BRANDING MILLENNIALS: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS UTILIZING HIRING PROFESSIONALS AND POPULAR PRESS BOOKS

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines personal branding for today’s job market with particular focus on the Millennial Generation. Millennials are individuals born after 1980. To accomplish this study, a thematic analysis of popular press books, utilizing independent coders to code the most influential books on the subject of personal branding, and personal interviews with hiring professionals were conducted. Eight principle themes regarding personal branding and the hiring process emerged from the data: definitions of personal branding; benefits of personal branding; elements of personal branding; discovering one’s personal brand; developing one’s personal brand; branding online (online dos, online don’ts, and online branding management); in-person branding; and in print branding. The themes were combined to produce a personal branding model entitled The Personal Branding Blueprint: A Guide for the Millennial Job Seeker, to be utilized to teach millennials effective branding techniques needed to achieve gainful employment. Suggestions on how practitioners can best use this data and how it compares to other empirical findings regarding millennials, job preparation, and personal branding are examined. Further recommendations and directions for scholarship are presented.

Keywords: thematic analysis, millennials, job preparation, personal branding, popular press
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CHAPTER ONE

Companies earmark billions of dollars each year to distinctively brand their goods and services to potential customers (Edwards, 2013). The American Marketing Association (AMA, 2014) defines a brand as a “name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers” (Dictionary, para. 115). These branding campaigns aim to convince prospective customers that a specific company’s products and services provide the best solutions to their specific needs. Similar to companies branding their goods and services to potential customers, personal branding is the concept of individuals marketing themselves as brands that allow for marketing techniques (Mather, 2008; Morgan, 2011; Rampersad, 2008; Trinchero, 2009; Vitberg, 2010). In today’s job market, the concept of personal branding for better career opportunities is essentially inescapable.

Personal branding can be especially challenging for the Millennial Generation currently entering the workforce, to include those already employed but seeking upward mobility opportunities in the management arena. For example, headlines such as “The Top Five Interview Mistakes Millennials Make” (Goudreau, 2012), “Why Millennials Have a Tough Time Landing Jobs” (Holland, 2014), and “Millennials Now Bringing Their Parents Along On Job Interviews” (Berman, 2013), are making it difficult for the Millennial Generation of workers to brand themselves effectively (Behrens, 2009; Berman, 2013; Goudreau, 2012; Holland, 2014). The millennial workforce includes those individuals born after 1980 who are either entering or currently working in the job market (Behrens, 2009; Hulett, 2006). Although millennials offer talents and expertise that past generations lack, research suggests that millennials suffer from poor communication skills, need constant supervision, lack loyalty, and can be overly casual,
immature, and apathetic in the workplace (Behrens, 2009; Hulett, 2006; Palmiotto, 2012; Smith, 2012). Considering these additional challenges millennials face, the overall brand management for this generation needs to be thoughtfully recalibrated to better prepare them for the workplace.

Whether corporations seek to hire millennials or attempt to avoid them altogether, the need to engage millennials is inevitable, especially as millions of Baby Boomers, those born between 1946–1957, are retiring each year (Behrens, 2009). With these generations colliding in the workforce, researchers have ventured to understand the effects of this imminent situation with particular focus on millennials (Behrens, 2009; Hartman & McCambridge, 2011; Holland, 2014; Hulett, 2006; Palmiotto, 2012; Richardson, 2009). As such, various researchers have examined the psyche, wants, attitudes, and needs of recent millennial college graduates to assist with better understanding the current phenomena (Association of American Colleges and Universities [AAC&U], 2007; Bauleke & Herrmann, 2010; Hanneman & Gardner, 2010; Harris, 2010; Hulett, 2006; Palmiotto, 2012; Smith, 2012), while others have focused on the lack of preparation students are receiving from higher education compared to what employers are seeking (AAC&U, 2007; Bushnell, 2012; Hanneman & Gardner, 2010; Richardson, 2009; Vitberg, 2010). Research has also provided guidance for college graduates on topics ranging from branding, résumés, and networking, to cover letters and social media presence (Akpan & Notar, 2012; Brown, 2009; Friedman, 2010; Haseltine, 2012; Mather, 2008; Morgan, 2011; Rampersad, 2008; Trinchero, 2009; Vitberg, 2010; Walton, 2009). However, no overarching study has offered college graduates concrete steps for personal branding regarding all of these topics to effectively find gainful employment.

In today’s competitive hiring climate, a firm understanding of personal branding based on employer needs and presented in a way that resonates with the Millennial Generation is
immeasurably fitting. As formerly noted, research has focused on various concepts surrounding personal branding as it applies to the Millennial Generation and employment, but no study has yielded an all-encompassing personal branding model designed for college graduates that can potentially bridge the gap between the working world and higher education by providing clear branding guidelines that millennials necessitate to meet employer needs.

Chapter One provides a brief overview of the study, problem/opportunity statement, purpose statement, research questions, theoretical perspectives, conceptual framework, researcher’s assumptions and biases, significance of the study, delimitations and limitations, definitions of terms, and a general overview of the research design.

**Background**

In the late 1990’s, the first millennials began entering college, and the differences between this generation and past generations began to emerge (Holliday & Li, 2004; McGlynn, 2005; Pardue & Morgan, 2008). McGlynn (2005) found that millennial students learned differently than former generations of students. McGlynn’s research focused on teaching millennials how to become effective learners and assisting them with critical-thinking skills. In addition, the research suggested that teachers should implement technology to enhance learning and that new teaching and learning strategies must be created for the Millennial Generation.

Holliday and Li (2004) also researched differences in Millennial Generation learning techniques and found that millennials turn to the Internet rather than the library as their primary information research portal, explaining how this phenomenon differed from past learning models. Pardue and Morgan (2008), likewise, found that millennials were technologically competent and group oriented; however, their partiality for electronics, need for immediate feedback, and ability to multitask often frustrated their professors. In effect, Pardue and Morgan
concluded that professors should develop strong partnerships with millennial students to bridge the generational gap, which in turn, will encourage mutual understanding, personal growth, and academic success.

As issues continued to arise from the generational gap between millennials and their professors (Holliday & Li, 2004; McGlynn, 2005; Pardue & Morgan, 2008), other research surfaced as millennials moved into the workplace (Bell, 2013; Kauri, 2013, Meiling, 2014). Kauri (2013) found that the negative reputation that millennials receive in the media and in academic research is not entirely unwarranted, but employers must find ways to overcome the challenges and engage millennial employees. Kauri’s work concluded that millennials crave feedback, blend their personal and professional lives, and prefer project-based work to monotonous routines.

Research has identified qualities that have proved problematic for the Millennial Generation, both in the workforce and in the classroom. Researchers found that millennials have high expectations, are self-gratifying, possess a sense of entitlement, lack a desirable attention span, are lazy, and seek constant personal attention (Bell, 2013; Meiling, 2014). Consequently, employers are looking for signs of these qualities as they scrutinize potential employees' brands in person, online, and in print.

The negative research and press concerning millennial employees and the attributes linked to this generation have made it challenging for millennials to find employment (Berman, 2013; Hanneman & Gardner, 2010; Hulett, 2006; Meiling, 2014; Ng & Gossett, 2013; Richardson, 2009). Consequently, a branding model for millennial college students that considers their specific needs and their potential employers’ desires is a pertinent and timely addition to the body of knowledge. As such, this branding model, based on popular press books
and interviews with hiring professionals, adds to the body of knowledge on management by teaching students how to market their personal brands; assists management with understanding the strengths and weaknesses of millennial employees; bridges the gap between the academic and professional sectors by utilizing popular press books on branding; and incorporates the Colorado Technical University doctoral program emphasis of new media by focusing on how social media and the Internet shape personal brands.

**Problem Opportunity Statement**

Today’s workforce is in need of qualified, professional, and prepared management employees to fill the vacancies of the retiring Baby Boomer Generation (AAC&U, 2007; Hulett, 2006; Richardson, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2013). However, employers claim that Millennial Generation employees embody characteristics that do not correlate with their needs and wants (AAC&U, 2007; Bell, 2013; Hanneman & Gardner, 2010; Hartman & McCambridge, 2011; Kauri, 2013; Meiling, 2014; Richardson, 2009; Woodbury, Neal, & Addams, 2008). Although some research provides insight into how to best work with millennial employees (Berman, 2013; Hulett, 2006; Palmiotto, 2012; Pardue & Morgan, 2008; Smith, 2012), many researchers conclude that higher education is not doing enough to adequately prepare millennial students for the workplace (Bushnell, 2012; Davidson, 2011; Hanneman & Gardner, 2010; Harris, 2010; Holliiday & Li, 2004; Jacques, 2012; McGlynn, 2005). As such, it is well established that observable problems have arisen since the Millennial Generation entered both school and the workforce; in effect, academics have scrambled to find answers. Conversely, the problem this study addresses is the lack of professionalism and preparedness of recent college graduates regarding personal branding. Inversely, an opportunity exists within academic institutions to improve instruction for students preparing to enter the workplace, thereby offsetting the
foreseeable labor shortage that lies ahead. The magnitude of this problem cannot be overstated as every millennial will be seeking employment, and every organization will be employing millennials. Thus, if the generational gap can be filled, even slightly, with increased preparation for millennials, it can potentially meet the professional workforce demands.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to provide educators with a personal branding model that can better prepare millennials for the workplace. Subsequently, the model accomplishes this goal by combating the stigmas associated with their generation through effective branding. Research shows a divide between the collegiate instruction millennials are receiving regarding branding and job preparation and what employers are looking for in an employee (AAC&U, 2007; Bushnell, 2012; Davidson, 2011; De la Llama et al., 2012; Delaney, 2013; Hanneman & Gardner, 2010; Holliday & Li, 2004; Richardson, 2009; Smith, 2012).

The phenomenon was studied utilizing a thematic analysis of popular press books on personal branding and by interviewing hiring professionals. Popular press books were chosen based on popularity, relevance, and reader reviews. Hiring professionals interviewed included individuals who hire more than ten millennial employees annually. The results filled the gap in the body of knowledge by collecting and summarizing information from branding and hiring professionals in the field, utilizing the data to generate a comprehensive branding model which emphasizes millennials’ needs, and ultimately to be taught in institutions of higher learning.

**Research Questions**

The model is to serve as an instructional guide academic institutions can utilize to better prepare millennials as they make their way into the workforce. The central research question for this project is, “How can millennials better brand themselves for the workplace?” To help
answer this central overarching research question, the researcher posed the following questions:

“What is the most relevant information on personal branding based on popular press books?” and “What branding elements are most important to hiring professionals?”

Theoretical Perspectives/Conceptual Framework

The theoretical perspective utilized to explore personal branding models for millennials is the Management by Objectives (MBO) theory, an early management theory fathered by management theorist P. Drucker, which is based on the idea that individuals require and seek specific objectives and expectations. Odiorne (1965) defined MBO theory as follows:

A process whereby the superior and the subordinate managers of an organization jointly identify its common goals, define each individual’s major areas of responsibility in terms of the results and what is expected of him, and use these measures as a guide for operating the unit and assessing of each of the members. (pp. 55–56)

Although past generations of employees appreciate clear objectives, which MBO theory illustrates, step-by-step instructions for millennials are not only a solid management strategy, but are a necessity (Behrens, 2009; Bushnell, 2012; Davidson, 2011; Holliday & Li, 2004; McGlynn, 2005; Palmiotto, 2012; Pardue & Morgan, 2008).

For instance, many branding models reflect the ideals put forward by MBO theory, but more concrete guidelines are required to assist millennials in understanding the importance of personal branding. No story illustrates this premise better than that of millennial athlete Paraskevi Papahristou, the Greek Olympian who was removed from the 2012 London Olympic Summer Games after posting a disparaging racist remark on her Twitter account (Pilon, 2012). This case validates how millennials misjudge the importance of their online presence and require guidance in forging a positive personal brand.
While Greenwood (1981) noted that, “Peter Drucker put objectives into center stage and made them the core of the structure of a discipline of managing” (p. 230), the work of Drucker and others regarding MBOs led to additional conceptual managerial frameworks, such as the idea of setting SMART goals, an acronym that stands for specific, measurable, assignable, realistic, and time sensitive objectives. The first-known use of the term SMART objectives occurred in a 1981 issue of *Management Review* in which Doran (1981) said, “The establishment of objectives and the development of their respective action plans are the most critical steps in a company’s management process” (p. 35). Today’s millennial students require specific, measurable, assignable, realistic, and time sensitive instructions to manage their personal brands.

The SMART framework will assist with exploring a branding model that can generate clear objectives for millennials, thereby providing a step-by-step approach they can utilize to brand themselves in person, online, and in print. Thus, SMART objectives are another framework utilized in creating the model, in addition to MBO theory.

**Assumptions/Biases**

The researcher has worked in marketing, sales, public relations, and higher education; which has provided extensive experience in branding and marketing, as well as working with, mentoring, training, teaching, and recruiting millennials. Therefore, this research was viewed through a strong lens of personal opinions and individual experience concerning millennials’ strengths and weaknesses regarding personal branding for employment. Thus, particular measures were taken to ensure the data collected during the interviews and from popular press books emerged naturally through an objective thematic analysis, avoiding personal bias.
Significance of the Study

With billions of names searched daily via the World Wide Web, online reputations and brands are significant, if not, vital to professional and personal success (Delaney, 2013; Mather, 2008; Morgan, 2011; Rampersad, 2008; Trinchero, 2009). Although everyone should be mindful of their brand, research denotes that millennials, in particular, have a much greater laissez faire attitude concerning branding, a mindset preventing them from getting hired (Bell, 2013; Goudreau, 2012; Hulett, 2006; Meiling, 2014). This study is significant because it has the ability to bring together large amounts of information regarding personal branding and to summarize, categorize, and present the data in a way that is useable, feasible, and effective. More importantly, however, the results have the potential to change the course of a millennial college graduate’s professional career. If used properly, the branding model assists students to best present themselves professionally to prospective employers and, in effect, to find employment that best suits their career goals. While the information is catered to millennials preparing to graduate college, the model can also be useful for all individuals interested in creating, protecting or improving their personal brand. A congruent, truthful, yet effective personal brand will attract the right candidate to the right job (Mather, 2008; Rampersad, 2008; Trinchero, 2009). This simple premise has the ability to save organizations time and money in the recruiting process, while providing employees with satisfying and fitting employment.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study are, first, a limitation on the amount of popular press books and interviews that were analyzed. Hundreds, if not thousands, of books exist regarding branding. In an effort to avoid analyzing an excessive amount of data, popular press books on personal branding were limited to five books. These books were chosen based on topic
relevance, number of copies sold, and reader reviews on Amazon.com. In addition, seven hiring professionals were interviewed to supplement the data being coded from press books.

**Limitations**

Study limitations include not using peer-reviewed sources but popular press books. Yet again, this was purposeful in its attempt to provide academics and students alike with a snapshot view of what professionals in the field are teaching regarding personal branding. Nevertheless, the research was limited to only what was coded, analyzed, and placed in the model based on the data collected from the books and the interviews.

**Definition of Terms**

Several terms were frequently employed for this study. A definition of each is provided for clarification and reader comprehension as follows:

*Personal Branding:* marketing one’s self and career as a company would brand a product and/or service (Morgan, 2011; Rampersad, 2008; Trinchero, 2009).

*Popular Press:* any material written for the general public, whereas trade material is industry specific and scholarly material is written for academic audiences (Culpan, 1987; Lewis, Schmisseur, Stephens, & Weir, 2006; Miller, 2009).

*Millennials:* individuals born since 1980 in the United States; also referred to as Generation Y, Nexters, and Echo Boomers (Behrens, 2009; Hulett, 2006).


*Thematic Analysis:* a common method of qualitative research that records patterns or themes within data (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012).
Research Design

This study employed a qualitative thematic analysis methodology. Thematic analysis was chosen for two specific reasons. First, the divide between the academic and professional realms regarding branding and job preparation (Bushnell, 2012) will not be merged by additional academic research. It is pivotal to understand what is being taught from professionals in the field. Thus, a thematic analysis of the most popular books on branding was an ideal canvas to study cutting edge concepts in branding. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to pinpoint, code, record, and examine common patterns and themes within data sets, requires major involvement from the researcher, and is an ideal method for large amounts of data (Guest et al., 2012).

In addition to providing a thematic analysis of popular press books on personal branding, interviews with hiring professionals were also performed. These interviews provided additional data to ensure the personal branding model was covering all angles of job preparation. The participant criterion included hiring professionals who hire a minimum of ten millennial college graduates annually. In addition, all hiring professionals worked in different industries within Utah. Creswell, (2009) found that a qualitative method for interviews in some cases requires fewer than 10 participants. Furthermore, since the interviews were in addition to the core data collection method of thematic analysis of the popular press books, only seven interviews were performed. Biases included any personal opinions on the hiring process and all personal sentiments regarding the strengths and limitations of millennials and personal branding.

Summary

This chapter provided a thorough, yet complete, overview of this paper, in an attempt to provide insight, context, and guidance for the study as it unfolds in the chapters to follow.
Chapter Two reviews the current literature regarding branding, millennials, and current hiring practices. Chapter Three defines the research tradition utilized for the study, research design, population and sample of participants, sampling procedures, instrumentation, validity, reliability, data collection, and data analyses. Chapter Four provides participant demographics and the presentation of the data and findings. Chapter Five consists of findings and conclusions, limitations of the study, implications for practice, implications of study, recommendations for future studies, and reflections.
CHAPTER TWO

This chapter explores the current literature on personal branding with specific focus on the following topics; personal branding, branding strategies being taught in higher education, employer’s uses of branding during the hiring process, millennials’ relationship with personal branding, and what colleges and universities can do to improve the branding of the Millennial Generation. Ultimately, millennials do not know how to brand themselves effectively and academics don’t know how to help them. The literature review provided a framework to create the new personal branding model to benefit both employers and millennials.

Personal branding is the knowledge of marketing one’s self and career as a company would brand a product and/or service. Rampersad (2008) observed the following:

In life, as in business, branding is more effective, powerful, and sustainable than marketing and sales and an effective way to eliminate competitors. It’s about influencing others by creating a brand identity that associates certain perceptions and feelings with that identity. (p. 34)

In short, personal branding is the ability to fashion one’s overall identity through communication, personal appearance, and online presence in a way that demonstrates who the individual is and what he or she has to offer, and the need to manage and synchronize the messages being sent in order to maintain a cohesive and trustworthy brand.

Although a surfeit of research has provided insight on branding and job seeking skills for college graduates (Akpan & Notar, 2012; Brown, 2009; Friedman, 2010; Haseltine, 2012; Mather, 2008; Morgan, 2011; Rampersad, 2008; Trinchero, 2009; Vitberg, 2010; Walton, 2009), additional research indicates that educators are not doing enough to train students for the
workplace, particularly in the area of branding (AAC&U, 2007; Bushnell, 2012; Hanneman & Gardner, 2010; Richardson, 2009; Vitberg, 2010).

Research on personal branding has become particularly germane in recent years as millennials have joined the workforce. Millennials, also referred to as Generation Y, Nexters, and Echo Boomers, are those born in the United States since 1980; Generation X refers to those born between 1958–1979; and Baby Boomers include individuals born between 1946–1957 (Behrens, 2009; Hulett, 2006). Research concerning millennials and branding is relevant because this particular generation is known to be overly casual, in need of constant supervision, disloyal, poor communicators, immature, and apathetic (Behrens, 2009; Hulett, 2006; Palmiotto, 2012; Smith, 2012). These characteristics can make for a feeble personal brand unlikely to impress Generation X and Baby Boomer employers.

**Personal Branding**

Morgan (2011) examined personal branding and suggested that effective branding must be conducted in person, online, and in print, and that all messages must be congruent with the personal brand. Morgan (2011) found that, “personal branding speaks to your unique selling points and values within the competitive landscape of all other brands and is often the source of first impressions for decision makers” (p. 13). Morgan concluded that hard skills and analytical contributions must be woven into a personal brand which is demonstrated on résumés and cover letters; that decision makers immediately turn to LinkedIn profiles to see if the brand stays consistent online; and that first impressions in person, including dress, need to meet the standards and brand that was created online and in print (Morgan, 2011). This research along with others introduces the digital age to personal branding and reveals how the Internet has provided both opportunities and risks to managing brands and adds a new dimension of personal branding.
Although Morgan provided great insight into the importance of including these three areas into personal branding, no clear model demonstrating approaches to branding or instructional methods for preparing college students was provided.

There are few models designed specifically for personal branding purposes; however, Rampersad (2008) fashioned a model to assist human performance technology professionals on taking control of their brand and the message it sends. Rampersad (2008) stated, “Your personal brand should be authentic; reflect your true character; and be built on your values, strengths, uniqueness, and genius” (p. 34). The model provided a blueprint that allowed professionals to build an effective personal brand that can be projected in everything they do.

Rampersad (2008) suggested that personal branding entails managing and controlling perceptions. As such, Rampersad’s personal branding model provided four steps to authentic personal branding: (a) define and formulate a personal ambition; (b) define and formulate a personal brand; (c) formulate a personal balanced scorecard; and (d) implement and cultivate the personal ambition, personal brand, and personal balanced scorecard. Rampersad (2008) summarized that, “This holistic personal branding framework will help you build a trusted personal and professional image . . . if you are branded in this organic, authentic, and holistic way, your personal brand will be strong, clear, complete, and valuable to others” (p. 37).

Although Rampersad’s work is one of the few academic models on personal branding, the model does not delve into every aspect of personal branding and merely provides simple steps to begin to form the initial personal brand.

Mather (2008) argued that whether individuals want to admit it or not, everyone is judged on more than technical competence and that appearances matter. Mather found that individuals are always establishing their brands at all times, whether through e-mails, phone messages, or
appearance. Mather recommended how to get the most out of personal branding and provided steps to perfecting one’s brand: image, body language, etiquette, voice, and unique selling points. Mather concluded that personal branding can impact one’s performance in meetings, services, and competency in the marketplace. Mather’s work provided awareness into the communication and appearance aspects of branding but did not offer an all-encompassing model that included steps for online and job-seeking branding.

Vitberg (2010) provided a definition and specific steps to personal branding for accounting professionals. Vitberg found that personal brand equity combines both thought leadership and relationship building. In addition, Vitberg described the process of branding as the intangible value individuals bring in terms of their abilities; the relationships one has built and maintained; and the tangible value one brings in terms of contributions. Vitberg concluded that a personal brand position statement should consist of four key elements: a) identifying a target market by niche or job title; b) choosing attributes that define how one wants to be perceived; c) defining technical skills to highlight; and d) conveying what makes them different. Vitberg’s work is consistent with others and provided some structure for building a personal brand; however, this research again lacked guidance for online branding which is increasing in importance and prevalence.

Other current research, however, focused primarily on one’s digital brand. Trinchero (2009) examined the importance of public relations (PR) professionals to create their own personal brand online. Trinchero concluded that personal branding for PR professionals could help them in job security. This can be achieved by a strong online presence with different social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, and the importance of monitoring information appearing online for potential employers. Trinchero’s work is timely and assists with digital
online branding, however, more specific research on online branding is required to assist millennial college graduates on how to brand in the digital age.

Although research on job-seeking skills and branding exists, little academic research is found that evaluates popular press books on personal branding and job preparation. One exception includes the work of Friedman (2010) who evaluated what skills are transferable from the field of economics to other industries based on the popular press book *What Color Is Your Parachute? 2009: A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers*. Friedman concluded that transferable skills are developed on and off the job; economists’ skill sets are relevant in other fields; additional skills needed for a career change can be illustrated through life experiences; and communicating one’s qualifications in a way that is significant to the organization is crucial. This study bridged academic knowledge with popular press books in a similar field, but further research is needed to identify if the private sectors and academia are seeking similar concepts in personal branding.

Most conclusions in current research regarding personal branding have been formed utilizing an academic focus and lens (Friedman, 2010; Mather, 2008; Morgan, 2011; Rampersad, 2008; Trinchero, 2009; Vitberg, 2010); however, employers are reporting that millennial college graduates are not branding themselves sufficiently to find employment (AAC&U, 2007; Bushnell, 2012; Hanneman & Gardner, 2010; Richardson, 2009; Vitberg, 2010). This demonstrates a solid disconnect between the academic and professional realms and the need to bridge the gap between the two. By creating a personal branding model based on popular press books, it provided students and educators the ability to match what is being taught in the classroom with what employers expect in the working world.
Elements of Branding

Although little research has focused on an overarching personal branding model to assist college graduates, a surfeit of research exists on elements of branding and tips for seeking employment (Akpan & Notar, 2012; Behrens, 2009; Brown, 2009; De la Llama, Trueba, Voges, Barreto, & Park, 2012; Delaney, 2013; Elmore, 2009; Hartman & McCambridge, 2011; Haseltine, 2012; Morgan, 2011; Reicher, 2013; Thilmany, 2013; Trinchero, 2009; Walton, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Many of the conclusions are helpful in crafting a personal brand to get a job, but, again, the findings are only pieces of what is needed for a congruent, conducive, and all-encompassing brand.

Walton (2009) offered information to aid students in finding gainful employment noting that while many recent college graduates are not finding meaningful employment, there are simple things they can do while they wait. For example, instead of waiting for the perfect job to arrive, Walton offered tips for students to at least move in the right direction. As such, Walton advised students to consider internships to boost their chances of securing a higher-paying job, focusing on long-term goals, and possibly considering graduate school to provide a competitive edge over other applicants. Tips for finding employment are imperative; however, students must learn how to properly brand themselves first in order to apply for jobs, internships, and graduate school.

A strong personal brand offers a conducive and consistent message at all times and across different channels that employers can easily decipher during the hiring process. Rampersad (2008) noted, “Your personal brand is the synthesis of all the expectations, image, and perceptions it creates in the minds of others when they see or hear your name” (p. 34). These
perceptions are most readily generated through three overarching channels: in person, online, and in print (Morgan, 2011).

**In-person.** Hartman and McCambridge (2011) examined millennials’ communication styles, characterizing this generation as technologically sophisticated and good multitaskers but deficient in oral, written, and interpersonal communication skills. As such, their research offered educators insight on how to help develop communication styles and how to optimize communication effectiveness stating that, “We believe that educating students about the concepts of style-typing and style-flexing will help them become more effective communicators” (p. 36). Although Hartman and McCambridge demonstrated the importance of teaching students strong communication skills and provided tangible solutions for educators, educators must still do more to help college students entering the workplace to repair the communication disconnect that exists between the generations. Communication skills are an integral part of one’s personal brand and students must develop their communication skills in a way that they can properly portray their brand to others in person.

Similarly, Behren (2009) examined strategies for integrating millennial employees into the workforce, but specifically examined strategies for confronting employees wearing improper or suggestive attire including tattoos. Behren determined that due to the lackadaisical attitude millennials have toward dress in the workplace, companies need to create a rationale as to why suggestive attire and tattoos are not appropriate. This research provided valuable information regarding personal branding on an in person and professional basis. Behren also added to previous research by concluding that millennials “require structure and challenges because they were raised in structured and scheduled environments” (p. 21). The personal branding model aids in providing the step-by-step instruction millennials desire.
Smith (2012) found that face-to-face communication with millennials can be difficult as they are the generation that grew up “living and dying” by their electronics (p. 9). Smith continued stating that millennials have developed a cryptic language of abbreviations and phrases to communicate quickly through their devices. As such, their need to multitask and communicate electronically has created a lack of “social grace and charm” which aggravates Baby Boomers and Generation X’ers (p. 9). Smith’s findings only added to the argument that millennials require increased support to aid in improved communication between the generations.

In-person communication is still at the top of the list for what employers want in potential employees (AAC&U, 2007); however, in order for millennial college graduates to secure a face-to-face interview with a prospective employer, they must first produce a strong digital brand online that matches their communication skills and résumé.

**Online.** Research is clear and consistent in the fact that employers are looking at potential employees’ digital branding to assist in the hiring process (De la Llama, Trueba, Voges, Barreto, & Park, 2012; Delaney, 2013; Elmore, 2009; Morgan, 2011; Reicher, 2013; Thilmany, 2013; Trinchero, 2009; and Wilson, 2013). Reicher (2013) observed, “As our life on the Internet becomes a true parallel to our life in the real world, our Internet background report will become the full ‘background of our being,’ . . . documenting everything” (p. 153). Employers routinely look for red flags online including provocative and inappropriate photos and comments; drug and alcohol use; bad-mouthing previous employers; inconsistencies in résumé qualifications; discriminatory comments about race, gender, and religion; and personality traits (De la Llama, Trueba, Voges, Barreto, & Park, 2012; Delaney, 2013; Elmore, 2009; Morgan, 2011; Reicher, 2013; Thilmany, 2013; Trinchero, 2009; and Wilson, 2013). Although some researchers are
questioning the legality of such practices (Del Riego, Abril, & Levin, 2012; Delaney, 2013; Reicher, 2013), the fact remains that online recruiting is an ever-increasing exercise in the hiring process and an important element of personal branding.

Delaney (2013) analyzed employers’ practices and use of Facebook with potential and current employees. Delaney found that not only do employees use Facebook to find and interview employees, but also organizations are asking applicants to disclose their personal Facebook login information. In addition, Delaney looked at how employers use Facebook and other social media as grounds for termination and observed that, “Simply put, the less information an individual exposes to the public on their social media profile, the more positive effect it will have to their online reputation” (p. 98). However, Delaney determined that no digital presence can be problematic as well and that social media users must balance the risks of their online social life and reputation. These findings expose employers hiring tactics and are crucial in comprehending the importance of forming and maintaining a healthy personal brand online. Still, the research does not provide insight into how to improve one’s digital brand, but only stresses the importance of doing so.

Elmore (2009) investigated not how employers are using social media to recruit candidates, but how job seekers are using Facebook and other mediums to find jobs. According to Elmore, 73% of college students use social networking to find jobs and internships, 43% of students preferred to use social media to find jobs compared with eight percent who first looked at company websites and 13% who preferred a career fair. This conclusion reveals how companies also have the need to provide a strong digital brand to recruit high-quality employees, along with utilizing social media to recruit new employees. Elmore’s work merely reiterates the
influence of one’s digital footprints but provided little information to assist educators and job seekers in their journey toward employment.

Thilmany (2013) focused on social media and how job seekers utilize this technology to not only find jobs, but also to connect with others in the same profession to get answers, gather information, and network. Thilmany’s findings underscored student’s need for a strong digital presence in order to find, be found, and connect with other professionals via social media sites. However, this ability to connect and collaborate comes with concerns according to Thilmany. Thilmany explained that users must harness the collaborative powers of social media while protecting their intellectual property.

Thilmany (2013) also found that groups using LinkedIn to collaborate and share information in their specific fields often include recruiters using the groups to find employees for their organizations. Networking is moving substantially to the digital world, and online branding is increasing in importance and prevalence. Therefore, learning how to network online is an indispensable part of personal branding and is included in the personal branding model.

Similarly, Reicher (2013) also upheld the notion that employers are searching for job applicants through Google, Facebook, and a number of social networks. Reicher provided a definition for “Internet background checks” which refers to the general phenomenon in which employers gather information about prospects during the hiring process (p. 118). Using this definition, Reicher found that some organizations run an Internet background check on individuals by simply searching the candidates through search engines; yet, other online searches on potential employees are much more thorough and utilize third-party agencies to produce a formal online report documenting all websites and evaluating every source.
According to Reicher (2012), “The importance of Internet background reporting can only increase,” with digital lives paralleling real lives more and more closely (p. 153). Again, this emphasizes the need for students, job seekers, and all individuals to create a digital brand that sends the message as close to reality as possible and a message that one wants to be sent. Similarly, Reicher confirmed the significance of digital branding. Still, by providing a model based on popular press books, it bridged the ideas of branding professionals to assist instructors in teaching better digital branding skills.

Wilson (2013) examined ways to recruit the best talent and offered six strategies to U.S. organizations on hiring and retaining talented employees: empowering human resource managers, utilizing social media for recruitment, offering competitive compensation, making corporate culture employee centered, providing career development, and forming an employee advisory board for feedback. Several of these strategies strengthen the argument for a structured branding model for millennials joining the workforce such as the need to utilize social media for recruitment and to provide career development or structure for employees.

Digital branding is undoubtedly the fastest growing and most prevalent aspect of personal branding. One’s digital personal brand can quickly open or shut professional doors and can be painfully unforgiving or tremendously unrealistic. The idea is to create a digital brand that is genuine, impressive, and congruent with all other messages, including the résumé and cover letter.

Print. Although résumé and cover letter preparations are common place in education, there is still a lack of preparation in résumé branding for career preparation overall. Woodbury, Neal, and Addams (2008) found that although educators often teach students how to market goods and services, they are not diligent in teaching them to market themselves. Résumés are
crucial but only as a piece of the puzzle and must match the brand provided in person and online (Rampersad, 2008; Vitberg, 2010).

Akpan and Notar (2012) examined how college students should craft their résumés to differentiate themselves to potential employers. They found that one of the challenges facing college graduates is that of writing a résumé that effectively encapsulates their qualifications and accomplishments for employers. Their research discovered the following factors contributed to the low hiring level of recent college graduates: high unemployment, increased graduation rates, emergence of new curricula, new technologies, and weak résumés. Their findings provided college graduates with a blueprint for a résumé in the modern world, but it stopped there without providing guidance for branding as a whole. Akpan and Notar noted, “In today's highly competitive job marketplace the applicants only have one chance to make a first impression to potential employers because of the economic downturn” (p. 880). Although new elements of branding need to be taught to job-seeking graduates, such as digital branding, the résumé remains an important piece of personal branding.

Haseltine (2012) added to the body of knowledge regarding résumé creation during this period of high unemployment for recent college graduates. Haseltine focused on non-academic, scientific careers, and how résumés serve as critical job search tools. Haseltine revealed a proven strategy for writing an effective résumé and offered step-by-step instructions to students. However, Haseltine’s research provided students information, but it did not provide instruction for educators on how to prepare students while in college and stopped short in other areas of career preparation and branding skills.

Brown (2009) offered an additional step-by-step guide for college students to secure employment upon graduation. Brown focused on preparation for employment through
participation in extracurricular activities including joining a club and other campus groups. Brown’s findings showed that participation with extracurricular groups adds depth and strength to the student’s résumé. In addition, Brown advised college students to obtain knowledge about a company and its clients in preparation for the interview. Again, Brown focused on one aspect of the problem for recent graduates, but it did not provide a comprehensive overview or guide for teachers or students.

In addition to the lack of a comprehensive model for personal branding strategies for recent college graduates, the current research does little to understand the psyche of the new generation of employees entering the workplace. In order to design a model to teach millennials, it is essential to comprehend what appeals to them and how they best obtain information.

**Branding, Structure, and Millennials**

As Baby Boomers continue to retire over the next decade and the Millennial Generation floods the workforce, additional research will be required to assist companies, managers, and employees on both the risks and opportunities from this unavoidable situation. Much research has emerged to understand the millennials’ psyche and attitudes toward the working world (AAC&U, 2007; Bauleke & Herrmann, 2010; Hanneman & Gardner, 2010; Harris, 2010; Hulett, 2006; Palmiotto, 2012; Smith, 2012); however, one reoccurring millennial characteristic pertinent to this body of research is the millennials’ desire for structure. Research demonstrates that millennials seek structure and require clear expectations to complete tasks unlike past generations (Hulett, 2006; Palmiotto, 2012; Smith, 2012).

Palmiotto (2012) analyzed the benefits of mentoring for the millennial workforce. Palmiotto admitted that mentoring is an old concept in the workplace but found how millennial employees in the new generation are taking mentorship to a new level stating the following:
“For members of the workforce’s newest generation, who have been supported by their parents and society as a whole throughout their lives, seeking out a mentor is common” (p. 24). Mentors provide the structure and guidance that millennials seek in their jobs. Providing step-by-step instructions for branding delivers the Millennial Generation with the direction that they want, while assisting employers in receiving the employees they seek.

Hulett (2006) analyzed recruiting and retaining millennial employees, characterizing millennials as optimistic with high expectations of success, but poor at completing long-term plans and realizing their goals. In order to recruit this generation, the “hiring message must be carefully crafted” with a clear “focus on describing the specific skills the millennial will learn from the job” (p. 17). This again reinforces the need for guidance and clear expectations and strengthens the argument for a clear model for millennials to follow.

In addition, Smith (2012) concluded that millennials appreciate frequent feedback, rewards, and praise: “This is a well-coached generation. They will respond to substitute parents shouting encouragement from the sidelines” (p. 17). This premise is consistent with other research that shows that college students entering the workforce are adaptable and willing to change, but must be properly instructed. This personal branding model for practitioners and students provides the structure solicited by the Millennial Generation to be properly prepared on how to brand themselves in the modern technological age.

Other researchers have studied the opportunities and consequences that occur as different generations collide in the workforce. Smith (2012) analyzed the emerging generation entering the workforce and sought to understand how to “leverage the strengths while overcoming any potential negative impact” (p. 9). One concern about the Millennial Generation is their lack of communication skills—a skill that research has shown is at the top of desired skills by employers.
(AAC&U, 2007; Hanneman & Gardner, 2010). Face-to-face tactics were included in the model to assist millennials with this essential yet lacking skill.

Smith (2012) stated, “Our emerging work force communicates but does not talk. They ‘text’ but do not write. Millennials may be the most educated, and most immature, ever to enter the work force” (p. 9). This “immaturity” has been displayed in millennials’ personal branding causing severe concerns and even termination of employment. Improper Tweets, inappropriate pictures on Instagram, and unbefitting materials on Facebook have held immeasurable amounts of millennials back from gainful employment (Smith, 2012). During these occurrences, millennials are not finding the forgiveness that was allotted them during their youth of “everyone is a winner” type of environment.

Similarly, other research has been conducted to assist educators in teaching millennials (Bauleke & Herrmann, 2010; Befner & Shanahan, 2013; Davidson, 201; Harris, 2010; Jacques, 2012). Davidson (2011) concluded that teachers must stay current with technology, plan appropriately, provide students with structure, and offer outside speakers to help reinforce material being taught. Harris (2010) added additional insight concerning teaching millennials and concluded that instructors must understand their students’ often short attention spans and their preference for education in entertaining formats. Harris (2010) stated the following:

Millennials . . . are commonly characterized as having low thresholds for boredom and showing short attention spans. Simultaneously, these students run laptops, listen to cell phones, have iPods plugged in and keep their textbooks wide open. Seemingly unable to memorize information, they are said to prefer education in entertaining forms. (p. 13)

These studies reinforce the notion that millennials require a brief, structured, outline concerning personal branding, and, in addition, asserts that teachers should provide the
information in an engaging and entertaining format for students to effectively retain the information.

Correspondingly, Bauleke and Herrmann (2010) examined the Millennial Generation in the classroom and found that millennials spend so much time using electronic media (iPods, social networking, instant messaging and downloading during their week) that they experience attention problems in typical classrooms. They concluded that teachers need to “stress the power of active learning, giving students choices, and using multimedia to achieve the emotional impact needed to reach the Gen M students” (p. 38). In addition, Bauleke and Herrman found that by applying these strategies, teachers noticed a much deeper understanding of the principles being taught. Again, this highlights the need for structure coupled with interactive and entertaining material to present to the Millennial Generation of students.

Brief, structured, entertaining, and interactive material is the key to teaching the Millennial Generation. The personal branding model followed this pattern to better prepare the next generation of managers, teachers, innovators, and leaders. Furthermore, research found that millennials lack proper preparation as they enter the workforce placing increased pressure on higher education professionals to meet employer’s demands (AAC&U, 2007; Bushnell, 2012; Hanneman & Gardner, 2010; Richardson, 2009; Vitberg, 2010).

**Lack of Preparation**

For students seeking employment, there is no shortage of information on how to get a job. Data on everything from résumé building, internships, and networking is available to provide college graduates this insight. Nevertheless, research to date has not been able to construct an overarching blueprint for personal branding in person, online, and in print to secure gainful employment. Vitberg (2010) said, “Younger professionals need to develop a position, or
personal brand statement, that they can clearly articulate across a series of platforms” (p. 44). In addition, little to no academic research has measured popular press books to find out what industry professionals are coaching regarding personal branding. If educators are not carefully following industry trends, then they cannot properly prepare college graduates for the competitive and ever-changing job market. Bushnell (2012) reported the following:

It is essential for higher education professionals to remain abreast of industry trends, emerging fields, and changing requirements that affect the job market and advanced educational opportunities for new graduates. Equally important is a continual review of evolving strategies for success in the job search itself. (p. 91)

Bushnell (2012) also found the need for higher education professionals to modify the ways they prepare students for after-college life:

Social media and new communication venues are transforming the recruiting and job search process. Résumé PDF files uploaded to company websites have replaced mailed applications on crisp résumé paper. E-mail blasts and forwarded messages among online networks are replacing job vacancy announcements in the local newspaper. (p. 94)

Bushnell explained that due to the constant changes in media, it is crucial to teach students the fundamentals of a professional online existence and networking instead of teaching how to use one specific website or tool.

However, Bushnell admitted that job market and recruiting practices do influence academic preparation for a student’s after-college experience, but these factors are not necessarily defining how job preparation is provided to students. Bushnell (2012) stated the following:
Certainly, employer expectations and hiring preferences help define what constitutes workplace ready. The influence of employers’ preferences on higher education is mixed. Although some changes in higher education and curricula are made with an eye on job preparation, others are not. (p. 97)

This idea of preparing curriculum based on the needs of the workplace demonstrates a need to examine popular press books for guidance on effectively teaching branding strategies.

Furthermore, Bushnell (2012) suggested that a way for student services professionals and professors to evaluate their programs with an “eye on job preparedness,” is by following market trends and current industry standards. Upon learning these standards, academics should educate their graduates to include career goals and outcomes in their graduate school decisions (Bushnell, 2012).

Additional research has demonstrated the gap between recent college graduates and the expectations of employers. Hanneman and Gardner (2010) investigated the changing expectations of employers and the competencies they expect in new hires. Their research did not focus on one particular industry but included all academic majors from across the economy. Hanneman and Gardner explained how in the next decade companies will desperately seek talent to replace their aging Baby Boomer workforce: “One strategy in knowledge management is to recruit young professionals, directly from college campuses, to help partially alleviate the problem” (p. 1). They showed that millennial graduates are expected to demonstrate a higher level of proficiency than those who have previously joined the workforce—employees of longer than two to three years. Again, Hanneman and Gardner’s conclusions proved the need to discover what industries desire for their workforce and then for educators to prepare students
accordingly. The analysis of popular press books helped discover industry standards for those who teach in the classroom and in assisting graduates fulfill employer expectations.

In addition, Hanneman and Gardner (2010) found that if college education is focusing on specific job skills “through professional curriculum that is highly structured,” then it limits a student’s capacity to function in a shifting workplace (p. 17). Hanneman and Gardner outlined mega-competences for employees that can be utilized across industries such as building working relationships, continuous learning, oral persuasion, managing a project, creating new knowledge, building a team, and mentoring.

Hanneman and Gardner (2010) concluded that practitioners charged with preparing students for the workplace must be aware of employers’ needs and noted that educators can take initiative to better assist students. A strong personal brand can contribute to students’ ability to demonstrate the mega-competencies that employers are seeking. Thus, a model of how to brand based on professionals in the field offers guidance for teachers with this goal.

Further research has added to the work of Hanneman and Gardner and has advised students to learn competencies that are universally applied, instead of merely focusing on their particular area of study. The AAC&U (2007) asked for cross-disciplinary training within departments rather than keeping students narrowly focused on their major. In addition, the AAC&U produced a poll that stated that two-thirds of employers say college graduates lack essential skills for the workplace. The AAC&U cited that communication, team work, and analytical reasoning abilities top the list of skills employers seek and feel new hires lack. “The findings from these polls are significant and make quite clear that colleges and universities must raise the bar for college learning,” said Harvard University President Derek Bok (AAC&U,
Thus, training students on what employers seek and then preparing them to brand accordingly is increasingly imperative.

Bok (2007) continued that students must do more than prepare themselves for their first job but need a broad education to prepare them for a well-rounded life (as cited in, AAC&U, 2007). Bok concluded that, “with the capacity to innovate now the United States’ most significant competitive advantage, the high-level knowledge and skills traditionally associated with liberal (arts) education have become the new passport to economic opportunity” (as cited in, AAC&U, 2007, para. 5). Again, branding online and in print is not enough, but personal communication skills that correspond with other branding practices are at the top of what employers seek.

A lack of students prepared to enter the workforce is not unique to the United States, but is being experienced on a global level. Richardson (2009) studied skills shortages in Australia and said, “Skills gaps occur were existing employees do not have the required qualifications, experience, and/or specialized skills to meet the firm’s skill needs for an occupation (p. 333). Richardson focused on the importance of education to be a solution and to solve the skills shortage problem in the country. Studies showed that the supply of workers is insufficient to satisfy the demands. Like similar studies, the research disclosed how a specialized degree can affect the success of students seeking employment and how students entering the workforce lack skills and are inept in showcasing the skills they do have. Richardson stated, “A shortage of skills is a source of aggravation to firms” and unprepared employees are “likely to hamper the quality and quantity of their output” (p. 326). Skills shortages and deficiencies in personal branding are restricting millennial graduates from proper employment placement.
Educators must do more to prepare students for the real world by providing tangible and effective processes for finding employment. Woodbury, Neal, and Addams (2008) stated that teachers have “the responsibility to teach students self-marketing/job search skill development,” otherwise, a good student cannot find employment, which reflects poorly on the student and the institution (p. 49). This research will help educators provide students with the real-world training they need for a branding blueprint based on the work of professionals in the field that is complete, concise, and with the proper structure that the generation entering the workforce requests.

**Summary**

The current research regarding branding and the Millennial Generation is essential to understanding the elements of personal branding, the psyche of the Millennial Generation, and the effects of these two phenomena colliding in today’s workplace. In short, the literature review established how branding encompasses a personal message that should be congruent in person, online, and in print; what is currently being taught in higher education regarding branding; what employers are looking for regarding branding; the specific needs, strengths, and weaknesses of the Millennial Generation; and what educators can do to better prepare students for the workforce.

As the Internet makes it possible to project personal lives instantaneously to the world, the need to create and maintain a personal brand has become increasingly apropos. Although definitions and elements of branding have been established, the essence of millennials explored, and the need for higher education to play an increased role in branding recognized, there is an apparent disconnect between these elements. The literature review, thus, established a need to provide an overarching blueprint of personal branding that includes instruction for in-person
online, and in print branding. This research filled the gap by creating an all-encompassing personal branding model that can prepare millennial college students seeking gainful employment.

Chapter Three presents the research methods used along with supporting information including research tradition, research design, sampling, validity and reliability, data analysis, instrumentation, and an explanation of the data collection and analysis.
CHAPTER THREE

This chapter explains the methodology used for the study. It includes a brief description of the methodology’s research tradition, a recap of the purpose statement and research questions, and an explanation of the research design, including sampling, instrumentation, validity, reliability, data collection, and data analysis.

Study Design

This study utilized a qualitative thematic analysis methodology which focuses on pinpointing, examining, and recording themes and patterns within data. Thematic analysis has much in common with grounded theory, which is a set of inductive and iterative techniques designed to identify categories and concepts within text that are then connected to formal theoretical models (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Charmaz (2002) described grounded theory as providing flexible and systematic guidelines for collecting data that produce theories “grounded” in past data. Similarly, a thematic analysis requires more involvement and interpretation from the researcher than with other qualitative coding methods (Guest et al., 2012).

Creating a model that incorporated pertinent branding elements (in-person, online, and in print based on popular press books) required large amounts of data to be interpreted. One of this methodology’s strengths is that thematic analysis is well suited for large data sets, making it an ideal method for this particular project.

The basic idea behind thematic analysis is to gradually refine a set of themes and relations between them. Braun and Clark (2006) described how a theme captures something significant within the data in relation to the research question, and it signifies some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set. A strong thematic analysis is analogous with
providing a summary of a 100-page research paper. Instead of reading through each section of the paper, the summary provides an overarching and concise recap of the most important elements. A thematic analysis of the popular press books worked in a similar fashion, generating patterns of concepts currently being taught concerning personal branding and providing a snapshot of the information.

The model for personal branding was created by discovering and organizing the most common themes that emerged within current popular press books on branding. Guest et al. (2012) stated that despite issues with reliability, “thematic analysis is still the most useful in capturing the complexities of meaning within a textual data set” (p. 11). However, thematic analysis provides greater reliability than other word-based analysis due to the fact that more interpretation is involved in defining the data items (Guest et al., 2012). Consequently, thematic analysis was the designated method for this study, and the following section provides both a rationale and method for the study as well as describes why other qualitative methods were not employed.

**Justification of the Study**

By creating personal branding models, several major contributions to the body of knowledge were made since a strong rational for the project exists. First is the increased importance of personal branding, in particular for recent college graduates. Much research has attempted to prepare college students for the workforce by helping them brand themselves positively and effectively (Akpan & Notar, 2012; Brown, 2009; Friedman, 2010; Haseltine, 2012; Mather, 2008; Morgan, 2011; Rampersad, 2008; Trinchero, 2009; Vitberg, 2010; Walton, 2009). However, little to no research has tied all of the elements of branding together (in-person, online, and in print) in a way that is comprehensive and uses material from the popular press.
Secondly, the use of popular press books for this study was tactical and significant in order to tie what is being taught in academia with what is wanted in the workforce. Again, the work of Bushnell (2012) found a disconnect between higher education and the private and public sectors. In addition, Bushnell advised that teachers in higher education modify the ways they prepare students for the workforce by adding an “eye on job preparedness” and by understanding what is happening in the job market. By utilizing books written by professionals for this specific study, academic circles can link with the working world and bring them in sync to properly prepare college students approaching graduation and the job market.

Similarly, research shows that students are not prepared upon graduating for the workforce nor are they branding themselves appropriately to obtain and/or maintain employment (AAC&U, 2007; Bushnell, 2012; Hanneman & Gardner, 2010; Richardson, 2009; Woodbury et al., 2008). With the costs of a college degree rising at a rapid rate, it is essential that job preparedness is a priority for academic institutions (Bushnell, 2012; Woodbury et al., 2008).

Lastly, justification for a comprehensive personal branding model to teach in college comes from the way Millennial Generation students receive and retain information (AAC&U, 2007; Bauleke & Herrmann, 2010; Hanneman & Gardner, 2010; Harris, 2010; Hulett, 2006; Palmiotto, 2012; Smith, 2012). Palmiotto’s (2012) research demonstrated the need for mentoring, structure, and clear messages for the millennial student. Similarly, Hulett (2006) concluded that messages for the millennial student should be crafted clearly and that millennials need and seek feedback.

A branding model is the ideal way to collectively improve the lack of workforce preparation for college graduates, bridge the disconnect between academics and employers, and
discover best practices for teaching millennials. Furthermore, the superlative methodology for this study was thematic analysis when compared to other qualitative and quantitative methods.

In addition to the thematic analysis of popular press books, qualitative interviewing using thematic analysis was used to gather data for the model. Qualitative interviewing is a technique that involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and sustained interfaces to generate patterns and associations of meaning. This strategy of inquiry allows researchers to explore the essence of human experiences about specific phenomenon as described by the participants (Creswell, 2009). In order to provide an increased depth to this study, seven personal interviews with professionals currently hiring college students were conducted, transcribed, coded using thematic analysis, and used to form the model of branding.

Other qualitative methodologies that were ruled out for this study included ethnography, case studies, narrative research, and quantitative strategies such as survey research and experimental research.

Ethnography is used to “form objective descriptions of social norms and events as they occur” (Rubin, Rubin, Haridakis, & Piele, 2010, p. 222). Ethnographers observe participants within an organization to recognize patterns of behavior and their use of communication. Ethnographers often facilitate interviews and examine documents and artifacts (Rubin et al., 2010). Clearly, this qualitative research method would not be possible since the purpose is to collect branding themes through the most popular press books published on the topic. It would have been beneficial to interview the authors personally; however, this kind of access was not achievable.

Case studies are a qualitative methodology in which researchers explore comprehensively an organization’s processes, individuals, activities, programs, and/or events. Researchers collect
detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Stake, 1995). Since the core data was extracted from popular press books, this eliminated the case study method as a viable option.

Additionally, another qualitative methodology is narrative research where researchers ask individuals to provide stories about their lives, and then the data is retold by the researcher into a narrative chronology. Ultimately, the narrative consists of views of both the participant(s) and the researcher(s) in a collaborative narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Likewise, this was not a suitable strategy of inquiry since a textual analysis was better equipped to extract the data from popular press books on branding.

Furthermore, this type of study was best suited for qualitative research when compared to quantitative inquiry. Quantitative research strategies are deductive, statistical methods of inquiry (Rubin et al., 2010). The most common quantitative methods include true experiments: survey research and experimental research. Survey research offers a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population. Experimental research seeks to determine if a specific treatment influences an outcome (Creswell, 2009). Understanding how this research focused on works of branding and hiring experts, and cannot measure the attitudes of a large population, the deductive processes of quantitative research was not appropriate for this study.

Therefore, the strategy of inquiry apposite to developing the personal branding model comprises both textual research methods and qualitative interviewing. Several forms of textual research exist including rhetorical criticism, dramatistic analysis, textual analysis, content analysis, and thematic analysis (Rubin et al., 2010). Again, thematic analysis is an inductive analytic process that involves searching through data to identify recurrent patterns. The themes emerge as a cluster of linked categories conveying similar meanings (Guest et al., 2012).
Consequently, thematic analysis was the preeminent research method available to develop a personal branding model that instructs millennial students based on popular press books.

**Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to utilize thematic analysis to develop a personal branding model for recent millennial graduates entering the workforce. The model was created by coding the most important elements of personal branding based on the most popular press books on the subject and by interviewing hiring professionals to gage their perspectives.

The overarching central research question that laid the foundation for this study and guided its construction and execution was simply, “How can millennials better brand themselves for the workplace?”

Many researchers have examined different aspects of this current phenomenon related to the Millennial Generation as it prepares to enter the workplace (AAC&U, 2007; Bauleke & Herrmann, 2010; Behrens, 2009; Davidson, 2011; Hanneman & Gardner, 2010; Harris, 2010; Hulett, 2006; Palmiotto, 2012; Smith, 2012; Walton, 2009). However, no study has provided an overarching solution that can assist academic institutions to better teach and prepare incoming millennial employees to effectively brand themselves for employment. Furthermore, past research has not utilized information based on non-academic research, such as popular press books.

Sub-questions that further narrowed the central question and assisted in choosing the methodology and research design are as follows: “What is the most relevant information on personal branding based on popular press books?” and “What elements of branding are most important to hiring professionals?”
Research Design

Although thematic analysis is a common qualitative research technique, little research has provided large descriptive analyses of popular press writings. Moreover, no known thematic analysis concerning books on personal branding exists. However, numerous projects have compared popular press books utilizing qualitative methods (Culpan, 1987; Lewis et al., 2006; Lewis & Seibold, 1998; Miller, 2009).

Lewis et al. (2006) offered a thematic analysis of bestselling popular press books focused on communication during implementation of organization change. The analysis found themes concerning the communicative role of change agents, general strategies for introducing and communicating change, and tactics for communicating during implementation of change. Additionally, sub-themes within each of the main categories were presented. This study used a similar method, but with an emphasis on organizational change, and provided a solid structure regarding how to conduct a multi-book thematic analysis.

Miller (2009) offered suggestions on how to teach millennial students based on the popular press book *The Teacher's Way: Teaching and the Contemplative Life*. Although Miller did not use thematic analysis to analyze the book, this study demonstrated the method of analyzing popular press books to improve teaching strategies as a possible tool.

Another study offered a new method of communicating with employees based on a thematic analysis of practitioner-oriented journal articles (Lewis & Seibold, 1998). Lewis and Seibold found several themes and identified action steps based on the recommendations made by the various articles used in the study. Additionally, Culpan (1987) created content analysis of 10 popular press books on management. Culpan evaluated the books based on specific characteristics, such as time perspective, orientation to tasks or people, uniqueness, scope, and
level of analysis. Although these studies are similar in their methodology and areas of study, these reviews are far from comprehensive, and none have similar focuses concerning personal branding.

In order to narrow the search and to discover the most popular press books on personal branding for this particular study, Amazon.com was employed. When the topic of personal branding was searched, Amazon.com generated 1,799 books. The endeavor of this research was to compile the most influential information from popular press books on personal branding in order to create a model that can be taught to millennial students in addition to bridging the gap between the academic and professional realms.

In order to determine which books on personal branding were the most influential, three areas were evaluated: relevance, number of copies sold, and customer reviews. The first 100 books on personal branding for each category were analyzed to determine a book’s influence. Relevance was used to generate the initial list of books due to the fact that only books with a central focus on personal branding were utilized. Each relevant book on personal branding received a score from one to 100 with the most relevant books receiving a score of 100 and the least relevant books receiving a score of 1. Some books were thrown out due to their lack of focus on personal branding. Some books touched on branding, but it was not the main concentration.

Next, the books were analyzed based on number of copies sold. The advance search function allows books to be filtered by the number of books sold within the subject of personal branding; again the number one book based on sales volume was given a score of 100 down to the hundredth book receiving a score of one.
Lastly, the books regarding personal branding were sifted by the highest customer reviews. Once again, the first 100 books in this category were given scores from 100 to one. The books were then given an overall score to discover which five books received the highest scores based on relevance, books sold, and customer reviews. However, if the books did not make the initial relevance list, or did not have a primary focus on personal branding, they were excluded from the study. See Appendix E for a complete list of the books.

Population and Sample

Although the majority of the data came from the thematic analysis of popular press books, personal interviews were utilized as well. Participants provided an added layer of insight into personal branding and the hiring process. This section describes the sample size and sampling procedure of this study as well as the selection of participants and procedures used. Since the interviews are not the main data-gathering mechanism for this study, the interview sample size was small. Creswell (2009) stated that in qualitative sampling the researcher purposefully selects individuals and sites that will provide the necessary information. Thus, purposeful sampling was utilized for this study. Creswell (2009) found that a qualitative method for interviews in some cases requires fewer than 10 participants. The sample size for this research was seven interviews of hiring professionals. The selection criterion for the participants included individuals who hired a minimum of ten millennial graduates annually and each of the hiring professionals lived in the state of Utah.

Sampling Procedure

There is no uniform opinion on sample size (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). However, certain factors are considered when determining sample size: level of analysis and reporting, richness of data collected, and constraints with which the researcher is faced. The level of
analysis is not large since the interviews were supplemental to the thematic analysis of press books and not the main data-gathering method. The richness of the data collected through the interviews was solid, but again merely a compliment to the primary data method. Lastly, there were no strong restraints to participant access; however, the participants were purposefully chosen based on one main criterion: each participant must be currently hiring a minimum of 10 recent millennial college graduates annually. Questions regarding what hiring professionals are looking for regarding branding in person, online, and in print were analyzed. This information was gathered, coded, and used to assist in creating the branding model and to compare the information against the data gathered through popular press books.

**Instrument**

The instrument for the study was the thematic analysis of popular press books and the instrument for the participant section was in-depth, one-on-one interviews. The interview questions were a series of open-ended questions aimed at discovering what employers look for regarding personal branding in person, online, and in print during the hiring process. Creswell (2009) explained that, “The basic distinction we make between qualitative and quantitative data is that qualitative data consist of information obtained in open-ended questions in which the researcher does not use predetermined categories or scales to collect the data” (p. 176). The research questions that participants were asked are the following (see Appendix D).

1. What is your definition of personal branding?
2. How do you recruit potential employees?
3. What do you look for specifically in a potential employee’s cover letter and résumé?
4. What specifically are you looking for during the interview, both good and bad?
5. What are your expectations regarding dress and appearance during the interview?
6. What do you look for regarding body language during the interview?

7. Do you search online to find additional information about potential employees? If so, what are you looking for online?

8. What are positive and negative elements of a potential employee’s online presence?

9. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Millennial Generation employees?

10. What additional information can you provide regarding the topic of personal branding and the hiring process?

Validity

Validity refers to how well a test measures what it is alleged to measure. In qualitative research, there is more of a focus on validity than reliability to determine whether the account provided through the study is accurate, trustworthy, and credible (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). A major strength of qualitative interviewing is that it produces highly credible results; however, the researcher must accurately and transparently report what was said in the interviews, interview individuals who are knowledgeable on the topic, restrict questions to information the participants know firsthand, and effectively analyze the information (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To ensure validity, each participant interview was transcribed by a third party, and each of the participants met the requirements of a current hiring professional in the field.

Likewise, validity for the thematic analysis of popular press books is only as good as the data being collected. Guest et al. (2012) suggested that nothing is as important to research as validity. Thus, the most important role of the researcher is to ensure that the data being collected, analyzed, and interpreted is represented accurately and credibly. According to Guest et al. (2012), the best way to determine validity for thematic analysis is through face validity. For face validity, the researcher must “rely on our own judgment and that of our peers—
judgment based on the information available—to decide whether or not what we do and have done, and the findings we present, are valid” (p. 84). This is imperative when applying the information from popular press books to determine the validity of the data. Choosing the five books on branding based on three separate areas (relevance, books sold, and reviews) assisted with providing valid data for the study.

**Reliability**

Reliability is the degree to which an assessment tool produces consistent and stable results. As previously mentioned, it is commonly accepted among qualitative researchers that reliability is less important for qualitative inquiry than validity (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Guest et al., 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). There are two main reasons for this: first, replication is typically not a goal in qualitative research; second, qualitative research is often innately unstructured, thus, making it difficult to obtain similar results again and again (Guest et al., 2012).

However, in order to generate both validity and reliability for this study, it was vital that a constant and stable research design existed. This included knowing the purpose behind each interview question and identifying a strong structure for coding and analyzing the press books. Regarding the strength of the coding structure, Guest et al. (2012) reported, “Structure facilitates reliability, (and validity), and therefore comparative analysis. Instruments, questions, and process with more structure enable a more meaningful comparative analysis” (p. 88).

**Data Collection**

Once more, interviews and analysis of popular press books on branding were employed for this study. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. In addition, field notes were taken during the interviews to provide increased understanding and to make note of non-verbal
messages, tone, and other meanings expressed by participants. Popular press books were chosen from Amazon.com and were based on the three areas of importance: relevance, number of copies sold, and customer reviews.

**Interviews**

Although the core of this study was the thematic analysis of popular press books on branding, interviews added an additional level of understanding about branding and hiring. Interviewing is fundamental to qualitative research, and the interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of what employers are seeking and provided additional information for generating the branding model (Creswell, 2009).

Participants were asked primary and follow-up questions as well as probes that allowed them to expound on their experience and provide clarification for the researcher (see Appendix D). Main questions provided the overall structure of the interview, while probes were used to interpret and clarify the conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Probes can be verbal or nonverbal. Verbal probes include short phrases such as, “Could you tell me more about that?” or “Go on—this is very insightful.” Likewise, probe questions simply clarify the who, what, where, when, and why of each situation. Nonverbal probes include waiting to hear more information, leaning forward to express interest, and nodding the head while taking notes (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Each of the interviews was conducted in person. The interviews lasted between 35-50 minutes in length. In-person interviews took place in the Dixie State University Gardner Student Center in St. George, Utah, or in the participants’ place of employment. The data was transcribed and then coded using thematic analysis by the researcher who is a subject matter
expert along with an additional independent coder who was trained in thematic analysis and color coding.

**Transcription**

Each interview was recorded and transcribed to better analyze each interview session. In addition, each of the transcripts was read and checked against the recordings for accuracy. Braun and Clark (2006) suggested that with “verbal data such as interviews, television programs, or political speeches, the data will need to be transcribed into written form in order to conduct a thematic analysis” (p. 94). Although the transcription process can appear tedious and even boring, it should be viewed as a vital step in data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology (Bird, 2005). The information was coded using thematic analysis and added to the information from the popular press books. The transcriptions do not contain any reference to the interviewees’ names and a copy of the transcript was sent to each participant to be checked and initialed for accuracy. All information was stored at the researcher’s home office and locked in a filing cabinet. The information will be utilized solely for this study.

**Popular Press Books**

The majority of the data was collected via popular press books on personal branding found on Amazon.com, and the books were based on three dimensions: relevance, number of copies sold, and customer reviews. The top five books with the highest overall average score were analyzed using thematic analysis, coded based on themes, and used to create a personal branding model to teach Millennial Generation college students.

**Data Analysis Procedure**

According to Braun and Clark (2006), there are six major steps to thematic analysis: becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes,
defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Braun and Clark suggested that the researcher must “immerse yourself in the data to the extent that you are familiar with the depth and breadth of the content” (p. 93). This often involves repeated reading of the data, and, in this case, the five popular press books selected as well as the interview transcripts. It is by completing this process that meanings and patterns emerge from the data. It is suggested that the researcher read the data at least once before coding begins (Braun & Clark, 2006). After the initial data reading is complete and a list of initial ideas has been developed, the formal coding can begin.

As themes appear through the initial readings, one critical component of thematic analysis is the use of an organized codebook. Guest et al. (2012) explained that, “Codebook development is a discrete analysis step where the observed meaning in the text is systematically sorted into categories, types, and relationships of meaning” (p. 52). The text is read, reread, and analyzed by segmenting and coding before being placed into the codebook. The codebook consists of the code or theme, a brief definition of the theme, a full definition, and an explanation of when to use the code and when not to use the code (Guest et al., 2012). Creating an in-depth codebook facilitates addressing three aims of thematic analysis as outlined by Gibson and Brown (2009): examining commonalities, differences, and relationships. The coding process is part of the analysis that allows the researcher to organize the data into meaningful groups.

For this study, three overarching themes were predetermined prior to the data analysis: in-person, online, and in print branding. The subthemes that emerged through the thematic analysis of the popular press books and the interviews were all placed within one of the preset themes. This is due to the overwhelming research discovered through the literature review that found that millennials are in need of a personal brand that is cohesive within each of these three
areas. Coding can be done either manually or through a software program, and there are a number of ways to code extracts; however, this research utilized manual coding to segment different branding themes. Manual coding can be done by “writing notes on the texts you’re analyzing, by using highlighters or colored pens to indicate potential patterns, or by using ‘post-it’ notes to identify segments of data” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 96). The main points to remember with coding, according to Braun and Clark, is to code for as many potential themes/patterns as possible; code some of the surrounding data if relevant; and code individual extracts of data in as many different themes as possible.

Once the data has been coded and organized, the next step is to extract themes. During this phase, the analysis shifts from individual codes to a broader level of themes. Here the researchers utilize tables, create mind-maps, organize the names of each code and place them in piles, review the codebook, and employ any other sorting strategies to unearth the overarching themes from the data (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Next, the themes must be refined and narrowed. Some themes will either not have enough data to support them or will need to be combined or separated. This phase involves two levels of reviewing and refining the themes. Braun and Clark (2006) stated that level one involves reviewing at the level of the coded data extract, which means the researcher reads through the organized extracts to identify each theme and considers whether a coherent pattern exists. Next, “Level two involves a similar process but in relation to the entire data set…[where] you consider the validity of the individual themes in relation to the data set” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 98).

The last steps for analyzing the data include defining and naming the themes and producing a report. Defining the themes begins when a satisfactory data map is complete. Braun
& Clark (2006) stated that, “At this point, you then define and further refine the themes that you will present for your analysis, and analyze the data within them” (p. 99). It is important to note that a researcher should not attempt to extract too much out of a theme or allow it to be too complex. This is done by reviewing the organized data extracts from the coding exercise and by discovering themes with an accompanying narrative. Lastly, the information was compiled and placed into a report which is found in the conclusion section of this document.

**Ethical Considerations**

After all interview data was collected, the researcher coded the answers based on common themes that emerged by employing thematic analysis. Participants included individuals currently recruiting and hiring no fewer than ten college graduates at their respective organizations annually. Risks were limited due to the small number of individuals participating; however, no matter what precautions are taken, all research involves a degree of risk. These risks were mitigated through careful analysis and strict monitoring practices. Names and any other facts that would point to specific individuals or organizations do not appear within any section of this study. Each participant was provided a reference number (i.e. JS01 for participant one), and initials for names within the transcript text (i.e. John Brown – JB). There was no deception involved with this project.

Informed consent was obtained by distributing the Informed Consent form with the participant’s signature (see Appendix B). A copy of the Informed Consent form was provided to each participant. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) Application was created, sent for admission, and accepted before any research data was gathered for this project. This ensured that all research regulations were followed and that participants were treated ethically and properly within the IRB statutes.
Data Storage

The Informed Consent form and the data collected were kept private to the extent allowed by law. Records were kept in locked files at the researcher’s home. The consent forms were likewise kept in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher’s home, and all consent forms and interview data will be destroyed after seven years. Privacy was also protected to the extent allowed by law. To ensure this research was carried out properly, the Colorado Technical University IRB was able to review project records at any time during the research process.

Summary

Chapter Three provided an overview of the specifics for this study, including, the methodology of thematic analysis; a justification for this research; a purpose statement and research questions; the research design; the population and sample of participants; validity and reliability of the method; data collection methods and analysis procedures; data storage measures; and ethical considerations. Chapter Four provides additional participant demographics, a presentation of the data, and a discussion of the findings.
CHAPTER FOUR

The purpose of this study was to create a model for personal branding with the intent to assist recent graduates in finding employment. The model was based on data extracted from popular press books on branding and personal interviews conducted with hiring professionals. Chapter Four provides demographics of interview participants; an overview of the study; data analysis procedures; and major themes that emerged from interviews and popular press books.

Participant Demographics

Interviewed participants, which consisted of hiring professionals, included four males and three females living in the state of Utah with a medium age of 38.3. The only requirement to participate in this study was that each hiring professional hired a minimum of ten millennial workers annually. Table 1 identifies the age, sex, and industry of each participant.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Number</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Industry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Health Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Rehabilitation/Counseling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Dentistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Sales/Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Landscape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Architecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Retail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both the participant interviews and the popular press books laid the foundation to analyze the data, extract themes, and, ultimately, create the personal branding model.
Overview of the Study

A thematic data analysis regarding personal branding and the hiring process was executed to create a model for personal branding to be taught to the Millennial Generation currently entering the workforce. Research has indicated that higher education must improve preparing college graduates regarding branding and hiring procedures (AAC&U, 2007; Bushnell, 2012; Hanneman & Gardner, 2010; Richardson, 2009; and Vitberg, 2010). Thus, two sources were analyzed to create a personal branding model: hiring professionals interviews and popular press books on branding.

Purposeful sampling procedure was employed for the qualitative interviews. Purposeful sampling is used when “researchers intentionally select (or recruit) participants who have experienced the central phenomenon or the key concept being explored in the study” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 173). Toward this end, participants were chosen based on their understanding and knowledge of the hiring process and branding and on their meeting the requirement of hiring a minimum of ten millennial graduates each year. Similarly, popular press books were chosen based on the author’s expertise in the area of personal branding. The snowball strategy of asking participants to identify other prospective participants involved with hiring was also employed (Creswell, 2009). Thus, purposeful and snowballing strategies led to 15 possible participants.

While all 15 prospective participants were contacted via telephone, seven interviews were conducted. The researcher determined that seven participatory interviews were sufficient due to theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation is achieved “when no new information seems to emerge during coding, that is, when no new properties, dimensions, conditions, actions/interactions, or consequences are seen in the data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 136). Of
the 15 prospects, seven participants were chosen based on their accessibility and particular industry.

During each of the interviews, a digital recording device was placed on the table in front of the participant. Each participant was informed about the nature and importance of the study. Prior to each interview, consent forms were issued, explained, signed, and collected. Participants were clearly instructed that they could resign at any time; however, all seven participants finished the interview. Field notes were taken during the interviews to capture any non-verbal communication pertinent to the study. Each interview recording was transcribed and printed for more efficient and accurate thematic analysis coding.

The interview entailed 10 semi-structured open-ended questions (see Appendix C), with sub-questions and follow-up probes to encourage elaboration. The interviews provided detailed information about the hiring professionals’ expectation regarding personal branding and job preparedness. Questions were designed to gather information regarding branding but, specifically, within the three subject areas of personal branding: online, in-person, and in print.

All seven participants were passionate regarding their views on branding and expressed their belief that the study was timely, important, and relevant. Participant 4 said, “I think this is going to become more and more relevant as time goes on…more people are on the internet, (and) this is going to become even more and more of an issue.” Participant 1 stated, “I just think this is great what you’re doing, because…it has just become a real relaxed subject.” Participant 3 explained that personal branding is something “you just have to do. I think it is like your credit score to be quite honest. Something you need to start working on when you’re young, or it will come back to haunt you.” The participants’ passion reaffirmed the germane nature of this study, and the potential good that can result from the collected data and the created branding model.
The additional data source was the popular press books on personal branding. Appendix E provides a complete list of the titles, rankings, and scores of the popular press books categorized by relevancy, copies sold, and customer reviews. Popular press books were narrowed down to the five most influential books about personal branding through Amazon.com, based on three criteria: relevance, number of copies sold, and customer reviews. The first 100 books in each category were given a score from 1 to 100 depending on their Amazon.com ranking. Next, all three scores were combined and totaled to select the five books with the highest total scores based on relevance, copies sold, and customer reviews (see Table 2).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cijo, M.</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>You Branding: Reinventing Your Personal Identity as a Successful Brand</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark, D.</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Reinventing You</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark, T., Osterwalder, A., &amp; Pigneur, Y.</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Business Model You</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kang, K.</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Branding Pays: The Five-Step System to Reinvent Your Personal Brand</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the hundreds of books on personal branding that were ranked and scored, these five books were chosen and analyzed for this study. Other books received higher scores but were discarded due to their lack of concentration on personal branding.

Data Analysis Procedure

The six major steps of thematic analysis as offered by Braun and Clark (2006) were utilized to analyze the data collected from interviews and popular press books. The first step, become familiar with the data, requires that researchers immerse themselves in the data to
understand the depth and breadth of the material. Toward this end, the researcher and
independent coder read through all of the material once before any coding was initiated.
Although structured coding did not begin, patterns emerged from the initial readings of the five
popular press books and the interview transcripts. After the original data reading was finished,
formal coding began.

During the second reading of the books and transcripts, a codebook was employed to
write down and sort common themes, categories, subcategories, and relationships. Crafting an
in-depth codebook enables the researcher to achieve the three thematic analysis goals: examining
commonalities, differences, and relationships (Gibson and Brown, 2009). Thus, the coding
process allows the researcher to organize the data into meaningful groups.

Three overarching themes concerning branding and the millennial generation were pre-
established based on the data extracted from the literature review: online, in-person, and in print
branding. These are areas where millennial graduates send mixed messages to employers and
stifle their ability to find employment. Therefore, many of the themes fell into one of these
overarching categories. Although most of the subthemes that emerged through the thematic
analysis of popular press books and the interviews were all placed within one of the preset
themes, other themes developed that were also added to the branding model. All of the coding
was completed manually to segment different branding themes. Manual coding can be done by
“writing notes on the texts you’re analyzing, by using highlighters or colored pens to indicate
potential patterns, or by using ‘post-it’ notes to identify segments of data” (Braun & Clark, 2006,
p. 96).

The themes that emerged frequently were placed in the codebook; however, most of the
coding took place on the transcripts and the books themselves through different colored
highlighters and pens. Any codes that dealt with online branding were highlighted with a pink marker; any references to in-person branding were highlighted with a green marker; and any mentions of in print branding were marked with a blue highlighter. Other themes that emerged were categorized with other colors and notes were made in the codebook.

The next step was to extract themes in which the analysis shifted from individual coding to unearthing broader-level themes. As such, it is common for researchers to utilize mind-maps, create tables, organize codes into groups and piles, evaluate the codebook, and employ any other cataloging strategies to extract themes from the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). At this point, the information was reviewed for a third time and placed into separate tables that were constructed within Microsoft Excel to organize overarching themes and subcategories within themes.

The next step included narrowing and refining the themes. Some of the themes did not provide enough data to support being part of the model while other themes were placed as subcategories or combined with other themes. Here the researcher considers “the validity of the individual themes in relation to the data set” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 98). In order to increase reliability and validity of the project, an independent coder was contracted to code the material along with the primary researcher. Notes were combined and reviewed at the end of the coding sessions; like themes were combined; other themes were clustered as subcategories; and additional themes were eliminated due to lack of support.

Once all of the coding was extracted from popular press books and transcripts, 22 separate themes were identified within the tables. The final thematic analysis step included defining and naming the most prominent themes for the branding model. Twenty-two themes were too many for the model; therefore, some themes were ultimately identified and grouped as sub-themes.
Personal Branding Themes

Six thematic analysis steps were employed by the researcher and the independent coder that resulted in eight overarching themes concerning personal branding. Each of the principle themes provided multiple sub-themes that emerged through interview transcripts and popular press books. According to Foss (2009) the “significance of terms is determined on the basis of frequency or intensity” (p. 66). Although hundreds of pages of data were coded, the following eight themes and their respective sub-themes were extracted for this research which, ultimately, laid the foundation for the personal branding model illustrated in Chapter Five.

Definitions of Personal Branding

An overarching theme that emerged due to high frequency and intensity was definitions of personal branding. All data, from both the authors and participants, addressed this theme, but Kang (2013) summarized this premise by stating, “Personal branding is your image and reputation” (p. 26). The word reputation appeared most frequently in the definitions of personal branding. Other sub-themes utilized to define personal branding in order of frequency and intensity included image, influence, skills, uniqueness, strategies, first impressions, integrity, and what others think and say about you. Participant 3 said, “Personal branding is directly related to how others view you. The expertise you have, the skillset you have, and the image you portray.” Personal branding definitions were found primarily at the beginning of the data sets but laid a foundation of understanding for subsequent themes.

The data described that personal branding is not solely the skills, image, and reputation that one portrays, but the strategies that generate and promote the brand. Kang (2013) explained that “personal branding is the act of developing the strategy and actions to guide our brand” (p. 59).
Thus, branding becomes much more strategic and interactive, an assumption that is explained throughout subsequent themes.

**Benefits of Personal Branding**

The next theme was identified as *benefits of personal branding*. Large portions of the data were dedicated to convincing the audience of the necessity to personally brand including the need, benefits, reasons, and motives to brand. Cijo (2014) said, “Regardless of your field, regardless of your position, and regardless of where you want to take your life, proper personal branding is a way to ensure our success” (p. 9). The most prominent theme that emerged regarding benefits of personal branding was the theme of opportunity. Cijo (2014) continued stating, “Whether you are changing careers, staring a job search, starting your own business, or are trying to improve your position…branding will help you” (p. 31).

Other sub-themes that clustered around the benefits of the personal branding key theme included standing out, visualizing, recognizing, managing personal story, reflecting skills, self-discovering, and being memorable. Clark (2013) observed the following:

> With hundreds, or even thousands, of Facebook friends and vague social connections, we can’t expect everyone to remember all the details of our lives. That’s why it’s so essential, that we take charge of our own reinvention and ensure our personal brands reflect, to the outside world, the reality of our lives. (p. 9)

The essence of this theme was to provide a clear rationale or “why” factor for personal branding. Participant 4 said, “Today people can brand themselves and create such a name for themselves if they put in the effort and energy.” Additional benefits of personal branding were offered, yet these sub-themes provided the core justifications for personal branding. The next group of themes aimed at providing a basic structure for personal branding.
Elements of Personal Branding

Hundreds of descriptions could be employed to explain the elements of a personal brand. Thus, the next core theme was defined as *elements of personal branding*. Three sub-themes developed frequently and with the greatest intensity when describing the most important elements of branding: authenticity, differentiation, and consistency. Kang (2013) explained, “When you align your brand with your core values, your brand will be more authentic and credible” (p. 80). In addition, Clark (2013) said, “One of the most important ways you can maintain your positive brand momentum is to be consistent” (p. 189). Concerning differentiation, Kang (2013) said, “You not only need to sell your solution to your target audience’s problem, but you need to set yourself apart” (p. 52).

Other themes relating to personal branding elements included core values, target market, positivity, self-knowledge, passion, integrity, clarity, trust, being memorable, vision, and value. Speaking of personal branding elements, Participant 4 said, “It’s not just the first impression, it’s not just your resume, it’s not just your dress, it’s all of it.” These themes were woven within nearly all of the strategies, ideas, suggestions, and goals of effective personal branding. Cijo (2014) noted that without vision, self-knowledge, self-learning, thinking, mindset, integrity, happiness, passion, sharing, trust, love, there is no way to be authentic and “if you are missing any one of those ingredients, your branding will fail.” (p. 23). Thus, the themes regarding the definitions, justifications, and elements of branding led to themes of how to discover one’s personal brand.

Discovering One’s Personal Brand

The next major theme was labeled *discovering one’s personal brand*. Most of the branding books followed a similar pattern which began with explaining the definition of
branding, followed by why one should brand, the benefits of branding, the elements of personal branding, and then transitioned into providing tactics for discovering one’s personal brand. Specific strategies to realize one’s brand were often expansions of personal branding elements previously discussed which created this theme. Themes focused on how to discover a personal brand included finding one’s core values, recognizing strengths and weaknesses, determining what differentiates someone from someone else, specifically defining the target audience and creating positioning statements, brand strategy platforms, and mission statements.

Participant 4 said, “You really do need to follow your passion in order to come through honestly with your personal branding.” This idea demonstrated the need for serious self-reflection and understanding to create an authentic brand. Participant 6 said, “Everyone is unique. Everyone has their own skill set whether from experience or from education or from their ability to simply say ‘I have worth’. If you are truthful about your abilities then you are branding yourself with honor.” Detailed instructions to discover a personal brand are offered within the branding model found in Chapter Five.

**Developing One’s Personal Brand**

The next overarching theme was named *developing one’s personal brand*. Once the importance and elements of branding were understood, and one’s unique brand has been discovered, strategies emerged regarding developing and strengthening a personal brand. Even if individuals have a natural ability or passion that helps brand them, they may not possess the experience to make those elements marketable or profitable. Clark (2013) noted, “Once you’ve solidified your brand, you’ll want to shout if from the rooftops…but at this early stage, you may not have a fully formed sense of where you’re going, and that uncertainty has the potential to confuse others” (p. 31).
Concepts that emerged regarding developing one’s personal brand were strategies to morph passions and abilities into skills sets and to expand those skills into expertise. As such, tangible approaches to developing personal brands included joining community groups, teaching, volunteering, interviewing experts, attending conferences and workshops, furthering education, interning, job-shadowing, and taking on special projects. Participant 3 stated, “The way that people can brand themselves today is so completely different than 20 years ago… anyone can brand themselves and create a name for themselves if they put in the effort and energy.”

**Branding Online**

Considering the data overall, the one theme that surfaced the most consistently and was intertwined throughout all other themes was the power of online branding. As such, the next core theme was named *branding online*. The Internet provides an opportunity to positively build or seriously damage a brand. When each of the participants was asked if they searched prospective employees online it was a unanimous and fervent “yes.” When questioned about what specifically they were looking for online, themes emerged such as brand consistency, personality, extracurricular activities, behavior, photos, comments, and red flags. Consistency, however, was the theme that ascended with the greatest frequency and intensity. Vincent and Whitmarsh (2014) said, “Establishing this type of positive, consistent message, communicated across all of your distribution platforms, will create a resilient brand (p. 10).” Although a surfeit of themes emerged to offer assistance for online branding, four principle themes categorized all the data: online dos, online don’ts, social media site usage, and online branding management.

**Online dos.** While entire books have been dedicated to teach proper digital etiquette, several reoccurring themes provided a basic list of online dos. Participant 2 said, “You can show more of what you do, what you are about (online). You can explain more through pictures; show
interest and hobbies in action; show your personality.” Themes for online dos included using the same picture across all social media sites; illustrating brand consistency; being social and interacting with others; being positive; using correct grammar; showing personality but remaining professional; demonstrating hobbies, involvement, and service opportunities; and showing gratitude.

**Online don’ts.** Online don’ts in today’s digital age are as important if not more important than positive online branding. Online don’ts, or red flags, that employers look for can wreak havoc on one’s professional and personal lives. Kang (2013) noted, “If you can’t be found or show up poorly (online), you may lose an important opportunity” (p. 158). Online don’ts in order of frequency and intensity included lack of consistency with brand; alcohol and drug usage; sexually explicit material; revealing clothing; negativity; controversy; political rants; pushing your brand too hard; over confidence; and racist remarks.

**Online branding management.** Many strategies were offered to assist with digital personal branding. Suggestions regarding how to utilize social media sites were the most prominent themes for controlling one’s online brand. Hundreds of social media sites assist with online branding, but the data overwhelmingly focused on three: LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter.

**Social media sites.** Today there are hundreds of social media sites to assist with branding and many sites are industry specific; however, the data overwhelming specified three sites that everyone should utilize to personal brand: LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter. Kang (2013) noted, “LinkedIn has become one of the world’s most important professional networks” (p. 74). Themes that emerged to positively brand via LinkedIn included writing a heading and summary that is consistent with the brand; maintain a professional feel with this medium; create a tagline
that promotes the brand; work to receive recommendations; add groups to your account; add links that combine all social media; and maintain a complete profile. Facebook is less formal and helps to demonstrate personality, but, nonetheless, must remain consistent to the brand. Facebook is the ideal medium to brand hobbies, activities, and passions that are consistent with one’s brand. Kang (2013) further noted, “Facebook is a network that blends your social life and, if you allow it, your work life on one platform” (p. 162).

Twitter is another powerful branding tool but, likewise, must remain consistent and professional. Twitter is like “microblogging” where short, professional messages that promote one’s brand can be sent. Furthermore, Twitter users should remain more professional than social via their tweets. Participant 2 explained, “The main thing I look for (with social media) is if the pictures and comments go against or are consistent with the branding they portray in the interview.” The use of social media can be a great asset or hindrance in the branding process. Additional information regarding online branding is found in the personal branding model in Chapter Five.

Additional brand management tools. Other brand management themes that developed included utilizing blogging; employing online social media management tools such as Hootsuit, TweetDeck, and Google Alerts; and applying search engine optimization (SEO) to further the brand. Simple steps for applying these tactics are available in the personal branding model in Chapter Five.

In-Person Branding

The next major theme was named in-person branding. Although technology has created a major shift in the discussion regarding personal branding to digital platforms, in person branding is as important as ever. Kang (2013) stated, “When you meet people for the first time,
they will remember only one or two things about who you are. What do you want to leave them with” (p. 61). Secondary themes for in-person branding included interviewing; elevator pitches; networking opportunities; non-verbal communication; dress and appearance; apprenticing and job shadowing; and attitude. These secondary themes provided great additional insight and are discussed in Chapter Five along with specific instructions for improving in-person branding.

**In Print Branding**

The next major theme that emerged was labeled *in print branding*. This included any branding themes that could be categorized as print branding. Secondary themes for in print branding involved résumés, cover letters, blogs, business cards, bios, portfolios, and thank you notes. Résumés in particular incorporated various sub-categories such as format, grammar, length, and content. Blogs, although a digital platform, were included within this theme due to the focus on writing. Blogs, likewise, offered multiple sub-categories including, how to blog, how often to post, pros and cons of blogging, and various blogging formats. Participant 6 said, “Although the whole rest of the world is going away from pen and paper, I still like it…I like to see how it is formatted, how they do it, and (through it) what I can learn about their personality.” Specific steps for in print branding are offered in Chapter Five.

**Summary**

Chapter Four provided participant demographics, an overview of the study, data analysis procedures, and the eight personal branding themes that emerged from the data. The eight principle themes regarding personal branding and the hiring process extracted from the data included definitions of personal branding; benefits of personal branding; elements of personal branding; discovering one’s personal brand; developing one’s personal brand; branding online
(online dos, online don’ts, online branding management); in-person branding; and in print branding.
CHAPTER FIVE

The purpose of this study was to create a model of personal branding. The model is to serve as an instructional guide for academic institutions to better prepare millennials as they make their way into the workforce. The central research question for this project was to determine how millennials could better brand themselves for the workplace. To help answer this central, overarching research question, the following research questions were subsequently identified to assist in guiding the project: 1) what is the most relevant information on personal branding based on popular press books, and 2) which branding elements are most important to hiring professionals?

This chapter includes findings from the research and contains nine specific steps that make up the branding model. Each step represents one of the eight overarching themes that were extracted from the thematic analysis of the interviews and press books. Each step includes explanations, subthemes, and/or step-by-step instructions concerning personal branding. In addition to the nine personal branding steps found within the discussion of results, Chapter Five includes limitations of the study, implications for practice, implications of the study, recommendations for future studies, and the conclusion.

Overview of Study

Powerful stigmas have labeled millennials with qualities that are not favorable to hiring professionals; consequently, the Millennial Generation has found it difficult to find employment, due in large part to the poor branding skills they exude. Research demonstrates a clear divide between the instruction millennials are receiving in higher education and what hiring professionals seek (AAC&U, 2007; Bushnell, 2012; Davidson, 2011; De la Llama et al., 2012;
Delaney, 2013; Hanneman & Gardner, 2010; Holliday & Li, 2004; Richardson, 2009; Smith, 2012). This problem laid the groundwork for this exploratory research.

The phenomenon was analyzed through a thematic analysis lens using interviews conducted with hiring professionals as well as popular press books on personal branding. Popular press books were chosen based on popularity, relevance, and reader reviews and incorporated in the study to include the angle of branding professionals in the field. To add depth to the data, hiring professionals who hire more than 10 millennial employees annually were interviewed and specifically asked about branding, millennials, and the hiring process.

**Discussion of Results**

In this discussion section, the findings of the study are discussed with respect to the research questions. The findings were derived from the literature review, the thematic analysis of interviews with hiring professionals, and the thematic analysis of popular press books on personal branding. Participant comments and the information from the books were broken into eight primary themes. These themes provided the basis for the personal branding model entitled *The Personal Branding Blueprint: A Guide for the Millennial Job Seeker*. The nine steps of the personal branding model can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

*The Personal Branding Blueprint: A Guide for the Millennial Job Seeker*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nine steps of The Personal Branding Blueprint: A Guide for the Millennial Job Seeker</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Definition of Personal Branding</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Benefits of Personal Branding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Elements of Personal Branding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Discovering a Personal Brand

5. Creating a Personal Brand Statement

6. Developing a Personal Brand

7. Online Personal Branding Strategies

8. In-Person Personal Branding Strategies

9. In-Print Personal Branding Strategies

Each step of the personal branding model was derived from the major, overarching themes extracted from the data. The subthemes and strategies associated with the model were likewise collected from the data and provided the in-depth, step-by-step instructions that millennials desire.

**Definition of Personal Branding**

Before a personal brand can be effectively shaped, it is essential to understand the basic definition of personal branding. Each of the press book authors and interview participants made a concerted effort to first define personal branding before other themes were conveyed. Defining personal branding was the theme that emerged initially and consistently across the data set.

A definition of personal branding based on a compilation of the data is represented in the first step of the personal branding model. Each step of the personal branding model is illustrated in a table along with additional information concerning specific steps beginning with step one (see Table 4).

Table 4

*Step 1 – Definition: The Personal Branding Blueprint: A Guide for the Millennial Job Seeker*

Definition of Personal Branding
**Personal Branding:** the ongoing, strategic process of managing a reputation by integrating personal skills, values, passions, and individuality within a consistent message that is sent to specific target audiences via a variety of mediums.

This definition lays the foundation for each step of the personal branding model and provides perspective and understanding for other elements of the model. The first three steps of the model offer basic information regarding personal branding, while the last six steps of the model prepare the reader to discover, develop, and ultimately promote an individual brand.

**Benefits of Personal Branding**

Definitions alone do not necessarily motivate people to make sweeping changes in their actions; similarly, the definition of personal branding is not enough to encourage individuals to create and manage their personal brands. Thus, themes that described the benefits of personal branding and why an individual should brand subsequently followed branding definitions. It was widely illustrated throughout the data that branding is becoming more and more prevalent due in large part to the advent of the internet. The days of simply working hard and letting your reputation speak for itself are long gone. In today’s interconnected world, if individuals do not brand effectively, then others will do it for them or will reap the accolades instead of them.

Personal branding allows individuals to take control of shared messages and generate a controlled and effective image. As shown in Table 5, themes that emerged from the data set related to the benefits of active personal branding included opportunity; standing out; visibility; recognition; managing your personal story; reflecting skills; self-discovery; and memorability.

Table 5

*Step 2 – Benefits: The Personal Branding Blueprint: A Guide for the Millennial Job Seeker*
Benefits of Personal Branding

*Opportunity:* the ability to enhance, further, and promote personal and professional relationships via personal branding.

*Standing Out:* the opportunity for individuals to differentiate themselves from others by branding their unique skill sets.

*Visibility:* when individuals demonstrate who they are and what they represent through mediums that can be readily discovered by others.

*Managing a Personal Story:* the ability of individuals to govern and to harness the power of personal branding.

*Reflecting Skills:* the ability of people to employ personal branding to illustrate the skills they possess to others.

*Self-Discovery:* the in-depth self-reflection that is generated as a result of creating an authentic personal brand.

*Memorability:* capacity for individuals to utilize personal branding to position themselves in ways that are easily remembered by others.

Branding allows individuals to craft an image that innately produces these specific benefits. For these reasons, branding is particularly helpful while seeking employment and has proven to assist job seekers in gaining employment (Brown, 2009; Cijo, 2014; Clark, 2013; Delaney, 2013; Haseltine, 2012; Kang, 2013; Mather, 2008; Morgan, 2011; Trinchero, 2009; Vincent & Whitmarsh, 2014; Vitberg, 2010). The definition and benefits of branding assist in preparing participants to understand the elements of a positive personal brand.
Elements of Branding

A strong brand is an exceedingly valuable asset to a company, organization, or individual. Today, Apple owns the most valuable brand in the world with an overall brand value of $145.3 billion (Badenhausen, 2015). Although everyone conveys a personal brand whether he/she acknowledges it or not, no two personal brands are built the same or hold the same value. Some personal brands are detrimental to relationships and professional opportunities, while other personal brands impact these areas in a positive way.

The data provided key elements that make up an effective personal brand. The research identified numerous elements of a dynamic brand, but the most pertinent were authenticity, differentiation, and consistency. Authenticity describes a brand that is genuine and one that truly describes the individual. False claims and vast exaggerations lessen and, ultimately, hurt the value of a brand. Differentiation is a vital element of a personal brand and represents one of the sole purposes of a brand: to separate the individual from others. Brand consistency explains the process of maintaining a constant brand across all mediums. For example, if an individual looks professional on his/her LinkedIn account, but showcases unseemly or inappropriately suggestive photos on Facebook, then the mixed message confuses employers and decreases trust in that person.

Other subthemes that emerged with the greatest amount of frequency and intensity were positivity and target market. The element of positivity continuously emerged throughout the data and is heavily tied to a strong personal brand. Negativity through social media comments regarding employers, one’s self, friends, family, government, companies, or any other subject was typically viewed as damaging to the brand. Authenticity does not necessarily mean every
thought or opinion must be shared via social media. Individuals can brand authentically and remain positive and civil. In addition, positivity can be demonstrated in any number of ways and strengthens the overall brand value. Equally important is the idea of understanding the brand’s target market. Identifying the target market(s) is a vital preliminary step that must be achieved prior to generating a personal brand. Understanding the target market assists with creating the brand in a consistent, authentic, and distinct way.

Other elements relating to personal branding included core values, self-knowledge, passion, integrity/trust, clarity, memorability, vision, and value. These themes furthered the ideals of authenticity, differentiation, and consistency but in more specific terms. Table 6 illustrates each element of a healthy personal brand.

Table 6


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of Personal Branding</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Authenticity:</strong> conveying a personal brand that is real, genuine, and not replicated from another.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Differentiation:</strong> creating a personal brand that is distinct and will contrast and separate a brand from others.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Consistency:</strong> maintaining a personal brand that is steadfast to its core principles and portrays a similar image across all branding channels: online, in-person, and in print.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Core Values:</strong> the traits, qualities, and beliefs a person considers worthwhile and which represent his/her highest priorities. These values should be crafted within the brand whenever possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target Market:</strong> a group of customers towards which an individual strategically aims branding and marketing efforts.</td>
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</table>
Positivity: branding in a way that is optimistic, constructive, and inspiring.

Self-Knowledge: conveying a personal brand that is conscious of individual strengths and weaknesses and fully understands the individual’s purpose and values.

Passion: the enthusiasm, fondness, and intensity people demonstrate toward what they are doing and the brand they are portraying.

Integrity: creating and portraying a personal brand based on principles, moral character, and honesty.

Clarity: a personal brand that is simple to understand and free of ambiguity.

Memorability: a personal brand that is noteworthy and easy to remember.

Vision: a personal brand that establishes forward thinking and identifies a clear destination and purpose.

Value: demonstrating worth, merit, and importance through the personal brand.

It is vital to understand the elements that make up a vibrant and dynamic brand before an individual embarks on discovering, forming, and promoting a brand. Each of these elements should be reviewed and understood during the discovery and development stage of the personal branding process. If the brand is lacking any of these elements, further brand modifications must be made until each element is fully enforced.

Discovering a Personal Brand

Along with the definition, benefits, and elements of branding, another overarching theme that emerged via the thematic analysis was the process by which an individual discovers his/her personal brand. This included subthemes such as establishing core values, recognizing strengths and weaknesses, defining a target market, creating branding and positioning statements, and determining what will differentiate this brand from others.
The first step to creating the branding statement is to unearth passions. Individuals must then discover the core values that drive them and that will guide the overall brand. Subsequent actions are to detail the skills that will benefit the brand, and then determine the target market that would benefit most from those skills. Identifying and defining ways to differentiate the brand from others complete the process. Table 7 illustrates how to discover a personal brand, and Table 8 enables participants to create a personal branding statement.

Table 7


Discovering a Personal Brand

Find your passion:

1. Write down all the people you love, the places you love, the activities and hobbies you love. Write down what you loved before you were 20, e.g., hobbies, sports, extracurricular events, school subjects.
2. Choose three to five passions that are most important to you and the brand you intend to create.

Find your core values:

1. Make or find a list of values.
2. Brainstorm which values are the most important to you.
3. Choose three to five values that are the most important to you and the brand you intend to create.

Find your strengths:

1. List any hard skills you have been specifically trained to do or skills you would like to
have, e.g., web design, accounting, social media marketing, sales.

2. Choose three to five hard skills that are most valuable to you and the brand you intend to create.

3. List any soft skills you possess or would like to possess, e.g., public speaking, management, listening, leadership.

4. Choose three to five soft skills that are the most valuable to you and the brand you intend to create.

Find your target market:

1. Who can benefit most from your skills and/or services?

2. Name your target market(s).

Find what differentiates you:

1. List anything that is unique, different, or special about you.

2. Choose three to five qualities that differentiate your brand from others.

Once passions, values, strengths, target markets, and differentiations are unearthed, step five allows for the information to be placed within a personal branding statement. This statement was derived from a compilation of similar branding guiding statements found throughout popular press books (see Table 8).

Table 8


Creating a Personal Brand Statement

Strengths (Hard & Soft Skills):
I am a…(Write down the three to five hard and soft skills from Table 5.),

**Passions:**

Who is passionate about…(Write down the three to five passions from Table 5.);

**Values:**

And who is guided by the core values of…(Write down the three to five values from Table 5.),

**Target Audiences:**

Providing my ________(goods and/or services) to__________. (Write down the three to five target audiences from Table 5.),

**Differentiation:**

In a way no one else can deliver with…(Write down the three to five elements that differentiate you from Table 5.).

Step four and five provide users the ability to create authentic, consistent, and distinct brands that can guide their branding strategies within the three avenues of branding: online, in-person, and in print. If additional skills are needed to establish the brand, the next step of the model facilitates personal brand development.

**Developing a Personal Brand**

Upon discovering a brand and creating the personal branding statement, it may become apparent that the brand is lacking in one aspect or another. Understanding key elements of branding, discovering passions, and assembling core values are a great start to developing a healthy brand; however, after completing steps four and five, it is quite possible that individuals lack the necessary skills to advance the personal brand they desire. Once a brand is solidified, the final steps in the method assist with promoting the brand to the world, but, at this stage, the
brand might not be fully formed and any uncertainty will confuse target audiences. Themes that offered suggestions on how to strengthen the brand or ways to increase skills that can fortify the brand were clustered around the key theme of *brand development* (see Table 9).

Table 9

*Step 6 – Development: The Personal Branding Blueprint: A Guide for the Millennial Job Seeker*

Developing a Personal Brand

1. Conduct a SWOT analysis to understand which areas can be improved upon to strengthen the brand.
2. Read books, blogs, biographies, magazines, and any other material that can facilitate expertise in the particular area.
3. Interview individuals who work in similar fields to learn everything possible from them.
4. Develop brand validators, who are individuals that will promote you and your brand within their circles of influence. You, in turn, can do the same for them.
5. Take advantage of viable leadership opportunities, help with special projects, attend conferences, sign up for web seminars in the field, and teach concerning the brand whenever possible.
6. Receive more education. Some skills require formal training while others do not. Consider the options carefully to understand if additional schooling is worth the investment.
7. Volunteer in the community with organizations that will increase knowledge, brand awareness, and networking opportunities.
8. Participate in job shadow or an internship within the specific field.
9. Join a local community group that focuses on aspects of your skills or brand element that needs strengthening.

Once the personal brand is understood, discovered, and developed, it is time to promote the brand via the three areas of brand management: online, in-person, and in print.

**Branding Online**

Maintaining a healthy and relevant personal brand online is crucial in today’s digitally interconnected environment and can provide one of the greatest opportunities to brand effectively. Vast amounts of information are available to assist with online brand management; therefore, step seven of the branding model offers a snapshot of the online branding advice collected from the data. Step seven includes specific directions for the three most prominent social media sites (LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter), dos and don’ts for online branding, and online management tools and strategies (see Table 10).

Table 10

*Step 7 – Online: The Personal Branding Blueprint: A Guide for the Millennial Job Seeker*

**Online Personal Branding Strategies**

*Consider the following when utilizing LinkedIn:*

1. Write a heading and summary that is consistent with the branding statement.
2. Maintain a professional feel within this medium.
3. Create a tagline that promotes the brand.
4. Work to receive recommendations by requesting them and by recommending others.
5. Add groups to your account that enforce the brand.
6. Add links that combine and link other social media sites.
7. Maintain a complete profile.

8. Share content that strengthens the brand.

Consider the following when utilizing Facebook:

1. Facebook can be less formal and assists with demonstrating personality, but should remain consistent with the branding of other social networking sites.

2. Utilize this site to demonstrate hobbies, activities, service opportunities, and passions that promote the brand.

3. Add groups to your account that enforce the brand.

4. Add links that combine and link other social media sites.

5. Maintain a complete profile.

Consider the following when utilizing Twitter:

1. Twitter is like microblogging and a great way to promote the brand.

2. Ninety percent of tweets should be professional and promote the brand, while 10% can be of a personal nature.

3. Those who have Twitter followers tweet about a specific topic. Create specific messages about the elements of your brand.

4. Utilize hashtags to help others follow the conversation surrounding your brand.

5. Add links that combine and link other social media sites.

1. Maintain a complete profile.

Online Branding Dos:

1. Use the same avatar (profile picture) across all social media sites for consistency. Utilize a professional and clear photo of your face from the shoulders up.
2. Maintain brand regularity across all online mediums that are consistent with the branding statement.

3. Demonstrate interests, hobbies, and skills in action that are consistent with the brand.

4. Be social and interactive with others through social media, e.g., make comments and link to their pages.

5. Remain positive and demonstrate gratitude whenever possible.

6. Show personality but remain professional.

*Online Branding Don’ts:*

1. Avoid a lack of consistency with the brand.

2. Avoid the appearance of alcohol and drug use.

3. Avoid sexually explicit material.

4. Don’t dress provocatively in online images.

5. Don’t push your brand too hard.

6. Avoid overly controversial topics if not consistent with your brand, e.g., political and religious rants.

7. Don’t be over confident.

8. Avoid making racist and disparaging remarks.

9. Don’t brag online; show humility.

*Additional Brand Management Tools and Strategies:*

1. Utilize social media management tools to control and promote your brand online:
   
   a. Hootsuite: a social media management system for brand management.
   
   b. TweetDeck: a social media dashboard application for Twitter account management.
c. Google Alert: a content change detection and notification service that keeps users aware of their online brand and content.

2. Apply basic search engine optimization (SEO) strategies:
   a. Monitor your page rank on searches. Use the following tactics to improve the rank and monitor if the rank is increasing.
   b. Utilize key words in your content that are relevant to your sites and brand.
   c. Utilize good links that connect all of your content on the web.
   d. Produce good content that is interesting and fresh; search engines favor the newest content.
   e. Develop relationships with other sites and link to them, as they will often link back to you.
   f. Keep all social media sites relevant and current, as personal sites commonly come up in web searches.
   g. Register your avatar with a third party company, like Gravatar, so your picture shows up in comments.
   h. Include your name whenever possible in all online content.

3. Consider the following when creating domain names:
   a. All domain names need to speak to your brand.
   b. Keep domain names simple and memorable.
   c. Use a .com domain whenever possible.
   d. Consider what the domain name looks like when written out.
   a. Beware of copyrights.
Online branding plays a significant role in upholding an individual’s personal brand and is increasing in prevalence; however, the importance of people skills and in-person branding remain key elements to hiring professionals and for robust professional and personal relationships. The following step in the personal branding model provides instruction on how to effectively brand in person.

**In-Person Branding**

Despite the dominance of technology, effective person-to-person communication skills remain at the top of what hiring professionals desire in their employees (AAC&U, 2007; Hanneman & Gardner, 2010). Secondary terms surrounding the in-person branding theme included interviewing; elevator pitches; networking opportunities; non-verbal communication; dress and appearance; apprenticing and job shadowing; and attitude. Explanations of key terms within this theme are included.

An elevator speech is a brief discourse that can promote a person’s brand and helps educate people about who that person is and what he/she does in a quick and effective manner. Specific steps and instruction for an elevator speech are included in Table 11. A networking/ecosystem is a person’s sphere of influence that can assist with endorsing their personal brand. The data demonstrated it is much more effective for others to endorse your brand than to do it personally. Ways to expand your networking/ecosystem are included in step eight along with dress and appearance strategies, and interviewing instructions (see Table 11).

Table 11

*Step 8 – In Person: The Personal Branding Blueprint: A Guide for the Millennial Job Seeker*

| In-Person Personal Branding Strategies |  |
1. Create an elevator speech:
   a. State your name and what you do or want to do using key words the audience will remember (5–10 seconds).
   b. Provide context and value that helps audience members understand why your skills are important (30–60 seconds).
   c. Briefly provide evidence to support your claims by illustrating stories, numbers, highlights, fun facts, etc. (60–90 seconds).

2. Consider the following additional factors:
   a. Maintain a natural and smooth tone, not canned or boastful.
   b. Educate audience members about your brand, but do not over promote.
   c. Have a list of skills and fun facts available to intermix depending on the audience.
   d. Do more than just talk; ask questions and allow others to speak.

Developing a Networking Ecosystem:

1. Identify influencers in your industry.
2. Connect with them on some level and work to find common bonds.
3. Put yourself in places where you will connect with these individuals:
   a. Trade shows
   b. Workshops
   c. Conventions
   d. Volunteer opportunities
   e. Networking groups
4. Maintain ongoing communication with them:
   a. Connect via the internet.
b. Send a thank you note when they help you.

c. Do something for them.

5. Invest in the relationship:
   a. Be patient and devote time and effort. Developing relationships is a commitment.
   b. Be amiable, positive, and work to be remembered.

6. Connect others:
   a. Connect others, as it helps to extend and strengthen your brand.

7. Create validators:
   a. Generate validation by developing relationships, or validators, in which you agree to help promote each other’s brand.

Appearance, Grooming, and Attire:

1. Smile:
   a. Smile, as it expresses that you are open, friendly, and approachable and helps you exude confidence as well as feel more comfortable.

2. Handshake:
   a. Offer a sturdy handshake that is not too weak or too strong.

3. Eye contact:
   a. Make eye contact, as this skill is more important than ever. Practice everywhere you go, e.g., the grocery store, bank, library.

4. Posture:
   a. Stand tall, as it expresses confidence.
   b. Lean forward when seated at a table and use nonverbal cues that demonstrate you are listening.
5. **Cell Phone:**

   a. Refrain from using your cell phone in social and networking settings, as technology can be detrimental in social environments.

6. **Grooming:**

   a. Maintain good personal hygiene to ensure your appearance is clean and well-groomed when interacting in important social settings, i.e. take good care of your fingernails, teeth, hair, and face.

   b. Accessorize your attire in ways that add to the brand and your appearance without being distracting, and apply makeup lightly for a natural look.

7. **Attire:**

   a. Choose professional and appropriate attire that is not revealing or provocative and that embraces bright colors to compliment your brand.

   b. Dress for the job you want, not the job you have, by researching the proper attire for any social setting.

8. **Physical Characteristics:**

   a. If you have physical characteristics that may be distracting, but you cannot or do not want to alter them, focus on these features and make them a part of the brand.

**Interviewing:**

1. Research the company:

   a. Understand the mission, vision, strengths, weaknesses, goals, and specifics of the job for which you are applying.

   b. Conduct internet research to study company news, events, products, and services as well as to get a feel for the company culture and industry trends.
c. Tie your history and skills to the future of the company to which you are applying as much as possible.

2. Arrive early to the interview.

3. Stay hydrated to prevent your voice from cracking or becoming dry.

4. Ensure your appearance is well groomed and your attire is professional and appropriate (see all standards provided in Appearance, Grooming, and Attire listed in the previous section).

5. Be authentic, upbeat, focused, confident, candid, and concise:
   
   a. No answer should be shorter than 30 seconds or longer than 2 minutes.
   
   b. Show passion for what you have achieved and want to accomplish.
   
   c. Demonstrate excitement and positivity at all times.

6. Be specific:
   
   a. Have specific ideas, goals, and plans for the job whenever possible. Even if the ideas aren’t achievable or practical, it shows you are thinking.
   
   b. Use specific examples from your past to answer questions. When possible, use numbers, statistics, dollar amounts, and percentages to prove your points.
   
   c. Answer questions with stories that demonstrate your past, skills, and abilities.

7. Practice, practice, practice:
   
   a. Imagine the types of questions that will be asked and practice answering with responses that demonstrate your brand, skills, and experience.
   
   b. Prior to the interview, have someone ask you a list of questions to which you already know the answers, e.g., what is your favorite color? This will loosen your nerves and position you to answer questions confidently and quickly.
8. Show curiosity and a desire to learn:
   a. If possible, ask questions about the company, the culture, and the specific job.
   b. Show interest in and excitement for what is happening within the organization.

In Print Branding

The last step of the nine-step personal branding model includes findings for in print branding. In print personal branding includes resumes, cover letters, blogs, business cards, bios, portfolios, and thank you notes. Again, all printed or written material must stay consistent with the overall brand. Blogging is included in this section due to its emphasis on writing. A blog is an online discussion or informational website and a great way for individuals to spread their brands and get the message directly to their audiences. However, blogging is a continual obligation, takes great effort, and is time consuming. To determine whether blogging is a good option, individuals should ask the following questions: Do you have something to say? Do you have time to post at least once a week? If so, strategies for blogging and other in-print tactics are indicated in Table 12.

Table 12

*Step 9 – In Print: The Personal Branding Blueprint: A Guide for the Millennial Job Seeker*

In Print Personal Branding Strategies

1. Creating an effective résumé:
   a. Ensure your résumé is no more than one to two pages. One page is preferable.
   b. Include one to two direct quotations e.g., from a customer, client, or employer, at
the top of the resume below your name and contact information.

c. Provide a summary statement or overview instead of objectives.

d. Keep information short and pertinent.

e. Create two resumes: an abbreviated version for recruiters and an extended version for hiring personnel.

f. Format the resume in a way that best demonstrates your experience:
   i. Choose a functional or accomplishment-based format depending on your history and what will best leverage your experience.
   ii. Include education versus experience first based on the job’s needs.

g. Focus on the job’s needs.

h. Link your experience, skills, and abilities to the job description.

i. Validate past successes and contributions using numbers, dollar amounts, and percentages whenever possible.

j. Align the values important to you within your branding statement with the values of the company.

k. Use brief, past tense, action verbs to describe your skills and accomplishments.

l. Edit for grammatical errors.

m. Upload or send your resume as a PDF to ensure it can be opened and the format is not compromised.

2. Create an effective cover letter:
a. Cover letters can be organized according to the following elements:

   i. Greeting: directly address the person responsible for hiring if at all possible.

   ii. Paragraph one: immediately focus the information in a way that ties you to the position and explains why you are a good fit.

   iii. Paragraph two: provide tangible examples of work performed and results achieved, keeping the job requirements in mind.

   iv. Paragraph three: demonstrate knowledge of the company and the position, and reassert why you are a good fit.

   v. Paragraph four: summarize what you offer and close in a strong and memorable way. Include that you will follow up with them; be proactive.

b. Do not simply repeat the resume.

c. Use the cover letter to show personality, interests, curiosities, and to expand on your brand.

d. Ensure the letter is succinct and concise (half to one full page).

e. Edit for grammatical errors.

f. Ensure the cover letter matches the overall brand.

g. Upload or send the letter as a PDF to ensure it can be opened and the format is not compromised.
3. Produce a blog to promote your brand:

   a. Understand that blogging is a long-term and constant commitment.

   b. Plan posts ahead of time so you don’t get overwhelmed.

   c. Write timely posts that are current and that focus on the elements of your branding statement.

   d. Update frequently to not lose followership and to stay high on the SEO rating.

       Most bloggers post at a minimum of once a week to once a day.

   e. Edit for typos, spelling, and grammar.

   f. Use guest bloggers to cross promote and to save time and effort.

   g. Utilize various blogging alternatives to ensure variety, e.g., photos, podcasts, and videos.

   h. Ensure all content is consistent with your brand.

   i. Consider the following topics when planning blog posts:

       i. Ambitions and goals

       ii. Announcements and news regarding your brand and industry

       iii. Current events happening within your brand and industry

       iv. Your unique insight

       v. Specific industry lists, e.g., best and worst lists and favorites

       vi. Personal stories
vii. Creative memes that promote the brand

viii. Surveys and questionnaires

ix. Reviews

j. Use quality equipment to ensure high-caliber sound and images, e.g., videos and podcasts that will reflect your brand positively or negatively accordingly.

Additional Print Materials:

1. Biographies:
   a. When writing biographies, consider the target audience.
   b. A biography must match the tone of the brand, e.g., humorous, professional.
   c. Use first and third person accordingly depending on the situation; first person is more personal, while third person is more professional.
   d. Always use your name near the front of the biography.
   e. Biographies can show personality, so be creative.

2. Business cards:
   a. Create a design that communicates the brand.
   b. Be consistent with the brand color scheme.
   c. Select heavier paper stock, not flimsy or thin.

3. Brand image:
   a. Create a memorable company name or brand that is easy to read, convey, and spell.
   b. Design a creative, attractive logo that is aligned with the brand.
   c. Select a color scheme that matches the brand, e.g. soft pastels may be considered more feminine, while reds and blacks are often deemed more masculine.
d. Utilize the color scheme across mediums, e.g., online, in person, and in print.

For a complete version of the Personal Branding Blueprint: A Guide for the Millennial Job Seeker, see Appendix F.

Findings and Conclusions

The findings of this study helped answer the research questions: how can millennials better brand themselves for the workplace; what is the most relevant information on personal branding based on popular press books; and which branding elements are most important to hiring professionals? The data produced the Personal Branding Blueprint: A Guide for the Millennial Job Seeker, which, in essence, answered each of the research questions.

The guide provided specific instruction on how millennials can effectively brand themselves in preparation for the workplace based on popular press books on branding and data collected from hiring professionals. The nine-step guide is intended to assist those who teach and work with millennials or as a personal guide for the millennial job seeker.

Limitations of the Study

This study involved certain limitations. First, the participants were limited to only those who reside in the state of Utah. Hiring practices and insight regarding branding may differ nationwide, thus the limited geographical area of the study was a limitation. Next, popular press book data was restricted to only five books. Although these five books generated nearly 1,000 pages of data, the branding viewpoints from professionals were limited in scope to only five authors. A larger study that included additional material regarding branding could have added further insight. Lastly, the purpose of the branding model produced was to provide a snapshot of each element that makes up personal branding. However, providing such a broad overview of personal branding did not allow for an in-depth look at any one aspect of branding.
Implications for Practice

This study provides real life, tangible, and specific instructions to assist with the generational divide that is preventing millennial students from gaining employment, due in large part to poor personal branding practices. Past research has proven that the Millennial Generation is unprofessional, negligent, and unprepared in their attitude toward the hiring process; furthermore, their personal branding habits are self-destructive, ineffective, and naïve (AAC&U, 2007; Bell, 2013; Hanneman & Gardner, 2010; Hartman & McCambridge, 2011; Kauri, 2013; Meiling, 2014; Richardson, 2009; Woodbury, Neal, & Addams, 2008).

In addition, research has demonstrated that, unlike past generations, millennials seek structure and require clear expectations to complete tasks (Hulett, 2006; Palmiotto, 2012; Smith, 2012). The Personal Branding Blueprint: A Guide for the Millennial Job Seeker model offers the definition, elements, and processes to discover and promote a healthy personal brand. The step-by-step guidelines are simple yet sufficiently extensive for anyone to create and further a brand in ways that will be beneficial to securing employment.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study aimed to first understand the Millennial Generation in an attempt to assist them in finding employment. Through the literature review, the habits, strengths, weaknesses, desires, and trends of millennials were discussed. This provided a framework to then analyze current information regarding branding from both the media and hiring professionals in the field. The Personal Branding Blueprint: A Guide for the Millennial Job Seeker assists millennials in developing brands that focus on personal strengths and promotes personal brands positively. However, the model was intended to be broad in scope, creating an all-encompassing guide that
can be used quickly and efficiently without the need to wade through extensive amounts of information and research.

Therefore, The Personal Branding Blueprint: A Guide for the Millennial Job Seeker serves as an effective guide to personal branding for any job seeker. However, industry-specific branding models could be created to provide more specialized training for particular industries. Often it is one small detail that makes the difference between securing a job or not; for example, personal branding for a graphic designer will be different than personal branding for a financial planner. Overarching industry-specific branding models would assist with taking this research to the next level.

**Conclusion**

This study aimed to make a positive impact in people’s lives. A large percentage of a person’s adult existence is spent at work; thus, discovering passions, developing skills within those passions, and branding within circles that can employ those passions can drastically and positively transform lives. Millions of millennials have struggled with both finding their passions and branding themselves accordingly; consequently, many have struggled to find employment that is best suited for them. Many millennials feel that simply earning a degree will provide the sufficient opportunity to secure employment; unfortunately, in the current interconnected, ever-changing, and technologically-enhanced job market, degrees are not enough. Today, job seekers must offer more if they expect to get the jobs they want.

Therefore, this study intended to unearth variables surrounding this situation by asking why millennials struggle to brand themselves? What are the best ways for millennials to learn? Where can millennials find the most pertinent information regarding branding? What are the most important elements of branding? How can the information be brought together in a useful,
complete, and compelling fashion? These ideas shaped the research questions and method selection, which led to collecting, reviewing, analyzing, and presenting the data, and that ultimately formed The Personal Branding Blueprint: A Guide for the Millennial Job Seeker.

Although personal branding was not as critical for past generations, today it is arguably an important, if not necessary, part of a person’s personal and professional success. Technology has made it possible for anyone to see, change, adapt, create, enhance, destroy, support, and mold personal brands. If individuals do not proactively and purposely craft their personal brands in authentic, passionate, and effective ways, others will form these brands for them. Personal branding is too critical to leave to chance, and, when done properly, has the power to revolutionize lives and careers. Personal branding is the key to opportunity, influence, and advancement. Regardless of a person’s industry, position, or current career status, personal branding is the way of the future when it comes to ensuring success.

The model that was created through this research, The Personal Branding Blueprint: A Guide for the Millennial Job Seeker, provides critical information necessary to jumpstart a brand and generate a brighter future. The model first assists in finding and developing passions; provides positioning strategies; helps to purposefully maneuver one’s career and life in a desirable direction; and aids in making the most of one’s talents and abilities. It is crucial that millennials generate personal brands that reflect who they and what they have to offer, in order to position themselves for happiness, fulfillment, and success. Most importantly, when individuals’ lives, careers, skills, passions, and brands are in sync, they are poised to not only be authentic and effective, but to truly make a difference in the world around them.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: PARTICIPATION REQUEST EMAIL

Dear (Participant Name),

I am inviting you to participate in a research study involving personal branding and current hiring practices. Your participation will greatly assist my research which is part of my Doctorate of Management Dissertation at Colorado Technical University. The purpose of this study is to create a model for personal branding with the intent to assist recent graduates in finding employment. The model will be based on popular press books on branding and personal interviews conducted with hiring professionals.

Your participation in this 60–90 minute interview is essential to the data gathering process. Interviews will be scheduled in a way that they do not interfere with your primary duties. Dixie State University has permitted these interviews to take place in the Gardner Student Center.

Participation is completely voluntary. However, if you choose to participate you will be asked to review and sign a consent form. You are free to leave the interview at any time. Interviews will be conducted between __________and____________. For your convenience, I have attached a consent form for review.

Your participation in this study represents your opportunity to contribute to the body of knowledge specific to branding and the hiring process. Your experience as a hiring/recruiting professional for millennials is crucial to the success of this study. The results of the study could assist college graduates to proficiently brand themselves and secure gainful employment. The information will be kept confidential and will be used for research purposes only. Furthermore, at no time will your company’s name or your name be mentioned.
Please respond to this email within five business days to let me know if you would agree to participate in this study. If you consent to participate, I will work with your schedule at nearly anytime between the dates listed above.

Thank you for your consideration and feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns.

Jordon Sharp
DM Candidate
Phone: 435-668-3001
Email: jsharp@dixie.edu

Dr. Kennedy Maranga
CTU Dissertation Mentor
Phone: 314-556-3216
Email: kmaranga@faculty.ctuonline.edu

Attachment:
Consent Form
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT


Investigator: Jordon Sharp

Contact Number: 435-668-3001

Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to create a model for personal branding to be taught at the college level with the intent to assist recent college graduates in finding employment.

Participants

You are being asked to participate in the study because of your experiences with respect to hiring and branding.

Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to provide your opinions on what employers look for in a potential employee regarding three dimensions of personal branding: in-person, online, and print. I will ask for specific examples.

Benefits of Participation

There may/may not be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to provide a model that will better prepare college students to brand themselves effectively for the job market.
Risks of Participation

There are risks involved in all research studies. However, this study is estimated to involve minimal risk. The research is not specific to your employer. Information provided based on experiences will be noted in a way that does not identify you or your employer.

Cost/Compensation

There will be no financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take approximately 60–90 minutes. You will not be compensated for your time. *Colorado Technical University will not provide compensation or free medical care for an unanticipated injury sustained as a result of participating in this research study.*

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Jordon Sharp at 435-668-3001 or at j.sharp22@my.cs.coloradotech.edu. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects or any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted, you may contact Colorado Technical University—Doctoral Programs at 719-598-0200, or Dr. Kennedy Maranga at 314-556-3216 or kmaranga@faculty.ctuonline.edu.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without penalty. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at any time during the interview process.

Confidentiality

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you or your employer to this study. The
records will be stored at the investigator’s home office for the duration of the study. Once the final report is generated, the questionnaire will be shredded.

Participant Consent

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

____________________________________  _____________________
Signature of Participant                                                               Date

______________________________________
Participant Name (Please Print)
APPENDIX C: SCRIPT

Location: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________

Name of Subject: _______________________

Subject Number: _______________________

Time Started: _________________________

Time Finished: _________________________

Total Interview Time: _________________ (minutes)

Interview Opening Remarks:

Hello, my name is Jordon Sharp, and I am a doctoral student at Colorado Technical University. As part of my doctoral dissertation research project, I am researching personal branding and how college students can most effectively brand themselves to find employment. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Today, I am interested to learn what you, as a hiring professional, look for regarding personal branding in potential employees.

Ice Breaker Question: How are you today? Is there anything that would prevent you from participating in today’s session? (If not, proceed.)

Consent Form: Before we begin the short survey and interview, I would like to go over the informed consent form (if subject does not have his copy, provide a blank copy, and go over the form). Do you have any questions regarding this form? (If none, proceed.) Could you please sign and date the form for my records. I will also provide you a copy for your records. (Once form is signed/dated, provide subject a copy.)
Interview: Your interview is part of a larger study that includes five interviews conducted with hiring professionals and data collected from popular press books on branding. I would like to record the interview via digital recording device so that I can spend more time listening than taking notes. Everything we discuss will be kept confidential. You may request that the recording device is shut off if its presence precludes your answering in a particular manner. A transcript of the recording will be prepared but no data will be attributed to any specific individual. At no time will anyone, except me, know what you said in response to the interview questions.

This study focuses on three dimensions of personal branding utilized by a prospective employee during the hiring process: in-person branding, online branding, and in print branding. The following provides definitions of each dimension:

1. In-person—In-person branding includes any type of branding accomplished in person, including, but not limited to, networking, elevator speeches, interviews, dress, appearance, grooming, posture, and body language.

2. Online—Online branding includes the prospective employee’s digital footprint found on the World Wide Web, including, but not limited to, websites, blogs, social media sites, online articles, and e-portfolios.

3. Print—Print branding includes any specific materials used in the hiring process, including, but not limited to, résumés, cover letters, thank you notes, letters of recommendation, and portfolios.

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study. Here is your previously signed informed consent form that I am now handing you. In it, you indicate that you have read it, understood the process of the study, and agree to participate. This is a copy for your records.
Thank you. Do you have any questions for me before we begin the interview questions? I would now like to move into the discussion segment of the interview and ask you several questions. Do you have any objections? [If no objections, turn on the recording device, then check/annotate the time, and proceed.]

**Continuing the Interview:**

My name is Jordon Sharp, today is (date)______________, the time is ______________, and I am interviewing subject ______________. I will now ask you a number of questions. When answering these questions, think about your perceptions and experiences regarding the hiring process at your organization and the personal branding of potential employees. Please do your best to respond to all the questions. All of these questions are designed to assist me in understanding your expectations regarding personal branding and the hiring process.

1. What is your definition of personal branding?
2. How do you recruit potential employees?
3. What do you look for specifically in a potential employee’s cover letter and résumé?
4. What specifically are you looking for during the interview, both good and bad?
5. What are your expectations regarding dress and appearance during the interview?
6. What do you look for regarding body language during the interview?
7. Do you search online to find additional information about potential employees? If so, what are you looking for online?
8. What are positive and negative elements of a potential employee’s online presence?
9. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Millennial Generation employees?
10. What additional information can you provide regarding the topic of personal branding and the hiring process?

Closing Remarks:

Thank you for your time. As I review the information you have provided, I may have some clarification questions. May I contact you if I need to clarify something?

Again, please be assured your individual responses will be kept confidential, and thank you for your participation in this study.

Thank you very much.
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEWER NOTE SHEET

Demographic Data:

Name: _____________________________

Age: ________

Gender: _______________

Ethnicity: _____________

Current Position: _____________________________

Number of Years Involved with Hiring: _____

Number of Years with Current Employer: _____

Interview Question Notes

1. What is your definition of personal branding?

2. How do you recruit potential employees?

3. What do you look for specifically in a potential employee’s cover letter?

4. What do you look for specifically within a potential employee’s résumé?

5. What specifically are you looking for during the interview?

6. What are possible red flags you look for during the interview?
7. What are your expectations regarding dress and appearance during the interview?

8. What do you look for regarding body language during the interview?

9. Do you search online to find additional information about potential employees? If so, what are you looking for online?

10. What are positive and negative elements of a potential employee’s online presence?

11. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Millennial Generation employees?

12. What additional information can you provide regarding the topic of personal branding and the hiring process?
APPENDIX E: LIST OF POPULAR PRESS BOOKS WITH TITLES, AUTHORS, CATEGORIES, AND SCORES

Popular Press Books and Scores Based on Relevancy

43. Chiaravalle, B., & Schenck, B. F. (2014). *Branding For Dummies (For Dummies (Business & Personal Finance))*. Score: 58.
branding system to help you earn more, do more and be more at work. Score: 53.
96. Kaveripatnam, N. (2013). Resumes that Win, They have Very Powerful Opening Lines-How

Popular Press Books and Scores Based on Copies Sold

17. Ayres, S. (2014). Facebook All-in-One For Dummies (For Dummies (Computer/Tech)). Score: 84.
19. Ayres, S. (2014). *Facebook All-in-One For Dummies (For Dummies (Computer/Tech))*. Score: 82 (This book showed up twice but was not scored as such)
20. Vavnerchuk, G. (2009). *Crush It!: Why NOW Is the Time to Cash In on Your Passion*. Score: 81. (This book showed up twice but was not scored as such)
55. Beegel, J., & The Infographic World Team. (2014). *Infographics For Dummies (For Dummies (Computer/Tech)).* Score: 46.
‘Employee’ into a Brand That Shouts Distinction, Commitment, and Passion! Score: 7.

**Popular Press Books and Scores Based on Customer Reviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Ducker, C.</td>
<td>Virtual Freedom: How to Work with Virtual Staff to Buy More Time, Become More Productive, and Build Your Dream Business</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Humphreys, K.</td>
<td>Go Solo: How to Quit the Job You Hate and Start a Small Business You Love!: You can break free from your day job, start your side hustle from home, and achieve success as a solopreneur!</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Coine, T., &amp; Babbitt, M.</td>
<td>A World Gone Social: How Companies Must Adapt to Survive</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Iantsch, J.</td>
<td>Duct Tape Selling: Think Like a Marketer-Sell Like a Superstar</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Levinson, J. C., &amp; Perry, D. E.</td>
<td>Guerrilla Marketing for Job Hunters 3.0: How to Stand Out from the Crowd and Tap Into the Hidden Job Market using Social Media and 999 other Tactics Today</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Cantwell, M.</td>
<td>Be a Free Range Human: Escape the 9-5, Create a Life You Love and Still Pay the Bills</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Bernstein, B.</td>
<td>How to Write a KILLER LinkedIn Profile... And 18 Mistakes to Avoid: 2014 Edition (10th Edition)</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Cijo, M.</td>
<td>You Branding: Reinventing Your Personal Identity as a Successful Brand</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Duffy, S.</td>
<td>Launch!: The Critical 90 Days from Idea to Market</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Capala, M.</td>
<td>SEO Like I’m 5: The Ultimate Beginner’s Guide to Search Engine Optimization</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Yate, M.</td>
<td>Knock ’em Dead 2011: The Ultimate Job Search Guide</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Newlands, M., &amp; Hendricks, D.</td>
<td>How to Get PR for your Startup: Traction</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
57. Morgan, J., & Garcia, P. M. (2012). Brand Against the Machine: How to Build Your Brand, Cut Through the Marketing Noise, and Stand Out from the Competition... Score: 44.
Copywriting Tips to Increase Your Conversion Rates by 30% or More. Score: 31.


APPENDIX F: THE PERSONAL BRANDING BLUEPRINT: A GUIDE FOR THE
MILLENNIAL JOB SEEKER

The Personal Branding Blueprint: A Guide for the Millennial Job Seeker

Nine steps of The Personal Branding Blueprint: A Guide for the Millennial Job Seeker

1. Definition of Personal Branding
2. Benefits of Personal Branding
3. Elements of Personal Branding
4. Discovering a Personal Brand
5. Creating a Personal Brand Statement
6. Developing a Personal Brand
7. Online Personal Branding Strategies
8. In-Person Personal Branding Strategies
9. In-Print Personal Branding Strategies


Definition of Personal Branding

*Personal Branding*: the ongoing, strategic process of managing a reputation by integrating personal skills, values, passions, and individuality within a consistent message that is sent to specific target audiences via a variety of mediums.

Benefits of Personal Branding

Opportunity: the ability to enhance, further, and promote personal and professional relationships via personal branding.

Standing Out: the opportunity for individuals to differentiate themselves from others by branding their unique skill sets.

Visibility: when individuals demonstrate who they are and what they represent through mediums that can be readily discovered by others.

Managing a Personal Story: the ability of individuals to govern and to harness the power of personal branding.

Reflecting Skills: the ability of people to employ personal branding to illustrate the skills they possess to others.

Self-Discovery: the in-depth self-reflection that is generated as a result of creating an authentic personal brand.

Memorability: capacity for individuals to utilize personal branding to position themselves in ways that are easily remembered by others.


Elements of Personal Branding

Authenticity: conveying a personal brand that is real, genuine, and not replicated from another.

Differentiation: creating a personal brand that is distinct and will contrast and separate a brand from others.

Consistency: maintaining a personal brand that is steadfast to its core principles and portrays a
similar image across all branding channels: online, in-person, and in print.

Core Values: the traits, qualities, and beliefs a person considers worthwhile and which represent his/her highest priorities. These values should be crafted within the brand whenever possible.

Target Market: a group of customers towards which an individual strategically aims branding and marketing efforts.

Positivity: branding in a way that is optimistic, constructive, and inspiring.

Self-Knowledge: conveying a personal brand that is conscious of individual strengths and weaknesses and fully understands the individual’s purpose and values.

Passion: the enthusiasm, fondness, and intensity people demonstrate toward what they are doing and the brand they are portraying.

Integrity: creating and portraying a personal brand based on principles, moral character, and honesty.

Clarity: a personal brand that is simple to understand and free of ambiguity.

Memorability: a personal brand that is noteworthy and easy to remember.

Vision: a personal brand that establishes forward thinking and identifies a clear destination and purpose.

Value: demonstrating worth, merit, and importance through the personal brand.

---


Discovering a Personal Brand

Find your passion:

3. Write down all the people you love, the places you love, the activities and hobbies you
love. Write down what you loved before you were 20, e.g., hobbies, sports, extracurricular events, school subjects.

4. Choose three to five passions that are most important to you and the brand you intend to create.

*Find your core values:*

4. Make or find a list of values.

5. Brainstorm which values are the most important to you.

6. Choose three to five values that are the most important to you and the brand you intend to create.

*Find your strengths:*

5. List any hard skills you have been specifically trained to do or skills you would like to have, e.g., web design, accounting, social media marketing, sales.

6. Choose three to five hard skills that are most valuable to you and the brand you intend to create.

7. List any soft skills you possess or would like to possess, e.g., public speaking, management, listening, leadership.

8. Choose three to five soft skills that are the most valuable to you and the brand you intend to create.

*Find your target market:*

3. Who can benefit most from your skills and/or services?

4. Name your target market(s).

*Find what differentiates you:*

3. List anything that is unique, different, or special about you.
4. Choose three to five qualities that differentiate your brand from others.

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Creating a Personal Brand Statement

**Strengths (Hard & Soft Skills):**

I am a…(Write down the three to five hard and soft skills from Table 5.),

**Passions:**

Who is passionate about…(Write down the three to five passions from Table 5.),

**Values:**

And who is guided by the core values of…(Write down the three to five values from Table 5.),

**Target Audiences:**

Providing my ________(goods and/or services) to_____________.(Write down the three to five target audiences from Table 5.),

**Differentiation:**

In a way no one else can deliver with…(Write down the three to five elements that differentiate you from Table 5.).

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**Step 6 – Development: The Personal Branding Blueprint: A Guide for the Millennial Job Seeker**

Developing a Personal Brand

10. Conduct a SWOT analysis to understand which areas can be improved upon to strengthen the brand.
11. Read books, blogs, biographies, magazines, and any other material that can facilitate expertise in the particular area.

12. Interview individuals who work in similar fields to learn everything possible from them.

13. Develop brand validators, who are individuals that will promote you and your brand within their circles of influence. You, in turn, can do the same for them.

14. Take advantage of viable leadership opportunities, help with special projects, attend conferences, sign up for web seminars in the field, and teach concerning the brand whenever possible.

15. Receive more education. Some skills require formal training while others do not. Consider the options carefully to understand if additional schooling is worth the investment.

16. Volunteer in the community with organizations that will increase knowledge, brand awareness, and networking opportunities.

17. Participate in job shadow or an internship within the specific field.

18. Join a local community group that focuses on aspects of your skills or brand element that needs strengthening.

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**Step 7 – Online: The Personal Branding Blueprint: A Guide for the Millennial Job Seeker**

**Online Personal Branding Strategies**

*Consider the following when utilizing LinkedIn:*

9. Write a heading and summary that is consistent with the branding statement.

10. Maintain a professional feel within this medium.
11. Create a tagline that promotes the brand.

12. Work to receive recommendations by requesting them and by recommending others.

13. Add groups to your account that enforce the brand.

14. Add links that combine and link other social media sites.

15. Maintain a complete profile.

16. Share content that strengthens the brand.

Consider the following when utilizing Facebook:

6. Facebook can be less formal and assists with demonstrating personality, but should remain consistent with the branding of other social networking sites.

7. Utilize this site to demonstrate hobbies, activities, service opportunities, and passions that promote the brand.

8. Add groups to your account that enforce the brand.

9. Add links that combine and link other social media sites.

10. Maintain a complete profile.

Consider the following when utilizing Twitter:

6. Twitter is like microblogging and a great way to promote the brand.

7. Ninety percent of tweets should be professional and promote the brand, while 10% can be of a personal nature.

8. Those who have Twitter followers tweet about a specific topic. Create specific messages about the elements of your brand.

9. Utilize hashtags to help others follow the conversation surrounding your brand.

10. Add links that combine and link other social media sites.

2. Maintain a complete profile.
Online Branding Dos:

7. Use the same avatar (profile picture) across all social media sites for consistency. Utilize a professional and clear photo of your face from the shoulders up.

8. Maintain brand regularity across all online mediums that are consistent with the branding statement.

9. Demonstrate interests, hobbies, and skills in action that are consistent with the brand.

10. Be social and interactive with others through social media, e.g., make comments and link to their pages.

11. Remain positive and demonstrate gratitude whenever possible.

12. Show personality but remain professional.

Online Branding Don’ts:

10. Avoid a lack of consistency with the brand.

11. Avoid the appearance of alcohol and drug use.

12. Avoid sexually explicit material.

13. Don’t dress provocatively in online images.

14. Don’t push your brand too hard.

15. Avoid overly controversial topics if not consistent with your brand, e.g., political and religious rants.

16. Don’t be over confident.

17. Avoid making racist and disparaging remarks.

18. Don’t brag online; show humility.

Additional Brand Management Tools and Strategies:
4. Utilize social media management tools to control and promote your brand online:
   a. Hootsuite: a social media management system for brand management.
   b. TweetDeck: a social media dashboard application for Twitter account management.
   c. Google Alert: a content change detection and notification service that keeps users aware of their online brand and content.

5. Apply basic search engine optimization (SEO) strategies:
   a. Monitor your page rank on searches. Use the following tactics to improve the rank and monitor if the rank is increasing.
   b. Utilize key words in your content that are relevant to your sites and brand.
   c. Utilize good links that connect all of your content on the web.
   d. Produce good content that is interesting and fresh; search engines favor the newest content.
   e. Develop relationships with other sites and link to them, as they will often link back to you.
   f. Keep all social media sites relevant and current, as personal sites commonly come up in web searches.
   g. Register your avatar with a third party company, like Gravatar, so your picture shows up in comments.
   h. Include your name whenever possible in all online content.

6. Consider the following when creating domain names:
   a. All domain names need to speak to your brand.
   b. Keep domain names simple and memorable.
c. Use a .com domain whenever possible.

d. Consider what the domain name looks like when written out.

b. Beware of copyrights.

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**Step 8 – In Person: The Personal Branding Blueprint: A Guide for the Millennial Job Seeker**

In-Person Personal Branding Strategies

3. **Create an elevator speech:**

   a. State your name and what you do or want to do using key words the audience will remember (5–10 seconds).

   b. Provide context and value that helps audience members understand why your skills are important (30–60 seconds).

   c. Briefly provide evidence to support your claims by illustrating stories, numbers, highlights, fun facts, etc. (60–90 seconds).

4. Consider the following additional factors:

   a. Maintain a natural and smooth tone, not canned or boastful.

   b. Educate audience members about your brand, but do not over promote.

   c. Have a list of skills and fun facts available to intermix depending on the audience.

   d. Do more than just talk; ask questions and allow others to speak.

**Developing a Networking Ecosystem:**

8. Identify influencers in your industry.

9. Connect with them on some level and work to find common bonds.

10. Put yourself in places where you will connect with these individuals:
a. Trade shows
b. Workshops
c. Conventions
d. Volunteer opportunities
e. Networking groups

11. Maintain ongoing communication with them:
   a. Connect via the internet.
   b. Send a thank you note when they help you.
   c. Do something for them.

12. Invest in the relationship:
   a. Be patient and devote time and effort. Developing relationships is a commitment.
   b. Be amiable, positive, and work to be remembered.

13. Connect others:
   a. Connect others, as it helps to extend and strengthen your brand.

14. Create validators:
   a. Generate validation by developing relationships, or validators, in which you agree to help promote each other’s brand.

*Appearance, Grooming, and Attire:*

9. Smile:
   a. Smile, as it expresses that you are open, friendly, and approachable and helps you exude confidence as well as feel more comfortable.

10. Handshake:
   a. Offer a sturdy handshake that is not too weak or too strong.
11. Eye contact:
   a. Make eye contact, as this skill is more important than ever. Practice everywhere you go, e.g., the grocery store, bank, library.

12. Posture:
   a. Stand tall, as it expresses confidence.
   b. Lean forward when seated at a table and use nonverbal cues that demonstrate you are listening.

13. Cell Phone:
   a. Refrain from using your cell phone in social and networking settings, as technology can be detrimental in social environments.

14. Grooming:
   a. Maintain good personal hygiene to ensure your appearance is clean and well-groomed when interacting in important social settings, i.e. take good care of your fingernails, teeth, hair, and face.
   b. Accessorize your attire in ways that add to the brand and your appearance without being distracting, and apply makeup lightly for a natural look.

15. Attire:
   a. Choose professional and appropriate attire that is not revealing or provocative and that embraces bright colors to compliment your brand.
   b. Dress for the job you want, not the job you have, by researching the proper attire for any social setting.

16. Physical Characteristics:
   a. If you have physical characteristics that may be distracting, but you cannot or do
not want to alter them, focus on these features and make them a part of the brand.

**Interviewing:**

9. Research the company:
   a. Understand the mission, vision, strengths, weaknesses, goals, and specifics of the job for which you are applying.
   b. Conduct internet research to study company news, events, products, and services as well as to get a feel for the company culture and industry trends.
   c. Tie your history and skills to the future of the company to which you are applying as much as possible.

10. Arrive early to the interview.

11. Stay hydrated to prevent your voice from cracking or becoming dry.

12. Ensure your appearance is well groomed and your attire is professional and appropriate (see all standards provided in *Appearance, Grooming, and Attire* listed in the previous section).

13. Be authentic, upbeat, focused, confident, candid, and concise:
   a. No answer should be shorter than 30 seconds or longer than 2 minutes.
   b. Show passion for what you have achieved and want to accomplish.
   c. Demonstrate excitement and positivity at all times.

14. Be specific:
   a. Have specific ideas, goals, and plans for the job whenever possible. Even if the ideas aren’t achievable or practical, it shows you are thinking.
   b. Use specific examples from your past to answer questions. When possible, use numbers, statistics, dollar amounts, and percentages to prove your points.
c. Answer questions with stories that demonstrate your past, skills, and abilities.

15. Practice, practice, practice:
   a. Imagine the types of questions that will be asked and practice answering with responses that demonstrate your brand, skills, and experience.
   b. Prior to the interview, have someone ask you a list of questions to which you already know the answers, e.g., what is your favorite color? This will loosen your nerves and position you to answer questions confidently and quickly.

16. Show curiosity and a desire to learn:
   a. If possible, ask questions about the company, the culture, and the specific job.
   b. Show interest in and excitement for what is happening within the organization.

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In Print Personal Branding Strategies

4. Creating an effective résumé:
   a. Ensure your résumé is no more than one to two pages. One page is preferable.
   b. Include one to two direct quotations e.g., from a customer, client, or employer, at the top of the resume below your name and contact information.
   c. Provide a summary statement or overview instead of objectives.
   d. Keep information short and pertinent.
   e. Create two resumes: an abbreviated version for recruiters and an extended version.
for hiring personnel.

f. Format the resume in a way that best demonstrates your experience:

   iii. Choose a functional or accomplishment-based format depending on your
       history and what will best leverage your experience.

   iv. Include education versus experience first based on the job’s needs.

n. Focus on the job’s needs.

o. Link your experience, skills, and abilities to the job description.

p. Validate past successes and contributions using numbers, dollar amounts, and
   percentages whenever possible.

q. Align the values important to you within your branding statement with the values
   of the company.

r. Use brief, past tense, action verbs to describe your skills and accomplishments.

s. Edit for grammatical errors.

t. Upload or send your resume as a PDF to ensure it can be opened and the format is
   not compromised.

5. Create an effective cover letter:

a. Cover letters can be organized according to the following elements:

   i. Greeting: directly address the person responsible for hiring if at all
      possible.

   ii. Paragraph one: immediately focus the information in a way that ties you to
       the position and explains why you are a good fit.
iii. Paragraph two: provide tangible examples of work performed and results achieved, keeping the job requirements in mind.

iv. Paragraph three: demonstrate knowledge of the company and the position, and reassert why you are a good fit.

v. Paragraph four: summarize what you offer and close in a strong and memorable way. Include that you will follow up with them; be proactive.

b. Do not simply repeat the resume.

c. Use the cover letter to show personality, interests, curiosities, and to expand on your brand.

d. Ensure the letter is succinct and concise (half to one full page).

e. Edit for grammatical errors.

f. Ensure the cover letter matches the overall brand.

g. Upload or send the letter as a PDF to ensure it can be opened and the format is not compromised.

6. Produce a blog to promote your brand:

a. Understand that blogging is a long-term and constant commitment.

b. Plan posts ahead of time so you don’t get overwhelmed.

c. Write timely posts that are current and that focus on the elements of your
branding statement.

d. Update frequently to not lose followership and to stay high on the SEO rating. Most bloggers post at a minimum of once a week to once a day.

e. Edit for typos, spelling, and grammar.

f. Use guest bloggers to cross promote and to save time and effort.

g. Utilize various blogging alternatives to ensure variety, e.g., photos, podcasts, and videos.

h. Ensure all content is consistent with your brand.

i. Consider the following topics when planning blog posts:

   x. Ambitions and goals
   xi. Announcements and news regarding your brand and industry
   xii. Current events happening within your brand and industry
   xiii. Your unique insight
   xiv. Specific industry lists, e.g., best and worst lists and favorites
   xv. Personal stories
   xvi. Creative memes that promote the brand
   xvii. Surveys and questionnaires
   xviii. Reviews

k. Use quality equipment to ensure high-caliber sound and images, e.g., videos and podcasts that will reflect your brand positively or negatively accordingly.
Additional Print Materials:

4. Biographies:
   a. When writing biographies, consider the target audience.
   b. A biography must match the tone of the brand, e.g., humorous, professional.
   c. Use first and third person accordingly depending on the situation; first person is more personal, while third person is more professional.
   d. Always use your name near the front of the biography.
   e. Biographies can show personality, so be creative.

5. Business cards:
   a. Create a design that communicates the brand.
   b. Be consistent with the brand color scheme.
   c. Select heavier paper stock, not flimsy or thin.

6. Brand image:
   a. Create a memorable company name or brand that is easy to read, convey, and spell.
   b. Design a creative, attractive logo that is aligned with the brand.
   c. Select a color scheme that matches the brand, e.g., soft pastels may be considered more feminine, while reds and blacks are often deemed more masculine.
   d. Utilize the color scheme across mediums, e.g., online, in person, and in print.