact with a person, read what you wrote to that person, thus helping to associate the image with the message they wish to transmit. Therefore, personal brands have two major components: the person on the basis of which the second component is created, namely, marketing. Using this concept, an individual can turn their name in a product able to attract an audience to which to "sell"; this has an immense impact since it has spread in all branches of all areas of activity. Consequently, a personal brand represents a mental image of those who follow and admire you.

Site: The website is the collection of files linked together to become a separate entity in a network known as the internet. Depending on the

complexity of a site, namely the volume of information which it contains, the aims pursued, the content submitted, the Community, websites can be of several types: websites, blogs, forums, online shops, etc.

Blog: A blog represents a site which has its roots in the diary/log concept. The blog can be used as a branding tool, a communication tool and/or as a promotion tool.

Personal site vs. Blog: The differences between a blog and a site are as follows: generally, a blog is a free hosting pre-defined customizable platform, which has a default domain, e.g.: wordpress.com. A blog has a limited content quota share which can be uploaded (videos, photo galleries, etc.) and which cannot be cost-free increased. The security of a blog is provided solely by the platform it uses. In the case of a site, a hosting name and domain can be chosen. Most hosting domains have a web interface, which is also a security anti-spam module (e.g. CPanel); buying a certificate may increase the security.
Another difference between the two is the SEO - Search Engine Optimization. In the case of a blog, it is limited; the user can only insert key words, images, etc. In the case of a site, plug-ins can be installed that can help the site appear in the organic mode in the search engines (Google, Safari, etc.).

Social networks: Social networks are defined as web services that allow individuals to build a public or a semi-public profile, to create a list of connections (SNS- Social Network Sites). Social Networks allow sharing information submitted by the persons that are in the list of connections of the individual and by other persons, and this is possible thanks to the opportunities the platforms offer. The relations created using the list of connections can be bilateral in the case of a personal profile, and unilateral in the case of a professional profile. What differentiates these two types of profiles is the fact that in the case of a professional networking platform (e.g. Facebook pages), only one of

the two parties may follow the activity of the other, without receiving the agreement of what is being watched (so having access to the information you want), being merely a follower.

The choice of the appropriate platform is extremely important because each platform has a certain type of target audience, and the message transmitted must be adapted to each type. The fact that there are currently 7 billion people facilitates the transmission of information between the transmitter and receiver.

3. The research method

This research aims to explain exactly what the subject(s) of research did to acquire a personal brand, what platforms the research subject uses and how it managed to maintain its popularity. The observation of a positive or negative correlations between public actions of the research subject(s) and the increase or decrease in the number of trackbacks, shares likes, reactions, and searches in the search engines available, will be considered positive or negative critical actions which will be integrated as types of action in the personal branding best-practice guide.

The first step in this research was to select two notorious research subjects, Donald J. Trump – President of the United States of America and businessman, and Kim Kardashian-West – influencer, businesswoman and tabloid diva. A qualitative analysis was made for the two research subjects in order to identify at global level the social media channels that bring them the highest number of online followers, which act directly on constant personal brand awareness. The analysis flow is depicted in Figure 1.

The online check-up step from Figure 1 implies searching the professional pages of the research subject(s) in the online social-media and Web 2.0 platforms (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, personal sites) and gathering their presence or non-presence on the previously mentioned online platforms. The metrics dispersion step implies gathering numbers regarding followers, shares, posts and

reactions. The quantitative comparison step follows the metrics dispersion of the research subject(s) and places their metrics in parallel to achieve the best fit of online platforms which fits the research subject type.
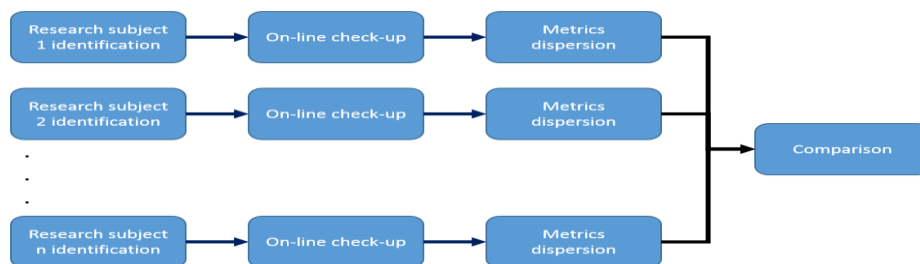

Figure 1

The second step used a more quantitative method in determining the way the research subjects' public sites reflects the growth or decrease of their personal brand over a period of time. The measurement of growth/decrease over time was made using a free online tool provided by Spyfu (https://www.spyfu.com/), without using Google Analytics. Google Analytics would have been a more precise tool in gathering and summarizing all the data, but it could not be of help due to the fact that it can be used only by the team in charge of the website. The only drawback of using Spyfu as freeware tool is that in some cases it does not show data regarding paid ads. The use of the Spyfu tool is relatively simple and implies entering the desired website in a search bar and the trend line of the site will appear. An example is depicted for the http://www.clatite-pinochio.ro in Figure 2.

With the help of the Spyfu platform, the following data could be gathered:
1. Number of Organic searches (SEO) and of sponsored searches (PPC- Pay per click) over time
2. Comparison of paid and organic (free) searches
3. Main organic competitors of the site
4. Search keywords shared with competitors

5. Ranking of search keywords
6. Recommendations on what search keywords to be used
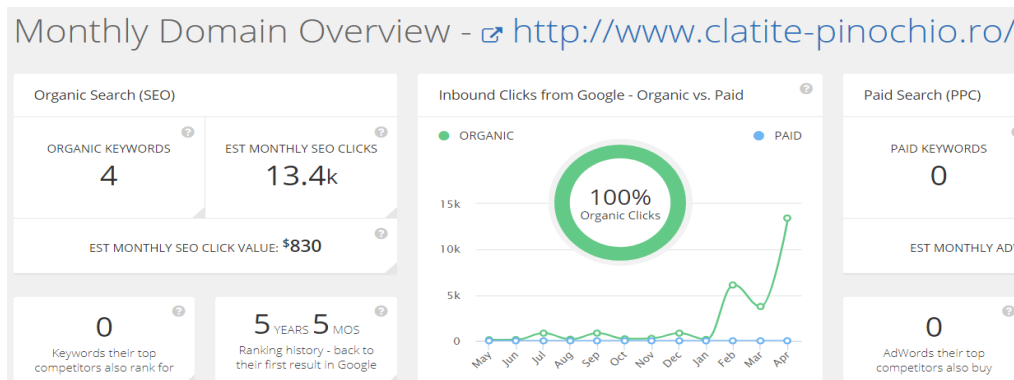7. A short history of AdWords (ads which appeared in the search results top), the price paid for ads.

Figure 2

4. Results and discussion

The first quantitative analysis of research subject Donald J. trump, using the flow depicted in Figure 1, shows (Table 1) that the largest number of followers are on Twitter, the largest number of shares are on Facebook, the largest number of reactions on YouTube, and the largest number of posts, on Twitter.

Donald J. Trump				
Platforms	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	Twitter
Followers	23milioane	8milioane	111000	50.7milioane
Shares	20000	-	-	8200
Reactions/Views	80000	14000	1milion	30000
Posts	-	3279	-	37300

Table 1 Metrics dispersion of online platforms for Donald J. Trump

The quantitative analysis of Kim Kardashian-West, using the flow depicted in Figure 1, shows that the largest number of followers is on Instagram, the largest number of shares is on Twitter, the largest number of reactions is on YouTube, and the largest number of posts, on Twitter.

Kim Kardashian-West				
Platforms	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	Twitter
Followers	30milioane	150milioane	1.1milioane	59.6milioane
Shares	200	-	-	5000
Reactions/Views	20000	18000	1milion	61000
Posts	-	4279	-	26000

Table 2 Metrics dispersion of online platforms for Kim Kardashian-West

The comparison of the two subjects' followers reveals, as shown in Figure 3, that Kim Kardashian has a more dispersed specter in the used platforms, while Donald J. Trump has a higher focus on a single platform.
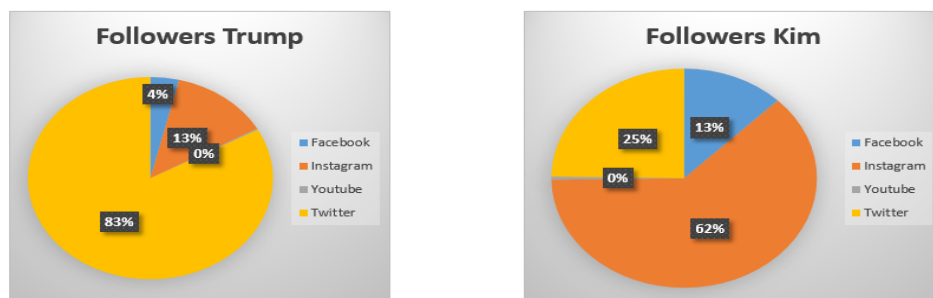

Figure 3 Followers' comparison

The reactions/views comparison shown in Figure 4 reveals that both have their most significant number of reactions/views on YouTube, both above 88%.
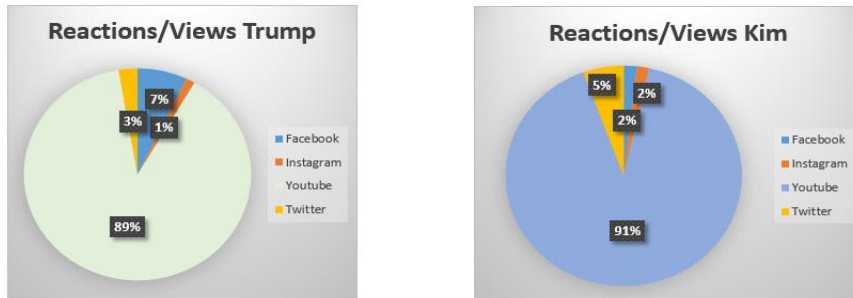
Figure 4 Reactions/views

An analysis of Table 1, Table 2, Figure 3 and Figure 4 reveals that both have a large number of followers and a high impact on their target audience. The differences between the two are as follows:

- The number of shares is higher in Trump's case, due to its brand kernel which is dominant in written materials using his political statute
- Kardashian's personal brand focuses more on the image of the brand and on promoting it

The second quantitative analysis focuses on the search characterization of the two research subjects' trend lines (Figure 5 and Figure 6) in time, and reveals some ups and downs, which can be strongly correlated with some offline events and statements that changed the way they were searched through search engines. For example, political scandals, tabloid scandals, and statements.
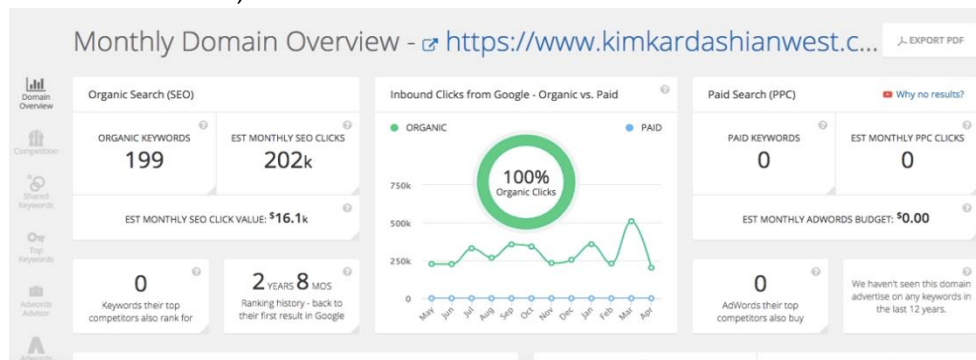

Figure 5 Kim Kardashian-West site trend line

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Figure 6 Donald J. Trump trend line

In Figure 5 the tool shows that there were more searches in the site in the months of January and March. In January, the third child of Kardashian-West was born and that determined a bigger interest in the research subject. In March, the research subject and her husband participated in a march called "March for Our Lives"; their interest in gun law manifested offline led to an increase on the website.

In Figure 6 the tool shows that the site was searched more in February and April.

In February, the Secretary of state said that he was going to resign; in April, the US President started to threaten the President of Russia and on the 14th of April, armed forces from the UK, the US and France fired missiles to chemical weapons factories in Syria.

Closed questions will be used, as such questions can be answered with yes/no or a short phrase, they can provide facts, and are easy to answer.

5. Conclusion and following steps

Based on the study of the two research subjects, a first glance on determining the most appropriate online channels for the best-practice guide for a personal branding project can be drafted as follows:

1. For the political personal brand type, the best way to make him or her visible in the online media is to create a smart and attractive Twitter account through which concise statements and quick and powerful interaction can be made. Also, a personal website will

accompany the politician personal brand, where internet users can see a more detailed image of what the personal brand consists of and also his or her vision and mission.

2. For the tabloid diva personal brand type, the most appropriate way to reach people is to use a more widely spread online channel, on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, but also a personal website. The content of the channels above should not vary too much, e.g. an image shared on Instagram should also be found on Facebook or on Twitter, and if not, at least content from the same location should be shared on the channels at a short interval of time (same day but different hours).

The best practice guide shall consists of the following main components:

1. Establishing a unicity factor of the personal brand
2. Establishing a personal values nucleus: a number of 3 to maximum 5 themes to be addressed
3. Knowledge development
4. Sharing knowledge
5. Choosing a name and a catchphrase
6. Transposing the personal brand to the online medium
7. Creating a connections list

6. Following steps

Because the public figures chosen for the personal brand channels analysis are from another country (the United States of America), and because online channel audiences are different than the ones in Romania, a more detailed research is needed in order to make a deduction of an as much as possible correct personal branding best-practice guide.

In order to get more accurate results, a questionnaire will be created, which aims to link some local public figures who can be considered personal brands to a personal-branding guide. The questions will address the following: if the people have heard about

the selected public figures, if they follow them on social media platforms, if they have heard or read news the persons concerned, and where, during the last year. Also, the questionnaire will establish if the survey takers know details about the subjects and about the concepts of brand and personal brand, they will be asked if they know other people who have a personal brand in Romania and who work in different environments.

The study will be carried out on people aged between 15 and 45, who live in an urban environment and who use at least one social platform.

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