



**Exploring the perceived role of brand identity in growing small
business in the boutique retail jewellery sector.**

by

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Abstract

Studies in the literature show that in most countries, SMEs make up between 95 to 99 percent of businesses and contribute 70 percent to employment. In South Africa, it is estimated that close to 91 percent of businesses are classified as SMEs, contributing between 52 – 57 percent to GDP and 61 percent to employment. These figures would suggest that SMEs could be contributing more towards South Africa's GDP and employment if they had the resources and support to do so.

A recent report estimates the fashion and luxury jewellery segment to account for approximately 17 percent of apparel spending. Globally, consumers spend approximately \$348.5 billion annually on jewellery, with the sector predicted to grow significantly over the next five years, and this research study is focused on how brand and brand identity can be used to help with the growth of this segment.

Small businesses are at a disadvantage as they do not have the same capabilities and resources to compete at the same level as big business. Additionally, most of the research in branding focuses on big business, with the learnings not generally transferable to SMEs due to their distinct and unique characteristics.

The purpose of this qualitative study is fourfold: firstly to explore the role of brand identity in small independent boutique jewellery stores in the Gauteng region, secondly to investigate whether small businesses in the retail jewellery sector engage in building brand identity, and thirdly to understand whether brand and brand identity helps to grow the business. Lastly, to add to the limited body of existing research as it relates to small independent boutique jewellery retailers.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with three SME retail jewellery boutique owner-managers, customers, and suppliers (nine data sets). These interviews were built around the Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) brand identity framework (deductive).

Major findings for boutiques 1 and 2 include a lack of focus on brand or brand identity as well as a strong link to the owner-manager as the brand rather than the retail store itself. Their perception was that building strong customer relationships were more important than brand building, and it followed that their marketing activities tended to focus on word of mouth. They also felt that they were offering a niche product and service without much competition. Major findings for boutique 3 include a much stronger focus on branding and marketing activities, as well as a strong understanding of what their competitors were doing. Customer service orientation was a key finding for all three boutiques, echoed by both owner-managers and customers as a differentiator from commercial retail jewellery stores.

In conclusion, using insights from this study, the researcher recommends further research and exploration of additions to brand and brand identity guidelines for SMEs which flows from the primary business aims of the retail store as the starting point, with customer relationship management as a focal point.

Keywords: SMEs, brand identity, boutique retail jewellery, branding, brand building, small business

Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Creative Brand Leadership at The IIE's Vega School. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

Asheeqah Buccas
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List of Abbreviations

DTI	Department of trade and industry
EU	European union

GDP	Gross domestic product
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SEDA	Small enterprise development agency
SMEs	Small and medium-sized enterprises
SMMEs	Small, medium and micro enterprises

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Contextualisation

Historically, jewellery and adornment has been documented as part of human culture from as far back as 100,000 years ago where jewellery was initially created from anything in the natural world, including stones, animal skins, feathers, plants, bone, shells, wood and gemstones, before artisans developed the technology to manipulate precious metals and gemstones (History of Jewelry, 2018). The purpose of jewellery across time has always been the same – they have enabled the wearer to express themselves non-verbally in many ways, display their wealth, rank, political and religious associations, receive and give affection to someone and to denote marital status. Culturally, jewellery was also used as currency and wealth security, purely as functional fashion accessories, symbolically in rites of passage and as protection, and valued as heirlooms (Mountz Jewelers, 2018). The importance of jewellery has endured throughout history as a non-verbal communicator. Jewellery techniques have advanced, along with advances in technology but it has remained through the ages as far more than just a form of personal adornment, but also as a silent communicator.

A Common Objective (2018) report estimates the fashion and luxury jewellery segment to account for approximately 17 percent of apparel spending. Globally, consumers spend approximately \$348.5 billion annually on jewellery. Up Market Research (2018) predicts that this market will continue to grow in the next five years, indicating a heightened consumer interest in brand jewellery, smart wearable jewellery and artistic jewellery. Jewellery is a fast-growing segment in the global economy and contributes commercially to employment, GDP and foreign earnings via exports (Up Market Research, 2018). A recent National Jeweler report (2018) indicates that platinum jewellery sales in the US market alone increased by 11 percent year-on-year, making it the fifth consecutive year that the sector has grown. The same report shows that silver jewellery sales in 2017 increased by 17 percent year-on-year, with 57 percent of retailers saying that Silver had the best inventory turnover rate (National Jeweler, 2018). In contrast, the South African market indicates negative sales trends for this industry due to pressure on disposable income, although this is relevant mainly for the costume jewellery segment (Euromonitor International, 2018). Interestingly, Euromonitor International (2018) also notes that the competitive landscape for fine jewellery in South Africa consists of mainly small family-owned businesses who tend to cater mainly to lower-income consumers and are situated outside major shopping centres.

Studies show that in most countries, SMEs make up between 95 to 99 percent of businesses and contribute 70 percent to employment (OECD, 2017:6; Pandya, 2012:427). In South Africa, it is estimated that close to 91 percent of businesses are in this sector and contribute between 52 – 57 percent to GDP and 61 percent to employment (Abor and Quartey, 2010:218).

The jewellery sector can be labelled as luxury brands since most consumers will buy jewellery irrespective of the economic climate, and branded jewellery is often a first choice. Although the term 'luxury brand' can mean a variety of different kinds of offerings, they can be characterised as brands that offer symbolic and experiential

benefits beyond mere price and demonstrate price sensitivity, with more expensive jewellery being seen more positively (Seo and Buchanan-Oliver, 2015:83).

Historically, luxury goods were small family-owned businesses, but this changed with the emergence of large brands such as Louis Vuitton, or Gucci, which have in common their commitment and investment in brand and brand-building which in turn creates a strong competitive positioning (Seo and Buchanan-Oliver, 2015:83). The emphasis on branding by large organisations meant that the jewellery industry began to change its identity and focus, evolving from a design-focus into a brand-driven economic focus led by a group of large powerful multinationals where a strong brand identity and image became key factors for success in the industry, with the result that luxury brands have become highly valued and sought after (Seo and Buchanan-Oliver, 2015:84).

The focus on the SME space is crucial as demonstrated by their significant economic contribution; however, there is little research in the jewellery retail SME space which is considered a gap since this sector caters to the fundamental human need for adornment, self-expression and commitment, besides contributing significantly in economic terms.

1.1.2 Rationale

Within the SME sector, , the focus of small jewellery retailers has not evolved over time as they remain mainly design and creativity focused and do not place emphasis on brand building. Further, although SMEs constitute many organisations in world economies, mainstream literature on branding is geared towards large organisations, and the findings may not be applicable or transferable to SMEs (Abimbola, 2001:102; Krake, 2005:228; Juntunen, Saraniemi, Halttu and Tähtinen, 2010:116; Spence and Hamzaoui Essoussi, 2010:1037; Mitchell, Hutchinson and Quinn, 2013:1368; Agostini, Filippini and Nosella, 2015:161; Odoom, 2016:1230; Resnick, Cheng, Simpson and Lourenco, 2016:155; Odoom, Mensah and Asamoah, 2017:59). In fact, many small businesses do not think of themselves as brands at all, may not have the resources to contribute towards a brand focus, and are therefore unlikely to incorporate branding into their daily operations (Merrilees, 2007:403; Spence and Hamzaoui Essoussi, 2010:1038; Kahle, 2016).

Centeno, Cambra-Fierro, Vazquez-Carrasco, Hart and Dinnie (2019:555) note that brands are valuable assets as they create benefits that enhance and maintain relationships with all relevant stakeholders, both internal and external.

Despite the significance of the SME sector, and of jewellery as an industry, there is limited research in the retail jewellery space, and, as far as this researcher can establish, limited research exists in the boutique retail jewellery SME space that specifically relates to how brand and brand identity is perceived.

This study contributes to the field of branding as it applies to small and medium-sized enterprises, specifically retail jewellery by studying the perceived role of brand identity in the small retail jewellery business sector.

1.1.3 Problem Statement

Stokes and Lomax (2002:350) note that many small business owner-managers tend to shy away from traditional marketing practices and focus on word of mouth to create and sustain customer relationships through the use of recommendations. Further, SMEs tend to use their personal contact networks and word of mouth as a

key part of their marketing practices and are not leveraging a brand name and identity to draw in sales (Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001:7; Inskip, 2004:359; Bresciani and Eppler, 2010:361; Pérez-Cabanero, González-Cruz, and Cruz-Ros, 2012:118). They focus on products rather than brand and may not understand the difference between the two concepts. In a South African SME study Cant, Wiid and Hung (2013:743) suggest, paradoxically, that while SMEs see branding as important, this does not translate into marketing strategies, nor is branding perceived as essential in running the business.

Studies also show that the owner-manager is often the face and personality of the brand, is key in decision-making, management and most other functions, and this suggests that the owner-manager *is* the brand (Inskip, 2004:359; Krake, 2005:229; Abimbola and Vallaster, 2007:343; Merrilees, 2007:405; Berthon, Ewing and Napoli, 2008:28; Spence and Hamzaoui Essoussi, 2010: 1049-1050; Mitchell, Hutchinson and Bishop, 2012:162; Centeno, Hart and Dinnie, 2013:450; Mitchell et al, 2013:1377; Friedrich, 2016; Resnick et al, 2016:155). Abimbola (2001:102) refers to the “individual flair” of the entrepreneur as a well-recognised source of branding communication. In fact, Clarke, Perry and Denson (2012:501) noted, in their research on the sensory retail environment, that one shopper mentioned that she visits the store because she knows the owner and often ends up buying something, and this links back strongly to the owner-manager’s personality providing a point of differentiation for the retail environment.

Therefore, this study explores the perceived role of brand identity in a small boutique retail jewellery business and probes how the focus on brand and brand identity can boost the business successfully.

1.1.4 Research Purpose

Small retailers are at a disadvantage as they don’t have the same capabilities and resources to compete as big business does (Spence and Hamzaoui Essoussi, 2010:1038; Kahle, 2016).

The purpose of this qualitative study is fourfold: firstly to explore the role of brand identity in small independent boutique jewellery stores in the Gauteng region, secondly to investigate whether small businesses in the retail jewellery sector engage in building brand identity, and thirdly to understand whether brand and brand identity helps to grow the business. Lastly, to add to the limited body of existing research as it relates to small independent boutique jewellery retailers.

1.1.5 Research Objectives

Therefore, the research objectives are as follows:

- To explore the role of brand identity in boutique retail SME jewellery businesses.
- To investigate whether small businesses in the retail jewellery sector engage in building brand identity.
- To contribute to the limited body of existing research as it relates to small independent boutique jewellery retailers.

1.1.6 Research Questions

Therefore, the research questions are as follows:

- What is the role of brand identity in boutique retail SME jewellery businesses?

- To what extent do small businesses in the retail jewellery sector engage in building brand identity?
- What aspects of existing brand identity theory should be further researched for SME jewellery business applicability?

1.2 Literature Review

This literature review comprises four topics for exploration, each aimed at better understanding the existing knowledge, its relevance to the study and how it will impact on the research problem identified.

The four topics are: the contribution of small business to economic growth, brand identity theories, branding and the link to small business and the boutique retail jewellery SME sector.

Firstly, the contribution of small business in the South African economy and other countries is examined as a big picture to frame the research. Secondly, brand identity theories are explored to broadly understand the meaning and application of this theory to the proposed study and to SMEs specifically. Thirdly, the research focuses on understanding the link between branding and small business and how it can either be applied or further developed. Finally, the boutique retail jewellery SME sector is focused on investigating whether there is a link between brand identity and building a successful small jewellery retail business.

1.2.1 The Contribution of Small Business to Economic Growth

The contribution of small business to economic growth is explored as a big picture overview before deep diving into the SME jewellery retailer, and chapter two will explore this sector of the economy in greater detail. SME's play a pivotal role in many economies and can therefore be major contributors to economic growth, innovation, and job creation (SEDA, 2016:5; Statistics South Africa, 2013:1).

1.2.2 Brand Identity Theory

A brand comprises of three areas, namely products, behaviour and identity, and its purpose is to create an experience that consumers can connect with and believe in. This study will centre on the concept of brand identity, and three models will be presented and explored in this section to better understand how they can be used as part of brand building efforts in SMEs. The Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009:40-43) brand identity model stresses that it is used to drive all brand-building efforts. The Kapferer (2012:149) brand identity prism states that a brand is the vision or key belief and core values that drives the creation of products and services. The Klopfer and North (2011:58-59) brand identity system focuses on the value that a brand adds to consumer's lives.

1.2.3 Branding and Small Business

1.2.3.1 Importance of Branding for SMEs

This section explores some of the theory of branding and specifically looks at the how it has been used by large business to enhance their business dealings, as well as whether these theories are easily transferable to SMEs. Some brand models that relate specifically to SMEs are also explored to better understand how they operate in comparison to large business and what brand needs they might have.

1.2.3.2 The Retail Brand

The subject of retail branding is explored specifically as it relates to the retail small jeweller. Retail branding is a growing field and linking it closely with brand identity for SMEs might be beneficial for this sector.

1.2.3.3 Brand Impact on Performance and Growth

This section explores the concept of brand and its possible impact on performance and growth in business, as well as the impact that it might have on SMEs.

1.2.3.4 The Boutique Retail Jewellery SME

This section explores the boutique jewellery SME, its importance, its contribution to the economy, as well as investigating how brand and brand identity can be used in this sector.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Research Design

The research design has been based around qualitative research and the use of in-depth interviews to gain an understanding of how brand and brand identity is used, if at all, in the SME environment, how the owner-managers operate, and to get the perspective of customers and suppliers. The interviews used the Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) brand identity framework as the basis of inductive research to explore and consider new theory relating to SMEs. Chapter two will explore the chosen research design in much greater detail.

1.3.2 Research Plan and Methods

The study uses a qualitative approach and the data has been collected by means of semi-structured interview guides. The study focuses on three (3) SME boutique retail subjects in various locations across Johannesburg, Gauteng. The researcher adopted a case study research method and compared each boutique within a case, as well as comparing across cases to search for patterns, similarities, and differences.

1.3.3 Unit of Analysis

In this study, the focal point is the boutique retail jewellery SME, and this is therefore the unit of analysis. An overview of the SME was obtained via interviews with the owner-manager, a customer, and a supplier for each retail boutique, and this resulted in data within each case (boutique), as well as cross case analysis.

1.3.4 Population and Sampling

The researcher was unable to find a definitive number of jewellery retailers in South Africa, but the following statistics provide some estimates. The Jewellery Council South Africa mentions 1580 members currently registered (Jewellery Council South Africa, 2018) – however, this is not an accurate picture of the industry as not all retailers will be registered with the Jewellery Council, and not all registered members will be retailers. The Jewellers' Network Directory (2018:120-124) lists 80 retailers nationally, again not a definitive number. The Jewellery Biz-News Bi-Annual Directory (2018:18-21) lists 208 retailers nationally across Gauteng, Limpopo, the Free State, KZN, the Eastern Cape and the Western Cape, with the largest concentration of 90 listed in Gauteng.

The sample for this research consists primarily of boutique jewellery retailers that are independent and classified as small or medium-sized enterprises: three (3) boutiques have been identified for this study. They are all based in Johannesburg,

Gauteng Province of South Africa. Diversity and rigour in the sample is created by location, the type of small jewellery retailer and their consumer base. The sampling method will be further discussed and clarified in Chapter three.

1.3.5 Data Collection Method

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews. The reason for the choice of semi-structured interviews was that this allowed flexibility in adding additional questions based on responses received and allowed more in-depth information to be gained. This translated into nine (9) distinct data sets to be analysed.

Chapter three will explore the data collection method in more detail.

The researcher was always aware of the risk of personal bias in the research and thus strived to remain impartial and objective. This was managed through the creation of semi-structured open-ended questions that the researcher was conscious of asking each participant in the same way to ensure consistency while still allowing a certain level of adaptation that lent a personal approach to each interview. In addition, the themes selected were partially based on the Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) brand identity model, and partially on the common phrases, ideas or words that each participant used.

1.3.6 Data Analysis Method

The selected data analysis method was thematic research, which Kumar (2014:317) describes as the development of main themes that emerge from the field notes. Chapter three will explore the data analysis method on greater detail, as well as software used for interpretation of the data.

1.4 Limitations

The following limitations might impact on the study: access to identified boutiques retailers and participants, small sample size and single provincial location as the study is Johannesburg-based, and the findings might not apply in the same way in other regions. Chapter three will elaborate on how these limitations were mitigated for the study.

1.5 Ethical Considerations

As the study was conducted with humans, written consent was obtained for recording the interviews. Participation was voluntary, and each participant was fully informed of the research focus and purpose. In addition, participants were free to withdraw from the interview at any time and were advised of this at the start of the process. Information is kept confidential and participant anonymity is assured. Each boutique and participant have been assigned a response number, for example Boutique 1, Respondent B1O, B1C and B1S.

No physical, emotional, or reputational harm was caused during or after the study. The researcher does not consider this study to be high risk.

Ethical approval has been provided by The IIE's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review comprises four topics for exploration, each aimed at better understanding the existing knowledge, its relevance to the study and how it will impact on the research problem identified.

The four topics are: the contribution of small business to economic growth, brand identity theories, branding and the link to small business and the boutique retail jewellery SME sector.

Firstly, the contribution of small business in the South African economy and other countries will be examined as a backdrop to frame the research. Secondly, brand identity theories will be explored to broadly understand the meaning and application of this theory to the proposed study and to SMEs specifically. Thirdly, the literature will focus on understanding the link between branding and small business and how it can either be applied or further developed in this study. Finally, the boutique retail jewellery SME sector will be focused on, investigating whether there is a link between brand identity and building a successful small jewellery retail business.

2.1 The Contribution of Small Business to Economic Growth

SEDA (2016:5) and Statistics South Africa (2013:1) state that small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs) play a key role in the economy, and can be significant drivers of economic growth, innovation, and job creation. Spremo and Mičić (2015:72) note that small businesses are typified by greater innovation, flexibility and adaptability to unpredictable business conditions and therefore contribute significantly to employment and economic growth. Neagu (2016: 333) further states that SMEs represent an essential source of entrepreneurship, innovation, and job creation, and that their capacity to apply, adapt and encourage the spread of new technology is unique.

The definition for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) includes a broad range of organisations, including formally registered, informal, and non-VAT registered entities (SEDA, 2016:5). A standard description of SMEs does not exist as SMEs are defined differently in different legislations and countries (Abor and Quartey, 2010:219; Pandya, 2012:426; Tewari, Skilling, Kumar and Wu, 2013:6; OECD, 2017). The OECD (2017:4) and Tewari et al (2013:6) define SMEs as organisations employing up to 249 people in the following ratios: micro (1 – 9), small (10 – 49) and medium (50 – 249). Abor and Quartey (2010:221) outline slightly different definitions for South Africa, where a micro enterprise employs no more than 5 people, a very small enterprise employs fewer than 10 people, a small enterprise has a limit of 50 people and a medium enterprise is either up to 100 or 200 people depending on the industry.

Abor and Quartey (2010:219) also refer to a definition of SMEs as created by The Bolton Committee in 1971: it has a relatively small market share; it is personally managed by owners or part owners without a formalised structure and it is independent and does not form part of a larger enterprise. Neagu (2016: 332) specifies two kinds of SMEs, based on economic reality and these are the small traditional enterprise which doesn't have a long-term strategy, serves a small market and hands down their knowledge through the generations, versus the modern SME which uses technology, continuously searches for new markets and maximises the effectiveness of their activities through competitiveness. The traditional SME is

usually established based on the strengths and talents of their founders (Neagu, 2016:332).

SMEs in South Africa are classified by the DTI based on turnover and this differs based on the industry (SEDA, 2016:11). Of the 2.2 million SMEs that operate in South Africa, 944 500 thousand operate in the domestic trade which includes wholesale, retail, and the accommodation industry (SEDA, 2016:19).

According to Timmis (2017), small businesses in South Africa account for 52 percent of the country's GDP and help create much-needed employment. Xero and World Wide Worx (2017:9), surveyed more than 400 businesses across 25 markets in all nine provinces and reported that 36 percent of the small businesses surveyed will record their biggest spend over the next year in the marketing space.

Timmis (2017) notes that small business survival is dependent on a very specific set of requirements, which is undermined by the current economic climate and the lack of support received from Government. Areas that require immediate attention were highlighted where Government can assist small business to better achieve their goals and continue contributing to the country's long-term success and these included providing more funding, reducing red tape, offering tax breaks and improving access to finance. Akinbola, Sanni and Akinbola (2019:30) further state that a lack of business advisory services, inadequate training and development, and tax related issues are some of the factors that impact on at least 80 percent of SMEs in Nigeria going into extinction before the fifth year. Further Akinbola et al (2019:35, 40) conclude that owner-managers who were able to attend business development training reported an improvement in sales and growth in comparison to those who did not attend training. Neagu (2016: 334-335) supports these findings by indicating some weaknesses that SMEs experience, which can include lack of access to capital, high dependence on a select group of clients, lack of access to distribution systems and marketing services, and lack of sufficient management and economic knowledge.

The OECD estimates that SMEs account for over 95 percent of organisations and generate 60 – 70 percent of employment in OECD countries (OECD Observer, 2000). A more recent OECD report (2017:6) suggests that this number is even higher, approximately 99 percent of organisations and 70 percent of jobs. An SME BANKSETA report (n.d.) estimates that in South Africa, SMEs account for approximately 60 percent of employment. Abor and Quartey (2010:218) estimate that 91 percent of formal business entities are SMEs in South Africa that contribute approximately 52 – 57 percent to GDP and about 61 percent to employment.

Pandya (2012:427-428) provides comparative data on various countries, including that more than 99 percent of US and Japanese businesses are SMEs, 45 percent of manufacturing output and 40 percent of total exports in India are accounted for by SMEs and in Indonesia the total number of SMEs is 42.4 million which contributes 56.7 percent of GDP, and employs 79 million in the workforce. Spremo and Mičić (2015:72) indicate that 99.8 percent of all companies are small enterprises for the EU and the Republic of Srpska. Lekmat, Selvarajah and Hewege (2018: 215) note that in Thailand, 99.73 percent of all enterprises and 80.3 percent of total employment is created by SMEs, they contribute 39.6 percent to the GDP of the country and 26.25 percent of the total export value. Eggers, O'Dwyer, Kraus, Vallaster and Gldenbergl (2013) state that since SMEs contribute approximately 75

million jobs and represent 99.8 percent of the 21 million enterprises in the EU, it is vital to better understand whether branding is one of their key determinants of success, and how branding elements such as brand consistency, brand customer orientation, brand congruency and brand trust can result in SME growth. Pérez-Cabanero, González-Cruz, and Cruz-Ros (2012:116) further contribute by stating that family-owned businesses are a dominant element in worldwide economies, and that 99.6 percent of family-owned businesses are SMEs and represent the backbone of both the European and Spanish economies.

Neagu (2016: 334-335) and Kajalo and Lindblom (2015:581) argue that small retailers have several advantages and strengths, including full responsibility for management and decision-making with the owner-manager able to make faster decisions and focus on innovation, ability to instil a market-oriented culture and values in a small staff complement, close contact with customers, being able to act more quickly and flexibly than large competitors whilst increasing the competitiveness of the market, job creation, and a significant contribution towards GDP growth. This is echoed by Mitchell, Hutchinson, Quinn and Gilmore (2015:1819-1820) who highlight some of the strengths of SME marketing and the owner-manager, namely, their ability to seek out market opportunities, their flexibility, adaptability and ability to demonstrate an entrepreneurial mindset to marketing, their cultivation of intimate customer and market knowledge, their creativity in reaching their customers, their reliance on marketing relationships, building customer loyalty and leveraging networks to create value, their drive, personal ambitions and management goals and their ability to leverage word of mouth as a key form of marketing communication. Horan, O'Dwyer and Tiernan (2011:118) further discuss the influence of the owner-manager on change within an SME and how this focus leads to the creation of a strong brand.

Arenhardt, De Oliveira-Simonetto and Oliveira-Rodrigues (2018:25), in their discussion on innovation, note that SMEs are not just smaller versions of large companies, they conduct their business in several fundamentally different ways, including that the owner-manager is key to management and decision-making, they have access to fewer resources and a different organisational structure and that these differences make it important for SMEs to understand their own capabilities and market expectations so that they can exploit the most appropriate strategy for business success.

Tewari et al (2013:8) estimates that 20-40 percent of new organisations fail within two years while 40-50 percent survive more than seven years. Of those that survive, three categories are introduced (Tewari et al, 2013:10) namely those that remain small, those that grow moderately and those that show high growth. Small or 'lifestyle' organisations may survive for a longer time but may not have any significant growth aspirations while those SMEs in the moderate category will have 'capped' growth and the remainder will have high growth aspirations (Tewari et al, 2013:11). Neagu (2016:332) paints a bleaker picture, stating that 20 percent of new SMEs last only one year, 20 percent last only two years and 50 percent only last five years – therefore, only 10 percent of SMEs survive more than five years.

As can be seen in the literature, SMEs are a valuable part of a country's economy (both developing and developed) and yet they struggle with various issues, including, among others, lack of access to finance and technology, limited access to global markets, laws that might regulate the development of the sector, lack of

management skills and training (Abor and Quartey, 2010:224; Pandya, 2012:429; Timmis, 2017), and Tewari et al (2013:8) estimates that 20-40 percent of new organisations fail within two years while only 40-50 percent survive more than seven years.

2.1.1 SME's and Branding

In a recent Entrepreneur Magazine (2018) article titled "6 of the most profitable small businesses in South Africa", well-known brands such as Bos Brands, Hello Group, Sorbet, YDE, GetSmarter and Big Blue are profiled. Some of the key learnings as they relate to this study are summarised:

- Bos Brands – their strategy from the beginning was geared towards building a big brand, and in their first year, they spent as much on marketing as their turnover. As their revenue has increased, they still focus on marketing and have not decreased spend in this area (Entrepreneur Magazine, 2018). In a 2016 interview, Grant Rushmere, the co-founder of Bos Brands, discusses the importance of research, understanding competitors, creating a simple message, making interactions with the brand simple, creating a compelling brand story that people can relate to, and tapping into emotions by articulating what the brand stands for and how it makes you feel rather than selling the functional benefits (Todd, 2016).
- Sorbet – their key strategy is twofold: firstly, to create a high level of loyalty (both staff and customer), and secondly, to always have a fully-booked store. To this end:
“..... everyone in the brand isn't working to build personal relationships with clients, but rather an attachment to the brand itself, so that all stores are full at all times” (Entrepreneur Magazine, 2018).

Fuhr (2016) states that they needed to create a brand that customers loved and a sense of brand loyalty, but they also wanted to create a franchise model that would work both for franchisees and franchisor. Once people became loyal to the brand, and they had created a consistent experience across multiple stores, they were ready for the franchise model to take off (Fuhr, 2016).

- Big Blue – “the brand isn't just different for the sake of being different” – it is a key strategy for Big Blue and its founders, who work mainly with local designers and manufacturers, using locally milled and recycled fabrics (Entrepreneur Magazine, 2018; Smith, 2015). In a 2015 interview the founders of Big Blue, Cronje and Richardson discuss how they created a store that combined clothing with gifting and was one of the first in the country – a concept in the retail industry now commonly known as a 'lifestyle store' (Smith, 2015). The biggest lesson was the differentiation of their brand which they term 'retro-kitsch' and is a strong differentiator against big brand retailers or other boutique clothing stores (Smith, 2015).

These findings indicate that these successful and well-known small South African brands recognise the importance of branding and marketing in building and growing their businesses and that their focus in these areas is strategic.

For the purposes of this study, small business (SMEs) in the boutique retail jewellery sector is defined as either a micro enterprise that employs no more than 5 people, a

very small enterprise that employs fewer than 10 people, or a small enterprise has a limit of 50 people.

2.2 Brand Identity Theory

Brand is the reason why consumers purchase products – brand is a differentiator, and holder of value: the purpose of a brand is to create an experience that consumers can connect with and believe in. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009:40-43) fundamentally define brand identity as what the organisation wants the brand to stand for and stresses that brand identity is used to drive all brand-building efforts, it must have depth and richness, is not merely an advertising tagline or positioning statement, and, when fulfilled, should help establish a relationship or strong connection with the customer by generating value. Kapferer (2012:149) further fleshes out this concept by stating that a brand is the vision or key belief and core values that drives the creation of products and services. Brand identity and brand positioning are the two essential tools of brand management and a strong brand identity precedes strong brand positioning. Klopper and North (2011:58-59) add that a brand is described primarily by the value it adds to consumer's lives (the purpose of the brand) and that a brand identity system is the pivotal mechanism that guides a business in the brand building process. Urde (1999:128) states that the brand identity creates a collective picture and answers the question "who is the brand", it provides an understanding of the value system and generates the meaning.

In the assessment of literature relevant to this study, some comparison is conducted between the theories of Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009), Kapferer (2012) and Klopper & North (2011) specifically.

2.2.1 Brand Identity Planning Model

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009:44) present the brand identity planning model (Figure 4 below), which consists of the following three components: the brand identity construct, the strategic brand analysis, and the brand identity implementation system.

Aaker (2012) highlights several reasons why a brand needs a brand identity model, including that a brand is more than a tagline or slogan, that the extended identity elements can further differentiate the brand, that the elaboration of the core identity leads to the creation of relevant marketing and that the brand should be adaptable across different products, markets or countries.

Brand Identity Model

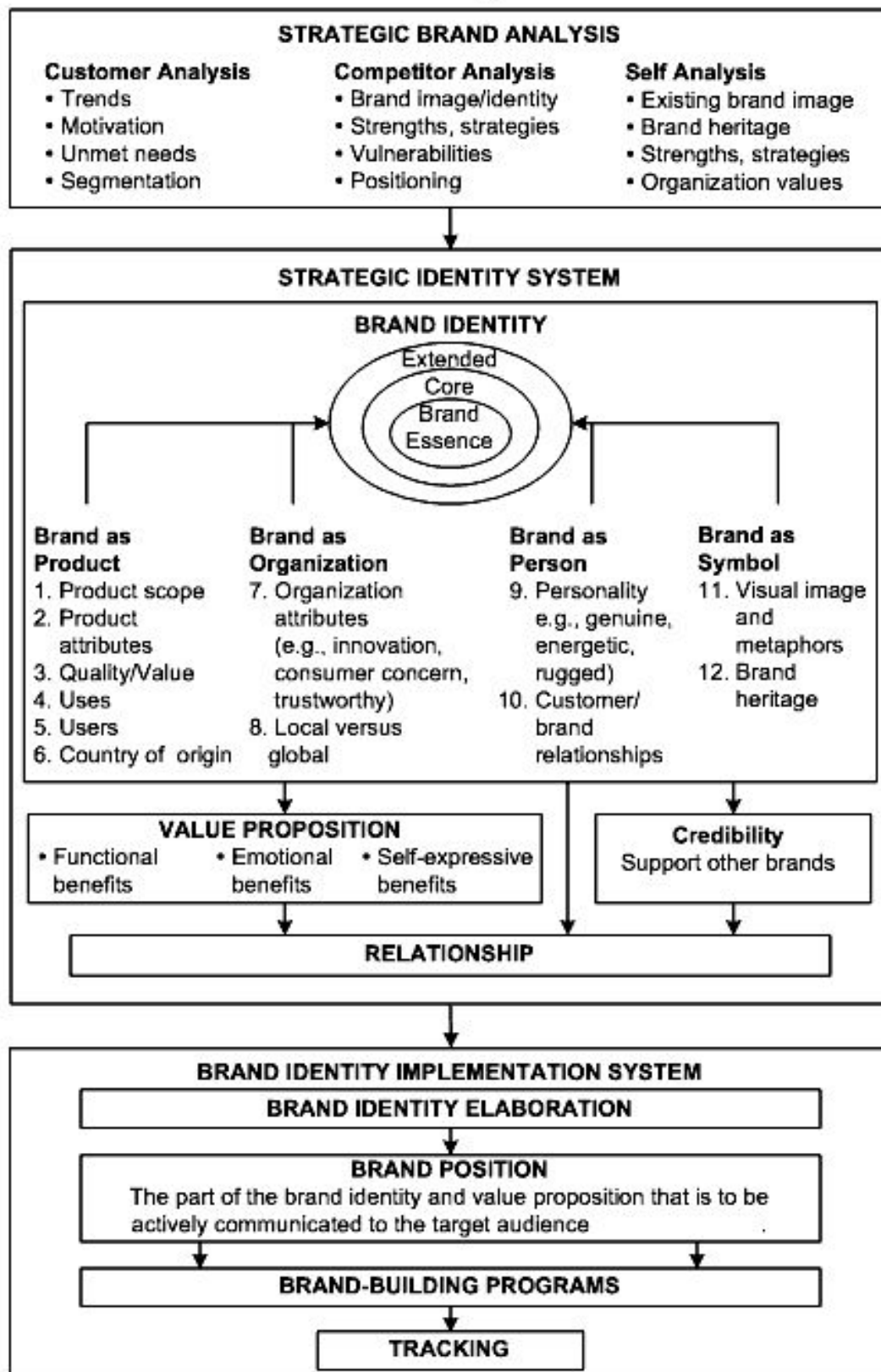


Figure 1: The brand identity planning model. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009).

The strategic brand analysis component allows a brand to flesh out how the brand will resonate with customers, how it differentiates itself from competitors and how it will behave over time (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009:40). Customer analysis is a deeper understanding of consumer behaviour and should lead to insights that the brand can use to develop a relevant segmentation strategy as well appropriate customer communications (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009:41). Competitor analysis requires a deeper understanding of the competitor landscape to differentiate the brand successfully (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009:41). The self-analysis component is vital to better understand the organisation itself, its resources and limitations, heritage and image, and strengths and values, and how these can be leveraged to best advantage (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009:41). The model encourages an analysis of the brand holistically to make decisions based on a better understanding of the brand, its competitors and target market, and this analysis is relevant for any brand, whether large or small. From the customer perspective, how do they view the brand, are they the right target market and is the appropriate marketing being used to connect with customers. From a supplier perspective, do they also supply your competitors? If so, what, and why and what's the differentiator? How do you choose appropriate suppliers?

The brand identity implementation system is concerned with the use of brand-building programs to enhance and clarify brand identity – it is an elaboration of concepts used to guide decisions and behaviour (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009:41). The brand positioning element actively communicates the brand identity to the target audience and aims to own a clear space in the mind of the consumer (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009:41). Brand-building programs refer to any kind of communication that is used as a point of contact between the brand and the target audience (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009:42). The final element is tracking, and this can be broken down into ten brand equity dimensions, that include brand loyalty, perceived quality / leadership, association, awareness, and market behaviour measures (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009:42). Brand positioning is linked closely to brand identity as it highlights the advantage that the brand has over competitors and can be used to guide communication goals. Every brand requires brand-building programs, as these are responsible for attracting and retaining customers, but are the correct programs being implemented and measured? This analysis is useful for a brand to understand whether their positioning, identity and communication programs are in alignment with each other and the brand objectives.

The brand identity construct consists of four main themes, namely, brand as product, brand as organisation, brand as person and brand as symbol which combined comprises 12 sub-categories. Other brand identity constructs include the value proposition, credibility, and the brand-customer relationship. These elements feed into the brand onion, which Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009:43-47) discuss in more detail (Figure 5):

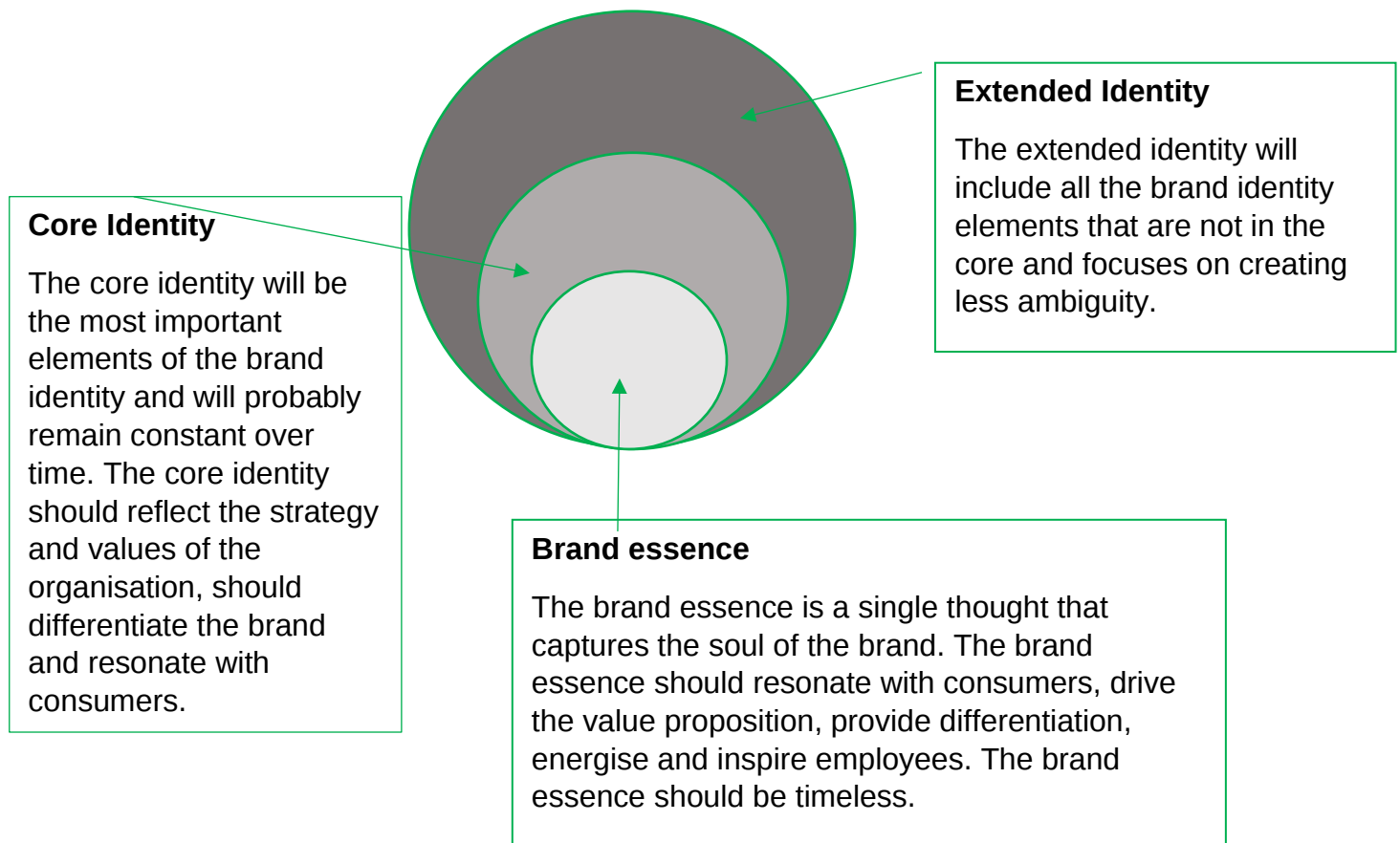


Figure 2: The brand onion. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009).

The value proposition should include functional benefits, as well as emotional and self-expressive benefits. Emotional benefits are designed to make the consumer feel something during the purchase process or user experience (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009:49), and this creates a sense of ownership with the brand. Self-expressive benefits are used by consumers to express their self-image when they use / experience the brand.

Finally, the relationship element is focused on the kind of relationship that the brand creates with the customer (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009:50).

The brand identity construct is the heart of the model and this analysis should clearly demonstrate whether the brand has a strong identity that is understood by competitors, customers, and suppliers, and whether it is being correctly leveraged.

2.2.2 The Brand Identity Prism

The brand identity prism introduced by Kapferer (2012:158-163) incorporates internal (source of communication and brand identity) and external brand elements (recipient of communication), and this is represented by Figure 6:

- **Physique:** physical specifications and qualities; tangibility; key product and brand attributes and benefits. The physique of a brand is highlighted by its key features, and the physical representation of the brand is often epitomised in its key product. Is the small business able to identify and define its physique and key products? Does the customer see this in the same way (identity versus image)?

- **Personality:** indicates what kind of person the brand would be, and it facilitates that consumers either identify with it or project themselves onto it. Brand personality is the main source of tone and style in advertising, it creates consistency with consumers and recognisability. Does the small business have a brand personality? What is the brand personality and how is it communicated?
- **Culture:** the brand culture is more than product benefits, it is the ideology upon which the brand is driven – people tend to gather around causes, ideas, ideals, and values. The culture will resonate with your target market. Does the small business have a strong culture that people identify with, and that drives loyalty?
- **Relationship:** that the brand has with its consumers, and that is exemplified in its communications. The relationship that a brand has with its customers will impact on how it behaves and relates to customers. Does the small business actively build relationships with its consumers, and if so, what kind of associations are being fostered?
- **Reflection:** this is how the customer wishes to be reflected because of using the brand, that is, how consumers use the brand to build their own identity. This should be used in communication to build relationships with consumers – understanding that consumers do not want to be reflected as they currently exist, but as they wish to be if they use the brand. Is this understood and utilised by the small business when communicating?
- **Self-image:** a brand speaks to the consumers self-image – how do they see themselves when purchasing and using the brand – this understanding might not be the same as the brand's intention when communicating. Reflection and self-image are closely linked and should not be opposites of each other. Does the small business correctly reflect the self-image of their consumers?

Brand Identity Prism

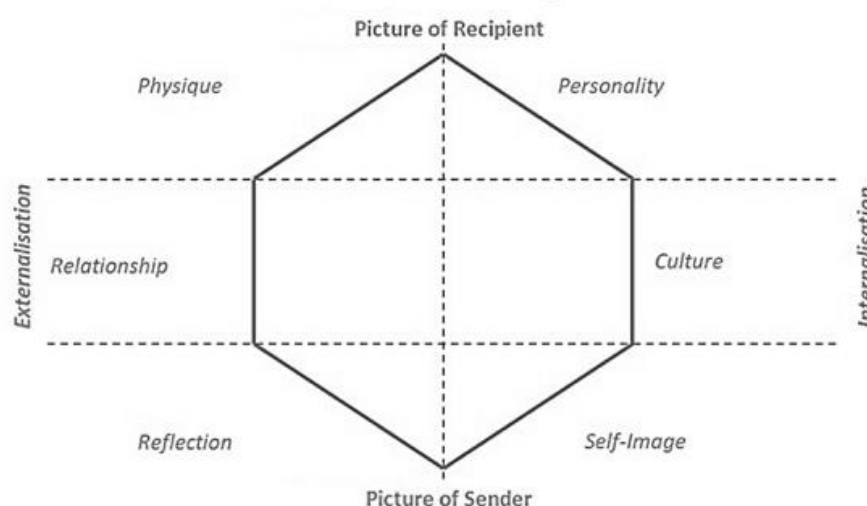


Figure 3: The brand identity prism. Kapferer (2012).

Although product/s are the first source of brand identity with consumers, the core brand identity is key as it conveys the brand's meaning and embodies the brand's values (Kapferer, 2012:165). A strong brand identity prism will only have a few

powerful words for each facet that are not repeated in any other facet and these are what make the identity striking and highly differentiated (Kapferer, 2012:164).

Kapferer (2012:163) notes that the external factors – physique, relationship, and reflection – are social factors and are focused on giving the brand outward expression. The internal factors – personality, culture, and self-image – are incorporated within the brand as part of the identity (Kapferer, 2012:163).

Kapferer (2012:150) lists a few questions that help to clearly define a brand identity, beyond the purely graphic element of logos and colours, and these include, what is the specific vision and aim, what is the differentiator, what need is being fulfilled, what is its purpose, what are the values, what is it good at and what makes it easily recognisable? For the small business, these questions can form the basis of understanding their own brand identity and starting to build a credible and consistent brand for its consumers.

2.2.3 The Brand Identity System

Klopper and North (2011:65) present a brand identity model that includes the reason for being, motivates why the brand will add value to consumer's lives, and successfully differentiates it against competitors (Figure 7 below). This model defines brand identity by its stakeholders, i.e. who they are, and what they need and want (Klopper and North, 2011:59), and argues that if the brand can fulfil these requirements, they are able to build a relationship with consumers. Three vital questions that a brand should consider include: who are you, what do you do and why does it matter, as these focus not only on the brand identity, but also on the consumer and why they should consider your brand (Klopper and North, 2011:64).

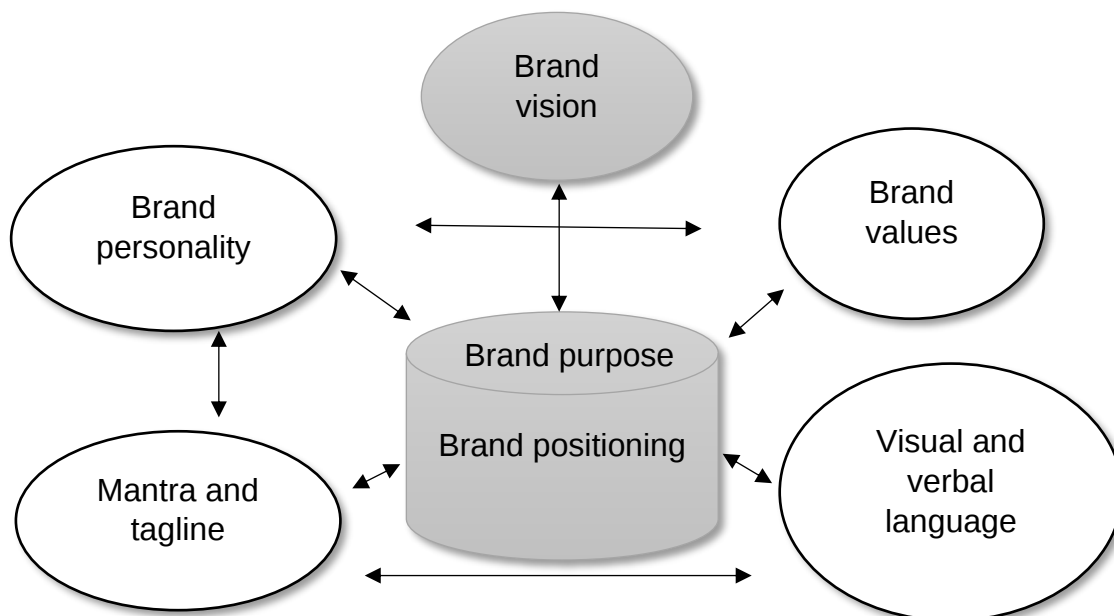


Figure 4: The brand identity system. Klopper and North (2011).

Elements of the brand identity system include the following:

- Brand vision: this expresses the purpose of the brand as well as the aspirational future for the brand (Klopper and North, 2011:70). This is the lofty goal that the brand aspires towards, it unifies and guides the brand, and it motivates the reason for being. A brand's vision will be moulded by insight

into the industry, trends, competitors, stakeholders and predicting how things will change over time. What is the vision of the small business, has it been clearly defined and communicated to internal stakeholders to guide the brand?

- Brand purpose and positioning: the brand purpose should be unique and closely linked to the brand vision (Klopper and North, 2011:72) as it demonstrates the motivation behind the vision and the reason why the vision will be achieved. The brand purpose and positioning are strongly connected as they dictate how the brand wishes to be experienced and perceived by stakeholders. When creating the purpose and positioning, some pertinent questions include, will the brand's purpose motivate stakeholders to connect with it and form relationships, does it adequately differentiate it from competitors (Klopper and North, 2011:73). Is the purpose and positioning clearly understood by stakeholders?
- Brand personality: this brings the brand to life and must align with the purpose and vision. Personality asks the question: what kind of person would the brand be if it were a human being (Klopper and North, 2011:74). The brand personality will require a unique voice, tone and character and must be expressed clearly and specifically so it cannot be misunderstood, confused, or misinterpreted. Is there a distinct and clear personality?
- Brand values: this is the belief system of the brand and is aligned with the personality, purpose, positioning, and vision (Klopper and North, 2011:76). Brand values shape the culture and behaviour and directs relationships, it makes the purpose believable. Do the values express a clear belief system and guide behaviour?
- Brand mantra and tagline: these are created to exemplify the brand's personality, purpose and positioning in a brief statement that serves to evoke an emotional response with stakeholders (Klopper and North, 2011:79). The mantra is internal and designed to guide and connect with internal stakeholders and allow them to adequately fulfil the brand promise. The tagline on the other hand is designed to connect with external stakeholders and evoke an emotion. Both are designed with the purpose, personality, and positioning in mind, but must typify the most powerful reason to believe in the brand. Is the mantra and tagline clear to all stakeholders?
- Brand visual and verbal language: these are the specific guidelines on how the brand behaves and expresses itself, and this can include logos, staff behaviour, signage, packaging, marketing communication, essentially, every interaction with stakeholders is driven by this guide (Klopper and North, 2011:81). Is the visual and verbal language clearly articulated, understood, and lived?

2.2.4 Comparison between the Models

Some commonalities between the models / theories are represented here:

Aaker and Joachimsthaler	Kapferer	Klopper and North
Customer analysis	Reflection and self-image	
Competitor analysis		
Self-analysis	Culture	Mantra and tagline
Extended; core; brand essence	Culture	Brand purpose / brand vision
Brand as product	Physique	Visual and verbal language
Brand as organisation	Culture	Brand values
Brand as person	Personality	Brand personality
Brand as symbol	Physique	Visual and verbal language
Value proposition		Brand positioning
Credibility		Brand values
Brand-customer relationship	Relationship	Brand purpose / brand vision
Brand identity elaboration		
Brand positioning		Brand positioning
Brand-building programs		Explored further in Klopper & North
Tracking		

Table 1: Commonalities between the models. Author (2018).

While the Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) model provides an overview of brand identity incorporating elements including stakeholders, competitors, self, identity analysis, positioning and brand-building programs, the Kapferer (2012) model focuses on communication as the key of the model and how this impacts identity, while the Klopper and North (2011) model focuses on stakeholders as the key of the model and how it impacts identity. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009:43) further state that although each category has relevance for all brands, it is virtually impossible for brand to have associations in all areas when assessing against the core concepts of brand as product, organisation, symbol and person.

The Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) model thus provides a holistic outline of brand identity and will be used in the analysis of boutique retail jewellery SMEs. The aim is to use the model as a starting point for brand evaluation in each business and identify missing elements specific to small business or to suggest adjustments to certain elements to cater specifically for the small business environment.

2.3 Branding and Small Business

2.3.1 Importance of Branding for SMEs

Couto and Ferreira (2017:194) define branding as a process that is intended to influence consumers' perception of what the brand is, its meaning, and how it adds value to the product, and suggest that the branding process is continuous and interlinked with a marketing-mix strategy that is focused on creating strong, favourable and unique associations in the consumer's mind about the brand. Brands are an essential tool in a cluttered marketplace as they allow consumers to

distinguish between various offerings, make informed decisions, create competitive advantage, and are used to nurture value and create profitability (Abimbola, 2001:99; Agostini et al, 2014:78; Osakwe, Chovancova and Ogbonna, 2016:34). A brand-based strategy allows an organisation to create brand equity, which includes concepts such as perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand awareness and brand associations (Couto and Ferreira, 2017:194). SMEs are well poised to use brand advantage to create consistent positive customer experiences as they are more flexible and adaptable than large organisations (Krake, 2005:229; Abimbola and Vallaster, 2007:342), but Couto and Ferreira (2017:195) note that although branding has been extensively studied, the literature relating to this topic is more geared towards large organisations than SMEs. Couto and Ferreira (2017:196) suggest that while SMEs might believe in the power of branding, most of them remain operationally focused, and do not outline a methodical and consistent branding strategy. In fact, SMEs might have a very limited view of what branding entails, and this is mainly concerned with advertising, brand name and logo (Couto and Ferreira, 2017:196). Branding should not be an “add on” but a fundamental part of the creation of the brand, permeating everything it does (Juntunen et al, 2010:129). Mowle and Merrilees (2005:223) further discuss the difference between product-driven branding (functional) versus marketing-driven branding (symbolic) where product-driven companies engage in less marketing and promotion with a focus on the product and its functional value, while marketing-driven companies focus on a holistic brand, and the experiential nature of the consumer’s interaction with the brand, with a greater emphasis on marketing, branding and extending the product range. Couto and Ferreira (2017:202) state that in most cases the brand-building effort undertaken by SMEs is small and closely linked to the owner-manager and the location of the business. In addition, it was noted that brand-based decisions are made by the owner-manager, and that the brand becomes the personification of the owner (Couto and Ferreira, 2017:202). Christmann, Alexander and Wood (2016:138) in their work on internationalisation, cite the crucial role of the entrepreneur to the development of brand identity, including their international or global mindset, personality, personal networks in foreign countries and their central role to retail branding in both symbolic and functional meaning. As regards brand relevance, although brand value is cited by owner-managers as important, the brand is described as the “label” to identify the product and provide distinction against competing products and is not seen as an asset that can add value to the company (Couto and Ferreira, 2017:202). Inskip (2004:360) further states that some organisations share the belief that the best products / services will sell themselves, that corporate branding is not required, and that the word ‘brand’ is exclusively used when referring to products and not the organisation itself.

Many studies indicate that academic definitions of marketing and branding are designed for large organisations that have access to more resources and are not transferable to SMEs who have unique characteristics (Gilmore et al, 2001:6; Berthon et al, 2008:30; Juntunen et al, 2010:116; Resnick et al, 2016:155). Centeno et al, (2013:446) further state that although SMEs are usually characterised by flat and informal organisational structures, high levels of innovation and creativity, ad hoc planning and a lack of financial resources and experience, they are often still expected to develop their brand in the same way as large organisations who have access to more resources, formal structures and long-term planning. It is therefore logical to have an SME-specific framework to cater for their special characteristics.

Abimbola (2001:103) summarises an SME model with five guidelines geared towards the creation of a strong brand, including focusing on corporate branding, creatively designing marketing programmes with specific brand association focus, an integrated set of brand elements to enhance awareness and image, appropriate campaigns for specific audiences and leveraging secondary associations.

Krake (2005:233) further leverages and fine-tunes this model (Figure 8) to propose a funnel model for the role of management in SMEs that includes the influence of the entrepreneur, the influence of the company structure, the influence of the market, marketing (creativity), marketing activities and messages, budget, turnover and brand recognition. Krake (2005:233) elaborates on the role of the entrepreneur by stating that they are often the personification of the brand, their influence is greater and much more direct in an SME, and that the brand is more closely linked with the entrepreneur than it would be in a large organisation.

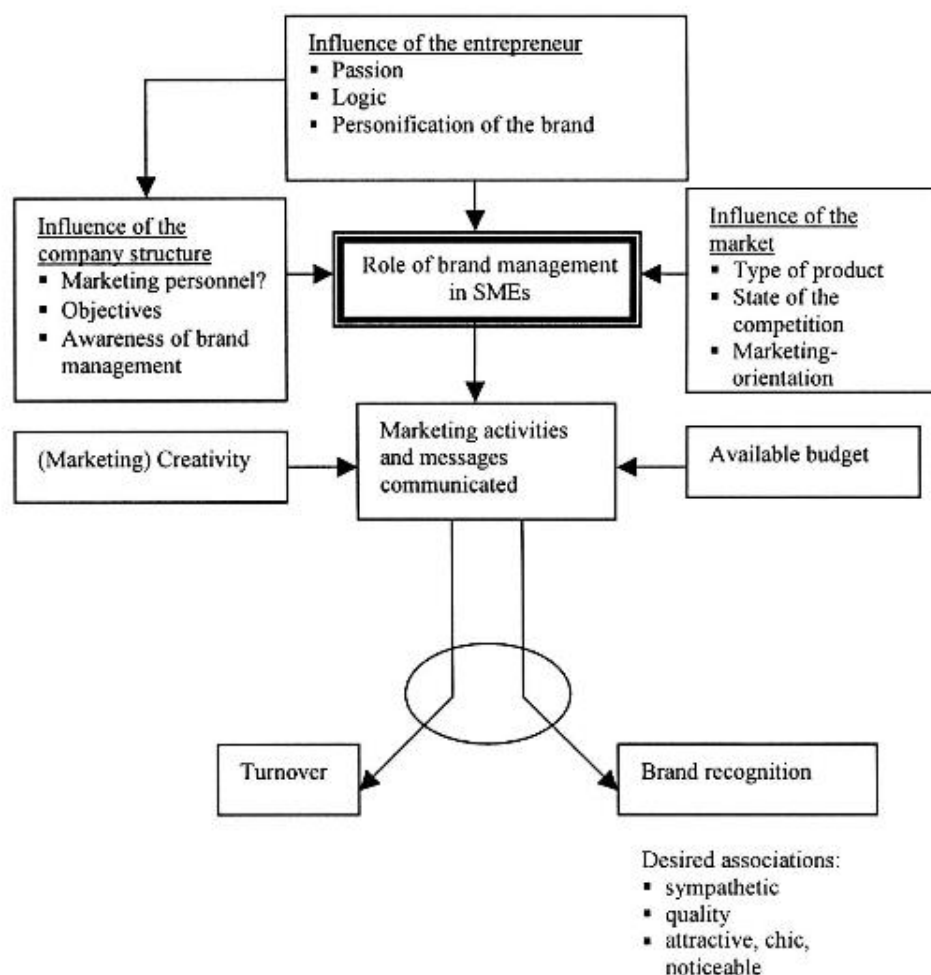


Figure 5: Funnel model for the role of management in SMEs. Krake (2005).

Wong and Merrilees (2005:158) summarise three models or archetypes of branding for SMEs, namely minimalist, embryonic, and integrated. The following table (Table 3) summarises the characteristics of the three models, with an emphasis on the degree of brand distinctiveness, brand orientation and brand performance for each model (Wong and Merrilees, 2005:159):

Type	Branding activities	Brand distinctiveness	Brand orientation	Brand performance
Minimalist	Low-key marketing across the board	Low	Low	Low
Embryonic	Stronger marketing but not branding; Very informal branding; Seen as optional; Narrow promotional tools; Word-of-mouth	Low / medium	Medium	Medium
Integrated	Stronger marketing and branding; Either formal or informal branding; Branding integral, not an option; Wider promotional tools	Medium / high	High	High

Table 2: Branding archetypes. Wong and Merrilees (2005).

The model is further illustrated via the idea of brand barriers being the starting point for SMEs to under-invest in brand-building which results in a low brand distinctiveness, and notes that once these are overcome, distinctiveness becomes the forerunner for brand orientation where branding becomes a focal point, which in turn, becomes the forerunner for brand-marketing performance (Wong and Merrilees, 2005:159).

Centeno et al (2013:449) propose a model for SMEs that comprises five phases of brand-building, linked closely to brand identity and differentiation, and the influence of the owner-manager on brand communication. This is depicted in Figure 9 below.

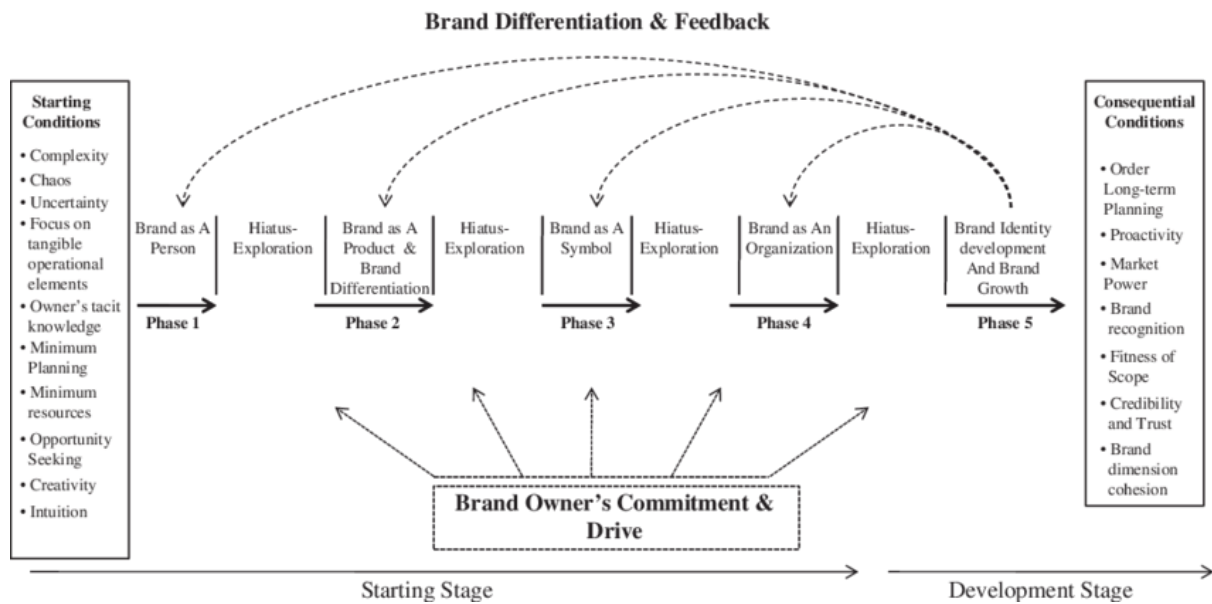


Figure 6: The five phases of SME brand-building. Centeno, Hart and Dinnie (2013)

The model is further illustrated by the following dimensions of brand identity, namely brand as person where the close relationship between the personality of the owner and the personality of the brand is demonstrated, brand as product where it is suggested that opportunity recognition is the most important first step that brand owners take when creating successful brands, brand as symbol where it is shown that brand owners need to be aware of the importance of choosing a good brand name meaning that it needs to be short and simple, attractive, easy to recall and evoke positive associations and benefits and finally brand as organisation where values were found to be key in the building of the SME (Centeno et al, 2013:450-452).

Centeno et al (2013:452) enhance the concept of SME brand identity by linking it closely to the role of the owner-manager, and the importance of their commitment towards their brands as depicted in Figure 10 below:

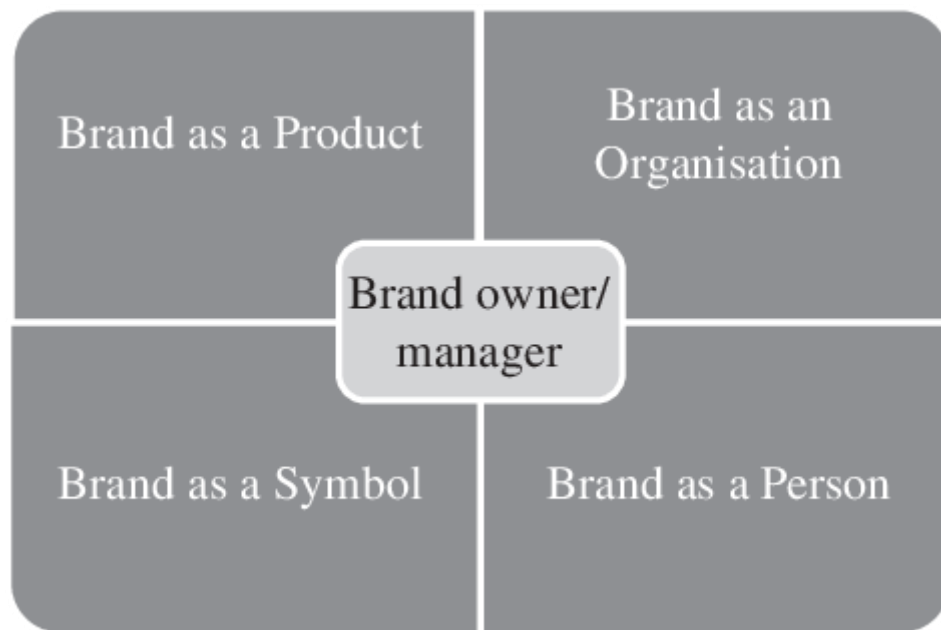


Figure 7: The brand owner/manager dimension of brand identity. Centeno, Hart and Dinnie (2013)

Each of the models presented demonstrates a specific focus on SMEs, their unique characteristics, and the way in which they use marketing to drive the brand. Further, from 2001 – 2013, it can be seen that significant progress has been made towards building a model for SMEs that highlights the strong involvement of the owner-manager as a key part of the brand-building capabilities and activities of the SME.

2.3.2 The Retail Brand

Retail branding can be defined as identifying the products / services of a retailer as different from those of competitors, and its brand equity is exhibited in consumers responding more favourably to its marketing actions than they do to competing retailers (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004). Mathews-Lefebvre and Dubois (2013:385) further define retail branding as a systematic process used to create a cluster of values that promise a unique and welcomed experience for the consumer. Retail branding can be considered a key differentiator of retail marketing strategy (Mitchell et al, 2011:160). Retailer brands are different from product brands in that they are typically more multi-sensory and rely on rich consumer experiences to build brand equity (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004). Retailer attributes can include variety and quality of products sold, store appearance and ambience, employee behaviour, customer service and appearance, price levels, and promotional activities, amongst others (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004). Mitchell et al (2011:165-167) comment on the importance of the owner-manager to the brand management function within the SME, and noted that they took an intuitive approach to designing a brand identity, implementing brand projects and managing the retail brand, and that they interpreted the retail brand concept as symbolic in nature, meaning that it is what you are and what you do. Retail branding also refers to the operational elements of being in the retail space and this includes the management of the store environment and the detail therein, the shopping experience that links with how it makes a customer feel, customer service that leads to loyalty and the importance of a strong product mix (Mitchell et al, 2011:167-169). The following model (Figure 11 below) of SME branding in the retail space typifies how owner-managers think about branding (Mitchell et al, 2011:170):

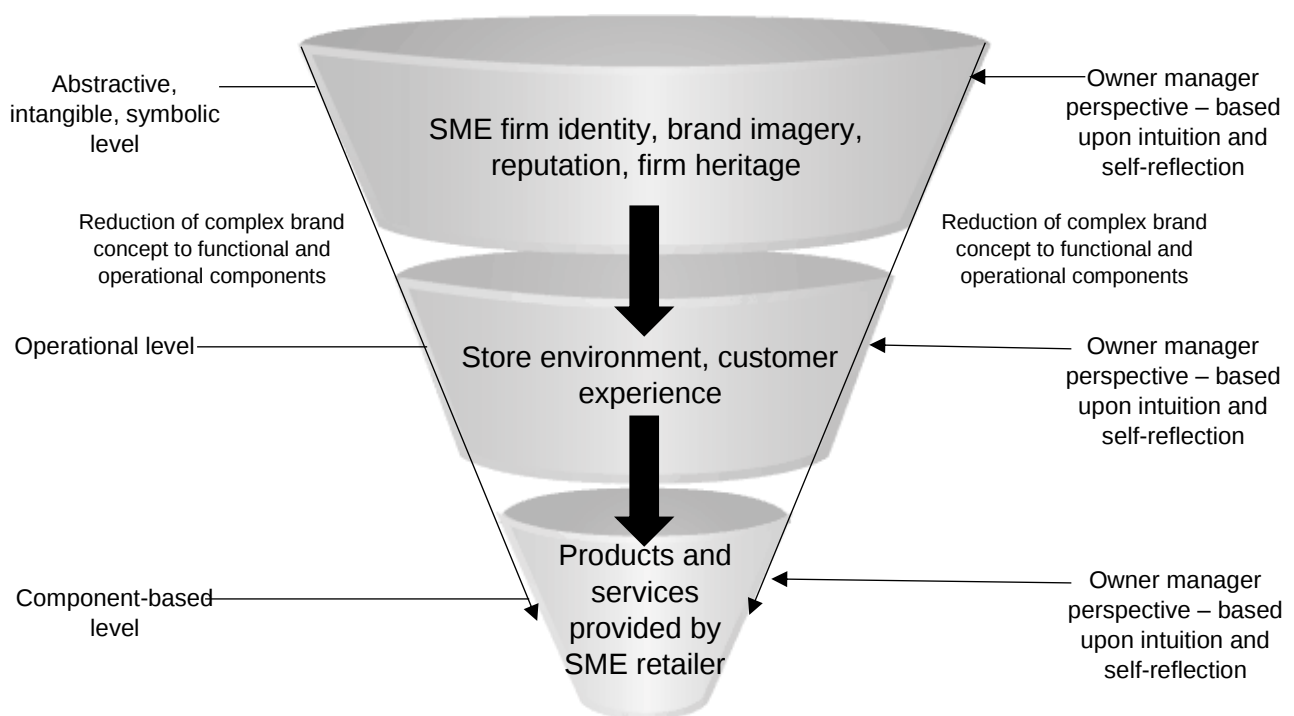


Figure 8: The reductive nature of SME retail branding. Mitchell, Hutchinson and Bishop (2011).

Kent and Stone (2007:532) link the concept of core values to the internal branding process and note that this includes elements such as the organisation's mission and vision, as well as their fundamental values, which further impacts on their brand architecture, product attributes, brand positioning and communications strategy. With increased competitiveness and a move towards strategic branding, the concept of branding moved from consumer products to the retail industry and the brand took on a greater importance as an intangible asset, evolving into metrics such as brand image, brand positioning and brand identity (Kent and Stone, 2007:532-533). Over time, retail-brand communication has evolved, moving from the use of graphics to communicate brand identity, to the creation of visual experiences with the store becoming a key part of successful retail brand strategies (Kent and Stone, 2007:533).

Hutchinson et al, (2005:151-152) suggest that SMEs are not merely smaller versions of their larger counterparts and that they must deal with very different issues including size, limited resources, personal objectives of the owner-manager, and informal planning and control systems. Their measurement for SMEs is related to sales turnover, in the region of a maximum of £24 million pounds sterling and based on these criteria note that approximately 40 percent of retailers in the UK market are SMEs (Hutchinson et al, 2005:151). It was found that the product, lifestyle, image and niche of the company's brand were key competitive advantages unique to small retailers who also operated in international markets, and that small retailers could differentiate themselves from larger retailers through product offering, exclusivity and price (Hutchinson et al, (2005:154). A niche strategy is proposed, one that allows a small retailer to respond to individual customer needs that allow it to differentiate from competitors (Hutchinson et al, (2005:165).

Botschen and Wegerer (2017:876) propose a framework that links the retail format, which is the store experience, with the concept of branding as an holistic management approach to direct the focus of the retail space from tactical to strategic, namely a space in which the touchpoints of the retail format are aligned with organisational culture, overall management responsibility moves to executive level, with a focus on all stakeholders not just consumers, and the retail experience, including touchpoints like employees, therefore links closely with brand heritage.

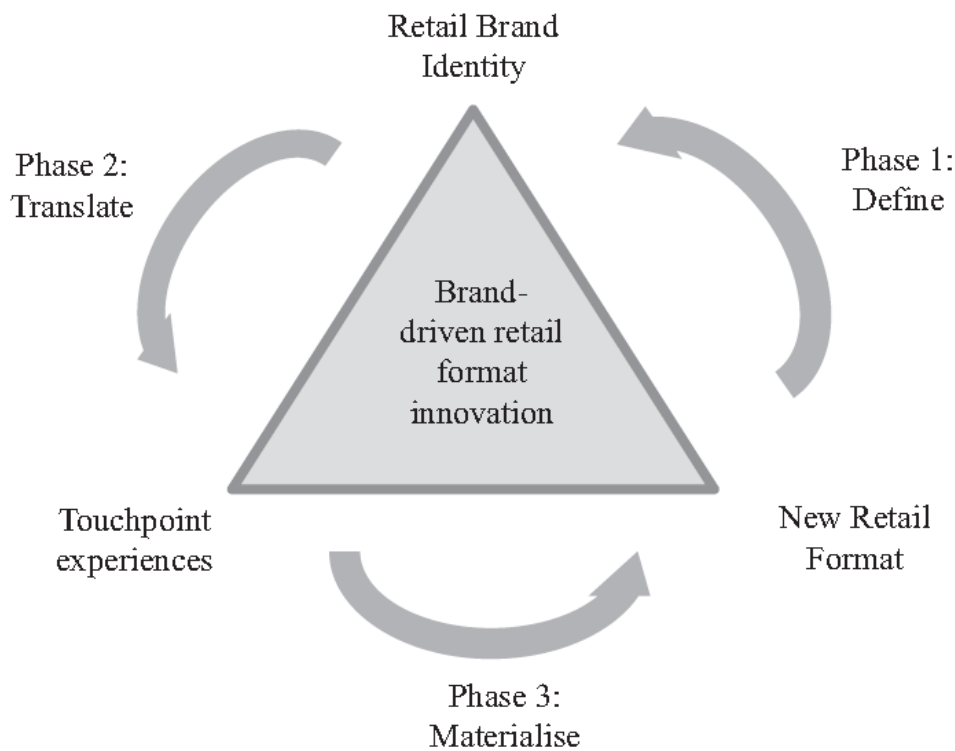


Figure 9: Brand-driven retail format innovation. Botschen and Wegerer (2017).

The process outlined in Figure 12 above by Botschen and Wegerer (2017:887) is designed to lead a retailer through the process of connecting the concepts of retail innovation and brand-building and is centred around the creation of a concrete definition of the retailer's brand identity, translating that identity into a definitive touchpoint experience in the retail space and finally the alignment of all organisation processes, structures and behaviours around the new format.

Mathews-Lefebvre and Dubois (2013:387) highlight some issues that may explain the reasons why retailers have problems with branding, including a product-centred culture focused on short-term financial results, and having too diverse brand portfolios. Opportunities for the future in the retail space include a focus on strategic and operational marketing, relational versus transactional branding, long-term value creation rather than short-term profitability, the creation and management of retailer brand portfolios with clear differentiation, positioning and brand-specific goals versus store-branded products, differentiation via identity and targeting rather than product, and finally brand-specific management rather than product-specific management (Mathews-Lefebvre and Dubois, 2013:389).

Retail branding, as can be seen, is a growing field that has much importance for SMEs operating in this sector, and links closely with the need for SMEs to use brand identity to build their brands in the retail space.

2.3.3 Brand Impact on Performance and Growth

According to Urde (1999:117-118), brand orientation is defined as: “...an approach in which the processes of the organisation revolve around the creation, development and protection of brand identity in an ongoing interaction with target customers with the aim of achieving lasting competitive advantages in the form of brands”. Gromark and Melin (2011:395) further refine this definition as: “brand orientation is a deliberate approach to brand building where brand equity is created through interaction between internal and external stakeholders. This approach is characterised by brand being the hub around which the organisation’s processes revolve, an approach in which brand management is perceived as a core competence and where brand building is intimately associated with business development and financial performance.” Further, Gromark and Melin (2011:401-403) present the eight dimensions of brand orientation that are vital in managing a brand orientation strategy, and these are: approach, which is related to whether a focus on brands and brand-building is seen as an investment or a cost; implementation, which focuses on whether an organisation always creates brand ambassadors and whether it keeps its promises; goals and follow-up, which is related to goals strategically created for brand development and achievement measurement; relationships, which is related to the creation and maintenance of relationships with external stakeholders; identity development and protection, which is related to brand identity development and protection; operational development, which is related to the ability to use core values to drive all processes; top management participation, which is related to their participation in brand development; and final responsibility and roles, which is related to responsibility and accountability in the area of brand management.

The definition of brand orientation is distinct from marketing orientation, which is short-term and functionally oriented, but Urde (1999:118) notes that both are necessary for an organisation. Urde (1999:124) elaborates by stating that a brand-oriented company will focus on transforming products into brands – where products can be objectively described, analysed and explained, a brand exhibits emotional and symbolic values and must be experienced and interpreted. Furthermore, a product is functional and can be compared with other products, while a brand exists to build a relationship with consumers through personality, identity, value and meaning (Urde, 1999:124). Urde (1999:125) outlines The Brand Hexagon – A Conceptual Model of a Brand-Oriented Company and its Identity to further explain a brand-oriented company (Figure 13 below).

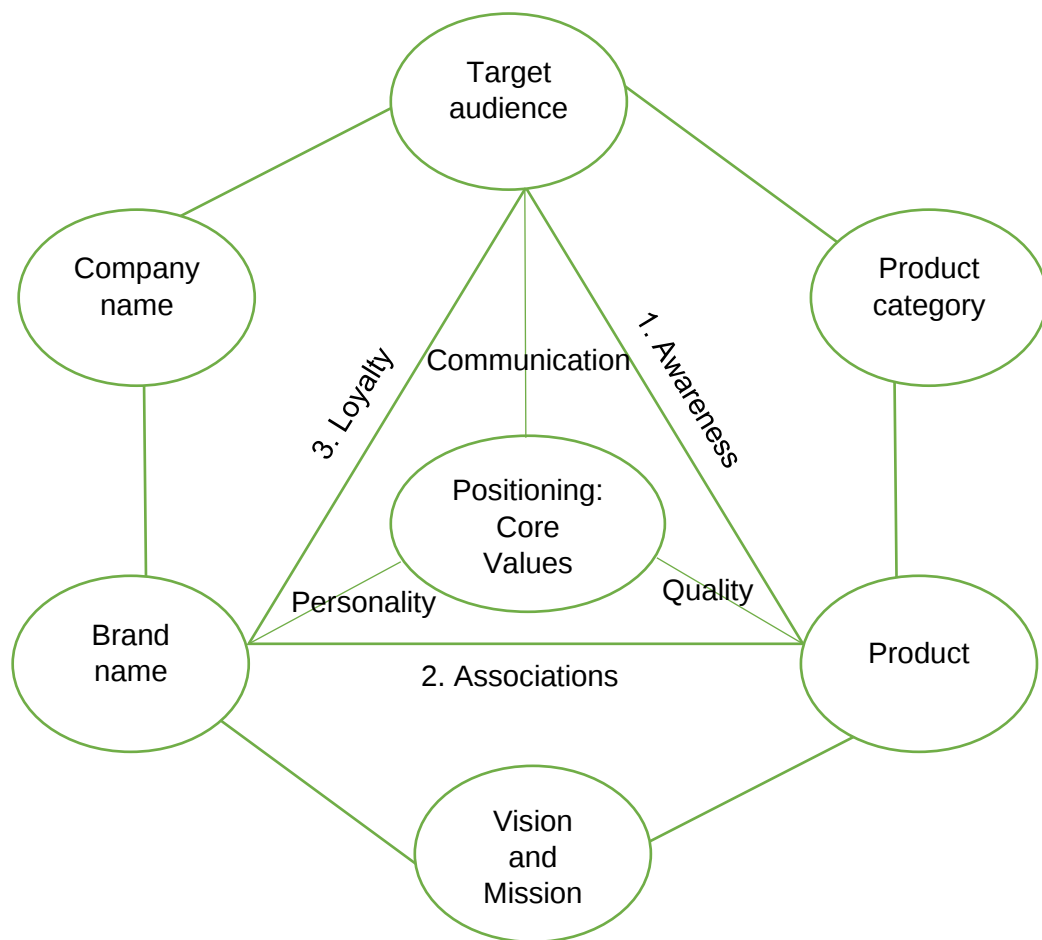


Figure 10: The brand hexagon – a conceptual model of a brand-oriented company and its identity. Urde (1999).

The model incorporates the various elements that a brand-oriented company embraces, including a vision and mission (aspirational plans and reason for being), the communication of value and meaning via concepts of product and product category, positioning and core values, brand and corporate name, identifying the target audience to facilitate communication, building relationships through awareness, associations and loyalty, and finally using the positioning to express the core values which holds the model together (Urde, 1999:125-128).

Urde, Baumgarth and Merrilees (2013:2) detail crucial differences between the concepts of brand orientation and market orientation via “The Egg Model” (Figure 14 below) where brand orientation is an inside-out approach with brand identity being central, while market orientation is an outside-in approach with brand image being central.

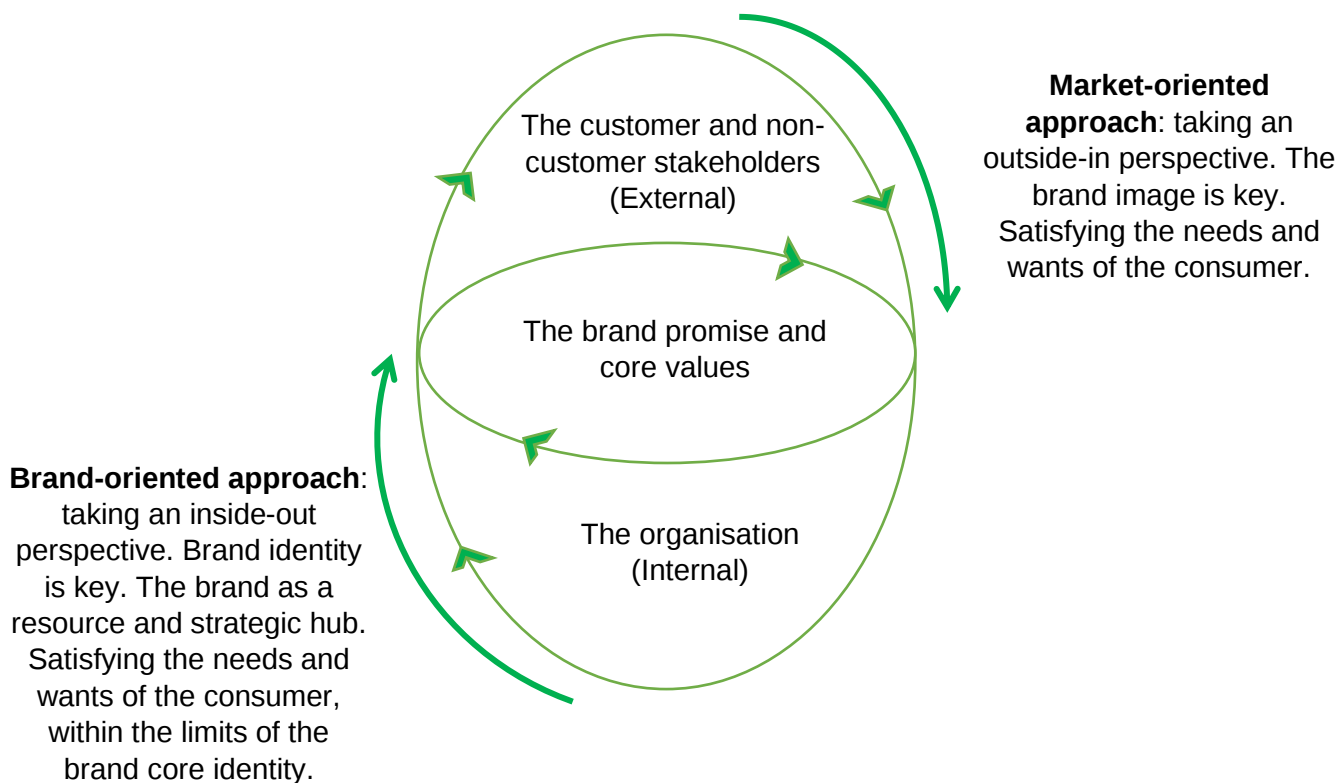


Figure 11: The market and brand-oriented approach; “The Egg Model”. Urde, Baumgarth and Merrilees (2013).

Urde et al (2013:4) note that various studies additionally indicate a positive relationship between brand orientation and corporate performance which is a critical consideration for any organisation.

Anees-ur-Rehman et al, (2018:310) examined the role of a brand-oriented strategy on financial performance via four branding constructs, namely, internal branding, brand communication, brand awareness and finally brand credibility. Brand credibility makes an organisation more reliable via the in-house route of internal branding, while brand awareness builds reliability via the external route of brand communication and both impacts positively on financial performance (Anees-ur-Rehman et al, 2013:310). The conclusion is that SMEs can benefit in both brand and financial performance by becoming more brand-oriented (Anees-ur-Rehman et al, 2013:311).

Hirvonen et al, (2013:624-625) further describe brand orientation as an approach that regards brands as strategic resources that react to customer needs in a way that is consistent with the brand identity and values of the organisation, where marketing orientation takes the short-term view that the customer is always right. Brand oriented firms are careful to consider how their actions affect their brands and use the vision, mission, and values as guides. This focus on brand orientation in turn creates and enhances an organisation-wide commitment to the brand, as well as helping to build greater brand consistency (Hirvonen et al, 2013:637-638). In fact, Hirvonen et al (2013:638) suggest that while SMEs may not be able to rely on exactly the same practices of brand building as other larger and older organisations, they should have the same attitude towards branding, that is, a brand orientation, and that they should not be thinking that they haven’t been in business long enough

to practice branding, or that their relative small size does not permit them to build a strong brand. This is echoed by Hirvonen and Laukkanen (2014:53) who state that most SMEs refrain from, or have a short-term approach to branding, even though branding has been proven to be relevant and worthwhile for any size of organisation.

Laukkanen, Tuominen, Reijonen and Hirvonen (2016:673) suggest that market orientation and brand orientation are complementary to one another, where brands are value creators for small business and a brand orientation has a positive effect on brand performance, business growth and profitability. In addition, research by Renton, Daellenbach, Davenport and Richard (2015:161) demonstrates that SMEs who invest in an integrated brand orientation approach combined with the entrepreneurial drive of the owner-manager enables market innovation and growth. This speaks to earlier literature that links the personality of the owner closely with the SME brand.

Reijonen et al (2014:250) investigated the link between SME growth objectives and brand-orientation, and further how this impacts financial performance. The results indicate that SMEs with high growth objectives also show a stronger propensity to engage in a brand orientation strategy which regards brands as valuable assets and places brand building as central to their strategy (Reijonen et al, 2014:261).

Hirvonen and Laukkanen (2014:42) consider the role of brand orientation via three brand constructs, namely brand performance, brand identity and internal branding. Their conclusion from the study was that brand orientation influences brand performance positively, but indirectly, through brand identity (Hirvonen and Laukkanen, 2014:53). A positive focus on brand orientation leads to a stronger focus on brand identity, which in turn positively impacts on brand performance (Hirvonen and Laukkanen, 2014:54). However, as brand orientation impacts brand performance indirectly, SMEs are urged to place greater emphasis on brand identity as a tool for financial advancement (Hirvonen and Laukkanen, 2014:54).

Osakwe, Ciunova-Shuleska, Ajayi and Chovancova (2015:254) discuss the correlation between brand orientation, customer retention and brand performance for SMEs. Brand performance in this study has been defined as customer loyalty and financial outcomes, and Osakwe et al (2015:255) state that brand consistency is a direct precursor to brand performance in SMEs. SMEs should focus on building strong customer relationships, as these will significantly impact on financial results, as will a strong and well implemented brand strategy (brand orientation) (Osakwe et al, 2015:255). Wong and Merrilees (2008:377) further support the correlation between brand orientation and brand performance, with emphasis on constructs of brand distinctiveness (differentiation) and innovation. Brand barriers to becoming brand orientated are highlighted including a resistance to place brand at the centre of company strategy, and brand only being used as part of product (Wong and Merrilees, 2008:378). However, the benefits of becoming brand oriented where brand is central to everything the company does is emphasised, and a consistent focus on remaining distinctive through constant innovation will influence brand performance, and in turn, financial performance (Wong and Merrilees, 2008:379). Odoom et al (2017:70) also conclude that branding positively impacts performance with the use of distinct brand names and product uniqueness as key drivers towards performance. Muhonen et al (2017:63) further verify the link between SME brand identity and business performance via the constructs of brand vision, brand values and brand positioning. Their results indicate that SMEs can use brand identity for

competitive advantage, and this has a positive effect on financial performance. To add to this, Pérez-Cabanero et al (2012:120) analysed the concept of marketing capabilities which are defined as outward-focused, namely marketing intelligence, segmentation, target selection, positioning and relationship development, and inward-focused which comprises marketing policies, coordination between departments and presenting a coherent image to the market. Financial performance was shown to be positively affected by both marketing and pricing capabilities (Pérez-Cabanero et al, 2012:133).

Odoom, (2016:1241) and Berthon et al (2008:40) demonstrate that there is a positive relationship between brand-building programs and company performance. Low-performing SMEs undertake brand-building activities in moderation while high-performing SMEs engage in higher levels of brand-building with performance across the SMEs showing a similar variance.

Agostini et al, (2015:162) demonstrate, through analysis of the Italian fashion industry, that there is a strong link between branding and SME sales performance, where branding is classified as the combined use of trademarks registration and marketing expenses which represent brand-building efforts. Furthermore, Agostini, et al (2014:88) use the term trademark (corporate trademarks and product trademarks) as indicative of the brand, and conclude that corporate trademarks have an important link with performance over a period of at least four to five years and this is relevant as most SMEs have resource constraints and would need more time to devote sustained effort to brand-building.

2.4 The Boutique Retail Jewellery SME

Carcano and Lojacono (2002:5) classify jewellery as an expressive design element, where expression is the meaning attributed to an object in terms of identity, status, prestige, and fashion. *“A piece of jewellery evokes sensations, places and memories. It is an integrating part of our culture and stays with us every day. We entrust it with an emotional heritage that goes beyond its intrinsic value.”* (Carcano and Lojacono, 2002:25). Jewellery pieces are adored not because of their performance or functional value, but because of their symbolic value (Cordeiro, 2003:21). The perceived quality, and value and the emotional component of jewellery sales and how marketing can highlight the relationship between jewellery and feelings of love, friendship and commitment is also stressed by Cordeiro (2003:21), as well as links to cultural practices such as graduation, engagements, weddings and anniversaries. Fine jewellery can be classified as a luxury product, which is defined by their scarcity or limited availability, durability, ephemeral qualities, exclusivity, higher price and quality, appealing aesthetics and layers of symbolic meaning (Moraes, Carrigan, Bosangit, Ferreira and McGrath, 2017:528). Further, it is noted that consumers describe luxury products in more abstract terms than necessary items and associate them with an experiential and symbolic dimension rather than the material ownership of things (Moraes et al, 2017:528). This suggests that the emotional value that consumers invest in jewellery is not fully exploited in the market by SMEs.

Sarett (1960) is easily one of the first articles available on jewellery marketing. Sarett (1960:51) quotes a gross retail sales volume of \$1.5 billion annually, and notes that jewellery is a luxury item, irrespective of price, use, need or function but that brand names do not play a role in the jewellery industry. Indeed, the average customer has little knowledge of brand names, nationally known jewellery brands are rare, and

most jewellery purchases are done directly from well-known small jewellers whose prestige, confidence and integrity are a central part of each transaction; the jeweller must sell himself first and then his products (Sarett, 1960:54). Fast forward almost 40 years to 1999 and the world-wide finished jewellery retail market amounted to over US\$200bn, which is a combination of gold, platinum, diamonds, and other stones (Da Silva, 2007:69). Wyld (2010:1) estimates the global jewellery market in 2010 at over \$150 billion, and the US market annual turnover of \$60 billion annually, with more than 30 000 jewellery retail stores. This is a mix of large retail stores interspersed with many small regional stores (chain and independent). The jewellery industry is also divided by price points and differences in inventory and customer types between high-end jewellery stores and those that are aiming at lower-end consumers (Wyld, 2010:1).

Gomelsky (2013) reported on robust growth for monobrand stores, with a poorer outlook for non-branded stores at the LINK Jewelry Summit in Vienna. The power of monobrand stores, such as Pandora and Swarovski, lies in the control of their brand identity and their closeness to customers, which non-branded stores cannot duplicate (Gomelsky, 2013). The qualities that make jewellery companies attractive to investors was also spelt out and these include brand and global presence as key, ability to demonstrate that you're not a single product company, product innovation and quality control (Gomelsky, 2013).

Dauriz, Remy and Tochtermann (2014:2) estimated that the jewellery industry remains mainly local, only capturing 12 percent of the worldwide market, with only two known brands – Cartier and Tiffany & Co - appearing in the top 100 global brands.

Interestingly, growth in the global jewellery market is being fuelled by the shift to e-commerce and is reputed to reach \$257 billion in 2017 and grow at a rate of 5 percent per year over the next five years (Weinswig, 2016). Online fine jewellery sales only accounts for a fraction of this (4 – 5 percent) but is projected to reach 10 percent of the market by 2020, which is significant (Weinswig, 2016). The De Beers Group (2018:3) notes the importance of the digital platform to Millennials and Gen Z consumers in their Diamond Insight Report and suggest that it must encompass everything from initial contact to post-purchase experiences in order to be meaningful.

More recent studies (Common Objective, 2018) estimate the fashion and luxury jewellery segment to account for approximately 17 percent of apparel spending, with consumers spending approximately \$348.5 billion annually on jewellery globally. The De Beers Group (2018:4-5) note that diamond jewellery demand is also on the rise, with an increase of 2.2 percent globally from 2016 to 2017, with some trends being the demand for more design-heavy pieces which results in an average increase in retail prices, more single women making purchases as opposed to those in relationships, an increase in self-purchasing as opposed to gifts and an increase in the average online price of diamond jewellery.

A McKinsey & Company (2018:77) report on The State of Fashion shows a growth in the jewellery and watches sector of between 1.5 – 2.5 percent in 2016, but a growth of 2 – 3 percent in 2018, demonstrating a slow-paced return to previous highs in this industry.

Even though branded jewellery currently makes up only about 20 percent of the overall jewellery market, it is strongly suggested that every jewellery company should look at strengthening and differentiating brands through distinctive design, and it is worth noting that small artisan jewellers will struggle to compete with larger jewellery groups due to limited marketing resources (Dauriz et al, 2014:2-3; Hailes, 2018). The jeweller / retailer as the centre of the transaction is particularly important because this is possibly how this relationship is still understood and hence the strong link between the owner-manager and the brand as demonstrated. Hailes (2018) notes that the branded jewellery sector looks set to grow to 30 – 40 percent of the overall market by 2020, and will comprise three types of consumers, namely new money who wear branded jewellery to show off their wealth, emerging market which relates to established brands continuing to inspire trust and the young who more and more turn to brands for self-expression and self-realisation. Deveshwar and Kumari (2016:179) also discuss the concept of branded jewellery and the motivations that consumers might have to purchase branded over unbranded jewellery, some of these being attractive and innovative design, better quality, purity, variety, durability, lightweight and comfortable, trust, uniqueness, specific product benefits, and status. Deveshwar and Kumari (2016:179) describe branded jewellery as lightweight and fashionable, while unbranded jewellery is described as local.

These studies indicate that the jewellery segment cannot be ignored as it contributes significantly to the economy, and it becomes ever more vital that SMEs are capturing a share of these profits.

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the review of the literature demonstrates the significant contribution of small business both globally, and in the South African economy. The brand theories explored broadly outline the meaning of brand identity in the proposed study and to SMEs specifically, and the Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) model has been identified as the tool to further investigate the use of brand identity as a focus point for SMEs in the jewellery sector. The literature has also demonstrated an understanding of the link between branding and small business and will be further developed in this study. The boutique retail jewellery SME sector forms the focus of this research study and investigates whether there is a link between brand identity and building a successful small jewellery retail business.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Methodology

Adams, Khan and Raeside (2014:4) make a clear distinction between business and social science research methods, stating that while business research deals with business concepts such as pricing, supply and demand, forecasting sales, and market behaviours and strategies, social science research is concerned with people, society, daily life and culture. As such, each will use different tools and research methods to ensure that the correct data is collected and analysed. In terms of a methodological approach, research can be broadly classified as either quantitative or qualitative. Quantitative research relies on the use of statistical or numerical data and can be used to predict and control future outcomes, explain the significance of, or relationship to quantities or to generalise from a sample of people to a larger population, while qualitative research utilises interpretive data to explore, understand or describe people's behaviour, identify themes in behaviour, attitudes or trends, or understand relations between people's actions (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:14). Each method will use different techniques to gather data, including surveys for quantitative research, or participant observation and interviews for qualitative research.

Furthermore, the research process consists of three main paradigms which determine how a researcher decides what should be studied, how it should be studied and how to interpret the data. Du Plooy-Cilliers et al (2014:23) discuss these three key paradigms, namely positivism, interpretivism and critical realism, in conjunction with how they might be positioned using research philosophy, either epistemologically, ontologically or axiologically. In brief, epistemology is concerned with knowledge, what is acceptable and how it is acquired, while ontology is concerned with the form and nature of reality and what can be known about it, and finally axiology is concerned with our values (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:8).

3.1.1 Epistemology

Positivism as a paradigm is usually applied to natural sciences with the belief that humans can improve themselves and the world through educating themselves (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:24), while interpretivism focuses on the study of people, how they change all the time and how their environment influences them (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:27), and critical realism argues that real structures exist outside of human consciousness and that our reality of knowledge is a result of social conditioning (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:31). Positivism as an approach prefers to work with an observable social reality and notes that only what can be observed will lead to credible data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009:103). Realism as an approach theorises that what our senses show us as reality is the truth, that objects have an existence independent of the human mind (Saunders et al, 2009:104). Realism can be further categorised as either direct realism, which says that what you see is what you get, i.e. that what you experience through your senses accurately portrays the world, versus critical realism, which argues that our experiences are merely sensations, images of things in the real world, not the things directly (Saunders et al, 2009:105). Using the interpretivist paradigm, a researcher is interested in getting a deeper understanding of social life and human behaviour, as well how people make sense of and give meaning to their daily experiences (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:65). Interpretivism is focused on people rather than objects and the researcher adopts an empathic viewpoint and enters the social world of the

research participants in order to understand their world from their point of view (Saunders et al, 2009:107). This study focuses on people, and how they interact with the SME jewellery retail environment, and the brand itself, with a view to understanding the world from their point of view. Therefore, the study is considered interpretivism, rather than positivism or critical realism.

3.1.2 Ontology

Objectivism notes that social entities exist external to humans, while subjectivism states that social phenomena are created from the perceptions and actions of humans (Saunders et al, 2009:108). This means that customers, for example, might place very different interpretations on situations in which they find themselves because of their worldview, which in turn affects their actions and social interaction with others (Saunders et al, 2009:108).

3.1.3 Axiology

This research philosophy is concerned with the role of values, how the researchers' values affect all stages of the research process and how that affects the credibility of results obtained in a study (Saunders et al, 2009:110). It can be argued that values are the guidance system for all human actions (Saunders et al, 2009:110).

3.1.4 Deductive versus Inductive Research Approaches

Research can also be further classified as either deductive (testing a pre-existing theory in a research study), or inductive (building up a new or existing theory in the research study) (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:48-49). Deduction is generally concerned with explaining the causal relationships between variables using quantitative data collection methods and analysis (Saunders et al, 2009:117). Deduction also notes that the researcher should be independent of what is being observed, and that the data is generalisable (Saunders et al, 2009:118). Induction on the other hand is more concerned with the context in which the events are taking place, uses a smaller sample (qualitative), and formulating a theory from the data gathered (Saunders et al, 2009:118-119). However, induction and deduction can be combined, and generally an approach is chosen based on the amount of readily available information. For example, if there is a lot of information available, the researcher can use this to define a theoretical framework and hypothesis, while research into a topic with very little data might be better handled with generating data and then creating a theory based on that analysis (Saunders et al, 2009:119).

This study is considered inductive as it uses the Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) brand identity model as the basis for shaping the interview discussion and SME exploration.

3.2 Research Plan and Methods

Once a researcher has agreed on the paradigm and corresponding positioning, they would then consider a variety of methods to use for data collection. In the case of quantitative research, which generates or uses numerical data, a viable data collection method could be a questionnaire, and data analysis methods might include graphs and statistics (Saunders et al, 2009:145). For qualitative research, where the goal is to gain a richness and depth of data, where data is considered words, pictures and video, these techniques can include field research which incorporates focus groups, and in-depth interviews, or unobtrusive research where the researcher is not directly involved with the research participants, and where the method of data

analysis can include categorisation of non-numerical data (Saunders et al, 2009:145; Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:175).

Du Plooy-Cilliers et al (2014:173) introduce qualitative research as research that strives to understand the why, what, and how of behaviour through gathering rich and detailed data that is subjective. Qualitative research relies on words rather than numerical data and is focused on finding meaning in data analysis instead of focusing on statistics (Maree, 2016:53). Leedy and Ormrod (2014:142) suggest that qualitative research as a technique can be used for several purposes, namely for description (narrative), interpretation (gain new insights, develop concepts or discover problems), verification (testing) and evaluation (assessment).

It is noted that collecting data in a qualitative study can be time consuming and that a researcher needs to record any potential data accurately and systematically, using a variety of methods, including field notes, audiotapes, sketches, photographs or a combination of these (Leedy and Ormrod, 2014:153). It is also useful to use jotting notes, or memos about initial interpretations of what is being seen and heard (Leedy and Ormrod, 2014:153,155) and this entails splitting the page into two columns and using the left column to record actual notes and observations, while using the right column to record preliminary interpretations (memos).

The collection of data in qualitative research can be done in several ways, including observation, interviews and focus groups and they will each generate different kinds of information (Leedy and Ormrod, 2014:154-156).

Interviews allow the researcher to have one-on-one conversations with participants either via informal conversations, using a general interview approach or via a standard open-ended interview and can yield a lot of valuable and useful information (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:188; Leedy and Ormrod, 2014:155). Maree (2016:93) notes that the aim of qualitative research is to see the world through the eyes of the participant, and they are a valuable source of information if correctly used. Maree (2016:93) lists three types of interviews, namely open-ended or unstructured interviews which take the form of a conversation, semi-structured interviews which generally contain open questions followed by probing, and structured interviews which are detailed and prepared in advance. Generally, in an open-ended or semi-structured interview, the respondent will do most of the talking and the researcher will do most of the listening, while ensuring that the conversation does not stray too far off topic. Leedy and Ormrod (2014:156) suggest that unstructured, or semi-structured interviews are best used for qualitative studies as they are more flexible and are very likely to yield information that the researcher had not specifically planned on getting. Adams et al (2014:144) note that a semi-structured interview approach is to create a 'roadmap' of questions as a guide but that replies to questions are followed with further questions that might not be in the guide but are relevant at the time in order to gain a better understanding. Leedy and Ormrod (2014:156-159) present several guidelines for conducting successful interviews, such as identifying questions in advance, considering how people's cultural backgrounds might influence their answers, making sure that respondents are representative of the group, finding a suitable preferably quiet location where you are less likely to be interrupted, getting written permission, establishing and maintaining rapport, focussing on the actual rather than on the abstract or hypothetical, not putting words in people's mouths, recording answers verbatim, keeping your reactions to yourself, and remembering that you might not necessarily be getting the

facts. In addition, Maree (2016:94) states that successful interviews need to be credible and trustworthy and these qualities can be ensured through interviews that are reproducible, systematic, and transparent. Wahyuni (2012:74), Adams et al (2014:146) and Saunders et al (2009:394) suggest that the researcher conduct mock interviews with colleagues beforehand in order to fine-tune the research instrument (interview guide) and make any changes to words or expressions in order to make the questions clear. Further Wahyuni (2012:74) advises that the interview should be framed by a briefing beforehand and a debriefing afterwards, and that a research pack should be provided in the introductory meeting or sent beforehand via email. The start of the interview is characterised by explaining the aim of the research and interview, emphasizing confidentiality and anonymity, as well as the voluntary nature of the study. This is followed by the signing of a consent form as well as permission to record the interview (Wahyuni, 2012:74). The researcher is further advised to take notes during the recording of the interview as well as memos afterwards (Wahyuni, 2012:74). In addition, participants should be encouraged to ask questions, make comments or add information during the debriefing that are relevant to the study, and the researcher can gather additional information such as documentation which can assist in triangulating the data (Wahyuni, 2012:75). Adams et al (2014:149) also discuss the use of telephone interviews for participants where geographic location or time and costs are a consideration. However, important disadvantages are noted, such as a sense of impersonality if you have not met before, a lack of visual contact where the researcher cannot build on verbal cues and a time pressure which can result in an interview being rushed (Adams et al, 2014:149). Some ways of overcoming these include using voice cues to compensate for lack of visual contact, listening sensitively and not talking too much, the importance of tone and the need to project warmth and friendliness, remembering to make notes and record, summing up important points throughout, arranging the appointment in advance, having all paperwork with you and not being afraid of silence while the participant ponders on their response (Adams et al, 2014:149).

A further consideration is questionnaire design which can also impact on the quality of the interview and the information obtained. Saunders et al (2009:360-361) define a questionnaire as a data collection technique where participants respond to questions in a predetermined order and note that for the questionnaire to be effective, the researcher has to ensure that the data collected will answer the research questions and achieve the objectives. Depending on the type of study, whether qualitative or quantitative, a questionnaire can include open-ended questions where respondents answer in their own way, or close-ended questions which provide a number of alternative answers to choose from (Saunders et al, 2009:374). If the researcher is planning to analyse data by computer, the Atlas.ti software facilitates coding simultaneously with conducting the data analysis. Other considerations include the order and flow of the questions, the layout of the questionnaire and the length of the questionnaire (Saunders et al, 2009:387-389).

The researcher considered the use of semi-structured interviews as the best option as it provides a basic guideline of the data required, facilitates one-on-one conversations, can be easily recorded, whilst also allowing room for flexibility in the conversation with participants.

Field research is defined as conducting research in the field through observation or participation in events (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:175) and primarily consists of

ethnography, grounded theory, case study research or action research. The researcher can be involved in three ways in field research, namely as an onlooker / complete observer where there is no actual contact, a partial participant / observer as participant where the observer does not influence the dynamics of the setting, or a full / complete participant where the researcher is totally immersed in the situation – each method has its pros and cons and must be specifically chosen to complement the research objectives (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:181; Maree, 2016:91). Leedy and Ormrod (2014:155) note that while observations present a very flexible research approach as the researcher can shift focus from one thing to another, they are also problematic as a novice researcher may not know what to focus on, and their presence may influence people and their behaviour. Case study research, as described by Crowe, Cresswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery and Sheikh (2011:1) is generally used when an in-depth and complex understanding of an issue in a real-life context is required. Yin (1981:97) further notes that case study research is not limited to exploratory studies but can also apply to descriptive and explanatory studies if correctly used. Three types of case study approaches exist, namely intrinsic, instrumental, and collective (Crowe et al, 2011:1). Intrinsic is used to study a unique phenomenon, instrumental uses a particular case to gain a wider understanding of an issue, whilst collective involves the use of multiple cases to generate an even broader understanding (Crowe et al, 2011:1). Furthermore, the case study research approach can be used to gather information on ‘how’, ‘why’ and ‘what’ questions that can lead to insights (Crowe et al, 2011:4). They are also linked clearly to the epistemological viewpoint and can therefore be critical, interpretivist or positivist (Crowe et al, 2011:4). Steps involved in conducting a case study include carefully defining the case, selecting the cases that should inform the study, depending on whether it is intrinsic, instrumental or collective, collecting the data, and finally analysing, interpreting and writing up the data and findings (Crowe et al, 2011:5-7; Yin, 2013:256). Interestingly, one of the potential pitfalls of case study research is considered a lack of scientific rigour and this can be alleviated by, for example, using a theoretical framework as part of the research, and providing transparency throughout the process (Crowe et al, 2011:7).

Furthermore, case study research can be based on single-case analysis, or multiple-case analysis, and Yin (2013:259) notes that doing more than one case can strengthen the researchers’ argument, provide richer data, broaden the coverage of the case study as well as provide rigour to the study. Yin (2013:262) further notes that using more than one type of evidence, for example interviews and direct observation in field will allow the researcher to triangulate data and avoid any criticism and bias that might result from using only a single data collection method.

Saunders et al (2009:145) also discuss using either a mono-method (single data collection technique and corresponding analysis procedure), versus a multiple method (more than one data collection and analysis procedure) and these are generally either quantitative or qualitative. The multi-method approach refers to using a combination of data collection and analysis methods but is also restricted to either qualitative or quantitative, while a mixed method approach combines both qualitative and quantitative methods and data analysis procedures (Saunders et al, 2009:145).

Hill and McGowan (1999:7) outline a qualitative (constructivism) research method that is specifically geared for small entrepreneurial organisations. Firstly, this method recognises the importance of the individuality, personality and qualities of the

research subjects involved in the research, i.e. the uniqueness of each entrepreneur and their individual personality traits and SME circumstances (Hill and McGowan, 1999:9). Secondly, Hill and McGowan (1999:9) discuss the need for the inclusion of the epistemological paradigm, which refers to the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the research subjects and recommend immersion in the small business environment to gain insights. The proposed method by Hill and McGowan (1999:12) is principally observational data, with extensive in-depth interviews, until patterns begin to emerge. This is considered a multi-method approach as detailed above, using qualitative data collection and analysis.

This study is considered to be a multiple-case study as it incorporates data collection and analysis from three (3) SME retail jewellery stores across different locations, as well as interviews with more than one subject associated with each jewellery store. It is further classified as mono-method since a single data collection method was used, namely semi-structured interviews, coupled with a single data analysis method, namely thematic coding.

Saunders et al (2009:148) further discuss a time horizon, where the period of study can either be a 'snapshot' at a particular time which is termed cross-sectional, or a 'diary' which is conducted over a period of time and termed longitudinal. Cross-sectional studies can be either qualitative or quantitative, and are generally conducted over a short period of time, while longitudinal studies are carried out over longer periods of time, such as a period of a year, or over the course of a group of people's lives and documents whether there is any change over that time period (Saunders et al, 2009:148).

This study would be considered cross-sectional as it was conducted over a short period of time. Interviews were conducted during January – June, with analysis taking place simultaneously on already completed data collection.

3.3 Research Approach

This study used a qualitative approach where the data was collected by means of semi-structured in-depth interviews. The study focussed on three (3) SME boutique retail jewellery cases in various locations. Interviews were conducted with owner-managers, customers, and suppliers. Neuman (2014:166) discusses triangulation which is built on the principle that we learn more by considering multiple perspectives, rather than from just a single perspective. In this study, triangulation of observers (Neuman, 2014:167) was used to create a view of the SME from different standpoints, and this rigour reduces the limitations and bias that might be associated with responses from only one kind of participant, for example, the owner-manager.

The reason for conducting in-depth interviews is to gain an understanding of the SME retail environment, how and why owner-managers operate in certain ways and how this behaviour adds value to their business and its financial performance. As indicated above, each owner-manager will be different, will manage their brand and business in different ways, will see the concept of brand identity and its role in their business differently as well as the impact of such on the business success. The inclusion of customer and supplier viewpoints will help to build an overview of the SME and to understand the concept of brand identity in the SME retail jewellery context in greater detail. The interview guides are based on the Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) brand identity framework which focuses on strategic

elements, brand identity specific elements, as well as the measurement of marketing initiatives and their success or lack thereof.

In summary, this qualitative study is considered interpretivism from the epistemological viewpoint, using inductive theory to conduct in-depth interviews (mono method) in a cross-sectional multiple-case study approach with SME retail jewellers in the Johannesburg area. The primary advantages of this approach are that the researcher will gain a deep understanding of the boutique retail jewellery SME, its complexity and unique context from multiple viewpoints (Pham, 2018:4). This analysis can be further refined to provide learnings on how this SME sector can be enhanced in terms of its utilisation of brand and brand identity in building brand and business and will also enable further research opportunities into SME-specific guidelines for brand identity enhancement.

3.4 Unit of Analysis

A unit of analysis in qualitative research assists a researcher to delineate what is being studied, and provides a scope to a study, outside the boundaries of which a researcher will not venture (Harris, 2018). A good way to identify a unit of analysis is to understand what you want to make recommendations about at the end of the study, and what the main focus of the study is (Harris, 2018; DeCarlo, n.d.).

A unit of analysis is different from a unit of observation, which is the level at which you are collecting the data, i.e. it is the item/s that you actually observe, measure or collect as you try to learn about your unit of analysis, for example an individual, a group of people or an organisation (Harris, 2018; DeCarlo, n.d.).

In this study, the focal point is the boutique retail jewellery SME, and this is therefore the unit of analysis or case. Each retail jewellery store is therefore a case in the study. An overview of the SME was obtained via interviews with the owner-manager, a customer and a supplier. These individuals are the units of observation.

3.5 Population and Sampling

A population includes all the elements, that is, the total group of people or entities, from a set of data (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:132). A population will have shared characteristics, which a researcher would describe in terms of the nature of, size and corresponding unique features (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:133). Once this has been defined, a researcher also needs to distinguish between a targeted population which is everyone or everything that falls within the population limits, versus an accessible population which refers only to that section of the population that we can include in the study (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:133).

A sample consists one or more elements drawn from the accessible population, as prescribed by the researcher (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:134). Saunders et al (2009:206) describe various reasons for sampling including the impracticability of including an entire population, budget and time constraints and the need for faster results.

Du Plooy-Cilliers (2014:136) further describes probability sampling which is used mainly for quantitative studies and is characterised by a sample that is drawn randomly, requires little influence from the researcher and leads to generalised findings. In contrast, non-probability sampling is used mainly for qualitative studies when a researcher cannot gain access to an entire population and will therefore

carefully select a sample from the accessible population and through those who can recommend other possible participants (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:137). It is further noted that findings from non-probability studies are usually not generalised to larger population groups (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:137). Non-probability sampling methods include accidental sampling where participants are included because they are in the right place at the time of the study, convenience or haphazard sampling which includes participants that a researcher has quick and easy access to, purposive or judgemental sampling which uses a set of criteria to carefully draw participants to be included in the study, quota sampling which is similar to purposive sampling but will include a ratio of different characteristics, snowball sampling which makes use of referrals to increase sample size, and finally volunteer or self-selection sampling which consists of volunteers to the study (Saunders et al, 2009:226-234; Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:142-143). Saunders (2012:8) and Kumar (2014:248) discuss the number of participants needed for a qualitative study and refers to data saturation which is the point at which no new data can be gained from any further data collection. Kumar (2014:248) notes that the data saturation point is highly subjective as only the researcher can determine when this point is reached based on the diversity of the situation being studied. Additionally, sample size is dependent on what information is needed, what information will be helpful to the study, what information will be credible, and what can be done within the resources that the researcher has access to (Saunders, 2012:8). For example, a carefully selected purposive sample of 12 participants is likely to be enough for a study where the aim is to understand commonalities between a homogenous population (Saunders, 2012:8).

The researcher was unable to find a definitive population of jewellery retailers in South Africa, but the following statistics provide some estimates. The Jewellery Council South Africa mentions 1580 members currently registered (Jewellery Council South Africa, 2018) – however, this is not an accurate picture of the industry as not all retailers will be registered with the Jewellery Council, and not all registered members will be retailers. The Jewellers' Network Directory (2018:120-124) lists 80 retailers nationally, again not a definitive number. The Jewellery Biz-News Bi-Annual Directory (2018:18-21) lists 208 retailers nationally across Gauteng, Limpopo, the Free State, KZN, the Eastern Cape and the Western Cape, with the largest concentration of 90 listed in Gauteng.

The sample for this research consists primarily of boutique jewellery retailers that are independent and classified as small or medium-sized enterprises: three (3) boutiques (cases) were identified for this study. They are all based in Johannesburg, Gauteng Province of South Africa. Diversity and rigour in the sample is created by location, the type of small jewellery retailer and their consumer base. The first boutique identified was based in an upmarket shopping mall and had been a tenant there for about 16 years, with a well-established customer base. The researcher knew the owner-manager, and also being a jeweller, as well as working in the brand field, the researcher was interested in how she attracted customers, and used her brand name. Snowball sampling was then applied for the identification of further SME retail jewellers who would be willing to participate in the study. In summary, the jewellers were chosen through non-probability sampling, specifically using convenience sampling and snowball sampling. Taherdoost (2016:22) notes that non-probability sampling is often used with both qualitative and case study research. Further, case study research often tends to focus on small samples and is not

intended to make statistical interpretations that are relatable to larger populations (Taherdoost, 2016:22). The eventual participants resulted in an interesting mix of cases, one being a long-time tenant in an upmarket mall with a loyal and established customer base, another being a retail store located on a property with limited footfall but very loyal customers, and the last being a retailer with clear growth plans for multiple stores.

3.6 Data Collection Method

Participants were initially contacted telephonically to explain the nature of the study and the reason for their selection in the study. If verbal consent was received, an email was sent to participants outlining the study in writing, including a written consent form. The email also contained details of the interview. An email confirming interview time, date and venue was exchanged with all participants.

The semi-structured interviews consisted of two parts: firstly, an explanation of the research study, the reason for the selection of the participants, to gain consent to continue the study with the participants, to record all the sessions, and to assure participants of confidentiality and anonymity. Secondly, once written permission had been obtained, the primary research continued with semi-structured interviews for each boutique store, which were conducted with the owner-manager, one customer and one supplier – the contact information for each of these was supplied by the owner-manager. When selecting customers and suppliers, owner-managers were asked to consider who their best supplier was in terms of quantity and quality of goods provided and who they might have a regular business relationship with. The reason for this was that a regular supplier would be assumed to have a good idea of the brand and business and could potentially tailor their products to the retail brand they are supplying. Therefore, they would be able to answer, to some extent, some of the in-depth brand-related questions that the study would entail. In a similar fashion, owner-managers were asked to recommend good customers who had regular dealings with the brand in order to ascertain how and why they purchased, and which aspects of the brand impacted their decisions. This resulted in at least two customers and suppliers being recommended by each owner-managers and formed the basis of a list of potential participants that the researcher could contact for the study. Only one of each was contacted to be part of the study. Based on the objectives of this research study, which were explained to each owner-manager, no undue bias was expected nor experienced during the subsequent supplier and customer interviews.

The reason for the choice of semi-structured interviews is that this allows flexibility in adding additional questions based on responses received and allowed more in-depth information to be gained. This translated into 9 distinct data sets (3 per case / unit of analysis) to be individually analysed and rolled up into the defined unit of analysis, being the boutique retail jewellery SME. Interviews were conducted with the owner-manager at the business premises and were 45 - 60 minutes long. Interviews with customers and suppliers were scheduled at convenient locations as required and were also 45 - 60 minutes long. The respective interview guides are annexed as Annexure 1, 2 and 3.

Each interview was recorded to ensure that the researcher is not relying on memory and is correctly interpreting and transcribing participant responses within context. The researcher also made notes during the interview, with the addition of memos afterwards to record initial interpretations.

Saunders et al (2009:317-327) also introduce potential data quality issues when using semi-structured interviews that need to be considered including reliability, bias, validity and generalisation and suggests that these can be overcome through careful preparation and managing all aspects of the interview including the level of researcher knowledge of the business, the level of information supplied to participants, the appropriateness of the location, the researchers appearance and behaviour, opening comments as well as the debriefing to frame the interview, the approach to questioning, the researchers listening skills, scope to test understanding and approach to recording data, as well managing cultural differences and bias.

To mitigate these potential issues, the researcher conducted online research of each boutique to understand their online presence and types of customers they were targeting and ensured that participants were properly briefed in terms of what the study was aiming for and what kind of information would be required prior to the interviews being conducted. Locations were chosen to be convenient for participants; for owner-managers, suppliers and some of the customers, they were conducted at the place of business where possible, and for other customers they were conducted at a coffee shop for example. Two of the interviews were conducted during the lockdown and this meant that online video interviews had to be scheduled and facilitated. Opening comments were focused on orienting the participant again to the study, explaining how the interview would work, getting them to sign the consent form and requesting permission to record the interviews. After the interviews were completed, participants were thanked and also invited to ask questions or present any additional information that they thought might be useful to the study, relating to brand and brand identity. The researcher's appearance and behaviour were considered work casual and professional, and care was taken to avoid interjecting or leading participants during the interview. To further manage any potential issues, all of the above was effectively rehearsed through two mock interviews prior to fieldwork being conducted.

3.7 Data Analysis Method

Kumar (2014:317) discusses the ways in which qualitative data can be processed and analysed, either through a narrative describing a situation or event, or via developing main themes that emerge from the transcription of field notes, adding that themes can also be quantified by indicating the rate or frequency of recurrence.

Du Plooy-Cilliers et al (2014:240) discuss the different types of coding, including line-by-line coding, open/substantive coding, axial coding, selective coding, and thematic coding. Thematic coding is described as a process of data reduction through the identification of key themes and applies well to deductive research as known themes from the theory being applied can be used (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:241).

Each interview was recorded, and the researcher also made notes during the conversation of key points that demonstrated insights into the behaviour, thinking or understanding of the jewellery retail brand. Each interview was then transcribed into Microsoft Word and care was taken to ensure accuracy of information. It is noted that only grammatical errors were corrected during transcription, whereas primary content was captured verbatim. Next, the data was loaded into Atlas.ti, coded and organised into themes according to similarities to identify patterns across the retailers and participants. The resulting themes were also analysed for insights, leading to the creation of sub-themes that identified both similarities and differences between the cases, as well as highlighting key strengths and weaknesses within

each case. Kumar (2014:318) lists the steps involved in thematic research including the identification of the main themes, assigning codes to the themes especially if the number of occurrences is needed, classifying responses for each theme and then integration into the report. Themes can reveal meaning in the data, but it will be at the discretion of the researcher to understand which of the emerging themes are most important to the study and this requires a level of flexibility. The researcher is looking for insights in the data in terms of how brand and brand identity is used in and affects the SME retail jewellery space and guides behaviour. Braun and Clarke (2006:9-24) provide various guidelines for the use of this data analysis method, including what could be considered a theme, whether the data is deductive (working from general to specific, with a theoretical link) or inductive (working from specific to general where themes are linked to data), how to conduct thematic research as well as pros and cons of the method. In this case, the research is inductive as the Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) brand identity framework informed the basis of the research. The Atlas.ti software was used to analyse the data as it provides a structure for accurately analysing qualitative and mixed method data. Leedy and Ormrod (2014:161) recommend a variety of computer software, including Atlas.ti, noting that these programs are designed for complex qualitative studies to help find patterns in the data.

3.7.1 Trustworthiness

Du Plooy-Cilliers et al (2014:253) describe qualitative research in terms of what it is not: it is not to find causal relationships, and it is not to generalise findings. Instead, qualitative research tries to provide an exhaustive understanding of a situation or experience. Qualitative research also demonstrates that participants answers are not repeatable or objectively measurable since they are unique to an individual's experience (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:258). Therefore, qualitative research considers the concept of trustworthiness, rather than validity or reliability (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al (2014:253), and this concept consists of four dimensions, namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Noble and Smith (2015:34) further discuss the criteria for demonstrating rigour in qualitative studies as truth value (validity), consistency (reliability), neutrality (confirmability) and applicability (generalisability). Credibility is used to reference the accuracy with which the researcher interprets the data provided (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:258). Credibility can be increased by using more than one research method to substantiate the findings (for example, interviews combined with observation), or by ensuring that the findings are believable from the participants' point of view (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:258). Although only one method of data collection was used in this study, namely semi-structured interviews, since the interviews were mainly conducted at each place of business, the researcher was able to observe how customers were interacted with in a very informal way and informally correlate whether this was congruent with the information received during interviews with participants. These observations were recorded as field notations alongside respondent interview notes and served as a level of data triangulation.

Transferability is like generalisation in that findings should be able to be applied to similar situations and deliver similar results (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:258). Typically, qualitative research is not generalisable, and in this study, there were similarities, particularly in the marketing section that might actually be generalised across SMEs. However, it was noted as a limitation that the study was conducted

with SMEs located in Johannesburg and thus the findings might not be generalisable across other regions.

Dependability refers to the quality of the process of integration between the data collection method, the analysis and finally the theory produced from the data (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:259).

Finally, confirmability refers to how well the data collected supports the findings and interpretations of the researcher (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:259).

The researcher has attempted to address dependability and confirmability through the accurate interpretation of data using thematic coding to link participants' responses to similar themes across all the interviews; this demonstrates that the information collected supports the findings and analysis of the data and informs the stated research objectives.

Further Noble and Smith (2015:35) mention several strategies to ensure trustworthiness and these include, for example, accounting for personal bias which may affect findings, keeping detailed records, ensuring that data interpretation is consistent and transparent and including rich verbatim descriptions of participants' accounts to support findings. These have been addressed in part in chapters four and five which present an in-depth analysis of the findings and include participant responses.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

As the study was conducted with humans, written consent was obtained for recording the interviews. Participation was voluntary, and each participant was fully informed of the research focus and purpose. Information is kept confidential and participant anonymity is assured. Each boutique and participant have been assigned a response number, for example Boutique 1, 2 or 3, Respondent O (Owner), C (Customer) or S (Supplier): B1O, B1C and B1S.

No physical, emotional, or reputational harm was caused during or after the study. The researcher does not consider this study to be high risk.

Ethical approval has been provided by The IIE's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.

3.9 Conclusion

In summary, this study is considered interpretivism from the epistemological viewpoint, using deductive theory to conduct semi-structured in-depth interviews (mono method) in a cross-sectional study with SME retail jewellers in the Johannesburg area. The focal point of the study is the boutique retail jewellery SME, and this is therefore the unit of analysis. A 360-degree comprehensive view of the SME will be obtained via interviews with the owner-manager, a customer, and a supplier. These individuals are the units of observation. The sample for this research consists primarily of boutique jewellery retailers that are independent and classified as small or medium-sized enterprises: three (3) boutiques were identified for this study. They are all based in Johannesburg, Gauteng Province of South Africa. The sample has been created using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Diversity and rigour in the sample is created by location, the type of small jewellery retailer and their consumer base.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis, Interpretation and Discussion

4.1 Overview of Study

This chapter discusses the data analysis and findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted with nine (9) interviewees related to the SME retail jewellery boutique. The purpose of this qualitative study is fourfold: firstly to explore the role of brand identity in small independent boutique jewellery stores in the Gauteng region, secondly to investigate whether small businesses in the retail jewellery sector engage in building brand identity, and thirdly to understand whether brand and brand identity helps to grow the business. Lastly, to add to the limited body of existing research as it relates to small independent boutique jewellery retailers.

The study achieved these aims by looking through the lens of the SME retail jewellery boutique owner-managers, suppliers and customers and exploring how they understood these concepts and their application in business. Each boutique is classified as a case.

Data was therefore grouped as follows:

- Respondents per case (boutique): owner-manager, customer and supplier. This grouping provides a within case overview into each boutique. The aim of this is to understand whether the respondents have a similar or dissimilar view of the boutique, in terms of the various aspects of brand identity being explored. For example, is the understanding of brand identity the same for all the respondents associated with this brand and if not, what are differences, does the owner-manager engage in specific marketing activities that are apparent to the other respondents, do the respondents identify similar purchase motivations and the same competitors for their spend. In this analysis, the focus is on understanding whether the views expressed by the owner-manager are mirrored by the external respondents or whether their view of the brand is in contradiction to the owner-manager aims for the brand.
- Respondents by type, cross case: owner-managers were grouped, as were customers and suppliers across the boutiques. This grouping provides a cross case overview into the retail boutique. The aim of this is to explore whether there were any similarities or differences in the roles and how they perceive the boutiques. For example, do all the owner-managers focus on brand building and brand identity in the same way, do they have similar brand and business objectives, do they have a strong understanding of competitors and how they compare with them, are the marketing tools being used similar or are they doing completely different things with different results, and are they tracking the results of their marketing? This type of analysis provides an understanding of how an SME-specific framework might need to be tailored based on what the business objectives of each brand might be.

The below table provides a schematic of the data from a variety of angles to provide more depth and feeds into the SME approach that will be presented. The groupings within each case and cross case highlight similarities and differences in the perceptions of brand identity and how they impact on the growth and performance of each boutique.

		Within Case Assessment		
		B1	B2	B3
Cross Case Assessment	Owner-manager	←→	←→	←→
	Supplier	←→	←→	←→
	Customer	←→	←→	←→

Table 3: Data grouping (Author, 2020)

Codes:

- Boutique 1 (B1): B1O (owner-manager), B1S (supplier), B1C (customer)
- Boutique 2 (B2): B2O (owner-manager), B2S (supplier), B2C (customer)
- Boutique 3 (B3): B3O (owner-manager), B3S (supplier), B3C (customer)

4.2 Analysis of Findings

This section provides an in-depth analysis within case and across cases of the data gathered and demonstrates either a connection to the literature and the theoretical model used, no connection or a limited connection. The conclusions reached are analysed and feed directly into an SME approach for brand identity and brand building that is designed for small business branding considering their unique characteristics and circumstances.

The semi-structured interview guide questions are outlined and analysed here.

4.2.1 What is the role of brand identity in a boutique retail SME jewellery business?

4.2.1.1 Understanding and meaning of the term brand identity

Question 1.1 related to gaining a better understanding of how the respondents perceived the concepts of brand and brand identity.

The concept of brand identity, according to B1 and B2 seems to relate mainly to having a logo, and the understanding of brand is “big brand”:

“I think of brand as being a big corporation. I don't think of a little one-off shop.” (B1C)

“... if you've got a logo that is represented across your social media platforms, on your packaging, I think that's obviously the basic element of it.” (B2O)

This indicates that perhaps small business thinks that having a logo is enough of a brand exercise, and that brand may not even be applicable to small business.

B3 on the other hand, links brand identity to language, personality, aesthetics, values, and differentiation:

“To me branding identity means ... the values that are communicated to an audience of a particular brand or a particular company. It is what differentiates them, what sets them apart, what makes them unique,” (B3C)

This perception relates to a closer alignment with the theoretical understanding of the term brand and how it is linked to building a business, possibly relating to B3

having different business goals which are communicated via their interpretation of how brand identity and brand building link to business growth.

B1 and B2 have similar ideas whilst B3 takes brand identity beyond the others into the realm of human values. A better understanding of what brand identity means today, particularly in the light of the change to online marketing could be beneficial for small business in the future.

4.2.1.2 Does it play a role in business?

Question 1.2 related to gaining a better understanding of whether the respondents thought that brand identity had a role to play in a business, and if so, what that role might be.

The general feedback from the study was that brand identity does play a role in business, in varying degrees:

“Yes, giving people peace of mind that you’re not a fly-by-night, ...” (B1S)

“Massive, massive role to play in the business. creating that language and that look and feel.” (B3O)

Although B1S links it back to creating peace of mind, and B1O further states in answer to another question that she has been in business for 25 years and has a lot of loyalty, she’s not directly linking that to brand identity. B3O on the other hand, is stating that brand has a role to play in business as it helps to create a language and visual identity and this is the only boutique that seems to speak to the value of brand identity in creating a business. B2O notes that while she thinks it has a role to play in her business, since they represent more than 20 jewellers, it is a difficult concept to consolidate under one umbrella. Their token consideration to that end is the use of their logo on social media and packaging. Once again, B1 and B2 seem to share a commonality in their thinking around brand identity, while B3 is more actively leveraging the concept of brand for her business.

4.2.2 To what extent do small businesses in the retail jewellery sector engage in building brand identity?

4.2.2.1 Customer description, purchase motivation, trends

Question 2.1 related to gaining a better understanding of whether the boutiques were able to describe their customers and their purchase motivations, and whether following jewellery trends was a part of their business model. Understanding the brands’ customer base is important as it allows a small business to target their communications as well as tailor their messaging.

4.2.2.2 Customer Description

In general, what stood out was that B1O found it difficult to describe her customer base, the main descriptor being “it’s very broad”:

“This is quite hard to answer. I have tourists, I have locals, I have businessmen and women. I have teenagers, I have nine- and ten-year olds. I have the elderly and the very young, my customers are really across the board” (B1O)

An important question would be how she manages to keep everyone happy, considering that she is not actually a mass market brand, but does have an

extremely wide target market, and therefore, what are the commonalities in the customer spectrum that she's described?

There was also a difference perceived in what would be the customer profile for the retail store B1, versus the customer profile for the owner-manager B1O:

"I think they're two separate entities – B1O and B1. ... someone who specifically wants something made by her (B1O). I see it as two separate brands. B1 is more of an everyday sort of shopper" (B1S)

The comment around there being two separate entities is significant in that it shows a divide between the owner-manager brand and the boutique brand, specifically being expressed in terms of the kind of customers each attracts, and this is important when looking at brand identity and brand building. This finding further raises the following questions: is the owner-manager a brand versus the boutique itself, which brand is stronger (and why), is this divide present in all SME boutique jewellers, should there be a schism between the brands and which brand should we focus on building? This development is a significant consideration when reflecting on the building blocks of an SME approach as it speaks to possible growth and brand objectives.

B3 also found it difficult to describe their customer base, but was able to provide a general description:

"This is actually hard. I would say that they're in touch with a dark side, they're a bit more edgy. They're not run of the mill ..." (B3O)

Examining this in more detail, it appears that the difficulty expressed by two of the owner-managers (B1 and B3) in describing their customer base is because their customers want the different, the creative, the unique. Does this insight cater for the fact that they have such a wide customer profile? B2 expressed the same idea as:

"I think we attract people who want something that is a bit different. Because a lot of jewellery design out there is quite anonymous, there's a lot of mass manufactured stuff." (B2O)

This study highlighted a common thread across cases quite well, which is that customers who are looking for unique jewellery items, but, more than that, it is an important consideration when building a framework for growing and sustaining boutique jewellery stores through brand building and identity.

4.2.2.3 Purchase Motivation

The same thread of desired uniqueness is amplified in the purchase motivation for all three boutiques and has been mentioned by respondents across the three cases. This ties in closely with the customer description, i.e. customers who are actively looking for something out of the ordinary:

"I have a unique niche in the market: I am there, I can design on the spot, I can quote, I've got a huge number of options in terms of stones, designs and experience, as well as the ability to repair and alter. I am actually the only place in the Mall that has a workshop on the premises" (B1O)

"The uniqueness" (B2O)

“... I think a big part of B1O’s success is just offering that something different” (B1S)

This commonality can be utilised as a vital differentiator for small brands since they cannot compete directly with large organisations for various reasons, mainly financial and resource related. The identification of a strong differentiator is a key part of a robust brand strategy as it allows a brand to stand out from other similar brands, attract the right audience and attention (Paunovic, 2018).

What was also interesting to note was that customer loyalty was also highlighted as a purchase motivation:

“People walk in and say: “The only person who can help is B1O, I’ve found her in B1.” I’ve got very loyal customers who use me as a first port of call ... and they will say so.” (B1O)

Customer loyalty is a vital part of brand building, and something that SMEs can leverage more of to sustain the growth and longevity of their brands. This needs to be incorporated into a possible SME approach incorporating the reasons why people go back to a specific brand as opposed to another again and again should become part of the growth and sustainability of the brand.

When analysing supplier responses, what emerged in general across cases is that they struggled to articulate what they thought the customer purchase motivation would be – they supplied whatever was asked, without really concentrating on an end-user target market. They did not understand the purchase motivations of the boutiques’ target market. This was interesting as all three owner-managers could indicate why they purchased certain types of products, but their suppliers were unaware of these reasons. This can be considered a potential weakness as a supplier who is more aware of product needs and qualities can better supply the boutique:

“As far as the everyday Mall shopper I wouldn’t be able to say what the motivation is.” (B1S)

Only one supplier mentioned marketing as a purchase motivation, and yet interestingly he specifically mentioned that he was not interested in her pricing:

“She advertises properly, and she encourages people to go and see it online. And maybe her prices are right, I don’t know....” (B3S)

This relates to the general impression that suppliers are not really interested in the final product or end-user market, they are simply middlemen. In other words, the relationship they are interested in building is with the brand, they are not looking for individual target markets or end-users, they don’t do any marketing as jewellery manufacturers, preferring to supply a retail store with their products. This also links closely with their inability, as demonstrated in later analysis, to really provide insights into the brand they are supplying.

4.2.2.4 Trends

As with all apparel, there are very broad trends over time, to the point of looking ludicrous if you are too differently dressed. Consider a Victorian ball gown at a modern nightclub, or conversely, a tank top and shorts at a Victorian dance. Jewellery by its very definition is less subject to the extremes of fashion because it

generally has greater longevity and more emotional significance than clothing. Nevertheless, there are trends in jewellery that can have an impact on performance depending on the boutique, and this is demonstrated in the responses below. What was clear is that owner-managers and suppliers may not agree on what they perceive as part of the boutique strategy, and perhaps this is related to the business structure of the SME:

"I follow the fashions of the time. Following trends like fashion trends, impacts on the sales of the business and when I'm not following trends, I sell less" (B1O)

"I don't think it's as much about trends. I think through your different stages in life, the things you're attracted to changes..." (B1S)

"No. I mean individual jewellers might be looking at trends and might produce ranges that are influenced by that. And we have them here, but we certainly don't look at trends." (B2O)

"I don't really think 'trends' is the right word, but I definitely think they are aware of what's going on in the greater scheme of the jewellery world." (B2S)

"Absolutely, absolutely. So that's my thing, I definitely will follow a trend if I love it." (B3O)

B1 and B3 are similar in that they follow trends, but where B1O mentions it specifically as it affects her business (sales), B3O is more actively looking for trends that she can introduce into her business because she likes them (not necessarily because they will bring her sales). B1S thinks it more about life cycle changes, but this is not something that B1O highlights as part of her strategy at any time. B2O is quite definite about not following trends although the jewellers she represents might do so. Her supplier on the other hand thinks they are knowledgeable about trends, but that's not the strategy they follow as will be demonstrated further on where B2O mentions that they are about educating people about contemporary jewellery. In looking at these boutiques' presence in the market, perhaps following and representing trends can be advantageous to a brand to some extent, but not at the expense of losing its own identity. B1 and B3 are using trends to their advantage to some degree while B2 is quite adamant about not following trends and keeping true to their brand purpose.

4.2.3 Competitor description, strengths and weaknesses, customer profile overlap

Question 2.2 related to whether the boutiques were aware of who their competitors were, their strengths and weaknesses as well as whether they competed for the same customers. Big brands are always scanning the market for what their competitors are doing, do SMEs engage in the same behaviour?

In general, all the boutiques – owner-managers, suppliers, and customers – agreed on the niche nature of the market, emphasising the uniqueness of not only the product, but factors like customer service, quality and type of product. This further amplifies the feedback from earlier questions where uniqueness was prized above other characteristics.

4.2.3.1 Competitors

Interestingly, none of the boutiques who participated in the study mentioned each other as competitors, but they did touch on similar boutique jewellery stores as

possible competitors, most notably Veronica Anderson, and Reads. However, it was also reiterated that what they did was very niche and those mentioned were not really doing the same things.

The only boutique who really felt that they had competition was B3O who could mention specific boutiques and why she thought they were competitors.

Within case B1, B1O mentioned possible competitors based on them being in the same shopping Mall, not necessarily because they offered the same kinds of products, had similar strengths, or even dealt with the same kinds of customers. Her supplier and customer don't think she has any competition at all:

"I don't think there's anybody that directly does the same thing as I do. Probably Veronica Anderson could be a competitor in the small jewellery area. I think she is a competitor because she worked for Reads and then set up on her own. She is not a designer-manufacturer, she brings in silversmiths and sells on commission. Her style and focus on semi-precious is like what I do, probably a little bit more flamboyant." (B1O)

"I'd say she's quite unique, ... I don't think she has competition." (B1S)

"For me personally? Nobody." (B1C)

Within case B2, B2O felt that as a niche brand, they didn't have many competitors, Veronica Anderson was mentioned as her business model of bringing in jewellers is similar, but the style of jewellery is quite dissimilar:

"We fill a sort of niche. There's Veronica Anderson, she's got a similar thing, she's got a lot of jewellers who make work for her." (B2O)

"I don't think they have many, because there's not many people designing jewellery" (B2C)

B3O on the other hand was quite clear on who her competitors were and why. This correlates more closely with a brand that monitors their competition for various reasons, can compare with them, learn from them, and more clearly differentiate their own brand:

"Oh yes many many: Dear Rae, they are a beautiful jewellery brand. Famke, another one, she is also doing some beautiful work, also a lot of unique stones. And she's got a bit of an edgy side to her. I can't even compare myself to Kirsten Goss or something like that. She's been going for years, she's like this colourful, bright and wild brand where I feel that we're moodier and you obviously can compare, our prices are much more friendly on the pockets" (B3O)

B1 and B2 are quite sure that they don't have competitors and as such are also not scanning the external environment for threats or opportunities. B3 can clearly say what her competitors are doing, and how she compared with them. This raises the questions of whether an understanding of the competitive environment is necessary for an SME or does it only have an impact based on business objectives? This should be explored further in the SME-specific approach.

4.2.3.2 Strengths and Weaknesses

This question was centred around understanding what their competitors were doing well, or not doing well and why. Generally, brand building literature, such as Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009:41), encourages an awareness of the external environment and this includes an understanding of primary competitors, including elements like positioning, marketing, target market, pricing and so on in order for a brand to effectively differentiate itself.

B1O was quite clear in stating that, again, she does not consider competitors strengths and weaknesses in any brand planning per se, as she doesn't feel that she has any, however, she was also clear in mentioning customer service as a key strength for herself:

"I don't usually think along those lines. I think that possibly our personal service is what the customer wants and figures quite large in our way of dealing with customers as opposed to others." (B1O)

Within case B2, B2O mentions similar competitors as in question 2.2.1 which indicates that she does watch what they are doing. However, whether she uses this information in terms of differentiation for her own brand is not clear:

"I think Kirsten Goss is a very good marketer, she represents the brand well on Instagram. They've got a very strong brand identity. Veronica Anderson represents the work of the designers well. I think the one thing for Veronica Anderson, which is the same challenge we have, is to get stuff out there and just get it seen." (B2O)

"If you want to have a look at someone that's really good at their marketing is Dear Rae. The look and feel of it is consistent, ... and then their whole thing is well marketed." (B2S)

B2S brings up a consistent marketing element and that is word of mouth, but she also notes that she thinks the jewellery industry is more reputation-related than brand-related and that differentiation is key.

"Word of mouth is in when it comes to jewellery and that kind of parting of money, you want to know the person. Reputation related? Yes, Even more than branding. But it's hard to see all these little businesses, it's like they almost blend into one, unless you've got a very distinct style, or something that distinguishes you." (B2S)

Notably, Da Camara (2007:11) states that although reputation and brand are closely related, they should not be confused. Where brand is concerned with names, logos and advertising, and is focused on creating awareness and a strong connection with audiences (Da Camara, 2007:11), reputation is concerned with how the various stakeholders perceive the brand (Da Camara, 2007:12). Ettenson and Knowles (2008) note that focusing on reputation instead of the brand can lead to non-competitive or undifferentiated product offerings, while focusing on the brand to the exclusion of reputation can lead to poor performance. A strong brand underpins relevant and unique offerings to meet customer needs, while a strong reputation is highly desirable as it solidifies the company within the communities in which it operates (Ettenson and Knowles, 2008). A further consideration is that brand and reputation must be aligned to ensure that the promises made by the brand are

fulfilled and thus impact positively on the reputation of the brand (Da Camara, 2008:15). You need both as they are both valuable intangible assets that ensure communication to the right audiences in the right way.

B3O also mentions the same competitors as above, but takes this a step further by comparing herself to them and where the brand fits in. This kind of comparison is vital in terms of her differentiation and growth objectives. However, perhaps this is a key point to consider, in terms of which factors are necessary based on what the brand's objectives are, i.e. how important is it to keep up with competitors if your objective is to run a family business without necessarily going bigger than that?

"Kirsten Goss - their Instagram account is to die for and it's so beautiful, the way they package themselves. She's been very strong in how she represents her brand with not opening too many shops, she only has a one signature store. Famke - also beautiful jewellery and lovely content. I wouldn't say that they're on our level, their website is not so nice. But then I also say that we wouldn't be on Dear Rae's level. You put yourself somewhere in between.... Dear Rae is my most inspiring person to compare ourselves to." (B3O)

It is significant to note that B2O and B3O both mentioned forms of marketing as the aspects of importance or strengths that they admired most in their competitors.

This question highlighted that there really isn't much customer overlap with the competitors identified in the earlier questions. Although they were flagged as potential competitors based on being in the jewellery industry, in terms of type of customer, they might not actually be primary competitors at all but could be considered secondary competitors instead.

B1O comments that they redirect customers to stores that sell diamonds, and those same stores will redirect customers to them if they are looking for gemstones, South African in particular. Thus, they might be in the same location, and consequently flagged as a possible competitor, but they don't necessarily attract the same customers:

"Yes, there's a bit of an overlap. But not much. Some of the tourists want a diamond and we will steer them to a diamond shop. Equally the diamond shop will steer them to me for South African stones." (B1O)

Both B2O and B2S mentioned Veronica Anderson whose business model is the same, but noted that their customer profile did not actually match:

"I don't think necessarily. Now there might be a little bit of crossover with Ronnie Anderson. Because we are in the same city and it's quite a small market. She's also a different market. She's sort of older Rosebank, that kind of market, whereas we don't really access that." (B2O)

"B2's clients are kind of older, but they are very current. Whereas I'd say Veronica Anderson's are very wealthy, but not necessarily current. They may not actually be the same. Veronica Anderson's customers could be B2's but not the other way round. Because they are looking for something beautiful, something interesting" (B2S)

The answers to this question seems to concur with the earlier analysis into the identification of competitors as it would appear that for B1 and B2, there aren't any

that could be considered primary competitors if we measure based on style of jewellery.

Additionally, this lack of overlap in type of customers when comparing to competitors is also a consideration as it will relate to how an SME boutique is marketed. Each boutique has identified a totally different target market, albeit that they are all looking for something different and unique and this highlights the point that brand and marketing must be tailored to resonate with the right target market.

4.2.4 Current heritage and brand image, strengths and weaknesses

This question related to understanding the heritage of the boutique, as well as gaining an understanding of the brand image, and the boutiques' strengths and weaknesses.

4.2.4.1 Heritage and Brand Image

Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007:4) define brand heritage as a dimension of brand identity that is demonstrated via its track record, longevity, core values, use of symbols and in the belief that its history is important. A heritage brand, according to Urde et al (2007:4) is one whose positioning and value proposition are based on its heritage.

Although B1O was the only brand that mentioned heritage, i.e. how long the brand has been in existence, when considering the above definition, the heritage of the brand is not being used in either B1s' positioning or value proposition. Hudson (2011:1538) notes that antiquity alone is not enough to qualify for brand heritage status but should also be demonstrated in the value that brand is delivering over time. For B1, it can be seen in the brands' age and track record, but would not be considered heritage per se. However, once again, this question highlighted the unique niche nature of all the boutiques, and the service offerings as differentiation factors:

"25 years but in South Africa 17. I've got very loyal customers who use me as a first port of call. This is due to our uniqueness, being able to find stuff that they haven't been able to find elsewhere, customer service, design, having unusual things, knowing about stones, listening to what they want." (B1O)

Where brand identity is the set of associations that the brand owner or strategist wants to create or maintain about a brand, brand image is about the current associations that people have with the brand (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009:40).

The brand image question was interestingly interpreted, for B1, it related very clearly to the image of a treasure trove and coins which links closely to the name of the boutique:

"It's like a treasure trove." (B1S)

"I was thinking coins. Different, exciting." (B1C)

For B2 and B3, brand image was interpreted from the perspective of the owner-managers, how they think the boutiques are perceived, versus how they want the boutiques to be seen by customers:

"I think they see us as individual, it's a place where you can get original work that you can't get anywhere else. What I think we do well is, we are very good

at customer service, we offer a really good quality product and we are all jewellers, we all actually sit at the bench and make stuff.” (B2O)

“I don't know, it's difficult to answer. How do customers see my brand? It's the darker, edgier side. A darker edgier brand. Still a lot of stories and depth. And we're very much about reconnecting with yourself and being your best version of yourself.” (B3O)

While B1 and B2 mainly emphasize the uniqueness of their products, as well as customer service, B3 taps into the belief system of the customer, i.e. “darker, edgier”, “reconnecting with yourself”, and “being the best version of yourself”. This is significant as it speaks to gaining a better understanding of what your customers need, and therefore, focussing on different marketing strategies that can tap into these needs.

If brand identity is incorrectly interpreted by consumers, that means that the image being represented in all forms of communications needs to be changed or augmented to more closely align with the intentions of the brand owner (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009:40).

4.2.4.2 Strengths and Weaknesses

This questions related to what each boutique saw as their strengths and weaknesses, and although each highlighted slightly different areas of strengths and weaknesses, what was interesting in that only B2O and B3O mentioned marketing or “getting their name more out there”.

B1 appears to have only one strong marketing tool, although it is very innovative in creating loyalty and not something that anyone else has mentioned doing:

“I think I'm very much a people's person. I think that our party, our annual birthday party is quite a strong marketing tool.” (B1O)

This kind of innovative marketing is noted by O'Dwyer, Gilmore and Carson (2009:505) as something that SMEs are almost forced to conceive of, in the face of other limitations such as finance, and personnel restrictions. Innovative marketing in SMEs is defined as focusing on creative, novel, or unusual solutions to problems, including the development of new products, services or processes for performing organisational functions (O'Dwyer et al, 2009:505). In other words, the obstacles that SMEs face can often motivate the search for innovation in various aspects, including marketing.

Strengths from a supplier and customer perspective centred around the actual retail environment, and specific services that are relevant to consumers such as displays, being a manufacturing jeweller, as well as customer service:

“B1's displays are so very beautiful, friendly staff - client interaction is also very important. The fact that B1O is a working jeweller, most of your Sterns and your big guys like that, everything you take in now for repairs, they have to send off. So, with her, you could go in for repairs, could be done quickly, she has work benches right there.” (B1S)

“Great customer service, very warm. I don't think they could improve.” (B1C)

B2O compared herself to a competitor, noting similar issues around not getting out there enough, as well as something that is considered both a strength and a

weakness – being a manufacturing jeweller which means that you have to create the jewellery and don't get much time to do the other important things. Other important elements include not having a street-facing location – this limits the number of people who know about your brand. Word of mouth was again mentioned as a strong, primary marketing tool:

“Well, I think the one thing for Veronica Anderson, which is the same challenge we have, is to get stuff out there and just get it seen. And what is also probably a weakness is that we must be sitting at the bench making work. And so, all the other stuff or admin, we end up getting a bit resentful about. And we often don't have time to do it properly. So, I would say, things like maintaining the website, basic things like that, that take time, we end up letting slip, we're not actually very good at marketing, or maintaining a presence on social media.” (B2O)

“I don't think they're out there marketing enough, but they are definitely getting the word of mouth right. they've been a lot better with their social media posts.” (B2S)

“One of the biggest problems for me, is that they don't have a street face location.” (B2C)

B3 mentions specific strengths such as trying new things, but also focuses on not being good at business or social media. Customer service came up again as a strong point:

“I think we're brave, in terms of trying things and not really caring if we fail. We're very passionate about all the different stages from design to the stone selection to the piece. Our staff, I think we've been able to create this incredible team. My social media used to kill me because I did it all myself, I now have handed over to my rockstar and she is doing it so well. So much could be improved. I'm definitely not business orientated, I am a creative through and through. I would love to have someone that will be able to come on board that could be able to handle all the business side of things.” (B3O)

“Quality. I've had jewellery breaking, but the customer service is very good because I'm a regular. I think that their variety is good, and it makes it very easy to gift because their packaging is really good.” (B3C)

The purpose of these questions was twofold: to get the owner-managers thinking about how their brands were interpreted versus how they wanted them to be interpreted but also to acknowledge what they still needed to do to get their brand names out there. Ideally, the SME approach should cover very specific marketing for SMEs based on their unique strengths and weaknesses.

4.2.5 Product range and qualities, focus areas for acquiring products

This question related to the product range and quality for each boutique and whether there were specific things they focused on when bringing in new stock. The focus appears to be overwhelmingly on quality, handmade, variety and uniqueness of products – these are differentiators, but also being a manufacturing jeweller adds a level of uniqueness that competitors may not be able to match. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009:88) note that while having a consistent level of quality is very

important, this is not a differentiator, the brand must be able to identify something that makes them stand out from competitors.

Within case B1, three factors stood out:

“Quality workmanship because most of my jewellery is handmade. We have both designing and manufacturing. I literally choose every piece of jewellery, every rock, from the different suppliers. We concentrate on semi-precious stones, and the beauty of the stones set in jewellery as opposed to their perceived qualities or what some people perceive as their investment value. I do have a lot of once-off pieces.” (B1O)

“I think it's again, just bringing in the different stuff that you don't find and a nice range of stock for people to look through.” (B1S)

“Genuine, silver, semi-precious, good quality. The fact that you've got a manufacturing jeweller actually working in a shop.” (B1C)

Within case B2, B2O again also mentioning quality, but focussing more on offering something unique:

“High quality. There are some things that unite everything because we only take work by South African designers. It's handmade work, the styles and materials are quite varied, but we want to offer something that is not widely available anywhere else.” (B2O)

“It doesn't have to be handmade, but it's got to be good, it's going to be something unique and different, not commercial.” (B2S)

“Different, a bit wacky, it's something that talks to you.” (B2C)

Within case B3, B3O also focussing on uniqueness of product:

“Looking for additional things that are quite different and that stand out, and the ear candy that really stands out, it doesn't look like what anyone else is doing.” (B3O)

“High quality products. And I also like the variation. And again, price and quantity, I want to make sure that it looks expensive. It's got to look finished, and well made.” (B3C)

Although they've all mentioned uniqueness of product in varying degrees, they are all offering something different as they cater to different target markets: B1's focus is more on gemstones, silver and once-off pieces, B2's focus is more on different contemporary styles and materials made by South African designers, and B3 is focussing more on the ear candy range which is not prevalent in South Africa at the moment. Interestingly, what B3 has done with the ear candy range is create a niche for herself in the South African market through the “curation of the ear” – it is a pun on eye candy and key to differentiation which is necessary for brand survival. It also speaks very neatly into the personalisation trend which is quite prevalent now. (Kowalkiewicz, Rosemann and Dootson, 2017) discuss extreme personalisation where the customer is king, and products and services are tailored to individual needs and wants. This is echoed by Bagdare (2015:11) who notes that retailers try to build an emotional bond with customers by providing personal attention, individualising, and tailoring products and services and making the client feel special.

These elements also aid in building customer loyalty. All the product and services attributes mentioned above can be differentiators from a product perspective that, paired with other differentiators, can create a strong SME brand.

4.2.6 Business values and culture, staff behaviour

This question related to the values and culture of the boutique, and how this translates into staff behaviour, if at all. This links closely with the focus on customer service, friendly and well-trained staff, as well as integrity that were consistent with the responses to this question:

“Integrity is taken for granted. Respecting the customer's desires, they are expected to listen to what the customer wants, not to try and force-feed a sale. They are welcome to browse and try on and see if it suits them and bring their dress along next day if they want something to match, that kind of personal service.” (B1O)

“I think friendly staff - client interaction is also a very important. They are helpful, friendly, knowledgeable. I find with a lot of the bigger shops you lose that personal touch.” (B1S)

“Customer service very important. Integrity has always been quite an important thing for me, also having work by designers who are making original pieces and not copying other work.” (B2O)

“Customer service perspective, definitely, I mean people come back” (B2S)

“I think that it's caring about the individual. You never get the feeling that its mass produced. I mean, it's unique.” (B2C)

“The culture of the brand again, it's all about that edgy connection of accepting your imperfections and loving your imperfections. Customer service first is unbelievably important. And it's about also connecting with our customers, really knowing what they want.....” (B3O)

Again, a differentiator from B3O is about accepting and loving imperfections which she tries to bring about in some of the “unfinished” qualities of her jewellery and which further defines her brand and the ways in which she communicates.

4.2.7 Brand personality, customer relationships

This question related to understanding how the brand was portrayed from a personality perspective, and what kind of customer relationships were being built. The theory around brand personality is quite interesting. It was a concept coined by Aaker (1997:347) which states that brand personality is a set of human characteristics that are associated with the brand. Brand personality serves a symbolic or self-expressive function as it allows a consumer to connect with the brand and therefore develop a preference for it, as opposed to other similar brands (Aaker, 1997:347-348). There has since been a lot of research into the concept of brand personality ranging from associating it with human personality to gender and social class or other descriptors such as cost-effective and financially stable (Geuens, Weijters and De Wulf, 2009:99).

Brand personality is an important component of brand identity theory which states that it can make a brand more interesting and memorable (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009:53). A brand without a strong or noticeable personality can

struggle to gain awareness or develop a lasting relationship with customers (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009:53).

4.2.7.1 Brand personality

B1O does not associate her personality with the brand of B1, she discusses how she would like the brand to be perceived, and further remarks that brand and personality should not be confused:

“I am quiet and not flamboyant, but people feel that they can trust me and very often I get their life stories, or they feel like a chat. Not really the personality that I try to cultivate in the brand, I would like to be regarded more as an art jeweller and that each piece I make is a miniature work of art. That's what I would love to have as a brand. I think you are confusing personality and brand and it falls apart.” (B1O)

B1S, on the other hand thinks, that B1O's personality is indeed translated into the brand, and by personality she means knowledge:

“I'd say yes some of B1O's personality, she's very knowledgeable, obviously on her stones because of her studies, her history and her interests.” (B1S)

Quirky was the word used by B2O, which was echoed to some degree by B2S in describing the brand as a hipster:

“It's hard to say because on the one hand, I feel like it's quite serious. Like we are serious about contemporary jewellery. Quirky, I think is probably a good word to describe it. We like to do things that are just a bit unexpected, maybe intrigue people a little bit.” (B2O)

“One of those hipsters, you know with the tattoos and the cool hairstyle, about 25, cool, maybe even a bit androgynous.” (B2S)

B3O was very clear in her description of the brand personality, and this was echoed by her customer, mentioning again the dark, edgy side of a woman:

“We did a collection called Raven and that is who I wanted to aim B3's jewellery at. It was about the woman that's not afraid to dance in the moonlight, to embrace her shadows and about being real and authentic and a enjoys her dark side a little bit.” (B3O)

“Adventurous, quite bold, a little bit rebellious, put together, possibly fun, but edging more along the wild side.” (B3C)

Each of these boutiques, while not necessarily believing in the concept of brand personality, have created something that is quite different and unique. What's important would be how or even if, it was translated into marketing and brand communications, and whether the target market resonated with it. Once again, this emphasises a need for different communication strategies that speak to different audiences.

4.2.7.2 Customer Relationships

This question focused on understanding the kinds of relationships that the boutiques wanted to build with their customers and why. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009:50)

mention that the goal of a brand should be to create a relationship with the customer because loyal and committed customers influence others positively (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009:264). Some of the drivers of a customer's relationship with a brand centre around gaining a better understanding of why they have an attachment to a brand, their values and beliefs as well as their activities and interests (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009:264). The key learnings from this question centred around getting to know people, remembering their names, and building long-term loyal relationships across the board.

B1O used the words "getting to know them on a personal level so that they become like a friend" as that often guided her in ensuring that they were offered the right products:

"My relationship with customers, well number one, I very very often greet them by name, know who they are, I know their stories, their relatives, their friends. Getting to know them on a personal level so that they almost become like a friend that also happens to make a purchase because I know what are the right things that would appeal to them. Definitely building a lot of loyalty and long-term relationships." (B1O)

B2O also identified customer relationships and loyalty as their main descriptors for the relationships that they build with customers, as well as word of mouth:

"We've got customers that we've had because we've been going since 2006. We've still got customers from 10 years ago who will come looking for a gift, knowing that we do something different. A lot of it is loyalty." (B2O)

"Its long-term relationships, its people showing their friends who to come to get stuff." (B2S)

B3O also mentioned relationships, specifically related to customer life cycle and catering for that so that as people change, the brand can still meet their needs. However, she also noted that it was something they could do better:

"Relationships we build with customers - because we've got that life cycle. Maybe we're too busy at the moment to actually focus on it enough because I think there's a lot of energy that actually needs to go in that" (B3O)

"I'm sure she's got repeat customers. When she opened the new shop last year, she had 200 people there attending the opening." (B3S)

"I think remembering the customer's name as a regular is very important which they did well." (B3C)

All the respondents, regardless of target market, regarded building long-term customer relationships as key, and this aspect could be a vital component of the SME approach.

4.2.8 Visual elements of the brand

This question related to understanding which visual elements of the brand were strong and noticeable. In the retail space, the strategic use of a strong visual element to attract attention without seeming gaudy but fitting in with the brand personality is vital. In general, the strength of the displays came across clearly as a very inviting and enticing visual element, tempting customers into the retail space.

B1O was very specific about what she wanted for the retail space, besides the logo, an almost minimalistic approach, almost subconsciously in line with her own personality which she mentioned earlier as quiet and not flamboyant:

“Possibly a red dragon on a white background, the boutique name in the same font all the time, white clean lines, lots of light, no loud music, the atmosphere, a warm friendly greeting.” (B1O)

“The display, very clean and clear, inviting.” (B1S)

“Sparkly, because I’m walking down there and I’m making a beeline for the shop, I’m not gonna be distracted. It’s got lots of windows, it displays well.” (B1C)

B2O also leaned towards a minimalist environment where the jewellery could shine, besides supportive elements like the logo and packaging. This is blended well with the addition of the bookshelves and jewellers’ benches which adds to the reputation of being manufacturing jewellers:

“You mean like the logo? Packaging is beautiful. We like to keep it quite pared down so that the jewellery speaks for itself, quite slick and professional, minimal. And the look of the gallery as well, we recently painted a dark grey, a bit more dramatic, but it works well for the jewellery. The bookshelf with all the books and, in the studio, the workbench at the back adds to the visual element. Because that also reinforces the point that we make about handmade and often it’s nice when people can see “Oh, you’re actually making work, right here.”” (B2O)

B3O tended to focus more on dark and dramatic colours, with black as their main theme, and this links clearly with her previous descriptions of the brand being dark, edgy, the shadow side:

“Black, gold, white and red. Mainly black. The main thing about B3 is what the black actually represents. Other visual elements – logo, colour, it’s about our diamond, we got a diamond that’s got black marks on it.” (B3O)

“Young, different, vibey, energetic because she’s got skulls, guns, evil eyes, piercings, earrings, all kinds of funny things. I will say mix of everything. It’s really riveting” (B3S)

“Dark, very dark. Not dark as in evil, dark as in like black, the colour, a bit too dark. It comes across as a little bit scary. There’s also again an edgy cool, very much a bad girl vibe.” (B3C)

What was noteworthy here was that they all have clear brand descriptors from a visual perspective, and their descriptions blended well with the kind of brand image they were trying to project to customers and demonstrated an understanding of what their customers would find appealing.

4.2.9 Functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits for customers

This question related to how they wanted people to feel after making a purchase at the boutique. Functional benefits are generally benefits that have a rational appeal focused on what the brand is (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009:48), but as discussed earlier, jewellery pieces are adored not because of their performance or functional value, but because of their symbolic value (Cordeiro, 2003:21). Emotional and self-

expressive benefits on the other hand focus on the emotions and feelings that the brand induces (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009:48) and this is more the realm of the jewellery industry. While functional benefits draw attention to a product attribute that the brand wishes to own (for example, the brand 3M and the innovation that all their products exhibit), emotional and self-expressive benefits provide a stronger basis for building relationships (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009:48). Emotional benefits focus on how a person feels when using the brand, while self-expressive benefits allow an individual to use the brand as part of cultivating and communicating a self-image (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009:49-50).

All the boutiques used words that in fact associate closely with their boutiques' personalities and what they were trying to communicate, with a very strong focus on the emotional benefits of the purchase:

"Excited. Happy, I do feel that we are dealing with people on a happy mission." (B1O)

"I want them to feel like they're special." (B2O)

"I want them to feel connected. And very excited. And maybe a little bit naughty." (B3O)

This is interesting as all three boutiques, despite their very different kinds of customers, have the common aim of wanting to delight their customers in some way and this may not actually be very prevalent in larger retail outlets as customers can lose their individuality in such environments. This reiterates the cultivation of a certain kind of customer relationship as mentioned in question 2.6.2 and connects with the SME approach to be presented in the next chapter.

4.2.10 What is the influence of building brand identity on the reputation of these businesses?

4.2.10.1 Brands uniqueness (positioning), marketing activities, measures, and tracking

This question related to better understanding what made the brands unique, how they were positioned, what kind of marketing activities they were engaged in, and how or if, they measured and tracked those.

Brand positioning is about the space in the mind that the brand wishes to own and wants to be associated with, it is what sets your brand apart from other similar brands (Patel, 2019). Brand positioning can be successfully used to establish an emotional connection with your audience, strengthen your brand's differentiating characteristics, create value, and symbolise the essence of your brand (Patel, 2019).

4.2.10.2 Brand uniqueness (positioning)

The responses to this question centred more around the uniqueness of products and services offered and, in this researcher's opinion, is not true positioning, unless, what the brand wants to own is the complete uniqueness of what they offer. In this case, all the communications need to be centred around this to start associating the brand with this attribute. In addition, is the uniqueness of product and service something that no one can copy, or can copy in the same way? This echoed some of the feedback already mentioned above in terms of what was identified as unique.

B1O is the only retail store in the Mall that offers a jeweller's workshop on the premises and can repair and make jewellery on the spot, this can be an effective differentiator if used correctly:

"I have a unique niche in the market which is - I am there, I can design on the spot, I can quote, I've got a huge number of options in terms of stones, of designs, experience, the ability to repair, the ability to alter. I am actually the only place in the Mall that has a workshop in the premises." (B1O)

B3O focused more the ear candy range as her differentiator, which could be considered a short-term advantage, as this can be easily copied by competitors:

"Looking for additional things that are quite different and that stand out, and the ear candy that really stands out. It doesn't look like what anyone else is doing." (B3O)

In summary, brand uniqueness, although a recurring theme throughout the study, is more focused on product and services than the broader and more durable concept of brand positioning. This could be a focus area in an SME-specific framework that encourages smaller jewellery brands to discover and exploit more fully a truly strong positioning.

4.2.10.3 Marketing Activities

Marketing activities are focused on what communications the brands are engaging in to get their names out there and attract new customers, or to keep current customers interested and involved. Although there were a lot of marketing activities mentioned, the primary theme that emerged was that nothing really worked for them, except one. The one that really stood out was the word of mouth marketing that they all gained through their customer relationships and networks. In addition, each boutique had one other strong marketing tool that was quite unique to them but needs to be leveraged more.

B1 has only one really strong marketing tool, besides word of mouth, which is both innovative and differentiating:

"I think that our annual birthday party is quite a strong marketing tool. All these commercial promotions, or at least a lot of them, have been money that has been wasted, I have tried quite a lot of things over the ages. I once did a research project on my customers, I asked everybody who walked in the door what made them come into this particular shop and way ahead of anything else was "a friend told me to come". (B1O)

This opinion on whether advertising is even needed for small businesses might be one that is quite prevalent and should be changed. Perhaps it also highlights a common misconception about marketing, that's it an unnecessary evil.

Marketing is a necessary communication tool for any business, big or small or you risk being forgotten:

"I'm not aware of whether she does any personal promos or as I said besides that party and let's be honest how many businesses do that – also very unique. I don't understand why they advertise. I don't feel it necessary for small businesses. I think yes to create awareness initially. But I don't think advertising is the be-all and end-all for a business." (B1S)

The marketing highlighted by B2O also centred around word of mouth, a bit of Instagram and magazine advertising which seems to work quite well for them:

“Some of the modern ways of marketing on Instagram and stuff like that, it's nice because it's a visual platform and what we do is visual. But mostly it's like a long, slow process of word of mouth. A little bit of Instagram, but we seem to rely mainly on word of mouth. The magazines that I think are the best for us are things like House and Leisure, more of the home magazines that focus on design rather than fashion.” (B2O)

B3, focuses mainly on Instagram and this is working very well for them:

“Facebook, we are putting money into trying to spread the sponsored posts and all that type of boring stuff, which is tedious as hell and Instagram, same thing as Facebook. Loads of Instagram, that's where our main work goes in.” (B3O)

What is important to highlight here is that even though they are all not really engaging in high levels of traditional marketing, they might also not be putting the required energy and focus into those marketing avenues that do work for them.

4.2.10.4 Measures and Tracking

This question was aimed at understanding how, if at all, they are tracking the marketing activities that they're engaged in. Simpson (2017) stresses that the ability to collect, aggregate and calculate the data from various marketing activities allows a brand to gain insight into what's working, what can be improved and what demonstrates a reasonable return on marketing investment.

An important commonality that emerged from the research is that none of the boutiques are tracking what they're doing, so they don't necessarily know what's working and what's not:

“I'm not measuring, not particularly no. Occasionally yes, someone mentions the website or Facebook, or the website.” (B1O)

“So, it's not a direct measurable, I mean, we can go back and look and see if the things that we sold are online and obviously those are in addition to what we're selling here. But we haven't had people that come in and say I've seen you on Instagram and I wanted to come and have a look, not specifically, although the reason they're here is that they must have seen us somewhere, because we're out of the way, you have to make an effort to get here. You do, now and again, get a query from the magazines.” (B2O)

“I've asked them, have you guys noticed an influx of people and they're like no, they're not convinced about Instagram. Although Instagram is a lot more active, which I think can only be positive.” (B2S)

B3O was the only brand who noted that it was something that she should be doing more of, and once again demonstrates a stronger understanding of marketing and its role in small business than the other boutiques:

“That would be a big thing that I'm not doing enough, is that analysis, that needs someone doing a full-time job. I need to spend more time on my Google things, see what people are looking for.” (B3O)

Overall a common feeling expressed here is that there is a lack somewhere in their marketing, but they're not exactly sure where, or even how to address it. Marketing and tracking needs to be an important component of the SME-approach for brands to really understand what they're doing that's working and can be duplicated in some way, however, it might be entirely dependent on the growth objectives of the brand.

4.2.11 Does brand building and brand identity influence business performance, and how?

This question related to understanding whether they felt that brand identity and brand building influenced their business performance, and if so, how.

B1O's response focused on differentiating between her personal brand as a jeweller, and the boutique brand, and noted that business performance was dependent on the economic climate, and consequently reflected on which brand did better, herself as an individual or the boutique:

"Are you referring to me as the brand or the brand as itself? I cannot focus more on B1 as the brand as opposed to myself, being very closely linked to that - I think it would be quite hard to talk about individual creative pieces without saying who did them. Probably dependent on the economic climate whether I would build up the brand B1O (my name) or B1 (boutique name). If it was good times, B1O as a brand would sell more and in hard times, as at the moment, B1 would. It's a matter of price. B1 is more of an affordable everyday market, where the brand "B1O" is a more upmarket expensive brand." (B1O)

B2O struggled to articulate whether building up a brand identity helped or not from a business performance perspective. She focused more on the trust issue, which in the jewellery arena is common, as demonstrated earlier:

"It's one of those things that is probably difficult to measure, because so much of our business is word of mouth, because it's such a luxury item, and it's something that you might think about for a long time. And because it's often there's a trust issue as well." (B2O)

B3O was clear on the brand being an important component of creating loyalty and firmly believes that it does promote business success:

"I do think so. One of the big things is that it creates loyalty. And it gives your brand a new language that people can identify with quite quickly, which is what you're hopefully working towards." (B3O)

From the above analysis, it would appear that brand identity is not being leveraged enough, or in some cases at all, to create and enhance business performance and this could also need to be a key focus point for the SME approach.

4.2.12 Owner-manager as brand or retail store as brand?

This question related to whether the owner-manager was the brand, or whether the retail boutique was the brand and which one of these drew customers in. In two instances, it's the owner-manager who draws in the customers, but in the other, it's almost a 50/50 split as customers know both.

For B1, these responses link closely to the above question in that the owner-manager and the boutique brand are closely linked but remain two separate entities.

This is significant as where does the focus need to lie, which brand do we look at enhancing and building brand identity or are both equally important? It would appear from the literature that the owner-manager is intricately linked to the retail store brand and the question then also becomes, should they be separated, or merely leveraged more?

“They are drawn to the store because I am there. I am a designer and manufacturer and I source in jewellery. Those that I might have formed a relationship with often say to me: “Oh I came past, but you weren't there, so I didn't go in.” The B1 brand is fairly closely linked with my personality” (B1O)

“And besides B1, I think B1O herself also has a brand, she's known as a designer and people specifically want pieces done by her. I think they're two separate entities – B1O and B1.” (B1S)

For B2O, the divide is clear in that the owner-managers are more well-known than the boutique itself, and in that case, what should they be promoting? The retail boutique, or themselves? Perhaps this also depends on the long-term growth objectives of the brand:

“The vast majority of our customers have known us for a long time. And that people get introduced to us through friends or family members.” (B2O)

“I think it's the reputation of the owners as well as B2, I really have the feeling that it's about them (the owners) rather than the gallery, but then that's what holds the gallery. So, it could be the reputation and word of mouth and people that know about it already, relationships.” (B2S)

For B3O, the clear focus has been on the creation of the boutique brand, with a 50/50 split, and this is significant as the brand will slowly overtake the owner-manager as the central drawcard as their marketing and brand focus demonstrates:

“I would say 50/50.” (B2C)

“I would say both.” (B3S)

“I think the brand is strong, stronger than the owner.” (B3C)

It's not a clear-cut decision, but the study demonstrates that perhaps it depends on what the growth objectives of the brand are, which will determine where the focus lies.

4.3 Overview of Major Findings

This study has yielded the following general observations which will provide some of the focus areas of the SME approach to be presented in the next chapter.

B1 and B2 seem to have some similarities in that they tend to focus on the art of the jewellery, rather than the brand as such, whereas B3 appears to be more focused on growth and this is evidenced in having three retail stores, and is the closest of the three boutique subjects to follow brand building and brand identity guidelines:

“What I would like it to be is art jewellery as opposed to the commercial” (B1O)

“So that's how we also see ourselves, as kind of educating people about what contemporary jewellery is. So that's why it's important for us to have the

space to show the work because ultimately, if the works not getting seen, then you're not going to grow the audience, you're not going to grow the market for this kind of work.” (B2O)

B1 and B2 also focus strongly on being manufacturing jewellers as part of their business model, and that the services that they can provide are far superior to someone who only sources in jewellers and cannot manufacture, or repair without sending it out.

B1 and B3 have a strong focus on gemstones, but where for B1 is it about South African stones that you can't get anywhere else, for B3 it's about the story behind the stone and the jewellery piece.

They are all catering to a niche target market, someone looking for something different and unique, not commercial, or traditional types of jewellery. Despite this, their target markets are quite different and none of them mentioned each other as competitors, but they all mentioned similar possible competitors, namely Veronica Anderson and Reads. B2 and B3 also mentioned Kirsten Goss and Dear Rae numerous times.

There is a very strong focus on creating and maintaining strong customer relationships and loyalty, such that customers follow them and ask specifically for them, generating a lot of repeat business. This would appear to be the pivotal point of the SME approach being expanded on from this study.

Marketing consists strongly of word of mouth, brought in by friends, they've known me for a long time and although they have tried a variety of marketing activities, this appears to be the strongest channel. Interestingly, none of them are tracking any of the seemingly traditional channels that they might use, but they know that word of mouth is their strongest marketing activity.

4.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the study would suggest that the SME space requires a specialised branding approach that caters to their highly individualistic way of doing business, while still focusing on the importance of the brand and business growth. This SME approach will be presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Research Findings and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is focused on the discussion, findings, and conclusion of the research, culminating in the presentation of an SME approach tailored to different requirements.

5.1.1. Overview of Study

The focus on the SME sector is crucial as demonstrated by their significant economic contribution in terms of GDP, economic growth, job creation and innovation. In South Africa, it is estimated that close to 91 percent of businesses are in this sector and contribute between 52 – 57 percent to GDP and 61 percent to employment (Abor and Quartey, 2010:218). Mkhosi (2017:1) notes that small businesses in South Africa are engines of economic growth, sources of innovation and employment creators, stating that 90 percent of employment opportunities stem from small and expanding companies.

This study was chosen because there is little research in the jewellery retail SME sector. This is considered a gap since this sector caters to the fundamental human need for adornment and self-expression, besides contributing significantly in economic terms.

Furthermore, retail branding is a growing field generally, and has special importance for SMEs as the shift to online marketing becomes more prevalent and offers customers a far greater choice than when there were only physical stores. Wright (2020) credits the recent surge in online retail growth as COVID-19 related and states that 85 000-plus retailers in the UK were forced to launch an online shop in the last four months. Swanepoel (2020) quantifies this by stating that, in South Africa, total retail sales via online channels averaged R2 billion about 15 years ago, but now this figure is closer to R14 billion. Besides the fact that these figures encourage SMEs to consider how they should be trading in the online environment; it also emphasises the need for SMEs to use brand identity more strategically to build their brands in the retail environment. Since they cannot rely on customers seeking them out because of proximity, brand and brand identity helps to differentiate them irrespective of locality.

The focus on brand is fundamentally important as it is the reason why consumers purchase products – brand is a differentiator, and holder of value: the purpose of a brand is to create an experience that consumers can connect with and believe in. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009:40-43) define brand identity as what the organisation wants the brand to stand for and stress that brand identity is used to drive all brand-building efforts, it must have depth and richness, is not merely an advertising tagline or positioning statement, and, when fulfilled, should help establish a relationship or strong connection with the customer by generating value.

The Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) model provides a holistic overview of brand identity and has been used in this study for the analysis of boutique retail jewellery SMEs, using the model as the starting point for brand evaluation in each business.

In summary, this study explores the role of brand identity in small boutique retail jewellery businesses and investigates how the focus on brand and brand identity can boost the business successfully, with the aim being the exploration of an SME approach to cater for their special characteristics.

5.2 SME Business Objectives

The following business objectives have been extrapolated from each case:

B1O is opposed to her business being commercially focused, and she relates this concept specifically to producing multiples of any jewellery item:

*“What I would like it to be is art jewellery as opposed to the commercial.”
(B1O)*

This statement clearly demonstrates a focus on artistic, one-off unique pieces, as opposed to mass-produced commercial focused jewellery, which further emphasises a business objective of remaining small and dedicated rather than becoming a large jewellery brand which, by necessity, must be driven by multiples of each item.

B2O’s statement centres more around education than sales, or even brand awareness:

“We also see our job as educating people about contemporary jewellery, and thus we have evolved into more of a curated gallery space than just a shop selling nice jewellery. What’s nice about the new space, is that we don’t feel that it’s about selling as much as possible, we’d rather have great product, and really nice pieces.” (B2O)

This sentiment feels counter-intuitive, as one of the primary objectives of business is gaining awareness and profits, with brand being the central tool that allows this to happen. Further to that, considering that they are not located at a shopping mall but rather at a private house, the use of the gallery space as the primary means of brand and business introduction feels paradoxical:

“So that’s why it’s important for us to have the space to show the work because ultimately, if the work’s not getting seen, then you’re not going to grow the audience, you’re not going to grow the market for this kind of work. So, we know that it’s very niche, and we’ve got a very small market, but even within that market, to just introduce people to bit more challenging work, more interesting work is important.” (B2O)

It would appear from the above analysis that their goals are more small business oriented than commercially oriented. Additionally, how does the shift to online shopping impact their retail and gallery space, especially as this is noted as a crucial means of introducing their unique jewellery pieces?

B3O is much more commercially focused and this is demonstrated in multiples of items being available, as well as having three retail stores and an online store to promote her sales. In addition, while she does express concern over commercialisation, she also recognises that it is required to stay in business:

“I mean, it’s so scary what the world’s now become, and how people are actually selling stuff and how you go onto a website and you look at something and then suddenly it’s on all your channels everywhere and part of me can’t stand it but you still want to make the bucks.” (B3O)

All three boutiques demonstrate quite different business objectives but highlight key questions around the awareness of these business objectives and whether they are being consciously used to drive the business and the brand. The objectives may not

be actively driving the growth and longevity of the businesses, besides demonstrating a weak focus on brand identity.

This analysis around business objectives forms a key part of the SME framework as it dictates the starting point for an SME, based on their business objectives.

5.3 Key Insights

The following key insights have been extracted from the data and analysed in terms of their significance to SMEs, and how it impacts their business operations.

The learnings gleaned from the research have been instrumental in theorising an SME approach that can be used by small businesses to leverage the concepts of brand and brand identity as part of their strategic objectives.

The Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) brand identity model was used as the primary means of analysing the boutiques to understand whether it catered for the unique characteristics of SMEs. In addition, the researcher aimed to learn how the concepts of brand and brand identity were understood and applied in business by the boutique owner-managers, as well as the general understanding by customers and suppliers and this became the leading question in the research interview guide (opening construct). A question around the emphasis or integration of the owner-manager brand versus the retail store brand rounded off the interview guide as a final point in understanding the difference, if any, between these two brands (closing construct).

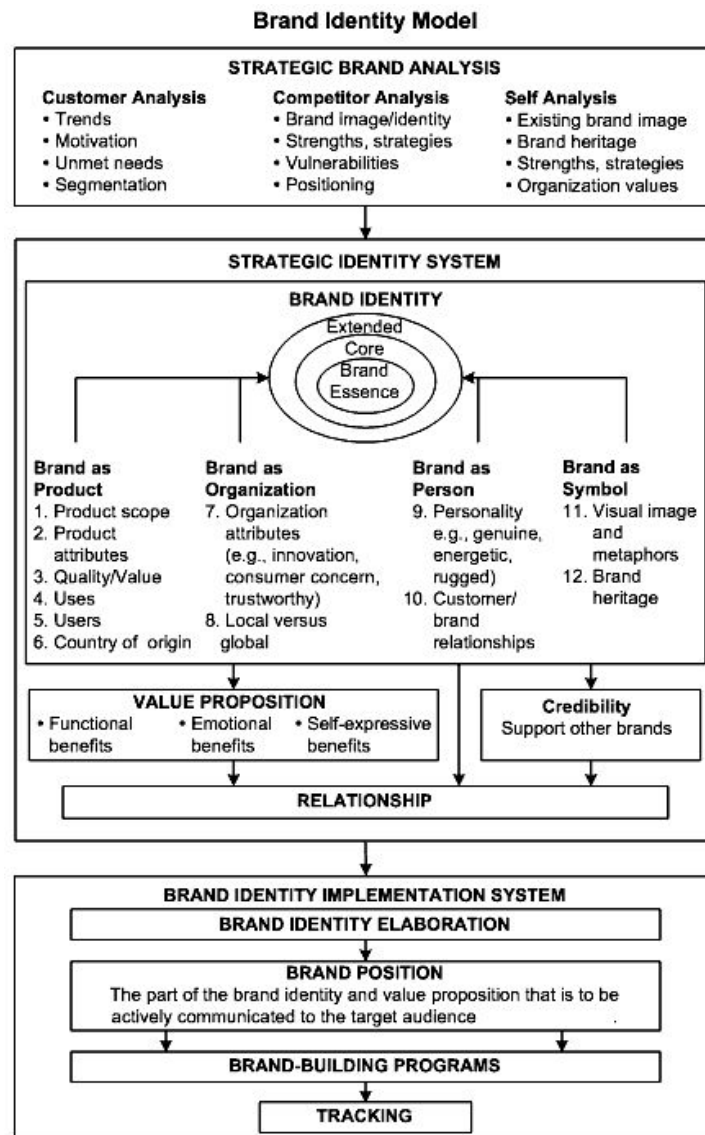


Figure 12: The brand identity model. (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009)

The Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) brand identity model is deconstructed in the following section and analysed in terms of whether it is part of the boutiques current business model, leading to a consideration of whether it can remain as is for SMEs, or whether the construct needs to be incorporated into the new proposed framework.

5.3.1 Brand, brand identity and its role in business

Opening construct	B1	B2	B3
Brand, brand identity and its role in business	Limited brand emphasis, business is seen as creative and artistic	Limited brand emphasis, business is seen as educational	Stronger brand emphasis, business is seen as commercially oriented

Table 4: Brand, brand identity and its role in business

B1 and B2 see brand identity merely as the name and logo of the business, while B3 is using it to create a perception of the business based on values, aesthetics, and differentiation.

B3O states that brand has a role to play in business as it helps to create a language and visual identity. This is the only boutique that seems to highlight the value of brand identity in creating a business.

This demonstrates the different aims of the three boutiques, with B1 and B2 having a much more limited vision of brand and brand identity. B3 demonstrates that a better understanding of what brand identity means today, particularly considering the change to online marketing, is important for SMEs in order to grow the business.

This difference between B1 and B2 on the one hand, and B3 on the other, is consistent with their different aims and the new framework created reflects these dissimilar needs, in conjunction with their differing aims.

5.3.2 Customer description, purchase motivation and trends

Aaker & Joachimsthaler brand identity model construct	B1	B2	B3
Customer description, purchase motivation and trends	Displays diverse customer base, looking for unique pieces; Displays strong customer loyalty	Displays diverse customer base, looking for unique pieces; Displays strong customer loyalty	Displays diverse customer base, looking for unique pieces; Displays strong customer loyalty

Table 5: Customer description, purchase motivation and trends

The customer base described by all the boutiques is very diverse, but a commonality expressed is that their customers want different, creative, and unique jewellery pieces.

This insight leads to a strong differentiator which is the uniqueness of the products, especially considering that all the boutiques have quite different products and thus target markets. The same thread of desired uniqueness is amplified in the purchase motivation for all three boutiques and has been mentioned by respondents across the three types.

This ties in closely with the overall customer description, i.e. customers who are actively looking for something out of the ordinary, but also links well to the next insight which is that customer loyalty is a vital part of brand building and can be better leveraged by SMEs to sustain the growth and longevity of their brands. Fourie (2015:183) notes that a consistent customer experience of satisfaction leads to customer loyalty, intention to repurchase, positive word of mouth, as well as paying less attention to competitors. In addition, satisfied customers will also refer others to the company (Fourie, 2015:183). This makes it vitally important for SMEs to maximise customer satisfaction as key to developing strong relationships that ultimately lead to strong customer loyalty.

Furthermore, each boutique identified a totally different target market, albeit that they are all looking for something different and unique and this highlights a key point in that brand and marketing must be tailored to resonate with the right target market.

5.3.3 Competitors, strengths and weaknesses and customer profile overlap

Aaker & Joachimsthaler brand identity model construct	B1	B2	B3
Competitors, strengths and weaknesses and customer profile overlap	Limited focus on competitors, no comparison to own brand, marketing is key strength in competitors; Strong focus on customer service	Limited focus on competitors, no comparison to own brand, marketing is key strength in competitors; Strong focus on customer service	Strong focus on competitors, comparison with own brand, clear differentiation; Strong focus on customer service

Table 6: Competitors, strengths and weaknesses and customer profile overlap

The competitor analysis revealed an interesting question: Is an understanding of the competitive environment necessary for an SME or does it only have an impact based on business objectives? To frame this thought another way: How important is it to keep up with competitors if the objective is only to have a small family-owned business?

None of the boutiques that participated in the study mentioned each other as competitors, and although they did touch on similar boutique jewellery stores as possible competitors, it was stated that what they did was very niche and the competitors mentioned were not really doing the same things.

B3O was the only owner-manager who was quite clear on who her competitors were, why she considered them competitors, she could compare her brand with them, learn from them and more clearly differentiate her own brand in terms of where in the competitor spectrum it fitted. This kind of comparison is fundamental in terms of her differentiation and growth objectives.

In addition, a strong spotlight on customer service as a differentiator is revealed as all the boutiques mention this as a number one strength that they leverage off continually:

“Customer service is key to keeping loyal customers.” (B1O)

“We are very good with customer service.” (B2O)

“Customer service first is unbelievably important.” (B3O)

Fourie (2015:187) infers that good customer service can contribute to a successful business. Huang, Mitchell, Dibner, Ruttenberg and Tripp (2018) further state that swift and personal customer service pays off, with customer's being willing to provide positive recommendations for companies that treat them well. The analysis above demonstrates that all the boutique owner-managers are aware of this behaviour and are already leveraging off this insight.

Furthermore, it is significant to note that this analysis highlighted that B2O and B3O both mention forms of marketing as aspects of importance or strengths that they admired most in competitors and this can possibly be attributed to their own shortcomings in this area.

5.3.4 Heritage, brand image, strengths and weaknesses

Aaker & Joachimsthaler brand identity model construct	B1	B2	B3
Heritage, brand image, strengths and weaknesses	Uniqueness of product touted as main strength; Word of mouth leveraged	Uniqueness of product touted as main strength; Word of mouth leveraged	Use of customer belief system to connect with them; Word of mouth leveraged

Table 7: Heritage, brand image, strengths and weaknesses

The insight from this section is related to the boutiques' strengths and how these can be used to connect with the right target market: B1 and B2 mainly emphasize the uniqueness of their products, as well as customer service, but B3 taps into the belief system of the customer through a strategic use of insightful descriptive words, i.e. "darker, edgier", "reconnecting with yourself", and "being the best version of yourself".

This insight is significant as it suggests that gaining a better understanding of customer needs, can consequently lead to the creation of tailored marketing strategies that can connect with these needs.

Word of mouth was mentioned several times as a strong marketing tool by all the boutiques:

"We seem to rely mainly on word of mouth which is actually very powerful"
(B20)

"Word of mouth is in when it comes to jewellery." (B2S)

Stokes and Lomax (2002:349) support the importance of word of mouth by stating that marketing as perceived and carried out by entrepreneurs is different from the concepts presented in conventional marketing textbooks, and that small business owners tend to avoid formalised promotional activities and rely more on positive word of mouth to develop their customer base through the use of customer recommendations. Further a reliance on word of mouth is prevalent across most sectors and lifespans of SMEs, besides being more realistically suited to the resources of the business (Stokes and Lomax, 2002:354). Since word of mouth could be considered hard to control, it would be vital for owner-managers to create some measure of control through, for example, the use of strong customer service practices amongst others.

An analysis of their strengths and weaknesses has uncovered that the boutiques need to consciously connect the dots of how their brands are currently being

interpreted, how they want them to be interpreted, as well as consider very specific marketing activities based on their unique strengths and weaknesses.

5.3.5 Product range and qualities

Aaker & Joachimsthaler brand identity model construct	B1	B2	B3
Product range and qualities	Strong product differentiation through quality, handmade, semi-precious stones and once-off pieces	Strong product differentiation through quality, handmade, SA designers, variety of materials and manufacturer on site	Strong product differentiation through use of imperfections, unfinished pieces and storytelling

Table 8: Product range and qualities

A key factor in a boutique jewellery store is product differentiation which was highlighted earlier in the analysis as a strong point for all the boutiques and is interpreted slightly differently by all the boutiques. This is echoed by Bagdare (2015:11) who notes that retailers try to build an emotional bond with customers by providing personal attention, individualising, and tailoring products and services and making the client feel special. These elements also aid in building customer loyalty.

“Quality workmanship, handmade, semi-precious stones, design and manufacture, South African stones, once-off pieces ...” distilled from B1O

“High quality, South African designers, handmade, something that is not widely available anywhere else, variety of materials, manufacturer on site” distilled from B2O

“Accepting and loving imperfections, keeping things unfinished, telling a story” distilled from B3O

It's useful to note that B1 and B2 focus on the actual product attributes and differentiate through very similar descriptors even though they have different target markets and do not compete for the same customers. B3, on the other hand, is leveraging wider descriptors that depict how people might feel about themselves, with a play on accepting their imperfections by purchasing jewellery that is also unfinished in some form, as well as utilising the power of storytelling to create connections with customers.

5.3.6 Brand personality and customer relationships

Aaker & Joachimsthaler brand identity model construct	B1	B2	B3
Brand personality and customer relationships	Building customer relationships are pivotal	Building customer relationships are pivotal	Building customer relationships are pivotal

Table 9: Brand personality and customer relationships

Each of these boutiques have created something that is quite different and unique in terms of their brand personality, and an important consideration would be how or even if, it was translated into marketing and brand communications, and whether the target market resonated with it. Once again, this emphasises a need for different communication strategies that target different audiences.

All the respondents, regardless of target market, regarded building customer relationships as pivotal to their business relationships:

“And it's about also connecting with our customers like, really really knowing what they want, what they're looking for, what their birthstone is, what their favourite colour is, who they're shopping for and learning from that.” (B3O)

“Essentially, you want all your new customers to become regulars.” (B3C)

It's important to note that thus far there has been a significant correlation between all three boutiques in wanting to build strong customer relationships as well as creating customer loyalty through strong customer service. These three ideas link well together in building a strong customer base and retaining customers.

5.3.7 Visual elements of the brand

Aaker & Joachimsthaler brand identity model construct	B1	B2	B3
Visual elements of the brand	Has clear visual brand descriptors correlating with brand image	Has clear visual brand descriptors correlating with brand image	Has clear visual brand descriptors correlating with brand image

Table 10: Visual elements of the brand

A noteworthy point was that all the boutiques have clear brand descriptors from a visual perspective, and their descriptions blended well with the kind of brand image they were trying to project to customers and demonstrated an understanding of what their customers would find appealing.

Phillips, McQuarrie and Griffin (2014:225) define visual brand identity as set of characteristics and attributes that join together a unique set of associations that companies aspire to create and maintain over time. Further, brand identity helps to

create relationships with consumers as well as lead perceptions of brand personality (Phillips et al, 2014:225). Visual elements thus become associated with the brand over time and become part of the brand identity descriptors over and above elements like the logo or tagline.

Therefore, an important next step in the process would be for the owner-managers to recognise the importance of strong and consistent visual elements being intentionally linked to brand personality, language and image, and leveraging off that connection.

5.3.8 Functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits

Aaker & Joachimsthaler brand identity model construct	B1	B2	B3
Functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits	Are focused on making customers happy	Are focused on making customers happy	Are focused on making customers happy

Table 11: Functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits

Threkeld (2015) defines a brands' value proposition as a statement of the functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits that the brand delivers, that adds value to the consumer, and can result in long-term relationships.

Jewellery pieces can be related more to providing emotional and self-expressive benefits rather than functional due to the nature of the purchase and the nostalgic and emotive value placed on them.

All three boutiques, despite their very different kinds of customers, have the common aim of wanting to delight their customers in some way. This can be a vital form of differentiation when competing against larger retailers since customers can lose their individuality in such environments.

5.3.9 Brand uniqueness, marketing activities, measures and tracking

Aaker & Joachimsthaler brand identity model construct	B1	B2	B3
Brand uniqueness, marketing activities, measures and tracking	Not focused on exploiting differences Not exploiting marketing that does work Not tracking or measuring their marketing	Not focused on exploiting differences Not exploiting marketing that does work Not tracking or measuring their marketing	Not focused on exploiting differences Not exploiting marketing that does work Not tracking or measuring their marketing

Table 12: Brand uniqueness, marketing activities, measures and tracking

Brand uniqueness, although a recurring theme throughout the study, is more focused on product and services rather than the broader and more durable concept of brand positioning. The analysis suggests that smaller jewellery brands need to be encouraged to discover and exploit a strong positioning as part of their brand strategy. A combination of differentiators can also work well, for example, the following have emerged from this study thus far: designing and manufacturing jeweller, product uniqueness, customer service, cultivating strong customer relationships, loyalty and strong word of mouth marketing.

With regards to marketing it is important to highlight at this point that even though they are all not engaging in high levels of traditional marketing, they might also not be putting the required energy and focus into those marketing avenues that do work for them, for example, word of mouth. Equally important is the commonality that none of the boutiques are tracking what they're doing, so they don't necessarily know what's working and what's not. Overall, the common feeling expressed was that there is a lack somewhere in their marketing, but they're not exactly sure where, or even how to address it. Linking this back to their growth objectives could be one way of determining what would work for each boutique based on their long-term goals.

The above analysis demonstrates that perhaps brand identity is not being leveraged enough, or in some cases at all, to create and enhance business performance. In order to work effectively for an SME, the brand must be the identity, not the product and this means building on concepts already highlighted, such as genuineness, customer service, trust elements, clear differentiators and so on.

5.3.10 Owner-manager brand versus retail store brand

Closing construct	B1	B2	B3
Owner-manager brand versus retail store brand	B1 and B1O are two separate entities with different target markets and focus points	B2 and B2O are two separate entities with different target markets and focus points	B3 is an entity with target markets and focus points; B3O does not feature that much

Table 13: Owner-manager brand versus retail store brand

This question exposed an interesting conflict in the owner-manager brand versus the retail store brand:

"I think they're two separate entities – B1O and B1." (B1S)

"I really have the feeling that it's about them (the owners) rather than the gallery." (B2S)

"I think the brand is stronger than the owner." (B3C)

Which subsequently raises the following questions: is the owner-manager a brand versus the boutique itself, which brand is stronger (and why), is this divide present in all SME boutique jewellers, should there be a schism between the brands and which brand should be the focus of brand building or are both equally important?

Based on some of the responses, it would appear that the owner-manager and the boutique brand are closely linked but remain two separate entities. This also relates neatly back to the growth objectives of the brand as stated earlier.

5.3.11 Key Insights in Summary

The following tables summarise all the key insights, displaying a clear pattern in the findings in terms of similarities and differences between the boutiques leading to focus points for the SME-specific framework.

Opening construct	B1	B2	B3
Brand, brand identity and its role in business	Limited brand emphasis, business is seen as creative and artistic	Limited brand emphasis, business is seen as educational	Stronger brand emphasis, business is seen as commercially oriented

Aaker & Joachimsthaler brand identity model construct	B1	B2	B3
Customer description, purchase motivation and trends	Displays diverse customer base, looking for unique pieces; Displays strong customer loyalty	Displays diverse customer base, looking for unique pieces; Displays strong customer loyalty	Displays diverse customer base, looking for unique pieces; Displays strong customer loyalty
Competitors, strengths and weaknesses and customer profile overlap	Limited focus on competitors, no comparison to own brand, marketing is key strength in competitors; Strong focus on customer service	Limited focus on competitors, no comparison to own brand, marketing is key strength in competitors; Strong focus on customer service	Strong focus on competitors, comparison with own brand, clear differentiation; Strong focus on customer service
Heritage, brand image, strengths and weaknesses	Uniqueness of product touted as main strength; Word of mouth leveraged	Uniqueness of product touted as main strength; Word of mouth leveraged	Use of customer belief system to connect with them; Word of mouth leveraged
Product range and qualities	Strong product differentiation through quality, handmade, semi-precious stones	Strong product differentiation through quality, handmade, SA designers, variety of materials and	Strong product differentiation through use of imperfections, unfinished pieces and storytelling

	and once-off pieces	manufacturer on site	
Brand personality and customer relationships	Building customer relationships are pivotal	Building customer relationships are pivotal	Building customer relationships are pivotal
Visual elements of the brand	Has clear visual brand descriptors correlating with brand image	Has clear visual brand descriptors correlating with brand image	Has clear visual brand descriptors correlating with brand image
Functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits	Are focused on making customers happy	Are focused on making customers happy	Are focused on making customers happy
Brand uniqueness, marketing activities, measures and tracking	Not focused on exploiting differences Not exploiting marketing that does work Not tracking or measuring their marketing	Not focused on exploiting differences Not exploiting marketing that does work Not tracking or measuring their marketing	Not focused on exploiting differences Not exploiting marketing that does work Not tracking or measuring their marketing

Closing construct	B1	B2	B3
Owner-manager brand versus retail store brand	B1 and B1O are two separate entities with different target markets and focus points	B2 and B2O are two separate entities with different target markets and focus points	B3 is an entity with target markets and focus points; B3O does not feature that much

Table 14: Key insights in summary

Commonalities across the three boutiques include a diverse customer base, uniqueness of product, a focus on customer loyalty, building relationships and customer service, clear brand descriptors, a common aim of wanting to make customers happy and not thoroughly exploiting or measuring marketing activities.

Differences are seen mainly in B3, which could be considered an outlier through a stronger focus on brand and brand identity, growth goals, competitor understanding and comparison, connecting with customer via belief systems and storytelling as well as a business / commercial focus through the creation of multiples of jewellery items.

These commonalities and differences resulted in the SME-specific framework which is presented in the next section.

5.4 SME Implications

The key question that this study explored was around linking the concept of brand identity to growing an SME boutique retail jewellery store. The analysis of the data suggests that perhaps this question should be preceded by one that relates firstly to understanding what the brands growth objectives are, and secondly, links this to brand identity.

The following table explains the relationship to the Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) brand identity model, how the model constructs were interpreted, and a summary of how the model aligned with the findings from the boutiques that were researched..

Opening construct	Construct interpretation	Boutique retailer summary	SME implications: Research	SME implications: Practice
Brand, brand identity and its role in business	This construct was added as a starting point to gain an understanding of how the concepts of brand, brand identity and its role in business was interpreted. It lies outside the theoretical model.	B1 and B2 display limited use of this construct, while B3 regards it as important.	The model needs to be further tested in the SME sector in order to better understand the impact of brand identity and how it's being used.	Owner-managers need to build brand identity constructs into their business strategy and leverage off this more to build the business.

Aaker & Joachimsthaler brand identity model construct	Construct interpretation	Boutique retailer summary	SME implications: Research	SME implications: Practice
Customer description, purchase motivation and trends	This construct requires an analysis of customers in terms of segmentation, their purchase motivation, needs and trends in the industry	All three boutiques are fully aligned in their interpretation and application of this principle	The model appears to adequately cater for this element across all three cases.	Owner-managers need to focus on building strong customer relationships as a foundation of the business as this study demonstrates that this element is vitally important in SMEs.
Competitors, strengths and weaknesses and customer profile overlap	This construct requires an analysis of the competitor environment	B1 and B2 display limited use of this construct, while B3 regards it as important.	The model needs to be further tested in the SME sector in order to better understand the impact, involvement and necessity of competitor research in	Owner-managers should be aware of primary competitors if their business objectives are to grow and expand the business. It might not be as

			the business and brand strategy.	relevant to those owner-managers who do not have expansion plans but are rather focused on survival / longevity.
Heritage, brand image, strengths and weaknesses	This construct requires a self-analysis	B1 and B2 display limited use of this construct, while B3 regards it as important.	The model needs to be further tested in the SME sector in order to better understand the importance of understanding and leveraging off the brand's image, and strengths and addressing weaknesses.	Owner-managers need to be more engaged with the image of the brand, as well as understanding how to leverage strengths and address weaknesses.
Product range and qualities	This construct requires a product analysis	All three boutiques are partially aligned in their interpretation and application of this principle	The model appears to adequately cater for this element across all three cases.	Owner-managers should be focussing on quality, but also product range with specific reference to uniqueness of product as a differentiator.
Brand personality and customer relationships	This construct requires an understanding of the brand personality and the relationships it seeks to build	All three boutiques are fully aligned in their interpretation and application of this principle	The model appears to adequately cater for this element across all three cases.	Owner-managers must consciously align brand personality with brand identity and leverage it further for the business.

Visual elements of the brand	This construct requires an understanding of the brands' visual signifiers and how they are used	All three boutiques are fully aligned in their interpretation and application of this principle	The model appears to adequately cater for this element across all three cases.	Owner-managers must consciously align visual elements of the retail space and communications with brand identity and leverage it further for the business.
Functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits	This construct requires an understanding of the brands' value proposition and the benefits provided	All three boutiques are fully aligned in their interpretation and application of this principle	The model appears to adequately cater for this element across all three cases.	Owner-managers need to leverage off their value proposition consciously and actively sell the emotional and self-expressive benefits of the brand.
Brand uniqueness, marketing activities, measures and tracking	This construct requires an analysis of brand positioning, marketing activities and measurement and tracking of these	All three boutiques display limited use of this construct.	This element requires further research as all three cases show limited use of marketing in their business.	Owner-managers tend to focus on personal methods of communication, including word of mouth and leveraging networks and relationships. If the objective of the business is growth and expansion, then traditional methods of marketing need to be considered.

Closing construct	Construct interpretation	Boutique retailer summary	SME implications: Research	SME implications: Practice
Owner-manager brand	This construct was added as an ending	B1 and B2 both display a schism	This element requires further	Owner-managers need to have a clear

versus retail store brand	point to gain an understanding of whether the owner-manager brand or the retail store brand was stronger and why. It lies outside the theoretical model.	between the owner-manager brand and the retail store brand with each having different target markets and focus points for products. B3 does not display this schism with a focus on the retail store brand almost exclusively.	research as two of the three cases show a marked difference between the retail store brand and the owner-manager brand.	brand objective: are they the brand, or are they promoting a retail brand? How much of the brand is dependent on them as the owner-manager? This relates to growth / expansion goals as well and will impact on how and what branding focuses on.
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Table 15: Interpretation of Aaker & Joachimsthaler model versus findings and proposal for new SME Approach

In summary, this table outlines areas where the Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) model does not cater for specific characteristics, unique needs and focal points in terms of the way in which SMEs might conduct business. The researcher demonstrates that there is a limitation in taking a one-size-fits-all approach and believes that there should be additional research conducted for this segment specifically in the area of brand identity.

Therefore, based on the research and analysis of the data, the researcher proposes the following SME approach that requires further investigation in consideration of a possible model adaptation in a later study, either through additional scholarly research amongst peers or through consideration of a doctoral study by the author...

5.4.1 Key descriptors of the SME-Approach

Based on the summary above, the following elements require further research in context of SMEs.

Opening construct	SME implications: Research
Brand, brand identity and its role in business	The model needs to be further tested in the SME sector in order to better understand the impact of brand identity and how it's being used.

Aaker & Joachimsthaler brand identity model construct	SME implications: Research
Competitors, strengths and weaknesses and	The model needs to be further tested in the SME sector in order to better understand the impact, involvement and

customer profile overlap	necessity of competitor research in the business and brand strategy.
Heritage, brand image, strengths and weaknesses	The model needs to be further tested in the SME sector in order to better understand the importance of understanding and leveraging off the brand's image, and strengths and addressing weaknesses.
Brand uniqueness, marketing activities, measures and tracking	This element requires further research as all three cases show limited use of marketing in their business.

Closing construct	SME implications: Research
Owner-manager brand versus retail store brand	This element requires further research as two of the three cases show a marked difference between the retail store brand and the owner-manager brand.

Table 16: Key descriptors of the SME Approach

The factors highlighted in Table 18 can be beneficial to SMEs in order to better develop and understand brand and its role in a business.

5.5 Conclusion

This study focused on the concept of brand identity and how it would be used to grow an SME boutique retail jewellery store. Major differences between the boutiques pivoted around the business aims and these aims were reflected in their approach to marketing, branding, and brand identity.

These findings sparked the realisation that one brand identity model might not fit all jewellery boutiques SMEs. It followed logically therefore, that the Aaker & Joachimsthaler (2009) brand identity model might not cater for such differences in aims.

This study has demonstrated a key difference in brand identity adoption in SMEs based primarily on their business growth objectives, and as such, has considered an SME approach that focuses on specific aspects of brand identity.

5.6 Limitations

The following limitations might impact on the study:

This qualitative study concentrated on a small sample size and single geographic location, Johannesburg, and thus the findings might not apply in the same way in other regions. This can be mitigated by expanding the study to include SME retail jewellers in other regions, such as Cape Town, Durban and Pretoria to understand whether the findings can be replicated.

The ability to apply the framework to other kinds of SMEs is not evident in this study, i.e. is the framework restricted to craft SMEs or does it have a wider application, including other SME industry sectors as well? The focus for this study was on a particular sector of SMEs, and this was selected due to interest in that sector. Further research can be conducted across sectors, or within other sectors to see whether the findings can be replicated.

The cross-sectional nature of the study as a moment in time rather than a longitudinal study which tracks sentiment over time might also be considered a limitation. This can be mitigated by expanding this study and conducting the same

research over a period of time (longitudinal study) to see how sentiment is affected over time and as circumstances change.

5.7 Implications for further research

There are several possible ideas for consideration for further research:

Extending the study to a broader provincial and national sample, possibly with a view to international comparisons in time can provide a rich level of rigour to the framework suggested.

Testing the proposed SME-approach in other areas, for example other craft SMEs, or any other kind of SME that falls within this category of business could be very useful in order to determine whether it has a wider application than the jewellery retail sector. Future research could deploy a mixed method approach which potentially both develops a new framework (qualitatively) while quantitatively testing it in parallel in either the same SME sector or across multiple SME segments.

The impact of COVID-19 and the number of SMEs that have either had to close their doors or transform into an online channel in order to survive becomes of great importance if we consider how an SME retailer could successfully build an online store using the framework.

5.8 Implications for practitioners

This research could be used as a starting point for SME owner-managers to clearly focus their growth and business objectives from the beginning, and thus concentrate their efforts on the more important elements of the framework to maximise their business potential.

For example, for those choosing the sole proprietor route, the focus is on building great customer relationships, loyalty and customer service, capitalising on trust and reputation, with an emphasis on great products that are unique and handmade. Further, they could have different strategies for the retail store brand versus the owner-manager brand based on target market and product type, and this will also require different marketing strategies. Marketing needs to be closely monitored and tracked to ensure that it is working and can be duplicated. The investigation of innovative marketing practices is also an opportunity in this area.

For those choosing the commercial route, they are very clear from the beginning that the aim is to create a full commercial business with national / global / franchise growth objectives. This requires a different focus, including a strong competitor understanding and comparison, marketing across a wide spectrum of activities including those that would be considered more traditional and not relying solely on word of mouth. The product focus is commercial, including offering multiples of each item without full customisability.

This clear direction from the beginning will allow an SME to meet overall brand objectives based on where they want to ultimately take the brand and business.

5.9 Conclusion

In conclusion this study adds to the body of literature in the SME field as it highlights that not all businesses or brands are created equal and that a one-size-fits-all approach can be detrimental to the future of the business. In addition, the SME approach acknowledges the characteristics and idiosyncrasies of this segment,

using these as positive points of differentiation and presenting a strategy to maximise them over time. It also clearly presents a starting point for small business owners based on their growth plans for the business and will help to set clear objectives from the start.

This research set out with the following objectives in mind:

- To explore the role of brand identity in a boutique retail SME jewellery business.
- To investigate whether small businesses in the retail jewellery sector engage in building brand identity.
- To contribute to the limited body of existing research as it relates to small independent boutique jewellery retailers.

The findings have clearly demonstrated that each business approaches brand identity slightly differently and that those businesses with a strategy of remaining small sole proprietors do not leverage this concept as much as they could. Further, the findings point towards a customised approach in building brand and brand identity based on business objectives. Finally, the study adds to the literature as it differentiates between different kinds of SMEs, whilst also presenting an opportunity for further research into SMEs with a specific focus on brand identity.

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Annexure 1: Owner-Manager Interview Guide

Topic: Exploring the role of brand identity in growing small business in the boutique retail jewellery sector

Notes on participation:

- You have been chosen to participate in this study as the owner / manager of an SME jewellery business in Johannesburg.
- Participation is voluntary, and you can decide at any time to withdraw from the study, or not to answer any interview questions.
- Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You will, however, add knowledge and insight within the field of SME brand identity building for a boutique jewellery business. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.
- The interview should take no more than one hour.
- Your identity will be kept confidential and coding will be used to refer to participant responses.
- The audio recordings of the one-on-one interviews will only be accessed by myself and my supervisor Dr Sean McCoy.
- Research summaries will be included in my Master's thesis in order to complete the research and these can be provided to you if required, for approval prior to submission.
- Ethical clearance for this study has been obtained from The IIE's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.
- Please read through the consent form and I'm happy to answer any questions before we start.

Research Questions:

What is the role of brand identity in a boutique retail SME jewellery business?

1. What is your understanding of the term brand identity?
 - a. What does it mean to you?
 - b. Do you think it has a role in your business? How so?

To what extent do small businesses in the retail jewellery sector engage in building brand identity?

Customer analysis

(trends, motivation, unmet needs, segmentation)

2. Describe your customers.
 - a. What do you think motivates them to purchase your jewellery?
 - b. Are there any trends in the jewellery industry that you follow and why?

Competitor analysis

(brand image / identity, strengths, strategies, vulnerabilities, positioning)

3. Who are your competitors?
 - a. What you think they do well and what do you think they do poorly?

- b. Do you compete with them in any way for the same customers? How so?

Self-analysis

(existing brand image, brand heritage, strengths, strategies, organisation values)

- 4. What is your current brand image and heritage?
 - a. How do you think customers see your brand?
 - b. What do you think you do well and what could be improved?

Brand as product

(product scope, product attributes, quality/value, uses, users, country of origin)

- 5. Describe your product range and qualities.
 - a. What are your focus areas when acquiring products for your store?

Brand as organisation

(organisation attributes, local vs global)

- 6. What are your business values and culture?
 - a. What is important for your brand and staff to project to customers?

Brand as person

(personality, customer / brand relationships)

- 7. Does your brand have a personality?
 - a. How would you describe your brand as a person?
 - b. What kind of relationships do you build with your customers?

Brand as symbol

(visual image and metaphors, brand heritage)

- 8. What are the visual elements that make up your brand?

Value proposition, credibility and relationship

(functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits)

- 9. How do you want people to feel when they walk out of your store with a purchase?

What is the influence of building brand identity on the reputation of these businesses?

(brand position, brand-building programs, tracking)

- 10. If you had to use one word to describe your brands uniqueness, what would it be (in comparison to your competitors)?
 - a. What marketing activities do you do?
 - b. How do you measure if they are working?

Linking brand identity and performance

- 11. Do you think that brand building and brand identity have an influence on your

business performance, and if so, how?

12. Would you describe yourself as the owner-manager as the brand or retail store as the brand? Which one is stronger and why? Do you think people shop at the store because of yourself as the owner, or because of the retail brand?
13. Are there any other comments you would like to add that relates to the role of brand identity in your business?

Annexure 2: Supplier Interview Guide

Topic: Exploring the role of brand identity in growing small business in the boutique retail jewellery sector

Notes on participation:

- You have been chosen to participate in this study as the supplier of an SME jewellery business in Johannesburg.
- Your details were provided by the owner / manager of **xx store**, with your consent.
- Participation is voluntary, and you can decide at any time to withdraw from the study, or not to answer interview questions.
- Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You will, however, add knowledge and insight within the field of SME brand identity building for a boutique jewellery business. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.
- The interview should take no more than one hour.
- Your identity will be kept confidential and coding will be used to refer to participant responses.
- The audio recordings of the one-on-one interviews will only be accessed by myself and my supervisor Dr Sean McCoy.
- Research summaries will be included in my Master's thesis in order to complete the research and these can be provided to you if required, for approval prior to submission.
- Ethical clearance for this study has been obtained from The IIE's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.
- Please read through the consent form and I'm happy to answer any questions before we start.

What is the role of brand identity in a boutique retail SME jewellery business?

1. What is your understanding of the term brand identity?
 - a. What does it mean to you?
 - b. Do you think it has a role in the business of **xx store**? How so?

To what extent do small businesses in the retail jewellery sector engage in building brand identity?

Customer analysis

(trends, motivation, unmet needs, segmentation)

2. Describe **xx stores** retail customers.
 - a. What do you think motivates them to purchase **xx stores** jewellery?
 - b. Are there any trends in the jewellery industry that you think they follow and why?

Competitor analysis

(brand image / identity, strengths, strategies, vulnerabilities, positioning)

3. Who are **xx stores** competitors?

- a. What you think they do well and what do you think they do poorly?
- b. Do they compete with them in any way for the same customers? How so?

Self-analysis

(existing brand image, brand heritage, strengths, strategies, organisation values)

4. How do you see **xx store**?
 - a. What do you think they do well?
 - b. What do you think could be improved?

Brand as product

(product scope, product attributes, quality/value, uses, users, country of origin)

5. How would you describe **xx stores'** products?
 - a. What do they focus on when purchasing products from you?

Brand as organisation

(organisation attributes, local vs global)

6. What do you think are **xx stores** business values and culture?
 - a. What so you think is important for the **xx store** brand and staff to project to customers?

Brand as person

(personality, customer / brand relationships)

7. How would you describe **xx store** as a person / brand personality?
 - a. What kind of relationships do you think they build with their customers?

Brand as symbol

(visual image and metaphors, brand heritage)

8. How would you describe **xx store** visually?

Value proposition, credibility and relationship

(functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits)

9. How do think customers feel after making a purchase at **xx store**?

What is the influence of building brand identity on the reputation of these businesses?

(brand position, brand-building programs, tracking)

10. If you had to use one word to describe **xx stores'** uniqueness, what would it be (in comparison to their competitors)?
 - a. Are you aware of any marketing activities that **xx store** engages in? can you describe them?
 - b. Do you think they are working and why?

Linking brand identity and performance

11. What do you think makes **xx store** successful from a performance perspective, in terms of their branding?
 - a. For example, their brand name, their location, their marketing, the relationships they build, etc etc
12. Would you describe the owner-manager as the brand or the retail store as the brand? Which one is stronger and why? Do you shop at the store because of the owner, or because of the retail brand?
13. Are there any other comments you would like to add that relates to **xx store**?

Annexure 3: Customer Interview Guide

Topic: Exploring the role of brand identity in growing small business in the boutique retail jewellery sector

Notes on participation:

- You have been chosen to participate in this study as the customer of an SME jewellery business in Johannesburg.
- Your details were provided by the owner / manager of **xx store**, with your consent.
- Participation is voluntary, and you can decide at any time to withdraw from the study, or not to answer any interview questions.
- Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You will, however, add knowledge and insight within the field of SME brand identity building for a boutique jewellery business. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.
- The interview should take no more than one hour.
- Your identity will be kept confidential and coding will be used to refer to participant responses.
- The audio recordings of the one-on-one interviews will only be accessed by myself and my supervisor Dr Sean McCoy.
- Research summaries will be included in my Master's thesis in order to complete the research and these can be provided to you if required, for approval prior to submission.
- Ethical clearance for this study has been obtained from The IIE's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.
- Please read through the consent form and I'm happy to answer any questions before we start.

What is the role of brand identity in a boutique retail SME jewellery business?

1. What is your understanding of the term brand identity?
 - a. What does it mean to you?
 - b. Do you think it has a role in the business of **xx store**? How so?

To what extent do small businesses in the retail jewellery sector engage in building brand identity?

Customer analysis

(trends, motivation, unmet needs, segmentation)

2. Describe your jewellery purchase needs?
 - a. What motivates you to purchase **xx stores'** jewellery?
 - b. Do you follow any trends in the jewellery industry that influence this and why?

Competitor analysis

(brand image / identity, strengths, strategies, vulnerabilities, positioning)

3. Who do you think are **xx stores** competitors?

- a. What do you think they do well and what do you think they do poorly?
- b. Do they compete with **xx store** for you as a customer? How so?

Self-analysis

(existing brand image, brand heritage, strengths, strategies, organisation values)

- 4. How do you see **xx store**?
- a. What do you think they do well?
- b. What do you think could be improved?

Brand as product

(product scope, product attributes, quality/value, uses, users, country of origin)

- 5. How would you describe **xx stores'** products?
- a. What qualities do you look for specifically from **xx stores** products?
- b. Why do you purchase from them?

Brand as organisation

(organisation attributes, local vs global)

- 6. Describe your experience of purchasing at **xx store**?
 - a. What values and culture do you think is emphasised in their staff behaviour?

Brand as person

(personality, customer / brand relationships)

- 7. How would you describe **xx store** as a person / what is its personality?
- a. What kind of relationship do they have with you as a customer?

Brand as symbol

(visual image and metaphors, brand heritage)

- 8. How would you describe **xx store** visually?

Value proposition, credibility and relationship

(functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits)

- 9. How do you feel after making a purchase at **xx store**?

What is the influence of building brand identity on the reputation of these businesses?

(brand position, brand-building programs, tracking)

- 10. If you had to use one word to describe **xx stores'** uniqueness, what would it be (in comparison to their competitors)?
 - a. What marketing activities do they engage in and how does it attract you?

Linking brand identity and performance

11. What do you think makes **xx store** successful from a performance perspective, in terms of their branding?
 - a. For example, their brand name, their location, their marketing, the relationships they build, etc etc
12. Would you describe the owner-manager as the brand or the retail store as the brand? Which one is stronger and why? Do you shop at the store because of the owner, or because of the retail brand?
13. Are there any other comments you would like to add that relates to **xx store**?

Annexure 4: Turnitin Submission Receipt

Exploring the role of brand identity in growing small business in the boutique retail jewellery sector.

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