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Article

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Proposing a new framework for personal brand positioning

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ABSTRACT

Personal branding is one of the newest topics in branding. It means that each person can have a stable personal brand by considering his/her given goals and using proper strategies. In this paper, the authors have tried to present a framework for personal brand positioning. To achieve this aim, a desk research was performed using meta/synthesis and experts' poll to extract effective factors and indexes including strategy-based, capability-based, differentiation-based, audience-based, and performance-based dimensions. To measure and evaluate the indexes of framework dimension, a questionnaire was given to and completed by 200 experts in branding field. Questionnaire reliability was measured to be 0.854 by Cronbach's alpha. To evaluate the validation of the questionnaire, content validation method was used. The data was analyzed using structural equations modeling and LISREL software to represent the final framework. The results showed that the framework is well fitted for determining personal brand positioning and the pertaining indexes.

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1. Introduction

When costumers show higher levels of sensitivity toward a certain type of product or service and the role of advertisement effectiveness in decision making, product and service branding becomes an important issue. The development of the concept of product and corporate brands has provided the background for new concept, namely the personal brand. Tom Peters (1997) has performed numerous studies on personal branding and coined this term in his pioneering work. He stated that senior managers generally pay attention to products and services, while the most effective factor in market pertains to workers and managers. Personal branding is the process in which people and their expertise are tagged like commercial brands. In other words, personal indexes of people are formed here (Arora & Stoner, 2009).

Positioning is a revolutionary concept in branding, which has been coined by Al Ries and Jack Trout in 1990. They defined positioning as a framework with which companies make their brands make strategies for their plans and expand their relations with costumers. Brand position means how it is understood in regards

with the presence of other rival brands (Lin, 2010). As a matter of fact, positioning strategy making is a major challenge for marketers because they are in the focal point of perceptions and choices of costumers. Whether or not positioning is done effectively, it has the capability of making powerful brands; otherwise, it may result in catastrophes (Trout & Ries, 1986).

- Which dimensions and indexes help to explain personal brand position in audience's minds?
- Regarding the identified dimensions and indexes, which framework can best describe personal brand positioning?
- How authentic is the designed framework?

2. Research background

Wetsch (2012) states personal brand forming and developing as a necessity for personal and organizational success. He argued that for personal branding, a gradual plan is to be taken. To this aim, beside making and developing personal skills, the personal capability of using communication technologies should be improved as well. This helps form strong links in communication networks thorough media and internet which is beneficial in developing personal brand, professionally. Chen (2013) investigated personal branding discovery in YouTube in which the extension of personal brand through social media is considered. In this qualitative study, the

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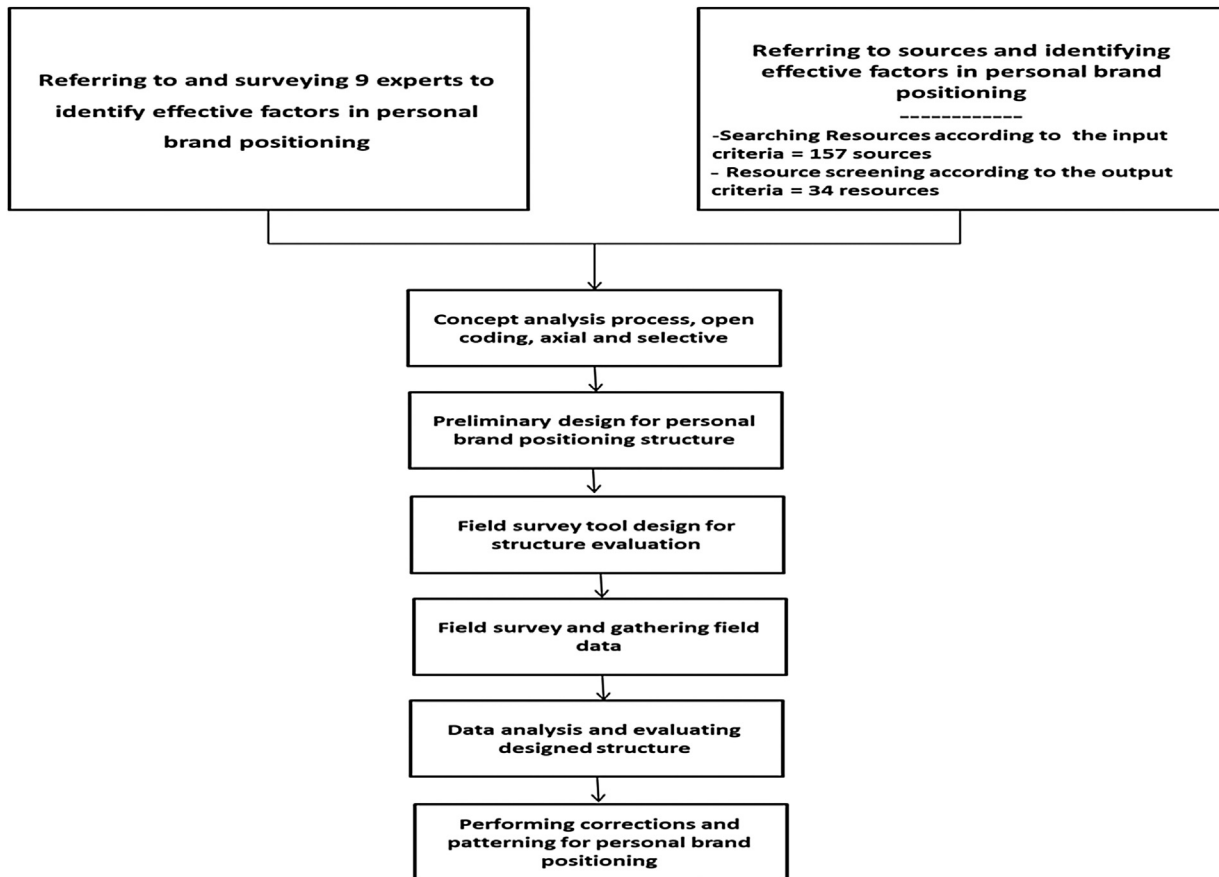


Fig. 1. Research process steps.

goal was to understand why and how personal brand is formed in social media. It can be observed that individual capability in social media like You Tube contributes to the improvement of personal brand. Hafiz and Shaker stated that there is a relationship between professional goals and ideals. This paper is aimed to make a conceptual framework of online personal brands and it is concluded that desirable influence of an online platform on audience can help self-confident participants to attain desirable personal brand. [Khedher \(2014\)](#) defined personal branding as the process of making unique personal identity, developing active relations of a brand with its specific target market, evaluating its impact on image and authenticity of the individual, as well as a tool for realization of personal and professional goals. He divided this process into three phases; forming identity for personal brand, personal brand positioning, and personal brand evaluation ([Figs. 1 and 2](#)).

3. Research methodology

The current research is an applied study in terms of goal, following a description approach. This research was carried out to form a proper framework for personal brand positioning. Thus, the 7-step meta-synthesis method of Sandelowski and Barroso was employed. A hybrid approach was used to respond research questions with qualitative and quantitative methods, respectively. The research population in the qualitative phase consisted of branding and marketing experts and commentators and a collective credible scientific papers published in Scopus and Proquest scientific journals, considering input criteria (Keywords: Brand Position, Brand Positioning, Branding Framework, personal Brand)

were composed 157. According to the purpose and scope of this research, 34 eligible resources were identified by considering output criteria (title, abstract, content and accessibility of resources) which were designated as statistical samples in this phase. A total number of 28 indexes were obtained from this phase by reviewing the final 34 resources. In order to ensure the credibility of the obtained information, consultations were carried out with 10 experts, critics and activities in personal branding. Sampling was carried out through the persuasion method to achieve theoretical saturation. The experts eliminated three indexes and added seven new indexes to the list. Therefore, there were totally 32 indexes of personal brand positioning. A kinship graph was used in order to determine the framework and indexes in the same level based on common attribute(s) were categorized and the research model was created. In the quantitative phase, the reliability of the model was measured. Statistical population in this phase was composed of 9 experts, critics and activities in personal branding, and a structured questionnaire was used to gather data. Sampling in quantitative phase was non-probabilistic and was based on existing judgment. According to the maximum potential of the researcher in accessing the target community, 200 questionnaires were re-collected. To measure the reliability of the questionnaire, the content reliability method was used. By reviewing research literature and influencing indexes in personal brand positioning, the initial checklist for indexes was formed, reviewed and corrected in several stages afterward and finally got accepted. To measure the reliability of the questionnaire in qualitative phase, triangulation method was used, while for quantitative phase Cronbach's alpha method was employed (valued 0.854 that it suitable).

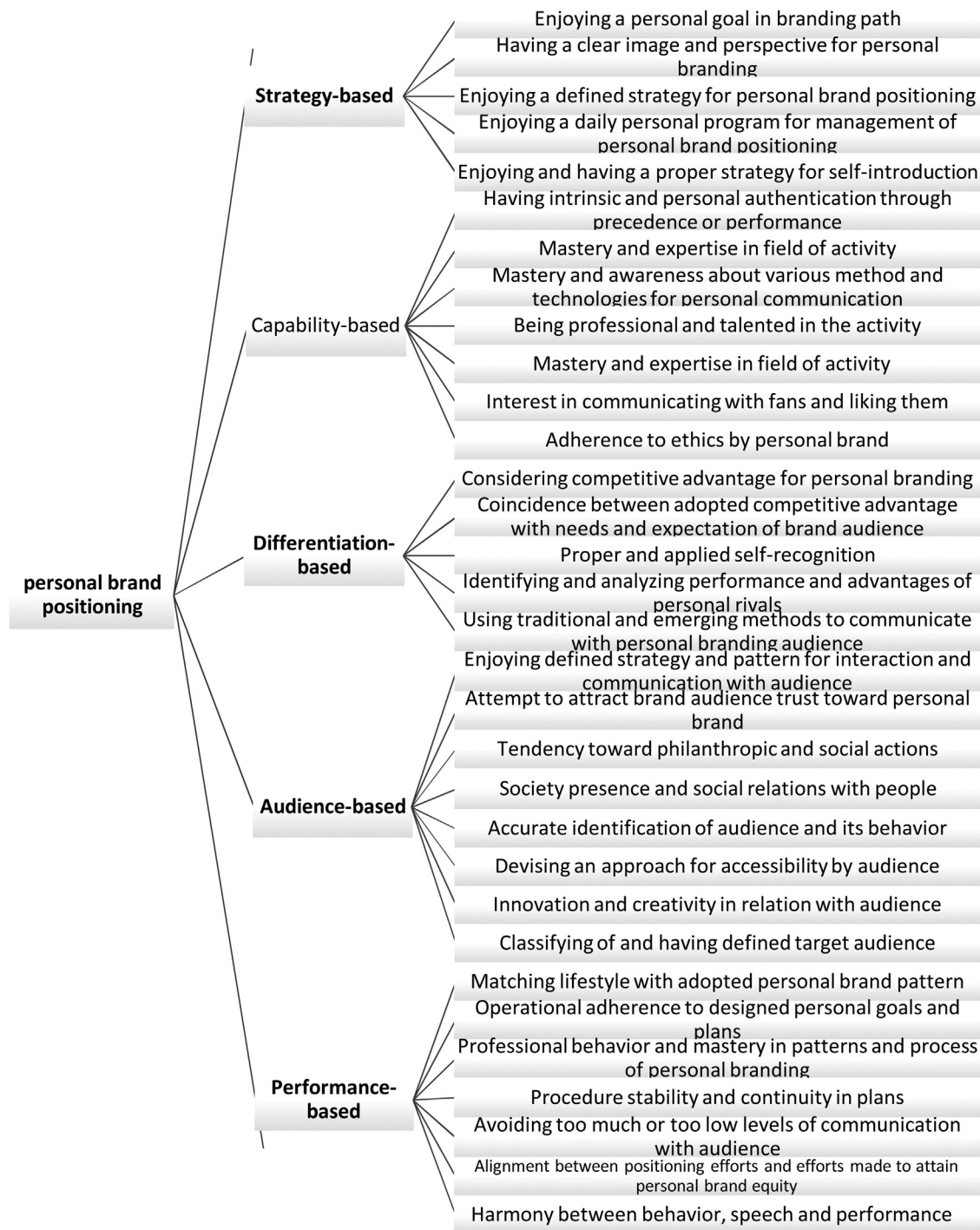


Fig. 2. proposed framework.

4. Finding

To identify the effective criteria for personal brand positioning in qualitative phase of research, the first step was to extract the opinions of various researchers about such indexes. The method employed in this step was desk research, and the dimensions and indexes affecting the positioning were extracted using a meta-synthesis method. Providing the researchers with a systematic perspective through combining various qualitative studies, a meta-synthesis attempted to discover new and fundamental metaphors and themes, thereby broadening the existing knowledge and offering a comprehensive view to an issue. Meta-synthesis requires the

researchers to have an in-depth and thorough review, and to combine the findings of qualitative studies. Regarding the objectives of the present study, Sandelowski and Barroso’s seven-step method (2003, 2007) was adopted for this purpose. The seven-some stages for meta-synthesis in this research are as below:

Stage one; formulating research questions: The first step in determining the research’s questions is to focus on “what”. In this research, the main question is Which dimensions and indexes help to explain personal brand position in audience’s minds? This is adjusted by considering the parameters listed in Table 1.

Databases and various search engines were explored using two keywords; namely brand and branding. Since these are generic

Table 2
The way of searching studies & input and output criteria studies.

Data base	searching	Input criteria		Number of preliminary findings	output criteria	Number of final findings
		First step's filter	Second step's filter			
Scopus	branding framework	Article title, Abstract, Keywords/1990 to present	English language/Article, conference paper, Book chapter	8	Irrelevant in content/Inaccessibility	6
	brand position & brand positioning	Article title, Abstract, Keywords/1990 to present	English language/Article, conference paper, Book chapter	74	Irrelevant in content/Inaccessibility	53
	personal brand	Article title, Abstract, Keywords/1990 to present	English language/Article, conference paper, Book chapter	61	Irrelevant in content/Inaccessibility	50
Proquest	branding framework	Abstract /1990 to present	English language/Book, conference papers, Dissertation & thesis	1	Irrelevant in content/Inaccessibility	1
	brand position & brand positioning	Abstract/1990 to present	English language/Book, conference papers, Dissertation & thesis	8	Irrelevant in content/Inaccessibility	6
	personal brand	Abstract/1990 to present	English language/Book, conference papers, Dissertation & thesis	5	Irrelevant in content/Inaccessibility	4

Table 1
Research parameters and questions.

Parameters	Questions
What	What dimensions and indexes influencing personal brand positioning are in audience minds?
Who (population study)	Various databases and search engines were explored
When	The articles studied in the study are from 1990 onwards
How(providing information)	The content analysis method was used to gather the information.

Stage two; systematic survey of texts.

terms, then most of the found resources were unrelated to the subject of the research; hence, these terms were limited to composite terms of branding framework, brand position, brand positioning, and personal brand. According to the input criteria, the results were composed of 157 references (paper, book chapter, dissertation & thesis). Finally, 34 items were evaluated using the output criteria. The following are the appropriate input and output criteria in order to find the related studies to the research subject to be reviewed in the Table 2.

In this research, Scopus and Proquest databases were used to identify and collect various studies. For some reasons, several databases have been considered instead of only some top journals. First, the way someone can access to a valid global scientific database is an issue. Moreover, initial searches also revealed that limiting searches to top journals and specific research fields may not fully capture all valuable and relevant research. Therefore, although high-quality journals express the high quality of the research, the focus of this research is on the two Scopus and Proquest databases since they covered a wide range of reputable journals in different management areas.

Phase four; extraction of results: to gather dimensions and indexes explaining personal brand position, content analysis was used (i.e. a method to collect information and its analysis). In this method, the relations between people and their messages were studied instead of direct observation of or asking about them. Content analysis considers letters, diaries, speeches, articles, laws and every other document. All indexes obtained from this phase (from literature review of 34 papers) were 28 as tabulated with frequencies in Table 3.

To assess the level and authentication of the extracted indexes, 9 experts and critics in branding and personal branding were consulted. As a result, three indexes of Enjoying personal missions along branding path, Determining proper slogans and Individual's key role for him/ herself in branding path were eliminated, and some indexes were added to the list, instead. The added indexes include Mastery and expertise in field of activity, Enjoying and adopting proper strategy for self-introduction, Classification of and having defined target audience, Avoiding too high or too low levels of communication with audience, Alignment between positioning efforts and efforts made to attain personal brand equity, and Interest in communicating with fans and liking them. Kinship graph establishes an existing supervision over the problem in groups with logical internal relations and is defined as a tool to gather plenty of ideas, opinions, verbal phrases, and their organization into defined groups based on their natural relations. Having investigated 32 effective indexes on personal brand positioning, five overall kinship groups were found: strategic based, performance based, audience based, capability based, and differentiation based. Each group houses a set of indexes as below (Tavakkoli et al., 2011).

4.1. Descriptive analysis of research variables

To descriptively analyze the research variables, central parameters (average, mean and mod) and distribution parameters (standard deviation, variance, range of variation) were used (Table 4).

4.2. Data normality test

In this research, Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was employed to check the normality of data. Results of the test are normal and are represented in Table 6.

Using Kolmogorov–Simonov test in all cases, significance levels are larger than error level (0.05). Therefore, there is no reason to reject zero assumption and all data have normal distribution.

4.3. Confirmation factor analysis

In this study, confirmation factor analysis was used to measure the relations between the hidden variables and measurement items.

Results for factor analysis for research variables are presented in Figs. 4 and 5. Factor loadings for all cases are larger than 0.3,

Table 3
Research studies coding.

Index	Frequency	References
Enjoying a personal goal in branding path	5	Alexander (2015); Rampersad (2008); Dibb and Simkin (1993), Saemian (2014), Nolan (2015)
Having a clear image and perspective for personal branding	2	Rampersad (2008); Dibb and Simkin (1993)
Enjoying personal missions along branding path	1	Rampersad (2008)
Enjoying a defined strategy for personal brand positioning	2	Balakrishnan (2009); Rosnani (2015)
Considering competitive advantage for personal branding	9	Dibb and Simkin (1993); Ahamd et al (2016); Asikhia (2010); Sweeney and Brandon (2006); Chritton (2012); Cutler (2003); Levine (2006); Najafzaded (2013); Saemian (2014)
Coincidence between adopted competitive advantage with needs and expectation of brand audience	2	Dibb and Simkin (1993); Ahamd et al (2016)
Enjoying defined strategy and pattern for interaction and communication with audience	3	Dibb and Simkin (1993); Ahamd et al (2016); Levine (2006)
Proper and applied self/recognition	2	Rampersad (2008); Rosnani (2015)
Matching lifestyle with adopted personal brand pattern	1	Saemian (2014)
Enjoying a daily personal program for management of personal brand positioning	1	Saemian (2014)
Individual's key role for him/ herself in branding path	1	Rampersad (2008)
Operational adherence to designed personal goals and plans	1	Rampersad (2008)
Identifying and analyzing performance and advantages of personal rivals	4	Levine (2006); Najafzaded (2013); Saemian (2014); Lawlock and Ritz (2004)
Attempt to attract brand audience trust toward personal brand	3	Rampersad (2008); Levine (2006); Blankson and Kalafatis (2004)
Having intrinsic and personal authentication through precedence or performance	1	Clement and Grottemeyer (1990)
Tendency toward philanthropic and social actions	4	Nolan (2015); Blankson and Kalafatis (2004); Alexander luka (2015); Shaker and Hafiz (2014)
society presence and social relations with people	3	Nolan (2015); Blankson and Kalafatis (2004); Saemian (2014)
Professional behavior and mastery in patterns and process of personal branding	2	Alexander luka (2015); Haghghi (2011)
Accurate identification of audience and its behavior	2	Najafzaded (2013); Shaker and Hafiz (2014)
Defining proper slogans	2	Shepherd (2005)
Devising and approach for accessibility by audience	3	Nolan (2015); Hartman (2012); Saemian (2014)
Procedure stability and continuity in plans	2	Clement and Grottemeyer (1990); Haghghi (2011)
Innovation and creativity in relation with audience	3	Saemian (2014); Omikikia (2011); Chakrabarti (2014)
Using traditional and emerging methods to communicate with personal branding audience	2	Nolan (2015); Saemian (2014)
Mastery and expertise in field of activity	2	Shaker and Hafiz (2014); Omidikia (2011)
Self/belief in personal brand	3	Clement and Grottemeyer (1990); Saemian (2014); Shaker and Hafiz (2014)
Adherence to ethics by personal brand	1	Rampersad (2008)
Harmony between behavior, speech and performance	1	Rampersad (2008)

Stage five; analysis and combination of qualitative data.

showing the correlation between hidden (dimension of each main structure) and visible variables are acceptable. To evaluate significant relation between variables, t-value statistic is utilized. For this study, all indexes are larger than this critical value, showing significant correlations.

4.4. Research framework test

After confirmation of factor loading for research structures, structural equations modeling was used to investigate it. Analysis results are represented piecewise (Fig. 6).

4.5. Framework goodness of fit (framework credibility)

The next step is to examine the fitness of the framework. Chi squared index is 1.335 and higher than 2.

$$\frac{\chi^2}{df} = \frac{613.08}{459} = 1.335$$

On the other hand, as RMSEA index is 0.035 and lower than 0.05, the framework has acceptable fitness. Also, other criteria of fitness of the indexes are in acceptable ranges.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This research was carried out to present a proper framework for personal brand positioning. Thus, using desk researches,

meta-synthesis, and expertise poll, effective indexes on this framework were extracted as follows: strategy-based dimension, capability-based dimension, differentiation-based dimension, audience-based dimension, and performance-based dimension. Based on the results obtained in this research, 5 main dimensions were identified in this framework to have factor loading higher than 0.3 and t-value statistic greater than 1.96, which means the correlations are significant. Also, indexes in each dimension were investigated. One can perceive, from factor loading and t-value statistic of each index, that the observed correlations between these 32 factors are significant (factor loading higher than 0.3 and t/value statistic greater than 1.96). On the other hand, regarding the data obtained from qualitative analysis of research variables (as Table 5), it seems that strategy-based and performance-based dimensions with the highest averages (respectively 3.783 and 3.758) have the highest impact on personal branding among the identified dimensions (based on experts' and commentators' ideas responding to questionnaire). According to this data, capability-based dimension with the lowest average has the least influence on personal branding. It means that from the viewpoint of personal branding commentators, having talents and capabilities necessarily does not result in successful branding. Thereupon, successful branding requires proper and harmonic performance with strategies followed by differentiation and self-competitive advantage, society presence and audience trustworthy, all just come after capability-based dimension (i.e. having talents and capabilities, being professional an expert). As seen in the real world, exter-

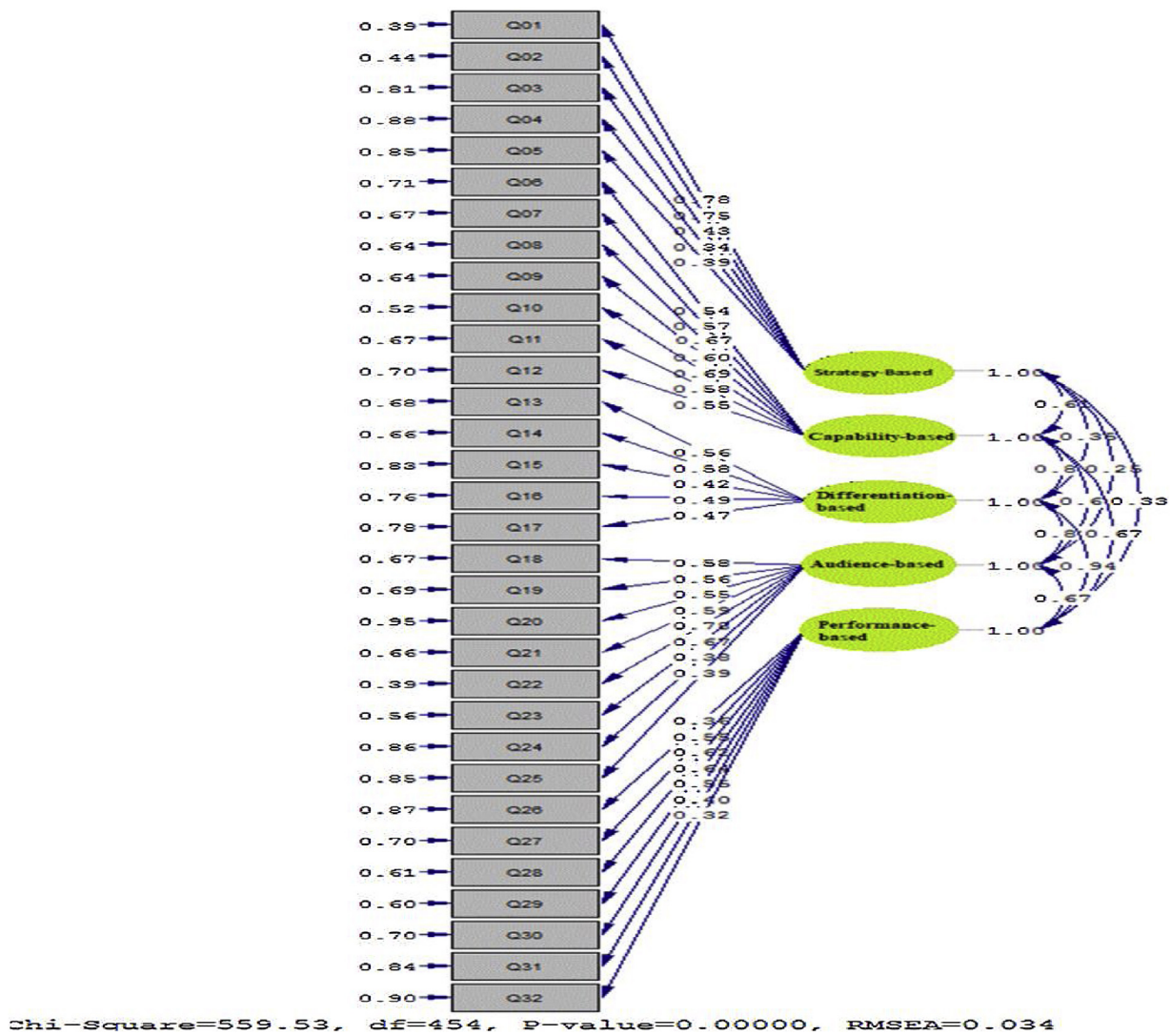


Fig. 3. Standard factor loading of confirmation factor analysis for research variables.

nal aspects of branding sensed by the audience (e.g. performance how/to that is originated by personal strategies and helps being recognizable) can persuade them to accept someone as a brand. On the other hand, there are lots of people who have a high capability-based dimension and very capable, but due the lack of defined strategy for branding, proper and harmonic performance does not make any differentiation. Unsuitable communications and interactions worsen the condition and hinder the process. To be sure about authenticity of the obtained information, some experts and critics for personal branding were consulted and sampling method was chosen to be persuasion up to theoretical saturation. Having analyzed the information, experts and commentators voted the following indexes as the most important ones (with 70% discerned as very important of important): having a personal goal in branding path; having a clear image and perspective for personal brand; having a specific strategy for personal brand positioning; considering competitive advantages for personal brand; having a defined strategy and pattern for interaction and relation with audience; proper and practical self-recognition; operational adherence to defined personal goals and plans; efforts for being trustworthy to brand audience; procedure stability and continuity in plans; innovation and creativity in communication with audience; having required talents and interests in the profession; being professional and expert in the field of activity; having

and following proper strategy for self-introduction; alignment between positioning efforts and efforts done for brand quality; self-belief in personal brand; adherence to ethics by personal brand; and harmony between behavior, speech and performance (Tables 6–8).

5.1. Comparison with former researches

Rampersad developed a model and framework for making a professional and credible brand. He enumerated the required criteria for authentic personal branding to have a goal and perspective, self-recognition, harmony in behavior and speech, differentiation, stability, trustworthiness, recognition as an expert, and continual improvement of performance. In his study, Rampersad developed a model consisting of 13 factors affecting personal brand positioning, whereas the model suggested in the present research embedded 32 factors including the ones used in Rampersad’s research as well as other factors collected from reviewing the literature and investigating other articles and experts’ opinions; hence, a more comprehensive model has been proposed. This study also examines the validity of the model. Rosnani et al. investigated current situation and mutual relations between effective and authentic personal brand indexes, and authentic personal brand strategy among 45 librarians in Malaysian Science University (including famous

Table 4
Classifying of indexes.

Dimension	Index
Strategy based	Enjoying a personal goal in branding path
	Having a clear image and perspective for personal branding
	Enjoying a defined strategy for personal brand positioning
Capability based	Enjoying a daily personal program for management of personal brand positioning
	Enjoying and having a proper strategy for self/introduction
	Having intrinsic and personal authentication through precedence or performance
	Mastery and expertise in field of activity
Performance based	Mastery and awareness about various method and technologies for personal communication
	Being professional and talented in the activity
	Mastery and expertise in field of activity
	Matching lifestyle with adopted personal brand pattern
	Operational adherence to designed personal goals and plans
Audience based	Professional behavior and mastery in patterns and process of personal branding
	Procedure stability and continuity in plans
	Avoiding too much or too low levels of communication with audience
	Alignment between positioning efforts and efforts made to attain personal brand equity
	Harmony between behavior, speech and performance
	Enjoying defined strategy and pattern for interaction and communication with audience
	Attempt to attract brand audience trust toward personal brand
	Tendency toward philanthropic and social actions
	Society presence and social relations with people
	Accurate identification of audience and its behavior
Differentiation based	Devising an approach for accessibility by audience
	Innovation and creativity in relation with audience
	Classifying of and having defined target audience
	Considering competitive advantage for personal branding
	Coincidence between adopted competitive advantage with needs and expectation of brand audience
	Proper and applied self/recognition
	Identifying and analyzing performance and advantages of personal rivals
Using traditional and emerging methods to communicate with personal branding audience	

Stage seven; presenting finding: the proposed framework is based on indexes obtained from the adopted approach as Fig. 3.

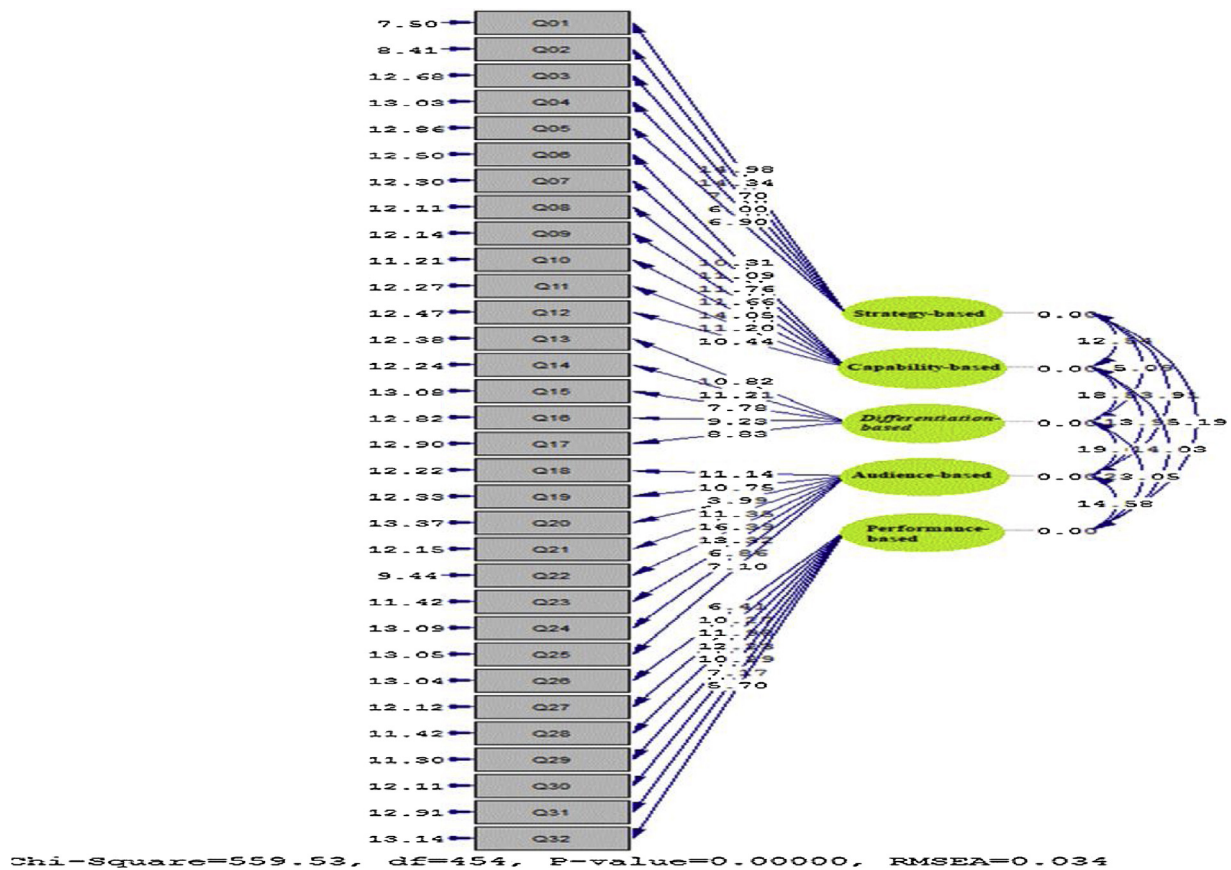


Fig. 4. T/value statistic value (significance) for research variables.

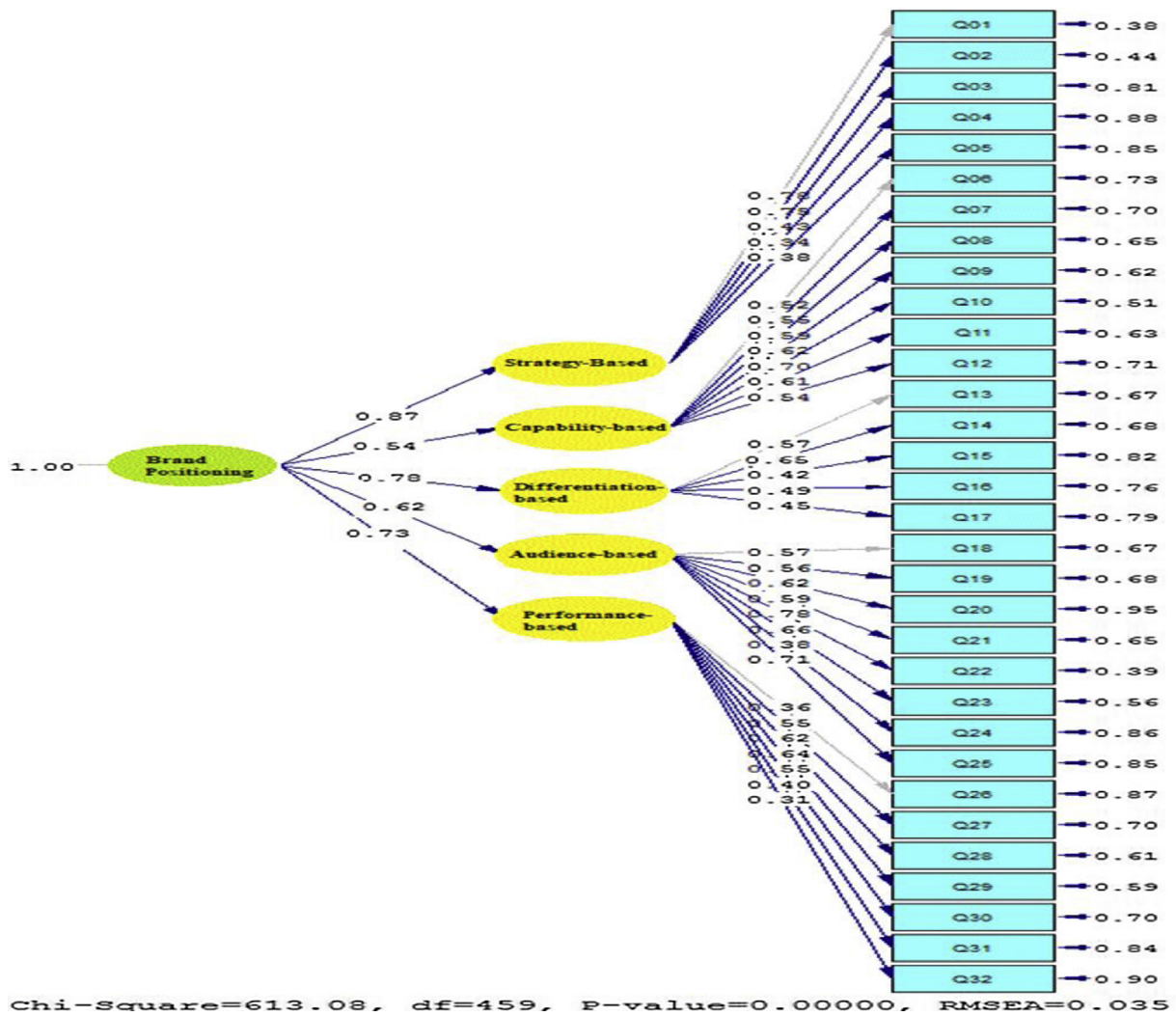


Fig. 5. Standard factor loading for research framework.

Table 5
Descriptive analysis of research variables.

Variables	Number	Average	Mean	Mod	Standard deviation	Variance	Variation range
Strategy based	200	3.783	4.000	4.000	0.695	0.484	3.571
Capability based	200	3.548	3.600	3.600	0.675	0.456	3.600
Differentiation based	200	3.644	3.750	4.000	0.810	0.657	4.000
Audience based	200	3.591	3.667	4.000	0.825	0.681	4.000
Performance based	200	3.758	4.000	4.000	0.760	0.5777	3.333

Table 6
Data normality test.

	Strategy/based	Capability/based	Differentiation/based	Audience/based	Performance/based
N	200	200	200	200	200
Average	3.783	3.548	3.644	3.591	3.758
Standard deviation	0.695	0.675	0.810	0.825	0.760
KS statistic	1.961	0.930	2.243	2.294	1.924
significance	0.165	0.131	0.169	0.123	0.097

Table 7
Goodness of fit indexes for structural framework.

Fit index	χ^2/df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	NFI	NNFI	IFI
Accepted values	<2	<0.1	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	0 / 1
Calculate values	1.335	0.035	0.94	0.96	0.95	0.96	0.93

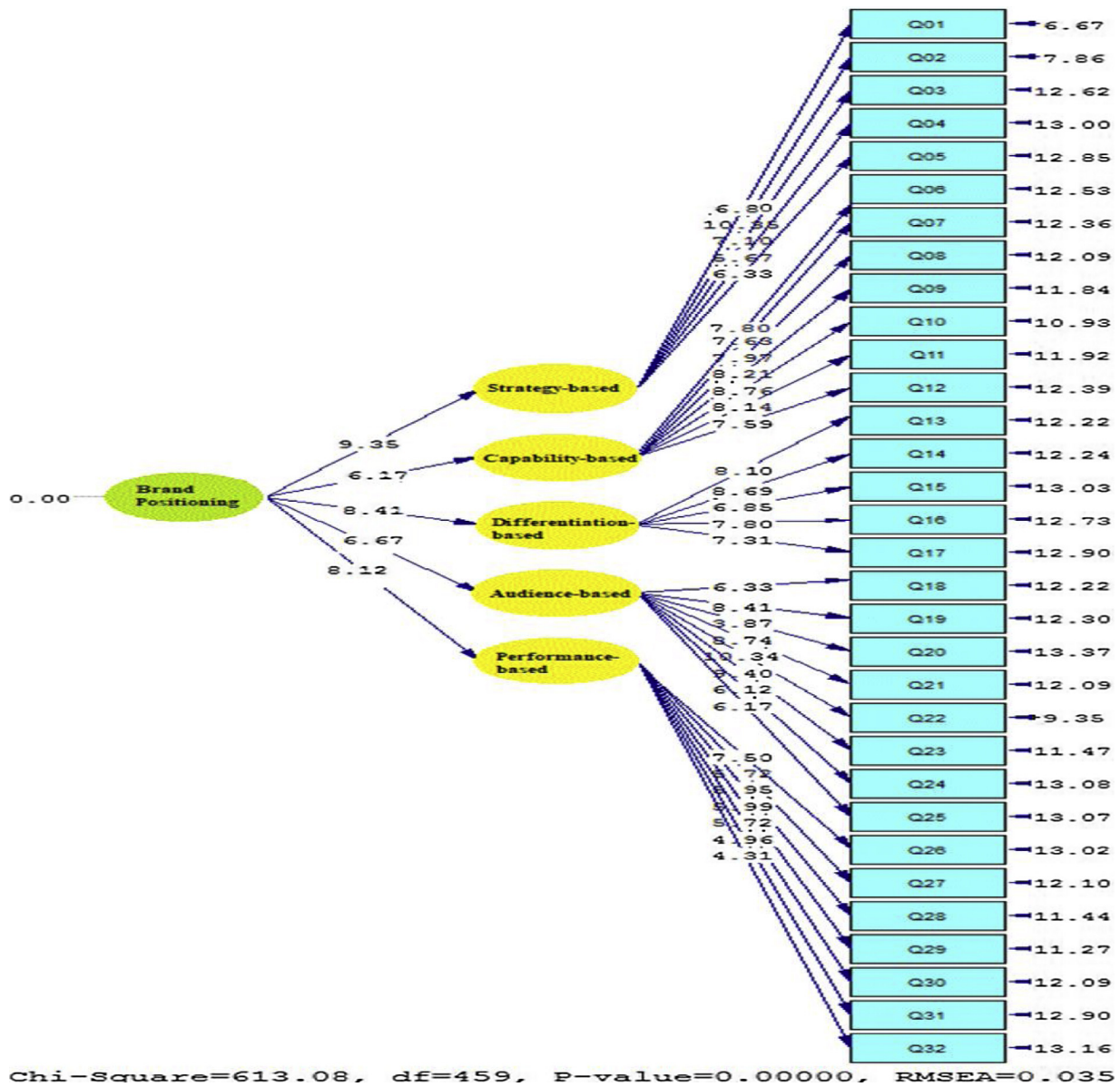


Fig. 6. T/value statistic test for research framework.

librarians in the university, library user authority, and library services). According to this research, good-willing, having perspective and personal mission, goals, and strategies were defined as effective criteria on the brand. In order to detect the effective brand positioning factors, Rosnani also used the factors introduced by Rampersad along with demographic factors to investigate brand positioning, while the present study extracted the effective factors from a literature review of 34 articles and consultation with experts in the field of branding. Nolan addressed personal branding in IT and intra-individual relations in US private organizations. The results, obviously, imply the importance of personal branding in private organization. Here, the personal brand helps the organizations to, accompanying their managers, act successfully in personal relations. He believes that philanthropic relations, social relations, accessibility for audience, and using virtual networks are the main indexes for effective personal branding. Hafiz and Shaker tried to make a conceptual framework of online personal brands and concluded that desirable impact of an online platform among the audience can help a self-confident person to attain the desired personal brand. They introduced believe in one's brand,

Table 8

Factory loading and t/value statistic for research framework dimensions.

Research dimensions	Factor loading	T/value statistic
Strategy/based	0.87	9.35
Capability/based	0.54	6.17
Differentiation/based	0.78	8.41
Audience/based	0.62	6.67
Performance/based	0.73	8.12

having talent, positive thinking, and proper relation and interaction with audience as the most important factors in personal brands. Nolan and Shaker separately considered four factors in their research as being effective on personal brand positioning; however, the researchers in the present study, in addition to identifying additional factors, developed a relevant model as well. Chakrabarti discussed various aspects of personal brand in his paper. He used a questionnaire-based dimension survey among 259 students from a famous business college in India, and concluded that post-graduate students have a higher level of awareness compared to the freshmen. He regards purposefulness, motivation for personal growth,

positive thinking and innovation as the most important aspects of personal brand.

Results of this research have a good correspondence with results from other personal branding or personal brand positioning works.

6. Suggestions

Regarding the obtained results, it is proposed that individuals with the aim personal branding or personal brand positioning must have a predefine goal and strategy in this path, and precisely define and explain their competitiveness advantage thorough proper self-recognition and paying attention to demands of target audience.

It is proposed to personal brand holders and all people with the aim of reaching a personal brand to be taught for branding and its favorable factors. More studies must be conducted in this regard.

It is recommended to personal brand holders and all people with the aim of reaching a personal brand to use the obtained indexes in this research for personal brand positioning. This helps to build the proper position in their target audience minds.

7. Recommendations for future research

Whether possible, it is proposed to cooperate with senior experts in this field to reinvestigate and correct the framework qualitatively and using interview.

It is proposed to rank the indexes obtained in the research from the viewpoint if importance in positioning, to identify the more important ones.

Also future researchers are recommended to identify effective dimensions and indexes on personal brand repositioning and assess the ability of the current framework to this aim.

Investigation and recognition of strategies in personal brand positioning are also suggested.

Finally, future studies can be conducted to investigate the internal relations and effects of dimensions of personal brand positioning.

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