

USING THE INSTAGRAM PLATFORM IN CREATING A PERSONAL BRAND

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Purpose: The purpose of the article is to present the possibilities of creating a personal brand image in social media.

Design/methodology/approach: The research analyzed literature materials on the development of social media and its use in personal branding. Compilations and reports covering users' online activity were analyzed.

Findings: Social media is becoming a tool for thoughtful personal branding, as well as proper two-way communication. Through the actions taken to create on Instagram, you can build an audience that will actively contribute to the development of your personal brand.

Research limitations/implications: Future research may be related to the creation of mentoring programs in the area under study.

Practical implications: The results of the survey can be used as input for designing training programs in the study area.

Social implications: Social media marketing means promotion conducted through a variety of means. This forces those who want to create a strong personal brand to be dynamically flexible and look for solutions that can optimize promotional and communication processes online.

Originality/value: This article is mainly addressed to those creating their personal brand on Instagram, who want to implement and improve their branding strategy.

Keywords: social media, personal brand, strategy.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

New technologies have made it possible to adapt a selection of classic marketing tools to the growing array of digital marketing tools. The continuous development of social media has made it necessary for both large and small businesses to dynamically adapt to the changing environment. This results in the need to monitor these media, continuously educate themselves and stay abreast of all the changes taking place in this area. However, it is important to remember that the classical approach to marketing and management is still valid. The needs of

the consumer are paramount, and it is these needs that should be kept in mind when marketing a product. Content published on social media is just such a product. It should be tailored to consumer expectations in order to "sell" it (Lupa, 2016).

Creating a personal brand and also managing it is becoming an increasingly popular phenomenon. Products or services offered by personal brands are carriers of specific personal representations. Creating the specific content associated with running a personal brand requires determination and great persistence on the part of the founders (Nowakowska, 2019).

The main purpose of the article is to present the possibilities of creating a personal brand image in social media. It discusses selected methods of marketing communication offered by the Instagram platform, used by specific individuals to create and strengthen the image of a personal brand. The goal was achieved based on literature studies of brand management and marketing theory and content analysis of accounts on Instagram. Information on personal branding was obtained during casual interviews with founders of leading brands from the list of top 100 Polish Instagrammers generated by ddo. The article presents tips on how to carry out the process of building a personal brand successfully.

2. The idea of a personal brand in the context of social media

A brand can refer to a great many meanings. It can be both an expression of certain characteristics of a product, benefits that are attractive and important to customers, values, culture, personality and the user (Rasmus, 2010). A brand is made up of two groups of elements. The first is made up of functional elements, the presence of which can be determined objectively. These are the characteristics of a given product, such as size, volume, taste, durability. The second, on the other hand, is formed by virtual elements, which are assessed subjectively and individually by each customer. These include generated: emotions, associations, feelings, etc. (Altkorn, 1999). It is clear that from the perspective of building a lasting and strengthening competitive advantage for the brand, the company should place equal emphasis on both elements, keeping in mind, however, that it is the virtual elements that allow it to authentically stand out from the competition.

It is assumed that the first time the term personal brand appeared was in 1997, in the August issue of *Fast Company Magazine*, in the article *We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc.* To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You (Peters, 1997). This term was discussed in the book *The Brand Called You* (Montoya, Vandehey, 2003). Due to the practical nature of the term, its definition seems to be still evolving. Nevertheless, it can definitely be noted that the first attempts to define the scope and nature of a personal brand referred directly to brand management theory.

Referring to the understanding of branding proposed by L. de Chernatony (Chernatony, 2003), a personal brand can be considered an identifiable persona that represents enduring values that are recognized by the recipient as those that satisfy his or her needs to the highest degree. In this context, the identifiability of a specific personal brand and the values that are valuable from the perspective of the brand recipient are paramount. This definition, however, in no way addresses whether a personal brand is the result of a conscious action by an individual.

If we consider the issue of personal branding from a marketing perspective, each of us is a product and, unfortunately, is constantly subject to a simplistic or superficial evaluation by the recipient (Grochowina, 2018). The main component of personal brand building is image personalization. It is necessary to build a brand first, and consequently become a brand in itself. The strength of this brand is based on the reputation, popularity and credibility of the person. The term personal branding - in Poland referred to as "personal brand" - originated in the United States, from where it then reached Europe (Personal branding <https://poradnikprzedsiębiorcy.pl/-na-czym-polega-personal-branding>).

In Polish literature and practice, the English terms personal brand and personal branding are usually used interchangeably. While personal branding does not raise much doubt, it is difficult to compare personal branding to personal branding. This is partly due to the different scopes that the term "branding" contains in different fields. For example, in the graphic creative industry, branding will involve the visual distinction of a brand¹, while for strategists it will be primarily the establishment of strategically perceived distinctive values, subsequently translated into the company's visual, verbal communication, product, service or organizational culture. It is clear that in the second case the understanding of the concept is much broader. Returning to the terms "personal branding" and "personal branding," it can be noted that in the literature and activities of specialists in the field, the use of the term "personal branding" results in a focus on image creation, while "personal branding" starts from an examination of an individual's personal potential and values, which are then communicated to the audience in an individualized manner and tailored to the goals and needs of both the personal brand and its audience (Walczak-Skałeczka, 2018).

In the age of booming social networks, branding has long gone beyond the zone of pure commercialism. In the past, well-known products belonging to large corporations were called brands, and nowadays there has evidently been a stage in which the term "brand" is used to describe charitable organizations, public institutions, and with them their cities, sports clubs, services of various kinds, as well as individuals operating under their own name (Olins, 2009).

Personal brand creation, analogous to product branding, should not be a composite of random activities. It must be a process implemented from a strategic perspective. The process should be based on the idea of one's own development path, which is consistently implemented, although with the possibility of acting flexibly. Brand building consists of three consecutive stages (Trzeciak, 2015):

1. Building recognition - is primarily about communicating information about yourself to your target group. It is therefore paramount to identify the target group that a person wants to reach (including principals, target employers) and to plan the selection of media and tools that will make it possible for a person to be noticed by the individuals or other entities that make up the target group. If such treatments are effective, the likelihood of establishing cooperation will increase. With regard to the general brand, this stage can be called brand awareness building.
2. Reputation building - reputation is the result of gaining experience in a particular industry with the occurrence of successes in a particular field or the demonstration of certain qualities and their composition. To confirm reputation in relation to a personal brand, especially for people or companies that have not yet worked with the person, recommendations are used either verbally or in writing, also publicly available (e.g., added in social networks like LinkedIn or on the person's website). If the reputation is built on the Internet, then one should keep in mind the speed at which information is transmitted through this channel of communication. Regardless of the number of positive reviews, even a single bad opinion about a person, but accompanied by his or her name, can quickly undermine previous efforts (Olczak, Sobczyk, 2010).
3. Gaining "customers" - is based on building a belief in the need to work with a person, culminating in the establishment of cooperation. Getting to this stage of the branding process does not absolve reputation building, as it is necessary to maintain trust once gained.

More than one person can work for the success of a personal brand. A prerequisite for success is that the brand image is uniquely identified with a particular person. This is related to the fact that it is necessary to create a strong image that gives a sense of naturalness in perception, resulting from the image holder's own competence and skills (Kysztyмова, 2013). Intensification of competition among personal brand varies and depends on the industry. It should be noted that a personal brand not only competes within personal brands, but also fights for position with large brands belonging to the so-called chains. Establishing yourself in the market is dictated, first of all, by the fact that you should demonstrate a professional approach and passion for your profession. A personal brand with its whole self should promote the approach associated with this activity.

Increasingly, both representatives of the younger generation and older Internet users are using new information and communication technologies to build their own brands. The development of social media is causing their users to take an increased interest in the possibilities of their use in various fields of activity. Conscious users are effectively using social media to build their own brands. Relatively few scientific articles have been written on the use of social media in the area of personal brand building. This topic is still under-researched and definitely deserves more scientific attention from modern researchers.

Social media branding is a relatively new issue. However, its foundations appeared much earlier, with the emergence of tribal marketing theory, built on the creation, or even subcultures, around selected brands. In social media, a community can be described as "a collective of Internet users who actively use this communication platform to exchange information and messages related to their common interests, beliefs or attitudes" (Smektala, 2006). A virtual brand community, on the other hand, is a collection of existing or potential brand customers who share interests, beliefs or life choices that are reflected in their purchasing decisions. These communities can be described as an online variety of brand-centered communities, whose members interact with the brand and exchange information with each other (Woisetschläger, Hartleb, Blut, 2011).

Delving into the social networks currently in operation in terms of how they can be used for personal branding, Instagram belongs to the group of add-on sites. Like YouTube and Pinterest, it allows you to post graphic or video materials and showcase your interests. The selection of well-thought-out graphic and video materials can strengthen or weaken the personal brand built in other media. At the same time, they are good tools for presenting niche interests or photography and filmmaking skills (Niedźwiedziński, Klepacz, Szymańska, 2016).

In considering a properly developed personal branding campaign on social media - especially on the Instagram platform, it is important to discuss the phenomenon of "storytelling". This term was formulated by Henry Jenkins in 2003. It encompasses a new way of telling stories, using different types of media, methods and points of view. It is a form that focuses on the message contained in multiple channels of communication. Different but complementary factors are present, ultimately outlining an elaborate message composed of several interacting elements. The content can change, mainly through the inspiration of the audience's story. Storytelling constitutes for it is a living communication organism that relies primarily on the transmission of content that evokes interaction. Influencing the development of a story brings users together, who identify with the characters in the story. This is crucial, as it allows the viewer to turn into a brand promoter (Radecka, 2023).

3. Instagram - analysis and research findings

The Digital Poland 2023 report shows that the number of Internet users increased by almost 3 million people, translating into an 8.5% increase in the Internet population. The number of active web users exceeded 36.68 million people, or 88.4% of our country's population. Poland has 27.50 million social media users, equivalent to 66.3% of the total population. As for the most popular social media, one of the growing platforms is Instagram. This tool is currently used by 10.4 million users in our country. 57.8% of this population are women, and 42.2% are men (Figure 1). Interestingly, every second user of the platform is a woman in

the 25-34 age range (DIGITAL 2023 report <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview>).

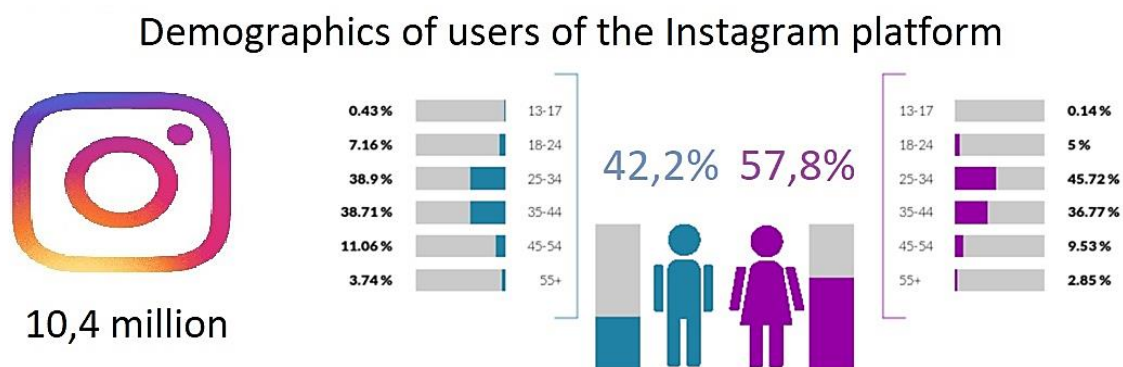


Figure 1. Percentage breakdown of Instagram users.

Source: Own study based on DIGITAL Report (<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview>).

Stories and reels continue to be popular. Reels are not only a separate format anymore, but all videos posted on the app. In addition, InstaStories through the Instagram algorithm are prioritized. In terms of marketing potential, the reach of Instagram ads in Poland at the beginning of the year was 25.1 percent of the total population. Unfortunately, the potential reach of Instagram ads in the country decreased by 300,000 (2.8 percent) between 2022 and 2023. (DIGITAL 2023 report <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview>).

Among those who professionally use the Instagram platform to build a personal brand are fitness trainer Ewa Chodakowska and married couple Anna and Robert Lewandowski and Veronica Sowa. These individuals tend to use several social media, as well as other online solutions, to achieve a synergistic effect and maintain ongoing contact with their audiences (ddob ranking <https://ddob.com/ranking/instagram>).

Presented below are partial results of our own research, conducted in the form of electronic free-form interviews sent to a group of people creating their accounts on the Instagram platform. The research targeted the most popular digital content creators. The interview questionnaire was conducted in September 2023 on a group of 30 of the most popular w Instagramers. An analysis of these accounts was also carried out based on observations made from May to September 2023. The aim of the measures taken was, firstly, to see how these individuals build their accounts and thus create their personal brand, and secondly, whether these individuals succeed in gaining new fallers who stay with them for longer.

In addition, the research material used for the analysis was participant observation by creating a personal account on Instagram. Data was collected for 3 years of observation starting in 2019. During this time, the profile featured publications about the presentation of prepared meals, since according to a 2019 Sotrender report, food was the most popular topic on this platform (Report <http://s3trends.s3.amazonaws.com/poland/facebook/202210/202210>).

The results of the free interviews are as follows. The response to the question regarding the strategy design process among the survey respondents was unanimous. This process should be preceded by answering several important questions. All participants began by thinking about what information about themselves they want, and especially for the comfort of their families, to present on their Instagram. Most began by presenting their own interests or earlier steps in their professional development. Sometimes posts from daily life were added showing, for example, photos with friends or other more spontaneous behavior. As the interviewees confessed, this was a deliberate act to build an emotional bond with the audience by showing that they were ordinary people "just like us". Secondly, most of them analyzed whether to restrict users' access to the account, thus creating a specific audience. Instagram, like other social networks, allows you to decide each time whether to make a given content public, visible only to a circle of friends. Conscious personal branding will therefore involve determining the reach of the content presented.

Another question asked about the combination of professional and private life and in what proportion the published content deals with these spheres. Here respondents' answers were already divided. As many as 60 percent of the users analyzed do not combine private content with the mainstream account. The justification for this was the comfort and safety of loved ones. Thirty percent of the respondents consider the best practice to be the ratio of 35% private content - mainly transmitted in the form of Stories (videos, or photos that disappear 24 hours after being added) to 65% content related to professional life. Ten percent of the surveyed group uses a different strategy by showing alternating professional and private content. Of particular note in this case is the account of fashion stylist Ms. Karolina D., whose form of fashion content has become highly controversial, according to news portals. Ms. Karolina breaks fashion standards so far considered appropriate in our country. Here, fashion content intertwines with private content to create a coherent image of a person followed by 111,000 users. This shows that users need content that they can identify with and is close to them.

The fourth question was partly related to the previous one and concerned who can share information from our profile and whether it will be possible to tag a given user in friends' posts. Here the respondents unanimously stressed that each sharing is a form of building reach and very often results in the growth of the account by gaining new observers. Noteworthy here is Ms. Sylwia Blach digital creator, whose very extensive content addresses, among other things, the problem of accessibility for people with disabilities. Shares of her posts have a significant impact on public awareness.

Target groups, or audiences, were also asked. Most people said that the beginnings were very difficult in this matter, mainly due to heckling. Fortunately, clearly defined rules regarding acceptable and unacceptable behavior allowed the account's audience to self-select.

A great deal of data was obtained through participatory observation, which involved creating one's own account and adding content related to the presentation of prepared meals. The analysis of the obtained results made it possible to create guidelines for the creation and dynamic development of an account on the Instagram platform.

It turned out that creating content within the account is very engaging especially if you want to build a large enough audience. It is necessary to properly prepare for these activities, namely to analyze similar accounts. Not to duplicate the method of message and content, but to avoid mistakes. It is necessary to fill in all fields correctly and if we are active in BIO include a link to our site. Posts should be aesthetically pleasing and preferably have their own aesthetics. Currently, the trend on Instagram is reels, or short videos. Therefore, we had to switch from initially adding photographs to short videos depicting, for example, the preparation of photographed meals. A lot of activity is very important. On average, you should add at least two posts per week, because the lack of such activity makes our account no longer attractive. In the case of a running account, when this activity decreased, a decrease in the number of likes under the added photo/roll was observed after a long break. The declines were significant and accounted for about 20% fewer users when a post was added after more than two weeks since the last publication. It is also important to engage observers, which can be achieved through properly prepared Storytelling. Announcing posts related to a particular raw material in a starring role caused users to wait for more variations of its use. This gave a higher volume for each post in the series.

The account that managed to build accumulated 3,200 followers in its first year of operation. Compared to the leading Instagram users, this is quite a small audience. Even so, it still managed to attract two food companies to collaborate on content creation.

Over the years in which the study was conducted, the trends and algorithm of the Instagram platform changed. In order to efficiently build your account and create your personal brand, you need to keep this variability in mind.

4. Summary

Personal branding is one of the important elements in the practice and systematically developing theory of marketing. The main purpose of the article was to present the possibilities of creating a personal brand image in social media. User accounts with a large audience were analyzed. The owners of these accounts provided answers during casual interviews.

The research shows that it is important to know who the potential consumer is. The entire process of building a personal brand and its communication begins and ends with the user in mind. It is important to be aware of the fact that not everyone may like a personal brand.

Narrow specialties of business usually have a few hundred people each, which is quite enough to operate efficiently online.

In times of intense development of the Internet and social media, where information about a person is sought by potential employers, colleagues, but especially business partners, it is necessary to create a credible and engaged personal brand. Social media allows a brand to establish a real connection with its target consumers. Nowadays, noticing and, above all, valuing the relationship with fans is becoming a very important factor in building a strong brand image.

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