

Wong, Charlane

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How did they make it? An examination of online personal branding: A pitch

Charlane Wong^{a,1}

^a *University of Queensland, Australia*

Abstract: This paper applies Faff (2017)'s pitching template to an academic research topic in marketing. Specifically, I will provide a reflection on the use of this pitching template and encourage other academic researchers to utilize this template for their research topics.

Keywords: Pitching Research; Marketing; Branding

JEL codes: M31; M37

1. Introduction

This paper applies the pitching research template developed by Faff (2017) to an academic research topic in marketing. In relation to my academic background, I am currently studying the PhD program at the University of Queensland within the marketing cluster. I just started my program in July 2016. I was introduced to the pitching template at the initial stage of my research so I was very excited to do this exercise. This was because I was sure that this pitching research template would make my research very concise. I encountered the concept of pitching research while I undertook Robert Faff's 'RBUS6914 - Process of Research in Business' coursework during the first semester of my PhD program. I completed the pitch on my research for my advisors during one of our initial meetings. It took roughly about 20 hours to complete the pitching research template. This is where the pitching research template included key literature, criticism and discussions.

¹ *Corresponding author:* UQ Business School, The University of Queensland, Colin Clark, 39 Blair Dr, St Lucia QLD 4067; tel. (+61) (07) 3346 8100; Email addresses: charlane.wong@business.uq.edu.au

Before this pitching research template, I initially produced another pitching template for my PhD application. Therefore, I had a brief idea on how to complete the pitching research template where I completed each part of the template step by step according to the template's format. This pitch is for my own real piece of research that I intend to execute for my PhD program. This paper will provide a brief overview on how I have completed the pitching research template followed by a personal reflection on it as well as concluding comments.

2. Brief commentary on the pitch

The pitching research template is summarized in Table 1 where my basic research question is 'What are the constructs that contribute to the success of online personal branding?' The research idea stems from the process of creating an online personal brand and specifically to discover what influences online personal branding success and how to maintain this particular success. The key paper is Lam *et al.* (2010)'s paper on Customer Based Identification. The motivation or puzzle of my research interest comes from the view that every consumer is a human brand and therefore has the opportunity to use this brand to create their own customer base and equity analogous to product brands. The motivation for this research is to discover the constructs and theories that explain online personal branding. Social media has been a recent and popular phenomenon in which consumers have been engaging. This is where they have used social media to communicate and retrieve information.

During the process of completing this pitching research template, I found it extremely difficult to complete several sections. These sections include 'The Basic Research Question', 'Motivation', 'Idea', 'What's new', 'So what' and 'Contribution'. This was because my PhD program was just at the initial stage, there was a lot of uncertainty as I had only just started to read into the literature. This is where I was still exploring 'What was new' and 'What was done' within my field of research. When it came to my key paper for my pitching research template, it was very hard to provide only one paper as there were many papers that were relevant. Therefore, it took me a long while to decide which paper to include as my key paper for my pitching research template.

The most difficult part out of the whole pitching research template was the 'Contribution' and 'What's new' section. This was because I found both sections to be extremely similar. But after analyzing both sections in relation to my research interest, I eventually realized both sections are not the same. This was because 'What's new' does not necessarily mean it has contribution towards the academic literature. Good quality research doesn't necessarily mean to fill gaps within the literature for the sake of gap spotting (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013) but it is instead

to have quality research that has an impact and contribution towards the relevant academic literature. In addition, I also examined and reviewed several examples of other pitching research templates in order to know what to expect within the content of each section. After my reviews, I then created a more organized draft for my pitching research template.

On the other hand, I thought three sections within the pitching research template to be quite straightforward. These include 'Data', 'Tools' and 'Other Considerations'. After I have completed my pitching research template, I have realized this template is essential for my future research decisions as this research template really made my research concise. Essentially, this pitching research template asks the most important questions and showcases the essence of my research.

3. Personal reflection

It has been a worthwhile exercise transforming my research ideas into a pitching research template developed by Faff (2015). As a PhD student, I was facing a lot of uncertainty and challenges to consolidate my research ideas into a standard pitching research template. This tool really helped my thoughts and ideas for my research project in a systematic way leading me to be concise and in the right direction. This is where this pitching research template asks the most important questions such as 'What's new' and 'So what' in relation to my research. In addition to the efficiency of this tool, this template also helped me to identify the strengths and weakness of my research. This led to me as a researcher to be able to understand the strengths of my research as well as acknowledge the weaknesses in order prepare for constructive criticism in the future.

Additionally, the 'Mickey Mouse' diagram which relates to pitching research as shown in Figure 1 was also a very crucial tool to highlight my research idea. Figure 1 showcases the "Mickey Mouse" diagram for my research project. This is where this diagram highlights the top three most important areas of my research project.

Prior to my PhD admission, I never thought there was a pitching research template. If I knew about the pitching research template during my honours degree, I think it would have definitely benefited me as I would have had a much clearer direction with my honours research project then. Therefore, I am very happy to have come across this tool during my beginning phase of my PhD program since it will challenge me to think what is my actual research project about. This is where, in time, I could potentially have the ability to publish my research with a positive contribution within the academic literature.

Table 1. Completed 2-page pitch template on online personal branding

Pitcher's Name	Charlane Wong	FoR category	1505 - Marketing	Date Completed	1/10/2016
(A) Working Title	How Did They Do It?: An Examination of Online Personal Branding				
(B) Basic Research Question	What are the constructs that contribute to the success of online personal branding?				
(C) Key paper(s)	<p>Keller, K. L. (1993) "Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity", <i>Journal of Marketing</i>, vol. 57, no 1: 1-22.</p> <p>Lam, S. K., Aheame, M., Hu, Y. & Schillewaert, N. (2010) "Resistance to brand switching when a radically new brand is introduced: A social identity theory perspective", <i>Journal of Marketing</i>, vol. 74, no. 6:128-146.</p> <p>Thomson, M. (2006) "Human brands: Investigating antecedents to consumers' strong attachments to celebrities", <i>Journal of Marketing</i>, vol. 70, no. 3: 104-119.</p>				
(D) Motivation/Puzzle	<p>Every consumer is a human brand and therefore has the opportunity to use this brand to create their own customer base and equity just as successful product brands do. The motivation of this research is to discover the constructs and theories that explain online personal branding. Social media has been a recent phenomenon that most consumers engage with to communicate and retrieve information. Despite a wealth of literature on product brands, there is a lack of research within academic literature focusing on personal branding and especially within an online context. However there are many examples of successful human brands in the business world where they first launched online and their success has landed them business opportunities that leverage their massive followings.</p>				
THREE	Three core aspects of any empirical research project				
(E) Idea?	<p>The core idea to discover on the process of creating an online personal brand and specifically to discover what causes online personal branding success and how to maintain this success. My plan is to conceptualise process model of online personal branding. This will be investigating how all the key constructs can lead consumer loyalty towards online human brands. The central hypothesis of this project will be that the increase in brand attachment, customer based identification and customer engagement will increase in customer loyalty towards online human brands.</p>				
(F) Data?	<p>My original project will consist a mixed methods research design. Study one and two will be qualitative based research to help in refining the conceptual model and study three will use quantitative methods. The thesis will consist of: 1. Study 1 (What?): Secondary data. I intend to conduct text mining on Instagram and Youtube to discover the underlying factors and mechanisms that create the difference between successful online human brands within fashion. 2. Study 2 (Why and How?): Interviews with branding agencies and the successful human brands in fashion. 3. Study 3 (Experimental Design): An online survey will be undertaken with relevant survey items that will be derived from the insights gained in studies one and two.</p>				
(G) Tools?	<p>Study one will use social media to conduct text mining analysis to explore successful human brands and their consumer interactions. Text mining analysis will also be conducted to analyse the interviews in study two. Finally, study three will use multivariate analysis to analyse the results of the online survey using SPSS.</p>				
TWO	Two key questions				

(H) What's New? ^α	I will be producing my original conceptual model to explain the process of online personal branding and testing this conceptual framework. Research in personal branding should have a different approach since more interactions with consumers are involved than commercial brands (Laur, Sullivan and Cheney, 2005). Additionally, personal branding and online personal branding in general is underdeveloped within academic literature. Therefore, it is appropriate for me to develop my original conceptualisation to explain the process of online personal branding. I will be incorporating the key theories mentioned in the previously section to develop a process model of online personal branding ^β
(I) So What? ^α	Social media has been a huge phenomenon with consumers in the last five years. Brands have also embraced this phenomenon and have paid extra attention towards their online presence to their consumers. Every consumer is a human brand and therefore it would be extremely important and beneficial to discover the constructs that drive successful personal branding. This will impact consumers across all contexts as well as contributing towards academic literature. This research can aid human brands to develop and implement effective personal branding strategies. Additionally, this research will aid marketing practitioners who work with influential people with high profile brands such as celebrities, athletes and politicians. This is where this research can reveal relevant and effective strategies in order for them to market the human brand online. This is also where discovering how a process model will enable the establishment of successful online human brands. ^β
ONE ^α (J) Contribution? ^α	One bottom line ^β Theoretically, this research will develop a conceptual framework to explain the process of online personal branding. This will be done by combining and evolving the key theories and constructs mentioned before. In terms of practical contributions, this research will be useful to marketing practitioners and consumers by outlining the key constructs that explain the process of online personal branding. ^β
(K) Other Considerations ^α	"Risk" assessment: ^β 1. No "result" risk (low): Text mining analysis will derive patterns of successful human brands. ^β 2. "Competitor" risk (low): Cannot be completed by a competitor as the context is based upon various successful human brands and branding agencies. ^β 3. Risk of "Obsolescence" (low): The field of personal branding and especially online personal branding is still relatively a new branch of literature within branding and is extremely relevant for marketing and business strategy. ^β 4. Is Collaboration needed/desirable? Idea: No. Data: Collaboration is needed in studies one and two. Branding agencies and successful human brands will be needed for studies one and two in order to collect data for the online survey in study three and consumers will also be needed in study three to collect data. ^β

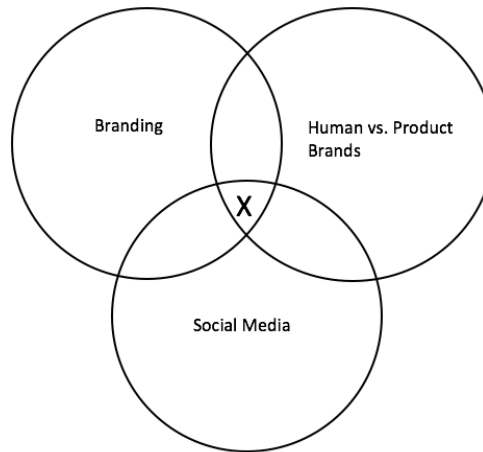


Figure 1. Mickey Mouse diagram characterizing novelty of research idea

4. Concluding remarks

This short paper showcases a commentary and a self-reflection of the pitching research template applied within marketing which aims to discover the drivers towards successful online human brands. It should be emphasized that the pitching research template is a great resource for novice academic researchers. This is where they will face many uncertainties and difficulties during their beginning phases of their academic career. This tool can also aid experienced researchers as it can provide a standard format to showcase their research. Faff (2015)'s pitching research template format is quite straightforward to apply for any research area. Different researchers from areas of research can adapt this template into their research projects. Hence, I strongly encourage any academic researcher to implement this pitching research template within their academic research experience.

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