

From Story to Success: How Storytelling Shapes a Strong Personal Brand

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Abstract

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From Story to Success: How Storytelling Shapes a Strong Personal Brand		
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<p>This thesis investigated the role of storytelling in building personal brands. By combining theoretical insights with practical analysis, the research explored how individuals strategically use storytelling techniques to strengthen their personal brands and connect with audiences in digital spaces. The study begins with an overview of personal branding and storytelling, followed by case studies of professionals with strong personal brands. These case studies demonstrate the strategic use of tone, narrative perspective, and consistency.</p> <p>To complement the qualitative findings, A/B testing was conducted on TikTok using video content that applies different storytelling approaches. This experiment aimed to evaluate the impact of storytelling techniques on audience engagement.</p> <p>Findings identify key storytelling elements that contributed to compelling personal brands, such as coherence between content and values and the use of relatable narratives. In contrast, a mini case study revealed how misalignment between storytelling and real-life actions can harm a brand's credibility. This thesis and its practical testing offer actionable insights for individuals and businesses seeking to strengthen their personal brands through authentic storytelling.</p>		
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Personal branding, Storytelling, Authenticity		

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1 Introduction

This thesis presents research on the role of storytelling in personal branding in social media. The thesis combines a review of personal branding as a concept, an exploration of the increasing importance of storytelling in digital communication, and an analysis of how individuals strategically use narratives to shape their public personas. This thesis provides a comprehensive description of research methods, including content analysis, using case studies of established personal brands.

This thesis culminates with A/B testing, which will be performed on one social media platform, TikTok. A/B testing is done in a video format. The study aims to explore how storytelling techniques can be effectively used to create a compelling and credible personal brand. Implementing research on this topic is relevant to the growing demand for authenticity in today's digital spaces and the increasing role of personal brands in professional and business success.

Social media has changed how individuals present themselves to the world, and storytelling has become a crucial tool for connecting with the audience and differentiating oneself from others. As personal branding gains increasing significance, understanding the impact of storytelling strategies can provide valuable insights into building trust, fostering engagement, and even establishing thought leadership. This thesis addresses the topic from different perspectives, including the role of tone and narrative consistency in shaping a strong brand identity.

By analyzing positive and successful personal branding cases, this research identifies key storytelling elements that contribute to an engaging and authentic brand presence. In addition, a contrasting case study illustrates how a disconnect between brand storytelling and real-life actions can lead to reputational risks. This thesis and A/B testing videos together provide actionable insights for individuals and businesses seeking to strengthen their personal brands through storytelling, helping them to craft narratives that align with their values and resonate with their target audiences.

AI tools such as Chat GPT and Copilot were used to help with structuring the thesis, ideation at the beginning of the process, and transcription of the video content scripts.

2 Personal branding

2.1 What is a Strong Personal Brand

Kurvinen and Laine (2017, 23) define brand as how people perceive you, and branding as how you want to use it. Each one of us has a personal brand. A personal brand is the image that other people have of you; however, at first, it is only an image. Sharing knowledge publicly and forming connections with other professionals and audiences marks the beginning of building a personal reputation. As the awareness of the image and personal reputation slowly builds and grows, it eventually becomes a brand. (Kurvinen et al. 2017, 22–23.) According to Varsta (2024, 22), a brand becomes meaningful when experiences and stories that people share start to matter in their lives and narratives.

Varsta (2017, 41-43) argues that behind every enduring personal brand, there must be a sustainable reason— something that stems from a value-based mission and a desire to create meaningful change in others' lives. The deeper the alignment with personal values, the more authentic and resilient the personal brand becomes. Vinod and Timeyin (2020, 56) recommend imagining values as an angel on your shoulder, guiding you to do the right thing and preventing actions you might regret later. Varsta (2017, 44) continues by stating that if there is no awareness of the values, or no loyalty to its values, this kind of “weak” personal brand most likely collapses in the future or cannot be identified as the same person as the one behind the brand. This damages authenticity and reliability.

Bastianelli (2017) uses the metaphor of Mr. Potato Head to describe building a personal brand by assembling and organizing the various pieces of one's identity. As Mr. Potato Head comes with various detachable parts, individuals possess different skills, traits, values, characteristics, and experiences. These pieces represent the different aspects of identity – personality, professional skills, and personal values. Creating a personal brand means deciding which parts to highlight. This means being strategic about how you present yourself to align with your goals and how you want others to perceive you. Bastianelli (2017) emphasizes that you have a personal identity known only to yourself, while self-awareness involves understanding how others perceive you. Branding is about bridging the two: aligning your internal truth with your external narrative.

Vinod and Timeyin (2020) support Bastianelli's findings with the statement, “*Your story is only yours, and you are ultimately the only expert in the life you have lived.*” When a person has learned to tell their truth and communicates that efficiently, this will have a more powerful impact on people's minds and help them to understand what this person has to offer. Building and presenting your personal brand requires you to know and understand your story thoroughly. That knowledge will help you to be more strategic by creating a narrative

that fits your values. Bastianelli (2017) outlines three essential steps in building a strong brand:

1. Have self-awareness.
2. Tell the story about your life.
3. Build deeper relationships.

Kurvinen, Laine, and Tolvanen (2017, 61) identify three cornerstones of a personal brand: findability, desirability, and relevance. Meanwhile, Varsta (2024, 85) offers a more emotional and multidimensional perspective, describing a strong personal brand through uniqueness, relevancy, diversity, and emotionality. Sointu Borg (2025) has a more provocative view in her reality show 'Sointu Borg & Tyrkyt': *"Your personal brand should annoy and divide people. You cannot please everyone. A good personal brand evokes emotions. You are not everyone's piece of cake, but when you find your audience, they want to devour you."* Her point underscores the value of emotional reaction and polarization: not being for everyone but deeply resonating with the right people, agreeing with Varsta's findings.

2.2 Brand attraction

Maslow's hierarchy of needs provides valuable insight into why some brands are more "attractive" than others. Maslow's hierarchy of needs consists of five different levels, which can be seen in Image 1, and everything we do daily is based on this hierarchy. The lowest physiological level is about basic needs, like having food, water, shelter, and good health. The next level, safety, is about having security and stability in life, and the ability to avoid possible dangers in the immediate future. At the social level comes the need to belong and be loved. Having friends and a community and being unworried about alienation. On the self-esteem level, getting recognition and respect becomes important. Status and self-esteem are our primal desires. At the highest level, self-actualization, when all the previously mentioned core needs are met, becoming the most authentic and complete version of ourselves becomes the main driver. It gives us the freedom to be creative and to act by our values and higher purpose. Summarized physiological and safety needs must be met before higher-level needs can become the primary motivational factors in one's life. (Bitesize Learning, 2025.)

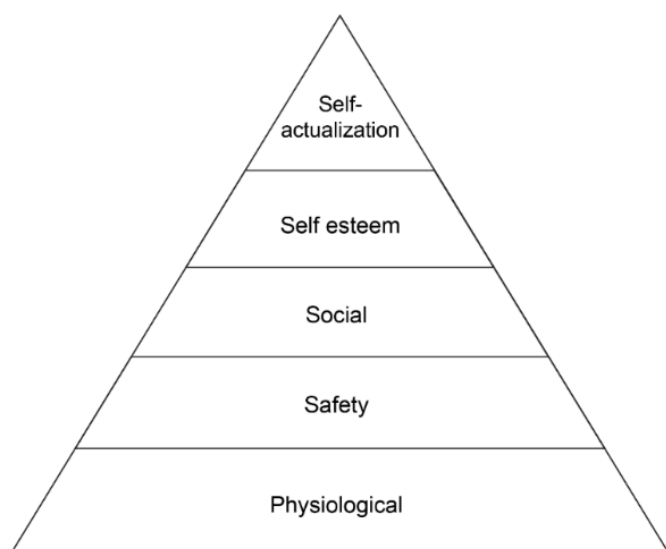


Image 1. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Bitesize Learning 2025)

Varsta (2024, 85; 132) gives examples of how a personal brand can tie with this hierarchy of needs and provide value to others at different levels. As previously mentioned, he describes a personal brand by four dimensions: uniqueness, relevancy, diversity, and emotionality. Next, we will examine how these dimensions can be linked to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The first dimension he mentions, uniqueness, should be measured by time and effort; a unique brand has spent time becoming an expert in its field and creating its niche. These personal brands have impacted people's minds and cultures, as seen in the case of Marilyn Monroe. Relevancy is only true if it meets a real need, not an expectation, but a redemption. A relevant personal brand resonates and influences others' lives, emotions, and thoughts. Therefore, relevancy serves a meaning and caters to several levels of Maslow's hierarchy. However, relevancy demands constant renewal to remain impactful – David Bowie is an illustrative example of continuous reinvention. Diversity occurs in the present moment and is recognized by comparing it to the current personal branding framework. Diversity supports belonging and adaptation, yet a strong brand may face challenges in evolving if it is too firmly associated with a particular identity in the audience's mind. Emotionality is a subjective experience, and a strong personal brand always resonates on an emotional level. Building a brand solely on emotional connections is not straightforward, but compelling life stories, particularly hero narratives, evoke feelings most effectively, as people are naturally drawn to them. It is important to remember that attempts to provoke a certain emotional response among the audience can be met with a counterproductive reaction.

In summary, personal brands can fulfill basic emotional needs, particularly for those whose foundational needs for safety and belonging were not met earlier in life. On higher levels, a brand's social aspect could provide the feel of belonging to a group (Varsta, 2024, 27-31). However, Varsta (2024, 98) also notes that a personal brand can become publicly recognized while remaining "unrelatable" and therefore may not satisfy any needs from Maslow's hierarchy perspective.

2.3 Strategies for building a personal brand

Varsta (2024, 49-51) mentions that strategies are equally as good as their implementation. In strategy, vision means a strategic goal, and strategy is a systematic tool to achieve it. Strategy is based on an overall view of the following parts:

- market overview
- environmental factors
- consumers
- competitors
- actions of self
- available resources.

In business and personal branding, strategy is an important tool for planning how to move within the changes of the operating environment. This means that having a flexible strategy helps adaptation and acting fast. Vision and goal-oriented actions help to keep the focus on personal branding and avoid doing something that is not aligned with the truest purpose. Therefore, building a personal brand starts with an introspection: What are your values and motivations? Are your values implemented in your daily life? Values should be aligned with life's purpose and dreams; when they are not, this contradiction eventually becomes an obstacle. Equally important is to acknowledge what you don't want to do with your brand. (Varsta, 2024, 43-45.)

As Varsta (2024) stated, the importance of introspection, vision, and what parts are included in the overall strategy, Vinod and Timeyin (2020, 64-67) focus on the consumer aspect. They emphasize the importance of audience alignment. It is important to understand your audience and not try to please everyone. Focus on asking what your audience's attitudes, behaviors, and needs are, which platforms they use, how they engage with content, and what problems your brand can solve in the audience's daily life. Audience insight can also be broken into four dimensions: demographic (age, gender, income, location), behavioral (how people consume media and products), attitudinal (values, perceptions, satisfaction), and interest-based (what they care about – e.g., art, sport). Vinod and Timeyin (2020, 74)

suggest observing your audience in their natural environments. This helps to identify possible pain points and moments where your brand can create value. Borg (2025) supports this observation, serving a specific audience allows for deeper emotional connection and organic community growth.

Once introspection, visions, and strategic elements have been implemented, another crucial step is to set milestones. This helps to identify the trajectory of self and brand – is there something that needs to be improved? What needs to be changed completely? Is additional help required? When all the previously mentioned steps are used, a personal brand has a good start. (Varsta, 2024, 51.)

2.4 Key Elements of a Personal Brand

According to Varsta (2024), there will be new kinds of pressure when sustainable development is required in personal branding. When personal branding relies on surface-level trends, such as beauty standards, sustaining it becomes difficult. Therefore, the solution is to build personal branding on a strong, solid ground. This means the brand is rooted in identity, instead of aesthetics. Operating through identity also brings out authenticity and an easier approach for the audience. Next, the sustainable development of a personal brand will be presented through a few key elements:

Authenticity

As Varsta (2024) highlights, operating through identity fosters authenticity, which in turn serves as the foundation of a personal brand. Authenticity is imperative to transcend the superficial and present a genuine, unfiltered version of oneself. The utilization of personal anecdotes and core values creates an instant, meaningful bond with the audience. (The Indie Practice, 2025.)

Values, vision & mission

Values are non-negotiable. It dictates what you look and sound like. When figuring out your brand's values, start by going to your roots and identifying what beliefs are important to you and which ones are important to your brand. Once values have been identified, let those guide your brand's messaging and tone. Vision is the future goal, a desired state, and mission is what is actively done to achieve it. Mission can also mean the reason for a brand's existence. Consistency and authenticity are reached once the values, vision, and mission are aligned. (Vinod & Timeyin, 2020.)

Brand identity and assets

A range of brand elements can be a distinctive brand asset, such as colors, slogans, music, sounds, advertisement style, logo/symbols, characters, celebrities, or pack shapes. Make the asset a distinctive part of your brand. When a consumer sees the asset, it evokes the brand, meaning it has been instinctively associated with your brand. Make your brand experience consistent (brand identity is what the brand looks and feels to the outside world). Visual elements a cohesive brand should use are a logo, color palette, fonts, typography, and photographic style. Your brand identity should be clear across all touchpoints. Consistency builds recognition, and recognition builds trust. By sharing personal stories, individuals allow their audience to connect emotionally and see parts of themselves in the brand. (Vinod & Timeyin, 2020, 91-92.)

3 Storytelling as a Branding Tool

3.1 Understanding Storytelling in Branding

Storytelling is an ancient and universal form of communication. According to evolutionary biologists, the human fondness for storytelling can be traced back 100,000 years, practically as long as modern humans have been on Earth. Stories have been used to preserve knowledge and foster communal cohesion, and not only that, but stories are also used for helping us to relate to other people, influence our attitudes, and help us to remember things more effortlessly. (Rauhala & Vikström, 2014, 56; 82.)

Since storytelling has been part of humanity throughout time, it is not only for a limited group of professionals but is meant for everybody. Stories and storytelling are excellent tools for letting the imagination flow and creating new things. In Dictionary (2025), a story is defined to be: “*a narrative, either true or fictional, designed to interest, amuse, or instruct the hearer or reader.*” In addition, Björninen and Mäkelä (2020, 118) say the story refers to the events that are the subject of the narrative and the listener’s interpretation of those events. Each story has a beginning, middle, and end. Rauhala and Vikström (2024, 23; 59) emphasize the need for an actor, a protagonist, in the story. In its simplest form, storytelling is an effective and practical way to communicate (Rauhala & Vikström, 2014, 23).

Björninen and Mäkelä (2020, 23-24) state that there are so-called “template stories” and they are widely used in today’s “story economy”. These example stories are frames made by our society and, therefore, are easier to understand and interpret compared to other storytelling methods. When encountering familiar template stories, it is easier to like and share them on social media, and the viewer has a clear understanding of what the point or goal of the story is. These stories usually include familiar attributes and details, mixed with transformative individual experiences, and evoke strong feelings in the reader. This is why most of the template stories include a lesson and are told either from the perspective of the victim or the inspirer. According to Rauhala and Vikström (2014, 77), the best kind of story evokes feelings, strengthens credibility, and is believable with a hint of hope.

In comparison to Björninen and Mäkelä’s template stories, story models refer to recurring narrative structures that form the foundation of most fictional storytelling. Booker (2006, 229-233) outlines seven universal plot types, such as Overcoming the Monster and Rags to Riches. In the first plot, the protagonist defeats an evil force that threatens the protagonist and/or the protagonist’s homeland, just like Harry Potter sets out to defeat Voldemort. In a rags-to-riches type of plot, the poor protagonist acquires power/wealth, loses it all, and gains it back, and as a result, there has been personal growth. Flood (2016) continues that these

models serve as blueprints that help storytellers craft engaging and emotionally resonant narratives. The core idea is that humans are drawn to patterns. Recognizing these patterns can enhance a storyteller's ability to create meaning and heighten emotional impact.

Rauhala and Vikström (2014, 36-41; 114) present another term, "story capital". It consists of all the stories, storytelling tools, elements, and raw materials that everyone holds. It is crucial to identify these elements and utilize them in the right contexts and for appropriate purposes. To harness story capital most effectively, one must adopt a goal-oriented approach. A goal-oriented storyteller must understand three key aspects: their objective, audience, and how to construct a functioning narrative (Image 2). Understanding and narrowing down your desired audience helps to make stories more effective for the listeners.

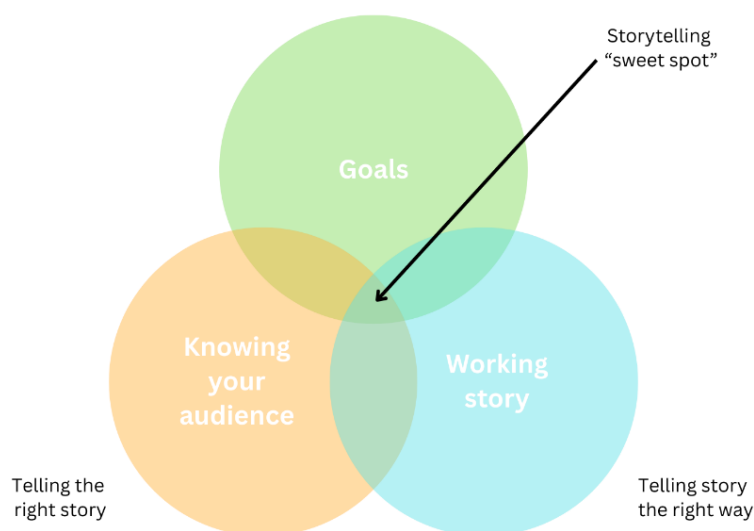


Image 2. Business storytelling sweet spot adapted from Rauhala and Vikström (2014, 43)

To make any story and storytelling effective, it is important to understand archetypes. We have become familiar with different archetypes throughout our lives, and therefore, using them brings up a sense of familiarity and understanding. They appeal to our subconscious, helping us to identify and interpret stories quickly. Brand personas, for example, can often be described through one or two archetypes. According to Carl Jung, who originally advanced the concept of archetypes, there are 12 main archetypes. The archetypes are: The Innocent, The Everyman, The Hero, The Nurturer, The Explorer, The Rebel, The Lover, The Jester, The Thinker, The Magician, and The Leader. The most well-known ones are proba-

bly The Hero, who takes the lead, works hard, and always solves the problem. In a storytelling sense, it is a journey of overcoming a challenge and gaining a sense of achievement. A good brand example is Nike. Another prime archetype example is The Magician, who dreams and thinks big. It is supposed to inspire and evoke wonder and awe. The Magician's storytelling narrative is about new innovations and a sense of renewal. This narrative is used by Apple. A good story often "hooks" the listener or viewer quickly, and archetypes help by providing familiar roles and meanings. The reason archetypes are powerful is in the fact that they are based on experiences and memories accumulated over generations. For example, in PR and brand campaigns, archetypes help the audience to identify the key characters in the story (such as the hero or villain) and their roles. (Wozny, 2023, 80-82.)

3.2 Emotional Connection & Authenticity

Emotion is where it all begins. In storytelling, it's essential to know your audience—who you are speaking to and what kind of emotion you want to evoke in them. It is easier to make an emotional connection to a story when there are some similarities with the viewer's life (Rauhala & Vikström, 2014). Courtney-Smith (2018, 229) explains that to become a storyteller, you either naturally have stories to tell or you create them. Great stories often come from real-life experiences and achievements; even small moments infused with humor. If you don't yet have achievements to share, go and get them. People are drawn to personal stories and know who you truly are – this highlights the importance of authenticity.

Authenticity stems from parts that truly are part of you, whether it is leadership skills in a professional setting or a sense of humor in a social one. The next important step is to start telling your story to the world and living it. Thus, you are living proof that you are what you say you are. (Bastianelli, 2017.)

Creating compelling and emotionally triggering stories could have its disadvantages as much as its advantages. Social media is often primarily a place to share experiences and seek peer support; content that evokes the strongest emotional reactions is more likely to spread to a wider audience than simply sharing factual information. When an individual's personal story appeals so effectively to the audience's emotions that it goes viral on social media, it is called a viral exemplum, or an educational experience. In social media, these stories and the individual experience they reinforce instantly become representational and normative, i.e., the story is perceived as strongly true, therefore, campaigns, social media, or political initiatives are launched. Generally, these viral stories avoid being questioned because they are typically in a good cause. A good example of a viral exemplum of how, during the MeToo movement, some individual cases generated new campaigns against

specific people. Although MeToo was opposite to the viral exemplum, being a deconstructive mass movement, eventually, in a collective analysis, the uninterpretable details of an individual experience began to speak against the MeToo movement. (Björninen et al., 41–48; 128, 2020.)

Storytelling can also go wrong for a different reason. Wozny (2022, 132-137) gives an example of how even one word can change a well-intended message to negative and attract backlash from the audience. If the mistake happens, whether it is on stage or a social media platform, Wozny recommends taking quick action and starting with transparency. It is important to admit it if you are genuinely wrong and apologize. Reach out to the people you have possibly hurt. The next thing is to show your trustworthiness to your audience. Your words and actions should be aligned, give calm, clear, and confident responses, and commit to making things right. It is also important to respond promptly, depending on the damage scale and whether it affects your brand directly or indirectly.

3.3 Copywriting vs. Storytelling: Finding the Right Balance

Copywriting and storytelling share similarities, but at the core, they serve very different purposes. Copywriting, or ‘copy’, can be anything and everything one can imagine, but it usually must follow a given brief. Copy does not have to be based on facts; it can be fictional too, if it serves the purpose. It is usually more persuasive and “call-to-action”, meaning it guides the reader to act in a specific way to get the desired result. Storytelling aims to create a narrative that engages the audience’s emotions – it can involve expressing your thoughts and feelings. However, with copywriting, the writer has to bring out the brand’s voice over their own and follow through on the given brief. (Lingwood et al. 2022, 11.)

Having a personal brand is not always just telling stories, there are moments when sales also have to be made, and therefore, a good copy is needed. Balancing between the two is necessary when you also collaborate with other brands. Lingwood and Shaw (2022, 13-15) explain how the best way to start writing a copy and making it good is to focus on the target audience. When understanding your audience and how they behave, the reader will experience a sense of familiarity with the author’s writing style. Researching your targeted audience is called profiling. After profiling and researching which kind of message would work on your target audience, the second thing to consider is the tone of voice you should use with your messaging. If the chosen tone of voice is wrong, it won’t reach the targeted audience as effectively as it should.

Also, Rauhala and Vikström (2017, 230; 233) support incorporating a familiar element in storytelling, just like in copywriting. When the audience recognizes this familiar element, it

can trigger a sense of reward. This level of familiarity makes a story more compelling and increases the likelihood that people will share it. However, compelling stories, or even viral ones, do not guarantee extra sales. The story has to be structured in a specific way so that it is impossible to share without mentioning the product or service. Lingwood and Shaw (2022, 15) continue by stating that products and services should be presented in terms of how and why they improve people's lives.

In conclusion, finding the right balance between copywriting and storytelling is essential for anyone wanting to build a personal brand. While storytelling fosters emotional connection and builds authenticity, effective copy ensures that commercial goals are met. When both elements are used strategically, they support each other rather than compete.

4 Case Studies

4.1 Case study 1 - Erika Kullberg

Erika Kullberg is an American lawyer, personal financial expert, and content creator with a substantial social media following. Recognized as the most-followed money expert globally, she has gained over 21 million followers across multiple social media platforms, such as TikTok, Instagram, and LinkedIn. She became widely recognized for her viral tagline, "I read the fine print, so you don't have to!". Kullberg's journey into personal finance content began with her own experience of repaying over 200,000 US dollars in student debt in under two years. This achievement laid the foundation for her storytelling and personal brand narrative: demystifying complex legal and financial topics to make them more accessible for ordinary people. (Kullberg, 2025.)

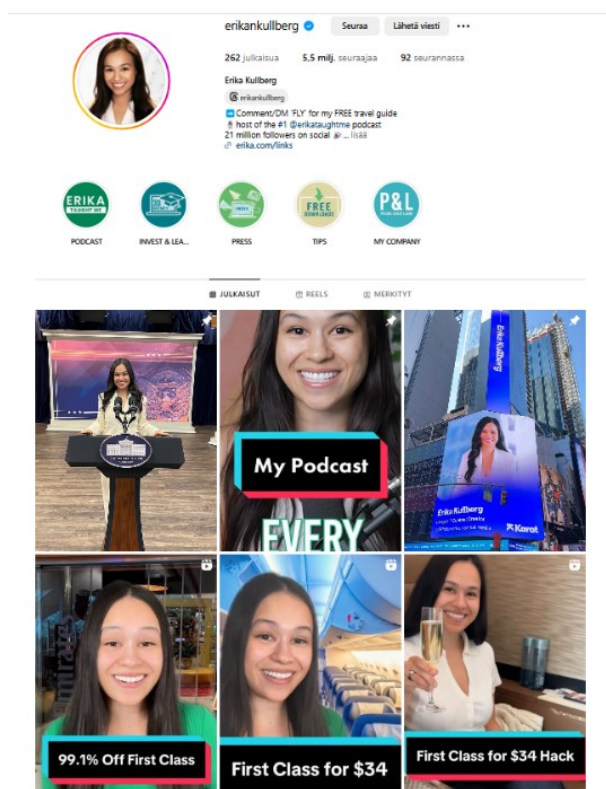


Image 3. Erika Kullberg's Instagram page (Kullberg, 2025)

Kullberg's primary audience includes individuals seeking to improve their financial literacy and well-being. Her typical followers are just starting their financial journeys, or they are professionals looking for advanced financial strategies. Kullberg operates in the personal

finance field, providing money-saving tips and advice on budgeting, investing, and managing debt. She shares these tips and advice through her social media channels, like Instagram (Image 3), and LinkedIn, especially TikTok, where she uses 30-second to one-minute clips to present everyday financial scenarios as seen in Image 4. These scenarios often show how simple pre-planning could have led to better outcomes, such as saving money or protecting oneself financially within marriage. Her consistent filming style, cheerful tone, friendly demeanor, and relatable scenarios strengthen her personal brand's authenticity and accessibility. She also has a podcast, Erika Taught Me. In her podcast, Kullberg tends to leave her interviewees, who are experts in their fields, share their life or business lessons. Kullberg's goal is to have stories that are inspirational or more practical, and on some occasions, give guidance on how to change your money mindset and increase happiness. All of these help listeners to take control of their lives and financial situation. (Kullberg, 2022.)

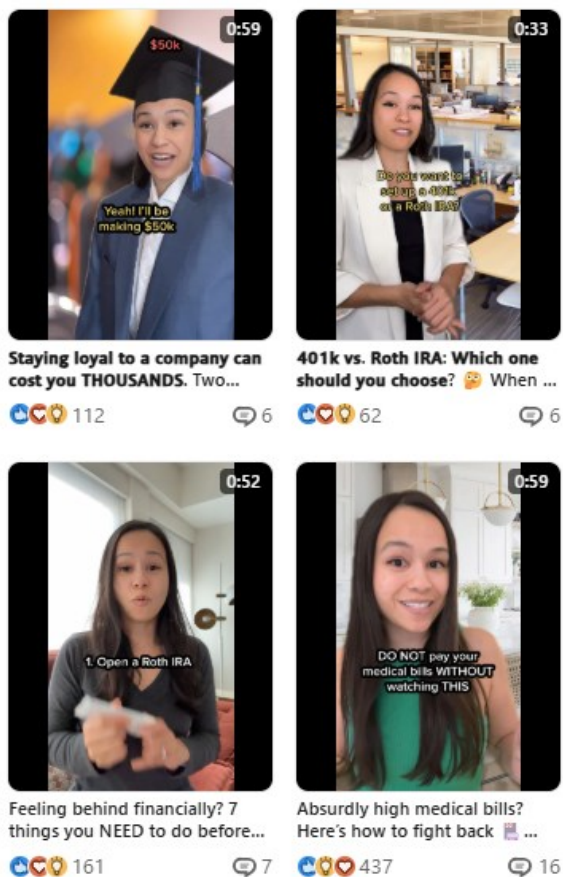


Image 4. Erika Kullberg's TikTok videos (Kullberg, 2025)

Kullberg's storytelling approach is a blend of personal, professional, and aspirational narratives. She positions herself as a relatable peer and a guide. She weaves together her personal journey, professional expertise, and aspirational messaging. By positioning herself as a relatable guide rather than a distant authority figure, she reconstructs financial literacy into an easier approach. This makes Kullberg's approach effective and authentic, since it's deeply rooted in her own experiences. Her narratives include trust, authority, and relatability. She builds trust by transparently sharing her financial journey and the strategies she used to achieve her goals. Her authority is established through her professional background as a lawyer and personal finance expert. Relatability is a key theme, as Kullberg often shares stories that her audience can easily connect with, such as dealing with debt or finding ways to save money.

Kullberg's values and mission are clear: financial education should be accessible to everyone. This mission remains a consistent theme across her content. Her communication style is a mix of informal and friendly, remaining authoritative. Having a friendly demeanor makes Kullberg's content engaging and accessible.

Over time, her core narrative has evolved slightly. While her initial storytelling centered largely on her personal debt repayment journey, it has expanded to encompass broader themes of financial independence, mindset shifts, and personal empowerment. Despite this evolution, authenticity and accessibility remain central pillars of her brand narrative. Since she has personal experience of being in debt and how to get out of it, this creates an emotional connection with her audience. While having this special connection and providing factual and actionable advice, this combination helps her audience feel more inspired and informed.

4.2 Case study 2 - Ann Handley

Ann Handley is a digital marketing pioneer, content strategy expert, and storytelling expert. She earned the title of Chief Content Officer, recognized as the world's first. Forbes named her "the most influential woman in social media", and she also ranks among the top 20 women bloggers. Handley has best-selling books, such as "Everybody Writes" and "Content Rules: How to Create Killer Blogs, Podcasts, Videos, Ebooks, Webinars (and More) That Engage Customers and Ignite Your Business". (Handley, 2025.)

Handley's primary audience consists of marketing professionals, businesses, and aspiring content creators who want to enhance their content marketing strategies and communication. She uses a combination of professional and aspirational narratives with her storytelling approach. Handley primarily engages her audience through platforms like LinkedIn, her

popular email newsletter “Total Annarchy”, public speaking events, and digital marketing courses. (Handley, 2025.)

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🗣️ THIS IS THE SIGN YOU'RE LOOKING FOR 🗣️

Dear friends: Is 2025 the year you made a promise to yourself to Stop Playing Small and to do Bigger Things...? Here is the sign you're looking for!

👉👉 Now (right now) is your chance to raise your hand to speak at the [MarketingProfs B2B Forum in 2025!](#) It's back in Boston.

Personal story: I didn't start speaking on stages until 2009, when my first book came out. That was 16 years ago... yet I was well into my career by then. What took me so long? Fear? Insecurity? Didn't yet have a fantastic suit? Whatever... I was comfortable Playing Small.

I had to take myself by my own sweaty-palmed hand & lead myself out of my comfort zone.

It's one of the scariest and most important risks I ever took in my career. It's made a massive difference for me... and it will for you too. I promise.

Now I *love* speaking on stage. I Played Small for too long. Don't make the mistake I did... mmkay?


Submit your session idea here by 1/31/2025:
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See you in Boston!

P.S. Please share or tag anyone you think would be a good fit. Thank you in advance.

P.P.S. Can you tell that I made this graphic myself? 🙄

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👍 Like 💬 Comment 🔄 Repost ✉️ Send

Image 5. Ann Handley LinkedIn post (Handley, 2025)

Handley's (2025) storytelling approach is distinct in its focus on "smaller stories," emphasizing specific, personal anecdotes over generalized narratives. She advocates for content that connects deeply with the audience. By exact, "smaller stories", she means life stories and lived experiences, and having an emotionally resonant aspect. As an example, she shares her insights from the marketing field and incorporates personal anecdotes to make herself and her content relatable, as seen on her LinkedIn post in Image 5.

In her work, Handley combines professional authority with aspirational messaging. She not only shares marketing strategies but also frames her own learning experiences, successes, and mistakes in a way that makes her advice both educational and personally relatable. Her stories are designed to inspire and educate her audience, providing practical advice and thought-provoking ideas. She also suggests focusing on empathy, authenticity, and an audience-first type of communication.

Handley's communication tone and style are informal, friendly, and humorous, yet authoritative. She uses a conversational writing style, which makes complex marketing ideas feel accessible and actionable. Her humor also makes her content enjoyable while being informative. Her approach is effective and authentic since everything she shares is deeply rooted in her own experiences and expertise. This helps her audience to trust her insights while feeling personally connected to her brand.

The key values and mission that emerge through Handley's narratives are authenticity, audience engagement, and continuous learning. She positions herself not only as an expert guide but also as a relatable peer who is on the same journey of learning and adapting. Her mission is to make business communication more actionable and accessible, helping brands set aside dry corporate-speak toward more engaging and relatable storytelling.

While browsing Handley's content on LinkedIn and her website (blog), her storytelling and narrative have evolved. Earlier, her storytelling focused on the rise of digital content and marketing best practices. As her brand matured, her narrative shifted towards a broader advocacy for human-centered communication, emphasizing empathy, real connection, and writing as an act of service to the audience. Despite these shifts, her commitment to authenticity and education has remained a consistent central pillar of her personal brand.

Overall, Handley's approach to storytelling demonstrates how focusing on personal, specific narratives - delivered in a humane and humorous tone – can differentiate a personal brand and foster stronger audience loyalty compared to more traditional, formal marketing styles.

4.3 Mini case: Matilda Djerf – The risks of an inauthentic personal brand narrative

At the end of 2024, a social media scandal occurred. In the center of this scandal was a Swedish social media influencer and entrepreneur, Matilda Djerf. Her personal branding focused mainly on her cute, girl-next-door-esque, curtain bangs and voluminous blow-out. She quickly became the “Nordic IT girl” and someone to look up to. She has millions of followers on her social media accounts, and due to her fame and love for fashion, she launched her clothing brand ‘Djerf Avenue’ in 2019. Djerf uses honesty and authenticity to be more approachable on social media and create a common ground between her and her audience. (McInerney, 2024) In her interview for Toresson (2022) in Forbes, she mentioned that when she started gaining a following, she wanted to be open about her struggles with mental health and eating disorders.

“If my experiences and difficulties that I’ve gone through can help just one person, I think it’s worth it.” Matilda Djerf, 2022.

On Djerf’s social media, she focuses on aesthetic storytelling instead of having vocal narratives. She utilizes natural, soft light and pastels, creating a continuous story of effortless-ness and luxury. She also shares behind-the-scenes content of her business and snippets of her self-care-focused mornings at her home to generate transparency for her brand.



Image 6. Screenshot of Matilda Djerf’s apology video (Unnamed user on TikTok, 2025)

She has been vocal about being authentic, which has also been an important value for her clothing brand. Due to her body image issues and eating disorder background, she did not want her models' photos to be retouched. (Toresson, 2022.) However, in late 2024, a Swedish newspaper, Aftonbladet, investigated and revealed allegations from Djerf's current and former employees. She was accused of bullying, body-shaming plus-size models, and favoritism. When faced with allegations of workplace toxicity (Ekström, 2024), Djerf made a video response relying on her content's trusted aesthetic style, seen in Image 6. In a softly lit setting, she acknowledged her failures as a leader and her willingness to improve. Being open, honest, and vulnerable supported her previously built image of a girl-next-door. Her response was also framed as a part of her personal growth narrative. These storytelling tools now seem to be more strategic than sincere, showing how fragile a brand can be.

5 Case study insights

In the previous chapter's case studies of Erika Kullberg, Ann Handley, and Matilda Djerf, the initial goal was to research how storytelling can be done differently and if there are any common factors. For the deep dives, two social media personas, Kullberg and Handley, operating on different platforms and having a varied audience, were chosen. Key focal points with the deep dive analysis were storytelling approaches, tone and style, values and mission, and personal brand perspective. What is their core narrative, and does it change over time? In the mini study, the focal point was on how an inauthentic personal brand can cause harm. The findings suggest that effective personal branding is not solely about self-expression but about the calculated construction of a relatable and credible identity over time.

The comparative analysis of Kullberg and Handley reveals that while their audience demographics and content formats differ, their approaches to personal branding through storytelling share foundational elements. The findings suggest that effective personal branding is anchored in authenticity, strategic narrative design, and a consistent, audience-centered communication style. Conversely, Djerf has a more visually driven and aesthetic storytelling style. Both Kullberg and Handley emphasize authenticity as the cornerstone of their personal brands. By sharing personal experiences – whether financial struggles or professional insights – they establish trust and emotional resonance with their audiences. Authenticity is used as a strategic tool for fostering long-term loyalty in the audience. Djerf does cater to authenticity and transparency, sharing her struggles like Kullberg. However, her behind-the-scenes behavior and later attempt to repair her narrative through vulnerability show how carefully constructed authenticity can collapse.

When only observing Kullberg and Handley, they use a communication style that blends an informal, conversational tone with the authority of professional expertise. This duality enhances the accessibility of their messages without intervening with their credibility. Additionally, as their core values—such as authenticity, education, and emotional connection—remain stable, their core narratives evolve through personal and market changes.

In summary, the key takeaways from these creators are:

1. Authenticity comes first

Personal stories create emotional trust, but inauthentic behavior can quickly weaken that trust.

2. Balancing authority and relatability

A strong personal brand presents the individual as both an expert and a peer – ensure credibility but stay approachable.

3. Share real-life stories & have a human-centered narrative

Personal anecdotes resonate more strongly than overly polished content.

4. The audience's trust is fragile

Strategic storytelling can be effective, but when perceived as manipulative, it may backfire.

5. Multi-platform consistency strengthens brand identity

Coherent voice and style across platforms- whether visual, verbal, or written- enhance brand recognition and reliability.

These case studies demonstrate that successful personal branding through storytelling relies not only on the content of the stories shared but also on the manner, consistency, and emotional resonance with which they are communicated.

6 A/B Testing on Storytelling in Personal Branding

Building on the insights from previous case studies and theoretical frameworks, this chapter explores the practical application of storytelling techniques through an A/B testing experiment conducted on TikTok. By creating three 'Day in My Life' videos, each video using a different storytelling approach, the aim was to analyze how narrative style affects audience engagement and contributes to the development of a personal brand on social media.

6.1 Experiment Design: TikTok and Storytelling Tactics

Vinod and Timeyin (2020,105) recommend starting with fewer digital channels, like one or two, but choosing a channel where the majority of the desired audience is and where it is active. They also mention observing the channels where the minority of the audience is, but where they are also active. This could give valuable insight into the latest trends or find new niches to catch on and potentially serve a new audience. Once a community has been established on one particular platform, there is an increased probability of attracting an audience from other channels.

The A/B testing aims to analyze how storytelling techniques affect the performance and engagement of TikTok videos, which are used to build a personal brand. TikTok was chosen to be the basis of this experiment purely due to my preferences. Based on my experiences, I have found it easier to reach a wider audience and achieve better engagement in a short amount of time on TikTok in comparison to Instagram. For a comprehensive analysis, TikTok Studio provides analytical tools to research video performance. The chosen video format was a "Day in My Life", where daily life situations and thoughts are presented and narrated in different styles.

Based on the findings of the literature review and case studies, I got a clear vision of which elements are suitable for me to use and how I would like to be perceived by my audience. The goal is to show authenticity, share my struggles, and show how I overcame them, providing peer support. Being seen as a relatable peer, advising the audience, should allow me to gain engagement and build my future community.

6.2 Execution and Engagement Metrics

Execution of the A/B testing started by thoroughly reviewing case studies and literature materials to incorporate those findings in my content, from which I ideated video topics,

formats, storytelling techniques, parameters, and content scheduling. As previously mentioned, the video format was chosen as 'A Day in My Life'. These videos revolve around everyday situations and scenarios encountered during this process.

What became clear through the literature review was that authenticity matters to a considerable extent, and that was something I preferred to be perceived as by my audience. Additionally, based on Bastianelli's (2017) thoughts on aligning internal truth and external narrative, I wanted to be sure of how I see myself and how others see me fit together. I wanted to utilize my characteristics and experiences, so I could make my storytelling more effective and interesting. In my subconscious mind, the words of Sointu Borg (2025) echo and remind me of not trying to be someone that everybody likes. How I started combining my video ideas was to collect my story capital, what has happened recently, how I overcame my struggles, and what advice I could give to my viewers. Showing viewers everyday life and struggles while providing authenticity and relatability. One of the main situations I came up with was my journey with writing this thesis. I wanted to base my branding around authenticity, self-love, and learning/teaching how to love yourself and life, these became the carrying theme of the videos. Every video is made in Finnish.

At the beginning of video creation, it was decided to use a different storytelling technique. These storytelling techniques with the chosen format (A day in my life), videos were divided into A, B, and C. Video A was chosen to follow a problem-solving arc, with a more emotional, yet calm and friendly tone, also showing vulnerability. Problem-solving arc starts with presenting a concrete problem, explaining how it was handled, and a small mindset shift or a new solution at the end. Video B "Spend a cozy Sunday with me" uses chronological narration and has a cozy, calm setting, with a bit of humor. It does not have voice narration but instead has text, which supports the calm atmosphere throughout the video. Video C focuses on a relatable-moment arc, similar to the first video's problem-solving arc. The video focuses on a specific area where I have struggled and how it made me feel. Tone is more upbeat but "firmly friendly".

Originally, I chose to talk about my thesis journey on each video, which I quickly understood would be too repetitive for my audience and myself. Furthermore, video A was done twice due to a mistake with the storytelling style and not following the parameters carefully enough. Therefore, video A was divided into video A V1 and video A V2. This was done to ensure that analytics were not harmed, and parameters were followed. Every video and posting followed the same parameters, which were set to be: posting time at 19:00 (EEST), video length (approx. 1 min), "A day in my life" topic, and hashtags (#selflovejour-

ney/#itsensärakastaminen, #selfcare, #selflove). Variable elements of the videos were storytelling techniques, possible music/sound/narration. Each video and its engagement were monitored for the next 48 hours to achieve a thorough understanding of video performance.

For the posting time, an article was found that stated the best posting hours for each part of the world, as seen in Table 1. Despite the recommendations, I decided to keep the same time (19:00 EEST) throughout the process, since it was easier to manage and have data on each video performance.

Table 1. Best Times to Post on TikTok (Analyzify 2025)

Country	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
USA	12 PM & 4 PM	8 AM & 3 PM	1 PM & 2 PM	5 AM & 6 PM	11 AM & 9 PM	5 PM	1 AM & 10 PM.
UK	11 AM & 3 PM	9 AM & 2 PM	12 PM & 1 PM	4 AM & 2 PM	12 AM & 6 PM	4 PM	12 AM & 1 PM, 9 PM
Europe	10 AM & 2 PM	8 AM & 1 PM	11 AM & 12 PM	1 PM & 1 PM	9 AM & 7 PM	3 PM & 11 PM	11 AM & 8 PM

At the actual execution, each video starts with a visual or vocal hook. In the video A (both versions), a hook was a sentence *“This morning I could hardly get out of bed”*, video B’s hook was a mixture of visuals of outdoors rainy weather and animated text *“come and spend a cozy Sunday with me”*, and video C’s hook was combined with a camera movement and sentence *“If you have ever felt behind in life, watch the next clip”*. With these kinds of hooks, it is easier to catch the viewer’s attention. I also kept all the videos visually interesting by using multiple short clips related to the topics.

Video A’s script follows a problem-solution arc, where I narrate (through voice-over) my feelings about being in a stressful situation in life and how I get through it, ending the video on an assuring note, *“it’s okay to take it easy sometimes”*. Video B has chronological narration, a simple beginning, middle, and end. There are no deep arcs, and it shares a surface-level insight into the day. Narration is done by text. Video C has a relatable-moment arc where I share my struggles, advise my viewers, and tell them to share their stories of being in a similar situation. At the end of video C, a call-to-action (CTA) phrase was added, encouraging the audience to share their stories and feelings. Narration is done by talking straight to the camera.

6.3 Comparative Analysis of Results

When this A/B-testing started, my personal brand was not fully developed; however, it was shaped around documenting a self-love journey through a relatable and cozy lifestyle lens. This open and evolving framework allowed authentic experimentation with different storytelling formats in real time while aligning with the thesis goal of examining storytelling's role in building personal brands.

At the beginning of this test, video A, now known as video A V1, was meant to have a problem-solution arc, but due to failure with the original script, it became a mixture between problem-solution and chronological narrative. This video A (V1) original script in Finnish can be seen in the Appendix (Appendix 1). Combining two storytelling approaches created an issue with the theme being unclear, and it failed to provide enough relatability. Video A (V1) was also posted outside TikTok's "primetime" (Table 1). Based on the performance of my older content (Image 5) and seeing that Video A V1 was not performing as expected after 12 hours, I wanted to make sure to get reliable data for further analysis. Therefore, the decision was made to make a new video, A (V2), with the clarified theme and storytelling technique. This new video kept the original problem-solution arc with a calm and gentle narration tone. The same video clips were also used to avoid the new video being a different style from the original. Video A V2 full script can be found in the Appendix (Appendix 2).

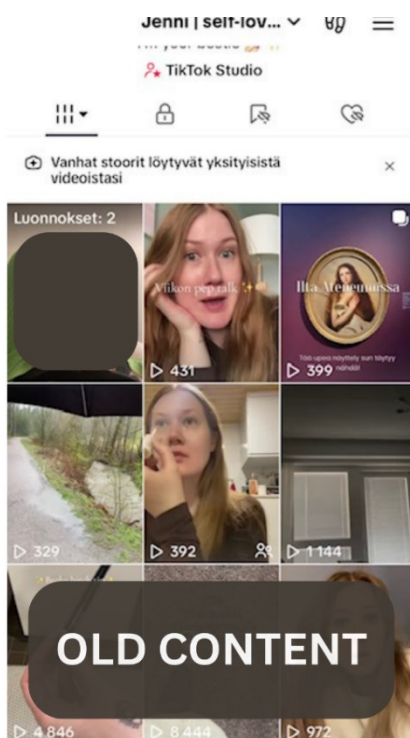
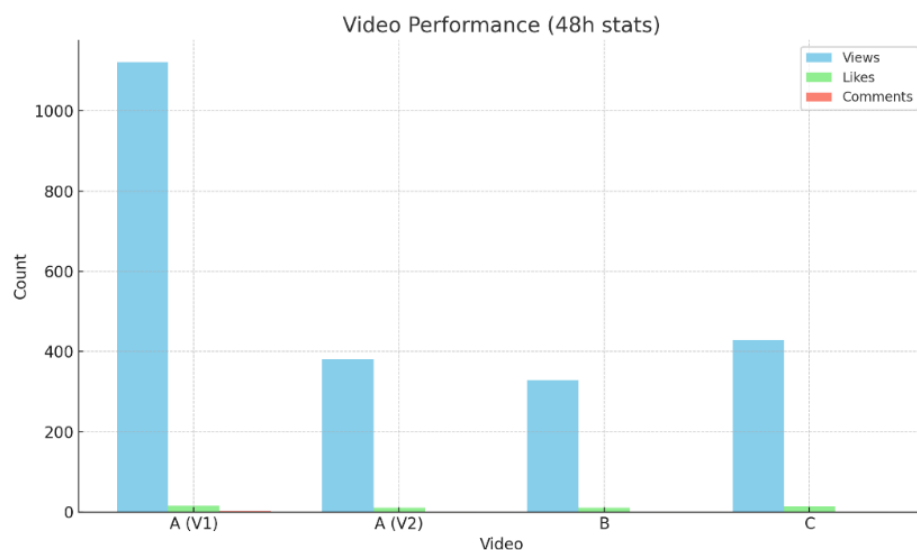


Image 7. Screenshot of TikTok profile front page (Rimpiläinen 2025)

Video B followed a chronological narration style as a text, supported by matching visual video clips of my relaxed Sunday. This video I was proud of, since it gave a rainy-day calming feel, which I enjoy. However, it got the least amount of engagement.

Since I had seen a poor performance of videos A and B, with Video C, I decided to drive from my authentic self and bring more of my personality and cheerful energy to the audience. I did not have a rigid script as in previous videos, and all I had was a simplified idea of the narration and my main goal, which can be seen from the Appendix (Appendix 4). Being more strategically spontaneous left me feeling more satisfied with the result. The decision was proven to be right, even though performance was still below expectations, as seen in Graph 1.



Graph 1. Video performance based on TikTok Studio analytics (2025)

Posting was scheduled to happen during Easter holidays, excluding video C. While noticing the low engagement in terms of likes, views, shares, and comments, I thought Easter holidays could have affected the video's performance. Poor performance and the lack of engagement could also be explained by forced and rapidly created content, lack of strong visual elements, and/or weak storytelling. Rushed content could also have come across as inauthentic to the audience. Another reason might have been that the content was not relatable or interesting enough to reach a bigger audience.

When comparing old content to new storytelling-focused content, the new ones have performed significantly worse. My old content did not follow storytelling as strictly as it does now, but there are visible elements. For example, one point of view (POV), a humorous

short video has reached almost 8.5 thousand views, hundreds of likes and saves, and numerous amounts of shares. A similar phenomenon was noted on a video after that, where I shared my affordable eyebrow pen find. In the video, I explained that my purchase was a duplicate of another popular brand, which caught the interest of my viewers. Overall, my old videos were made in the moment, without any planning or storytelling in mind. Thus, my decision to revisit this “spontaneous” style with my video C.

Based on this testing, it is surprising to see how the first “failed” video and the last one performed the best. For each video, I made a posting schedule and kept track of the variables and consistent parts as seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Video analytics (TikTok Studio, 2025)

Video	Posting Time	Planned Time	Length	General Topic	Hashtags & Caption Style	Storytelling Technique	Music/ Sound	Views (48h)	Likes (48h)	Comments (48h)	Avg. View Time	Completion Rate
A (V1)	18.4. at 22:38	19:00	1.16 min	A day in my life	Consistent	Variable	Variable	1121	15	2	5.1 seconds	1.34%
A (V2)	19.4. at 19:00	19:00	55 seconds	A day in my life	Consistent	Variable	Variable	381	11	1	4.4. seconds	2.17%
B	20.4. at 19:40	19:00	54 seconds	A day in my life	Consistent	Variable	Variable	329	11	1	3.5 seconds	1.99%
C	29.4. at 18:55	19:00	1.18 min	A day in my life	Consistent	Variable	Variable	429	14	1	10.4 seconds	4.19%

What cannot be seen on Table 2 is that 93,1% of the views came through TikTok's ‘For You’ page, and 6,7% of the views came through my profile, meaning people have either searched me or they have been my friends.

The difference between my old content and new content is mainly the length of the videos. My better-performing videos were from 10 to 30 seconds long, which are drastically shorter than my storytelling videos. Secondly, based on TikTok Studio analytics, on average, the completion rate of my best-performing content is 9%, when video C has the best completion rate of 4,19% as seen in Table 2. This could indicate that shorter storytelling content could have reached better engagement, a 1-minute video on a TikTok scale is somewhat lengthy. I do not see the posting time affecting video performance, but the bigger factor is quality content. This experiment revealed how storytelling is not always easy, but it also gave me room to try and find a style that suits me personally the best and what I would like to continue

to perfect in the future. In terms of building my community and name, publishing short stories daily could help push my content more and reach a bigger audience. I would not say that these storytelling techniques were bad, but they would probably have a bigger impact if more of the viewers were already familiar with them. I will most definitely keep using and exploring more storytelling techniques in the future. This experiment was not a failure, as it gave me new followers. I'm still a small content creator, but I do have more tools to use than I had before this A/B testing.

7 Summary and discussion

7.1 Summary

During this research, it became clear on multiple occasions how authenticity, authority, and creating an emotional connection with an audience can take you a long way. However, building a community or a social media following does not happen overnight, yet it requires strategic thinking and following through with your brand mission. As we have learned, every one of us has a personal brand and everyone can start building it further.

Even though this research culminated in testing storytelling techniques on TikTok, building a personal brand can be started without social media. All that is needed is your work environment, colleagues, and friends. For anyone who wants to start focusing on their brands, my recommendation would be to begin collecting life experiences and writing them down. Think about what you have done, achieved, and what kind of struggles you have encountered, and most importantly, how you overcame them. Pinpoint your personality and what you enjoy doing the most. Is it helping others with their finances like Erika Kullberg, or do you want to share your more hands-on expertise like Ann Handley? Once you have identified your strengths and desires and created a strategy, you can start sharing your knowledge with the world.

Here are a few steps on how to get started with building your strong personal brand:

- Identify your story
- Find your compelling life story (what is your hero story?)
- Identify your true self, strengths, and values
- Learn from your competitors, but do not copy
- Build a narrative that aligns with your values
- Choose the best platform to share your stories and talents, map where your potential audience is, and start sharing your knowledge.

The A/B test revealed that the format and storytelling arcs that were tried need adjustment to gain recognition and help build a stronger brand. To see which areas needed strengthening and which were stronger, a cross-comparison table, as seen below (Table 3), was created. Using Varsta's (2024) four-dimensional criteria for a strong personal brand, and comparing my experiment results to case studies, it is clear that my personal brand needs strengthening and to use more of my unique story capital, as seen in Table 3. Kullberg and

Handley have built their brand visibility and storytelling for years, but they are also great examples of how the narrative and storytelling can be developed over time.

Table 3. Chosen and used personal brand elements cross-comparison table

Criteria	Definition	Erika Kullberg	Ann Handley	My experiment	My other videos	Improvement suggestions
Uniqueness (Varsta, 2024)	Measured by time and effort. A unique brand becomes an expert and creates its niche.	Built authority as a lawyer; unique by simplifying legal/financial concepts; viral tagline.	Pioneered content marketing; uses 'smaller stories' approach; first Chief Content Officer.	Focused on the thesis story and life struggles; used personal experience and story capital.	No clear authority, sharing snippets of life,.i.e., experiences and activities.	Add more unique visual/voice elements; develop a signature storytelling style.
Relevancy (Varsta, 2024)	Authentic and resonant with the audience, it demands constant renewal.	Relatable through debt journey; resonates with those starting a financial journey.	Talks to marketers/content creators; offers practical yet inspirational stories.	Relevant topics (self-love, struggles, thesis stress); audience-centered. Resonates emotionally and topically.	Resonates on an emotional level (thesis stress, cosmetic recommendation).	Explore additional relevant topics based on follower feedback.
Diversity (Varsta, 2024)	Present-day resonance avoids being tied to a single identity. Supports belonging and adaptation.	Mixes personal/professional tone; content in multiple formats (TikTok, podcast).	Shares mistakes and growth; adapts tone over time (e.g., early vs. later storytelling). & books, talks, text, video formats	Used different narrative arcs (problem-solving, cozy, relatable); different tones (emotional, motivational).	Different storytelling styles and formats.	Continue to test different narrative arcs and formats & sharing personal growth.
Emotionality (Varsta, 2024)	Resonates emotionally; hero narratives are most effective.	Uses emotional resonance through overcoming debt; trust via transparency.	Humorous tone, uses personal anecdotes that foster emotional ties.	Tone ranges from emotional to cozy and motivational; vulnerability is used. Hero arc activated.	Humorous tone, personal anecdotes.	Lean further into hero journey arcs and emotionally compelling narratives.
Authenticity (Courtaney-Smith, 2018 & Bastianelli 2017)	Stems from parts that truly are part of you. People are drawn to personal stories and know who you truly are.	Storytelling is most effective when honest and personal, sharing her story of being in debt.	Everything she shares is deeply rooted in her own experiences and expertise.	Storytelling is being honest and sharing my journey with thesis/learning to take it easy.	More surface level. The personal story has not been shared as deeply.	Start gathering more story capital and show up more authentically through my experiences & expertise.

There are good elements used in this experiment, such as using my thesis process as a relatable element with my storytelling. In the relevancy dimension, another relevant topic was used: self-love. These topics were addressed clearly, and they share a universal struggle that many can relate to, especially students and even young professionals. Another dimension of success was around emotionality, there was a calm, warm, and sincere atmosphere. Videos A and C, especially, delivered an emotional connection through vulnerability. Vulnerability evokes trust and empathy, which also drives emotionally impactful

branding. Kullberg and Handley also use a warm and authentic tone, which my posts managed to maintain as well. Kullberg also uses emotional resonance, which softly builds trust with an audience, and my way of using a cozy and calm emotional atmosphere mirrors it in some ways. Lastly, the authenticity criteria that both Kullberg and Handley have rooted their storytelling in personal stories. Their stories feel honest and unfiltered. This was also my non-negotiable. My content has to be and has been throughout, genuinely me. I reflect on my journey openly and have made it trustworthy. For example, in my old content, I shared a makeup product for the sole purpose of liking the product and wanting others to find that “gem” as well.

Areas that should be improved compared to Kullberg and Handley are ‘uniqueness’ and ‘diversity’. In uniqueness, Kullberg, who has perfected simplifying legal concepts, and Handley, who pioneered digital marketing and human-centered content (marketing), my brand is still in a formative stage. Even though the stories I have are personal, they do not yet clearly construct a recognizable niche or unique storytelling signature. A strong and recognizable hook, a narrative angle, or aesthetic style would be needed to signal me as a person and my brand. In diversity, Kullberg and Handley use multiple formats, tones (professional and personal, warmth and authenticity), and platforms to reach audiences. With my content, old and new, formats and perspectives have been limited. With more experimentation, such as adapting different styles of voiceovers, visuals, and narration arcs, like leaning more into personal hero stories, my brand personality could be broadened and reach new audiences.

This reveals that the path is right in terms of relevancy, emotional depth, and authenticity. What should be done next is to sharpen uniqueness and explore bold content. Not to be everyone’s cup of tea. When emotional trust exists, it is time to build recognition.

7.2 Further research opportunities

One of the main things that came up during this research was how big a factor authenticity is when it comes to personal brand. When looking back at the content produced during this process, the possibility of using Varsta’s (2024) emotionality dimension and leaning into the hero journey arc could offer an interesting point of view when creating personal brands. What would happen when personal narratives are exaggerated? The personal story behind the storytelling is true, but to make it more emotionally compelling, it would attract even more attention than the “normal” story would. How would “colored” stories affect brand attraction, and if it’s possible to build a long-term brand around it? This could be taken in a slightly different direction, keeping the emotional storytelling but adding ethical influence. This would keep the personal branding element and lean more on neuromarketing.

Personal branding offers a variety of research opportunities. One of them could be inspired by Sointu Borg's provocative approach, it would be interesting to investigate how intentional audience polarization impacts brand growth and community building in different industries. Also, based on Matilda Djerf's case of inauthenticity, there would be a possibility to research the evolution of brand authenticity in crisis management. This could include exploration, how personal brands navigate authenticity during public mistakes, scandals, or brand crises could offer valuable strategic insights.

7.3 Self-evaluation

Since starting this thesis process, I could never have imagined where this would take me. These past few months have been incredibly educational, and I have grown professionally to a new level. At the start of my studies, I was determined to become a branding and copywriting professional. The second part was slowly forgotten until I started writing my thesis. I have not understood why I gave up on this thought. I have always loved writing, and I have considered myself quite a good storyteller as well. Crafting compelling slogans and marketing texts was something that I loved to do. The best part of the packaging and brand design studies was the fact that you can create a design career that looks like you. Through this storytelling and personal branding project, I found my way back to something I want to pursue further.

I discovered how much I enjoyed creating video content and ideating different approaches that could attract better views. Literature reviews revealed how deeply it would be possible to go with personal branding and storytelling. I would have loved to talk more about different theories and explain model story plots and archetypes even further. This could be another possible future research opportunity. One of the most interesting parts I found was how Maslow's hierarchy of needs ties with building a personal brand and how it can be utilized to attract more attention.

Despite my struggles with research work and narrowing down the material I found, I believe my success was in A/B-testing, where I created test videos in a relatively short amount of time. This included ideating, scripting, filming, and editing. The testing period was one of the fun things I have ever done, and it gave me crucial information on how I could move forward with my content creation career. Even though the videos did not reach high volumes of attraction and engagement, this time also showed me how time-consuming and occasionally hard it was to come up with good ideas. Despite the limited amount of time, I managed to gather a great number of insights to move forward with building personal brands, whether it is my own or someone else's. Personal branding and storytelling revealed a wide range of opportunities and paths that could be taken.

At first, I was not fully satisfied with the amount of time used in the literature review and A/B testing but looking back at the information I managed to gather, I changed my mind. This time sharpened my analytical skills and strategic thinking. I am convinced that this information gained could be useful for my future work. I hope my research will offer helpful insight to anyone who wants to find their brand and to grow or strengthen their potential. My goal is to pursue personal branding and storytelling further and use this study later on in my business, and/or postgraduate studies.

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Appendix 1. A/B test video, A V1 – Script

Hook: "Tänään en meinannut jaksaa nousta sängystä..."

"Tänään mä en meinannu jaksaa nousta sängystä. Oon ollu stressipallona kun opparin deadline lähestyy ja työtä riittää. Näkee varmaan naamastakin, että neitiä hieman väsyttää. Oon tehny tässä nyt työtöitä ja vääntänyt opparia yömyöhään ja stressihormonit pitää huolen, että että yöllä herätään kesken unien, eikä sitten nukuta enää ollenkaan. Väsymyksestä huolimatta yritän puskea opparin valmiiksi. Oon tuntenu tosi paljon huonomuuden tunnetta siitä, etten välttämättä saiskaan palautettua sitä määräaikaan mennessä ja valmistuisin kuukauden myöhemmin kuin muut. Mulla on ollu aina tapana ruoskia itseäni ja asettaa välillä liian korkeita tavoitteita. Oonkin yrittänyt opetella olemaan itselleni armollisempi. Tänään halusinkin pitää itestäni tän kirjoitusrupeaman keskellä vähän parempaa huolta, ja kävin ostamassa hyvää ruokaa ja otin tietoisesti aikaa ulkoilulle. Ajattelin, että kun saa hyvää ruokaa ja raitista ilmaa, näyttää maailmakin sen jälkeen hieman valoisamalta. Ja onko sillä oikeesti mitään väliä vaikka valmistuisinkin vähän jälessä muista? On aivan ok tehdä asioita omassa tahdissa ja oman kantokyvyn rajoissa ja pitää itestään huolta. Kaikki tulee kuitenkin menemään just hyvin."

Appendix 2. A/B test video, A V2 – Script

Hook: ”Tänään en meinannut päästä sängystä...”

”Tänään en meinannut päästä sängystä. Mun koko keho päästä varpasiin tuntui raskaalta ja mieli vielä raskaammalta. Viime päivät oon nukkunu todella huonosti stressin takia. Oppari painaa päälle, ja tuntuu, ettei mikään riitä. Ei aika, eikä mun aivot. Hetken jo mietin, että ehkä en vaan jaksa tänään tehdä mitään. Mutta päätin nousta ja tehdä asioita, jotain pientä. Kirjotan oppariakin vaikka sivun tai puoli. Silleen vähän kerrallaan. Kävin ulkoilemassa, ostin hyvää ruokaa ja herkkuja ja yritin hengittää. Yritin myös meditoida. Vähän epäilin alkuun, että onko näistä nyt mitään hyötyä, mutta kyllä ne vaan autto vähän. Varsinkin raitis ulkoilma. Ehkä mun ei tarvii puskea täydellisesti joka päivä. Ehkä pienet teotkin riittää. Ainakin tänään.”

Appendix 3. A/B test video, B – Script

Hook:

Liikkuva teksti, sadesää: *"Vietä rento Sunnuntai mun kanssa."*

Klippejä luonnosta ja sateesta.

Tekstiselostus sopien ruudulla nähtyyn ja vähän huumoria, *"tää sade", "hetki, joka oli taistelua elämästä ja kuolemasta"*.

Klippi minusta kirjoittamassa Artist's Way -kirjan aamusivuja ja kuvatekstinä *"oon laiminlyönyt Artist's Way kirjaa ja aamusivujen kirjoittamista. Tää on ollu kyllä hyvä tapa purkaa asioita heti herättyä paperille ja manifestoida hyvää elämään"*.

Klippi jossa valmistan päivällistä, tässä lyhyitä klippejä eri vaiheista aina ruuan ottamiseen uunista. Tekstiselostus eri vaiheista ja hook: *"Tehdään seuraavaksi päivällistä (gnocchisienipelti piti tulla, mutta eipä tullutkaan)", "Siellä on hometta!"* ja osoitus homeisiin sieniin, ongelmanratkaisu > *"Chili-paprika mifut sai korvata sienet"*

Uusi klippi, jossa kirjoitan opparia sohvalla *"Tää opparin kirjoittaminen ei sit vaan ota loppuakseen. Viimeiset pinnistykset vielä!", "oho/I f-cked up"*

Klippi iltateehen *"Mä oon kunnon tea lover, en pärjää ilman iltateetä"*

Klippi teen juontiin ja television katseluun *"Illan tärkein hetki", "can you guess it?", "90 day fiance! Storytime kun melkeen haettiin exän kans läpällä tohon sarjaan?"*

Video päättyy.

Appendix 4. A/B test video, C – Script

Hook alku

Heilauta kameraa/mukia ja puhu reippaalla äänensävyllä

"Tässä teille viikon pep talk. Jos susta on koskaan tuntunu, että sä oot jälessä sun elämässä, niin kato tää seuraava klippi."

Samaistuttava hetki (videopätkä minusta itkemässä)

"Tässä olin minä pari päivää sitten. Ja tältä näyttää kun alkaa vertaamaan itseä liikaa muihin."

Rehellinen pohdinta

"Se tunne, kun tuntuu et kaikki muut menee eteenpäin ja ite vaan junnaa paikoillaan... jne."

Yhteyden luominen ja kannustus:

"Jos kukaan ei oo sanonut tätä sulle tänään: sä oot oikealla tiellä, vaikka se ei aina näytä siltä."

"Ja jos oot tuntenut viime aikoina samoin, kerro mulle kommentteissa. Sä et oo yksin. Eikä me olla yksin."

Jokaisessa videoklipissä puhun kameralle eri kuvakulmasta, tai teen eri asioita samalla kuin puhun.