Relationship between number of employed students with number of students that perceive themselves as brands

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Abstract

According to Personal Brand strategist Meredith Liepelt "Your brand is what people think of when they think of you. In some ways, it's a reflection of the values you represent and the talents you can bring to a company (Cote, 2016)". It is a time-consumingprocess, but its role is crucial nowadays. This research paper aims to provide general information on personal branding and the impact that employment has in it. The focus of this study are Albanian studentsand how their engagement in employment policies (work experience, training program, internship) impacts their perception on personal Branding. The research question of this paper is: Is there is a relationship between employment and personal branding perception? To answer the research question, a mixed approach of qualitative and quantitative research was conducted, and questionnaires were distributed to third year Business Administration students (Bachelor Students who study Brand Management). The findings and conclusions of this study indicate that employed students are more oriented towards personal branding, but neither engaged students' nor unengaged ones think that their brand can be communicated online. This study has an innovative value, because there are no studies focusing in the role that employment plays in personal branding perception.

Keywords: Personal Branding, Personality, Personal value, Self-presentation.

Introduction

In many states, governments, in order to deal with the youth unemployment problem, design strategies, approve policies and support contracts between faculties and private enterprises. These engagements decrease the number of unemployment among students, but indirectly these help them knowing themselves and growing as personally and professionally.Branding (in general) is as old as human kind. Johansson and Carlson say; "brands are trademarks that identify the product maker or service provider" (Johansson, 2015). Regarding Montoya and Vandehey, Personal Brand is related to three elements: "1) that is you, designed to convey two vital pieces of information to your target market, who you are as a person and what you specialize in doing, 2) It is a promise and tells prospects what others can expect when they deal with you; 3) a Personal Brand is a relationship that wields influence over prospects and clients" (Peter Montoya, Tim Vandehey, 2009). Keller thinks that: "The right awareness and image can be invaluable in shaping the way people treat you and interpret your words, action and deeds" (Keller, 2008) and only by knowing and

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applying personal branding you can have the right awareness and the right image. Employment experiences play a crucial role in making students perceive themselves as brands because they provide to students the possibility to know themselves, their weaknesses, their strength, set their goals, etc. If they find themselves in one work experience, they can grow up professionally, invest time and energy, and be someone in that field. If that work experience is not what they want to do in their lives, they havetime to look for something else that accomplishes them. It is the area where they begin to communicate themselves and to manage it.The first part of this paper consists of a literature review, which will provide the terminology explanation and some models of developing Personal Branding. It will serve as a starting point for the research and will be followed by a description of the methodology and analyzes of obtained data. At the end, conclusionswill be provided.

Literature Review

Student's employment and Personal Branding are both very actual topics nowadays. All people know the importance of being employed, but not all of them know what personal branding means, the role it plays in everyone's life or how employment impacts it. These are the main reasons, forcing the events. The aim of this research is to make students aware of its role and to analyze if there is a relationship between employment and Personal Branding.

Scholarly article review

A. Employment Policies: Employment in general, represents one of the biggest challenges in Albanian society. The transition from the command economy, to a market economy, affected the labor market, which is changing continuously.On one hand; Albania is characterized by a young population, but on the other hand is characterized by a relatively high unemployment rate, especially for young people. According to the data provided by Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), for 2016, participation in the labor force was "57.5% (1.1 million people), while the participation of the age group 15 to 29 in the labor force, was 45.7%" (Instituti per Politika Publike dhe Mireqeverisje, 2017). This percentage indicates a very low activation of youth in the labor market. The graphic shown below (Figure 1), is based on the World Bank Data and helps to
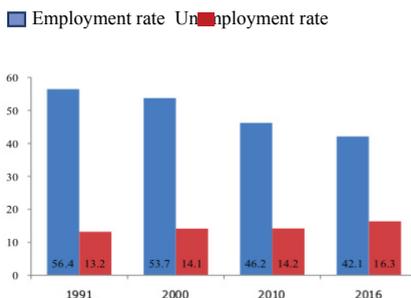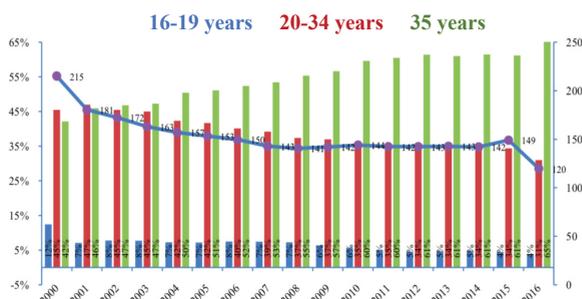

Figure 1. Unemployment and employment rate %

Figure 2. The weight of jobseekers by age group

create a general idea about the general employment and unemployment ratein the last 15 years. While, regarding the unemployment rate, is worth to say that the youth age (group 15 -29 years) unemployment level, in 2015, was at 33.2%, and it reduced to

28.9% in 2016. The other graphic (Figure 2), shows the share of unemployed jobseekers based on age groups. Students, which are on the focus of this research, belong to 20-34 age, and the weight of the jobseekers from this group, has been declining.

The weight of job seekers has declined, while based on the European Commission Study (2007-20015), the number of students registered in the Bachelor Program has increased. They study specifically: Business Administration and Law (28.8 %); Health and Wealth (13.5%); Arts and Humanities (11.4); Social Sciences, Journalism & Information (9.8%); Education (9.1 %); Engineering, Manufacturing & Construction (8.1 %); Information & Communication Technologies (5.9%); Natural Sciences, Mathematics & Statistics (5.7%); Services (4.3%) and Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries' & Veterinary (3.4%)(European Commision, 2016). Seems like, their field of study is not in accordance with what the market is asking for. Regarding to private sector, companies that represent the top 100 employers, belong to: Textiles, Finance and Banking; Call Center; Energy and Private Education, etc. The researcher Hoxha identified three main causes of the youth unemployment in Albania, and they are as follows: "The high economic growth did not contribute enough to reducing unemployment; The target of young people for a university degree and not for vocational education; Employment has been effected by the transition of the economy and its exit from the agricultural and public sector"(Hoxha, 2017).

Based on the necessity of the Albanian social reality, but also on the European Commission recommendation, Albanian government, through the National Employment Service, Ministry of Education Sport and Youth and other actors, has designed and approved employment strategies, policies and training programs, which aim to involve students in practical activities.Someof the main policies to decrease the youth unemployment are concentrating in:

1. **Offering quality vocational education and training for youth and adult,** whose aim is to "is to support a common system of vocational education and training in the Republic of Albania, capable of getting adjusted to the social, economic and technological changes, to labor market needs, as well as ensuring an optimal utilization of the financial, human and infrastructure resources" (Assambly of the Republic of Albania, 2011)

2. **Engage the youth in governmental initiatives and provide public employment:** so, pubic institutions like Public Administration Department, ministries and municipalities offer internships for students. Their aim is not only the internship itself, but to attire potential candidate for the public service as well. This February the Municipality of Tirana launched the pilot project offering students a paid internship for 3-6 months. Student can apply from February - April 2018 and they will be ready to begin on September. They will be assessed based on their GPA, Diploma level (Bachelor, Master), and their Reference Letter. On the other hand, private companies like Vodafone Albania, Deloitte Albania, etc. provide many internships followed by employment possibilities for economic students.

3. **Enforce the collaboration between universities and private sector:** by which many more internships will be offered to students in Bachelor and Masterprograms. They will make the students gain practical skills but can provide job opportunities as well.

Every actor knows that "Early labor market experience is a crucial element for young people, because it helps them to learn the work's ethic, culture and values.Also, it is

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necessary a combination of work and school in order to have a shorter average time gap between finishing education and starting a first job" (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2015).
On the focus of this study are the students of the Faculty of Economics and according to the Deputy Dean of the faculty, the level of employment in economics students is higher compared tothe other faculties. "Employment for those who have completed bachelor's degree is 10-15%, while this figure increases significantly for master's degree, mainly in Professional Master, employing about 65-70% of students" (SCAN TV, 2017).

*B. Personal Branding:*According to the American Marketing Association, "Brand is a unique design, words, symbol, sign or a combination of these, employed in creating an image that identifies a product and differentiates it from its competitors" (AMA, 2018). Branding signs are seen in early Bronze age (2250 – 2000 BCE), where many craftsmen in Egypt, by working in stone and bronze, have used as trademarkshundreds of square seals with animal figures. These seals had one crucial function 'they identify the sender of a certain piece of merchandise(Stanely, 2000).
Everything can be branded, products, services, ideas, events, even places and people. According to Tom Peters, Personal branding: "is the process whereby people and their careers are marked as brands". The Amazon founder Jeff Bezos says: "Your brand is what people say about you when you're not in the room."
Sometimes personal branding is confounded with self-marketing, self- promotion and self-esteem. But it is different from those, becauseself-marketing: "contains several activities practiced by the individuals in order to obtain beneficial employment (Shepard, 2005)", and self-promotion is in the same logic line. While personal branding goes further. It is not related only with employment andit is not related with selling yourself as a package.It is a long process which begins with discovering who you are, investing every day, presenting the true you and managing it daily virtually or not. Self-esteem is the way you perceive yourself, while for personal branding this is not sufficient because you must even communicate yourself in other's eyes.
Everyone is unique and authentic, and Personal Branding is a journey that begins with knowing yourself and ends up with being a successful person. Karen Kang considers it as process: "Personal branding is the act of developing the strategy and actions to guide your brand" (Kang, 2013). So, Personal Brand describes the quintessential you and it is the public perception about you, in which you take control. "It is authentic, which means that it always should reflect your true character, and should be built on your dreams, life purpose, values, uniqueness, genius, specialization, and things what you love doing" (Rampersad, 2009).Personal branding belongs to everyone. Dolak, states: "The issue is not whether you have a brand, but how your brand is managed" (Dolak, 2008). It is no fair to see it connected only with very important people. Who you are, what you do, what you say, how you present yourself, your gestures, personality, etc., are elements which communicate your brand and help others to perceive us.
There exist some models, based on which you can build your personal branding and sometimes they overlap with one another. Hartman emphasizes a five-step process that starts up with discovering your personal profile and ends up with maintaining your created brand. Below shows this process step by step.

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Figure 3. Hartman's model(Kang, 2013)

The second model is designed by Rumpersad. It starts by defining and formulating your personal ambition or determining who you are at your core authentic self. This process emphasizes elements such as defining dreams, vision, mission, values, key roles, identity, self-knowledge, and self-awareness. The second step is defining and formulating your personal brand, or making SWOT, defining objectives, logo, and life story. Formulating your personal scorecard and implementing your brandare the final steps. Definition of measures to evaluate your personal performance, definition of personal targets and improvement action, belong to personal balanced scorecard, while you implement your brand by planning, acting, deploying and changing, (Figure 2).These two models are combined, in order to have a simpler model, and the third model is shown in Figure 3. Question of the questionnaire are organized according to the last model.

The third model consists of three elements: knowing yourself, developing your brand and communicating it. This is an enclosed cycle because after exposing yourself to others, their feedback guides you to reflect and update yourselves. By this procedure you maintain your Personal Brand continuously. Firstly, you need to know and
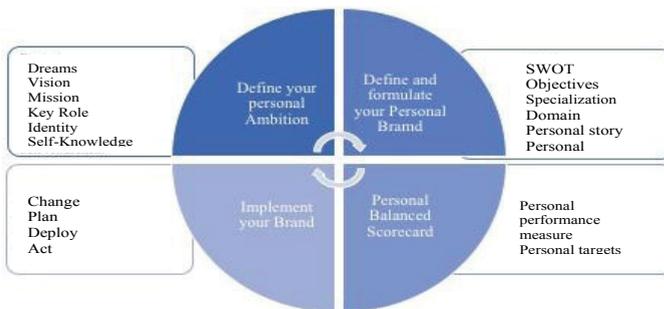

Figure 4. Rumpersad's model(Humbert, 2009)

Figure 5. Combined model of Personal Brand

define yourself, determine who you are, what makes you great, what separates you from your peers. So, understanding your personality, values, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, talents, helps you understand your authenticity. After this first step, it is very important to plan your goals, objectives, and to project yourself in the future terms. At the end, you think about how to communicate your brand, who your target-group's members are and in front of whom you want to present your brand. Youinteract with others and Personal Branding is the way others see you, but you can manage their perception by exposing it properly into other eyes or minds.

You present yourself by communicating verbally or nonverbally, by your CV, your marks, your performance, even by the using social networks tools. Maybe you have not googled your name, but managing your image online is crucial as well. Facebook, Tweeter, Instagram, google +, research gate, LinkedIn, etc. are elements by which you present yourself. This paper is concentrated in the fact of how employment

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impact personal branding, but as mentioned above, even personal branding impacts employment. This is a symbiotic relationship.

C. Relationship between employment and personal Branding: The world where you live, requires you to be aware of the way youpresent yourselves to others. Even in a spontaneous and unintentional way, you develop a personal brand that defines you in front of a target group. Personal branding helps you to manage your image, by presenting a real person in front of your parents, friends, professors, colleagues or even employers.This section of the paper will explain the impact of personal branding in employment and vice versa.

The first step of getting employed is to apply for a position by sending a CV and a cover letter. These are two elements by which you are presenting your personal brand and creating an impression in recruiter's eyes. Despite these elements, there are other important elements of personal branding which helps you being employed, such as: knowing your values, goals, vision mission talents, and comparing those with the company you are applying to, or the candidates it is asking for. If they fit, is advised to apply, if not, the probability of being rejected is high. These are also the elements that will keep you in a company for long. "Your brand must match the requirements in the company's job posting, as well as the company values that you find on their website" (Paterson, 2016).

After application, personal branding is emphasized once again. Before a job interview, "vetting" is a very important process, which is conducted by the Human Resources Department. It is related to the fact that your name is googled, and your online brand is assessed. If your profile fits with the company, you will continue with the interview, if not your, your application ends there.By knowing the importance of personal branding, you will be the first googling your name and managing your online image. Personal branding will help you to find something to be the first in, to invest and differentiate from other applicants, to present your expertise and personality. Your employers will also want to maintain and promote you, if youhave professional goals, attempt to accomplish those, invest continuously in your professional skills, etc., because they want to have on their board professionals and trusted people in whom they believe.

On the other hand, by having work experience, you will have an environment whereto expose your brand. A workplace helps you to know yourself, your skills, the way you perform, the way you communicate with others, and make you aware of who you are. In January 2011, Bute Coaching, a London-based professional coaching firm, conducted a study and "revealed that 45 percent of people don't even think about their own personal brand" (Schawbel, 2016). You can become someone in your company only by knowing your unique value,and connecting it with your company's overall mission, but in many cases, you can know your professional values only in a workplace. Also, as you work, you can have the feedback of manager and coworkers. In the Bute study, "43 percent of people didn't know, or were not sure, what others thought about them" (Schawbel, 2016). In a workplace you can understand how colleagues perceive you, bytheir messages, or their behavior to you but these are based on the way you communicate or behave to them. So, the workplace helps you define who you are professionally, personally and how you communicate yourself. If you don't perform,

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as you or others want you to perform, then you know that your skills are in another are area and you must develop yourself as a brand in something else.

Methodology

This methodical question will test the theory that Employment impacts Personal Branding. This research is based on primary and secondary resources.

Research questions: Is there a relationship between the number of employed students with the number of those students that perceive themselves as brands?

Null and research hypothesis:

Null Hypothesis (H_0):   There is no statistical relationship between the number of employed students and the number of students that perceive themselves as brands. The researcher rejects the null-hypothesis in favor of research hypothesis.

*Research Hypothesis(H_1):*There is a statistical relationship between the number of employment students and thenumber of students that perceive themselves as brands.

Population, sample, unit of analysis:

*The target population is:*third year students at Business Administration, Bachelor program, who have chosen Brand Management class. In total, the population is 824 students.

Table 1. Population, Sampling

	Total	**Academic Year 2015-2016**	**Academic Year 2016-2017**
Population	824 students	371 students	453 students
Population in percentage	100%	45%	55%
Slovin formula	n= 824 / (1 + 824 x 0.05 ^{2})		
Sample	269 students	45/100 x269 =121st	55/100x 269=148st

Table 1. Population, Sampling

Sample is: 269 students. Table below informs about the sample and the population as well. Sample is defined using Slovin formula and students were chosen randomly. The sample provides a 95% confidence level, and a 5% margin of error. The reasonwhy is chosen this sample is because: firstly, these students study marketing and brand lessons and they are able to give answer to question, secondly, they will have more benefits by personal brand, because they are in the age of applying for jobs, knowing themselves, creating their personal brand and communicating it. The necessary data was collected fromJanuary to March 2016 and from January to March 2017.*Unit of analysis is:* students (at Business Administration, Bachelor program, who have chosen Brand Management class).

Variables:

Independent Variable: Employed Students (Engaged in work experience, internship, trainings…)

Dependent Variable: Perception of Brand

Operationalization of variables: it is the process of strictly defining variables into measurable factors. In this case is measured the number of employed students, and the number of students that perceive themselves as brands. In the category of employed students, are included students who are engaged in internships or in

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training programs as well. They are quantifiable as they are represented by numbers.
Bivariate statistics: In this research paper are considered two variablesanalyzed at the same time, so there is bivariate statistic. It deals with cause or relationship between number of employments students and number of those students who perceive themselves as brands. Both variables consist of quantitative data and those are continuing variables, not categorical ones. Both variables are ratio, as 0 is included as well.

Sample survey: The instrument used to collect data is a questionnaire referring to Personal Brand Week by Pace University (Paul), Personal Branding Questionnaire by ManolisZografakis (Zografakis), Personal Branding Questionnaire by Mitch Joel (Joel) and model proposed by Rampersad in his book. The questionnaire is composed by three main groups of questions. Each group aimsto complete each step at combinedpersonal brand model.

Validity violations: In this paper, is considered the external validity, because results cannot be generalized, and they cannot be the same if the research will be conducted somewhere else.

Statistical limitation: Personal Branding is a qualitative term and translated in some quantitative terms, by questions and number, may impact the reliability of the study. Most of the answers were self-reported and sincerity of the respondents impacts the research as well.

Findings

As the number of Employed/engaged students is increasing, (because of policies implemented), the number of students that perceive themselves as brands is increasing too. This is explained by the fact that by having an environment where students can present themselves professionally, they become personal branding aware. The graphics shows this fact. Also employed/engaged students know themselves better than unemployed students. So, most of employed students know themselves at level 4-7 (intermediate level) or 8-10 (very well), whilemore unemployed students know themselves at level 0-3. Interactivity with coworker's communication, work performance, etc. make them know themselves better in personal or professional aspect.

Referring to the question: "how often you google your name, it is not seen a difference between employed or unemployed students. Both of them are not aware of communicating their brand online despite the fact that all students, 269 in total, have social media accounts.
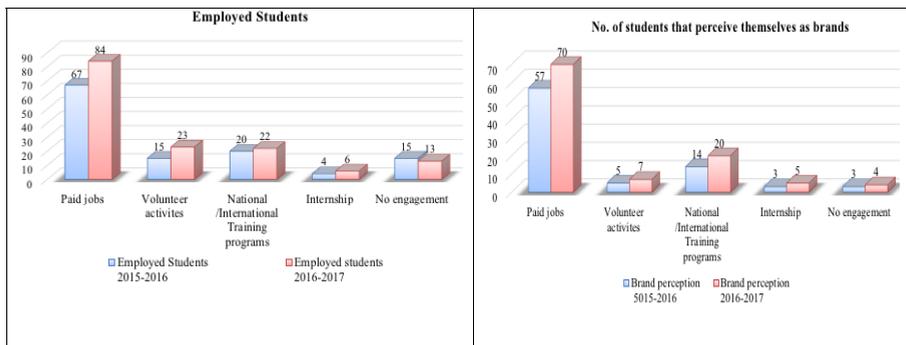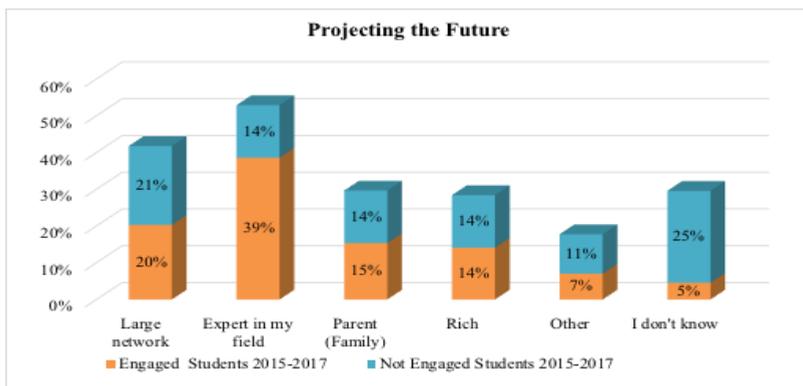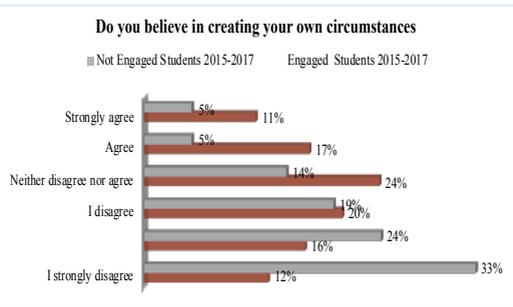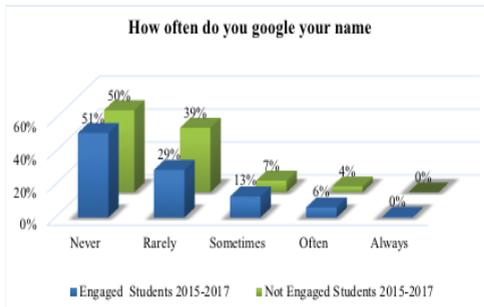
Questioned if they believe in creating their own circumstances, as it is illustrated in the graphic below, most of the employed students have chosen: *neither disagree nor agree*, *agree* and *strongly agree*. On the other hand, most of the unemployed students have chosen *stronglydisagree*, or *disagree*. It is explained by the fact that employed students, know where they are, where they want to go and what to do. Work experience, internship, etc. is a good starting point in thinking like this, while
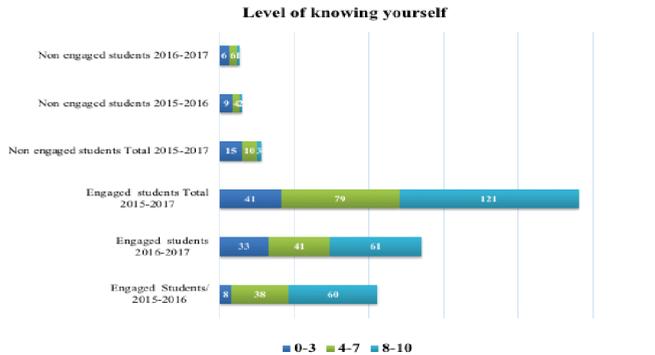
unemployed students don't believe they can create their circumstances, because they don't even know what they are able to do.

The question, "Do you believe in creating your own circumstances" and the question, "Where do you see yourself 10 years from now" are related with student's ability to have goals visions, plans and to project their brands in future terms. Usually, in order to establish or latter to manage your brand is advised to have a written plan because

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psychologically you will concentrate in realizing it. It is just like a self-fulfilling prophecy that directly or not, causes itself to become true. Again, most of the engaged students, (39 %) project themselves as *Expert in their fields*, while most of unengaged students 25% said they don't know.

Conclusions

Research Hypothesis is approved. There is a relation between the number of employed students and the number of students that perceive themselves as brands. Employed students know better themselves, believe more in creating their own circumstances and in the future project themselves as expert in their fields. Unengaged students said they know less themselves, most of those don't believe in creating their circumstances and the don't know where they see themselves 10 years from now. Related to the communication of the brand online, neither engaged students, nor unengaged where aware of it, even if all of them had social accounts in Facebook, google +, Instagram. Employment policies have decreased the level of student employments but have helped them to perceive themselves as brands as well.

Appendix: Personal Branding Questionnaire

You have a unique story and it makes your authentic. Concentrate on things that make you unique and capitalize on them. Your credential and experience got you into your current role, but your character and story are what will compel people to follow you.

1.   Birthplace   ………………………
2.   Gender   M   F
3.   Choose one answer form the alternative listed below.

I graduated from high school with …………………... average grade

a)   5-6.5
b)   6.5-7.5
c)   7.5-8.5
d)   8.5-9.5
e)   9.5-10

4.   Your life experience you want to mention (actual or past):
a)   Work (Paid Job)
b)   Volunteer Activities
c)   National / International Training Program
d)   Internship
e)   No engagement

5.   How many awards have you won?
a.   0-1
a)   2-3
b)   4-more

6.   At what level you think you know yourself?
a)   0-3
b)   4-7
c)   8-10

7.   Do you think you have a personal brand?   a) Yes   b) No
8.   Where do you have a social media account?

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a)   Facebook
b)   Google +
c)   Twitter
d)   Instagram
e)   Pinterest
f)   Other
9.   How often do you google your name?
a)   Never
b)   Rarely
c)   Sometimes
d)   Often
e)   Always
10.   Where do you see yourself 10 years from now? Choose one answer you value more.

<center>With a large network</center>

<center>Expert in my field</center>

<center>A parent, with my own family</center>

<center>Rich</center>

<center>Other</center>

<center>I don't know</center>

11.   At what level do you agree with the expression: "I believe in creating your own circumstances"?
a)   I strongly disagree
b)   I disagree
c)   Neither disagree nor agree
d)   Agree
e)   Strongly agree

<center>"Life's battles don't always go</center>
<center>To the stronger or faster man,</center>
<center>But soon or late the man who wins</center>
<center>Is the man who thinks he can. (Hill, 2000)"</center>

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