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Building a strong personal brand on Instagram
Abstract

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Building a strong personal brand on Instagram, 46 pages, 1 appendix
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The purpose of this research was to study personal branding and design a step-by-step guide for building a strong personal brand on Instagram on Russian market. Firstly, the definition of personal branding is explained with fundamental branding theories. Secondly, the crucial elements of personal branding on Instagram are presented.

The information was gathered from literature, articles, magazines, statistics, case studies, reports, online blogs, videos and interviews. The author's proficiency in the field complemented the findings as well. The qualitative research included interviews with successful Instagram influencers.

The author identified some of the most effective branding models and provided practical advices. As a result, a strategy for building a strong personal brand on Russian segment of Instagram was suggested. This thesis can be used by any future influencer or a company as a practical guide for creating and implementing a strong personal brand on Instagram.

Keywords: personal branding, branding, digital marketing, influencer marketing, social networks, Instagram.
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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Nowadays people see from four to ten thousand messages from brands every day: on the street, in a smartphone, on TV, in magazines, on the radio and so on. To break through the barrage of "buy it right now" messages, it is not enough for brands to be just original — you need to choose the frequency at which this originality will be noticed.

People hardly notice the ads anymore. Over the years, as marketing was developing, people learned to ignore it. During the last 30 years, when technology allowed to place more and more advertisement online, people developed so-called "banner blindness". People are increasingly blocking banner ads — special programs are installed by 27-40 percent of users around the world (Guttmann 2019). If banners are not blocked by technology, then they are blocked by the brain itself. Only 14 percent of people remember the last banner they saw, and click on banners even less, on average 0.05 percent (Chaffey 2019).

Yet people still see each other. Especially we pay attention to those who we like and know. People perceive the person who they follow on social networks as a good friend and are imbued with his recommendations. 84 percent of people trust online reviews as much as friends' advices and 71 percent of users make a purchase decision based on recommendations in social networks (Ewing 2019).

Influence marketing through opinion leaders is one of the most reliable channels of advertising. Mediakix conducted a survey in 2019 to measure the efficiency of influencer marketing. The results are impressive: 80 percent of marketers find influencer marketing effective; 89 percent say ROI from influencer marketing is comparable to or better than other marketing channels; 71 percent of marketers say that the quality of customers and traffic from influencer marketing is better than other sources (Mediakix 2020). Those statistics prove the fact that people now trust only other people, not companies. The good news is that now you can
be your own main marketing channel by building a strong personal brand on Instagram.

1.2 Purposes of the study

This research is driven by several purposes, which are divided into primary and secondary ones.

Primary objectives include:

- designing a guide, which can help future influencers to understand how to build a strong personal brand on Instagram
- gathering the most efficient ways of personal brand’s monetarization
- collecting and shaping valuable knowledge and experience in the field of personal branding on social networks
- opening personal branding on Instagram as an efficient tool for the readers.

Secondary objectives are the following:

- defining the most innovative forms of personal branding
- determining the specifics of Russian Instagram influencers market
- explaining the value of influencer marketing on Instagram.

1.3 Delimitations of the study

The study was conducted according to certain boundaries established by the author of the thesis. The subject was researched within the framework of marketing and entrepreneurship. Instagram was chosen to be studied among the other social networks because this platform is avowed as the most popular one. The research is focused on personal branding, as it appears to be one of the most successful marketing tools in a digital world. The study is limited further with Russian Instagram market because there are critical differences between Russian- and English-speaking customers, which affects the content design strategy and ways of monetarization.
The guideline is intended to be universal, so the implementation of any specific topic of the content (e.g. beauty, sports, travel) is not examined. The study is focused on general concepts and tools, which are to be adjusted by the particular influencer to his/her case. The study results can be used both by the existing Instagram influencers and by those, who are only planning to build personal brand and use it efficiently.

1.4 Limitations

There are a few limitations in the study that have to be mentioned. First of all, there can be no formula of success on Instagram. Every person is different, so is his/her blog and brand behind it. Nevertheless, the researcher aims to provide a set of universal recommendations and techniques for building a strong personal brand on Instagram on Russian market. Secondly, due to rapid development and changes in the world of digital marketing, the guideline may become irrelevant over the years. Although, the basic recommendation will stay the same, the reader is advised to look for the newest trends in the field if reading the thesis later than three years after the initial publication.

1.5 Research questions

The principal research question, which is leading the whole thesis is the following:

- How to build and use a strong personal brand on Instagram on Russian market?

However, the following sub-questions have to be answered in order to make the most use out of the guideline:

- How can the success of the personal brand be measured?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of building a personal brand on Instagram?
- How can personal branding be implemented by the companies?
1.6 Research design

The procedure of conducting the research will be explained in this part. Based on the methodological literature, it was decided to conduct the study in two stages. The first stage included pre-investigations on the topic and establishment of clear future research directions. The next stage was a descriptive study. It comprised integrating primary data, collected through interviews, with secondary data, gathered from literature and reliable online sources.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into five main chapters, which are further segmented into more specific sections.

Chapter “Introduction” gives an overview on the whole study. The next chapter “Theoretical framework” provides the basic knowledge needed for understanding the subject. The key chapter “Guidelines” is the next chapter, which focuses on eight main parts of building a strong personal brand on Instagram:

1. Designing a foundation of the brand.

This part includes the following aspects:

- defining a target audience
- brand purpose and story behind it
- brand response to the audience
- brand resonance.

2. Brand’s positioning.

3. Designing a content plan.

4. Building the community.

5. Designing brand elements, such as:

- brand name
- short brand description
- way of communication.

6. Visual elements of the brand, such as:

- main picture of the page
• correlating colors of the pictures in the feed
• stories highlights covers
• style of photos.

7. Promotion of the blog.
8. Monetarization.

Results of the empirical study are included in this chapter as well. The chapter “Conclusion” summarizes the whole study and presents further research suggestions. The last section, “List of references”, consists of the list of sources, accompanied by lists of figures and appendices. The structure of the thesis is also illustrated on the mind map below (Figure 1) for better understanding:

Figure 1. Structure of the thesis
2 Theoretical framework

The purpose of this chapter is to study the key theories of branding. The main concepts, theories, and models needed for building a brand will be presented. Theory is focused on personal branding. The most suitable branding models for the research purposes will be chosen for further analysis and usage in the thesis. Once the suitable branding models are chosen, personal branding on Instagram will be examined.

The theory part is complemented by qualitative research conducted in the form of five interviews, which observes the practices of five Instagram influencers who have strong personal brands. The data collected from the interviewees will give an insight into personal branding on Instagram and demonstrate the practical methods that have been proven effective for building a strong personal brand on Instagram.

Success factors of personal branding on Russian segment of Instagram will be assessed based on the findings on the theory part as well as the qualitative interviews. Once the success factors have been identified, the guidelines for building a strong personal brand will be built.

2.1 Definition of personal branding

In the information age, recommendations for turning into a brand are becoming important not only for companies, but also for a person. The recognition of a person in a certain environment, reputation, established image, demand and popularity are related to the person who came to the level of the brand. In this research, the terms "brand" and "personal brand" are synonymous.

When applied to a person, a brand can be defined as a stable set of associations, an established image. It is worth saying that the definition of a personal brand in general does not differ from the definition of a product brand.

If the ultimate goal of a product brand is to increase profits in the long term, then the personal brand, depending on the scope of application, can pursue other
goals in addition to capitalization. In general, the ultimate goal of personal brands is recognition and demand.

A brand is an image or emotion formed in the mind of an existing or prospective consumer that expresses the experience and benefits of interacting with an organization or the experience of consuming its product or services.

A personal brand is an image or emotion formed in the minds of other people that expresses their experience and the expected benefits of interacting with that brand. It is a reflection of person’s character and values (Kapferer 2007).

2.2 Social media marketing

Social Media Marketing (SMM) is a new round of advertising on the Internet. Social media marketing is the process of attracting traffic or attention to a brand or product through social platforms. This is a set of tools which are supposed to use social media as channels for promoting companies and solving other business problems. The main emphasis in SMM is on creating content that people will distribute through social networks on their own, without the participation of the organizer (Deckers & Lacy 2012).

Social networks today are not only a leisure reality of the young generation’s life, but also a sphere of active interest on the part of modern business. Promotion in social networks allows brands to influence the target audience, choose platforms where this audience is more represented, and the most appropriate ways to communicate with it.

Social networks solve several advertising and marketing tasks for brands at once:

- designing more detailed portrait of the audience
- brand access to the consumer's personal space
- control of the brand image and consumer opinions about it
- increased customers’ loyalty and awareness
- increase in sales due to the new mechanics of sales promotion
- advertising of a brand, service, product
- attracting a new target audience
• constant feedback.

In the course of this study, the main directions of development of marketing communications in social networks were identified: monitoring, promotion in social networks, customer feedback and management of the company's reputation.

Monitoring social networks allows a brand to quickly respond to the needs of the audience, and also provides the necessary information to make a decision about how the company's brand should function in social media spaces.

Promotion on social networks includes an extensive set of actions that are aimed at getting the target audience. Using such an impact tool as communication and consulting with clients during the promotion process, the number of loyal clients increases. It is worth noting that promotion in social networks allows you to bring a new product or service to the market, while showing their unique characteristics and increasing brand awareness.

Reputation management is the analysis and collection of feedback from the audience and response to comments, as well as unobtrusive impact on the opinion of customers by placing the necessary content on social networks. The main advantage of managing the company's reputation in social networks is the formation and maintenance of a positive image for customers. Consumer reviews and comments are one of the main factors that shape the company's reputation. The company's reputation depends on the information space that has formed around it on the Internet. Negative reviews can ruin a reputation, positive ones can create a cult of the company's brand. (Keller 2013.)

2.2.1 Branding on social networks

A brand platform is a collection of all social media communities where the brand functions and communicates with the target audience. Having considered the main directions and components of marketing communications in social networks, the author will highlight a number of problems in their development and operation:
1. With insufficient experience in social networks there is a risk of irrational waste of time and money resources.

2. There are risks of wrong choice of target audience.

3. When monitoring social networks, the collection and analysis of information is done manually. This takes quite a long time for the SMM specialist. It is necessary to ensure the speed of updating information about the target audience, due to the fact that everything is changing rapidly in social networks.

4. Reputation management in social networks will not improve the situation if there are shortcomings or if the quality of goods or services is unacceptable.

5. Lack of a detailed strategy for positioning the company in social networks.

6. The problem of forming a quality audience. Often, when organizing a community, attention is paid only to the number of people, which is not the right way, since the core of loyal customers to the brand is formed by the target audience.

2.2.2 Instagram

There are currently more than two billion users worldwide on social media and the numbers are growing rapidly. This is almost 25 percent of the population of the entire planet. If your target audience is young, dynamic and responsive to visuals, then Instagram Is the best platform to promote your services and your personal brand.

Despite the fact that Instagram is so popular, only about 30 percent of companies and private entrepreneurs using social networks have accounts in this application. On the one hand, it is understandable, because Instagram has a number of limitations: for example, a small number of characters in one post, the inability to put active links, etc. However, despite this, this social network is an incredibly effective way to develop your business, increase traffic and increase sales. Instagram is especially useful for growing and scaling your personal brand.

The best way to build your personal brand is to give people a look at your life. This is a great chance to get to know the real you. If you do not want to spend a
few hours a day creating a YouTube video and then processing the video, Instagram is the easiest and most effective tool for brand and business promotion.

2.3 Success factors

Personal branding on Instagram follows many of the same fundamental rules of branding as traditional personal or service branding. However, Instagram has many unique elements that can only be seen on this platform. Since there is no official information about branding on Instagram from the company itself, the information will be based on qualitative interviews with successful Instagram influencers.

Alexandra Mitroshina (@alexandramitroshina 2020) states that to build a successful personal brand on digital environment, one should have and demonstrate at least one mission that he/she wants to convey to the audience. That mission can be anything from fighting global warming to rising money for charity. Once the purpose is clear, a method of communication should be chosen accordingly.

Pinky Sassafras (@pinky.sassafras 2019) states that the main success factor on building strong personal brand is the ability of the influencer to translate his/her life in an interesting way. Pinky thinks that bloggers should learn to use storytelling in everyday life and become a real movie characters for their audience.

Maryana Mironova (@maryana.mir 2019) argues that one of the most important aspects of a strong personal brand is building a community. She insists on the importance of it by stating that audience is a key part of any blog. Many influencers lose sight of the importance of the community, focusing only on benefitting from their audience through likes, views, and money. As an Instagram influencer, a huge effort should be devoted to community engagement. It is extremely important to show respect and gratefulness to followers for being a part of the blog. Moreover, by reading through all the comments and feedback, it is possible to gather insights from the audience to further development of the brand and the content.
Knesiia Khizhniak (@serenity_inside 2019) states that personal brand is based on influencer’s charisma and genuineness. She is a professional actress and believes that Instagram is quite similar to a theatre stage. In both cases a person’s goal is to hold audience’s attention and make them follow his/her every move. Same as theatre viewers will not come to the second performance of the bad actress, Instagram users will not follow insincere persons. The good news is that on Instagram it is enough to just be yourself. The success of personal brand relies on how sincere the influencer is.

Mikhail Parfenov (@mikhailparfennov 2019) believes that strong personal brand on Instagram has to be built by creating a mental connection with the audience. Influencer’s followers have to feel that they can relate to the life of this blogger. That means showing not only good sides of the life, but bad ones as well. No one likes to see just other people’s success, but if the audience have seen all the failures on the way to it, they will perceive that win as their own.

To conclude this chapter, the key elements of brand building has been created (Table 1), defining the main components for a successful brand building on Russian segment of Instagram based on the findings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key element</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>To become meaningful for the audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storytelling</td>
<td>To keep followers’ attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-building</td>
<td>To build a strong relationship with the audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genuineness</td>
<td>To get people’s trust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional connection</td>
<td>To get audience’s sympaty.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Key elements of branding

3 Guidelines

This chapter is the key part of the thesis, which suggests a detailed instruction on how to build and then use a strong personal brand on Instagram on Russian market. The guidelines are based on qualitative interviews with the following
Russian Instagram influencers: Alexandra Mitroshina (@alexandramitroshina), Pinky Sassafras (@pinky.sassafras), Maryana Mironova (@maryana.mir), Knesiia Khizhniak (@serenity_inside) and Mikhail Parfennov (@mikhailparfennov).

3.1 Designing a foundation of the brand

Brand identity is the most important part of building a strong brand, as it provides purpose, direction, and meaning for the brand (Aaker 1996, pp.67-68). The brand is built according to the four steps of Keller’s (2013, 108) brand resonance pyramid, as illustrated in Figure 2 below.

![Brand resonance pyramid](image)

Figure 2. Brand resonance pyramid

According to the proposed model, the process of creating a strong brand consists of a series of stages, and the success of each subsequent stage depends on the implementation of the previous one. Each step implies a question, which has to be answered in order to make that step.

The first stage focuses on the identification and association of the brand in the minds of audience with a certain class of product or with their needs. The fundamental question to be answered on this stage is “Who are you?”. The
branding objective of this stage is to gain deep, broad brand awareness for the audience as well as research the target market.

The answer to this question should contain the following information:

- name
- age
- nationality
- occupation
- key characteristics
- special traits
- background.

The second stage is the formation of the brand value in the minds of customers through the strategic connection of tangible and intangible associations with the brand. The fundamental question to be answered on this stage is “What do you have to offer?”.

The answer to this question should propose a set of person’s competences and expertise. That would be the reason, why future followers will pay their attention to the blog at the first place.

The third stage is to ensure that audience would respond appropriately to the brand's identification and meaning. The fundamental question to be answered on this stage is “What people feel and think, when they see you?”.

The answer to this question should design a set of emotions and feelings people are supposed to have, when they see the blog and person behind it. It does not have to be all positive. The main goal is to make the audience have feelings, that are strong enough to make them react.

The fourth stage is the transformation of the reaction to the brand into an active loyal attitude of customers to it. The fundamental question to be answered on this stage is “What associations do people have and how strong are their connections with the brand?”.
The answer to this question should propose a set of associations, which will be important to the audience enough to make them feel close with the person.

### 3.1.1 Target audience

Target audience is the group of people, who aims to satisfy some needs with your blog. Those are the people, who can potentially become your followers. Target audience is one of the most important parts in building a personal brand on Instagram. Defining target audience allows for better understanding on what topic the blog should be focused. That is also the key point in future promotion of the brand.

According to Alexandra Mitroshina (2019b), the most effective way of defining target audience is to build “follower’s portrait”. It consists of the following facts, divided into groups.

**Social and demographical factors:**

- gender prevalence
- age (with the approximate gap of 5-10 years)
- education
- income level
- marital status
- occupation.

**Geographical factors:**

- nationality
- place of residence.

**Physiographical factors:**

- values
- priorities in life
- vision of life
- character traits
- hobbies.
Economic factors:

- purchasing power
- purchasing decision making process
- readiness to make purchases.

The main groups for personal brand building and promotion are social and demographical factors and physiographical factors. However, if you are planning to sell promotion of services and goods, then economic factors are as much important. Demographical factors are not that much relevant in most of the cases, but are essential, if you are going to sell services or goods offline without the possibility of delivery.

Follower's portrait does not have to be 100 percent accurate but should reflect your average target audience as best as possible. When defining target audience, one should keep in mind that influencer’s audience is usually similar to the influencer him/herself.

Instagram audience could be divided into three main groups, as illustrated in Table 2 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>ER</th>
<th>Audience specifics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;18</td>
<td>7-10%</td>
<td>- “like” a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- buy nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- want to watch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>5-7%</td>
<td>- “like” normally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- buy low-priced items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- want to watch and read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-34+</td>
<td>2-5%</td>
<td>- “like” poorly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- buy most of the items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- want to read</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Audience classification

Engagement rate (ER) is the correlation between the activity of the audience and the total number of that audience. Minimal normal ER for any Instagram blog is 2
percent. But for blogs with strong personal brand, ER should not be lower than 10 percent (Parfenov 2019).

3.1.2 Brand purpose and story

Wheeler (2018, 38) states that the best brands stand for something: a big idea, a strategic position, a defined set of values, a voice that stands apart. To define brand purposes, you should answer two questions:

1. Why would someone follow you?
2. What problem does your blog solve or which need is it closing for the follower?

The benefits of your blog can be obvious or hidden. The obvious benefits come out of your blog’s main topics and your field of expertise. For example, if you have a blog about travels, people are following you to see some advice for what to visit abroad.

The hidden benefits are fulfilling the following needs of the audience:

- legal over watching of somebody’s life
- esthetical satisfaction
- horizon-broadening
- finding motivation
- finding role model.

Personal brand purpose is what values you are translating, for whom and with what goal. The story behind it demonstrates how and why you came up with this. It can be traumatizing or inspiring experience in the past, challenges you have overcome, your dreams or higher purpose in the future. Story behind the brand, that you are building and demonstrate to the audience, have to be understandable and emotional to make people more attached to the brand.

3.1.3 Brand response

The third step of Keller’s brand resonance model (2013, pp.117-120) focuses on creating brand response among customers, which falls into two blocks,
‘judgements’ and ‘feelings’. As brands bring up certain feelings in people’s minds, they respond to the brand depending on how it makes them feel about themselves. Brand feelings are people’s emotional responses and reactions to the brand that can be positive or negative.

According to Keller’s brand resonance model (Keller 2013, pp.117-120), there are six important brand-building feelings that brands try to evoke:

1. Warmth: the brand evokes a sense of calm and peacefulness. People feel warmhearted or affectionate feelings about the brand.
2. Fun: the brand makes people feel amused, playful and cheerful.
3. Excitement: the brand creates a feeling of experiencing something special and exciting.
5. Social approval: the brand gives the audience the feeling of being socially favorable.
6. Self-respect: the brand helps people feel better about themselves by evoking their sense of pride and fulfillment.

Influencer, who is trying to build a strong personal brand on Instagram, should concentrate mostly on three main feelings: fun, social approval and excitement. Those three feelings are avowed as key emotions people seek for on Instagram. But depending on a certain case and situation, key feelings can be mixed with the other three.

Negative feelings should be decreased to minimum level. First of all, Instagram is still an entertaining platform, where people are coming to rest. That does not mean influencer cannot speak on serious topics, but he/she should do it in a way, that audience does not feel offended, humiliated or unrespected. There always will be unhappy followers whatever you speak about, but their amount should be minimized (Mironova 2019).

3.1.4 Brand resonance

The last step of building the foundation of the brand focuses on reaching the ultimate loyal relationship between a brand and the audience. A strong
psychological bond should be developed by strengthening the resonance of each category of the Keller’s brand resonance pyramid. Once the audience feel a deep psychological bond with the brand, brand resonance has been reached. The two dimensions of this step are intensity and activity of the relationship, which are further divided into four characteristics of a resonating brand-customer relationship: behavioral loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community and active engagement among the consumers.

Brand resonance can be measured with Instagram build-in statistics:

- **Reach** — how many unique users have seen your content.
- **Impressions** — how many times users have seen your content.
- **“Likes”** — how many users liked your content.
- **Comments** — how many users were enough emotionally touched to comment your content.
- **Shares** — how many times users have shared your content with others.
- **Profile visits** — how many users wanted to see more of your content.

If people are being active on your blog, then you have good emotional connection with them. But it is important to keep in mind that Instagram sometimes still experiences technical bugs and the data is not always correct. So, influencer should analyze the statistics at least for a one-week period of time, instead of doing it separately for every post or story (Parfenov 2019).

### 3.2 Brand positioning

Brand positioning is the process of positioning a brand in consumers’ minds. As Keller (2013, p.80) states, brand positioning is the “act of designing the company’s offer and image so that it occupies a distinct and valued place in the target audience’s minds.”

The success of brand’s positioning depends on defining three key aspects: target audience, main competitors and brand’s differences from similar ones on the market. Instagram is now full of influencers and in order to succeed, brand must have clear and interesting positioning. Good positioning should be possible to explain in one sentence. Maandag & Puolakka (2014, p.14) present a simple
formula to create a brand positioning statement: “(Your brand) is the only (your product category) that helps (your target audience) to (what your brand is used for) so that (why your target audience uses your brand)”.

3.3 Content plan

Personal brand promotion is accompanied by evidence of expertise. But it is essential to not hide your personality behind expertise only. That is why content plan must be designed in a way to make potential audience become interested not only in your knowledge, but also in a personality behind it.

Instagram has the following two ways of publishing the content:

- Feed: photo- or video-posts with the caption below. This content stays in the profile for as long as the influencer wishes and allows the audience to comment.
- Stories: short (15 seconds each) videos or photos, which can be published in the amount no more than 100 per day. This content stays in the profile for 24 hours only but can be saved in the “highlights” and stay available to watch later.

Content plan for the feed should be based on the topic of the blog, influencer’s field of expertise and his/her lifestyle. It is essential to keep balance in the posts between positivity, negativity and fun. Anastasia Borshch (@n.borshch 2018) designed a chart, where posts in feed are displayed as a cardiogram (Figure 3).
Figure 3. Content cardiogram

This diagram shows that emotional weight of the content should be balanced in the uneven way, so the blog is “alive”. Positive content means that audience experiences mostly positive emotions when reading and seeing it. Negative content does not mean offensive or provoking posts. That just means that audience might feel upset when reading it, but not with the influencer itself. For example, information about global warming or domestic violence is considered negative content, because it makes people feel bad about the world in general, but not with the influencer him/herself. Fun content includes mostly interactives with the audience, like games, quizzes and other.

Stories content is now becoming more and more popular and is an essential part of building a strong personal brand on Instagram. Stories is where audience can see the influencer in more natural way, with less filters and editing. This allows for deeper connection between the influencer and his/her audience.

The content in stories should reflect the influencer’s nature and personality. The success of personal brand relies on people’s emotional connection with the
influencer. Such a connection can only be made if the audience sees not only the good sides of blogger’s life, but the bad ones as well. Stories should also come in a mix of successes and failures, positivity and negativity, beauty and ugliness, expertise and mistakes.

Pinky Sassafras (2019) states that the most effective tool for creation the content in stories is — unsurprisingly — storytelling. Each interesting story consists of five main stages:

1. context
2. conflict
3. climax
4. closure
5. conclusion.

Storytelling can be used in one-day content as well as in a longer period of time. Long-time stories are the most effective. Audience wants to know, how the story will end and therefore pays attention to the blogger most of the time. This is the great chance to catch and hold person’s attention and engage him/her into influencer’s life with personal brand, so he/she will stay in the blog even when the story has got its closure. For example, when the author of the thesis was preparing her seminar, she translated the process to her blog. That included showing her audience all the successes and failures on the way, asking for advice and demonstrating of her emotions. So, people became emotionally involved in the process and even started to be nervous for author of the thesis on the seminar day. On the day of presentation, statistics of reach and impressions in the stories have reached the record number and followers’ feedback shoved how deep they felt involved in that story. Of course, after that people felt emotionally connected to the thesis author and even asked her if they could buy the thesis itself (Pinky Sassafras 2019).

3.4 Building the community

Building a community on your blog allows for a deeper connection with the audience. A strong community is one of the main elements for long-term growth and success. A set of interactions with the audience has to be designed.
There are four common ways of interaction with the audience on Instagram stories:

1. Questions and answers (Figure 4): influencer allow his/her audience to ask their questions and answers them in next stories.
2. Quizzes (Figure 5): personal or thematic multiple-choice questions. The right answer shows up immediately, when person is pressing one of the given options.
3. Pools (Figure 6): questions with two possible answers, usually “yes” or “no” or “choose one of the options”. The percentage updates with each answer and the results can be shared later, when the pool is overdue.
4. Fund raisings (Figure 7): allows influencer to inspire the audience for donations into charity organizations, approved by Instagram.

Figure 4. Questions tool
Figure 5. Quiz tool

Figure 6. Pool tool
Each of those tools can be used many ways, depending on blogger’s imagination and creativity. Some instruments can be used regularly and may become a tradition on the blog, for example, monthly fund raisings or weekly quizzes with the according tool.

Feed instruments for interactions with the audience include the following:

- Asking a question at the end of the post, so people will share their opinion in the comments. The influencer should always answer the followers back in comments to let them know that their opinion is valuable.
- Games and entertainment under the posts instead of informative text, for example, a mixed story game. Th influencer writes down one sentence and asks followers to continue the story in comments. The result can be shared in Instagram stories or in the next post.
- Sharing the important news or stories and asking people to repost it to their own accounts. The information should be relevant to the main theme of the blog to make the audience react. For example, Alexandra Mitroshina
(@alexandramitroshina) speaks about feminism on her blog. She shared the stories of women who suffer from domestic violence and informed her audience about political demonstration aimed to support the law against domestic violence in Russia.

Building the community means that influencer has to listen to the audience and try to meet their needs or fulfill their curiosity. With the growth of the blog, it becomes impossible to hear everyone, but the majority of the followers would want the same things and it is important to give it to them or explain why the influencer cannot do it (Mironova 2019).

3.5 Brand elements

The purpose of brand elements is to identify and differentiate the brand from others. According to customer-based brand equity model, brand elements should be selected to build brand awareness and to convey strong, positive, and unique brand associations and feelings. (Keller 2013, p.142.) The main brand elements on Instagram are the brand name and short brand description.

According to Alexandra Mitroshina (2019b), brand name should be short, easy to read, unique and catchy. It can be just the real name of influencer, nickname or something that is associated with blog’s thematic. The last one is not recommended to use, because blog’s direction can change in the future, but influencer will be already remembered by that name. Due to high number of users, a lot of names are already taken, so people start using symbols like “.”, “_”, “__” etc.. This is fine for regular users, but influencers should try to avoid those symbols if possible or have just one dot between two words. For example, the thesis author’s brand name is “tanya.saturn” — simple, easy to read and understand, associative and contains a name in it.

Short brand description is placed at the top of the page of Instagram account. It should contain the information about the blog and its author. The description should answer the following questions:

1. What is the blog about?

A few main topics should be listed.
2. Who the author is?

Influencer’s name and his/her core values.

3. Why someone should follow it?

The benefits, which potential follower can get from the blog.

For example, thesis author’s brand description is illustrated in Figure 8 below.

![Figure 8. Brand description](image)

The top bold line declares influencer’s core values and characteristics. The name is not included, because it is already clear from the profile name. The first line in the description box represents the main topics of the blog: what the author speaks about on blog and does in real life. The next line tells what usage one can get from the blog. The last line encourages people to not just read the posts but also
to follow the blog and tells why exactly they should do it. Under the description box the link is placed. In this case it is the link to influencer’s another profile, where she is selling her services of creation Instagram augmented reality (AR) effects for other people. It could also be a link to another website with influencer’s services.

3.6 Visual elements of the brand

Instagram was supposed to be a visual platform at the first place and even though it has more functions now, visual elements are still important. Visual elements of the brand on Instagram include the following aspects:

- Main picture of the page.

It should be the photo or a good art of the influencer. The image has to be of a good quality and bright. Colors should be saturated and contrast. The image should not have other people on it and the face of the influencer should be visible.

- Correlating colors of the pictures in the feed.

The main page of the profile should look as a united picture. Color tones and temperature should stay the same to make all the photos look good together.

For example, the profile of Alexandra Mitroshina (@alexandramitrosina) is illustrated in Figure 9. All of her photos have the same color scheme: muted pastel shades and one bright picture with red lips.

Another example is illustrated in Figure 10. Pinky (@pinky.sassafras) has very bright, but still muted color scheme. The shades of the main colors are the same on every photo.
Figure 9. Feed example 1

Figure 10. Feed example 2
Both bloggers also have the variety of perspectives and camera angles. That makes their pages look interesting to watch more precisely.

- Stories highlights covers.

Stories highlights is the section below the description box. It contains folders of stories, which influencer has chosen to save. It also effects on the whole image of the profile, so the covers of folders should be designed. As shown in Figure 11, there are plenty of options.

![Figure 11. Highlights covers](image)

### 3.7 Promotion of the blog

On Instagram it is not enough to create a page and wait for people to follow it. Maryana Mironova (2019) states that even a strong brand with a clear brand concept and interesting blog posts cannot succeed without promotion. There are many ways to increase the discoverability of Instagram account, including free and commercial ones.

Free ways of promotion of Instagram account almost do not work anymore. However, the following ways can still be used:

1. Recommended page

   Instagram has a page with recommendations. The content in there is unique for every user. The official algorithms of formatting those recommendations are not...
known, but it is obvious, that beautiful pictures, which get a lot of users’ activity in the first hour after publication, are getting promoted on that page. This increases the “reach” of the publication and attracts users to a certain Instagram account.

2. Comments under posts from influencers with similar themes

Many Instagram users do not read the post only, but the comments under it as well. If they see your comments often enough, they might get curious and open your page. That does not mean that one should spam with emojis or meaningless in comments to every post. People would like to see the page only if the comments are interesting and relevant.

3. Mutual PR

At the beginning of promoting the Instagram page, influencers might cooperate with each other. Users with similar themes and target audience promote each other to their followers and exchange audience. This way works perfectly with the small audience from 1 000 to 15 000 followers.

4. Shout out for shout out (SFS)

SFS is a PR game that helps in promoting both the influencer who conducts it and its participants, who are usually also influencers at the very beginning of their way. The essence of the game is that the blogger offers everyone to tell about his/her page in their posts or stories, then chooses the most interesting among the participants blogs and posts them in his/her profile. What is the benefit? The one who conducts the SPS gets a new audience for free, and the participants get a chance to win free advertising from a blogger and also find a new audience.

5. Augmented reality (AR) effects

Facebook opened the feature of creating AR effects for Instagram and Facebook stories for every user in the summer 2019. Now everyone can create and publish AR effects. This is a relatively new feature, so it is extremely popular. Every time someone uses AR effect in his/her stories, the name of effect and the link to its creator is shown on the screen for everyone. People who want to get this effect
will have to follow the creator. Audience traffic from AR effects is enormous.

Figure 12 illustrated the statistics of thesis’s author AR effects.

### Figure 12. AR insights

*Commercial ways of promotion include the following ones:*

1. **Advertising on other influencers’ pages**

Advertising is the best way to show your product to people and find new clients and blog readers. It is recommended to start the promotion with an inexpensive advertising. So, you will learn to "sell" yourself to the new audience and understand how you can catch the attention. It can be done only by practice.

The cost of advertisement depends on influencer’s statistics, not only on the number of followers. The price starts from 5 euro and goes on up to 15 000 euro and even higher. Normally, the cost of 100 new followers will be around 5-8 euro. However, it varies for every blogger and depends on the quality of his/her promotion materials, blog theme and accuracy in defining target audience (Mitroshina 2019b).

2. **Target advertisement from Instagram and Facebook**
Targeted Instagram ads are advertisement in the feed or stories of the mobile app of this social network, published using the official service. These posts, although marked as advertising, look natural among other publications in the feed. Targeting settings also allow you to show ads to a precisely selected segment of more than 800 million users of this social network (including 24 million users from Russia).

Facebook ads platform allows to target ads to specified audience. This is an advantage over other advertising options, in which the minimum unit of audience division is all the subscribers of the profile. When buying advertising posts from influencers, you will have to evaluate the audience of each blogger yourself.

An Instagram ad looks like one of the posts in the users’ feed or stories, but it is always shown with an "Ad" mark and a link to the advertiser’s profile. The ad consists of the advertiser’s name, a media file, a call-to-action button, and a caption at the bottom, up to 2200 characters long.

Facebook does not have tools for predicting promotion budget. In reality, you cannot predict the cost of targeted advertising. The cost of a click can be from 0.04-0.07 euro to 1.4-2.5 euros. It is determined by competition and depends on the subject of the ad, geoposition and settings of the target audience. The cost of a click in this system is much more dependent on CTR. Socialbakers investigated advertising on Instagram during the first half of 2017. As it turned out, ads with CTR 1.9-2 percent clicks are 16 times cheaper than with CTR up to 0.1 percent (Buryan 2017).

3. Giveaways and marathons

Giveaways are any ways of promotion in which users get access to a raffle or valuable information in exchange for a subscription to the list of pages. There are two main formats:

- Classic giveaway: users have to sign up for sponsors and can get a chance to win something.
- Marathon: users have to sign up for sponsors and can get access to the live-translations and posts on a certain topic.
Giveaway or marathon sponsors pay for sponsorship and in exchange they get an increase in the audience. It usually costs from 1.5 to 3 euro per 100 followers. The expected increase in the followers is announced in advance.

The format may change, the prizes may be very different, but the point stays the same: sign up for someone and get something in return. The nuance of developing an Instagram page through such mechanics is that the audience which comes to the page is not interested in the influencer. If after advertising people sign up for blogger voluntarily because they have looked at him/her and become interested in, then in giveaways and marathons people follow bloggers only because of the prizes or information.

Giveaways can be a waste of money, as well as an excellent working tool. They work only for those who already know how to work with the audience, push the right emotional buttons in the souls of the followers and regularly produce good content (Khizhniak 2019).

3.8 Monetarization.

Monetization is the process of making the Internet resource a source of income. Some platforms have clear guidelines for monetization. For example, YouTube users have five official methods of monetization of the account, prescribed in the rules of the site. If we talk about Instagram, there are no official ways to monetize the content there. Regulation of this issue is also not provided. The lack of control from Instagram as a company gives users a place for imagination.

Strong personal brand on Instagram allows for monetarization. There are four main ways of monetarization on Russian segment of Instagram to be explained in this chapter.

3.8.1 Advertisement for other influencers

Advertisement is the easiest way to monetize a blog. This can be done starting with about 3 000 followers or even earlier in some cases. In the past years, the main requirement for selling advertising on Instagram account was the number of followers. However, everything changed after the precedents with cheating and inactive audience in big blogs. Since 2018, the main condition for monetization of
the account through advertising has become the engagement of followers. Marketers divided the influencers to three categories:

- medium-sized influencers (up to 300,000 followers)
- micro-sized influencers (up to 10,000 followers)
- nano-influencers (up to 3,000 followers).

The advertisers usually find influencers by themselves. Any blogger who reaches more or less serious number of followers starts to get advertisers’ offers. If the influencer wants to speed up this process, he/she can suggest to post someone’s advertising for free and ask him/her to leave the feedback on relevant sources.

According to Mariana Mironova (2019), to make the advertising effective and receive a stable income from it, it is enough to have a good and non-compromitted blog and do the job right:

- communicate politely
- post ads on time and according to agreements
- discuss in advance what is included in the cost of advertising
- approach the shooting of advertising content responsibly.

Provided with an active audience and a strong personal brand, the influencer will do effective advertising and get a lot of offers.

The price of the advertising can be set in three different ways:

1. Conduct market research find out the prices of similar influencers and set approximately the same price.
2. Test the effectiveness of advertising and multiply the average value of audience who follows the influencer by average cost of 100 followers (depends on the current value).
3. Just set the price, which seems reasonable for this job.

### 3.8.2 Selling knowledge

Informational product is the type of business that is not related to the real world. In most of the cases that means various guidelines, webinars, checklists, lectures
or electronic books. This way of monetarization allows for high income with low production costs. High income is achieved by setting low prices for the product and receiving high volumes of sell. Low production cost is explained with the absence of a physical product. Production costs include only the work of the designer, copywriter and IT specialist.

This is one of the most popular ways of monetarization personal brand on Instagram. According to Mikhail Parfenov, basic requirements for using this instrument of monetarization are the following:

- **Expertise on the topic:** the influencer should be certain in his/her knowledge in the field of information on which the product is based.
- **Sales skills:** it is not enough to just launch the product - bloggers must know how to sell it.
- **Legal form of employment:** influencers often register themselves as individual entrepreneurs of self-employed.
- **Strong personal brand:** people would not buy anything online, especially non-physical product, from someone who they do not trust as much as they trust their friends.

Each influencer decides on the price for the particular product individually. However, most of the webinars cost 14.99 euro; guidelines 9.99 euro; checklists 4.99 euro. Low prices simulate audience to buy the product and high income is being achieved by volume of sell.

### 3.8.3 Collaborations with brands

Nowadays brands aim to cooperate with influencers and constantly increase the costs planned for influencer marketing. Bloggers create unique content, promote a product or service among their audience and allow a brand to increase reach at the expense of its readers without additional marketing efforts. A blogger's opinion can be crucial to making a purchase, whether it is an emotional post, a review on a blog, or on a brand's website.
To make the collaborations an effective instrument of monetarization and receive a stable income from it, influencer must follow a set of rules (Pinky Sassafras 2019):

1. Start an individual entrepreneurship or come up with another official payment system. Big brands do everything officially, but not everyone can pay big taxes. So, it is recommended to have a legal entity through all the payments will pass, and all the necessary documents can be issued.

2. Sign the contract. The influencer can sign a contract provided by a brand or develop his/her own sample. It is necessary to remember that no one signs standard contracts — the influencer has the right to change and agree the new terms with the brand, and the same happens to influencer’s own sample. In general, the function of the contract is to determine the rights and obligations of the parties, so this part is really important.

3. Prescribe the terms in the contract. This can be modified later, but the initial agreement has to be clear.

4. Show statistics. When big brands come to the influencer with an offer, they usually do not ask for statistics, as they either came on a recommendation or made a preliminary assessment. However, if the influencer contacts companies him/herself, the presence of a media kit will be a plus. It can include cases from working with other brands, statistics and a portrait of the audience.

5. Agree on advertising content when necessary:
   - If the product placement is a barter initiated by the brand, the influencer may decide how to integrate the product in the blog on his own. If it is long-term partnership, the influencer may even not integrate some of the products at all.
   - If the placement is a barter initiated by the influencer him/herself, then an agreement is necessary. Since it is the first collaboration with the particular brand, the influencer has to make sure this relationship will become long-term.
   - If the placement is commercial, the influencer and brand representatives agree on both the text and the picture of publication. Feed or stories post has to be approved by the brand before publication.
3.8.4 Promotion of own business

Influencers promote brands and other bloggers, but they can as well promote their own businesses. Influencer’s personal brand development contributes to the development of his/her business. The more loyal blogger’s audience is, the better his/her sales are. Nevertheless, it is important to not transform Instagram blog into the unstoppable advertisement channel. Audience wants to see the person, not just the businessman. In most of the cases the influencer does not even have to promote his/her product or service, because if he/she has a real strong personal brand, followers are willing to buy without extra questions and reassurances (Mitroshina 2019a).

Conclusion

The goal of the given study was to design a step-by-step guide for implementing one of the most innovative marketing tools — personal brand building on Instagram. The author covered all research questions and achieved the initial objectives. Basic branding theories from the literature allowed to understand the foundation of branding in general and online sources provided the author with the information about personal branding in particular. The qualitative research was essential for confirming the theories and developing recommendations. Above that, the author’s real-life experience complemented the study. As the final outcome, a detailed guide for building and using a strong personal brand on Russian segment of Instagram has been designed.

The research process was rather problematic, because qualitative research method required conducting the interviews with successful Instagram influencers, who are difficult to contact. The author recommends contacting the interviewees in advance and setting a clear deadline for the interview itself. In the future researches the author suggests narrowing down the topic to a specific thematic of the blog (e.g. beauty industry, travelling).

To conclude, it must be acknowledged, that we live in a digital world, which is rapidly changing. Social networks rules are not eternal, they change every day. Who knows, maybe this guide will become irrelevant in only a couple of years.
Therefore, the author strongly recommends to use the knowledge reader has gained from this thesis immediately. There is no better time to use the Internet and social networks as a business tool than now! The author wishes everyone good luck in building and implementing personal brand on Instagram.
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Appendices

Appendix 1. List of questions for the interview.

1. Tell me about your Instagram blog. What is it about? What is your niche?
2. What are the problems your blog is solving for your followers?
3. How do you differentiate yourself from other influencers? What is unique about your blog?
4. Do you consider yourself as a brand?
5. On your opinion, what makes you a brand?
6. How do you shape your brand image through your content, initiatives and collaborations?
7. On your opinion, what is the #1 key to success in personal branding?
8. How do you monetarize your blog?
9. What is your main source of monetarization on Instagram?
10. When did you start to monetarize your blog? How many followers did you have back then?
11. Could you tell, how much money you now make on Instagram per month? And how fast is this number growing?
12. For how long have you been collaborating with brands?
13. Do you work with contracts? If yes, what is the most important in the contract for you and why?
14. Do you have anything else to share concerning our topic?