

Shava Sofy -Personal branding on Instagram

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<p>This thesis examines the personal branding of Instagram influencer Shava Sofy. The overall focus and objective of this thesis revolved around the re-established personal brand, and how the follower base would perceive the change from Home of Sneakers to Shava Sofy.</p> <p>A qualitative approach was applied for this thesis. The qualitative research method was picked for this thesis, due to the necessity of understanding the consumer perception of the brand. With the recent brand change, it was important to understand why people follow the brand, and what new opportunities would the brand name change bring to the table.</p> <p>The theoretical framework introduces the honeycomb model, influencer marketing, a framework about Instagram, and branding concepts. Both primary and secondary information was collected during the research process. The primary data was acquired with an online survey, and by discussing the matter with the founder. The secondary data was collected through published articles and books that would build up the theoretical framework. This would eventually support the survey, and the analysis of the results.</p> <p>In the last chapter, the data from the online survey was presented and analyzed connecting it to the theoretical framework. The reliability and validity of the research will be presented, as well as the recommendation for future studies and personal learnings from this thesis. The thesis will be concluded with thoughts about personal branding and what can a change within a brand cause.</p>	
Keywords Brand image, influencer marketing, Instagram, personal branding, sneakers	

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1 Introduction

This chapter will get the reader introduced to the personal brand of Shava Sofy, and how an influencer can use a social media platform to become a brand.

1.1 Case company and background

With the fashion retail market constantly growing, it allows new opportunities for businesses and niche markets. Particularly the sneaker industry has been around for a very long time, but in the recent future it seems to be growing exponentially. According to a Forbes article, the sneaker market is expected to reach 95 billion dollars by 2025, when it was only around 55 billion dollars back in 2016 (Steinberg 2018).

With the help of digitalization and online marketing, we can browse and review fashion, sneakers and trends from all around the world, having hundreds of brands within our reach. Nowadays, purchasing sneakers has become a booming trend that should not be taken lightly. It has become a phenomenon to wear the right clothes and have the right shoes, but who are the right people to recommend such a thing? Brands and online influencers work together to make the selection process less time consuming by providing variety and information just a click away. One example of an influencer who does this would be a personal brand operating from Helsinki called Shava Sofy.

Shava Sofy (previously called Home of Sneakers) is an Instagram influencer, who is marketing and providing information about sneakers, fashion and so much more. Previously known as “Home of Sneakers”, Shava has been the biggest sneaker influencer in Finland for the past 4-5 years, and he was awarded the “Top 40 Sneaker Blog Reward”, and he still ranks in the top 50 (sneaker blogs, 2020). At the start of 2020, Shava came out of a social media silence to let his followers know that he is going to do some changes concerning his brand. Soon, Home of Sneakers was changed to Shava Sofy, after his own name. But why would Shava do this? During our interview Shava said:

“Creating content started to feel limited with the name “Home of Sneakers” after 4-5 years. Having the word “sneakers” in your brand name creates expectations and ultimately limitations, and I wanted to be more than sneakers. By personalizing the brand name and changing it to “Shava Sofy”, it allows me to create more personal content without any restrictions. Sneakers are still a top priority for me, but I am also interested in providing content, for example about fashion in general, interior design, male cosmetics. I want to be unpredictable and different. Ultimately, I want to create content with more passion to my own interests, that I hope will catch on to my followers.”

From now on, Home of Sneakers is a personal brand called Shava Sofy. He can be found on Instagram and Facebook, under the username Shavasofy, with over 13500 followers on Instagram.

Even though Shava Sofy is based in Helsinki, Finland, he does not want to restrict his content creation to only Finland. He wants to expand and gain an audience internationally. Being online means that you are not restricted to one country, but you are able to expand your influence in different markets depending on your capabilities. Shava Sofy and his brand also work as an affiliate with multiple global brands ranging from Nike, Adidas, Vans, Klekt and many more.

1.2 Objectives and demarcation

The main objective of the research was to observe the change from Home of Sneakers to a personal brand (Shava Sofy) and to investigate the perception of his Instagram followers. Does the newly re-established brand identity match with the brand image? The research question goes as follows: How is Shava Sofy perceived as a personal brand?

The investigative questions (IQ) were divided into sub-questions that would assist with procuring the answers for the research objective:

IQ 1. How did the followers adjust to the change of the brand, from Home of Sneakers to Shava Sofy?

IQ 2. Does the brand image adjust with the new brand identity?

IQ 3. What kind of new opportunities does the re-established brand identity provide?

The research is not restricted to a certain location or sociodemographic. Since the case company is operates on Instagram, which is a global social media platform, and the followers can be from all over the world, we must keep that in mind. The business operates in Helsinki, Finland, and most of the customers and followers are from Finland. But there are also many B2B partnerships with international companies.

An online survey will be conducted, that will be utilized by using already existing platforms. Shava Sofy's Instagram platform will be used for publishing the survey, this way we can engage the target audience. For theoretical models, I will be using the marketing and branding theory books provided by our Haaga-Helia university library. I will also use existing research papers and theses on this similar topic.

1.3 Key concepts

Brand equity is a concept where good marketing builds the firm's intangible assets (Aperia & Black 2004, 39). Brand equity consists of three separate elements that are: brand description, brand strength, and brand value (Aperia & Black 2004, 39).

Brand identity is how a company would like to be perceived and what they want to project for others (Wilson & Blumenthal 2008, 58).

Brand image is how a brand is perceived by the consumers (Wilson & Blumenthal 2008, 58).

Influencer is someone who has the ability and power to affect the purchasing decisions of others due to their authority, knowledge, position, or relationship with their audience (Influencer MarketingHub 2020).

"Influencer marketing is the art and science of engaging people who are influential online to share brand messaging with their audiences in the form of sponsored content" (Sammis & al. 2015).

Instagram is a photo and video-sharing social media platform owned by Facebook. Instagram has over a billion monthly active users, with over 500 million active users daily (Mohsin 2020).

Personal branding is when you market a person as a brand, e.g. celebrities, athletes, CEO's. Personal branding usually revolves around a person who has magnitude and influence over the public perception (Wilson & Blumenthal 2008, 3).

2 Theoretical framework

This chapter describes which theoretical methods were used to create the basis of this thesis. The theoretical framework consists of social media strategy, influencer marketing, Instagram and branding concepts.

2.1 Social media strategy: The honeycomb model

Social media and its platforms have been a pivotal tool in marketing, and it will keep playing a major role in marketing for the foreseeable future. The honeycomb Model was created by Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre to analyze the effectiveness of social media, by examining the theoretical perspective to why users engage with social media (Kietzmann & al. 2011, 242). The honeycomb model has seven blocks in total (see figure below), and each block represents a key aspect on how social media is used, and what it might mean for companies. The blocks are identity, conversation, sharing, presence, relationship, reputation, and groups. In the following sections, each building block will be explained so that there will be an understanding to why they are relevant, and how different levels of social media functionality can be configured (Kietzmann & al. 2011, 243).

Figure 1. The honeycomb of social media

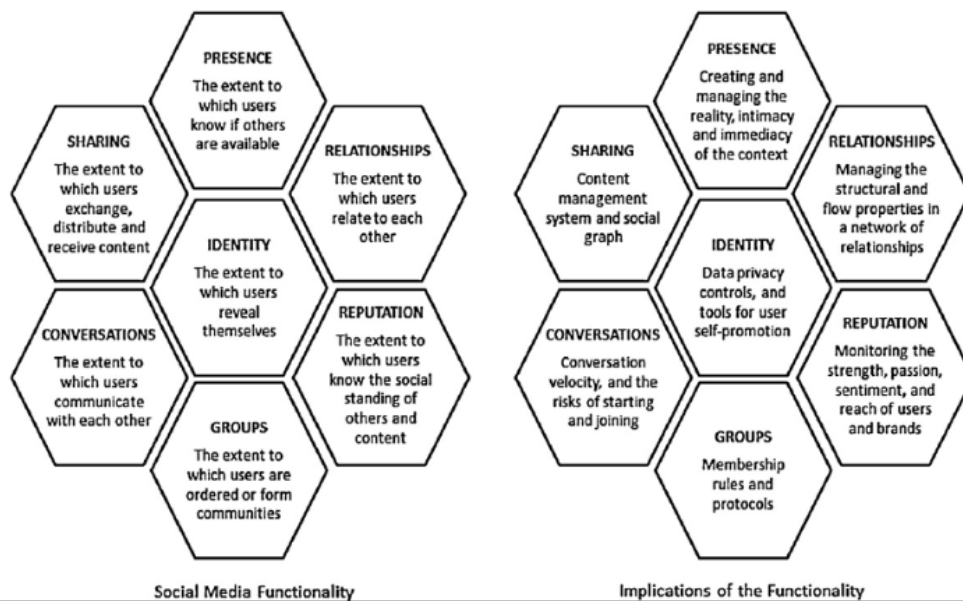


Figure 1. Honeycomb of social media (Kietzmann & al. 2011, 243)

2.1.1 Identity

The identity is a functional block that tells you to which extent a user exposes any valuable information about them. This can include information such as the name, age, gender, location, profession, education, hobbies, likes, dislikes, opinions and many more (Kietzmann & al. 2011, 243). The amount of information can vary depending on the social media platform. Some platforms are bound to have the user's real name and other information, but on many platforms, users tend to use nicknames. Identity is a core functional block for many social media platforms, and it gives the following implications for organizations; tools for user self-promotion and branding, and data privacy controls (Hanlon 2017).

2.1.2 Conversation

This block defines the way users communicate on different social media platforms. Most social media platforms have created an opportunity for its users to like, comment, share. This allows individuals and groups to express their opinion, share their message, and connect with like-minded people. It is crucial for companies to understand how communication between social media platforms can vary, and how they can engage users into having a conversation (Kietzmann & al. 2011, 244).

2.1.3 Sharing

"Sharing represents the extent to which users exchange, distribute, and receive content" (Kietzmann & al. 2011, 245). Sharing content is a way to build your identity and spark a way for a conversation. The sharing block is a big reason why companies are interested in social media. By creating proper content, users have a reason to share and communicate, ideally something to connect over. Without proper content, a network between users can still be made, but it will be lacking the essential thing they are connecting over (Kietzmann & al. 2011, 245).

2.1.4 Presence

"The framework building block presence represents the extent to which users can know if other users are accessible (Kietzmann & al. 2011, 245). Most social media platforms offer the option to showcase if a user is present, or when was the last time they were available on a platform in question. Presence can be indicated by having the social media platform feeds updated or showing the exact time when a post was made. The presence on a social media platform can also be translated to the presence in the physical world. For example, by posting "live stories" on Instagram, or just making a regular post on Facebook,

you can geotag your location. This shows other users that you have been in at this specific location at a specific time.

2.1.5 Relationship

The relationship block represents the degree to which users are related to one and other. On a social media platform, being “related” can be just as simple as two previously unknown online personas following each other’s social media content. It requires two or more users forming some sort of association between one and other by talking, sharing interests, meeting in person or just being friends (Kietzmann & al. 2011, 246).

Kietzmann explains the importance of different relationship traits by using the properties “structure and flow” from Borgatti’s social network theory. Property being the first structure, it explains the user’s quantity of connections and the position in its network of relationships. The flow property reflects on what kind of resources a user might have in their relationships, and how they are used (Kietzmann & al. 2011, 246). The structure and flow properties need to be held important if social media communities and companies value relationships. It is key to understand how to engage with the users and how to form a relationship with them (Kietzmann & al. 2011, 246).

2.1.6 Reputation

“Reputation is the extent to which users can identify the standing of others, including themselves, in a social media setting” (Kietzmann & al. 2011, 247). For companies, reputation gives implications of trust, strength, and reach. “If firms and users value their reputations and those of other users, then a metric must be chosen to provide this information” (Kietzmann & al. 2011, 247). After the metrics are put in use, it is time to establish an evaluation tool to measure the reputation of a companies’ social media engagement. Objective data like numbers of likes, comments, and followers, like on Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter are feasible options.

2.1.7 Groups

“The groups functional block represents the extent to which users can form communities and subcommunities” (Kietzmann & al. 2011, 247). Groups within social media platforms vary in size, and for it to be controllable for its users, social media platforms offer tools to manage these relationships.

2.2 Influencer marketing

What is an influencer and what is influencer marketing? An influencer is someone who has the ability and power to affect the purchasing decisions of others due to their authority, knowledge, position, or relationship with their audience (Influencer MarketingHub 2020). They have a large follower base in a distinct niche, with whom they actively engage with (Influencer MarketingHub 2020). Influencers are the pawns in influencer marketing. "Influencer marketing is the art and science of engaging people who are influential online to share brand messaging with their audiences in the form of sponsored content" (Sammis & al. 2015). According to Levin (2019), there are three levers that can be moved to impact the level of influence an individual can have (Levin 2019). Below you can see the formula for the three levers of influence.

Influence = Audience Reach x Affinity (Expertise, Credibility) x Strength of Relationship with Audience (Engagement)

1. "Audience reach is the size of the audience and who they are. Subscribers, followers, or a network of friends" (Levin 2019).
2. "Affinity (expertise, credibility) is making sure that there is an affinity, a natural liking, or sympathy for your message or brand" (Levin 2019).
3. "Strength of relationship with the audience (engagement) is about how close the audience is. If the relationship is weak, the audience is not paying attention and the message will have low attention and low impact" (Levin 2019).

By optimizing each of these concepts, it will be more likely to reach better outcomes in influencer marketing (Levin 2019).

Social media influencers are usually early adopters within their field of expertise. What does it mean to be an early adopter? The "diffusion of innovations theory" by Everett Rogers explains how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technologies are absorbed by society and how innovations are diffused in a population (Levin 2019). There are innovators, early adopters, the early majority, the late majority, and laggards. This can also be applicable to influencer marketing. As previously explained, who influencers were and what they do, it can be stated that they are more likely to be early adopters. Early adopters are role models and trendsetters (Levin 2019). According to a research made by Levin (2019) that studied the results of over 2000 influencers with over 75000 followers on Instagram (Levin 2019). The participants were asked a series of questions that would determine

what group they would belong to. In the figure below you can see the comparison of adaptation of influencers versus the general population (Levin 2019).

Group	Influencers	General Population	Difference
<i>Innovators</i>	29%	2.5%	+1040%
<i>Early adopters</i>	48%	13.5%	+255%
<i>Early majority</i>	21%	34%	-37%
<i>Late majority</i>	1%	34%	-97%
<i>Laggards</i>	1%	16%	-93%

Table 1. Comparison of adoption (influencers, general population) (Levin 2019).

2.3 Instagram

This section will take a deeper look at one of the biggest influencer marketing platforms there is. To understand the role of online promotion and the product itself, it is crucial to know where you will find your potential customers online. Each industry and niche have their own demographic, and each demographic have a most likely online presence somewhere. It is important for brands to know who their consumers are, and what platform do they use. Once the online placement is defined, then it is easier to market and promote your brand, product, or service.

What is Instagram? Instagram is a photo and video-sharing social media platform owned by Facebook. Instagram has over a billion monthly active users, with over 500 million active users daily (Mohsin 2020). How does Instagram work? Like previously mentioned, Instagram is a social media platform with the ability to network through photos and videos. Below you can see features of Instagram:

Image editing	Video editing tools
Location tagging	Text & drawing tools
Private messaging	Live video streaming
Commenting	Stories feature
@mentions	Disappearing photos & videos
Push notifications	Search functionality
Group Messaging	User tagging
Hashtags	User profiles
Filters	Public & private profiles

Table 2. Instagram features (Instagram 2020)

What are the key features that stand out with Instagram? Besides posting photos and videos, you can share stories, start and receive conversations, watch long form videos, shop as you scroll, and discover more with the search & explore function. Sharing stories is a way to post moments from your everyday life, and they only last for 24 hours (Instagram 2020). The start conversation function allows users to communicate with each other by sending photos, videos and messages privately (Instagram 2020). Also known as the IGTV, this function allows users to make and watch long-form videos. The “shop as you scroll” function allows users to browse and shop products from their favourite brands and creators (Instagram 2020). This is an important feature especially for influencers and brands. The search & explore function allows users to find more content that they might like from unknown users that they do not follow (Instagram 2020). Why is Instagram such

a big platform for influencers and brands? Instagram attracts its users due to its features like mentioned earlier. There are over a billion Instagram users monthly (Mohsin 2020), and this makes it an attractive platform for many companies, brands and influencers. But how do brands know if their demographic is on Instagram?

According to Statista (2020), around 35% of Instagram users are 25-34-year old and 29% are between the ages of 10-24. This is already a big indication for brands. By knowing which age demographics are on different social media platforms, brands can target their consumer base by being present on Instagram. Either by having their own social media presence, or through influencers and celebrity endorsements. According to Mohsin (2020), around 71% of US businesses use Instagram (Mohsin 2020). Around half of Instagram users follow at least one business and when it comes to the shopping impact of a user, Instagram helps 80% of Instagrammers whether to buy a product or service (Mohsin 2020).

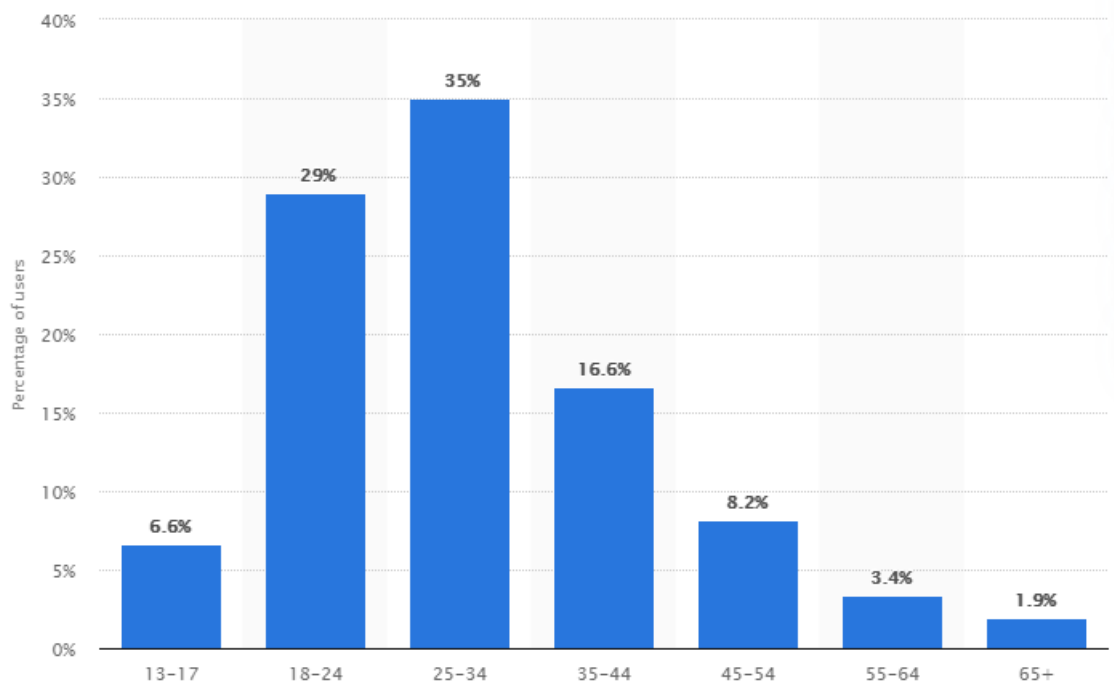


Figure 3. Distribution of Instagram users worldwide as of April 2020, by age group (Statista, 2020).

2.4 Branding concepts

This section will be about the theoretical framework of some of the most important concepts of branding relating to this thesis. Understanding what a brand is, and what do terms like brand equity, brand image, brand identity and personal branding mean. What is a brand, how is a brand identity formed, and what is a brand image? “A brand is an identifying symbol, mark, logo, name, word, and/or sentence that companies use to distinguish their product from others” (Kenton 2020). The brand represents the face of the company, and when people think of certain good or service, these brands are what come to mind first.

For a company to have a brand, it must determine its brand identity first (Kenton 2020). Brand identity is how a company would like to be perceived and what they want to project for others (Wilson & Blumenthal 2008, 58). Whereas the brand image is how a brand is perceived by the consumers (Wilson & Blumenthal 2008, 58). When talking about branding, it is usually referred to a good or to a service, but it can just as well be a person. In this case it would be called a personal brand. Personal branding is when you market a person as a brand, e.g. celebrities, athletes, CEO’s. Personal branding usually revolves around a person who has magnitude and influence over the public perception (Wilson & Blumenthal 2008, 3). These types of people are usually influencers and credible sources within their respected industry or niche.

A product or a service is usually the tangible asset of a company, but what about the intangible asset. According to Aperia and Black (2004), good marketing builds the firm’s intangible assets, and this concept was named as brand equity (Aperia & Black 2004, 39). Brand equity consists of three separate elements that are: brand description, brand strength, and brand value (Aperia & Black 2004, 39). Below you can see a figure of the different elements of brand equity.

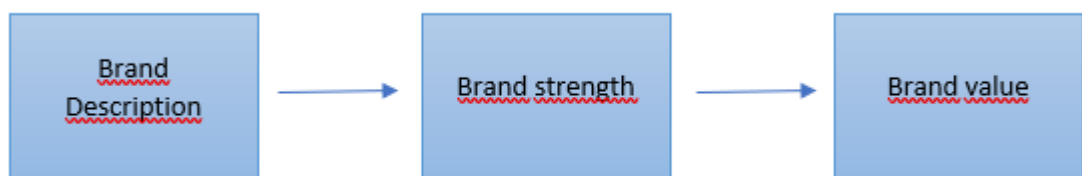


Figure 5. Different elements of the term brand equity (Aperia & Black 2004, 40).

The figure above shows that a strong brand image is a condition for strength in a brand, which in turn allows us to have a valuable brand (Aperia & Black 2004, 40). Brand description consists of the brand image and perception within the minds of a consumer. Brand strength can be described as brand loyalty and brand value is the financial value of a brand (Aperia & Black 2004, 40).

3 Research Methodology

This chapter describes what type of research methods were used to make this thesis. It also presents how the data was gathered and analyzed. Risk management was also addressed in this chapter.

3.1 Research methods

A qualitative approach was applied for this thesis. According to Ghauri & Gronhaug (2010, 196) qualitative research is used when the need is to understand a purpose or gain insights about a phenomenon. For this thesis, all the possible information about the case company was obtained from the founder. The business is run by one person, so getting access to the information and data was not a problem.

The qualitative research method was picked for this thesis, due to the necessity of understanding the consumer perception of the brand. With the recent brand name change, it was important to understand why people follow the brand, and what new opportunities would the brand name change bring to the table.

Both primary and secondary information was collected during the research process. The primary data was acquired with the survey, and by discussing the matter with the founder. The secondary data was collected through published articles and books that would build up the theoretical framework. This would eventually support the survey, and the analysis of the results. All the information that the founder had was at use for this thesis, for example access to financial data, competition analysis, partnerships, short- and long-term strategies and plans, if needed. Based on the existing information and data the survey was conducted using the founder's Instagram profile, which is a social media platform.

The figure below (figure 6) demonstrates my research design for this study. In phase one, I conducted a qualitative survey for the followers of the Shava Sofy -Instagram account, followed by analyzing the survey results. Part two on the other hand was linked to the empirical part. Using secondary data and case company information to understand the collected data. The investigative questions were placed depending on the relationship with each phase.

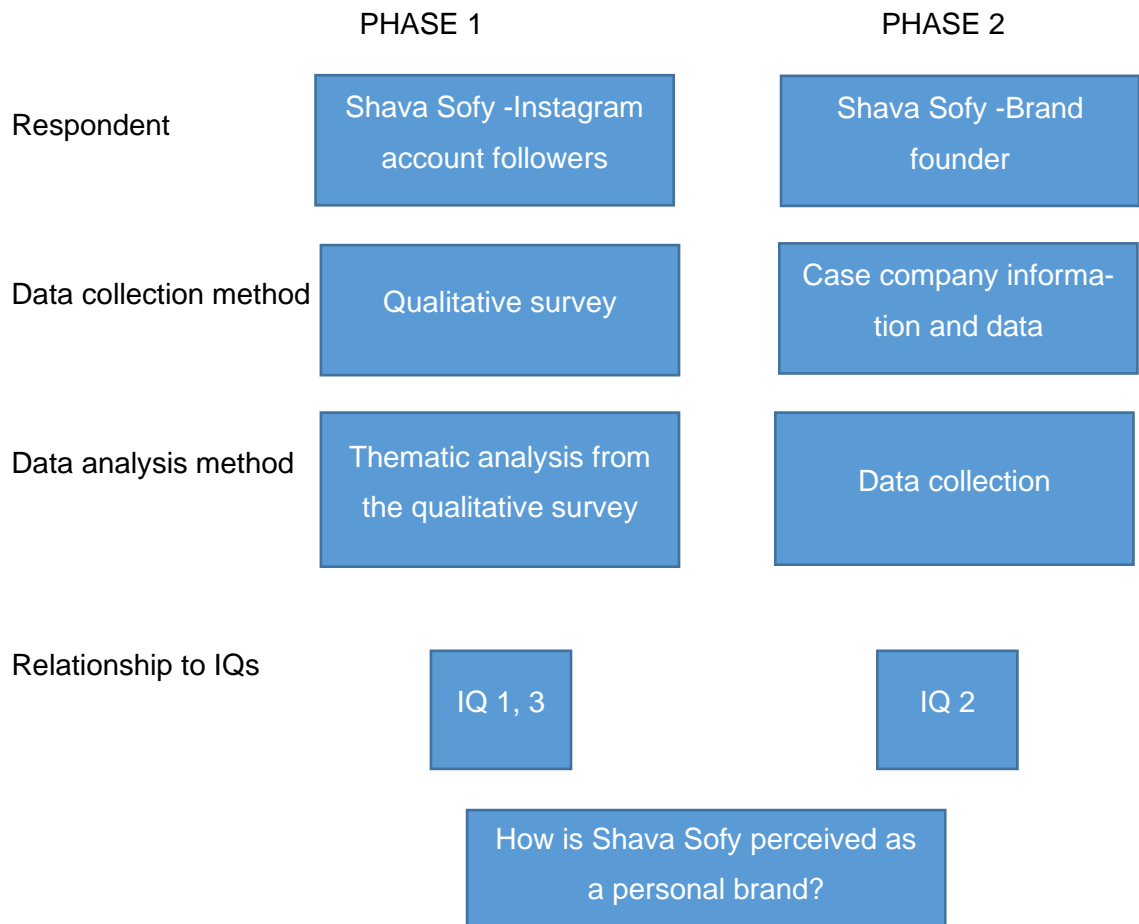


Figure 6. Illustration of research design

3.2 Online Survey

The qualitative survey that was conducted, was a structured survey. In a structured survey the interviewer has already determined the issues and topic to be covered beforehand (Ghuri & Gronhaug 2010, 126). The survey was qualitative because we needed to see if the brand identity matched with the brand image. With the recent brand name change from Home of Sneakers to Shava Sofy, the brand turned into a personal brand. It was important to understand early on how the followers perceived this change, and what are they looking for out of this change possibly.

4 Survey results

This chapter presents the research results obtained from the online survey. A total of 200 Instagram users responded to the research survey consisting of nine questions that were published on Shava Sofy's own Instagram. The survey was posted on Shava Sofy's Instagram Story, which was available for the followers for 24 hours.

In the first two questions, the background variables of the respondents were asked. In the first question, the age was asked. Out of 200 respondents 152 were men and 47 were women. One person responded as other. The second question asked for the age of the respondents. Out of 200 respondents, 89 of them were between the ages of 18-24, 80 of them were under 18, 28 were between the ages of 25-34, and three were over the age of 35 (see figures 7 and 8 below).

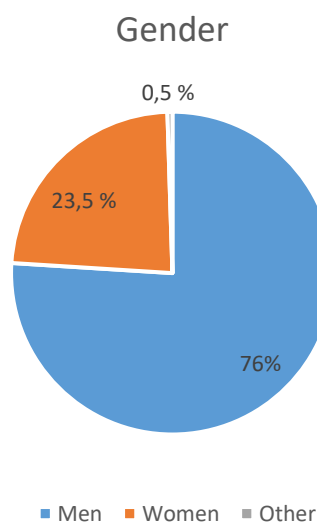


Figure 7. Gender of respondents

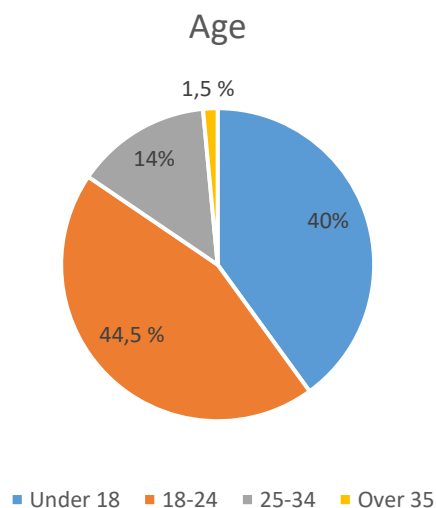


Figure 8. Age of respondents

The third question wants to find out, what is the first word that comes to mind when you think of Shava Sofy. Out of 200 respondents 61 responded “sneakerhead”, 53 responded “fashion”, 15 responded “cool guy”, 5 responded “creative content creator”, and 66 responded with the option “all above” (see figure 9).

What is the first word that comes to mind when you think of Shava Sofy?

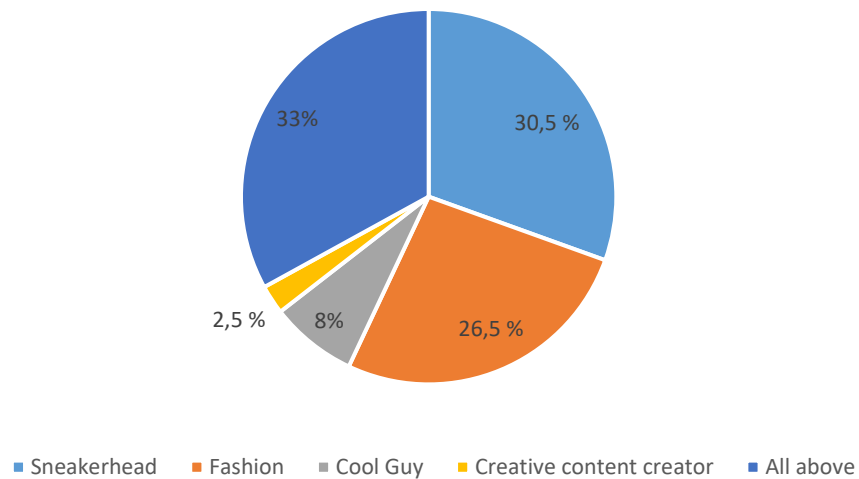


Figure 9. What is the first word that comes to mind when you think of Shava Sofy?

The fourth question goes over the reasons why people would follow Shava Sofy on Instagram. Out of 200 respondents, 82 responded “cool and creative content”, 35 responded “To get advice about brands/products/services”, 35 responded “interesting and cool content creator”, and 48 responded with the option “all above” (see figure 10 below).

Why do you follow Shava Sofy on Instagram?

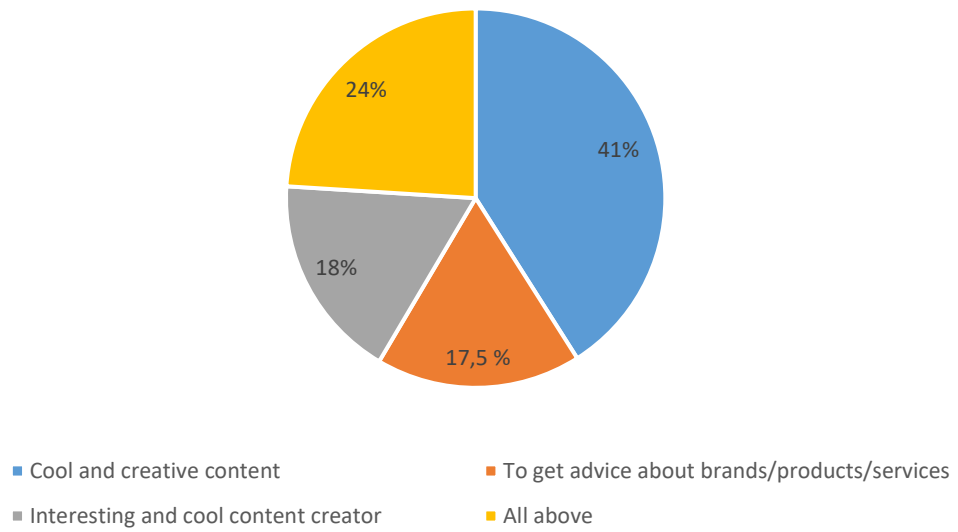


Figure 10. Why do you follow Shava Sofy on Instagram?

The fifth question wants to find out, if changing the brand from "Home of Sneakers" to "Shava Sofy", a personal brand, was a positive change. Out of 200 respondents, 136 voted yes, 15 no, and 49 responded "I don't know" (see figure 11 below).

The brand was changed from "Home of Sneakers" to "Shava Sofy". Was this a positive change?

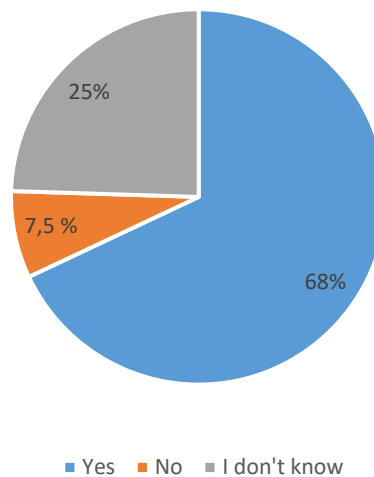


Figure 11. The brand was changed from "Home of Sneakers" to "Shava Sofy". Was this a positive change?

The sixth question wants to find out, what kind of content are the respondents interested in. Respondents were able to pick more than one option. Out of 200 respondents, 132 selected “sneakers”, 159 selected “fashion”, 99 selected “home decor”, and 53 selected “male cosmetics” (see figure 12 below).

WHAT KIND OF CONTENT ARE YOU INTERESTED IN SEEING MORE? (YOU CAN SELECT MORE THAN ONE)

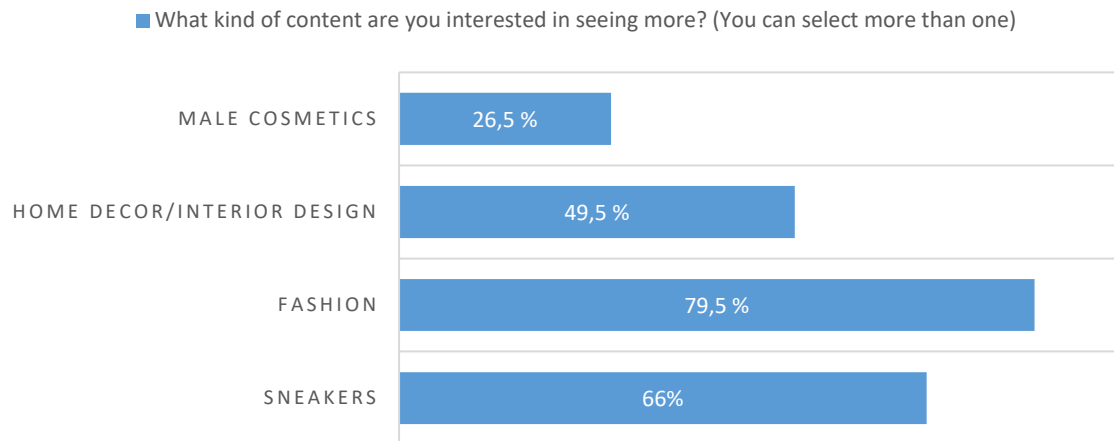


Figure 12. What kind of content are you interested in seeing more?

The seventh question wants to find out, which of the following options draws the attention of a respondent to Shava Sofy’s Instagram posts. Out of 200 respondents, 131 responded “visual photos and videos”, 62 responded with “the influencer himself”, and seven responded with “discounts and raffles” (see figure 13 below).

Which of the following draws your attention to Shava Sofy's posts?

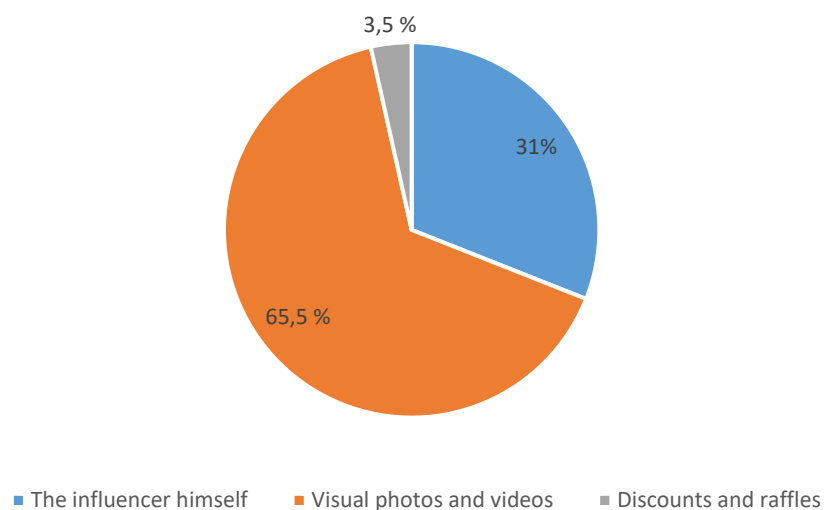


Figure 13. Which of the following draws your attention to Shava Sofy's posts?

The eighth question wants to find out if the content on Shava Sofy's Instagram has influenced the purchasing decision of a respondent. Out of 200 respondents, 74 said yes, 86 said no, and 40 respondents answered, "I don't know" (see figure 14 below).

Has the content of Shava Sofy influenced your purchase decision?

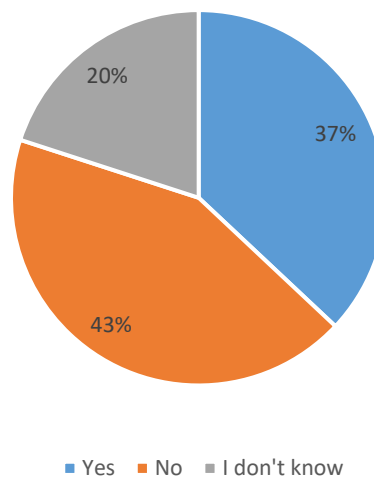


Figure 14. Has the content of Shava Sofy influenced your purchase decision?

The ninth and last question wants to find out, what kind of Instagram publications do the respondents find the most interesting. Out of 200 respondents, 127 replied with "Instagram feed", 72 replied with "Instagram story", and one replied with "IGTV" (see figure 15 below).

What kind of Instagram publications do you find most interesting?

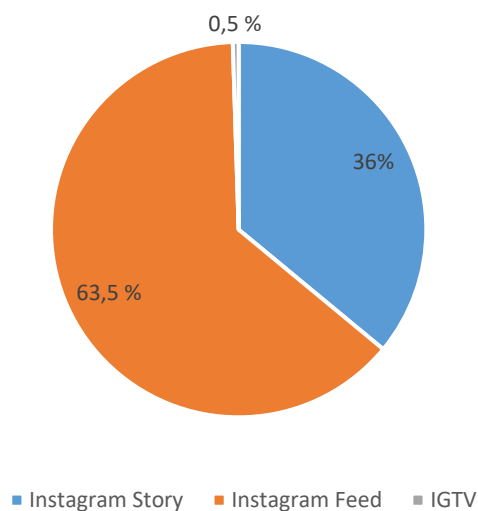


Figure 15. What kind of Instagram publication do you find most interesting?

5 Discussion

This chapter introduces the findings of the thesis and correlating it with the theoretical framework. It will also represent the reliability and validity of the research, recommendation for future studies, and personal learning. Shava Sofy's influencer platform will be used to describe the honeycomb model blocks and try to understand its importance for Instagram. Shava Sofy's influencer platform and the results from the online survey will be broken down by using the theoretical frameworks of influencer marketing and branding concepts.

5.1 Key Findings and Analysis

When examining the blocks from the honeycomb model and comparing it to Instagram's platform, we can see that the most central block is the sharing. The four most important blocks will be compared to Shava Sofy's Instagram profile. According to Kietzmann "sharing represents the extent to which users exchange, distribute, and receive content" (Kietzmann & al. 2011, 245). Instagram's main objective is also to share content, in the form of photos and videos. Sharing content is a way to build your identity, and without proper content you are lacking the ability to form a proper connection (Kietzmann & al. 2011, 245).

Sharing on Instagram is possible through few functions. Sharing content on your feed and on your story. Sharing content on your feed stays on your profile, which is why you are able to build an identity. Instagram stories on the other hand only last for 24 hours. Below you can see images taken from Shava Sofy's Instagram, portraying the different functions of sharing content on Instagram.

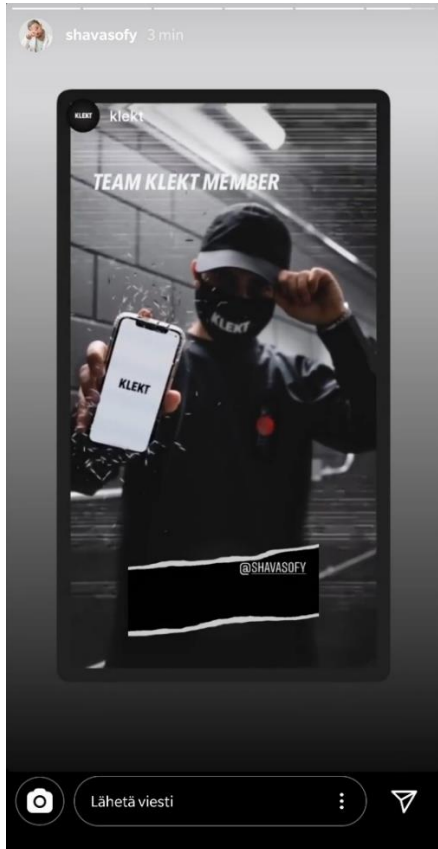


Image 1. Shava Sofy Instagram story



Image 2. Shava Sofy Instagram post (feed)

Identity is also one of the central blocks on Instagram due to being able to sign up as a private individual with a unique username. In image 3 you can see Shava Sofy's Instagram profile. As you can see, the account serves as a personal brand with the username. Platforms as Instagram give the option to expose your identity to your personal need. As seen in image 3, Shava's account is personal with 373 publications and Instagram stories on a weekly basis. Combining content with personal information is how you build an identity.

Personal branding is building a reputation over time. How is reputation measured on Instagram? A primary measurement tool on Instagram is the number of followers on his profile, which is 13500. A secondary measurement tool is the engagement that is happening with the profile. This includes likes, comments, views and shares. Sharing or mentioning someone else's profile on Instagram can be viewed as endorsement, and this way you can get indirect engagement. In image 1, Shava Sofy's Instagram profile was shared by Klekt. This is a prime example of a company endorsing an influencer. People who follow Klekt will have the opportunity to see Shava's profile, and vice versa.

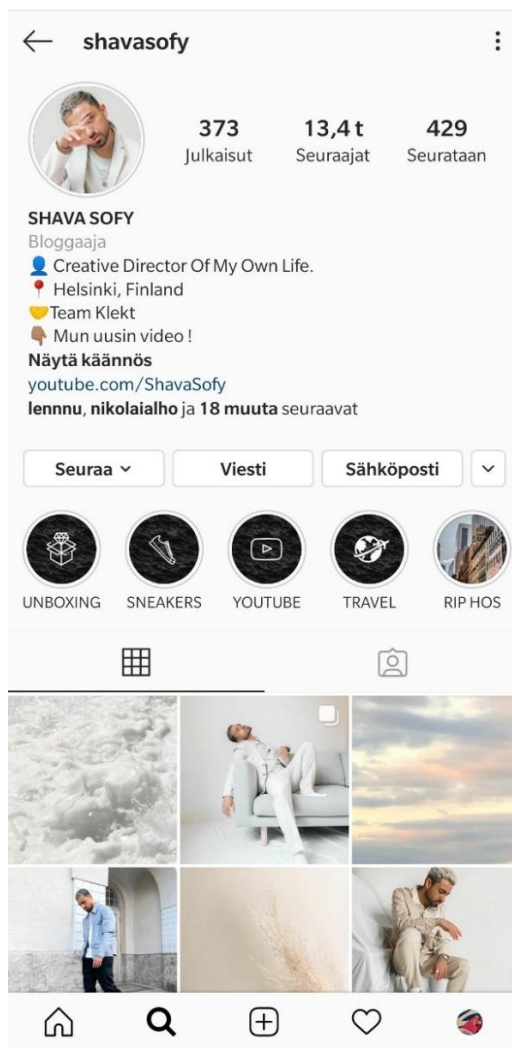


Image 3. Shava Sofy Instagram profile

Instagram has over a billion monthly active users, with over 500 million active users daily (Mohsin 2020). Presence is a block that has been growing on Instagram for a while now. With the functions of the 24-hour story, and Instagram Live, influencers are able to stay in touch with their follower base on a daily basis.

Now that there is understanding in how the main functions of Instagram operate with the help of the honeycomb model, the next part of this discussion is to analyse the key findings of the online survey. The online survey was kept to only nine questions in total, due to the reason of keeping it basic since it is the first time a survey has been conducted for Shava Sofy, especially after the brand re-establishment. The first two questions were to understand the background variables. Questions three, four and five were to understand the brand perception and the brand image. Questions six and seven were to understand what kind of content the followers seek after, and the last two questions were to understand the follower's behaviour on Instagram.

As mentioned in chapter 1, the main objective of this research, supported by the online survey, was to examine the re-established brand identity and to understand the perception of Shava's Instagram followers. The hypotheses and the survey results correlated, and the pattern of results were expected. If the results were as expected, then how did the survey add value to the thesis?

The survey adds value by reassuring Shava Sofy of the direction his personal brand is taking. The re-establishment of the brand is still in the early stages, but the survey results gave indications to how the personal brand could be improved. These indications will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

The background variables indicated that the majority of the followers were men. This was a foreseeable result since Shava Sofy himself is a young male adult, and most of the content that he presents is directed towards men. The niche market that Shava represents, especially in the case of sneakers and fashion can be attractive to both men and women due to the unisex appeal of the clothes and shoes at hand. When it comes to the age of Shava's followers, the majority is below his target audience after the re-established. With the new personal brand, Shava wants to have more freedom in presenting a variety of content, ranging from fashion to interior design. The younger audience will not have the same purchasing power as the older followers, ranging up from the age of 25. If the current follower base does not represent the desired target audience, then what can be done? This is a change that can not be bought or altered in a short amount of time. Time is the most valuable component when it comes to this matter. The younger demographic

will age eventually to meet the target group, and the personal brand will keep growing over time. Eventually it will gain a certain reputation that will attract the right audience, like it first did with Home of Sneakers. Natural growth takes time, so does building a new reputation.

How is the new brand perceived by the follower base and has the brand image changed? The brand identity has been established earlier in this thesis, and it was described as being a creative content creator who has much more to offer besides sneakers. When examining the results for questions three, we can see that still a majority think Shava Sofy as a sneakerhead (a sneaker enthusiast). A big chunk of the respondents also linked Shava to fashion. These results were to be predicted, but it indicates that the previous brand was that powerful. Sneakers still are a key point in Shava Sofy's content creation, and the image will probably never fade. The responses for the fourth question were more evenly distributed, but the majority went to "cool and creative content", when asked the reason to why they follow Shava Sofy. Even though the brand identity has expanded, the direction still stays the same, which is why the brand image responds to the brand identity. The fifth question deals with one of the cornerstones of this thesis. Was changing the brand a positive change? A big majority of 68% of the respondents supported this change. Only 7.5% resisted and the rest were unsure. Home of Sneakers had been around for over 4 to 5 years and the brand had grown very popular within its niche market here in Finland. What made it easier to transition from the old brand to a personal brand was that the audience were familiar with Shava already. Even though his content was under a different name, he made the content personal by showing himself in the photos, videos and being in contact with his audience. He had built a reputation over the years, and the audience followed.

Questions six and seven focus more on then content itself. When the respondents were asked with "what kind of content are you interested in seeing more" the majority of went with fashion or sneakers. As mentioned earlier, this was not surprising due to those two being the cornerstone of the brand previously. What was intriguing though, was that approximately half of the respondents wanted more content regarding interior design. Interior design is not restricted by gender, so this might be something that could attract both equally. Interior design is something that will have an effect on the age. It is more likely that Shava Sofy's target audience would be more interested in this due to being financially more independent than the younger audience that claim the majority of the follower base. The seventh question revolves around the idea of what draws the attention of a respondent. The majority responded with visual photos and videos, and the next favourable option was "the influencer himself". The responses were predictable, but it only shows that the brand itself is strong and that the followers value the content.

Table 1 about the comparison of adoption indicated that a majority of influencers are either early adopters or innovators. Early adopters are role models and trendsetters (Levin 2019). Sneakers have been around for many decades, but the market still has been growing over the years (Steinberg 2018). Fashion and sneakers go hand in hand, they complement each other, and that is why influencers like Shava Sofy indulge in both. Shava has been a recognized sneakerhead for many years now, which places him as an early adopter.

The last two questions were to understand the behavior of followers on Instagram. When asked the question “Has the content of Shava Sofy influenced your purchase decision?”, 43% answered no and 37% answered yes, and the rest were not sure. There are a few reasons for this. The first reason would be that the content that is pushed out is not usually an impulse purchase. The sneakers and products that are marketed require purchasing power, and that is something the young audience most likely do not have quite often. The sneaker market is also about exclusivity, which means that a lot of the most wanted sneakers are limited, which also increases the price. When it comes to impulse buying straight from an influencer, especially in Finland, men are more reluctant to do this, in comparison to girls. This is something that has been noticed within the influencer industry. A solution for this would be having the target audience matched with the follower base. This is something that would be desired, as earlier mentioned due to having more purchasing power when you get older.

The last question asks the respondents a simple, yet an important question for the influencers. What kind of Instagram publication do you find most interesting? 63,5% responded with Instagram feed and 36% responded with Instagram story. The responses here support the rest of the questions on the other questions. In previous questions respondents have stated that they are interested in cool and creative photos and videos. Even though the Instagram story function has gained immense popularity, the feed is intended more to showcase your photos and videos. Instagram story can be used as a tool to endorse brands or create day to day content so that your followers can experience your daily activities. When examining the results from another thesis made by a female Finnish influencer, the results were quite the opposite. According to Vilma Järvinen, who has a follower base of 23500, the majority were interested in her Instagram stories, with the ratio of 63% to 36% for Instagram feed (Järvinen 2020, 36).

The research question goes as follows: How is Shava Sofy perceived as a personal brand? After conducting the research and examining the responses, the majority of responses were quite positive. By my interpretation Shava Sofy has been perceived in a positive light, with an insignificantly small drop in the follower amount after declaring a new personal brand. The followers have been adjusting to the change really well, as suspected, and they have been receptive to the new content. The only negative remark was that the majority of the follower base did not represent Shava Sofy's desired target audience. This was anticipated and it can be dealt with by staying true to the brand identity and keep growing the personal brand. Over time the target audience will shift more towards to whom the content is targeted to. The Home of Sneakers brand was able to gain a target audience with a restricted content, so by expanding the content creation, Shava Sofy allows himself to tap into a broader follower base. It is important though to keep consistent and have a healthy balance between the brand identity and the brand image.

5.2 Reliability and validity of the research

To ensure the reliability of my research, the secondary sources used were published books and articles on the topic. The case company information was given by the founder of the company, or then obtained from his Instagram page. To ensure the integrity and the quality of the research, validity is also needed alongside reliability. The results of this thesis are case company specific and cannot be used for anybody else. The results indicate a certain direction, but they do not give any definitive answers. The empirical part of this thesis was completed by conducting an online survey and by interviewing the founder of the brand. The survey results are to support future of the personal brand.

5.3 Recommendation for further studies

As this thesis concentrated on the personal brand of Shava Sofy on Instagram, and the brand image, it would be wise to reconduct this research again for comparison of results. As the personal brand was just recently re-established, the change that has occurred so far has been minimal. Conducting a new survey with more intricate questions once a year would allow Shava Sofy the understanding of his personal brand's development.

Additionally, it would be interesting to see if the brand image has strengthened, and if the representation of the target audience has increased. The increase of the total follower amount would indicate in brand strength and that the content matches with the interests of the follower base.

5.4 Personal learning

Personal branding and the niche market that the thesis covered was something that I was really fond of, but also helping my friend Shava Sofy motivated me to pursue this thesis. The growth of influencer marketing on social media has been a hot topic and it is something that everybody who is on social medias has faced one way or another. The niche market of sneakers and fashion has been something that I have a passion for and that I follow frequently, so making a research based on my own interests while helping a friend has been very rewarding for me.

The biggest challenge for me was writing the theory itself. It was the most time-consuming part, but also the most rewarding section since the theory is the basis of the entire research. I learned how to find relevant secondary information about this topic, then narrow it down so that I could get the most use of it.

Having changes made with a brand can always be risky and cause detrimental changes within the brand perception of a customer. But when it is done right, the results can be positive like in the online survey that I conducted. After a brand change, especially in such a niche and highly competitive market, it will take time for a personal brand to form and gain the reputation it desires.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Structured Survey Questions

Shava Sofy Brand Survey

* Required

Gender *

- Male
- Female
- Other

Age *

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- Over 35

What is the first word that comes to mind when you think of Shava Sofy? *

- Sneakerhead
- Fashion
- Cool guy
- Creative content creator
- All above

Why do you follow Shava Sofy on Instagram? *

- Cool and creative content
- To get advice about brands/products/services
- Interesting and cool content creator
- All above

The brand name was changed from "Home of Sneakers" to "Shava Sofy". Was this a positive change? *

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

What kind of content are you interested in seeing more? (You can select more than one) *

- Sneakers
- Fashion
- Home decor/interior design
- Male cosmetics

Which of the following draws your attention to Shava Sofy's posts? *

- The influencer himself
- Visual photos and videos
- Discounts and raffles

Has the content of Shava Sofy influenced your purchase decision? *

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

What kind of Instagram publications do you find most interesting? *

- Instagram feed
- Instagram Story
- IGTV