

**EVALUATING A BRAND IDENTITY PLANNING MODEL FOR AN INDEPENDENT  
CONTRACTOR**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Evaluating a Brand Identity Planning Model for an Independent Contractor consists of evaluating the 4 perspectives of the Aaker Brand Identity Planning Model. These 4 perspectives consist of brand as product, organisation, person and symbol. The researcher, in this document has determined if these perspectives will indeed assist an independent contractor within the creative field to resonate more with their possible clients.

The aim of this study is to assist independent contractors within the struggling South African economic climate, helping them find and keep clients. Is it possible to build a brand identity for an independent contractor, specifically a freelance graphic designer, using a brand identity planning model?

The researcher has taken the evaluation approach, utilizing a thematic content analysis to examine and narrate the data collected from in-depth interviews.

Using the semi-structured in-depth interview tool the researcher has determined that all 4 perspectives affect directly and indirectly, emotionally and functionally, the beliefs, confidence and trust prospective clients have within an independent contractor. To the participants, the visual perspectives of a freelance graphic designer are vital to their choice, but not only the visuals, also the personality and the brand story.

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## **1. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

“Brand”, a word that has been defined in various ways; is the way in which goods and services are differentiated from competitors, in terms of name, symbol and design (Heding et al., 2009). Brand identity helps build a brand and influences brand activity, business strategy and how it will resonate with customers (Aaker, 2014). Is it possible to build a brand identity for an independent contractor, specifically a freelance graphic designer, using a brand identity planning model? This brand needs to create awareness and an identity for an individual.

### **1.1 Background and Orientation**

The concept of Independent Contracting can be widely defined as a person, business, or corporation who, under specified terms in a contract, provides goods or services to another entity when required. With the rise of economic issues, to be discussed in detail later, self-employment has grown (Brighton Fuse 2, 2015). The self-employed are commonly referred to as freelancers and contractors within the creative industry (Brighton Fuse 2, 2015) and they will be the focus of this research.

An important concept for this research topic is the idea of branding a person such as a self-employed freelancer. This has been debatable, but as *Fidelum Partners* states, “humans respond to brand” through the ways they “perceive, judge and behave towards one another” (Fidelum Partners, 2011). Branding an individual is simply using the brand as a person, which directly interacts with the general human response. Instead of building a business as a brand, the business is the individual, which makes the brand more attractive for customers, as they feel they can build a relationship with that individual (Fidelum Partners, 2011). Aaker’s theory on brand identity includes looking at a brand as a person, as it helps to resonate more with customers; therefore, branding and individual is a valid concept (Aaker, 2014).

### **1.2 Rationale**

The world economy is the lowest it has been since 2009, but within South Africa, 2016 had the lowest growth economically since 1994 (Industrial Development Corporation, 2017).

Household expenditure has dropped, living costs have risen and there is a drastically high level of debt and increase of unemployment and poor employment (Industrial Development Corporation, 2017). With South Africa's credit rating downgraded, the struggle of employment and surviving financially has affected households negatively (Industrial Development Corporation, 2017). This affects the independent contractors within the creative environment, as with the difficult economy and expenditure going down, fewer clients will be willing to pay the freelance hourly rates. The economic decline makes it even more important for brands to build a strong foundation and identity in order for consumers to resonate with their brand.

Brands are required to stand out in order to be noticed; therefore the purpose of this research has been to evaluate a brand identity planning model for a freelance graphic designer, to determine whether the model will benefit this type of independent contractor.

Brand identity development is an integral part of brand management (Hadi, 2007). This helps clarify and differentiate an identity of different brand elements and patterns. The researcher has determined whether it is possible to use a brand identity planning model to brand an independent contractor as a person. Will an independent contractor need a brand identity in order to create brand essence and become memorable?

As it has become important to become a differentiated brand, the significance of developing a strong brand identity increases. This will allow for customers to see promise, through perception and experience, in the brand on functional, emotional, self-expressive and social benefits (Aaker, 2014). Not only will this brand identity, with reference to this research, help define the relevance to independent contracting, but it will help the brand develop into a business asset that will drive the performance of the individual (Aaker, 2014).

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

Since the economy in South Africa is low and clients are less likely to seek and be able to pay for independent contracting services, brand identity development that can resonate with the possible clients has become even more important (Industrial Development Corporation, 2017). David A. Aaker (2002) developed a Brand Identity Planning Model that includes considering a brand under 4 perspectives, brand as product, organization and symbol (Hadi, 2007).

This model helps to consider different “elements and patterns” that could help to “differentiate an identity” (Hadi, 2007). This research considers Aakers Brand Identity Planning Model (2002) perspectives and determines if and how they could assist an independent contractor to build their brand and resonate with their possible clients.

The problem statement therefore is:

Is it possible to build a brand identity for an independent contractor, specifically a freelance graphic designer, using a brand identity planning model?

### **1.3.1 Research Questions**

A research question is the sectioning of parts of the problem statement into actionable parts and sets out what the researcher would like to learn from the topic (Shaffield Hallam University, 2005). The topic, “Evaluating a Brand Identity Planning Model for an Independent Contractor”, requires research into independent contracting, brand identity models, branding as a person and requires opinions from potential clients.

The research questions, formulated from the problem statement, include the following:

1. Will a Brand Identity Planning model benefit a creative industry independent contractor within the low South African economic climate?
2. What would possible clients expect, desire and need from an independent contractor within the creative industry?
3. What will gain the attention of clients through the Brand Identity Planning model for an independent contractor?
4. Will an independent contractor require all brand identity perspectives in order to be effective?

### **1.3.2 Research Objectives**

The research objectives, formulated from the research questions, would include the following:

1. To determine the benefit of a Brand Identity Planning for a creative industry independent contractor within the low South African economic climate;
2. To determine the expectations, desires and needs of clients of an independent contractor within the creative industry;

3. To determine the way to gain attention from clients through utilizing a Brand Identity Planning model for an independent contractor;
4. To determine the best brand identity perspectives that will help the independent contractor brand to be more effective?

#### **1.4 Purpose Statement**

This study determines if the Aaker Brand Identity Planning Model can be used in order to brand an independent contractor, specifically a freelance graphic designer. The research may benefit these individuals by determining if and how this model could essentially help them connect with clients.

#### **1.5 Conceptualization**

The key concepts of this study include the following:

**Brand Identity:** It can be defined in various ways, but is best defined by Aaker (2002) as being “a set of associations the brand strategist seeks to create or maintain” including all visible aspects of a brand including logo, name, colours and so forth (Business Dictionary, 2017). This is what identifies a brand in the consumers mind.

**Independent Contracting:** Essentially, independent contractors are self-employed by using their skills and hiring them to other businesses, but importantly, they negotiate their own payment expectations and their preferred way of working (Business, 2016). They work unsupervised and have control of their own schedule, as the employer may only expect the results of their work (The Legal Aid Society, 2007). The service of an independent contractor provides is not an “integral part of the employers business” and the contract will end when they finish the job they were hired for and normally they work for more than one organisation at a time (The Legal Aid Society, 2007).

**Branding a Person:** Branding an individual is using the brand as a person, this means directly interacting with the general human response. Instead of building a business as a brand, the business is the individual, which makes the brand more attractive for customers, as they feel they can build a relationship with that individual (Fidelum Partners, 2011).

Freelance Graphic Design: Within the creative industry, freelancing has become a prominent way to earn an income (South African Freelancer's Association, 2016). Self-employed freelancers need to stay up-to-date with trends, should be able to network and their work involves creating products for clients (Career Planning, 2007). Freelance graphic design is a subset of independent contracting within the creative industry because it is also defined by the same elements as independent contracting. This includes being hired, on a contract basis by an organisation in order to deliver services that is not a functional driver for the organisation, but is still needed (Career Planning, 2007).

## **1.6 Overview of Research Methodology**

Determining the research methodology is a crucial part of conducting research. A more detailed methodology discussion can be seen in Chapter 3 of this paper.

Specific to this study, in order to answer the research questions, a qualitative research approach is best suited. The study has collected data by utilizing the qualitative research tool that is semi-structured in-depth interviews. This has allowed the researcher to gain more subjective data to determine the answers for the research questions (Teijlingen, 2014). The evaluation methodological approach has been chosen for this study as it allows the researcher to evaluate the existing brand identity models and see how it could be applied to the independent contracting field within the creative industry (Changing Works, 2016).

The sampling method, purposive sampling, was selected to allow the researcher to choose the particular relevant sample. These were individuals that wish to start their own businesses, which are willing to use a graphic designer to design their corporate identity. This sample includes individuals between the ages of 25 and 30 and includes 5 participants and 1 pre-test participant. This purposive sampling method was used to select the participants and is a "judgemental, selective and subjective" method of sampling (Crossman, 2017).

The data was analysed using a thematic content analysis so that the data could be interpreted and explained by evaluating the data (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The themes and patterns have been identified, analysed and, through this method, reported on and described in extensive detail. It is a purely qualitative method of data analysis (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

## **1.7 Structure of the Paper**

### Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1 includes the introduction of the study. This will basically introduce the research problem, aims, objectives and the introduction of the methodology. This chapter also introduces the concept of the struggling economic climate in South Africa, cementing the need for this study.

### Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 includes the Review of the Literature, fully describing the theoretical framework, Brand Identity models considered for the research and a full discussion on what independent contracting is and how freelance graphic design relates to this.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter includes the methodology including the research design, objective and research orientation. This section fully discusses the population and sampling methods, data collection methods, tools and data analysis methods including the reliability and trustworthiness of the study and the ethical considerations of the study.

### Chapter 4: Data Findings and Analysis

Included in this chapter is the interview findings and the evaluation of the chosen Brand Identity Planning model by Aaker to determine if this model may be able to aid an independent contractor within the struggling economy.

### Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

The final chapter concludes all the findings and include the recommendations of the researcher with reference to the findings and analysis done in Chapter 4. These recommendations also include options for further study and reference the limitations the current study has had.

## **2. CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

As defined earlier, a brand is a promise to the customer, but Aaker mentions that not only is the brand a promise, but a journey for the customer every time they come in contact with the brand as it builds “relationships, perceptions and experiences” (Aaker, 2014). Brands should be used as an asset that could create “on-going value” and should be used strategically (Aaker, 2014). Branding is not only visuals, but an experience. Independent contractors need to deliver not only services to their clients, but an experience. Therefore brand identity models need to be evaluated to discover the best route for the creative and self-employed individual.

### **2.2 Review of the literature**

Below the researcher discusses paradigms which then lead to the theoretical framework. This includes reviewing literature on brand identity including Aaker, Kapferer and Keller which determines the model that best suits the topic. Then a review on independent contracting and freelance design is discussed and determines whether they relate and if the concept is valid.

#### ***2.2.1 Paradigms***

A research paradigm is a term that can be defined as a “pattern, structure and framework system” for conducting research through a certain set of “beliefs, values and assumptions” (Thomas, 2010). These paradigms can be fall under 3 categories. Firstly, ontology, which is questioning what reality, really is. The second category is epistemology, which is questioning how one knows something and how to gain reality and knowledge. Lastly is methodology, which is about what procedure to use when acquiring knowledge (Salma Patel, 2015). These research paradigms reflect clusters of beliefs, influences and what should be studied, how and the way in which results are interpreted (Thomas, 2010). The 3 popular philosophical paradigms include positivism, interpretivism and critical postmodernism (Thomas, 2010). These were reviews and the best suited paradigm for this study, interpretivism was chosen.

In short, the positivist paradigm explores social reality and is focused on observation, reason and experimentation in order to understand the behaviour of people (Thomas,

2010). This uses a quantitative method of research as it links to relationships and takes a positive stand point, but it uses facts and a systemic way to conduct research. It mainly sees “human behaviour as passive, controlled and determined” and is strategic and constructive (Thomas, 2010). Even though the paradigm is structured, this paradigm is not able to be objective as it is about observation and it is impossible to perceive completely accurately. Positivism believes it can be objective, if the researcher conducting the research is objective and disregards their emotions, however, emotional responses are natural and can’t guarantee fully objective research (Johnson, 2017). This paradigm is not appropriate as the intention of this research is to gain human truths in a subjective way.

Critical post-modernism focuses on a historical reality (Thomas, 2010). It is focused on the constraints of social, cultural, political and economic variables and how people are constantly affected by them (Thomas, 2010). This paradigm believes in constant influence and that these influence society (Salma Patel, 2015). This was not appropriate for this study as it is “materialistic” and focuses on “society development and social struggles” in the past and makes assumptions based on that (Thomas, 2010).

The chosen paradigm for this study, interpretivism, believes in a reality that consists of subjective experiences of people and with no specific method to gain knowledge (Thomas, 2010). The judgement of this research is not about how correct a theory is, but rather how interesting the theory is, therefore it is not about objectivity, but the meaning of the information collected (Thomas, 2010). It is about interpretation and discovering the “underlying meaning of events and activities” (Johnson, 2017). This paradigm is grounded in theory and analysis and is usually qualitative. The methods used would include interviews, observation and cases studies. These would be interpreted; themes would be identified and would take a narrative approach (Johnson, 2017). This paradigm is not about presenting new theory, but to “judge, evaluate and refine” existing theories (Thomas, 2010). The methods are about participation and engagement and observing with bias.

Interpretivism relies on the natural way of human communication and accommodates variables that change, but it is not able to make general claims in the research as it uses smaller samples (Thomas, 2010). This paradigm also has issues with the validity of the research as it is interpreted and subjective; therefore it would be needed to use 2 or more methods of gathering knowledge (Salma Patel, 2015). This study has used evaluating an existing Brand Identity Planning Model theory as well as data collecting with the in-depth interview tool.

This paradigm would suit the topic as it evaluates existing theories, allows for changes in variables, uses smaller sample sizes and has allowed for the use of 2 or more methods to increase the validity of the research, being the evaluation of the Aaker Brand Identity Planning Model and the collection of data using in-depth interviews. Interpretivism allows for the forming of deeper insights on the subjective opinions of the participants, gaining data on natural human behaviour (Salma Patel, 2015).

### ***2.2.2 Theoretical Framework***

Brand identity is what identifies a brand in the consumers mind through the visible aspects of a brand including logo, name, colours and so forth (Business Dictionary, 2017). It can be defined in various ways, but a well-accepted definition is that of Aaker (2002), being that brand identity is a “set of associations the brand strategist seeks to create or maintain” (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2002). The brand identity should be able to last, have vision and should portray “what the brand stands for” (Heding et al., 2009).

#### ***2.2.2.1 Brand Identity***

Brand Identity Models were reviewed, including the Kapferer Brand Identity Prism, Keller’s Brand Resonance Model and lastly, Aakers Brand Identity Planning Model. Determined for this study, the Aaker model was identified as suiting it best. Each model was reviewed in-depth and a short summary can be seen below, with the in-depth review of the Aaker model.

Jean-Noel Kapferer identified key elements of a brand identity. He developed what is called the Kapferer Brand Identity Prism (Martin, 2017). This model believes brand image is completely different to brand identity (Martin, 2017). The elements developed for this prism includes physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection and self-image (Martin, 2017). This model is used to identify “key aspects of communication of a brand” and uses this to consider the role of the client with the brand (Martin, 2017). It focuses more on relationships rather than image. The model has difficulty applying it to a service based brand (Martin, 2017). This study has a focus on a service based freelance graphic designer. Therefore it was considered, but deemed not appropriate for this study.

All brand elements together create awareness and image, but form the brand identity (Keller, 2013). Keller believes that a brand identity is created by measuring aspects of awareness and how often the brand is brought up in various “situations and circumstances” (Keller, 2013). Keller’s brand resonance model focuses on 4 steps of brand building. These steps include creating a suitable meaning for the brand, gain brand response and lastly to build a customer relationship (Keller, 2013). This brand equity model focuses on relationships and the resonance of the brand, but also the brand itself and the judgements and feelings of the responses to the brand (Keller, 2013). Keller’s theory might include a brand resonance model and a brand equity model, but does not include a brand identity model (Keller, 2001). For this reason Keller, was considered, but not suited as the topic required an existing brand identity model.

David A, Aaker (2002) developed a Brand Identity Planning Model, which is best suited for this study. This model considers 4 perspectives of a brand. These perspectives include brand as product, organization, person and symbol (Hadi, 2007). This model helps to consider different “elements and patterns” that could help to “differentiate an identity” (Hadi, 2007). Aaker (2002) states that it is not required implementing all 4 perspectives, but it is vital for a brand to consider and reflect which perspectives are important for their specific brand. (Hadi, 2007). To fully understand this brand identity model, it is important to discuss and understand each perspective.

The first perspective, brand as product, is about attributes related to the product or service. In the case of independent contracting it would be the service. This perspective may help define the service, how the customer remembers the service and the scope of the service (Hadi, 2007). This perspective is easily applied to both a product and service based brand, which is 1 the reasons it suited this study so well (Hadi, 2007). Brand as product helps to identify how the service is used, who may use the service and how the service needs to portray itself in the environment or country it will be present in. With relation to this topic, this perspective may help identify what independent contracting and freelance design is and may help define the creative environment it operates within. Furthermore, it may help identify the market for it within South Africa and how it needs to operate to be a successful brand within that market.

The second perspective, being brand as organisation, focuses on the organisation itself. It finds what drives quality, people, culture and values from an organisational perspective (Hadi, 2007).

Regarding independent contracting it may help identify competitors and to define the essence of the individual as the brand. This perspective may help defining the independent contractors' attributes and what they wish to communicate themselves as.

Another perspective to consider is focusing on the brand as a person. This helps to identify the "unique personality" of the brand to make the brand more interesting (Hadi, 2007). Aaker (2002) has suggested 3 ways in which a brand can develop a personality, including, self-expressive, relationship based and using the product as a "functional benefit" (Hadi, 2007). The self-expressive development is using the brand as a way for individuals to project their own personalities. Freelance graphic designers are essentially creating visuals their clients should be proud of. This same reason can be used for using the brand as the product, in this case, creative service. The style, in which a designer presents themselves, depicts not only their visuals and personality, but also their level of skill. This may help to sell the brand by using the service to sell it, for its "functional benefit" (Hadi, 2007).

Lastly, taking the perspective of seeing the brand as a symbol is the visuals used to gain brand "recognition and recall" (Hadi, 2007). This mainly means how strong the visual identity is to have clients, or possible clients remember the brand. This perspective is exceptionally important to an independent contractor within the creative environment as this is the service they wish to offer to clients. This visual element of the brand may not only be used as a recall factor, but, as mentioned before, be used to portray the skill of the individual independent contractor.

To elaborate more on Aaker's (2002) brand identity planning model, it consists of a Core Identity and Extended Identity. The core identity visualises the meaning and the associations of a brand and the possibility for the brand to exist for a long time (Hadi, 2007). The extended identity allows one to add "texture" to the brand, defines the product class, and generally makes the brand strong, more memorable and allows for easier connection to the client (Hadi, 2007).

The model best suited to the study was determined to be the Aaker Brand Identity Planning Model (2002) as it provides tools on all perspectives of brand identity with regards to creation and communication.

#### ***2.2.2.4 Independent Contracting and Freelance Graphic Design***

Independent contracting has become a considered method to outsource work, in South Africa (Oberholzer & Beer, 2006). Independent contractors include, but are not limited to, freelancers and independent service providers (Oberholzer & Beer, 2006). Independent contractors operate as business entities that “produce results for an agreed price” (Australian Government, 2016). These independent contractors provide all or most of the materials or equipment need for the work, have freedom in the way they work, provide services to other businesses and are the deciding factor in accepting or refusing work (Australian Government, 2016). Essentially, independent contractors “run their own business”, therefore they are self-employed, through “hiring out their services” to other businesses while negotiating their own payment expectations and their preferred way of working (Business, 2016). Independent contractors have control in the way they work, unsupervised, as the employer will only expect the results of their work (The Legal Aid Society, 2007). The service an independent contractor provides is not an “integral part of the employers business” and the contract will end when they finish the job they were hired for and normally they work for more than 1 organisation at a time (The Legal Aid Society, 2007).

Within the creative industry, freelancing has become a prominent way to earn an income (South African Freelancer's Association, 2016). Graphic designers form part of this creative industry and work within various environments and apply their skills on various projects (Career Planning, 2007). According to the University of Tennessee (2007), 3 out of 10 graphic designers are self-employed freelancers and their work involves creating products for clients (Career Planning, 2007). This type of career requires staying up to date with trends, being able to network and to persuade while staying “in-touch” with the clients preferences (Career Planning, 2007).

As discussed, independent contractors are self-employed, such as freelancers. Freelancing is a subset of independent contracting and creative freelancing, such as a graphic design freelancer, because it is also defined by the same elements such as independent contracting. This includes being hired, on a contract basis by an organisation in order to deliver services that is not a functional driver for the organisation, but is still needed (Career Planning, 2007). Also included is that a freelancer determines their own hours, their payment requirements and also supplies their own required working material and equipment (South African Freelancer's Association, 2016).

## **2.3 Conclusion**

In the struggling economic climate of South Africa, brands are required to stand out; therefore the research purpose is to evaluate a brand identity planning model for a freelance graphic designer to determine whether the model may benefit this type of independent contractor. Brand identity helps clarify and differentiate brand elements and patterns. With regards to the creation of a brand and the brand communication, Aaker's brand identity planning model has been determined to suite the topic best. It allows the brand to be understood and elaborated on under 4 perspectives; brand as person, organisation, product and symbol. This model also allows the brand to be developed under a core and extended identity; fully unpacking the personality, the type of service and the memorability of the brand. Freelance graphic design is a subset of independent contracting and offers services to other organisations, and, as discussed, Aaker's model has no difficulty in applying it to the service based industry. Self-employment requires staying up to date with the industry they revolve in. Aaker's model help identify the requirements of this industry, but the research paradigm selected, interpretivism, may help gain subjective opinions and has been used to evaluate Aaker's brand identity planning model and apply it to freelance graphic design. Through utilising the different methods, a freelance designers brand may, both visually and theoretically, gain a strong foundation and identity in order for consumers to resonate with their brand.

### **3. CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Research methodology is best defined as “a systematic way to solve a problem” (Rajasekar et al., 2013). Basically, the research methodology is the way in which a researcher aims to conduct, analyse and describe the research data and allows the researcher to set out a work plan for the research (Rajasekar et al., 2013).

There are various ways of gathering information when conducting research and the chosen ways could make or break the study. Therefore, below the researcher outlines the research methodology to organise how the data for this study has been collected, discussed and analysed.

Firstly, the methodological approach, which was evaluation, is clarified to determine the research objective, orientation and how they relate to the research problem. Following this, the population and sampling methods are discussed which then leads to the data collection method, being semi-structured in-depth interviews. A required method of analysing the data is then discussed, for this study being a thematic content analysis. The last topic of discussion in this Chapter includes the limitations and the delimitations of the study.

#### **3.1 Research Paradigm**

As determined in Chapter 2, the research paradigm, interpretivism, evaluates existing theories like, specific to this study, the Aaker Brand Identity Planning Model. It focuses on how interesting the theory is and interpreting and discovering how it could possibly be applied to an independent contractor (Thomas, 2010). It is about examining with bias, relying on the natural way of human communication (Thomas, 2010).

#### **3.2 Methodological Approach**

The objective of this research was to evaluate an existing brand identity model in order to see if it could be applied to an independent contractor within the creative industry. The evaluation qualitative research approach has been chosen for this study as it seeks to assess or judge information that would be overlooked in mere observation or investigation (Changing Works, 2016). This approach can be used both for qualitative and quantitative data, but with reference to this study it is focused on qualitative (Kothari, 2004).

The evaluation approach with qualitative data allows for the use of a narrative and a description of the data rather than the quantitative approach that uses numbers (Changing Works, 2016). This evaluation approach allows for the description of the views and attitudes of those completing the in-depth interview, and it would represent the participants' thoughts on the points they truly find important (Kothari, 2004). Qualitative methods are most often used in a formative evaluation to aid a project's planning stage and when assessing participants' needs (Kothari, 2004). Evaluation allows for understanding of the application of a brand identity model to an independent contractor, meaning it allows this concept of the study to be understood. This evaluation helps to see if the application of the brand identity planning model to an independent contractor would improve their chances of gaining clients and building brand equity.

There are 3 main research orientations include qualitative, quantitative and mixed research (Garbarino & Holland, 2009). These orientations are the type of data that is generated during the research process. Qualitative data is usually textual and quantitative data is numbers (Garbarino & Holland, 2009). The mixed research method uses both quantitative and qualitative methods (Garbarino & Holland, 2009).

The methodological approach determined best for this research was qualitative, as it focuses on the quality (Kothari, 2004). Qualitative research allows for a small sample size in order to gain deeper insights and opinions about the subject matter (Kothari, 2004). As this study is the evaluation of a brand identity model and used the opinions of individuals, it is more focused on the "human behaviour" aspect, which is what the qualitative research approach focuses on (Kothari, 2004). The opinions of participants helped discover how this model may benefit the business of a creative independent contractor. The main aim of the research is to evaluate the "underlying motives and desires" of these participants with relation to their choice of an independent contractor (Kothari, 2004). Through utilizing the qualitative research orientation, the researcher has been able to evaluate what motivates the prospective clients to like or dislike this creative service (Kothari, 2004).

### **3.3 Research Design**

For this study, a phenomenological research design was chosen. This research design focused on subjectivity and understanding and describing experiences that have been lived (Statistic Solutions, 2017).

This approach identified information through perceptive qualitative methods including interviews, discussions and observational research (Lester, 1999). This study uses in-depth interviews in order to gain such subjective information. This approach is based on subjectively perceiving and interpreting data and seeks to “describe rather than explain” (Lester, 1999). Phenomenological design can be applied to selecting samples “deliberately” and specifically to what the researcher requires (Lester, 1999). This research design produces transcriptions, a great amount of data that needs to be interpreted, and requires the researcher to read through these and identify themes (Lester, 1999). Reporting needs to be done in a logical manner that describes these themes identified, but also clearly explain to the reader how and why the researcher has come to the specific conclusions (Lester, 1999).

### **3.4 Population and Sampling**

Population in research is a “large collection of individuals or objects” that is the focus of the specific research question (Explorable, 2017). Due to the “large sizes of populations”, it is impossible to question each individual; this is why researchers use sampling techniques (Explorable, 2017). A population can be further defined as individuals that have similar characteristics or populate the same area (Explorable, 2017). In this study, the target population is South Africa, the accessible sample, available to the researcher, is in Gauteng and the sampled population is from the Pretoria area.

Sampling in research is “selecting a particular group” to respond to the research tool and have their answers “represents the entire population” (Surbhi, 2016). As mentioned earlier in this paper, the specific category of the population that the researcher has used to respond to the interview includes individuals that plan to open their own businesses and are willing to use graphic design services. These individuals are specifically chosen to be between the ages of 25 and 30. Additional population parameters include that the participants are limited to the Pretoria area in South Africa. The sample was not limited to the industry the individuals operate in, as this was determined not to be important for this study, it was simply required that they wish to open their own business. As the clients of a freelance graphic designer can be seen as nearly anyone, the researcher believes the study requires a focus in order to gain insights instead of quantitative data (College Grad, 2017).

It is important to note that the researcher has chosen this sample through purposive sampling, meaning these are the individuals the researcher has chosen that apply to a certain type of characteristic (Crossman, 2017). Purposive sampling is the technique where the participants are selected through the characteristics defined by the researcher to reach the sample quickly and where the sample specifically helps gain the research objective, but having the sample not be the main concern (Crossman, 2017).

As the sample only focuses on participants who wish to start their own business, prospective clients including corporate companies and small established businesses have been excluded from the population sample. The sample is broad, but focused on a specific type of client.

Furthermore, with purposive sampling, there are different methods of identifying the sample. These include maximum variation sampling, which is selecting a diverse range of individuals related to a specific event, then homogeneous sampling, individuals being selected by certain characteristics that are the same, then there is typical case sampling, referring to the typical sample of a trend (Crossman, 2017). These also include the extreme/deviant case sampling, which is a selection of a particular sample related to a trend, then we have critical case sampling, where 1 sample is chosen that the researcher believes could be applied to other population samples easily, total population sampling, meaning selecting an entire population with 1 similar characteristic and, finally, expert sampling, which is a sample selected by the specific expertise they have in an area (Crossman, 2017).

The researcher believes critical case sampling is the best type of purposive sampling for this research. This means the researcher chooses a case for this study, which has been mentioned earlier, that can be easily used to gain insights and be applied easily to other clients a graphic designer could have (Crossman, 2017). Therefore the data collected from these participants “could be more generally applicable” (Crossman, 2017).

The sample that that was chosen to participate, using the purposive sampling technique, included 5 individuals, both male and female, living in the Pretoria area, South Africa. They are interested in starting their own businesses, are between the ages of 25 and 30 and are willing to use Independent Contracting Graphic Design services to develop their corporate identity.

### 3.5 Data Collection

Smaller sample selection for qualitative data collection is important as it can be time consuming to evaluate the data (University of Surrey, 2009). Qualitative data collection methods include individual interviews, focus groups, observation, document textual analysis and interviews with open-ended questions (Harris & O'Brien, 2017). The research tool best suited for this study was semi-structured in-depth interviews with open-ended questions because it requires a small amount of time investment compared to other tools, participants can be more honest due to complete anonymity and the data collected can be easier to generalize (Ferber et al., 2017).

An in-depth interview can simply be defined as a tool used to have a sample respond to questions subjectively based on their feelings, tastes and opinions (Glasow, 2005). The individuals that take part in an interview are referred to as participants (Quizlet, 2017).

The main purpose of an interview is to understand the “meanings of what people say” (Teijlingen, 2014). These interviews can be done telephonically, face-to-face and through online methods (Teijlingen, 2014). There are structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Teijlingen, 2014). The researcher believes semi-structured interviews would search the study best as it consists of “predetermined questions”, but the researcher can re-order or modify the questions depending on what the researcher observes during the interview or what the researcher finds “most appropriate” (Teijlingen, 2014). This has allowed the researcher to include specific questions or ignore certain questions depending on the answers given. This tool allows identifying and exploring the specific views of the participants (Teijlingen, 2014).

Based on the theoretical framework and the literature review, the researcher has developed the questions for the interview. Firstly the literature review of the Aaker Brand Identity Planning Model (2002) has been considered in order to identify the questionable areas that need answers or further clarification from the participants. This has helped to formulate the questions used for the interview. The questions were developed by considering aspects including the following (Glasow, 2005):

1. Different levels of education of the participants;
2. Questions having no alternative meanings;
3. Fully explaining the purpose and anonymity of the interview;
4. Ensuring questions are applicable, open-ended, simplistic and specific;
5. To avoid leading questions that includes assumptions from the researcher.

The researcher has additionally avoided asking questions that:

6. Include double negatives;
7. Are too long;
8. Are biased;
9. That evoke a negative emotional response;
10. That do not include definitions of abbreviations or jargon.

The timeline for the activities of this study can be seen in Table 1, which outlines the activities, including the development of the questions, the pre-test phase interview and the scheduled interviews.

TABLE 1: SCHEDULE DETAILS

| Item   | Participant name       | Date              | Start time | End time | Place                         |
|--|------------------------|-------------------|------------|----------|-------------------------------|
| Evaluation of Aaker Brand Identity Model and development of questions. | NA                     | 3-15 October 2017 | 08:00      | 17:00    | Researcher Place of Residence |
| Pre-test Interview   | Pre-test Participant A | 20 October 2017   | 08:00      | 09:00    | Researcher Place of Residence |
| Interview  | Participant A          | 25 October 2017   | 18:00      | 19:00    | Researcher Place of Residence |
| Interview  | Participant B          | 27 October 2017   | 17:00      | 18:00    | Researcher Place of Residence |
| Interview  | Participant C          | 28 October 2017   | 08:00      | 09:00    | Researcher Place of Residence |
| Interview  | Participant D          | 28 October 2017   | 10:00      | 11:00    | Researcher Place of Residence |
| Interview  | Participant E          | 28 October 2017   | 12:00      | 13:00    | Researcher Place of Residence |

An important aspect of developing interview questions is to test it before using it for the study (Bullen, 2014). The pre-test, preliminary test, for this study involved 1 in-depth interview; a small scale study used to evaluate variables of the study, is only needed for a long and complex study, which is not the case for this study (Bullen, 2014).

The pre-test involved firstly finding a willing participant within the population sample specification, having the participant answer questions in the interview while the researcher observed them answering the questions (Bullen, 2014). An important aspect of this pre-test was that the participant was required to “think out loud” so the researcher could properly identify the problem areas of the questions (Bullen, 2014). The following questions were developed for the pre-test phase:

1. Do you find corporate identity, the look of your business, important for your future business?
2. Can you please explain what independent contracting is, as you understand it?
3. Can you please explain what graphic design is to you, as you understand it?
4. If you were to choose someone to design your corporate identity, would you prefer a large graphic design company or an individual freelancer?
5. What would the ideal graphic designer be like for you?
6. How would you want to learn about the designer and their services (If they struggle to answer: website, word-of-mouth, posters, and emails, anything else you can think of)?
7. Do you normally trust designers or independent contractors?
8. What would help you to trust a Graphic Designer?
9. What aspects of your future business would you need an independent contractor in this creative field to focus on? What problems could they solve for you?
10. How would you choose a graphic designer?
11. What type of personality would you wish a designer to portray in order for you to use their services? (If they struggle to answer: Approachable, corporate, fun, crazy?)
12. What would make you choose a freelancer above larger graphic design companies? Would it be lower prices, more personal involvement?
13. What do you think a brand is?
14. Do brands influence your decisions? If yes, how? If no, why do you think not?
15. Would the way a graphic designers brand looks influence your decision in using them as your designer?
16. Would you want a designer to tell you a story about who they are, or instead go straight to the point about their services and what they could do for you?
17. If you were not to consider a freelance designer, what type of methods, companies or people would you instead use to develop your corporate identity?

18. Do you feel graphic design would add to your product or services value?
19. Do you find it important for the freelance designer to be portrayed as a business or as an individual?
20. Is it important how much experience the designer has, or is it all about what you see they can do, or what their brand looks like?

After the pre-test interview was conducted, the researcher identified problem areas. The feedback provided by the participant and the observations of the researched helped developing a new set of questions that were more direct and less likely to be misunderstood. The developed questions used for this study can be seen in Appendix C. These questions were more grounded in the theoretical model, the Aaker Brand Identity Planning Model, and were more specific. Some questions were re-phrased to not be as easily misunderstood. This pre-test phase also allowed the researcher to realise that a simple question was not enough to get the data needed, the questions needed to be followed up with more questions, as specified in Appendix C, why they feel and how they feel.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis “draws out patterns from concepts and insights” (Sunday, 2017). The analysis takes the data that has been collected and forms it into an explanation or interpretation of the participants answers through evaluating the “meaningful and symbolic content” (Sunday, 2017).

This study used the thematic content analysis method, which, according to Braun & Clarke (2006), is a way the themes or patterns of the findings is identified, analysed and reported (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). A thematic content analysis is useful for evaluating open-ended questions and allows the researcher to take the data and break it into smaller bits of content that is then described (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). It is a more “flexible” research tool that allows for extensive detail and is a purely qualitative method of analysis (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). This method is focused on the actual opinions and motives of the participants, the human truths. The “deductive” approach of a thematic analysis is rooted in the evaluation of existing theories, such as the use of the Aaker Brand Identity Planning Model for this study, and allows it to be compared to other data, like the qualitative interview tool used for this study (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

The phases of a thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006) include the following (Vaismoradi et al., 2013):

1. Familiarising with data;

The researcher collected data, via semi-structure in-depth interviews, wrote transcripts of the data, read the data, highlighted the initial findings and then re-read and noted down any new findings.

2. Generating initial codes;

The researcher identified “interesting features” or ideas of the data and divided them into sets (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). These initial ideas included the importance of recognition, visual aspects, linking, emotional themes, functional services, consideration and trustworthiness.

3. Searching for themes;

Here the researcher searched for similar ideas and themes, identified in step 1 and 2, and grouped them into sections. These ideas and themes included the importance of performance, face-to-face meet ups, word-of-mouth, online communication, quality, building not only a working but friendly relationship and satisfaction.

4. Reviewing themes;

With step 4, the researcher reviewed the grouped themes from step 3 and compared them to the initial themes identified in step 1. All emotional feelings and functional benefits were sectioned under these groups. The researcher grouped the themes even more, by location, importance of visuals, recognition, the personality aspect and portrayal of the designer themselves. The researcher recognised the elements important to the participants and recognised the recurring elements between each participant. The researcher noted that even having the participants from different backgrounds; they mostly had the same ideas of graphic designers and experienced a trend of feeling at ease and having their ideas represented visually.

5. Defining and naming themes;

Taking a narrative approach, the researcher then described each finding and defined each theme they had discovered. The themes identified were grouped into the perspectives of the Aaker model, and each identified theme from the participants was sectioned under the 4 Aaker perspectives that may benefit the independent contractor.

6. Lastly, Producing the Report;

The researcher reviewed the past few steps, and fully analysed the themes again, but at the same time compared it with existing literature, the Aaker Brand Identity Model. The researcher interpreted the data and wrote the final narrative report, which can be viewed in Chapter 4. The interpretation was considered under the 4 perspectives of the Aaker model (2002) mentioned in Chapter 2.

The above is how the researcher had applied each step of the thematic content analysis; the identified themes, ideas and findings can be seen in detail in Chapter 4.

### **3.7 Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

Limitations and delimitations of a study include “situations and circumstances” that could or would affect or limit the method of research and the analysis and collection of the data (Baltimore County Public Schools, 2017). Below these limitations and delimitations are mentioned.

#### **3.7.1 Limitations**

Limitations, specifically, is what the researcher is not able to control including influences, shortcomings or certain conditions that can restrict coming up with conclusions for the study (Baltimore County Public Schools, 2017).

In order to answer the research questions, a qualitative research design is most appropriate. As the paradigm chosen, interpretivism, is a qualitative method of doing research, a limitation would be that the findings are not able to be “generalized to the larger population” (Baltimore County Public Schools, 2017). With the sample size being small, it is a non-representative sample.

This mainly means that because the sample is small, the data is not generalizable to the larger population, the sample being prospective clients that wish to start up their own businesses. This limitation means that the findings are not tested with this method to prove whether they represent the opinions of many, or if the findings are due to chance, which could alter the findings of the study. The sampling limitation would be solved at a later stage through further research by selecting a larger sample and focusing on more than 1 type of client of an independent contractor.

Another limitation of the research includes time, because of due dates set by the Higher Education Institution for the Honours research assignment. Therefore the data collected through in-depth interviews is not robust enough or as in-depth as the researcher would like. The time limitation affects the level of depth the study could undergo.

Since the study is conducted by the author, an unavoidable limitation includes a certain degree of subjectivity and would have been more objective if the research had been conducted by 2 or more researchers.

A further limitation includes the research not being funded. Research requires funding. This means all the resources and tools were not available for this study, which influences the size of the sample used, and therefore the depth of the data collected. This limitation concluded that all the research, questions, data collection and analysis was done by one researcher, which could cause a bias with the research.

### ***3.7.2 Delimitations***

Delimitations are choices and boundaries set by the researcher (Baltimore County Public Schools, 2017).

The researcher has limited the sample to the Pretoria South Africa area as this is the location most convenient to the researcher. This location is chosen specifically because of the time limitation specified earlier and the researcher is unable to travel or to identify the specific sample in any other area. This same delimitation is further substantiated by the lack of funds, mentioned earlier as a limitation.

The study is limited to participants between the ages of 25 and 30, that want to start their own business and are willing to use a graphic designer to develop their corporate identity.

Individuals who have their own businesses already are excluded, as well as corporate company clients, individuals that sell their own products and any possible graphic design client other than the sample mentioned above. The results of this study are generalizable, to a limited extent, to the graphic design client base, but it is not generalizable to clients that are not an individual, therefore consist of a corporate team.

## **4. CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter details all findings from the in-depth interview data collection. The full transcriptions can be viewed in Appendix D. These findings are detailed and analysed below by utilising the thematic content analysis method and has helped identifying the answers to the research questions stipulated in Chapter 1. These findings are presented in a narrative format as the data is qualitative.

### **4.1 Findings**

Below, the researcher has analysed the answers to the questions from all 5 participants and the researcher has sectioned it into smaller bits of content that is then described. The researcher has followed the process of a thematic content analysis. These steps included familiarising with the data, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming these themes and the finally generalising them in the report below (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The researcher familiarised themselves with the data by transcribing and highlighting important aspects of the data, the codes were generated by recognising certain themes between the participants, finally the researcher grouped this data in sections relevant to the research and produced the report by defining and naming these themes and referring back to the literature reviewed for this study (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

#### ***4.1.1 The Report***

The below report has been sectioned into themes including general themes, brand as symbol, brand as product, brand as person and brand as organisation. These themes were not only how the questions were structured, but are also the perspectives of the Aaker Brand Identity Planning Model that the researcher wishes to identify if it could help and independent contractor.

##### ***4.1.1.1 General Themes***

Importantly, the researcher identifies that corporate identity is a theme within the questions and that all participants noted its importance for a future business to develop it, and the influence it would have on them choosing a designer.

As mentioned in the literature review and by the participants, corporate identity is an important aspect for a graphic designer specifically as it represents them and their level of skill. Participant A specifically mentioned how you need a corporate identity to “identify the business”, while Participant B noted that “no-one will know what the business is, what they do...You won’t be able to get a feel for the business”.

With regards to independent contracting, 4 out of 5 participants mentioned it is more difficult for an individual to get established and in fact “more important”, as mentioned by Participant A, C, D and E. Participant A mentioned it would be “more difficult to become established” as and not trusted as easily. “There are already a lot of 1 person businesses out there and they all need a corporate identity, otherwise they would not be able to function”, Participant B declared.

An important aspect seen in the transcripts is also that all participants described the identity as a feeling that they would have of a company, feelings that the identity could evoke for them. This theme was identified over various answers for various questions during the interview. Participant C mentioned that recommendations of the services would also come easier if there were a type of personal attachment to the brand and relationship development aspect with the freelancer.

Brand to all the participants meant visual aspects you could recognise, participant B mentioned it is “something you look at, see who it belongs to” a “symbol”. Participant C felt it was visual, but not only visual, it is also how the “business is run”, meaning other sensual aspects like touch, taste and sounds.

The participants, specifically 4 out of 5 of them, understood brand as a way everything from feeling to visual aspects would fit together and how they would be remembered and seen as different from competitors. Participant E instead felt it was “when you think about a company”, what you could recall.

3 of the 5 participants identified that business now is not about the company itself anymore, but rather more about the individual they deal with, what they feel they get from the company; honesty, transparency and overall what they know about them. Participant B mentioned that all people are actually businesses when they offer you a product or service. These general themes are important to mention as the feelings identified, the participants understanding of brand and the importance of the individual are all themes present in general brand identity to allow for the brand to have an essence and build brand equity (Aaker, 2014).

#### **4.1.1.2 Brand as Product**

An important perspective of brand as product is identifying the services clients wish to receive from the brand; it is about the problems it could solve for the individual and identifying if the clients would find it important where the independent contractor comes from (Aaker, 2014).

The aspects identified that could be problems for the participants were mostly functional aspects like websites, clothing, logos, labels and a few other mentioned visual aspects. These aspects are mentioned commonly between all 5, some more specific to their industry. Participant E mentioned sourcing of printing was a functional aspect they found important, the make their lives a bit easier and less complicated. Identifying that they have problems a freelancer could solve for them concludes that this perspective of the model could be beneficial for an independent contractor.

Themes identified that were not functional were their ideas of becoming recognisable, building a relationship with the designer on a working and a personal level, the feeling of safety and the relief of stress they would not otherwise be able to relieve. All participants found these were emotional benefits they could gain from using a designer. Participant C mentions that they would feel a sense of “satisfaction and completion”. This can be assumed that, by being able to provide these individuals with both functional and emotional benefits, the product perspective of the Brand Identity Planning model could possibly help clients feel more secure and essentially more willing to use the independent contractor’s services.

An essential part of what makes all the participants trust and choose the independent contractor includes functional and personal attributes. Mentioned by all the participants, the quality of the work and having the designer respect their opinions and deadlines. This was a crucial aspect the designer needed to portray to them. Participant A specifically mentioned “quality service, reasonable price and within a reasonable time frame”. Multiple participants, specifically 4 of the 5, mentioned that the designer required a confidence about themselves, their skills and the work they could provide for them and most importantly, a confidence in the specific projects they request. Participant C said that interacting with the designer was very import, the Participant referred to “feedback sessions” that would make them feel more comfortable with the service.

The brand as product perspective is important to portray as it explains to possible clients what is possible if the use your brand instead of competitors (Hadi, 2007).

#### **4.1.1.3 Brand as Person**

Since all participants came from different industries including business, politics, media and self-employed, their opinions of personality related aspects and relationship aspects differed immensely. 2 participants required serious professionalism, quality and business etiquette, while the other 3 had a deeper focus on the creative, “out-of-the box” and a focus on building not only a working relationship, but a friendly relationship. This essentially confirms that “1-size-does-not-fit-all”. This is confirmed in the Aaker Brand Identity Model, the brand should identify the audience they wish to cater to, as this may influence different individuals in different ways (Aaker, 2014).

The amount of experience a designer has was important to 2 of the participants, but not nearly as important to them as the personality and the visual work of the independent contractor. The 3 other participants mentioned they would focus on the visual portfolio, rather than their references.

All participants required visual affirmation of their mentioned skills and services to fully know if they would even consider the designer, but 2 participants noted the reviews and past experience would influence their choices immensely. Largely, after considering the designers services, their first face-to-face meet up was an essential part of all the participants’ willingness to trust or use them. These face-to-face meets were not important to be physical meet-ups, 3 participants mentioned video calling to them would be just as effective. Participant E specifically noted that “people like to interact with people”, this alone determining the Brand as Person perspective is essential for the clients, this way they can relate.

The “friendly” personality aspect was also mentioned by all participants regularly during the interviews.

All participants mentioned knowing the individual behind their work is important, this way they can understand the individual and also know that the designer will understand them and their required work. Corporate companies, as mentioned by 3 of the participants, had a cold and distant aspect to them. That to them is not as appealing as being able to build an understanding with a freelancer, but importantly still having a deep focus on the work.

#### **4.1.1.4 Brand as Organisation**

Participants, 4 of the 5, commonly mentioned during various questions that referrals, reviews and word-of-mouth, is partly the first aspects they would consider to use a designer, if those resources were not available, the freelancers presence online is very important, as all participants mentioned this would be their first option if they had no reference to work from.

The local vs. global perspective of brand as organisation essentially determines your client base, where you are situated and how it is important in your clients mind (Aaker, 2014). 3 participants require a face-to-face connection with the designer, Participant E mentioned that the reason for this is that communication is more than just verbal, but also visual, especially body-language and facial expressions. Minimum, specifically 2 participants required direct face-to-face, some mentioned video calling and specifically Skype would be able to assist them to overcome the pure textual barrier.

With regards to location specifically, 3 out of 5 participants would require a local designer. 2 Participants noted that they would only consider international if either they had a stunning referral or found a specific element of their work appealing to their business goals. Participant C mentioned that they might buy a logo they found represented their idea specifically from an international designer, but other than that they would not consider it.

Competitors for a freelancer, as discovered by interviewing these participants, include large graphic design companies, small design studios, online logo and website generators and then in-house design teams. Only 2 participants identified new competitors other than the 2 competitors mentioned by the researcher, and both were new ideas, website generators and in-house design. Identifying these competitors is a strong element in developing and identity, as these may greatly affect the difference the visual image needs to have to gain attention (Aaker, 2014).

#### **4.1.1.5 Brand as Symbol**

All participants noted that corporate identity was a visual aspect they felt identified the business “that people know who you are”, as mentioned by Participant A.

The visual aspect is an important perspective of the Aaker Brand Identity Model, as mentioned in the literature review, the brand seen as a symbol is about the visuals and the importance of “recognition and recall” (Hadi, 2007). The recognition theme was not only common for all participants in identifying brands today, identifying the designer, but it was also an essential part of their personal goals, their identity.

Visually, the appearance of a graphic designer’s corporate identity was essential to all participants to even consider the designer. Participant A mentioned “if they can design themselves, then I can expect that they could design my work as well”. Participant B mentioned “it influences you without you even knowing it”. The other participants confirmed this statement by saying a lot of what you decide on visually is determined subconsciously, not deliberately.

Perceptually, all participants have the idea that subconscious choice would be a major aspect in choosing a creative independent contractor. They would subconsciously, rarely deliberately, identify aspects of their likes and their personality in a brand. That would not only be something they could determine through that the work that will be done, but it would be something they like and enjoy. All participants feel this personality aspect could boost the work the designer does and then communicate their personal message to their client base even better than if they were to use a studio or a graphic design firm. Personal attachments to the visuals are a great influencer for all these participants.

With regards to the brand heritage, 4 out of 5 participants wish that the independent contractor have a section on their media sources regarding themselves, their influencers and who they are as an individual. Participants mentioned that this would be relatable and would be a factor that could greatly influence their choice of designer, with regards to this, only 1 participant disagreed. Participant B said “it should not be too personal...it should be vague, to the point”. Participant A, however, said that it “would be nice” to know “who they are and where they come from, but only to the extent that it influences what they do”. 4 of the 3 of the 5 Participants want it to be a short “about” section. Participant D specifically said they would want to know if they could “have a beer with this person”, so the more they could know about them, the better. This greatly increases the importance of this perspective of the Brand Identity Model, as most clients, derived from the participants’ answers, will expect a story about the freelancer that they feel they could relate to and also possibly build a working relationship with.

## 4.2 Trustworthiness

Reliability is a way to assess the quality of data collected (LAERD Dissertation, 2012). Reliability within this study was ensured by the pre-test described earlier. The interview pre-test allows for errors and misinterpretations to be identified and fixed before the real interviews with the selected sample takes place and the data used for the research is collected. This ensures that if the interviews were to be sent out to different individuals or again at a later stage, the questions would not be interpreted differently (LAERD Dissertation, 2012).

Within a qualitative study the more “obscure” concept of trustworthiness is introduced instead of focusing on reliability (Statistic Solutions, 2017). Trustworthiness in qualitative research is about establishing 4 dimensions including that the research findings are “credible, transferable, confirmable and dependable” (Statistic Solutions, 2017).

1. Credibility refers to the “truth” of the findings of the research (Statistic Solutions, 2017).

As the research, due to the limitation of time and funding, was conducted by one researcher, a form of bias can easily slip through. The researcher has kept this in mind while researching, collecting and analysing the data for this study. The researcher focused on the quality of the data and the depth available, ensuring to not skew perspectives or the quantity collected.

In order for a qualitative study to be found credible, the researcher, normally would use analyst triangulation. Analyst triangulation uses another perspective from a different analyst in order to identify the “blind spots” within the research (Statistic Solutions, 2017). For this study, due to the limitation of funding, analyst triangulation is more difficult to approach.

2. Transferability is how “applicable” the findings are to similar situations, contexts, populations and circumstances (Statistic Solutions, 2017).

In order to achieve transferability with this study, the researcher has used “thick description”. Thick description details and describes the research sufficiently and in great detail (Statistic Solutions, 2017).

The researcher ensured to transcribe the data collected from in-depth interviews in great detail and described in the findings report the main themes identified in the data through quotes and specific mentions of participants. This assisted the study and ensured, narratively, no data was overlooked or not described in enough detail.

3. Conformability is the “neutrality” of the findings of the study and confirming that the responses received are of the participants and not the bias of the researcher (Statistic Solutions, 2017).

As mentioned before, with this study, due to the limitation of time and funding, it was conducted by one researcher, therefore a form of bias can easily slip through. The researcher has used what is known as an “audit trail”, and ensured all transcriptions and findings were made reference to (Statistic Solutions, 2017). The rationale to each decision made by the researcher was described in order to ensure the researcher was not bias with the findings or skewed in any way (Statistic Solutions, 2017).

4. Dependability is how possible it would be for another researcher to use the study and reproduce the same or similar findings at a later stage (Statistic Solutions, 2017).

To have the study be dependable the researcher reported on every detail and finding so that another researcher could follow the same process and reach similar results and findings (Statistic Solutions, 2017). This not only makes the research more dependable, but will allow the methods to be understood and seen how effective the Brand Identity Planning Model could be for an independent contractor. researchers to understand the methods and their effectiveness (Statistic Solutions, 2017).

## **5. CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

In the struggling economic climate of South Africa, brands are required to stand out; therefore the research purpose was to evaluate a brand identity planning model for a freelance graphic designer and to determine whether the model may benefit this type of independent contractor. This essentially may help individuals attempting to make a living. Derived from the findings discussed in Chapter 4, the researcher has answered the research questions below as well as discussed the implications of these findings, ethical considerations and finally, the conclusion for this study considering all that has been discussed in this paper.

### **5.1 Concluding Answers to Research Questions**

1. Will a Brand Identity Planning model benefit a creative industry independent contractor within the low South African economic climate?

The answer is yes, because this model may help people to build a relationship with the independent contractor, not only that, but because the SA economic climate is so low, building trust and a working relationship may essentially help the independent contractor to find clients, help clients to find them and, most importantly, keep those clients. With regards to independent contracting, 4 out of 5 participants mentioned it is more difficult for an individual to get established and in fact “more important”, as mentioned by Participant A, C, D and E. All Participants felt that a corporate identity would be essential for any business, as this is how you recall the brands.

2. What would possible clients expect, desire and need from an independent contractor within the creative industry?

It comes down to both functional and emotional benefits. The participants found the quality of work, the portrayal of confidence and creativity essential in their needs and expectations. They require a certain amount of service offerings, including creating an online presence and other forms of design, and that the designer had to have a strong understanding of their needs, wants and requirements, while at the same time have a consideration for timelines and to be honest in their capabilities. This determines that the expectations, desires and needs boil down to quality, respect, honesty and confidence.

These aspects were mentioned by all participants, especially the visual identity, visible skill and visible personality. Participant C found the visual identity the most important aspect of any business “as it is the first contact between the company and its consumer base”.

3. What will gain the attention of clients through the Brand Identity Planning model for an independent contractor?

Not only may this model help an independent contractor gain attention, but they may be more likely to build relationships with the designer. The visual aspects, as confirmed in the findings, are the most important aspect for individuals considering a designer.

It is about their personality, the manner in which they conduct themselves, their portfolio and most importantly their visual identity. 3 Participants mentioned that these attention grabbing elements were not only viewed and judged by them consciously, but also sub-consciously, beyond their own control. All Participants found that they seek to identify their personal likes when choosing a designer, these are the aspects that speak to them and gain their attention.

4. Will an independent contractor require all brand identity perspectives in order to be effective?

The independent contractor, as determined in the findings report, can use all perspectives of the Aaker Brand Identity Model. These perspectives may not only help the client to realise the services the designer can provide, but also what personally makes them more interesting, defines them from their competitors and lastly be able to be remembered in the clients mind. These are all part of the perspectives evaluated and may assist the independent contractor to have brand essence and build brand equity with their clients. Therefore, not only should the independent contractor be able to use these perspectives to their advantage, but it is also essential.

## **5.2 Implications of Findings for Future Practices**

This study may benefit independent contractors, specifically in the creative industry. The research may benefit these individuals by determining the best method of the application of the Aaker Brand Identity Planning Model to their personal brand identity. It may essentially help them brand themselves as individuals and be able to resonate with their possible clients.

The knowledge from this study may help to determine whether it is worth allocating their resources to their brand identity development, or if their services alone may serve their clients' wants and needs.

The research has determined that all these brand perspectives of the Aaker Brand Identity Planning Model (2002) may help an independent contractor, it is important to note that the individual may be required to do their own research in what their specific client base requires and needs from them, this may truly help them to use the model effectively.

### **5.3 Ethical Considerations**

It is important to remain ethical while conducting research. Ethical guidelines protect the individuals, communities and environments involved in a study (Institute of Lifelong Learning, 2017). These guidelines protect against malpractice, harm or manipulation (Institute of Lifelong Learning, 2017).

This researcher has ensured that the participants are considered under the 3 basic principles of ethical research which is consent, confidentiality and avoiding harm to do good (Institute of Lifelong Learning, 2017). Consent is simply informing any individual participating of the objectives and nature of the research in order that they can decide for themselves if they wish to take part (Institute of Lifelong Learning, 2017). Confidentiality means the research will not make specific reference to an individual, in order to protect their privacy (Institute of Lifelong Learning, 2017). The researcher has made it clear to the participants that none of their personal information will be shared due to responding to the interview. To avoid harm and to do good means the research is intended to provide a positive impact (Institute of Lifelong Learning, 2017).

Additional ethical considerations of the participants, with regards to the use of the interview data collection tool, include not asking any personal questions, asking questions that require the participant to include data they do not have or asking questions that require the participant to do difficult types of calculations (Ferber et al., 2017).

The participants also signed an informed consent form, which can be seen in Appendix B. Appendix B includes the empty form, though to keep the research ethical, the names of the participants are not revealed in this paper.

Ethically, the researcher has considered that the research could possibly be biased due to the limitation of funding and time, mentioned in Chapter 3; therefore the researcher has considered methods of data collection and analysis in order to not skew the data to the researchers' perspective. The researcher furthermore describes and reports on each element of the research process to further ensure the trustworthiness of these findings.

## **5.4 Conclusion**

In the struggling economic climate of South Africa, brands are required to stand out; therefore the research purpose was to evaluate a brand identity planning model for a freelance graphic designer and to determine whether the model may benefit this type of independent contractor.

Brand identity helps clarify and differentiate brand elements and patterns. With regards to the creation of a brand and the brand communication, Aaker's Brand Identity Planning Model was determined, in the literature review, to suite the topic best. It allowed the brand aspect of the service based brand to be understood and elaborated on under 4 perspectives; brand as person, organisation, product and symbol. This model also allowed the full unpacking of the brand personality, the type of service and the memorability of the brand.

Freelance graphic design is a subset of independent contracting and offers services to other organisations, and, as discussed, Aaker's model has no difficulty in applying it to the service based industry. Self-employment requires staying up to date with the industry they revolve in. Aaker's model helped to identify the requirements of this industry, but the research paradigm selected interpretivism, has helped to gain subjective opinions and has been used to evaluate Aaker's brand identity planning model and determined its importance and relevance to freelance graphic design, branding the person. The semi-structured interviews conducted allowed the researcher to gain qualitative data in the form of transcripts, then they were analysed and determined, by the answers of the participants, that each perspective of the Aaker Brand Identity Planning Model may assist an independent contractor to brand themselves as an individual. This may help them resonate with a client-base and build strong working relationships. This personal aspect has also been an important selling factor of a freelance graphic designer for the 5 participants as well as the important visual aspects.

The visuals, the symbolic perspective of the Aaker model, was of great importance to this service based creative independent contractor, as not only did the participants believe they judged them sub-consciously with their identity, but also consciously judged their visible skill set in their portfolio.

The way in which information is gathered in the research methodology could make or break the study. The solid foundation of using the qualitative evaluation approach to the research has allowed a full narrative report and analysis of the data collected. The thematic content analysis method was used to analyse the data collected with the in-depth interview research tool. The population sample of individuals planning to start their own businesses was determined by using the purposive sampling method. This method of collecting data has been effectively used to analyse and evaluate findings using the thematic content analysis approach, deducting and comparing the existing theory of the Aaker model.

This study may benefit independent contractors' specifically freelance graphic designers, by determining the best method of the application of the Aaker model to their personal brand identity. The brand identity application has proved to be essential and will now lie in the hands of independent contractors to apply it and make a success. Through utilising the different methods of research, a freelance designers brand may, both visually and theoretically, gain a strong foundation and identity and may help their consumers to resonate with their brand, on a not only a functional, but personal level.

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APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL CLEARANCE FORM



23/10/2017

Dear Carli Bester

ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

Your research proposal and ethical considerations were reviewed by your supervisor and moderated by the campus research panel.

Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns. We hereby provide you with ethical clearance to proceed with your research methodology.

OR

Your research proposal posed the following minor concern:  
Please mention how your research design will address this issue:

In the event of you deciding to change your research methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethical clearance letter will be issued.

We wish you all the best with your research!

Supervisor Name: Althea Fordyce

Supervisor Signature:

Campus Anchor Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Campus Anchor Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 2: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I, the undersigned, confirm that (please tick box as appropriate):

|    |  |                          |
|----|--|--------------------------|
| 1. | I have read and understood the information about the project, as explained by the researcher and described above.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. | I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. | I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. | I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. | The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (e.g. use of names, pseudonyms and the study being anonymous, etc.) to me.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. | I consent to be recorded with audio devices.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. | The use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. | I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the data and if they agree to the terms that have been specified in this form. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. | I, along with the Researcher, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

### Participant:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Name of Participant                      Signature    Date

### Researcher:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Name of Researcher                      Signature    Date

## APPENDIX 3: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### General Questions

1. Do you find corporate identity, i.e. the look of a business, important for a future business?
2. Do you feel this would be important for an independent contractor?
3. What do you think a brand is?

### Brand as Product

1. What aspects of your future business would you need an independent contractor in this creative field to focus on? What problems could they solve for you?
2. What functional benefits would a freelance graphic designer allow for you to achieve?
3. Would a freelance graphic designer be able to help you gain emotional benefits?
4. What would a freelance designer need to do for you in order for you to use them for future projects?
5. What characteristics of the design services would make freelance graphic design appeal to your future business endeavours?
6. Would it be important for you that the freelance designer be situated in close vicinity of you, or would you be open to international or online communications?
7. Do you feel graphic design would add to your product or services value?

### Brand as Organization

1. What attributes would a freelance designer need to have to gain your interest? (Prompts: innovation, creativity, style, time-management skills, high quality, specific values)
2. Do you find it important for the freelance designer to be portrayed as a business or as an individual?
3. In choosing an individual to design your corporate identity, would you prefer a large graphic design company or an individual freelancer? Why? 3 or for answers/reasons?
4. How would you want to learn about the designer and their services (Prompt: website, word-of-mouth, posters, and emails, anything else you can think of)? What media sources would you prefer to find them on?

5. What would make you choose a freelancer above larger graphic design companies or smaller design studios? (Prompts: Would it be lower prices, more personal involvement?)
6. How would you personally choose a designer?
7. If you were not to consider a freelance designer, what type of methods, companies or people would you instead use to develop your corporate identity?

#### Brand as Person

1. How would you describe the ideal graphic designer? (Prompts: Visibility)
2. What type of personality would you wish a designer to portray in order for you to use their services? (Prompts: Approachable, corporate, fun, crazy)
3. What are the personality aspects, or attributes of a business that would cause you to not trust a corporate or independent designer?
4. Is it important how much experience the designer has, or is it all about what you see they can do, or what their brand looks like?
5. When looking for a designer, would you find it important to identify aspects of your personality or likes in their brands personality?
6. Would you want to build a relationship with a freelancer, or simply use their services?

#### Brand as Symbol

1. Would the way a graphic designers brand looks influence your decision in using them as your designer?
2. Would you want a designer to tell you a story about who they are, or instead go have a focus on their different media on the services they can provide for you? (Prompt: Would you want to find out what they are like personally, or would you focus only on what they could provide for you)
3. Would a freelance designer's corporate identity be an important aspect of choosing them to develop yours?
4. Questions to be followed up by, how do you feel about that, why is that important to you, that is interesting can you elaborate, could you give me an example.

## APPENDIX 4: TRANSCRIPTIONS

### Participant A

Researcher (Re): Do you find corporate identity, i.e. the look of a business, important for a future business?

Re: Corporate I being the logo, the letterheads, how it is branded.

Participant A (A): I would say yes, because you need to identify the business. It is important that people know who you are.

Re: Is it important to you as a visual aspect?

A: Yes.

Re: Would you find it important in any other way?

A: I can't say anything else. It is important visually.

Re: Do you feel this would be important for an independent contractor?

A: It is difficult to say, because a company exists outside of the individuals. So, I think it was important in the past, but I would say as time has gone by it has become less important.

Re: Can you provide an example?

A: A lawyers firm, called Savage, Jooste and something and everyone always used them because it was Savage and Jooste, but now people will just go to any lawyer because it is not about the company anymore. Then actually, it is more about the person instead of the company, but I think it is more difficult for the person to become established, or to establish themselves.

Re: Why do you think it is more difficult?

A: Well, it is difficult to say, it is difficult to trust people. I have a business background, so I think of it like this. If you were to hold a company liable, then it would affect the whole company, while and individual only has so much money. Do you understand?

Re: Yes. So, would you say the personality aspect is more important than the identity for the individual?

A: Yes because you choose the business now because of the person instead of the company.

Re: What do you think a brand is?

A: That is a difficult question.

Re: It can be your interpretation of what it is.

A: I need to think about this.

Re: Would you say it is mostly about visuals, or do you think it is also...

A: I would say it is the quality, and the "knowing of" the brand.

Re: So the quality and the things...

A: Yes, the aspects you can recognize of a brand.

Re: What aspects of your future business would you need an independent contractor in this creative field to focus on? What problems could they solve for you?

A: Like a graphic designer?

Re: Yes.

A: Probably the website and to get your brand recognised.

Re: What functional benefits would a freelance graphic designer allow for you to achieve?

A: Marketability, as everything is online so you would need a website. Also the creative things because everything needs to be linked...everything needs to be recognisable. And promotions and advertising.

Re: So that you can get noticed?

A: Yes.

Re: Would a freelance graphic designer be able to help you gain emotional benefits? Personally.

A: If they are a professional yes, if they can advise you and tell you what people won't like and what they will like.

Re: If you could describe what it could make you feel emotionally. Having a professional?

A: It would comfort me knowing someone is making me visible.

Re: Anything else?

A: Well, I would be happy, if I get quality work.

Re: What would a freelance designer need to do for you in order for you to use them for future projects?

A: Quality work and deadlines, how they use their time. Within reason.

Re: Within reason?

A: Say if I know a website takes 1 week, and they take 2 weeks, then I would be unhappy.

Re: So deadlines are important to you?

A: Yes. Or they should give you a proper time frame they will do the work in.

Re: Ok. And they should stick to it.

A: Yes, and also I am not a designer, I do not know how long it should take. But you see, that is also the problem. You can go to 1 and they say it will take a month, but then you go to another 1 and they say it takes 3 days. So you wouldn't know what is really right.

Re: Those 2 time frames, would you expect a different type of quality?

A: No, they should offer the same quality, but I see what you mean. A shorter time might not mean the same quality website. That is why it is difficult.

Re: What characteristics of the design services would make freelance graphic design appeal to your future business endeavours?

A: Quality service, at a reasonable price, and within a reasonable time-frame.

Re: Do you have any examples of what you might expect?

A: Definitely web design and I would say logo design, letterheads, pamphlets, advertisements, however in my profession we aren't allowed to advertise.

Re: Really?

A: Yes. I think they say you put the profession in dispute? Or something like that. No, I mean you disrespect the profession.

Re: So if you think about that, what would you say a graphic designer needs to make sure they do for you?

A: That they keep things confidential. But I would think that is obvious.

Re: Graphic designers tend to publicize their work.

A: Well, I would say they can use my work to build their portfolio, but not use it for a different company, or use it to help a competitor.

Re: Would it be important for you that the freelance designer be situated in close vicinity of you, or would you be open to international or online communications?

A: Well with having Skype, they can really be anywhere, because you can then still have a face-to-face. I just think they shouldn't expect only email communication or just over the phone. Because you need to look at them.

Re: So you would say them being close is not important.

A: Yes, not important, because of Skype. It would be convenient having them close, but because of Skype you can basically get over it.

Re: Do you feel graphic design would add to your product or services value?

A: Yes, because they know what logos and such should look like. They can give you the best option. It is not something anyone can do.

Re: So do you think it could provide your services...

A: ...with a competitive edge? Yes definitely. Like online, with a web page, everyone has it, and everyone Google's. So it won't help if you don't have an internet presence.

Re: What attributes would a freelance designer need to have to gain your interest?

A: I think it would be good word-of-mouth. So someone who has already received good services from them. And that they are professional.

Re: Would it be important that they look creative, seemingly that they can think out of the box?

A: To me, in my brain, it would be more important that they be professional. I don't want them to be casual. I wouldn't be able to take them seriously?

Re: Casual?

A: Like in a jeans and T-shirt. Even though they are creative, they can have blue hair, but still dress professionally. Then I know they are serious.

Re: Do you find it important for the freelance designer to be portrayed as a business or as an individual?

A: See, this comes down to personal, knowing them. When it gets to a company, when 1 person makes a mistake, you also know there are others that could fix it, but then you don't always know who does your work.

Re: So which is better for you?

A: It comes down to the person. How approachable they seem.

Re: In choosing an individual to design your corporate identity, would you prefer a large graphic design company or an individual freelancer?

A: It comes down to the reputation. Because if you could go to a company, it is not definite that they would provide you with what you need, whereas an individual, if they do well, and you can see it, then you would instead use them.

Re: Which would you prefer?

A: In an organisation, you could get more ideas...people could leave, and then you don't get what you were promised anymore. I think it would be easier to go with an individual, because then you will know what you will get. It would be more consistent.

Re: How would you want to learn about the designer and their services (Prompt: website, word-of-mouth, posters, e-mails, anything else you can think of)? What media sources would you prefer to find them on?

A: Internet, Google.

Re: Where would you go.

A: Well I don't know. I would search design and see who comes up first. (laugh) And also maybe good word-of-mouth.

Re: If you were to receive e-mails from them?

A: If I were a business I would like this, but if they were to send it to my personal e-mail I would not like it.

Re: What would make you choose a freelancer above larger graphic design companies or smaller design studios? Personal involvement?

A: Personal involvement definitely. Price would also play a role, in the way that it does not influence the quality of the work. It would also be important to be continuous service. I should be able to get a hold of them if something were to go wrong. That should be easy.

Re: why would that be so important to you, continuity?

A: Because every moment your website for example is down, you would lose clients. If anything "design" is wrong, the possible clients or current clients could go to a competitor for example and then some would not come back.

Re: How would you personally choose a designer?

A: I would look at reviews, have a consultation, get a quote, review portfolio, that's how. And how good their website looks. I would look at everything I would ask them to make for me, to see if they can do it or not.

Re: If you were not to consider a freelance designer, what type of methods, companies or people would you instead use to develop your corporate identity?

A: If not a freelancer, just a big design company.

Re: You wouldn't attempt yourself?

A: No, because I do not know how it works. It would frustrate me more and would cost me more time and effort.

Re: How would you describe the ideal graphic designer? (Prompts: Visibility)

A: I would say, the type of person, they types of things they could do. Importantly, I would want them to be able to honestly tell me about the things they can do, and what they can't do.

Re: Would what they can't do not make you go somewhere else?

A: No, maybe just use someone else for that piece of the project. Maybe get recommendations from them? I would actually respect them and take them more seriously if they tell me that.

Re: Tell you their limitations?

A: Yes. If they are professional, have everything together and know what they are talking about. That's what is important. They must not tumble.

Re: So have a confidence?

A: Yes.

Re: Be able to sell themselves?

A: Yes. And also be prepared, because they can also ask the client what type of things they want, what they want to discuss. I would expect then that they get there with ideas, and not then ask what I want, they should be prepared beforehand.

Re: so it would be important that they come to you with ideas, questions and suggestions.

A: Yes, because it is not like I would know how it should be. That's why you get the designer. To lead you. To give you ideas.

Re: What type of personality would you wish a designer to portray in order for you to use their services?

A: Confidence, honesty about what they can do, within reason be available.

Re: What are the personality aspects, or attributes of a business that would cause you to not trust a corporate or independent designer?

A: I understand that it is a creative profession, but they need to be professional. It is still the job environment. If they ignore you, or they don't stick to deadlines.

Re: Is it important how much experience the designer has, or is it all about what you see they can do, or what their brand looks like?

A: It is important for them to have experience. Because someone who just finished studying won't know how to work. So a few years of experience is important, but it is also about the work. For example, if someone with 10 years of experience doesn't have a lot in their portfolio or any good work, then I would say someone with only 3 years of experience that has a lot in their portfolio, with a lot of ideas is more appealing.

Re: So someone with less experience, with an excellent portfolio would be chosen over someone with more experience with an average portfolio?

A: Yes, but it also depends on their reviews and word-of-mouth.

Re: When looking for a designer, would you find it important to identify aspects of your personality or likes in their brands personality?

A: Yes.

Re: Why?

A: That they do the type of work I want. I understand I don't know how design or the design world works, but I would rather choose someone I can relate to. That can do things I wouldn't be able to do.

Re: Would you want to build a relationship with a freelancer, or simply use their services?

A: The work is more important. If they do good work, then we could have a stronger professional relationship...working relationship.

Re: Would the way a graphic designers brand looks influence your decision in using them as your designer?

A: Yes.

Re: What type of things would trigger you?

A: Well, it is different with everyone. What if it is someone that doesn't like red, and the designers brand is very red, then immediately subliminally they would be turned away. But I don't think you can do anything about it. It depends on who does it, who you choose to do the work, not necessarily someone who is the "top-dog" in the field.

Re: Would you want a designer to tell you a story about who they are, or instead go have a focus on their different media on the services they can provide for you?

A: A bit of both.

Re: So you want a balance of the 2.

A: Yes, because they can say who they are and where they come from, but only to the extent that it influences what they can do. So it doesn't help they write a 2 page story about who they are, but then don't explain what their capabilities are.

Re: Would a freelance designer's corporate identity be an important aspect of choosing them to develop yours?

A: Yes, it is very important, because if they can design themselves well, then I will expect they could design my work well.

Re: Perfect. Thank you for your time.

## **Participant B**

Researcher (Re): Do you find corporate identity, i.e. the look of a business, important for a future business?

Participant B (B): Yes

Re: Why do you say yes?

B: Because it is the whole brand, the identity of a business. Without that, no-one will know what the business is, what they do. You won't be able to get a feel for the business without having a corporate identity.

Re: So it would help to remember them?

B: Yes

Re: Do you feel this would be important for an independent contractor?

B: Yes, there are already a lot of 1 person businesses out there and they all need a corporate identity otherwise they would not be able to function.

Re: What do you think a brand is?

B: A brand is something you look at, you see and know to whom it belongs to. It is an iconic symbol of a product or company.

Re: What aspects of your future business would you need an independent contractor in this creative field to focus on?

B: Branding, web design.

Re: Would these be problems they could solve for you?

B: Yes.

Re: Can you think of anything else? Any examples?

B: No not really.

Re: What functional benefits would a freelance graphic designer allow for you to achieve?

B: Well they can shape the whole idea of your business, to help make other people want to come to your business. They make it important to have that identity for your business. They help make it nice and more memorable.

Re: Would a freelance graphic designer be able to help you gain emotional benefits?

B: A freelancer will help get the work done on a more personal level than if you were to go to a large company for your needs. I think they would be able to have a more personal handle on your work. Which would be more beneficial to the company, but it also depends on what you need.

Re: Would them working for you allow you to personally feel anything? Maybe more at ease?

B: It depends on the quality of the work. If they were not to deliver on what I want, then no, but if I can see their work is what I need or expect, then it would give comfort.

Re: What would a freelance designer need to do for you in order for you to use them for future projects?

B: They would have to do what is asked of them to my expectations.

Re: So would you say their performance or the quality?

B: Performance, yes definitely.

Re: What characteristics of the design services would make freelance graphic design appeal to your future business endeavours?

B: What do you mean?

Re: What aspects of their business would be important to you when choosing them?

B: Reputation is important, but that is not always available. Not all designers will have the experience or frame of reference to work from that they can give you. Maybe they can do everything you want, but you don't know, you wouldn't be able to trust them because they do not have a lot to show you. So I think that is important, to be able to know that what they do and say they can do, they will be able to deliver.

Re: So word-of-mouth and reviews?

B: Yes that would be important.

Re: Would it be important for you that the freelance designer be situated in close vicinity of you, or would you be open to international or online communications?

B: No, I think if they were nearby, if you were able to see them in person. I think that would be better. You would be able to explain yourself better than you would be able to online.

Re: So would you think video calling is not personal enough?

B: Well it depends, I don't think...depending on what you need. I mean if you are a large business or you want something very specific it might be difficult to explain what you want and to express yourself over a video call. So a personal meeting would be better. But in other cases, if you need something small, like a menu, it could be done over the phone or like you said a video call. Larger projects face-to-face would be better.

Re: Do you feel graphic design would add to your product or services value?

B: Well yes, I mean, as I said it goes back to the whole image of your business. If your unique on that whole image, you would be unique on your whole business, and I mean, if you don't have that it would not be very smart.

Re: What value would it add?

B: Well the visual aspects are important. That is what you need them for, you want it to be visually appealing. What other aspects?

Re: What would people feel about your work?

B: Well other than visual I don't think they can add anything else.

Re: What attributes would a freelance designer need to have to gain your interest? Things you would see, would the need to be creative or professional?

B: Well I would say a balance between the 2 is important. You can't have...I mean I wouldn't trust a person in a full business suit, but I also wouldn't trust a guy in flip-flops and shorts. A balance, like smart-casual, you want that in-between. You don't want a business person to do your design and you also don't want someone that is not professional to do your design. The trust aspect comes from that for me. The way they dress and present themselves is very important. They should take pride in their work and also handle you professionally.

Re: Do you find it important for the freelance designer to be portrayed as a business or as an individual?

B: Well, every individual is also a business. So I think going as a business is the best route. Because either way you are still a business, even though you are doing business by yourself, it is still your business. A business is important, I think, and it sort of gives the consumer more comfort, to know that it might be one person business, but it is a business and I think that core image affects your mind.

Re: So essentially you could trust them more if they were portrayed as a business?

B: Yes.

Re: In choosing an individual to design your corporate identity, would you prefer a large graphic design company or an individual freelancer?

B: It all depends if you know the person. But as I said earlier, if you don't have a frame of reference, a company would be an easier choice. They would give you people that know what they are doing. That is a good option, but it depends on if you can trust the individual or not, can you see that they can deliver on what they say they can.

Re: So it comes down to reviews and what you hear and see?

B: Yes.

Re: How would you want to learn about the designer and their services? What media sources would you prefer to find them on? Your starting from scratch, where would the first place be that you would look for them?

B: Google. Graphic designer, in the area I live. That would be the easiest for me. Maybe go to their website or other review sites. Maybe have reviews or testimonials on their website.

Re: Would you like to receive an e-mail?

B: No, I would not be open to receive an email from a random person. It would be spam to me, an irritation. I wouldn't notice it even.

Re: What would make you choose a freelancer above larger graphic design companies or smaller design studios?

B: Cost, if it were more affordable. It all depends, most large companies wouldn't do it the way you want it. That personal bridge, you lose that. In that sense a freelance designer would be better, because you could have them execute your work more specifically to what you specifically want.

Re: How would you personally choose a designer?

B: Appearance, communication, straightforward. Have a straightforward and honest relationship about what they can do and so on. Yes, that is important to me. How they approach you.

Re: If you were not to consider a freelance designer, what type of methods, companies or people would you instead use to develop your corporate identity?

B: Well, the only other choices would be a studio or larger company. The cost then is the largest factor, but I don't see there being any other choice really.

Re: Would you consider doing it yourself?

B: No

Re: How would you describe the ideal graphic designer? You mentioned professional, upfront and honest? Is there anything else?

B: No that covers it?

Re: What type of personality would you wish a designer to portray in order for you to use their services? Corporate, professional, creative or fun?

B: I would say again it should be a balance of traits. You don't want it to be too corporate or too fun. It also depends what you are looking for, some people want to find "fun".

Re: What are the personality aspects, or attributes of a business that would cause you to not trust a corporate or independent designer?

B: Unprofessional, not punctual and also saying they would do something on a certain time and not delivering on that. All of that would cause me not to use them again.

Re: Is it important how much experience the designer has, or is it all about what you see they can do, or what their brand looks like?

B: Well, experience is always important, it is the reference that someone who doesn't know anything on what the graphic designer has to offer, to help them see what they are capable of. If they have a way to show what their capabilities are, without having the experience, like examples of their work, then its fine. Then it depends on the way they present themselves.

Re: When looking for a designer, would you find it important to identify aspects of your personality or likes in their brands personality?

B: In a sense I think you do that subconsciously, but I think there are a certain few things that you look for when you want to get a graphic designer to do the work for you. I think mostly it will depend on exactly what you have done. I do not think personal should influence the decision, except the whole subconscious part

Re: Would you want to build a relationship with a freelancer, or simply use their services?

B: Well build a relationship yes, if you don't they will not exactly do what you want them to. They won't know exactly what you want. So the relationship is important, even if it is just in a business capacity, you need to build a working relationship with that person to allow them to understand what you want done and how you want it done.

Re: So more a working relationship?

B: Yes, I don't want to employ someone to be my friend. It can be an informal business relationship, it doesn't have to be all corporate. But you want them to be friendly and helpful and communicate in a friendly and helpful manner.

Re: But with a focus on the work.

B: Yes

Re: Would the way a graphic designers brand looks influence your decision in using them as your designer?

B: Yes, from that you would be able to see if they have what you are looking for.

Re: Why is this important to you?

B: Well, you could see how their style lines up with your own, and the way they would do things. You could see if it is how you would like it.

Re: Would you want a designer to tell you a story about who they are, or instead go have a focus on their different media on the services they can provide for you?

B: Well I think, I would prefer to have an about section, it should also not be too personal. It can be vague, but it should be straightforward, but to the point. It helps if you want the designer to be more hands on. You would want a bit of that personal insight. But not too much.

Re: So you would also want the designer to strike a balance between the 2.

B: Yes.

Re: Would a freelance designer's corporate identity be an important aspect of choosing them to develop yours?

B: Yes I mean, we have talked about this, you might not know the person or the work they can do. But obviously the identity they have already established helps. It influences without you knowing it. So it is important. You could say it might not affect you, but if you place a person with a broader corporate identity next to one without, you would obviously choose the one with. Even though they might provide the same services to the same quality and everything, the person with the better identity would be the obvious choice.

Re: Would they be more approachable or trustworthy to you?

B: Not necessarily that, I mean it is just, you would be able to relate more to that or it would appeal better.

Re: Perfect. Thank you for your time.

### **Participant C**

Researcher (Re): Do you find corporate identity, i.e. the look of a business, important for a future business?

Participant C (C): Yes 100%

Re: Why would you say it is important?

C: Because most people, I don't...I try not to do this, but most people buy with their eyes first. Visual representation is what you see, almost off the "get go". It is also why there is no such thing as love at first sight, there is such a thing as lust at first sight, unless she is wearing a very very unique cosplay that you find attractive, then at least you can say "at least I know she likes that thing", but other than, almost all of your interactions are visual. Sound comes after that, touch probably before, but not as important as vision. For human beings, vision is probably the most important sense that they have and therefore coming into contact with corporate...well any identity, pretty much that is what is going to hit them first, then maybe the stats or whatever.

Re: Okay.

C: On vary rare occasions it would be word-of-mouth first. If anyone sees a logo, a friend might say "I know this very interesting grave digging company where they do great grave digging and you should probably follow them". Then maybe sometimes, even if they have a garbage logo it doesn't matter, but 99% of the time I am going to say visual representation is the most important thing for a company when it comes into contact with its consumer base, because it is the first thing to come into contact between consumer and company.

Re: Do you feel this would be important for an independent contractor?

C: Yes

Re: Why would you say? For the same visual reasoning?

C: Pretty for the same thing. An independent contractor is still somebody who is trying to sell themselves, and therefore they need to have it.

Re: Would you say it is more important?

C: It is more important to prepare it right than for an established brand. Some established brands have garbage logos, but because they are so established people already know what that looks like and that looks like, etcetera.

Re: What do you think a brand is?

C: A brand is, I don't know, what I would say, is the identity that a product or company or service provider has. It is visual representation, it is also franchisee, I mean, the manner in which a business is run, I would assume. Because I also know that with franchise groups they would give specific instructions on how to set up the store, where things should be, what the décor should be, what sort of specials you are allowed to have, etcetera.

Re: So do you think a brand is just visual or also as mentioned more?

C: It is more than that; brand is more than that, because if I think about a brand like Coke, if I think of a can of Coca Cola, it has to taste like Coca Cola. They do actually taste different, a can of Coke actually tastes different in Britain, but you still know it is Coke, because it still has the same basic taste of Coke. So I think brand is different, it is not just

the visual identity, it is a bunch of other things that go with it, I would say. Like for example the Samsung brand, you get sounds that are Samsung sounds, the same with Apple. They want people to go “Oh that’s an Apple phone” and that is one example of where sound is being used for brand identity. I think it is horrible and a brainwashing mechanism.

Re: What aspects of your future business would you need an independent contractor in this creative field to focus on? What problems would they solve for you?

C: Well for a designer, what big problems they would be able to solve for me is how to make something visually appealing to a wide consumer base, because it is all nice and good for you, and your friends to look at things and say things like “Oh that appeals to me”. Where a graphic designer would say this already exists and also, I don’t know if graphic designers actually do this, but they will compare their designs with market ready or brands that already exist and make sure that they are not too similar so that people would get confused. I suppose that is another service they would do and an important thing. Then set-up the brand identity, hopefully you would have conversations with the graphic designer, tell them what sort of vibe you’re going for, what your product is about and if they can take that and put it into a visual aspect that tells the consumer what you want to tell them.

Re: What functional benefits would a freelance graphic designer allow for you to achieve?

C: Functional benefits?

Re: Yes

C: Well, maybe I got ahead of myself, but a functional benefit would be getting across to the consumer what you are about and like the brand identity. The designer needs to communicate what you want unique about your brand to the customer base.

Re: Would a freelance graphic designer be able to help you gain emotional benefits?

C: Yes, most definitely.

Re: What type?

C: It would let me know, actually it would make me feel safe, I suppose. Safe in the knowledge that I know my...whatever I have decided on or the graphic designer has designed for me is reaching my client base the way I want it to reach my client base. It also take-off pressure and take away stress, especially if you are an independent contractor and your services are not insanely expensive or affordable for small scale businesses. Then it also give me that, sort of, ease of knowledge that I don't have to design my own logo, here is somebody that I can afford and do it well. Better than I could have done it. And satisfaction! Especially if you see your logo on a product I suppose, then you see that is the product I envisioned then you feel satisfaction and completion, one could reason. "Ah my life is complete. I have produced product A and B and it looks like I thought it would look".

Re: What would a freelance designer need to do for you in order for you to use them for future projects?

C: Well, I think it is so strange to say, but being friendly is very important when you are interacting with clients. So, having a designer who, especially a designer who belittles ideas, is probably not going to... I wouldn't recommend them to someone I know. If I had ideas and I wanted to change things and the designer belittled the ideas, I would be like "cool, that's fine" and pay for the services they have provided and find someone who...because the whole point is getting your ideas to the customers, but you also want the designers input and stuff like that. So if a designer interacts with me, gives me advice, takes my advice and works together with me on my brand identity and then gives me a cool brand identity, or when I look at it at the end of the day and say "this is what I wanted" then I am happy to recommend. Not only "this is what I wanted" but also "this is different from other peoples stuff" and it is my unique...completely our thing.

Re: So working together is a big aspect.

C: Yes, there has to be a lots of, what do you call it, cross-communication, interactive communication...whatever the word.

Re: What characteristics of the design services would make freelance graphic design appeal to your future business endeavours?

C: Well, all of the design for the brand. I don't know how it works actually. I don't know if designers specialize. With me, wanting to start a small-scale business, I would like a designer that could design logo, slogan, font, all of the visual design of the product packaging. I would need the designer to be able to do everything. Well I wouldn't need that, I mean if they did all the basic stuff and then maybe I could find another designer to do the other stuff then again as a small-scale business you wouldn't want to pay many different people. It is nice if one person has like a complete package that you can like access. And also definitely be able to do feedback sessions with me, I think that is very important. I would require feedback sessions. I wouldn't be able to give them the idea once off, we will have to talk about it afterwards again, after the initial phase is complete, once I have given them the idea and again and again and again, until the ideas work.

Re: Specific to the feedback sessions, would you enforce face-to-face?

C: I don't think enforced face-to-face is necessary with today's technology. I think it is a very good thing, personal contact is great, but then again that is dependent on the person. If I am a shut in type of person, and I have a great idea, but I don't really want to speak to people, it would be much easier for me to text, or to Skype. So I think it is important for the designer to be able to meet face-to-face, but it is not necessary, if you have Skype you can really have clients from all over the world. You are not restricted anymore, but if the designer wants to get clients from their local area, they should definitely be able to meet face-to-face especially if they start out with small-scale businesses. Small scale business are going to want to meet you face-to-face.

Re: Like you just mentioned about local area, it leads into my next question. Would it be important for you that the freelance designer be situated in close vicinity of you

C: For me personally yes.

Re: So you wouldn't be open to international or online communications?

C: Only if I really really really loved their work and I had seen it somewhere else where it is like insanely good.

Re: So you want exceptional, then international design would be okay?

C: Even then actually I will not be open to it, because again if I am starting a small scale business, personally I would want to have physical contact with them. If it were fun stuff for myself I would be open to it, but now I would be putting my money and business on the

line, then I would want local. I want to talk to them face-to-face, discuss my project at the very least, at the absolute very least, a Skype session. I don't think I will at all be able to use just e-mail. I might if someone designed a logo very close to what I want, I would ask to buy it via e-mail. Other than that, I would need feedback sessions and face-to-face.

Re: Do you feel graphic design would add to your product or services value?

C: Definitely, I think any business that is interacting with a consumer base, requires that.

Re: What kind of value could it add?

C: The main thing is it could communicate the way I see my product and what I want to show customers what I am offering in a visual format. So a customer would be able to look at it, and say "I kind of understand the.." maybe even all the way up to " I understand the philosophy of the business" or whatever, you know some of them have integrity, fidelity or whatever. The person could go "oh they are very professional" you could see immediately from the logo, so that would be the most important thing for me.

Re: So is professionalism important to you?

C: Well not exactly. Not with specific to the logo design, but the designer must be professional yes. What was the question again?

Re: Do you find professionalism important?

C: Oh, yes, yes. However you interact, not necessarily the designs.

Re: What attributes would a freelance designer need to have to gain your interest? So for example, would you need to see that they are creative or professional?

C: Well yes both of those. From a business perspective they would need to be communicable, if I send them something I would like for them to reply within a 24 hour period. So they need to be timely in their responses. Polite. But if I was just cruising the net looking for a designer, then I would like to see a body of their work, that would be important. If I emailed or phoned them I would need them to be courteous and responsive. They need to discuss with me the products and stuff like that.

Re: Do you find it important for the freelance designer to be portrayed as a business or as an individual?

C: I think I would rather have them be more upfront and say they are one person, because if I had interacted with them and had the idea they were an entire business and I found out it wasn't I would immediately drop them. However if I arrived at their advert or their page and they said "I am an independent designer, I do XYZ, here is my portfolio", then even if I was look for a design studio or something more ambitious, I might still have a look at their work and say "wow this is great". But if they say they are a studio and I go meet with them and they are not a studio, then they are probably going to lose me as a client. Studio implies that there is a group of individuals working together.

Re: So when you said ambitious, do you think a design studio would be able to offer you more than an individual?

C: Yes, if there is a group of people working on my project, of course they can, or well they could at least do it in a shorter time-span. But also again, if it is one designer then they can understand the whole thing at once and they won't need to have, it would probably be faster for one designer to do medium to small sections of work, but again if you are doing an entire 100 page catalogue and you want to get it out within a month, then you are going to be hard-pressed for one designer to do everything for you. I think it is just going to be difficult for them. I would select it based on what I wanted to accomplish. If I wanted like a 100 page catalogue, I would probably use a design studio. If a wanted a logo, branding and overall concept design, probably one is better actually because then it doesn't get lost between a team of people. I think a team of people does often cloud like core goals. Personally again, it's just my own opinion.

Re: In choosing an individual to design your corporate identity, would you prefer a large graphic design company or an individual freelancer?

C: For me, I wouldn't even be looking, I wouldn't even know if I am looking for a graphic design group, studio or a freelancer. I would literally just type in graphic design on the internet and see what I get. I would probably actually wiki first "How to choose a graphic designer". Then I would go and look and then they would probably say something like "scale of your project, how much sort of personal contact do you want". Because that is another problem with the design...a big firm, there is going to be less personal contact that

you have with a designer and even if you re-use the firm it is still going to be colder and more distant, I personally feel. I think it is like that generally when you interact with large companies. You are just another number, but if it is an individual designer, you are literally their lifeline to money so they want to interact with you on a personal level, they want to make sure everything is golden. Big companies will say “here’s the numbers, here’s the facts, we can do a lot, but we can’t do it on a personal level”. There are obviously companies in the world that don’t want that, some do want to foster a personal relationship with their clients, and I think most companies do actually try that, but as far as I am concerned, generally interacting with larger companies I feel that I am getting less personal service. Regardless of how much personal experience and professionalism they have.

Re: You mentioned earlier that you would be browsing the net looking for a designer. Is that the main way you would go about looking for one?

C: Yes.

Re: How would you want to learn about the designer and their services? What media sources would you prefer to find them on?

C: Word-of-mouth is another important part. Generally word-of-mouth is quite important in the small scale businesses as well. You want people to tell other people about your product in the same circles they travel in. The only problem is today the internet exists as well. Billboards are also good if you want like local, otherwise it’s the internet.

Re: What would make you choose a freelancer above larger graphic design companies or smaller design studios? You mentioned earlier it would be more personal.

C: I would probably have a look at their work. I assume they would design their own website, so I would look at the functionality, if I was going to use them for a website. Functionality isn’t that big if I was going to look for a logo or branding. Then I would definitely look at the way the website is designed and any art they have done on the website. That would pretty much be my first check and then I would check what sort of service they offer after that. If I see that they are in my sort of style, then I would check what services they offer, I think.

Re: Is this how you would you personally choose a designer?

C: Yes, pretty much.

Re: If you were not to consider a freelance designer, what type of methods, companies or people would you instead use to develop your corporate identity?

C: An advertising firm probably. The only other thing I can think of off the fly, I would say “I want to develop my corporate identity, who could possibly do that?” Advertising firm if it is not a graphic designer.

Re: If you couldn't afford it, what other avenues would you use?

C: I would probably go to a design school and see if any students were willing to do it for money. I would go to a design school and ask them permission, or I would post it at the University. If I were not to use a freelancer or design studio, which I realise now I have been calling an advertising firm, which is probably a whole different thing.

Re: How would you describe the ideal graphic designer?

C: For myself? Professional, but with a quirky side. I would want something different so quirky or odd. Something must attract that is more than just a sleek, you know the typical sleek professional look. There are a dozen of those and I would like something unique.

Re: What type of personality would you wish a designer to portray in order for you to use their services? Corporate, professional, creative or fun?

C: More creative looking, it depends who is looking, but for me, for my purposes, I would not want them to look too professional. I would rather have something quirky or interesting about them. I would like them to be professional, open and communicative.

Re: What are the personality aspects, or attributes of a business that would cause you to not trust a corporate or independent designer?

C: Tardiness, if they are missing deadlines that is a problem. Basically lack of communication, if they are not vocal. I don't want them to over sell themselves. I like people that are honest, I appreciate it more. So if somebody says to me, say I went to a designer and I said “ I want XYZ” and they said “ XYZ? I can do all of that. I am the best at

it. You are going to be so impressed by what I make” that is going to immediately put me off. I want people to be confident in what they can offer, but I want them to know what they can offer.

Re: So they should know their limitations.

C: Yes, they should know what their weaknesses are and what their strengths are.

Re: Is it important how much experience the designer has, or is it all about what you see they can do, or what their brand looks like?

C: For me it is not important about their experience. If I can see that their previous work is good, it's the style of work that I want and, the only time it would be necessary for experience is if I had hard deadlines and regular good service delivery was important.

Re: When looking for a designer, would you find it important to identify aspects of your personality or likes in their brands personality?

C: I think people often do that. I don't know if I would necessarily needs aspects of myself in their brand. That is pretty much the only way you can go, if you are just looking at their image, that's something you would need, something that matches you.

Re: Would you want to build a relationship with a freelancer, or simply use their services?

C: If I was doing a one shot, I would not care about building a relationship, if I was planning on building my business, especially if I was planning to add products, then I would want to build a permanent relationship with the designer. I think that is very very important if I want to build product continuity with small scale businesses that are just starting out. If you don't have a whole department doing that, then a relationship with a single designer would be important. They also get used to the manner that you communicate in, then it's easier for you to...then you don't have to go through so many revisions, because now the know. So if you say “ want a colour more brighter” then they understand from what you had said before.

Re: So you would use the relationship to develop an understanding.

C: Yes. Building a relationship depends on how long you will need them to design stuff for you.

Re: Would the way a graphic designers brand looks influence your decision in using them as your designer?

C: For me yes. It wouldn't be the make or breaker. I would take other designs they have made, I would speak to them, but it is one of the most important parts.

Re: What would you say be the first thing you notice?

C: The logo, then their name.

Re: Would you want a designer to tell you a story about who they are, or instead go have a focus on their different media on the services they can provide for you?

C: I would want to know who they are and what they could offer that's different. Services are important, but I think I would check who they are and what they offer and what makes them different and what sort of business they would want to run.

Re: Would that add a personality aspect that you could relate to?

C: Yes! It would definitely help me trust them more.

Re: Would a freelance designer's corporate identity be an important aspect of choosing them to develop yours?

C: For me yes, 100%

Re: Perfect. Thank you for your time.

## **Participant D**

Researcher (Re): Do you find corporate identity, i.e. the look of a business, important for a future business?

Participant D (D): Definitely, especially, not even in today's world, like even in the last 100 years every business has had a corporate identity. Whatever it is, people buy with their eyes and differentiate you by the way you look from your competitors.

Re: Do you feel this would be important for an independent contractor?

D: I think so definitely. I think it is more difficult for an independent contractor, especially starting out, because you also want to differentiate yourself from others. So I think starting out you would want to kind of go into a different direction than them and still look professional even though you are starting out independently.

Re: What do you think a brand is?

D: Like a cow brand (laughs)? I don't know, I think a brand is your entire "deal". So it is how you make people feel, how they think about you, how they interact with you, how they talk about it to other people, kind of how they experience your brand, it involves your logo, or the feeling you get or the style you have that is your brand. And everything you do is kind of how everything fits. I think a brand is about how to keep everything you have together that makes sense in your company, in your business. That is your brand.

Re: What about a brand is important to you?

D: I think it should just be relevant to what you do. It doesn't have to be, I have seen brands with logos that doesn't have anything to do with the brand. The most important thing of a brand is that you should understand it and know what you are doing with it for whatever reason it is.

Re: What aspects of your future business would you need an independent contractor in this creative field to focus on? What problems could they solve for you?

D: The designer? Well I guess it depends on what the designer does and what you expect from them. Because sometimes, if you know the person that could help you out, if you could just hire the designer, you would only expect them to carry out what you want. You would tell them what you need in terms of your logo or website or clothing or whatever you basic thing you have in mind, and they would come up with something that is close to what you want, and you pay them money and they do their job. I guess it depends on how you know the person. Because if you have a relationship with someone, designers are usually creative people so they would also be able to help you and advise you.

Re: What functional benefits would a freelance graphic designer allow for you to achieve?

D: I think it would just make you come across as more professional. If everything, your whole corporate identity and everything you have, just looks good and looks professional it just already makes it seem like you know what you are doing. If you make it yourself, it can be good, it really can be, but people can always see what's the difference between something you whipped together yourself and something that was professionally made for you.

Re: Why is professionalism important for you?

D: I think it is to have people trust your brand. I mean if I want to purchase or work with someone I kind of want to see that they have an idea of what they're doing. Because 9 out of 10 times I am probably going to be spending money, so if they look professional it will make me feel more comfortable spending that money with them.

Re: Would a freelance graphic designer be able to help you gain emotional benefits?.

D: Emotional benefits? Well I suppose, emotional benefits could be peace of mind maybe. It could make you a bit more calm about what you are doing, it could make you feel a bit more at ease. Knowing that whatever you are doing is in good hands.

Re: What would a freelance designer need to do for you in order for you to use them for future projects?

D: I guess it would depend on, obviously, their first work. Like if at first it does not look that great, then I am kind of put off to go ahead. I mean it is your decision to use them or not. No-one is forcing you. If you work nicely together, you understand each other and it looks cool, it looks great and it works for what your brand is and it is what you want to do, then you can move forward. I mean why would you go look for someone else and go through that trouble again if you already understand each other and they have done a good job.

Re: So would you say it is the first impression of their work or would that be the first impression of what their identity looks like?

D: I think it is a little bit of both, but for me especially it would be for their work. Because I am going to judge you on, not what you have always done before, I am going to look at

that to hire you for the first time, or even consider you the first time. When I see what you have done for me, that is going to be the yes or no for me and how I go forward.

Re: What characteristics of the design services would make freelance graphic design appeal to your future business endeavours?

D: Well I guess if they look cool to me, if it looks good, if it is functional. If I feel like I have a bit of a connection with it as well, not always an emotional connection, if I feel it is appealing to me then I would go forward. I mean you would have people, and to no offence of them, they would not be in your league. You would naturally gravitate to someone that does things in the way you like it already. Someone might do something for Apple, which looks great, but you're not Apple. So it would be difficult imagining that they would do something different for you.

Re: Would it be important for you that the freelance designer be situated in close vicinity of you, or would you be open to international or online communications?

D: I think it depends on the price and the needs. Like I have worked with people internationally and it was a bit difficult, like e-mailing back and forth all the time. It is much more convenient if someone is in your town already. If you can just drive to them or they drive to you, it is a bit effort on their part, which in turn makes you feel better about them and it shows that they actually want to work with you and want to help you. I am open to the long distance or international thing, but I think it could set up a bit of a problem.

Re: What would make you use someone internationally? Would it be their portfolio or...

D: I think it would be their work, but I think the only thing that would convince me to work with someone internationally, that is not even a company but an individual would be a referral. If someone else worked with them and said this person really exists and they really do this and they did a good job already and they did communicate effectively. Then I would consider it. But a big company, I could still kind of trust that, because they are big or a firm. With an independent person you always have that bit of angst, is this person even real?

Re: Do you feel graphic design would add to your product or services value?

D: Definitely.

Re: What kind of value?

D: Well for me, my future company is going to be very visual content creative, and we cannot do almost anything we do without a designer. If we make a TV show, help record and album or sell a book, everything we do requires design work. So it would actually be ideal to have a staff designer to do all that type of work. But also freelancers, you could use them because they are designing stuff every day. Everything we do is visual.

Re: So you find the visual important?

D: Yes.

Re: Why would you say that is important?

D: It is what you see first. If you walk into a shop, sometimes the most attractive thing is the one you are going to buy. In any kind of form, drink, t-shirt, anything you scroll past.

Re: What attributes would a freelance designer need to have to gain your interest? Creative for example?

D: That is something I actually find quite important. I mean you want to see them in a creative light. If you see a designer in a suit I am already going to be kind of hesitant, but maybe that is just me. For me, if I see a guy with a couple of tattoos and a little hat, it seems like the type of aspects of a person I would...especially if their look suits my brand. Maybe if you are a corporate brand, a person in a suit would not be that bad. But for what I do, I would prefer someone tattooed and metal shirted up. I would feel they understand my brand.

Re: Do you find it important for the freelance designer to be portrayed as a business or as an individual?

D: I think I would take you a bit more seriously if you are a business. The business could be your name, but if you are already registered and you do stuff and you have a website it lends itself just to be a bit more legit. I will just trust you a little bit more. Someone that will not waste my time.

Re: In choosing an individual to design your corporate identity, would you prefer a large graphic design company or an individual freelancer?

D: Also I guess it would depend on what it is for and also again word-of-mouth. In my life, I am in the position where I know 9 designers. So I could go to different ones because I already know what they do, but if I didn't know I would rather approach a firm first. Because I think legitimately I wouldn't know the real difference, but I feel I would trust a real company first. Every aspect of your thing needs to work. It has the impression that they have been around the block. Success means that you are growing, it seems they are successful.

Re: How would you want to learn about the designer and their services (Prompt: website, word-of-mouth, posters, e-mails, anything else you can think of)? What media sources would you prefer to find them on?

D: Word-of-mouth. Probably Google them. I would want to find them online, see their portfolio and a few testimonials. I want to see enough photos.

Re: If they were to contact you first?

D: Well I would look at it. It would be cool. I would entertain the idea and I would email them back. It would depend on if I had anything for them to work with me.

Re: What would make you choose a freelancer above larger graphic design companies or smaller design studios? Personal involvement?

D: Personal involvement yes. If I knew them I would definitely try to help them out. Also word-of-mouth. In the world we live in, it is especially difficult there are so many designers. I would first try to help out my own.

Re: How would you personally choose a designer?

D: Basically their portfolio, or if we met and I see that the person understands me. Like kindred spirits.

Re: If you were not to consider a freelance designer, what type of methods, companies or people would you instead use to develop your corporate identity?

D: It would depend on my budget I guess. Like now if I am starting my own little business, I would just go to those free online sites where I can make a free logo for myself and go to Wix and try to make my own website. If I had more money, then I would consult Google and type in graphic design and see what pops up, skip the ads, because they are never that cool. I would go through them until I find one that I like.

Re: How would you describe the ideal graphic designer? (Prompts: Visibility)

D: That is difficult. You can't really, it is all relative. It depends on your style. Generically, I would want them to be creative. I want someone who wants to do it that is prompt and understands deadlines. I will never work with you again if you miss deadlines or refer them. It is one of the most important things to me. Creative and understanding with what I want. Especially be prompt.

Re: What type of personality would you wish a designer to portray in order for you to use their services?

D: I want the designer to be like me, a creative person that can make a joke and take a joke, kind of nerdy. You don't want a shy person that is a drab. Like I want to go for a beer with this person.

Re: You want to build a relationship with them.

D: Yes.

Re: What are the personality aspects, or attributes of a business that would cause you to not trust a corporate or independent designer?

D: If it seems like what they do is not well done or professional. You don't want to hurt people's feelings, but sometimes when you look at someone's work you can see they try hard and they are here, but they are just not good at what they do. Not that I could do better, but I can see what is bad and what is good. And also like I said tardiness.

Re: Is it important how much experience the designer has, or is it all about what you see they can do, or what their brand looks like?

D: It is all about what I see they can do. The experience helps, but I have seen artists, actors, musicians, people that do it their whole lives and are still bad and then people in high school that are already doing amazing things. So I think it is the talent and what you do with it.

Re: When looking for a designer, would you find it important to identify aspects of your personality or likes in their brands personality?

D: Yes exactly. If I see their website and I already feel comfortable there. If I already see something I like, I am immediately drawn to it. But it is difficult, a tricky situation.

Re: Would the way a graphic designers brand looks influence your decision in using them as your designer?

D: Yes definitely. Because of the personality aspects I mentioned earlier.

Re: Would you want a designer to tell you a story about who they are, or instead go have a focus on their different media on the services they can provide for you?

D: Yes a story, because I would like to build a relationship with them and see that they understand me. If I look at your stuff, I will get to know you as well. This is cool. Firstly I would like to see what you can do.

Re: Would a freelance designer's corporate identity be an important aspect of choosing them to develop yours?

D: Yes, because what they do for themselves is most important. Because they have to sell themselves, if you sell yourself poorly, then how are you going to expect to sell something for someone else?

Re: Perfect. Thank you for your time.

## **Participant E**

Researcher (Re): Do you find corporate identity, i.e. the look of a business, important for a future business?

Participant E (E): Do you mean having a corporate identity for a business, is important for them having future business?

Re: Yes and just establishing a future business.

E: Yes I would say it is.

Re: Why would you think it is important?

E: Just, I think it is the way you think about the company as well. It can make you feel more comfortable if it has got a certain identity. Like it can make you feel certain things.

Re: Like how?

E: It could help me trust them more. And I think if a company has its own way, you get used to things, you know. You get used to them being like that and you keep going back to them because it is something you are used to.

Re: Do you feel this would be important for an independent contractor?

E: I would say yes.

Re: Why would you say it is important?

E: I think for an independent contractor it might be more important. Like a person can be a brand so, they would have a certain style I think and if you like that style or in the way communicate with their clients, that type of personality they have that makes you go back to them. You have got that connection with them. Am I making sense?

Re: Yes you are.

Re: What do you think a brand is?

E: A brand is when you think about a company or a person and you think about them in a specific way. It could be intentional or unintentional.

Re: What aspects of your future business would you need an independent contractor in this creative field to focus on? What problems could they solve for you?

E: Well, I mean, specific to my business (researcher nods). Designing of the labels, make sure it is in not alien to the industry. So it has to be related to the industry. I think getting printing. So finding places that will do it in a high quality and at affordable prices. Designing and sourcing of the labels and prices. The image.

Re: Do you feel these things would be something you would struggle with?

E: By myself maybe the designing yes, and finding the labels. Because I think as a graphic designer, when you use the places that do the printing, it comes easy. So the clients would say, please design me a label like this and then the graphic designer would come back with the image and also printing options. Then you don't have to find printers yourself, which is a huge bonus. I think it is a bit complicated, I mean in the past I have had someone else design labels for me and they sent me the images and I had to go find the printers and sometimes the quality varies and the prices and they require different formats. So it is easier in the sense that the graphic designer has already got their image and they can export it a lot easier than I can to whatever format is required.

Re: What functional benefits would a freelance graphic designer allow for you to achieve?

E: I wouldn't have to spend more time on the design or the image.

Re: And you could instead focus your attention on your business.

E: Exactly.

Re: Would a freelance graphic designer be able to help you gain emotional benefits? E:

E: In what sense?

Re: Would the work they do for you, set you at ease...

E: Yes I think that is possible, because through dealing with a person continuously, you would build a connection, not a connection but a relationship and then it is easier to deal with them. Then as time goes on they...you start to think more similarly. Like you would with a friend, they could tell what you are thinking already.

Re: So do you find building a relationship with a designer important?

E: Yes, because they will get your mind set. I mean after enough time you are not strangers anymore. They can kind of just pick up on what you are saying, it is easier for them to design for you then.

Re: What would a freelance designer need to do for you in order for you to use them for future projects?

E: So, after using them the first time...obviously I would have to be happy with the work. So it needs to be in line with what I have directed. I would have to have seen that it makes my life easier. I suppose the outcome of the first project would be close to what I have asked for and a pleasant image.

Re: What characteristics of the design services would make freelance graphic design appeal to your future business endeavours?

E: Well at this stage I am very focused on price, but quality of the work is also important. I think that, building with a relationship, the ease of which they understand your concept and certain services like I mentioned being connected to the printers.

Re: Is a low price important to you?

E: Realistically, I feel that you would be willing to pay a slightly higher price, above average, if you are comfortable with the brand that you are using. If you find that and a quality that you are happy with then you are willing to spend a bit more. I mean I think everyone in business would find that quality is more important than what you pay for it. In my mind at least.

Re: Would it be important for you that the freelance designer be situated in close vicinity of you, or would you be open to international or online communications?

E: I don't think that proximity is that important in this day and age, because you can do correspondence via e-mail, it is just as easy. Or maybe, if there is another forum, like I think Whatsapp is pretty good as well. But you don't even have to be close because you could send the final product, you could have it couriered, you could communicate over any forum, be it Whatsapp or e-mail. You can do video calls, but I also think it would be nice to talk in person instead of plain text. I think a lot of communication is not just verbal, I think

you pick up on body language. So when a person talks about an idea, certain points of that idea would be highlighted by their facial expressions. So I think subconsciously that builds up certain parts of the idea that they are trying to get across.

Re: Do you feel graphic design would add to your product or services value?

E: Definitely.

Re: How would you say it would add value?

E: Well, I suck at design (laughs). A graphic designer could...they would bring the image I have in mind to life, but also having studied what they studied, they would have more technical aspects. They could use their theory and put it into practice to make my idea better.

Re: Do you feel it is just visual aspects?

E: Mainly visual, but I think possibly cost effectiveness. Like for example if I wanted to print out labels and they had experience in the printing industry as well, because they would have that relationship as well.

Re: What attributes would a freelance designer need to have to gain your interest? Like honesty, professionalism, creativity...?

E: Yes, I didn't even think about that, but that is actually an important thing. I think any business should be straight forward, if they think something is not a good idea they should tell you. For me, professionalism is not that important, I mean there are certain boundaries, but I think in general it is not that important, their creativity is actually more important. I mean if I can see that this person is creative and can think out of the box, that is more important than the way they interact with people.

Re: Can you think of anything else?

E: I think, it is more important for them to have their own style. It is important for them to have their own style, but that you can see that they can adapt it as well. I mean when you choose a graphic designer and you have a look at their portfolio, you would choose one based on what you like.

Re: Do you find it important for the freelance designer to be portrayed as a business or as an individual?

E: I think it is a bit of both. I think that the designer should be...I think you want to know the individual and their creativeness. At the same time they should be a professional business. Well, if I think about the creative field, I think that individuality is important, somebody who is creative will express their ideas in the way that they do. Sometimes I am more distrusting of a more professional service provider, or something that is framed in is a company. Because what I think of as a company is logic, protocol, they have their functions set out. Whereas an individual who is creative can be more adaptive, less structured. If you were to go to a company, you can see the work and the work is good, but you don't know the individual, so you don't have that personal trust behind it.

Re: In choosing an individual to design your corporate identity, would you prefer a large graphic design company or an individual freelancer?

E: I think, I have this idea in my head that one day when my business is big enough, I will have a team. I think a team would be better than an individual, I mean more ideas and the best could come out. Please repeat the question?

Re: In choosing an individual to design your corporate identity, would you prefer a large graphic design company or an individual freelancer? It could be a small design studio as well.

E: So between those options I still need to find an individual. The idea of a design studio is nice, because a whole team will work on your work. With a large company, it is not guaranteed that the same people will work on your work. It depends on your needs which one you would choose. So maybe choosing the individual would be better, because they know your style already. You would have them in mind when you describe what you want. I would be able to build a relationship with an individual more than with a company or a whole team I think.

Re: How would you want to learn about the designer and their services (Prompt: website, word-of-mouth, posters, e-mails, anything else you can think of)? What media sources would you prefer to find them on?

E: So I what I would do if I was looking for a graphic designer is do an internet search and then I would like to know their services and examples of their work on their website. I think a website is very important.

Re: Can you think of any other sources you might come into contact with?

E: Such as word-of-mouth? And social media, Facebook, Instagram. But essentially I would go to an internet search first. Like in my mind I would look for them online and then find ones and put them into little boxes and compare them. It is important that they have a website.

Re: Is that how you will then assess them by their website?

E: Yes.

Re: What would make you choose a freelancer above larger graphic design companies or smaller design studios? Personal involvement?

E: Yes.

Re: Would that be the main thing? Would there be anything else?

E: I would go with a freelancer because building that relationship with them. You kind of just build a friendly relationship; it can be more than just the style you want. People like to interact with people.

Re: Why would that friendly part of the relationship be important to you?

E: I think a lot of people have anxiety. I think if it is someone you know, it would also be a lot easier for you to be more straightforward with your ideas. You can trust them more.

Re: How would you personally choose a designer? You mentioned you would put them into boxes. Would there be other aspects you would consider them for as well?

E: I think it depends on how I find the designer. Word-of-mouth, do I meet them at a function or something. I think that would be better than finding them online, because you have met them and you already feel more comfortable having met them. So I think meeting someone in person is better than just seeing services on a website. What's the question again I forgot it?

Re: How would you personally choose a designer? Would you say it would be visual style or seeing them face-to-face?

E: I think the way they work is important, but also the way they interact. Someone could be good at their design skills, but if they have poor social skills they could negatively affect the, I think if you get along with somebody, it would be easier.

Re: So would you say they need confidence?

E: I think that is important in any business. People would need the confidence in the person they are dealing with to make sure the work would get done.

Re: If you were not to consider a freelance designer, what type of methods, companies or people would you instead use to develop your corporate identity? Friends, companies, yourself?

E: I wouldn't feel more comfortable using myself, I would rather trust a company because I feel they would be able to understand...do it better than I would. So probably a company. I would search online for a company that does graphic design. The size would not be so relevant, I would look for a certain price range and check for quality.

Re: How would you describe the ideal graphic designer? (Prompts: Visibility)

E: Okay, the way you meet them is irrelevant. I have this idea of meeting the person in person and having the ability to discuss ideas, understanding my concepts. They should have confidence in my project or the outcome of the project. Then be able to communicate regularly.

Re: Would you find it important for them to adapt to what you like and still advise you?

E: Yes, but not force me.

Re: What type of personality would you wish a designer to portray in order for you to use their services?

E: See I would say, friendliness.

Re: Why?

E: It makes me feel better. I would feel more open-minded. It might also help with the process as well.

Re: Anything else?

E: Open-mindedness, creativity, professionalism.

Re: Professionalism?

E: They can't go about swearing. The way they handle deadlines, that's important. Dress-code you expect a certain level, not like flip flops and shorts, like jeans and a t-shirt is fine.

Re: What are the personality aspects, or attributes of a business that would cause you to not trust a corporate or independent designer?

E: I guess them not delivering on what I want, the quality.

Re: Anything else?

E: The way they portray themselves, their confidence in my project, I guess.

Re: Is it important how much experience the designer has, or is it all about what you see they can do, or what their brand looks like?

E: I think experience does help a bit with trust, but if you can see their work and examples, I think that can overcome the lack of experience. The portfolio would be important in choosing them.

Re: When looking for a designer, would you find it important to identify aspects of your personality or likes in their brands personality?

E: I think so. If I see two websites and the one is blockish and set colours, and the other one is more flowing and free-form, I would choose the flowing one over the set blocks, even though it looks good.

Re: You mentioned it would be important to build a relationship. Would that be more important to you than the services?

E: No. So when you see them you can almost be like friends, but there should be a focus on the work. The relationship and friendliness helps with your comfort ability. The end result is the most important, the relationship is also important but not as important as the work.

Re: Would the way a graphic designers brand looks influence your decision in using them as your designer?

E: I think it would be. But I can't say if it is a conscious thing or subconscious thing. If I saw a business card that is nicely designed, I would choose that over a bland one. It shows more skill.

Re: Would you want a designer to tell you a story about who they are, or instead go have a focus on their different media on the services they can provide for you?

E: I think an intro would be a nice touch. I think I would like that. It kind of builds more on that comfort ability. You feel like you are getting to know them. If it is just the services it feels a bit detached.

Re: So not as approachable?

E: Yes.

Re: Would a freelance designer's corporate identity be an important aspect of choosing them to develop yours?

E: I think so. I mean, it would help me assess their skill. If I saw their portfolio it might influence me. Do I want to use them? I might have an idea of what I want; when I am searching I would already be looking for something similar. So I would go with an example that is closest to what I already have in mind. Then they might be able to deal with me easier.

Re: Perfect. Thank you for your time.