

Personal Branding of Contemporary Novelists in the Digital Age

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Abstract: *Nowadays, not only politicians and actors do public appearances, publicity is accessible to anybody. Web 2.0 creates its own public figures, anyone longing for publicity can create a personal brand in the online space. Prosaists are also conscious users of the social networking services, and besides promoting their writings, they also work on building and keeping their personal brand, the writer's brand, and in a wider sense, their status as public figures, too. The aim is to generate a constant presence on as many surfaces as possible, and to supply it with multifarious contents. Being well-known sells the book, or more exactly, the writer's face, and the assigned authorial context has a certain appeal. This paper analyses the process of personal branding, including the creation of the writer's brand. The case study consists of the communication of a writer whose first novel sold 70.000 copies of several re-releases in 2010–2012 in Hungary and Transylvania. Besides writing novels and cookbooks, she is also a television anchorman. Her Facebook page has 6921 followers; her Instagram account has 536. She is the nr. 1. Transylvanian writer of Hungary.*

Keywords: *personal branding; web 2.0; digital era; novelists; Transylvania.*

Branding, brand valuation and defining brand personalities has been around for decades, there is an extensive bibliography (Healey 2009, Kádár 2007, Kádár 2008, Olins 2009, Papp-Váry 2009, Ries-Ries 1999, Olins 2004, Holt 2003, Govers-Go 2009, Dagenais 2002) for product-, service-, organizational- and personal branding (profile design/corporate identity). However, the daily practicing of personal branding has mostly spread in the last decade, and it has been used primarily in prevailing in the labour market. Formerly, selfbrand has been attached mostly to politicians, artists and public figures. Web 2.0 has made it possible to anyone to become a personal brand, publicity entered the reach of anybody.

A personal brand, or brand, in the traditional sense is based on values. It basically means an ensemble of content that we communicate about ourselves, that defines and differentiates us. Personal brand equity is composed of the following: the theoretical value of the personality, knowledge, facilities and public opinion that has a relevant impact; the given person's social situation and relationships; the added value to the medium one intends to succeed in (e.g. the specialisation). The brand personality is meant to answer, in itself, the question: what makes us different from others, how can we stir the interest of others, how do we position our brand personality (Vitberg 2010)? Just like branding the product or the service, personal branding is also a carefully planned process, which is composed of *input*, *method* and *outcomes*. Its target is the construction of an *image* (Image is a theory or an opinion that is formed due to objective or subjective impressions. Actually, it is everything people think, feel, believe or sense about an organisation, a product, a brand or a person. Work by Kádár 2008, p. 56), which can be achieved through the following phases: the planned image, the transmitted image and the formed image, which would later become the elements of building the selfbrand.

Bibliography names inputs *social and cultural capital*, which is rethinking or an extension of Bourdieu's *field theory* (*A modern társadalmakban a cselekmények mezők köré szerveződnek. A mezőben együttműködő cselekvőket erőforrások mozgatják. Az erőforrásokat Bourdieu tőkének nevezi és megkülönböztet gazdasági, kulturális, társadalmi és szimbolikus tőkét.* [In the modern societies, actions are built around fields. The cooperating actors in the field are moved by inputs. Bourdieu calls these inputs capital. He differentiates economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital.] Source: Lengyel 2005). By *social capital* we mean one's personal relationships, acquaintances, professional and personal relations, which ensure support and as references, also provide confidence to the given person. *Cultural capital* means knowledge, data, facilities, and studies one has, and also, the advantages a person has that provide a higher social status, position. Basically, this means all kinds of specific knowledge, mental attitude, behaviour, role or personal style that defines a person. A method of personal branding *impression management*, which assumes environment. („Minden cselekedet valamilyen benyomást vált ki azokban, akik megfigyelik.

Ezt fölismerve az emberek egyéni és társas szükségleteikhez mértén kísérletet tehetnek a másokban kialakuló hatás befolyásolására. Az erre irányuló motiváció mértékét a közösségi létben formálódó személyiség és a társas helyzet milyensége határozza meg. Work by Nemes 2000.” [Every action creates an impression in those who are observing. By knowing this, one might attempt to influence others’ impressions as it fits one’s individual and social needs. The extent of the motivation to do so is defined by the personality forming in social interactions and the nature of the social situation.] Shaping impressions is done through both verbal and nonverbal communication devices; through these, one can define the amount of information to be accessible to the public: appearance, behaviour, manners, speech when shaping the exterior image. The result of personal branding is *feedback*. Analysing feedback is part of constructing and shaping the self-image. Information gained from opinions and experiences can be included in this consciously built image (Khedher 2015).

In the information age, self-presentation means the packaging of information. The social platforms of the web 2.0 made it possible for making impressions to be more targeted, to be an ideal platform for regulation and standardization of the information published about ourselves. We create content on the same interface where feedback also arrives, hence, feedback is instant. Nowadays, virtual space also creates its own public figures, people longing for publicity can build their fame online. According to the experts, fame nowadays means online fame: „online reputation is your reputation” (Asha-Vidhi 2015).

Editing and writing books is also strongly influenced by the spread of social media. Promovation of the books and reaching the target audience is not exclusively the task of publishers, but the author can also do it via social media. The author has a direct link to the readers through the web 2.0 interfaces, they can know the reader base, the contemporary reading habits, they can identify and define the complete consumer profile, which are valuable data in order to increase sales (Kinberg 2014). On the other hand, readers also have a claim to knowing the authors, to tracking their lives, to communicate with them. The tendency of the author-reader communication is enforced by the phenomena of e-books, e-publishing and self-publishing (Self-publishing is a new phenomenon of the book culture. The authors themselves upload their works in an IT construction, in a web store, and they themselves decide about the further fate of the book. The authors get the book intended for publishing directly to those interested, the responsibility for the content and the business is their own. There is no third party like a publisher, or an other content organizer, between the reader and the writer. Work by: Kerekes 2015). Communication with the target audience (reaction to positive and negative criticism, answering questions etc.) is a modern form of market research; this can help a novelist decide to keep on writing sequels to a novel series or start a new one, or to publish the next book on paper or as an e-book.

Understanding the market or market sensing also means that a writer reaches the target audience via a communication strategy, with pre-defined or created communication devices. Basically, we speak about the regular use of social media (regular refreshing of contents), like Facebook (profile, page), Instagram (personal or institutional user) and blogs. This includes further online interfaces, like personal web pages, online media. Participating to traditional interfaces: audio-visual and printed press appearances, internal and external carriers. Event PR: openmic readings, book exhibitions (fairs), and participating to other protocol events (award ceremonies, theatre/film premiers, opera balls) (Plamer 2015).

In the social media, writers pursue, besides promoting their books, creating and constructing the personal brand, the writer's brand, and in a wider sense, their status of public figures. The aim is to generate a presence on as many surfaces as possible, and to fill it with diversified contents. Reputation sells the book, or more exactly, the writer's face, and the assigned authorial context has a certain appeal.

In my paper, I will present the communication of a successful character of the Hungarian book market. In 2010–2012, the book entitled *Úrilányok Erdélyben* (Noble Young Ladies of Transylvania) sold 70.000 copies through several re-releases in Hungary and Transylvania. The author's other historical novels lead the sales lists for weeks. Besides writing novels and cookbooks, she is also an anchorman of TV programmes. Her Facebook page has 6921 followers; her Instagram account has 536. Zsolna Ugron is currently the nr. 1. Transylvanian writer of Hungary, she is the writer "with the castles".

Social and cultural capital, creating the authorial context:

Zsolna Ugron was born in Cluj-Napoca, in 1978, she came from one of the oldest Hungarian noble families, the Ugron's. After the regime change, her family moved to Hungary. As her occupation, she is a writer, journalist and communications expert. After her job as an anchorman, she worked as a communications consultant for the MOL Group (Magyar Olaj- és Gázipari Részvénytársaság, Hungarian Oil and Gas Public Limited Company). In 2006, she married Gregor Roy Chowdhury-Mikes, also of noble heritage. The couple moved to the husband's family estate to Zabola, and lived there for a few years, until their divorce.

Her communication:

Hungarian media noticed her as a novelist. Her first novel was published in 2010, by the Ulpius-ház Publishing House. The book *Úrilányok Erdélyben* (Noble Young Ladies of Transylvania) has lead the sales lists for months. The author creates Transylvania according to a contemporary popular female literary canon. Her novel places the life of the current Transylvanian aristocracy in a mythical frame. The choice of theme and genre has proved to be successful, even only considering the number of copies. This theme, Transylvania and castles (the case of

castles recovered after the change of regime) seems to be extremely attractive to the readers from both Hungary and Transylvania, especially if it is presented in a readable, feminine novel. Hungarian feminine literature, especially about a minority related issue presents a niche even up until today on the Hungarian book market. Furthermore, the popularity of the novel has been increased by the appreciation and patronage of the wife of Hungary's current prime minister. After this, she published more novels: the first piece of a historical novel series, entitled *Erdélyi menyegző* (Transylvanian Wedding), published in 2013 by the Libri Publishing House. Her cookbook, *Hét évszak* (Seven Seasons) also appeared in 2013, it was published by the Book Publishing House.

Besides writing novels, cooking has become her trademark, and her love for the culinary art. Her culinary TV show, *Kastély a Kárpátokban* (Castle in the Carpathians) has become one of TV Paprika's most successful shows. The duality of region and castles appears here too. People can follow her non-culinary themed programmes on public service TV too: "Csodabogár" (Oddball) is an entertaining program (outstanding, talented and creative youngsters), "A Nagyok" (The Greats) is a talk show (with the prominent characters of Hungarian culture and sports).

Her activity as a writer and her TV programmes have separate Facebook pages, but her personal notes on her personal page are also interesting. She is also a keen and regular user of Instagram; she often posts images „edited” with Instagram on Facebook. In her photos she often appears in long, frothy evening dresses, many of these photos are taken in the nature (e.g. panoramas from Transylvania). On each photo, her dress and hairstyle are carefully prepared. Her latest photos on Facebook are „making of”-photos of the TV programme „A Nagyok” (The Greats). The venue, naturally, is an old, abandoned castle's inside.

According to the repetitive themes of the photos, and to the content sifted from the media, her *personal branding values* are the following:

- Upper social class (aristocracy) – exclusivity – intensity – castles – soirées evoking period repasts, internal decoration, classic interiors, ball gowns;
- Kitchen, cooking, gastronomy;
- Natural scenery, Transylvania, an exotic, unknown, far away world;
- Ball gowns, fashion;
- Single, careerist woman, female writer, media personality.

Hence, one can track the phases of branding in the writer's communication with Instagram photos: *the planned image*, *the transmitted image* and *the formed image*, which create the branding value and fill it with content.

The formed image supposes further steps of image design, like *reputation management*, which aids keeping up the formed image. Its essence is a constant presence on various communication interfaces that fits the formed profile (e.g. style) and is filled with multifarious content.

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