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Why Do Educational People Commit Corruption in Communicating Their Personal Brands?

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ABSTRACT

Amid the increasingly fierce competition, personal branding has become necessary for modern workers today, including professionals in education. This article explores why people in the educational milieu, especially higher education, commit corruption in communicating their brands. We conducted interviews and one-on-one discussions with ten people who work as instructors, researchers, and structural officials in educational institutions. We identified three main reasons motivating them to commit corruption in personal brand communication: financial reasons, managerial reasons, and communicative reasons. Financial reasons refer to economic goals in improving self and family well-being and meeting daily and long-term needs. On the other side, managerial motives refer to organizational performance goals that impact personal career advancement. Meanwhile, communicative intentions apply to imaging related to the need for identity and social recognition. This research can reference decision-makers to assess performance and determine what rewards or punishments are suitable for individuals in their organizations.

Keywords: Educational Institution, Financial Reason, Managerial Reason, Communicative Reason, Personal Branding, Communication Corruption.

1. INTRODUCTION

Personal branding has become a magical buzzword in postmodern society. This is due to the increasing tension and scope of competition, in which the word "branding" itself as a term that was born from the marketing field, emerges indeed to be a strategic tool in facing market competition, both for conveying information and image [1]. Individuals, who initially only act as marketers, then metamorphose as marketers as well as being marketed. An individual's competence, expertise, service, charm, and persona are "products" that deserve to be "sold" to potential users or partners. Not only that, but these "products" also need to be maintained and improved in value so that existing users or customers do not easy to "move to another heart" [2].

Brands are marks left in the minds and hearts of consumers, which create specific meanings and feelings [3]. Therefore, branding is a strategic process to develop meaningful imprints in the minds and hearts of consumers [3]. This process is usually in the form of integrated, consistent, and sustainable communication and interaction to have an impact on the lives of consumers. By understanding this definition, a personal brand can be seen as someone's mark left in the minds and hearts of consumers, while personal branding is a strategy to create and leave that imprint in a meaningful way. Put, if you are in a room with a group of people, then you go outside, you are talked about by the group. What people talk about you, that's your brand, and how to get people to talk about you the way you expect, is your personal branding.

Everyone has a personal brand and it can be either positive, negative, or neutral [4]. According to Holloway [5], the personal brand consists of values, drivers, reputation, behaviour, skills, and image. Basically, everything we do will affect our personal brand. Therefore, Gander [4] emphasizes the tangible and intangible aspects of personal branding. Tangible aspects include image, skills, and behaviour, while intangible is related to reputation.

Many definitions of personal branding exist, but there is one common theme—perception [6]. If self-esteem (or self-concept) regarding how we perceive our self, thus personal branding is about how others

perceive us [7]. Montoya and Vandehey [8] give three recipes to brand personal effectively: different, better, and authentic.

Apart from the context of public figures and celebrities (e.g., Khamis et al. [9]), personal branding is also widely studied in the context of employment for professional career development [6] [10] and increases competitive advantage [11] in the midst of a frenzied job market. Minor-Cooley and Parks-Yancy's [12] study states that personal branding plays an important role in job search. Traditional methods are still quite relevant, such as using referrals, resumes, and interviewing. Media employees and part-time journalists also carry out personal branding via Twitter by balancing one-way communication (broadcasting) and two-way (engagement) in promoting themselves [13]. Gorbatov et al.'s [10] study highlights play the importance of personal branding as a contemporary career technique in promoting personal brand identity to achieve beneficial career outcomes. They found that personal branding leads to greater career satisfaction, fully mediated by perceived employability.

The personal branding of educational professional employees has also received the attention of several researchers. The study of Mantulenko et al. [14] concluded that 66.7% of people in Russia considered branded teachers during their education. Students and their circles usually know branded teachers related to the positive attributes attached to teachers, such as how they teach, the material taught, the way of interaction, and even the style of their appearance. Nearly 70% of respondents agree that teachers/lecturers need and deserve to brand themselves [14]. Another study on personal branding academic librarians in Malaysia recommends several points for evaluating personal branding: authenticity, visibility, distinctiveness, persistence, performance, goodwill, personal mission and roles, brand statement, and brand identity [15].

According to Borman-Shoap et al. [16], having a clear sense of personal brand, coupled with an awareness of the ideal market for one's brand, positions faculty members in a university to promote their own professional development and career advancement. Today, new technologies enable the creation, development, and management of academics or 'teacher brands' with real and solid competitive opportunities in the education market [17]. Getting insights from Chris Strub, Professor Ai [18] advised teachers and lecturers to use digital storytelling and personal branding with the concept of a classroom without walls through live-streaming and social media networking.

However, from several previous studies on personal branding for academics or in educational ecosystems, studies on communication corruption in personal branding of professionals in education have not touched much. In fact, communication corruption is often found in branding practices [19] [20] and the world of education [21] [22]. The corruption of communication is an event or action in the communication process that reduces the audience's right to receive messages completely and correctly according to both normative and contemplative facts [23]. In practice, communication corruption can be in the form of manipulation, fraud, lies, cheating, or the most popular today are hoaxes and fake news.

According to Wijaya [23], communication corruption can occur in the dimensions of message, media, context, and behaviour. Message corruption relates to communication content, both verbal and nonverbal. Media corruption relates to the abuse of media, platforms, and its features, the abuse of ownership, management, and media work/ profession. Corruption in communication context is related to the engineering of settings, situations, and events that create a special impression in the audience's eyes. The dimensions of communication corruption behaviour include deliberate, cognizance, moral attitudes, ethics, and illegal acts [23]. Communication corruption generally occurs because it is driven by various communication needs such as physical needs, identity needs, and practical goals [24], but most notably for persuasion and imaging purposes [23].

Citing the concept of the authenticity of Montoya's personal branding, Gander suggests that it is essential and especially in college. "There is something about people that choose to work in a university that means they can sniff out spin at a hundred paces; your brand must be built on the truth of who you are, what your strengths are, and what you love about your work" [4].

This article focuses on exploring the causes of communication corruption in the personal branding of educational professionals, especially universities.

2. METHOD

We conducted a series of interviews, one-on-one discussions, and in-depth conversations with 10 informants to achieve the research objectives. The informants have different professional backgrounds and positions, ranging from instructors/ lecturers, researchers, to structural officials from various universities in Indonesia (one from the island of Sumatra, one from Kalimantan, two from Sulawesi, one from Maluku-Papua, one from Bali-Nusa Tenggara, and four from universities in Java). Ages vary from 27 to 49, male and female, with single, family, and divorced marital status. In order to respect their privacy, we encode the names of the informants as Inf-1 to Inf-10. We describe the profile of informants in table 1.

Table 1. Informants' profiles

Informants	Age & Gender	Educational Job
Inf-1	38, male	Instructor
Inf-2	45, female	Official
Inf-3	30, male	Instructor
Inf-4	27, male	Researcher
Inf-5	35, female	Instructor
Inf-6	28, female	Official
Inf-7	40, male	Instructor
Inf-8	31, female	Researcher
Inf-9	33, female	Instructor
Inf-10	49, male	Official

The format of the interview and discussion is semi-structured. This means that we have prepared a list of questions, but only in the form of a guide, because during discussions and interviews the questions develop following the depth of the issues being discussed. Three question styles are applied. First, *direct* (to-the-point questions on informant-related issues). Second, *indirect* (questions about issues that turn to general issues or other subjects to find out the informants' views).

The third is the *reversed* question (negative tone questions are asked positively or to find out the cause of something but asked about the effect, both are to indirectly interrogate an issue, especially for the sensitive ones). This model adopts Weijters and Baumgartner [25] in a qualitative form, who defines a reversed question item as an item whose meaning is opposite to a relevant standard of comparison. We then coded all answers of the informants according to certain theme categories by naming R1 (Reason 1), R2, R3, and so on.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We found several reasons behind the corruption of communication in educational personal branding. First, financial reasons are regarding wealth and well-being. Second, managerial reasons regarding professional career and key performance index. Lastly, communicative reasons related to image and identity building, social recognition, and symbolic as well as cultural capital.

3.1. Financial Reasons

The informants responded in a similar vein to the reasons for personal branding and communication corruption. Inf-2, for example. This woman who has worked as a lecturer for more than nine years believes that personal branding is essential in supporting a lecturer's career, which then has a financial impact (R1). Various strategies to brand herself, from being active in social media, building networking with multiple groups, and producing academic and non-academic works such as articles, books, and other works. Inf-7 is another. He branded himself as an HRD consultant because before becoming a lecturer, he had been the HRD director of a private company for quite some time. Likewise with Inf-1, who has a writing hobby and has professional journalist experience, branding himself as an author and trainer in writing and journalism, both for aspiring writers and institutions, especially employees in the PR division.

However, in the work of personal branding, communication corruption is not uncommon. Inf-7, although not directly acknowledging, said that the material he uses for consultation with clients was not always from his experiences. The experiences of others from document search materials on the internet also sometimes become material in talks. "... but clients see me as an experienced person in the HRD world, not someone else's experience," he said.

From this, we can see that experience bias can become communication corruption because there are truths that, intentionally or unintentionally, are obscured so that the audience does not fully receive the message [23]. The communicator gets benefits related to trust and credibility from it (R2). According to Yardley [26], consulting practice must meet triple responsibility, namely ethical and open ways, moral thinking, and ethical behaviour.

The experience of Inf-8, as a researcher, admits that with her team, she has made research reports which, to be honest, she said, were not 100 percent true. They did this because they saw that the research results were not as expected, while they had to produce satisfactory results so that the reviewers quickly accepted it (R3). "This is all we do by mutual agreement," revealed Inf-8, "…and we think it's normal, as long as there is no party that we harm." In a different context, Inf-10 noted that he had caught a "fake KPI" from his subordinates because he found something odd. "Maybe he hopes that I will not read carefully and can immediately approve (R4)," said Inf-10.

In reporting data on teaching activities to achieve promotion requirements, Inf-3 tells the story of a friend who collaborates with academic staff to take part-time lecturers record for benefiting him. Of course, this effort can add to his point (KUM) as a lecturer (R5). One of the dimensions of personal branding, according to McNally & Speak [27] is Standard. In the context of the Indonesian lecturer profession, the Standard in the form of *Jenjang Jabatan Akademik* (JJA) affects the added value of the salary (R6), and this, of course, impacts well-being both for himself and his family.

Table 2. Why do educational people commit corruption in communicating their personal brands?

Informants	Financial Reasons	Managerial Reasons	Communicative Reasons
Inf-1	R1, R5, R6	R1, R7, R8, R9, R11	R1, R17
Inf-2	R1, R5, R6	R1, R7, R8, R9, R11	R1, R17, R18
Inf-3	R1, R5, R6	R1, R7, R8, R9, R11	R1, R15, R16, R17
Inf-4	R1	R1, R7, R8, R9, R10, R11	R1, R12, R13, R14
Inf-5	R1, R5, R6	R1, R7, R8, R9, R11	R1, R12, R13, R14, R17, R18
Inf-6	R1, R5, R6	R1, R7, R8, R9, R11	R1, R15, R16, R17, R18
Inf-7	R1, R2, R5, R6	R1, R7, R8, R9, R11	R1, R12, R13, R14, R17, R18
Inf-8	R1, R3	R1, R7, R8, R9, R11	R1, R12, R13, R14
Inf-9	R1, R5, R6	R1, R7, R8, R9, R11	R1, R12, R13, R14, R15, R16
Inf-10	R1, R4, R5, R6	R1, R4, R7, R8, R9, R11	R1, R17, R18

3.2. Managerial Reasons

Previous research has found personal branding implications for professional careers [6] [10] [11] [12], including education [4] [12] [14] [15] [16] [17] [18] [21]. As the recognition of Inf-2 and other informants, personal branding is very beneficial in increasing the KPI (Key Performance Index) (R7), having an impact on institutional performance (R8) as individual contributions, and in getting a promotion (R9) because it is more comfortable to "be seen" by superiors and decision-makers. Inf-6 does not deny that her current position as a structural official is more or less due to good personal branding.

> Since joining, I've been active on social media. I am also involved in campus activities, both academic and non-academic, and as much encrypted as possible in decision-makers' minds. I also have good relationships with colleagues and staff, so that their recognition can reinforce my position. I try to communicate well with everyone, not just the bosses (Inf-6).

Meanwhile, Inf-4 admitted that he got a job (R10) at his current institution thanks to personal branding, both through a good CV and portfolio management and social media for researchers. One more thing that he thinks is important is Google Scholar (GS). "It affects because people can see our academic performance at GS. When GS is on the porch of our house, employers see it before entering, "said Inf-4. The same thing was conveyed by other informants, which have GS accounts and Research Gate, Academia, and Sinta (R11).

3.3. Communicative Reasons

Humans are social creatures. Thus, social recognition from the people around them becomes important, where it is considered a reflection of oneself [28]. Inf-5 admits that pride arises when her colleagues find out that she

has the h-index in Scopus (R12), which means that someone has cited her articles (R13). This sense of pride was even more exuberant when the Scopus h-index became a requirement for obtaining grants from the government (R14) because not all of her colleagues had it.

According to Inf-5, for the sake of Scopus, some of her colleagues joined the "author for sale" program offered by the "Scopus mafia" so that their names were included in an article. Likewise, Inf-9, Inf-3, and Inf-6 admitted that their colleagues also "bought" the author's status (R15) by joining the publication costs even though there was no writing contribution at all, either in the research or revision process. Moreover, if the main author can invite many citations, they will pay any fees because their names will also be affected by the increase in the h-index as the reputation tail effect (R16).

Ghost and fake authorship are communication corruption [23] to meet identity construction needs and specific communication goals [24], namely, personal branding. In the Indonesian context, the phenomenon of personal branding through the Scopus indexation status has become increasingly prevalent since the government's policy to require academics to publish their work in reputable international journals (R17), especially indexed by Scopus, even for this, the government provides special intensive [29].

Besides having an impact on personal brands, Scopus indexation status also impacts academic reputation as a form of academic branding (R18), both individually and institutionally [30]. It is not surprising that several universities have also institutionally provided additional incentives for lecturers and scholars who publish their work in Scopus indexed journals to move up the world rankings [31]. Therefore, with these reputation and economic benefits, it is not uncommon for professionals in the world of education, especially

universities, to use "all kinds of means," including committing communication corruption.

4. CONCLUSION

Communication corruption in educational professionals' personal branding is carried out to smooth efforts to achieve specific career goals. Communication corruption is performed individually or in groups, whether consciously or unconsciously, and some people consider it to be normal.

This indicates that corrupt communication practices have the potential to become a culture. Regardless of agreeing or not and practices that are specifically tolerated or not, communication corruption seems to be an issue that should be discussed in the educational environment. More in-depth studies of communication corruption will reveal the extent to which academics have committed these practices. On the other hand, good and proper personal branding is needed to support academics' professional careers, impacting institutional academic branding.

This research can reference decision-makers to assess performance and determine what rewards or punishments are suitable for individuals in their organizations. At the very least, communication corruption can be considered an indicator of KPI (Key Performance Index) for professional workers in educational institutions, especially higher education.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The first author contributes to writing the paper, collecting data, analysis, and discussion. The second and third authors contribute to collecting data and discussing the findings.

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