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Ethics of Communication as an Important Component of Teacher Self-Branding in the Settings of the Digital Environment

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Abstract: The purpose of the study was to identify how the Personal Branding Marathon with the involvement of the Ethics Supervisory Committee could influence the teacher self-branding in the settings of the digital environment if the ethics of communication is given paramount importance. The study used qualitative and quantitative methods such as a semi-structured in-depth interview, a self-assessment checklist, and an expert assessment checklist. The Triangular Assessment Method was used to obtain participants' judgments about the importance of every specified component of the self-branding viewed from their perspective in terms of implementation. The yielded data were processed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0.0.1. Software. The novelty of the study lies in the way the teacher self-branding was organised and delivered. The Marathon created a community of individuals with similar needs and the environment facilitated and assisted by the experts to put the teachers in the 'point of no return' situation. The Marathon with the involvement of the Ethics Supervisory Committee was found to positively influence the teacher self-branding in the settings of the digital environment if the ethics of communication is given paramount importance. The intervention raised the teachers' awareness of self-branding, enhanced/upgraded the tools and strategies of self-branding, and improved their communication and communication ethics, particularly. The teachers became more professionally advantaged, self-efficient, and confident as individuals. The intervention was found to help the teachers built-up a strong self-brand on the Internet and at the workplace. They also improved their communication skills in terms of ethics as the participants were assisted by the communication expert.

Keywords: *Personal branding, teacher self-branding, ethics of communication, digital environment, Personal Branding Marathon.*

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Introduction

Promoting expertise and building trust through a self-branding strategy is becoming an indispensable part of a teacher's job and the education institutions' policy. This trend is driven by the commercialisation of the instructional services provided by teachers privately and on behalf of the educational institutions (Collins, 2012; Khamis et al., 2017; Kolbuszewska, 2017). However, the teachers are still beyond this trend because they still do not accept the potential of this activity, and habitually, they see it as unimportant (Shulman, 2019). Additionally, they do not want to cause any negative impact of using self-branding to damage their career (Labreque et al., 2011; Ward & Yates, 2013; Wetsch, 2012). Recent digital advances make the process of self-branding less skill-capped and time-consuming as they provide the user with the ready-made tools and strategies to work for the individual (Khedher, 2015; Kleppinger & Cain, 2015). Communication ethics is interpreted differently in education and instruction. These interpretations rely on theories (communication theory, moral psychology, and philosophy) and ethical frameworks such as democratic, humanitarian, liberal, or authoritarian and on the context of communication such as digital, interpersonal, or institutional. These are

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also related to the approaches and way of its assessment (Ballard et al., 2014). Communication ethics seems critically important for the instructor because it determines and influences their behaviour, decisions, and interaction with students (Tompkins, 2018). In the context of the teacher self-branding, which is seen as not only self-commodification, communication ethics is about communication values and beliefs and lifestyle (Lair et al., 2005). The teacher brand then builds the public image of the institution they work for which ensures the competitive advantages to both. For the above reasons, investigating the ways to increase the effectiveness of the process of building a teacher's self-brand through the strengthening of the ethics of communication seems to be important.

Literature review

The literature review found several perspectives to define the notion of "personal brand". Labreque et al. (2011) along with Schawbel (2010) distinguish such perspectives as "brand identity" that focuses on brand perception by the target audience, "brand positioning" whose purpose is to create a positive image of the company or person to the consumers or clients, "brand image" which is about promoting the image of the company in the market, "self-presentation" which is aimed at creating rapport and gaining the trust of the individuals, and "personal brand" that combines the features of all the above. The above suggests that "personal brand" originated from commerce and is related to positioning oneself as both an entity and a product which are both presented from the perspective of bringing value to the target audience.

It was also found that different aspects of (teacher) personal branding are highlighted in the literature. For example, the use of Social Media tools (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and YouTube) for personal branding has rocketed over the recent decade (Harris & Rae, 2011; Patel, 2016; Poepelman & Blacksmith, 2014; Wetsch, 2012). These tools are considered the most effective and the least costly ways to promote one's expertise and establish trust with the target audience. Professional story-telling is another way of building a personal brand. This approach is gaining popularity in a brand-building because it creates rapport emotionally and builds loyalty, it makes the one who creates their brand unique and it makes people remember you (Brooks & Anumudu, 2016; Kleppinger & Cain, 2015; Walter & Gioglio, 2019). Reputation management is also discussed in the literature as a way to build a long-lasting personal brand. Since reputation presents someone's success story, both companies and customers draw much more attention and make their key decisions based on the results of tracking one's online presence expecting it to be strong and positive (Labreque et al., 2011; Stanton & Stanton, 2013; Ward & Yates, 2013). One more aspect of (teacher) personal branding that is revealed in the literature is ethics in public relations practice. This aspect has proven to play a crucial role in human communication because it aims at guaranteeing respect to a person and one's dignity, and justice in communication and behaviour (Haque & Ahmad, 2017; Smudde, 2011). Communication ethics is one more aspect that determines the outcome of the act of interaction. This supposes to stimulate equal and fair exchange, eliminate the communication barriers, and foster personal and professional cooperation (Anderson & Tompkins, 2011). Communication ethics is based on the principles of moral psychology stating that the moral emotions of empathy provide the background for ethical judgments of a person related to their 'basic sense of fairness aligned with egalitarianism, and disgust' (Vaydich, 2015). Due to cyberspace, teacher personal branding has become the way of pedagogical influence on the students through presenting the teacher's personality, behavior, values, and beliefs in a number of mediums (Sedereviciute-Paciauskiene, 2018). However, the ethics of communication in the teacher self-branding using technological advances is underrepresented in the literature and it made the scope for the research.

Therefore, the purpose of the study was to identify how the Personal Branding Marathon with the involvement of the Ethics Supervisory Committee could influence the teacher self-branding in the settings of the digital environment if the ethics of communication is given paramount importance.

The study attempted to address the research questions that were as follows: 1) whether there were loopholes in teacher self-branding and related to their ethics of communication which can be closed through the Personal Branding Marathon; 2) whether the Personal Branding Marathon impacts the sampled teachers' skills and awareness of their self-branding, with a particular focus on the ethics of communication; 3) what components of self-branding are seen by the teacher important and how these are prioritised by them.

Materials and Methods

The study used qualitative and quantitative methods such as a semi-structured in-depth interview, a self-assessment checklist, and an expert assessment checklist. The semi-structured in-depth interview, either of a face-to-face or group type, is a qualitative research tool that is most often used in the social sciences to explore the needs, attitudes, or perceptions of the target individuals regarding certain experiment-related issues (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). A teacher self-assessment checklist was used to identify the homogeneity of the sampled teachers. An expert assessment checklist was intended to evaluate the teachers' performance in the Personal Branding Marathon by four experts such as the expert in the communication strategy for a personal brand, the expert social media management, and strategy, the public relations and marketing expert, and the expert in career-counselling and guidance.

Research design

The study used a quasi-experimental design of the one-group post-test only type. It employed the exploratory research strategy. The study relied on four consequent stages that included a baseline study, a design of a Personal Branding Marathon (PBM), and running a PBM with the involvement of the Ethics Supervisory Committee, and reflection (see Figure 1). The role of the Committee was to oversee and control whether the teachers comply with the Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers (with the focus on communication ethics) in their activities and communication. In the reflection stage, nine teacher volunteers were supposed to express their judgements about the importance of every specified component of the self-branding viewed from their perspective in terms of implementation. They were asked to use the Triangular Assessment Method (TAM) (Pérez-Rodríguez & Rojo-Alboreca, 2017) to perform that. They used the 5-point scale from 1 – ‘very important and needs a lot of effort to implement’, to 5 – ‘not important at all’.

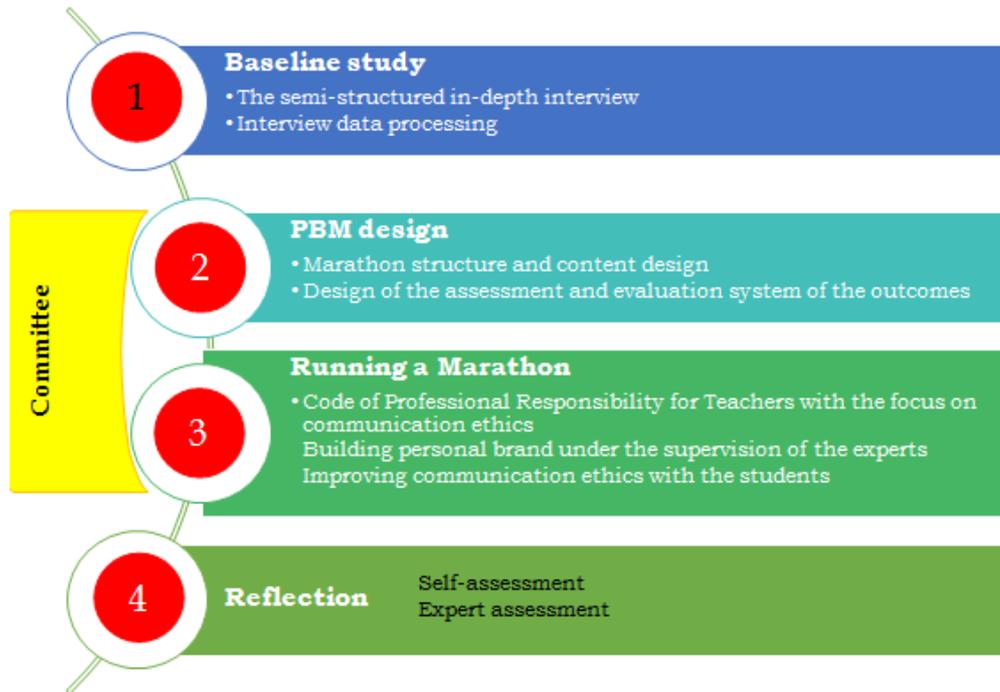


Figure 1. Research design

Description of a Personal Branding Marathon

The Marathon lasted a year, from February 2019 to the end of February 2020. It started with a contest run amongst three groups of 24, 24, and 25 participants randomly formed from the sampled teachers to design the Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers (with the focus on communication ethics) (see the consolidated version in Appendix A). The Marathon was preceded by the experts' audit of each sampled teacher's brand, if there was any, on the Internet, and analysing the students' verbal unstructured testimonials about certain teachers.

The 'listen or watch-and-do' approach was the key one on the Marathon. Teachers listened to the experts' recommendations, which could be the pre-recorded 3-8 min. videos or webinars or Zoom sessions, and instantly implemented them into practical actions. Then the effectiveness of the steps (or events, video, or posts) was analysed and tracked using incorporated (in Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, BrandYourself) statistical tools. These were as follows: the engagement metrics such as likes, shares, comments, and follower growth, the number shares of posts; click-through rate (CTR); open rate.

The teachers were assigned to do specific work on professional storytelling, reputation management (with an emphasis on communication ethics), and tracking their personal brand growth. They met once in two weeks at online 5-7-people conferences to present their work and provide their feedback to their peers' work. The communication inside the sampled group was facilitated by the research team members using the group chat in Telegram.

Sampling

The participants for the experiment were drawn from the target population of 1932 people who were the in-service teachers of government-owned schools in Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv, and Cherkasy in Ukraine. A random sampling method was used to select 187 teachers from those who desired to participate. That number of the short-listed teachers was further reduced to 73 persons due to the use of exclusion criteria such as a reference for the school headmaster and

from the mythologists for the Local (District) Education Authority, teaching experience, and results of the unstructured survey that was autonomously administered amongst the students of the selected schools. The sample size of 73 teachers was decided to make certain that the data analysis was manageable. The demographic data of the sampled individuals are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample (N=73)

Characteristics		N	%	p	
Gender	Males	13	17.8	p<0.001	
	Females	60	82.2		
Age	Males	27-35	2	15.6	0.117
		36-44	4	30.7	
		45-55	6	46.1	
		56-60	1	7.6	
	Females	27-35	7	11.8	
		36-44	16	26.6	
		45-55	29	48.3	
		56-60	8	13.3	
Experience	2-10 years	23	31.6	0.677	
	11-15 years	19	26.0		
	16-20 years	18	24.6		
	> 21 years	13	17.8		
Subject, a branch of knowledge they teach	Languages and Literature	16	21.9	0.782	
	Maths and Physics	13	17.8		
	Arts and Music	21	28.7		
	Chemistry and Biology	17	23.2		
	History	3	4.1		
	Physical Education	3	4.1		

Ethical considerations

The informed consent was obtained from the participants before the study to address the related ethical issues and their agreement to participate in the experiment voluntarily. The participants were supposed to allow processing and making public their personal data in the quantity needed for the experiment.

Instruments

The qualitative and quantitative data for the study were collected using three instruments such as a semi-structured interview questionnaire (see Appendix B), a self-assessment checklist (see Appendix C), and an expert assessment checklist (see Appendix D) and TAM. The yielded data were processed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0.0.1. Software.

Description of a semi-structured interview questionnaire (see Appendix B)

The interview was administered in groups of four-five participants by the expert panel and took mostly 30 minutes. If additional explanation were needed, the respondents were asked several follow-up open-ended questions. A standard audio recorder was used to collect the interviewee's responses which then were made a verbatim transcript. The context of some responses was clarified through paraphrasing. The themes were extracted using the thematic analysis of the words and sentence structures. The codes were then assigned to every theme utilising the Raven's Eye software which can be retrieved from <https://ravens-eye.net/>. This tool was used for this purpose because it was found to have been applied in several studies and recommended as a qualitative instrument (Masliy et al., 2020; Trybulkevych et al., 2020; 2SEO, 2019). The themes were as follows: 'the notion of a brand', 'components of self-branding', 'tools, strategies, and tactics of personal branding', 'communication ethics in the success of a brand', 'indicators of the success of a brand'. This software was also used to process the responses.

Description of a checklist for a teacher personal brand self-assessment

The key questions were as follows: how much attention and effort the teacher pays to self-branding; whether they are determined and committed in their efforts; whether they use communication strategy relevantly, with long-term benefits in mind. The checklist included 12 questions covering different components of branding. The respondents were supposed to give 'yes' or 'no' answers honestly. Having done that, they were supposed to total up the number of their "yes" answers to find out whether they needed experts' assistance and how much of it they needed.

Description of an expert assessment checklist

This checklist was utilised after the PBM was completed, as a reflection stage in the study. The checklist included 10 questions on understanding the basics of personal branding and using the tools to promote the brand (with an emphasis on ethics). The checklist used a 5-point Likert scale for performance with 1 meaning 'far below standards', 2 – 'below standards', 3 – 'meets standards', 4 – 'above standards', 5 – 'far above standards'. The experts were supposed to produce recommendations for the sampled teachers on how they could further strengthen their brand and increased its perceived value.

Data analysis

The data was yielded from the Personal Branding Marathon using qualitative and quantitative instruments and was analysed using scales and judgements. The semi-structured interview was used to identify whether the respondents were homogeneous in understanding the concept and importance of personal branding, developing and maintaining their personal brand, and being ethically-minded in communication and behaviour with their target audience. The self-assessment checklist was chosen because it was important to know whether there were loopholes in teacher self-branding and related to their ethics of communication which can be closed through the Personal Branding Marathon. The purpose of the checklist for expert assessment was to assess the progress of the sampled teachers in building their self-brand, with a particular focus on the ethics of communication, to have occurred when they participated in the Personal Branding Marathon. The TAM was utilised to identify what components of self-branding were seen by the teacher as important and how these were prioritised by them.

The interview questionnaire and both checklists were drafted, pre-tested, revised, and edited. The validity and reliability content and the discourse of the questionnaire and checklists were analysed and approved by the expert panel. Concerning the checklists, the experts used a 4-point scale to rate the worthiness, clarity, and precision of each question. The experts' judgements distributed from 1 that meant 'not clear' or 'not precise' or 'not worthy' up to 4 that meant 'totally clear' or 'absolutely precise' or 'really worthy.' The average rating scores were used to calculate the scale-level content validity index (S-CVI/Ave) of all questions (Rodrigues et al., 2017). The experts recorded the relevance rating score as 1 if the question was rated by as 3 or 4. If the relevance rating score was 1 or 2, the question was recorded 0. After the experts have rated the questions in the checklists, the mean relevance scores for a self-assessment checklist were 3.21 and for a checklist of expert assessment was 3.35. Those scores meant that both checklists were valid. The codes to questions were assigned by the research team members using the recommendation of Veal and Darcy (2017). The TAM was validated by Pérez-Rodríguez and Rojo-Alboreca (2017).

The common method bias that could occur as a result of the use of two or more scales together was addressed by the research team who intermixed the items of different constructs on the scales and limited the length of the scales to comply with recommendations of Podsakoff (2012).

Results

Overall, the study found that the Personal Branding Marathon could substantially contribute to the teacher self-branding in the settings of the digital environment if the ethics of communication is given paramount importance. The baseline study showed that the teachers lacked awareness and experience in building, communicating, and maintaining their personal brands and the Personal Branding Marathon addressed those issues.

When conducting the expert panel interview with the sampled teachers, the experts reported that (Interview Question 1) 73% of teachers associate personal branding with their educational background and recognition of the colleagues. Seventeen percent of the respondents referred to a teacher brand as a way of sharing (selling) their teaching experience. Ten percent of the interviewed defined the teacher's personal brand as a way to represent the educational organisation. Only 7% of the sampled teachers could provide the example of a teacher brand that served as an example to them. The experts found those interpretations to be misleading and quite inaccurate.

When responding to Interview Question 2, the participants mentioned such components as professional expertise, effective networking skills, reputation, teaching experience, and effective (trust-building) communication. They stated that those components could be helpful for them in their career as they are the prerequisites to gain recognition among their colleagues.

Among the tools, strategies, and tactics the respondents use to create or develop their personal brand, the participants mentioned taking part in the teacher contests (e.g. "Best Teacher of the Year"), conferences, other public events as a way to present themselves. Running or facilitation of the training sessions for the colleagues was also mentioned. The teachers stated that they could use the same approach to maintain their brand. The experts found these quite a limited set to build a strong brand.

Interestingly that 63% of the respondents (Interview Question 4) were certain the communication ethics was the prerequisite of a successful teacher brand because any manifestation of aggression or arrogance or disrespect can cause damage to the teacher's reputation and image. Thirty-one percent of the sampled teachers stated that the ethics

of communication is a component of a general professional competence of a teacher and helps create a comfortable learning atmosphere for the student in the class. Six percent of the teachers just tentatively agreed that ethics of communication was important claiming that some students like authoritative class management style and perform in studies better if they are forced. Besides, all the respondents confessed that they did not strictly follow or comply with any Code of Ethics or Professional Conduct.

Interview Question 5 appeared to be the most challenging to the teachers and the answers were quite dispersed. The most typical ones were as follows:

[... when all students at school know who you are ...]

[... when they write about you in newspapers and talk about you on TV ...]

[... when they invite you to some professional events as a key speaker ...]

[... when colleagues do not argue with you on the professional matters ...]

[... when your colleagues take notes of your speeches and cite or refer to your statements or claims in their work ...]

The results of the self-assessment of a teacher personal brand using the designed checklist showed that the majority of the sampled teachers (n=67) scored less than 5, while 4 teachers scored between 5–8, and just 2 teachers scored between 9 and 12 (see Figure 2).

The result was suggestive in terms of the necessity of some kind of training for the teachers that might forward them in the right direction. Therefore, the Personal Branding Marathon was a feasible solution. The underperformance of the teachers in self-branding was also proved by the experts' audit of the teachers' self-branding activity using the checklist in Appendix C. The experts also noted that 70 teachers cause a negative reaction to them by the way they communicate to their students and colleagues, especially when they give feedback to their colleagues' teaching work or their private life. Some teachers confessed that they were gossiping about their colleagues and were envious of their 'success'.

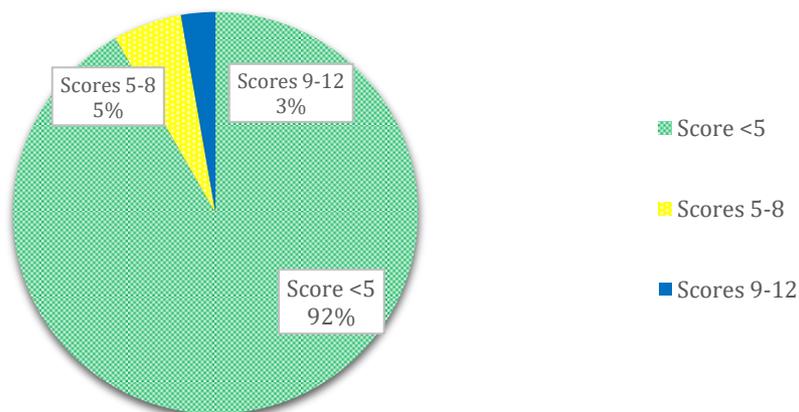


Figure 2. The results of the self-assessment of a teacher personal brand using the designed checklist

After the Personal Branding Marathon was completed, the results of the experts' assessment of teachers' knowledge and skills in self-branding were promising (Figure 3). The histogram was used to show whether the data drawn from the experts' assessment of teachers' knowledge and skills in self-branding are skewed left (low performance) or right (high performance). Descriptive analysis was performed using Jamovi software (Jamovi Project, 2020)

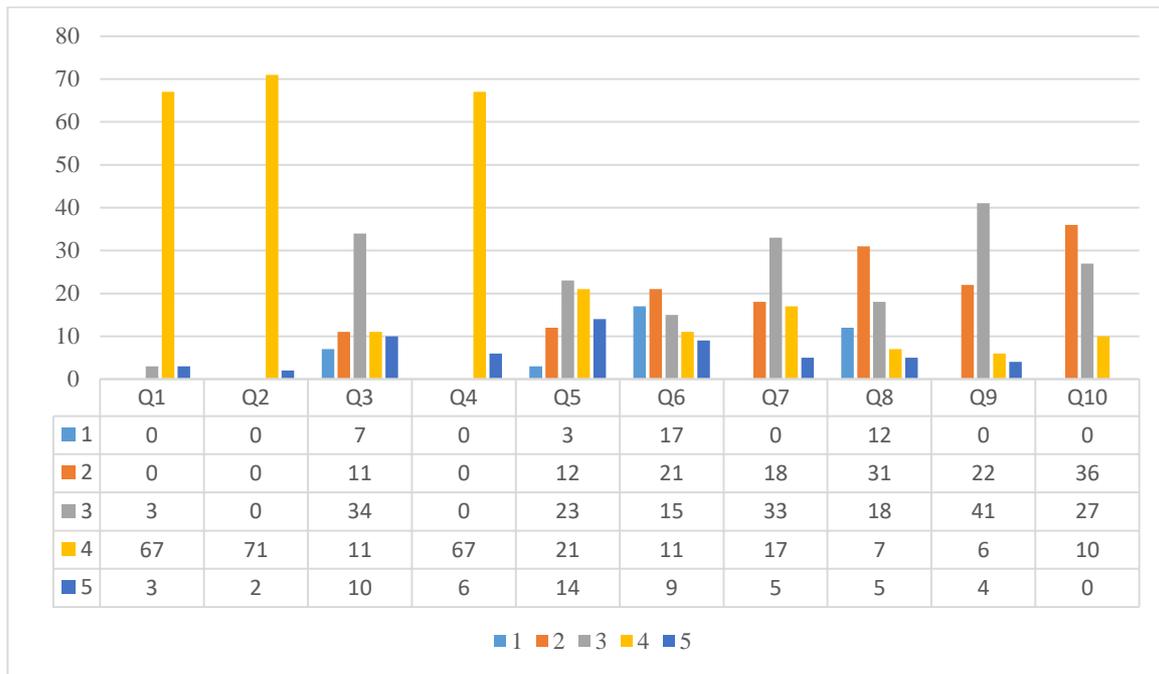


Figure 3. Results drawn from the experts' assessment of teachers' knowledge and skills in self-branding

As can be seen in Figure 3, the experts' judgements concerning the teacher awareness of branding and Labelling Theory (Q1) and awareness of their weaknesses and strengths (Q2) were mostly srewed right meaning performance to be 'above standard' and 'far above standard' (Q1: *Mean* = 4.00, *SD* = 0.289, *St error mean*=0.0338, $\sigma^2=0.0833$ and Q2: *Mean* = 4.03, *SD* = 0.164, *St error mean* =0.0192, $\sigma^2=0.0270$). Surprisingly, the easiness of identification of the teacher's brand on the Internet (Q3) was mostly rated by experts as the one that 'meets standard' (*Mean* = 3.08, *SD* = 1.11, *St error mean* =0.0130, $\sigma^2= 1.24$). The experts' values on Q4 proved that the students' opinions and judgements of the teacher are mostly positive (*Mean* = 4.08, *SD*=0.277, *St error mean* =0.0324, $\sigma^2= 0.0765$). The values for Q5 srewed right meaning that the teacher's performance in engaging their target audience in communication tended to be 'meeting the standard', 'above standard' and 'far above standard' (*Mean* = 3.42, *SD* = 1.10, *St error mean*= 0.129, $\sigma^2=1.22$). The data for experts' opinions on Q6 srewed left meaning that the sampled teachers built their networking not just using organic traffic but could influence the audience to become their subscribers in the media (*Mean* = 2.64, *SD*=1.33, *St error mean*=0.155, $\sigma^2=1.76$). The data for Q7, Q8, Q9 and Q10 srewed mainly right that meant that the teachers performed well in story-telling (Q7: *Mean* = 3.12, *SD*=0.865, *St error mean* = 0.101, $\sigma^2=0.748$), blogging, designing course-books, and manuals for the students (Q8: *Mean* = 2.48, *SD*=9.35, *St error mean* = 0.128, $\sigma^2=1.20$), involving the experts in building their personal brands (Q9: *Mean* = 2.89, *SD*=0.774, *St error mean* = 0.0906, $\sigma^2=0.599$), and improving their brand through online events, posts, meetings, and media (Q10: *Mean* = 2.64, *SD*=0.714, *St error mean* = 0.0836, $\sigma^2=0.510$).

The experts' judgments can be interpreted that the teachers were good at the theory of self-branding, but still needed assistance or peer support in their brand development and maintenance. The teacher's story-telling and networking performance were judged by the experts to be far better than previously but still needed development which implied that the quality of communication and the ethics of communicating their brand needed more time to improve.

The results of the judgments of 9 teacher volunteers about the importance of such components of self-branding as effective (trust-building) communication, professional expertise, effective networking skills, reputation, teaching experience that are viewed from their perspective in terms of implementation using the Triangular Assessment Method (TAM) are presented in Figure 3.

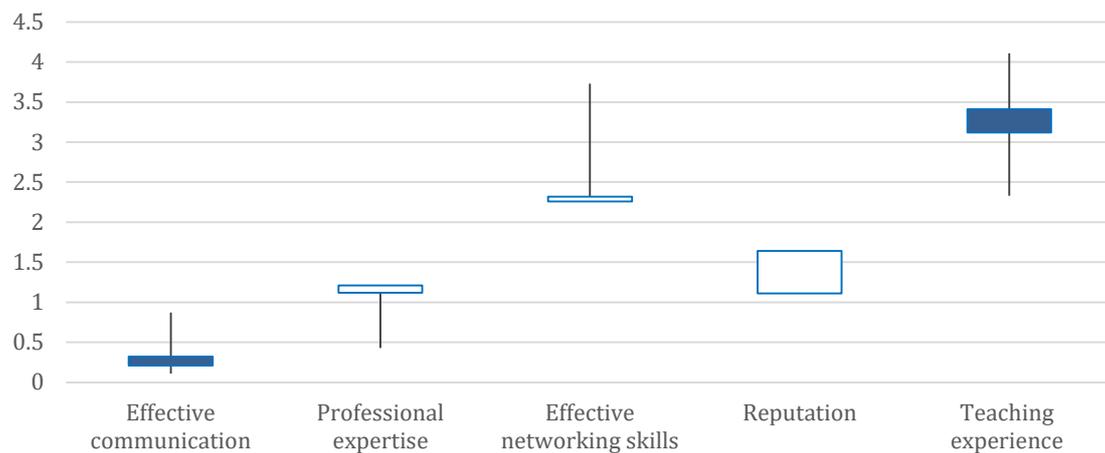


Figure 3. The results of the judgments of teacher volunteers about the importance

The results presented in Figure 3 suggest that participation of the teachers in the Personal Branding Marathon brought them to the conclusion that effective (ethical and trust-building) communication was the key component of the brand-development and maintenance. The professional expertise was rated by the teachers as the second most important component which was followed by reputation. Surprisingly, teaching experience was rated as the least important component of self-branding.

Overall, due to the Marathon, the teachers became more professionally advantaged, self-efficient, and confident as individuals. This suggested that the Personal Branding Marathon could help the teacher to build-up a strong self-brand on the Internet and at the workplace. They also could substantially improve their communication skills in terms of ethics as the Marathon is supposed to involve a communication expert in this project.

Discussion

The study attempted to identify how the Personal Branding Marathon with the involvement of the Ethics Supervisory Committee could influence the teacher self-branding in the settings of the digital environment if the ethics of communication is given paramount importance.

The study is relevant to the previous findings and important to society at large. The novelty of the study lies in the way the teacher self-branding was organised and delivered as the teachers are typically 'hard to budge' (García & Weiss, 2019) and humble in such things as self-branding. The teachers are also too sensitive to what they say about them which also serves as the psychological obstacle to them in creating their brands. The Marathon created a community of individuals with similar needs and the environment facilitated and assisted by the experts to put the teachers in the 'point of no return' situation.

In the baseline study stage, it was found that teachers' interpretations of a personal brand were quite inaccurate and misleading. The results obtained through the expert panel interview with the sampled teachers showed that 73% of teachers misinterpreted personal branding and associated it with their educational background and recognition of the colleagues, or a way of sharing (selling) their teaching experience, or a way to represent the educational organisation. It was found that only 7% of the sampled teachers could provide the example of a teacher brand that served as an example to them. These findings go in line with Kolbuszewska (2017) and Hopps (2020) who found that teachers still ignore their online self and consider branding a marketing hype that is not for them.

The Personal Branding Marathon helped the teachers raise their awareness of self-branding, enhance/upgrade the tools and strategies of self-branding, and improve their communication and communication ethics, particularly. It was proved that due to the Marathon, the teachers became more professionally advantaged, self-efficient, and confident as individuals. This suggested that the Personal Branding Marathon could help the teacher build-up a strong self-brand on the Internet and at the workplace. They also could substantially improve their communication skills in terms of ethics as the Marathon is supposed to involve a communication expert in this project. The results go in line with Still (2015) and Commaile (2018) who state that self-branding is about communicating your 'strengths and uniqueness to a target audience'. The findings of this study are consistent with Sedereviciute-Paciauskiene (2018) who sees the potential in using Facebook for the teachers to present themselves in the media. Furthermore, the study results agree with Sethy (2018) who proves the essential role of professional ethics in performing their responsibilities and institutional obligations that are closely related to self-branding.

The components of self-branding mentioned by the participants and approved by the experts were as follows: professional expertise, effective networking skills, reputation, teaching experience, and effective (trust-building) communication. It was also identified that the teachers used a limited set of tools, strategies, and tactics to build and

promote their personal brand. They underestimated the importance of following or complying with the Code of Ethics though they understood that communication ethics is an important component of their professional competence. The results of a teachers' self-assessment of a teacher's brand using the checklist showed that the participants underperformed in their self-branding and needed support to update and upgrade their self-branding activity. The experts also discovered that there was an issue of ethics of communication which disrupted the sampled teachers' self-branding.

The study added to the conclusions of Jones (2017) who stated that branding is not a purely commercial phenomenon, it also promotes the reputation of a person or organisation and its ethical purpose is in establishing a balance between the truth about a person or an organisation and the perception of them in the community. The implications drawn from the study are consistent with Schawbel (2010) and Noble et al. (2010) who suggest that a competitive environment requires a teacher to boost the size, activity rate, and reach of their network.

Conclusion

The study found that there were loopholes in teacher self-branding and related to their ethics of communication which can be closed through the Personal Branding Marathon. The results obtained through the expert panel interview with the sampled teachers showed that 73% of teachers misinterpreted personal branding and associated it with their educational background and recognition of the colleagues, or a way of sharing (selling) their teaching experience, or a way to represent the educational organisation. It was found that only 7% of the sampled teachers could provide the example of a teacher brand that served as an example to them.

It was also found that the Personal Branding Marathon (PBM) with the involvement of the Ethics Supervisory Committee could positively influence the teacher self-branding in the settings of the digital environment if the ethics of communication is given paramount importance. The PBM raised the teachers' awareness of self-branding, enhanced/upgraded the tools and strategies of self-branding, and improve their communication and communication ethics, particularly. The teachers became more professionally advantaged, self-efficient, and confident as individuals. The PBM was found to help the teacher build-up a strong self-brand on the Internet and at the workplace. They also could substantially improve their communication skills in terms of ethics as the Marathon was supposed to employ communication expert assistance in the project. Effective (ethical and trust-building) communication was rated by the teachers as the key component of the brand-development and maintenance. Professional expertise was rated by the teachers as the second most important component which was followed by reputation. Surprisingly, teaching experience was rated as the least important component of self-branding. Further research is needed in addressing the loopholes in the measurement of the success of self-branding.

Recommendations

Recommendations for creating a successful teacher brand include developing and maintaining a consistent and authentic brand through all available mediums and through creating authentic and valuable content to benefit your target audience. This will help you show your expertise in the field and retain the audience (Woods, 2020). The teachers should start building their positive image when they are students. Their first steps in brand building could be membership in the professional network or organisation or community. They can also develop their 'portfolio' of referees.

Further research is needed in the investigation of training the teachers in the use of marketing strategies.

Limitations

The limitations of this study might be related to the amount of time dedicated to the experiment and data collection as brand building is a time-consuming process that might take the whole life of an individual.

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Conflicts of Interest

No conflict of interest related to commercial, legal, financial, or any other opposing interests that may affect this study is declared by the authors.

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Appendix A

Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers (with the focus on communication ethics)

Preamble

Consistent with the norms of morality and professional ethics, the Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers shall serve as a basis for the ethical conduct of a teacher towards the student, the profession, and the community. The Code stipulates that the teacher acts in the best interests of a student who is the primary aim for the existence of the teaching profession. Thus, the teacher accepts that the physical, mental, and spiritual health of a student and their socialisation are of primary importance. Additionally, the teacher is committed to following the principles of respect-based communication to a student, responsibility to the community, and “*primum non nocere*” [“first, cause no harm”].

Ethical conduct of a teacher towards the student

The professional teacher shall:

- Treat every student with respect to human dignity and avoiding any offensive or discriminatory formulations in the way they engage them in learning, interact, or communicate information.
- Maintain the confidentiality of all information they obtained about the student in the course of the educational process and out-of-class communication.
- Not interpret the student’s opinions, judgements, or ideas in a humiliating way.
- Avoid moral, emotional, or verbal bullying in communication to establish dominance (leadership) in class.

Ethical conduct of a teacher towards the profession

The professional teacher:

- Accepts responsibility for their continuous professional self-development.
- Strives for teaching effectiveness.
- Accepts professional criticism from their peers responding it respectfully.
- Does not accept any gift or favor that would cause misleading judgements, decisions, or actions.

Ethical conduct of a teacher towards the community

The professional teacher shall:

- Be an example for the students.
- Communicate the community their teaching goals and expectations in a clear and non-intrusive manner.
- Strive to bring value to the community.
- Create a safe environment for every student.
- Create a democratic learning environment with equal opportunities for the students.
- Teach the students to be active citizens.
- Not be involved in gossiping, sharing false facts (claims), or gambling.
- Not pursue personal gains from their work in an educational institution.

Semi-structured interview questionnaire:

1. What does personal branding involve? Whose teacher brand could serve as an example to you?
2. What are the components of self-branding? How can you benefit from them in your career and professional environment?
3. What tools, strategies, and tactics can you use to create or develop your personal brand? How can you maintain it?
4. How does your communication ethics contribute to the success of your personal brand? Please, suggest your reasoning or provide examples.
5. What are the indicators of the success of your personal brand? How can you measure its success? Please, suggest your reasoning or provide examples.

Appendix C

Checklist for a teacher personal brand self-assessment

#	Question	Yes	No
1	I regularly Google myself on the Web and social media using my full name, full name & e-mail address to monitor my online reputation.		
2	I have a clear vision of who my target audience is from both perspectives personality-related and professional.		
3	I regularly audit and update my social media activity and profile so that these project a positive professional and personal image of me as a teacher.		
4	I seek the feedback of others to find out how my brand is perceived and whether it is consistent across all groups.		
5	I involve the expert in the communication strategy of for a personal brand and/or the expert social media management and strategy, and/or the public relations and marketing expert, or/and the expert in career-counselling and guidance in the evaluation of the written and video content, photos to identify whether these tools are used appropriately.		
6	I communicate ethically to my audience in class and out-of-class, using no emotional bullying or authoritative style of classroom management.		
7	I involve my hypercritical colleagues to read my (blog) posts, listen to my webinars, videos, comments, and feedback so that they do not use any offensive or discriminatory formulations.		
8	I do my best to extend my Internet community through organic traffic.		
9	I am certain that I bring value to my target audience.		
10	I avoid actions or messages or language styles that can weaken my brand.		
11	I use the strategy of Influencer & Community Marketing to promote my brand.		
12	I constantly do professional networking to extend my brand.		

The scores are interpreted by totaling up the number of “yes” answers. If you have scored 9-12 ‘yes’ answers, you are excellent in managing your personal brand. If you have scored 5-8 ‘yes’ answers, you certainly need the audit of your branding activity from the experts in branding through communication and marketing. If you scored fewer than 5 ‘yes’ answers, you might be doing work blindly, running in the wrong direction, and missing opportunities. It might help if you involve the experts in your self-branding.

Appendix D

Expert's checklist for the assessment of the teacher's personal brand (1 - Far below standards; 2 - Below standards; 3 - Meets standards; 4 - Above standards; 5 - Far above standards)

#	Question	Likert scale for performance				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	The teacher is aware of branding and Labelling Theory.					
2	The teacher is aware of their weaknesses and strengths.					
3	The teacher's brand can be easily identified on the Internet.					
4	The students' opinions and judgements of the teacher are mostly positive.					
5	The teacher's target audience is responsive and easily gets engaged in communication.					
6	The teacher's networking relies on organic traffic.					
7	The teacher's story-telling builds up trust and respect.					
8	The teacher is presented in the social networks, does blogging, designs course-books, and manuals for the students.					
9	The teacher involves the expert in the communication strategy for a personal brand and/or the expert social media management and strategy, and/or the public relations and marketing expert, or/and the expert in career-counselling and guidance in the evaluation of the written and video content, photos to identify whether these tools are used appropriately.					
10	The teacher constantly improves their brand through online events, posts, meetings, and media.					