

MANAGEMENT IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE PERSONAL BRAND ATTRIBUTES OF UNDERGRADUATES.

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Abstract

The notion of personal branding, borrowed from a marketing concept, has intrigued many ever since Tom Peters coined the term in ‘the brand called you’(Peters,1997 as cited in Shepard 2005) . This led to the explosion of personal brand research by various enthusiasts. However, there exists limited academic literature on personal branding in the higher educational context but more references to personal development instead. This paper explores various researches on the concept of personal branding and explores its application in higher education the aims to enhance the awareness and development of personal branding attributes within the Management classroom.

Keywords: personal brand, self-branding, undergraduates, personal development, higher education

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Problem Discussion

In pursuit of a degree and in the chase of good grades, tertiary students may compromise on aspects of personal development for the sake of academic success. Prensky(2001) notes that undergraduate students are left with little room for reflection or self-evaluation and are unaware of their own personal attributes . A significant article by Waddock & Lozano(2012) on promoting a more holistic management education explores the benefits of programs that emphasize self-awareness and self-development. Scahaller(2005) promoted ‘focused exploration through active reflection’ which is the underlying significance of this research. Student’s recognition and development of their unique qualities are vital for them to be able to represent themselves well in the working world and set them apart from other graduates. Shepard(2005) points out that personal development has been receiving increasing attention and thus further encourages individuals to market and brand themselves. Hence, is it worthwhile investing effort and time in the discovery and development of personal brand attributes? Could Management educators play a significant role in using classroom activities for this purpose and would students benefit from these efforts in terms of enhancing their own personal brand? These are the questions addressed in this study.

1.2 Objectives of Paper

This research aims to explore the importance of Personal Brand awareness and the building of attributes among undergraduates from the first year of college. It reviews some literature on the concept and its application in higher education particularly in management class activities. Lastly, the study takes the qualitative approach of focus group feedback to represent the perspective of current undergraduate and observations by the educator.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 The Concept of Personal Branding

Personal branding was said to be introduced by Tom Peters in a poignant article taking the perspective of personal and career development. He conceptualized that people can be likened to brands and just like how marketing efforts promote products on a basis of uniqueness and differentiation, people can be empowered to do so. This is called the 'sign of distinction'.(Peters, 1999). McNally and Speak(2002) popularized the concept further by translating brand management into basic guidelines. Their research mentioned that personal brand relates to making and managing relationship and perception by becoming more of 'who one is', authentically speaking. Arruda(2002) also stressed on authenticity with regard to personal brand on how an individual's make up of attributes, values, passion or strengths distinguishes oneself from others.

2.1 Personal Branding link with Personal Development in Higher Education

When it comes to personal growth and self-development, there are only few researches who connect with the concept of Personal Branding to achieve similar objectives. Rigopoulou and Kehagias(2009) ascertain that brand building theory fits in the personal development process especially with regard to PDP or Personal Development Plan. The potential for Personal Branding as a form of personal development outcome was not fully realized.(Constanti and Gibbs, 2004). In facilitating the pursuit of career goals, Montoya and Vendehey(2002) affirms Personal branding as a strategic process of controlling and managing perception that can help in achieving ones goals . Rampersad(2009) echoes that developing a personal brand is an evolutionary process based on individuals identity and self -improvement .These notions have implications that serves to endorse a more conscious exploration and active application of Personal Branding in Higher Education.

2.2 Making Personal Branding Work

There has been notable strategies of how personal branding can be practically applied. Kaputa(2005) said a strong personal brand should maintain a positive relationship between the brand and target audiences. Hodgkinson(2005) mentioned that your brand is how you live in the hearts and minds of those in your market. Arruda(2005), who advocates nurturing your brand in order to move in front of the pack, gave a very comprehensive and practical framework of personal brand attributes. It was strategized to extract, express and exude.

3. METHODOLOGY

- A Qualitative approach was taken in the form of Focus Group and Observation
- Design of Focus Group.
 - Three sessions of focus group conducted with demographic breakdown as follows

Table 1: Demographic Breakdown of Focus Group Conducted

Sessions	Number of Attendees	Nationality	Gender
1	9 students	4 international students & 5 Malaysian	4 females 5 males
2	10 students	3 international & 7 Malaysian	5 females 4 males
3	17 students	1 international & 16 Malaysian	11 females 6 males
TOTAL	37 students		

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Summary of Focus Group Findings

Question 1: Do You know what is Personal Brand?

10 said YES with the following comments

- *How you present yourself*
- *How you position yourself*
- *How others look at you*
- *The image you portray*

9 made guesses and looked for approval from the Focus Group Facilitator. Their comments were

- *'own brand image'*
- *own style or fashion*
- *own product identity*

18 said NO(not really familiar with it)

-All of them were then shown the bits of literature review explaining the concept of Personal Brand

Question 2:If you were a brand, how would you describe yourself?

Table 2: Personal Brand Description of Self by Respondents

Somewhat Related and Consistent	Two unrelated random categories
Calm and Cool	Honest and fun
Vocal and Straightforward	Responsible and caring
Unique and Colourful	Frank and creative
Creative and Innovative	Responsible and outgoing
Bold and Creative	Simple and comfortable
Active and Outspoken	Sociable and reliable
Daring and Outspoken	Intellectual and rugged
Talkative and Friendly	Emotional and original
Caring and Sociable	Truthful and humble
	Calm and reliable
	Shy and sensitive
	Kind and brave
	Humble and a daydreamer
	Emotional and talkative
	Happy and reserved
	Patient and practical
	Playful and competitive
	Responsible and creative

Question 3: Recalling the many MOB class activities, do you think it helped in any way to discover or build/enhance your personal brand attributes?

- 20 said YES, evident in group discussion activities, presentations, demonstrations etc.
- 13 said TO AN EXTENT
- 1 NOT REALLY

Question 4: Speaking personally, please elaborate specifically which brand attributes did you in particular discover or enhanced? If none, please state so.

Comments:

- By being verbal, I would emerge as a leader in group discussion.
- In group discussions, I would be straightforward and frank
- I became talkative to get initiatives from my passive peers so they would engage.
- In class demonstrations, I learnt to step up first and volunteer as it made me outgoing.
- The debates made me stand out and allowed me to be more outspoken.
- Class discussion that engaged me made me more outspoken/outgoing(2x)
- From a reserved person, the activities helped to bring me out of my comfort zone(2x)
- In group discussions, I became more vocal to verbalize thoughts
- Learnt to broaden my mind and make connections in class demonstrations
- Made me think more practically through using real newspaper articles.

Other comments:

- The activities were merely 'add ons' to what I already have discovered earlier
- Mainly emphasized particular attributes that may not be my own. Interpersonal, communication or teamwork related etc

Question 5: Do you think it is important for you to develop or enhance these attributes as an undergraduate? Why?

All said YES

From Potential Employer Perspective

- because it is what is expected of us at work
- for soft skills development
- employers perspective, makes more sense to hire someone who can offer something different

From Potential Employee Perspective

- because it shows how to represent yourself
- to stand out and be special
- for workplace advantage
- to stand apart from degree

One Disagreed

-should not be just for future employability. more for self-improvement and development that would give us satisfaction and sense of accomplishment(4 students proceeded to agree with this)

Question 6: Do you think it is important for modules like MANAGEMENT to consider building or enhancing students personal brand attributes?

All said YES

- exposure to more practical approach(2x)
- relate to life and not just textbook(2x)
- activities to be applied to working world & for workplace advantage(2x)
- certain topics applicable
- character building
- for workplace advantage
- to set us apart
- bring us out of our shell

Better than textbook learning(5 boys mentioned)

Activities to use with caution as a supplement to textbook so practical viewpoints can have more credibility.

Outside class activities would be effective for this purpose . Though the visit to court trip enhanced their knowledge on the legal system but did little for personal attributes.

4.2 Observation Findings

- Field observation was made by the educator as a facilitator for few prominent class activities.

Table 3: In-Class Activities conducted and Observations made.

CLASS ACTIVITIES & TOPIC/SUBTOPIC	DESCRIPTION	OBSERVATION
Demonstration of Motion Studies-'Brick laying role play' (History of Management Topic)	-A volunteer was called. The volunteer is to act like a brick layer and slowly demonstrate the process of laying a brick , both before and after motion studies was introduced	-Only less than five out of 150 above students would volunteer -Mostly male volunteers -Volunteer was mostly enthusiastic ; outgoing and bold(brave) as this was only the second week of class
Debate(Teams Topic)	-On the topic of teams, class is split into two large groups and they debate on 'pros and cons of working in teams'	-In every large group, one would emerge as a natural leader while few with language issues refrain from speaking. Usually the more communicative, confident and outgoing ones spoke up. What was seen in those who spoke were courage, humour sometimes emotional response . -The humble leaders listened to everyone speak but the few opinionated ones dominated the discussions -There were one or two laid-back ones who were social loafers and were crapping when called to speak.
Video Case on Workplace Deviance-Ethics Topic)	-A video of a true workplace incident was shown and students were paired up as managers to decide on the fate of the employee.	-as decision makers they needed to justify their decision.. -the more responsible ones seem to make a moral judgement whereas the practical ones were more honest with their justifications.
Newspaper ads(General Environment Topic)	-various print ads were shown and students were asked to pair up to see what positioning strategy was being used.	-Some students who had different opinions were not afraid to speak up and verbalize their thoughts. - Reserved students made their partners present while few took the opportunity too.
Music Band Demo (Leadership Topic)	-to demonstrate the use of different leadership style a guitarist with experience was sought, an inexperienced drummer and a singer was called	-Friends volunteered other names with enthusiasm -the quiet, reserved and shy students were called on purpose but were willing and they liked the attention they were receiving
Reinforcement Chair test (Motivation Topic)	-one student was called to demonstrate Reinforcement theory to sit on a chair	-Volunteer was sporting, brave and cheeky -usually the popular one with a lot of friends and someone with likable personality .
Global Brands quiz (Global Management Topic)	-all students took the quiz but worked in pairs to match the brand to the country of origin	-international students seem to know more about global brands although a local won -one or two dishonest students were caught checking their phones - competitive among friends

		-very proud when results were announced but received friends support
Ramly Burger case	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -students were asked to recommend to <i>Mr Ramly</i> the best method to go global. They represent management consulting firms -Friends were separated and the best group will be given a RM10 000 contract 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -students became very competitive when monetary deal was involved. -they showed initiative to gather feedback from team members. -the passive ones preferred to read and only contributed when the leader asked them to -the active ones who may or may not know the facts, gathered input from the rest, spoke to convince -not all able to think critically
'Be my Boss' JCM model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -students were asked to be the HEAD OF DEPT for all lecturers and use the model components to improve lecturers satisfaction and performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -the confident students were ready to lead and the more passive students knew the facts but needed help expressing -the reserved students were mostly factual based but the specific illustrations came from critical thinkers in the group

5.0 DISCUSSIONS & CONCLUSION

The results from both the focus group and the observation indicate that there is a definite link between management in-class activities and enhancement of personal brand attributes. From observation, students with obvious personal attributes showed it through the activities and it was often consistent. Lecturer could identify specific personality traits that were glaring for some students and this was clearly reflected in their weekly participation of the activities. The focus group findings implied that although students were mostly not aware what personal brand were at first, they all agreed that it was important and were able to describe their attributes with little or no hesitation with most being able to relate between the specific activity and a particular attribute. The choice of words to describe their personal brand was also intriguing as it was mainly positive words and a mixture of related words indicating consistency(example: cool and calm) and unrelated combinations(inconsistent but acceptable as a person can have two dimensional traits that stand out). There were notably a few exceptions revealing not everyone's personal attribute was recognized as it is mostly in areas of interpersonal communication, teamwork and leadership. It is also valid to point out that the students discovered their attributes either in school or through work experience and therefore the management activities mainly served to give them an avenue through practice and exposure to enhance or enrich further with only a handful of students saying the activities did make them change. It is safe to conclude that the management in-class activities does serve to enhance the personal brand attributes of students but at varying degrees and is therefore worthwhile to be infused in the delivery of the module.

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7.0 APPENDICES

Table 4: Complete Focus Group Session Record and Findings

QUESTION	SESSION 1	SESSION 2	SESSION 3
Do you know what the concept of 'Personal Brand' is?	Most students did not know what Personal Brand was until the concept was thoroughly explained to them. Thought it was to do with image or fashion	Half of them have a rough idea of the concept. <i>'How you present/position yourself/how others look at you'</i>	Few of them knew the concept but not thoroughly. Keywords were used 'uniqueness' 'differentiation' 'standing out' 'one-of -a-kind'
If you were a brand ,how would you describe yourself in just two words?	-honest & fun -responsible & caring -calm and cool -vocal and straightforward -frank & creative -responsible & outgoing	-unique and colourful -simple & comfortable -creative & innovative -sociable & reliable -intellectual & rugged -emotional & original -truthful & humble -bold & creative -active & outspoken -calm & reliable	-daring & outspoken -talkative & friendly -shy & sensitive -kind & brave -humble & daydreamer -talkative & friendly -emotional & talkative -happy & reserved -silly & over thinker -caring & sociable -patient & practical -playful & competitive -responsible & creative
	SESSION 1	SESSION 2	SESSION 3
Recalling the many MOB class activities do you think it helped in any way to discover or build/enhance your personal brand attributes?	All said YES. -in group discussion activities, presentations, demonstrations etc	7 said YES and one said to an extent while 1 said 'Not really'.	6 said YES . The rest said' to an extent'
	SESSION 1	SESSION 2	SESSION 3
Speaking personally, please elaborate specifically which brand attributes did you in particular discover or enhanced? If none please state so.	-In group discussion, I would emerge as a leader naturally by being verbal -In group activities, I would be straightforward and frank in telling someone who has a wrong idea about something -In presenting, I learnt to be myself -I became talkative to get initiative from my passive peers so hopefully they would engage. I set the trend -In demonstrations, I learnt to step up first and volunteer as it made me outgoing -For those with no works experience, it	-The debates made me stand out and allowed me to be more outspoken -class discussion that engaged me made me more outspoken -for me, it was initially a challenge to be outgoing but the activities encouraged that -two students said specific videos made them conscious of their behaviours -It did help me bring out my qualities but there is a lot more to discover -Most activities were on development and motivation but not specifically related to my brand attributes of -No-although activities does help us open up but does not reflect myself	-Two students said 'from a reserved person, I came out of my comfort zone' - In group discussions on tut activities, I became more vocal to verbalize thoughts -To think out of the box(creative thinking) when I was called to do the arm wrestling. I first thought it was crazy and what connection it has to Management but then after it was demonstrated and explained I learnt to broaden my mind and make connections -YES. In the newspaper article activity when worldly business issues were shown to us, it made me think more practically - To a certain extent cause it helped me enhance the attributes that was discovered earlier like when I was in school.(two agreed) -What the activities did for me were more add ons rather than a

	enhances a variety of work-appropriate attributes		discovery . Not necessarily build on my distinct attribute but other skills.(five people agreed to this) -It may not be my personal attribute I am known for because the activities emphasized certain attributes
<i>Do you think it is important for you to develop or enhance these attributes as an undergraduate? Why?</i>	SESSION 1 All said YES and thinks its important -YES. Because this is what is expected of us at work...our work skills YES. More to soft skills development YES. Because it shows how to represent yourself	SESSION 2 All said YES firmly YES. Definitely to stand out and be special -YES. From and employers perspective, it makes more sense to hire someone who can offer something different	SESSION 3 All said YES but reasons differed -Yes..for workplace advantage -Everyone seems to be getting a degree so it would set us apart. -One disagreed that it is for future employability.' I feel it is more for our self improvement and development that would give us satisfaction. A sense of accomplishment' (4 students agreed to this statement)
<i>Do you think it is important for module like MANAGEMENT to consider building or enhancing students personal brand attributes?</i>	SESSION 1 All said YES -To give students exposure to practical aspect -Yes because it should be relate to learning about life and not just the textbook material -However, for an activity to have a lastin meaning, it needs to be linked and explained well -An activity will have little value if it cannot be applied to the working world.	SESSION 2 All said YES -YES but only certain topics applicable. Example...goal setting , motivation, leadership and time mgt can be applied way after the MOB semester. -YES. Its not merely a subject but application to life's experiences, -YES because its good to have a combination of character building -YES. Its more practical to do so we learn by witnessing and experiencing -Top student in management declared...'I did well for my exam because I remembered those activities in class'	SESSION 3 All said YES -For workplace advantage -Everyone seems to be getting a degree so it would set us apart. -YES. Because it can bring us out of our shell away from comfort zone -YES as it suits us tech savvy person , when significant videos are shown for instance it gets my attention -YES for theory based subjects -'We should ban all textbook and have only practical learning activities' said one boy and four boys agreed -Four girls disagreed and argued there 'needs to be a balance.. book dependent and practicality'. 'Your comments and opinions need to have credibility and be based on something' they argued