



# Science in the spotlight – What academics think about personal branding?

29.12.2025

In a world where attention is becoming currency, also academics must learn to position themselves. However, there is a tension between academic integrity and personal branding. A German-Finnish study conducted as part of a master's thesis reveals the expectations and attitudes of academics towards personal branding and the cultural differences that play a role.

## Personal branding as a new key competence

Today, companies and institutions communicate via social media, careers are international, and competition is intensifying. The digital professional world challenges employees to increasingly also publish and publicize their work. Targeted positioning through personal branding is therefore gaining importance in all professional groups (Gorbatov et al., 2018; Qyll, 2021; Spall & Schmidt, 2019; Szántó et al., 2025). Academia is also turning its attention to this area and investigating the impact of personal branding (Gorbatov et al., 2018; Scheidt, 2020; Szántó, 2023; Tazi Riffi & Zohri, 2024). Some studies focus on specific occupational groups (Chen & Chung, 2016; Horky & Rudeloff, 2024; Kannasto, 2020, 2021; Qyll, 2021), and more recently also on academics (Borman-Shoap et al., 2019; Mantulenko et al., 2020; Phutrakul et al., 2017; Ramezani et al., 2024).

# The invisible researcher

Academics play a central role in the knowledge society (Ramezani et al., 2024). They conduct research, teach, and contribute their findings to societal development – yet they often remain in the background. Self-promotion is frequently considered inappropriate in academia (Jankowitsch, 2021). However, reality is changing: Funding, projects and careers increasingly depend on the status researchers achieve with their expertise and public visibility (Adlmaier-Herbst & Mayer, 2021), thus adding emphasis on personal branding. The responsibility to communicate knowledge effectively and position oneself as a competent voice in the field is also growing within the context of science communication (Jankowitsch, 2021). Studies that specifically address the wishes and attitudes of academics and their relation to personal branding are lacking, as are country comparisons regarding cultural factors. Anna Wirz addresses this topic in her master's thesis, "Personal Branding Framework for Academics – An Analysis of Expectations, Motivations, and Settings in Finland and Germany." The aim was to capture the expectations, motivations, and necessary framework conditions of academics regarding personal branding and to examine the cultural components in a cross-country comparison to create a basis for target group-specific personal branding concepts and further research.

## Mixed-methods study in Finland and Germany

A quantitative online survey asked staff members who hold a doctoral degree and work at Ansbach University of Applied Sciences in Germany and Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences in Finland about their attitudes toward personal branding. Qualitative interviews with branding experts from both countries provided deeper insights. The comparison between Finland and Germany revealed differing attitudes and cultural aspects of personal branding.

## Perceptions on personal branding

The study showed that academics are well aware of the meaning of personal branding and consider it crucial, but rarely implement it strategically. The biggest hurdle is a lack of time, compounded by cultural skepticism towards self-promotion, inhibitions about public exposure, and fear of potential criticism. While Finnish participants generally have a positive attitude towards personal branding, in Germany a negative attitude prevails, along with the pressure to position oneself through academic competition. Concerns about data protection also play a limiting role in Germany, which was found less relevant in Finland. Based on the analysis, the "fun factor" in personal branding is missing in both countries. Differences also emerge in the development of necessary skills. German researchers see the greatest need in developing a brand identity and creating suitable content, as well as in media skills; Finnish academics would like more technical support. In both countries, personal branding primarily aims to position oneself as a subject matter expert – not on self-promotion, but on visibility for research. Credibility, professionalism, and authenticity were found crucial, while financial incentives seemed irrelevant.

# Institutions as partners and supporters

Many respondents perceived the support they receive from their university regarding personal branding as insufficient yet considered it an important factor. German academics prefer a personal contact person, while Finnish participants prefer templates and forms. Both groups want practical and easy-to-use digital tools that they can use independently. The results imply that by providing resources, training, and appropriate measures, universities could play a key role, thereby not only strengthening their staff but also their own brand perception. Several studies conclude that the academic's personal brand also contributes to the institution's brand (Borman-Shoap et al., 2019; Mantulenko et al., 2020; Phutrakul et al., 2017).

## A contribution to the future of academic visibility

The thesis study makes an important contribution to the still-emerging field of academic personal branding. It shows that cultural factors, individual motivation and institutional frameworks are relevant and should be taken into account in personal branding strategies. Academics don't need basic training, but rather tailored concepts that are enjoyable, geared towards their needs, and support them in building their academic brand simply and efficiently. Universities play a central role in this, as they can use resources to promote the personal branding of their employees—and simultaneously their own brand. After all, personal branding is not a trend, but a future skill in the academic world.

## Background of the article

*This article is based on a master's thesis written as part of a double-degree program at Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences in Finland in the International Business Management master's program and at Ansbach University of Applied Sciences in Germany in the Public Relations and Corporate Communications master's program. **Theseus:** <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2025121838007>*

### Anna Wirz

Author of the thesis MBA International Business Management / M.A. Public Relations and Corporate Communications / B.A. Multimedia and Communication / Media Designer for Digital and Print Media **Elisa Kannasto** Thesis supervisor PhD, Head of Degree Programme, Master School, Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences

# Sources

- Adlmaier-Herbst, D. G., & Mayer, A. (2021). *Der Forscher als Marke: Die einzigartige Forscherpersönlichkeit erkennen, positionieren und kommunizieren* [The researcher as a brand: Recognizing, positioning, and communicating the unique researcher personality]. Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden.
- <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-33068-2> Borman-Shoap, E., Li, S.-T. T., St Clair, N. E., Rosenbluth, G., Pitt, S., & Pitt, M. B. (2019). Knowing Your Personal Brand: What Academics Can Learn From Marketing 101. *Academic Medicine*, 94(9), 1293–1298. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000002737> Chen, H. M., & Chung, H. M. (2016). How to Measure Personal Brand of a Business CEO. *Journal of Human Resource and Sustainability Studies*, 04(04), 305–324. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jhrss.2016.44030> Gorbatov, S., Khapova, S. N., & Lysova, E. I. (2018). Personal Branding: Interdisciplinary Systematic Review and Research Agenda. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 2238. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02238> Horky, T., & Rudeloff, C. (2024). Sport und die Selbstdarstellung auf sozialen Netzwerken: Personal und Human Branding von Athlet:innen über Social Media – ein Überblick [Sport and self-presentation on social networks: Personal and human branding of athletes via social media – an overview]. In J. Wiske (Ed.), *Professionelle Sportkommunikation* (pp. 153–170). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden.
- [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-45366-4\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-45366-4_10) Jankowitsch, R. M. (2021). *Sich besser präsentieren: Wirkungsvolle Kommunikation für Wissenschaftler\*innen* [Presenting yourself better: Effective communication for scientists]. Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-33175-7> Kannasto, E. (2020). Personal Brand of a Politician in an Election Campaign – Political Personas on Facebook. *Persona Studies*, 6(1), 12–14. <https://doi.org/10.21153/psj2020vol6no1art943> Kannasto, E. (2021). “I am horrified by all kinds of persona worship!” *Constructing Personal Brands of Politicians on Facebook* [Doctoral thesis, University of Vaasa]. <https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-476-983-9> Mantulenko, V. V., Yashina, E. Z., & Ashmarina, S. I. (2020). Personal Brand of University Teachers in the Digital Age. In S. I. Ashmarina, M. Vochozka, & V. V. Mantulenko (Eds.), *Digital Age: Chances, Challenges and Future* (Vol. 84, pp. 62–70). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-27015-5\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-27015-5_8) Phutrakul, P., Jinnge, P., & Chomphupart, C. (2017). 人物と大学のブランド: Facebook による大学教員の個人ブランド [Personal and University Brand: The Case of Personal Branding via Facebook among University Lecturers]. *Journal of Behavioral Science*, 23, 101–116. <https://doi.org/10.14456/JBS.2017.20> Qyll, N. (2021). *Visual Person Branding: Eine frame-analytische Betrachtung ikonischer Personenmarken* [Visual Person Branding: A Frame-Analytical Examination of Iconic Personal Brands]. Herbert von Halem Verlag.
- <https://doi.org/10.1453/9783869625805> Ramezani, Y., Moussavi Neghabi, S. M., & Shariat, F. (2024). Branding of Academic Staff; Components of The Personal Brand of Faculty Members. *Public Management Researches*, 17(65), 167–198. <https://doi.org/10.22111/jmr.2024.46055.6035> Scheidt, S., Gelhard, C., & Henseler, J. (2020). Old Practice, but Young Research Field: A Systematic Bibliographic Review of Personal Branding. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1809. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01809> Spall, C., & Schmidt, H. J. (2019). *Personal Branding: Was Menschen zu starken Marken macht* [Personal Branding: What makes people strong brands]. Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden.
- <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-23741-7> Szántó, P. (2023). Systematic literature and modeling review of Personal Branding. *Marketing & Menedzsment*, 57(1), 69–78.

<https://doi.org/10.15170/MM.2023.57.01.07> Szántó, P., Papp-Váry, Á., & Radácsi, L. (2025). Research Gap in Personal Branding: Understanding and Quantifying Personal Branding by Developing a Standardized Framework for Personal Brand Equity Measurement. *Administrative Sciences*, 15(4), 148.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci15040148> Tazi Riffi, Z., & Zohri, A. (2024). The evolution of personal branding: A systematic review. *Revue Des Études Multidisciplinaires En Sciences Économiques et Sociale*, 9(1), 19–46. <https://doi.org/10.48375/IMIST.PRS/REMSES-V9I1.46146>