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(IJLGC)**[www.ijlgc.com](http://www.ijlgc.com)**THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL BRANDING ON  
INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS: A REVIEW**William Chau Chi Kee<sup>1</sup>, Nabsiah Adul Wahid<sup>2\*</sup>, Tan Cheng Ling<sup>3</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> Graduate School of Business, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia  
Email: mindact@netvigator.com
- <sup>2</sup> Graduate School of Business, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia  
Email: nabsiah@usm.my
- <sup>3</sup> Graduate School of Business, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia  
Email: tanchengling@usm.my
- \* Corresponding Author

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**Abstract:**

Facing stiff competition from counterparts and alternative entertainment choice in the entertainment market, individual performing artists try hard to get their name and performance noticed by the audience and investors through personal branding. However, it will be shown that the effects and success of personal branding are contingent on whether the performing artists are volitionally involved in the process. It will then propose how to enhance the performing artists in volition for personal branding.

**Keywords:**

Personal Branding, Film Industry, Performing Artists, Agency, Volition, Career, Employability.

**Introduction**

When planning for a visit to a cinema or a theatre for watching a film or opera, apart from considering the title and content, we may also examine who are the producer and director. Ultimately, we will look into who are the performing artists and how well they have performed in the past and expect their similarly good performance in the current film or show. All our concern and checking for their past performance has actually imposed a need for the performing artists to develop and protect their personal branding. Following Tom Peters

(1997)'s article *the Brand called You*, more and more career-conscious people, researchers and consultants have shown interests and efforts in the personal branding (McNally & Speak 2002; Montoya, 2002; Rein, Kotier, Hamlin & Stoller, 2006; Arruda & Dixson, 2007; Nessmann, 2010). Driven by the economic and career needs, the success of personal branding is reflected in the brand owners' employability, more competitive salaries package, greater self-evaluations, higher self-esteem and self-efficacy (McNally & Speak 2002; Khedher, 2014; Khedher, 2015:20). Due to the potential enormous return in terms of money and fame upon their becoming popular, the performing artists have greater drive in personal branding. In addition, they might however wish to fulfil their internal need for being unique and connected with their significant others, such as the investors and fans. Before exploring the topic, the subject of discussion, i.e. the performing artists, need to be clarified.

### ***Performing Artists***

In this paper, the performing artists refer to the entertainers who performs a dramatic or musical work either on a stage, in a film or a TV show. Syam (2017) describes a rather gloomy picture about the unpredictable and hard life of performing artists. For instance, stiff competition is the norm; work bookings are short-lived; constant hustling for next job forms part of an actor's lifestyle; and having well-established credential cannot guarantee stable jobs for the performing artists in the Hollywood (Syam, 2017) and in Hong Kong (Szeto & Chen, 2013). To secure for more income, they would prowl for jobs in film production, television shows, web series, such as Netflix, Youtube talent shows, theatres, commercials, print modeling, voiceover for tour episodes, organization's corporate or training videos, cruise ship onboard entertainment for guests, theme parks, charity shows, shows in between political propagandas. But anyhow unpredictability of employment is the norm rather than exception for the labour market of performing artists!

Facing such unstable and unpredictable career situation, the performing artists need to adopt a very proactive attitude and behaviors to attract the influential people in the field so as to be known because "Directors, casting directors, and other actors prefer to work with people they already know" (Syam, 2017). Being known is one thing, having a good image in the mind of the players in the field is another because "Unprofessional behavior on set can ruin your chances of being hired again. Word travels fast in the industry." (Syam, 2017). In addition, "since acting is heavily appearance-based" (Syam, 2017) they have to mind and maintain a presentable appearance through makeup, hairstyling and proper wardrobe items for audition. All these are expenses could become a nightmare burden if the performing artists have no stable source of income. Being skillful and talented in performing is a basic requirement for performing artists to remain in the industry. But if they possess the wisdom and techniques in promoting themselves and thus getting more exposure, they may have better goodwill and a higher chance of getting noticed by the film directors, casting directors, producers and investors. All these have in fact come under the sphere of personal branding, which will be discussed in the next section.

### ***Personal Branding Concepts***

Some communication management practitioners have attributed the idea of personal branding to Dale Carnegie's (1936) "How to win friends and influence people". They proclaim that individual workers can be successful in the corporate setting through selfmanagement. Ries and Trout (1980) advocates the use of positioning strategy to advance one's own career.

Shepherd (2005) echoes this idea by stressing the personal branding's contribution for making a person known in the market place.

Erving Goffman's (1959) leads in the idea though indirectly that people are actually like actors performing on a stage in front of others with a view to influencing the latter's perception and reaction. This again focuses on how a person can *act* into elicit *react*, stressing a person's proactive role and position in influencing how other people view and treat him or her favorably.

The direct reference to the term Personal Brand started from Peters (1997). Apart from popularizing the term, the author advocated the people's proactive and responsible role in being "head marketer for the brand called You". It delivers a warning signal that if people do not manage well their brand, others will and they cannot expect the result will be in their favour. This worry is echoed by Labrecque, Markos and Milne (2011), and Marwick and Boyd (2010).

In explaining the definitive idea of personal branding, Lair, Sullivan and Cheney (2005) and Hughes (2007) flatly liken personal branding to development and promotion of product, goods and services.

Ibarra (1999) and Roberts (2005) expand the perspective to emphasizing the power of personal branding in enhancing a person's attractiveness and professional image in terms of character and competence in the perception of the targeted audience.

Gorbatov, Khapova and Lysova's (2018) interdisciplinary systematic review has identified 100 scholarly papers published in journals up to 2018 representing various disciplines, covering marketing, sociology, communication, psychology, organizational behavior, and even accounting. As a result, five attributes of personal branding, namely strategic, positive, promise, person-centric, and artifactual.

The "strategic" characteristic of personal branding means that the personal branding subjects will first have a specific audience or significant others in mind when establishing their personal brand.

The second attribute "positive" refers to the positive intentionality in "establish(ing) favorable impressions" (Lee & Cavanaugh, 2016), be(ing) "appealing" (Omojola, 2008) and "valuable, reliable or desirable" (De la Morena Taboada, 2014) with the targeted audience's desire in mind.

Being the third attribute, the "promise" characteristic is too obvious to be mentioned as a required character for a personal brand to be accepted by the audience of a product, good or service. It points to the delivery of characteristics or benefits promised by the personal brand holder for the targeted audience.

The "person-centric" attribute indicates that the personal branding subject is required to be personally involved through *agency*. It means that the personal brand subjects need to intentionally engage with commitment into the branding process without being forced to do so. And they should have *reflexivity*, that is identifying *differentiated* characteristics before engaging in positioning of their personal brands to the strategic target (Wee and Brooks, 2010).

The artifactual attribute such items of a personal branding subject as their attire, appearance, personalized stationary and name cards Gorbatov, Khapova and Lysova's (2018), narrative (Brooks & Anumudu, 2016; Eagar & Dann, 2016; Pera et al., 2016) and related imagery (van der Land et al., 2016; Holton & Molyneux, 2017), narrated selfies (Eagar & Dann, 2016), LinkedIn photos (van der Land et al., 2016), Instagram photos (Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016), YouTube videos (Chen, 2013), and ePortfolios (Jones & Leverenz, 2017).

After their review, Gorbatov, Khapova and Lysova (2018) has proposed a definition for personal branding as follows:

Personal branding is a strategic process of creating, positioning, and maintaining a positive impression of oneself, based in a unique combination of individual characteristics, which signal a certain promise to the target audience through a differentiated narrative and imagery.

### ***Personal Branding for Performing Artists***

Facing stiff competition from other performing artists and alternative entertainments, such as home TV shows, football matches and satellite programmes, performing artists have no choice but to find ways to gain attention and stand out from the crowd. Under Peters' (1997) alarming advice, individual performing artists should seriously think of creating their personal brand and then proactively engage in personal branding. Simply put, personal brand is how others say about you while personal branding is how to influence others' perception about your personal brand. The personal branding definition developed by Gorbatov, Khapova and Lysova (2018) can be applied to the performing artists in a quite fitting manner. For example, as a normal marketing practice, individual performing artists have been trying to impress their target audience with their positive and unique characteristics. These actions have actually reflected the *strategic and positive* attributes of personal branding.

When the performing artists take the initiative and exert utmost effort in keeping their each and every performance on stage, in films or in TV shows, thus protecting the name and fame in a predictably stable manner, they are in essence keeping their *promise* for good performance.

Regarding the *artifactual* attribute, it is not difficult to find examples of the individual performing artists paying more than ample attention for their artistic outlook and appearance through careful selection and matching of attires, hairstyles, footwear and accessories. It is not uncommon to hear the strategic sponsorship provided by the high-class fashion and apparel producers.

As described in the previous section on Performing Artists, the stiff competition for jobs and domination by directors or producers in the relevant labour market may have reduced their bargaining power. This situation may be worse for those less famous artists and in the union-free performing art market. Some of them might have to take whatever jobs offered to them and still have to accept the absence of guarantee for the next job. Under such circumstance, even when the performing artists are forced to present a personal brand contradictory to their real self or characteristics, they have no alternative but to obey. This will bring about a worrying concern for the *agency* attribute to be displayed or protected in such imbalance of bargaining power between the artists and their bosses or manager-agents.

But a twilight for the individual performing artists' volitional personal branding might have been brought about by the growing presence, convenience of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, whatsapp, signal and etc. As described in Carter (2010), Lady Gaga, a grand singer in America, has been so successful in creating her presence and influence by using "the Internet to build her brand community" (p. 10). Other performing artists are suggested by Carter (2010) to follow Lady Gaga's suit (p.3) in utilizing the social media though the author is unclear about whether the brand messages were posed by Gaga herself or by member of her team (p.10). Although praising the social media's contribution for personal branding, the same author adds that Gaga's own brand characteristics the basic recipe of success (p.2). Furthermore, when giving an account of Lady Gaga's branding journey from her early age, Carter (2010) quoted Lester (2010) as saying that "At age 19 Lady Gaga signed with Def Jam Records but was quickly dropped (p.42-43), possibly because management didn't understand her vision and her audience (Callahan, 2010, p. 92)". This has indicated the personal brand subjects can and should insist what they really like and reject what they don't agree. We would refer this freedom to accept or reject as volition.

### ***Volition of the Performing Artists in Personal Branding***

In order to handle the limited agency situation caused by the "unhealthy" labour market for the performing artists and for the purpose of this study, we suggest adding the volition construct (shown in italic below) into their definition for personal branding:

Personal branding is a *volitionally* and strategic process of creating, positioning, and maintaining a positive impression of oneself, based in a unique combination of individual characteristics, which signal a certain promise to the target audience through a differentiated narrative and imagery.

Our suggested *volition* construct is based its implied concept of being willingly or decidedness. It is therefore to emphasize that the subjects should not be forced by other parties in their personal branding. In fact we are just echoing Gorbato, Khapova and Lysova's (2018) observation that "while human branding, employee branding, fame, and reputation may occur without the subject's volition but personal branding demands the individual's involvement." (p.5).

As defined in the Oxford Advanced American Dictionary, volition is "the power to choose something freely or to make your own decisions". According to Blustein (2006, 2008), work is a platform for the individuals to express their identity through "socially and economically meaningful production activities in the community to which they belong". For the performing artists, the volitional immersion and devotion into their personal branding is believed to be fulfilling their need for expressing their identity too.

Furthermore, the performing artists' will and determination in creating, developing and promoting their personal brand should be driven by the potential or actual benefits as a result of such effort. The relevant benefits of personal branding are discussed in the next section.

### ***Benefits Of Personal Branding for The Performing Artists***

Individual performing artists have to be sure of the benefits for themselves before they are willingly and engaging with commitment in their personal branding process. The possible



benefits of personal branding, according to Gorbatov, Khapova and Lysova's (2018) review, can be classified into individual and organizational aspects (pg.10-11). And the individual benefits can be further split into intrinsic and extrinsic categories. The intrinsic benefits include enhanced self-evaluations (Chen et al., 2004), motivation (Ward & Yates, 2013), greater credibility and influence (Ward & Yates, 2013), getting selfpromotion skills (Edmiston, 2014), developing reflexivity (Khedher, 2015), and reaping self-realization (Gandini, 2016).

The individual extrinsic benefits comprise of brighter professional career, accumulation of social capital either in power or influence (Ward & Yates, 2013; Zinko & Rubin, 2015; Hanusch & Bruns, 2017), heightened visibility (Lee & Cavanaugh, 2016; Jaring & Bäck, 2017), or prestige (Milovanović et al., 2015), connection with the target audience through differentiation (Brems et al., 2016), winning through strategic connection with the target audience in exchange for scarce preferential treatment over other competitors (Parmentier et al., 2013), monetary returns from effective personal branding. (Rose, 1998, Hearn, 2008b:18) and the ability to deal with the challenges of precarious economy (Gehl, 2011).

As for the organizational benefits from the of their employees' personal branding, they can possibly be obtained through sharing tacit knowledge (Vosloban, 2012), more predictable employees' behaviors, spillover effect of the reflected glory of branded individuals and signaling of the employees' organization (Zinko & Rubin, 2015).

### ***Problem Statement***

In view of the aforesaid benefits of the personal branding, it seems to be a logical expectation that the individual performing artists should be more than willing to engage in such process. But if volition is removed from the formula of personal branding, the story might be different. Our perspective is that if the performing artists do not volitionally engage in personal branding, their personal brands in essence do not belong to themselves, thus limiting the brand power. The primary concern of this paper is therefore to explore how volition can affect the commitment of the performing artists in personal branding. As such, the performing artists and the investors / producers of the performing activities cannot ignore this potential problem and then proceed to take remedial actions to motivate and enhance the performing artists' volition in personal branding so as to help reap the full benefits as highlighted earlier on.

### ***Research Questions***

Based on the basic issue identified about the impact of volition on the individual performing artists' personal branding, we have the following research questions for exploration:

1. What are the limiting factors affecting the performing artists' degree of volition in personal branding?
2. How different will be the individual performing artist's personal branding in the presence or absence of volition?
3. How can the performing artists' volition in personal branding be measured?
4. How can the volition of the performing artists in personal branding be encouraged or enhanced?
5. In view of the trend and proven success of using social media in personal branding, how can the individual performing artists reap such benefit if they are not information-technology (IT) savvy?

6. How can the investors / manager-agents in performing art industry be encouraged to help enhance and accept the performing artists' volition in personal branding?

### ***Significance of the Research***

#### ***Academic Significance***

As there is little research particularly for the performing artists, so this study can fill the gap by adding knowledge about the importance of volition on the effectiveness of personal branding.

#### ***Practical Significance***

The study result will inform the practitioners, be they the artists, investors, or the manager agents, about the importance of having the volition, commitment, voluntary efforts and engagement of the performing artists in personal branding. This can act as a motivation for the artists, a catalyst for the mutual cooperation between the artists and their management.

### **Research Methodology**

As the extant literature on individual performing artists' personal branding is few, this study will rely on the individual performing artists' own biographies, websites, facebook, twitter, blogs and other social media; face to face interviews with them; exploratory discussion with the performing art industry leaders and managers as well as the academic of the Academy of Performing Art in Hong Kong.

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