An exploration of agile branding in the art industry during times of crisis and its influence on consumer behaviour

By

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Abstract:

The art industry relies heavily on the physical co-presence and interaction with artworks in order for them to be appreciated and traded. The Covid-19 pandemic severely interrupted established business routines, requiring agile solutions that could be immediately implemented. This qualitative research study investigates the agile branding strategies and business processes adopted by Strauss & Co, a key stakeholder in the South African art auction industry, during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study follows an interpretivist paradigm, a research technique that values the interpretation and understanding of human behaviour. The data collection method for this study was in-depth interviews, as the researcher needed qualitative insights from industry figures to formulate a holistic view. Drawing on the insights of five strategically placed individuals, this study considers how Strauss & Co's business processes and branding strategies influenced consumer behaviour and buying patterns, in effect ensuring continuity in the company's core business operations during a tumultuous time. This study details how innovative and agile business strategies, when firmly implemented, can lead to positive behavioural changes in consumers, as well as produce unexpected favourable consequences.

Declaration:

I hereby declare that the research report submitted for the BA Honours in Strategic Brand Communication degree to The Independent Institute of Education (The IIE) is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes.

Signature: [redacted] Date: **28/11/2021**

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Section 1: Introduction

Introduction and background:

The art industry relies heavily on the physical co-presence with artworks in order for them to be appreciated and traded (Buchholz, Fine and Wohl, 2020). During the months of lockdown, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a shift to online forms of communication and trade (Buchholz, et al., 2020). The challenge for the art industry lay in the absence of in-person viewing, whereby the art-interested public (notably collectors and prospective buyers, but also non-buying viewers) was unable to experience the communal commitment to art and the shared sense of enjoyment (Buchholz, et al., 2020; Crow, 2021). Drawing on interviews with local and international auction house executives, an auctioneer, art journalists and art collectors, this research paper will explore the changes in the South African art market in response to the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic (Buchholz, et al., 2020). The research will explore different perspectives from each segment of the art community, in order to gain insight and evaluate strategies implemented to ensure that the art industry remained relevant and capable of fulfilling its core transactional function during the pandemic. In particular, this paper aims to explore the importance of agile branding in the art industry and how it influences consumer buying behaviour, more specifically during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The pandemic confronted actors within the primary and secondary art market (retail galleries and art auction houses) with unanticipated challenges, notably through the absence of co-presence with artworks and individuals, who play key roles in the industry (Buchholz, et al., 2020). It affected the ability of those involved in the art industry to evaluate artworks, create new social connections, form trust, and share the pleasure of collective effervescence (Buchholz, et al., 2020). The industry had to actively find digital solutions in order to remain relevant, a concept that was novel and challenging for many players in the industry. Adaptive and agile strategies such as live-streamed auctions, virtual reality art exhibitions, and apps allowing clients to view art on the walls in their homes, are just a few of the strategies put in place to combat the effects of the pandemic.

Rationale and Relevancy:

The ability of a business, with an established brand presence, to remain relevant during a major business interruption such as a global pandemic, and specifically Covid-19, where there was no in-person communication or interaction, this paper argues, is achieved through agile branding. Agile branding refers to the capability of a brand to make immediate changes in response to sudden disruptions, thus repositioning itself within the market (Scates, 2020). In addition to this, agility in branding results in fluid marketing approaches that allow companies to move quickly, in parallel, with all the fast-paced trends (Phelan, 2020). This paper investigates the benefits of agile branding within the South African art industry and its effects on consumer behaviour. It focuses particularly on the agile solutions adopted by Strauss & Co, South Africa's leading art auction house. Strauss & Co was able to remain relevant and flexible throughout the pandemic, achieving its second-highest turnover since the business was founded in 2009. During the pandemic, world-renowned international auction house, Sotheby's, conducted 100 sales between March and June, netting $285 million, triple the total for all online sales in 2019 (Maximilíano, 2020).

It is pertinent to this study to explore consumers' psychological factors motivating art purchases, as well as how agile branding was able to prompt their purchases during a period of significant business disruption. This is important to explore further as other brands can utilise the findings of the study and incorporate them into both their marketing and business strategies, increasing brand associations and brand awareness. Additionally, in-depth exploration of the psychological motivations behind purchasing luxury goods will endeavour to understand what the most important factors are that influence consumers' purchasing habits. This can be implemented and exploited by other brands to understand the expectations of their consumers and how to effectively market and sell their products, thus contributing to the art industry or even the luxury goods industry (Radu, 2019).

Problem Statement:

As mentioned previously, the art industry relies heavily on the ability of an art-interested public to physically experience artworks in order to appreciate and understand them (Buchholz, et al., 2020). Covid-19 challenged the art market in many ways, due to the sudden migration of business processes to online platforms (Buchholz, et al., 2020). These challenges impacted the primary market, largely constituted by retail galleries, as collectors and prospective buyers were unable to immerse themselves in the experience of viewing art first-hand. In addition to this, art galleries rely on the ‘communal commitment’ that is felt when flowing through an art exhibition (Buchholz, et al., 2020). Art fairs and art biennales - where collectors, dealers, art critics, curators, journalists, artists and art aficionados from across the globe meet, network, buy and sell - were also impacted by cancellations and postponements. Furthermore, the effects of Covid-19 were also felt in the secondary art auction market, which is predominantly characterised by in-person attendance at previews, special functions and auctions. The advent of Covid-19 removed every opportunity for in-person experiences across all industries, thus creating a crisis within the art industry as a whole. The challenge for actors in the primary and secondary markets involved finding new ways to connect with their clients in order to maintain relationships and ensure continuity in their transactional relationships.

The problem identified for this research study is the challenge brands faced during the Covid-19 pandemic, more specifically businesses within the art industry, and how they implemented effective, agile strategies to combat the effects. Furthermore, to understand what motivated existing clients and new buyers to continue to purchase art during the pandemic, thus discovering psychological motivations as to why consumers buy into the luxury goods industry.

Purpose Statement:

The purpose of this study is to investigate how businesses, with an established brand presence, attempted to remain agile and relevant throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. It highlights the ability of a business to improve its brand positioning quickly and efficiently during a worldwide crisis, in its specific industry. Furthermore, this paper will analyse the manner in which Strauss & Co was able to remain relevant by ensuring its approaches were client-focused and what steps were taken to achieve this. This study will also interpret the views of other art world actors to gain insight into the effects of the pandemic and the benefits of strategies implemented to combat them. Lastly, this paper will highlight what drives consumers to buy art, more specifically during times of crisis when the only forms of communication are online platforms.

Research question:

What is the importance of agile branding in the art industry and how does it influence consumer buying behaviour during a worldwide crisis?

Sub-questions:

What are the benefits of agile and innovative business strategies that the art industry implemented during the pandemic?

How do art world experts interpret the influence the pandemic had on the art industry?

What are the psychological motivations that drive consumers to buy art during a pandemic?

Research objectives:

To explore the benefits of agile and innovative strategies implemented to combat the effects of the pandemic.
To understand and interpret the views of other art world actors in order to gain insight into the effects of the pandemic.
To explore what psychological motivations drive consumers to buy art, specifically during a pandemic.

Section 2: Research Foundation

Conceptualisation:

Agile Branding

Agile branding is the ability of a brand to quickly improve its positioning in order to improve its marketing strategies (Thomson, n.d.). A brand that commits to being agile, is consumer-centric and adaptable, resulting in flexible marketing communication strategies (Thomson, n.d.). The art industry had to remain agile to maintain customer loyalty and build brand equity. Thus, agile branding can be further explained as the adaptation strategy of a brand during turbulent and ever-changing market conditions, in an attempt to remain relevant to its consumers (Tailored Marketing, 2020). Lastly, due to the pandemic, purchase patterns and consumer behaviour were impacted, thus brands had to be innovative in their agile branding strategies to keep the attention of their consumers (Tailored Marketing, 2020).

Consumer Behaviour

Consumer behaviour is the study and understanding of what influences consumer buying decisions and the process taken to make their final decision (Solomon, et al., 2013). Schiffman & Kanuk (1997), define consumer behaviour as the behaviour that a consumer displays when searching, purchasing, making use, and disposing of products and services. In relation to this study, it refers to how art collectors made decisions to spend the resources available to them (time and money) on items that are consumption-related, such as artworks (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1997).

Primary Art Market

The primary art market relates to the first sale of an artwork, between the artist, the dealers, and the public (Candela & Scorcu, 1997; Artland, 2017; Baur, 2020) This sector of the market relates to art dealers and gallerists, who have first-hand contact with artists. Thus, it is the responsibility of art dealers and gallerists to promote artists and position them within the art market, creating a platform for their artworks (Krivchenia, 2020). The prices are based on the artist's exhibition and sales history, the size of the artwork, the medium and the demand for the artist's works (Artland, 2017). In summary, the primary market involves the selling of capital which has not been sold previously and is the only point in time at which artists will receive a direct payment for their artwork (Krivchenia, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic affected the primary art market as there was a shift to distant online communication, requiring the implementation of agile branding strategies by art galleries to survive (Corrigall, 2020).

Secondary Art Market

The secondary art market can be defined as the re-selling of capital, whereby artworks that have been valued and sold previously are sold again through auction houses, which are considered formal investment circles (Singer, 1978; Baur, 2020; Krivchenia, 2020). This sector of the market handles works by artists who have a good reputation and are well-known (Artland, 2017). The presale estimates for artworks to be sold at auction are based on their condition, the provenance, and the significance of the work within the artist's oeuvre (Krivchenia, 2020). The secondary art market provides investment opportunities for art collectors due to the value of artworks increasing as the artist's reputation becomes more substantial (Krivchenia, 2020). The secondary market typically operates through in-person attendance of auctions to create dynamic energy and a sense of community within the room. These factors presented obvious problems during the Covid-19 pandemic, requiring auction houses to adopt innovative and agile branding strategies (Krivchenia, 2020).

Theoretical Foundation:

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) – Azjen, 1991 (Seminal Author)

The Theory of Planned Behaviour is a social-psychological framework that will be used in this research as a guide to comprehend and predict behaviours (Azjen, 1991; Kan & Fabrigar, 2017). This theory is based on the notion that behaviour is determined by certain intentions within unique environmental contexts and circumstances (Raygor, 2016). In addition, behavioural intentions are predicted by three factors: subjective norms, attitudes, and perceived behavioural control (Kan & Fabrigar, 2017). It can be said that the central idea of this theory is focused on the intention of an individual to carry out a specific behaviour (Azjen, 1991). This creates an opportunity to explore the reasons behind specific consumer behaviour within the art industry as well as unpack the influence agile branding has on consumers' decision-making processes, within the art industry.

The exploration of *subjective norms* led to the understanding that this predictor is a social factor, which is influenced by social pressure that affects whether an individual will perform or not perform the behaviour (Azjen, 1991). This leads to a potential link between social pressures and conformity on influencing art buyers to purchase expensive art during a worldwide pandemic. Conforming to certain group norms based on social status and specific social groups has an influence on consumer behaviour, specifically within the luxury goods industry (Fernandes & Panda, 2019). This will help to explore the psychological motivations behind why consumers continued to purchase high-value art.

Following this, the second predictor within this theory is the *attitude toward the behaviour*. This refers to the prior evaluation of the behaviour and the degree to which the person has a positive or negative evaluation of it (Azjen, 1991). Thus, this predictor links back to the intention behind a specific behaviour, if an individual has positive intent towards the behaviour, it increases the likelihood of the individual to action the behaviour (Azjen, 1991). In terms of the research at hand, if an art collector has a favourable evaluation towards their behaviour of purchasing artwork, it increases the possibility for it to occur. Furthermore, the attitude Strauss & Co had prior to implementing new, agile strategies would have affected the likelihood of it implementing the strategies. It can be said that Strauss & Co's positive attitude towards the implementation of agile and innovative strategies is responsible for the success of the company.

The last predictor is *perceived behavioural control,* which relates to the apparent ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour (Azjen, 1991). This predictor is further affected by past experiences and anticipated obstacles (Azjen, 1991). Initially, clients would have perceived purchasing art online as difficult or time-consuming, but due to the pandemic, the shift online was essential. The success of Strauss & Co, is partly due to the shift onto online platforms and the ease with which clients could bid on and purchase artworks, thus this perceived ease resulted in the performance of the behaviour (purchasing the art). Strauss & Co made the process convenient and user-friendly, which resulted in its clients trusting the process and continuing to actively engage in buying art by means of their online platforms. Strauss & Co successfully empowered its clients with the necessary tools for them to feel at ease with the shift online, thus positively affecting their perceived behavioural control. It had full control over the agile strategies implemented, which helped to create confidence within the company itself and within the minds' of their clients.

Thus, this theory is relevant to understanding the psychology behind consumer behaviour during a pandemic and what influenced consumers to continue to purchase expensive art from the comfort of their homes. Furthermore, the TPB will aid the researcher in understanding the motivations behind the agile strategies implemented by Strauss & Co. Moreover, it will be able to explore how these agile strategies positively influenced buyers, during the pandemic, to continue purchasing art.

Literature Review:

The following literature review aims to provide general insight into existing bodies of knowledge and where the gaps lie in terms of the research topic in question. The two main themes include agile branding and consumer behaviour in the art industry, during the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the sub-themes include innovation during the pandemic and three potential reasons why consumers continued to purchase art during the pandemic. The literature review will identify gaps found within current literature as well as indicate the literature that supported the research topic.

Agile branding in the art industry during Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic caused unpredictable business environments that contributed to market uncertainty and increased risk for companies (Koch & Schermuly, 2020). Businesses were faced with constant challenges and thus needed effective strategies to maintain brand loyalty and attract customers, old and new (Koch & Schermuly, 2020). It can be said that agility in marketing and branding during the Covid-19 pandemic, resulted in businesses surviving this tumultuous time by rethinking their traditional operations and pivoting to hybrid digitised models (Kilbourn, 2020; Crow, 2021; Ding & Li, 2021).

During the first few months of lockdown (March – May 2020), businesses had to reinvent the way in which they operated to account for the distant transition to a remote workforce (Buchholz, et al., 2020; Pieper, 2021). According to Pieper (2021), industry reports indicated that there was a significant increase in digital media use as people were home-bound for many months (Nguyen, Gruber, Fuchs, Marler, Hunsaker & Hargittai, 2020). Thus, to utilise and monetise the increase in the use of digital platforms, businesses needed to innovate and integrate their already existing operations, to incorporate convenient, digital hybrid formats (Orzan, Zara, Caescu, Constantinescu & Orzan, 2021; Pieper, 2021).

Innovation requires taking risks to improve existing services or create new ones, thus innovative and agile branding strategies were necessary for businesses to survive the pandemic (Ding & Li, 2021; Heinonen & Strandvik, 2021; Pieper, 2021).

Businesses in the art industry, more specifically the secondary art market, had to rethink their traditional in-person auctions and effectively transfer to a unique hybrid model of live-virtual trading (Kilbourn, 2020). Consequently, the top international auction houses, Sotheby's, Christie's and Phillips, redirected their clients to online-only sales by creating telethon-worthy, live-streamed auctions (Buchholz, et al., 2020; Crow, 2021). Strauss & Co integrated similar approaches to improve its business performance during the pandemic, by moving to complete online strategies (Myburg, 2020; Pieper, 2021). Strauss & Co's agile branding approaches incorporated design thinking, as it was consumer-centric and resonated with its clients in a time of crisis (Heinonen & Strandvik, 2021; Pieper, 2021). Thus, the expansion of their digital platforms and introduction of effective hybrid digital formats were successful agile branding strategies, that resulted in their success during Covid-19 (O'Toole, 2020).

Companies that were slower in adopting agile practices during thepandemic performed significantly worse than their innovative and flexible peers (Pieper, 2021). According to Little (2015), companies that implement agile branding strategies and improve their innovation approaches, succeed in their business operations. Thus, during the pandemic, smaller businesses that were not agile or innovative perished (Cohen& Cromwell, 2021). The importance of agile branding is noted, as it was the reason many businesses survived Covid-19, a challenging problem that can only be addressed through extensive, innovative solutions (Cohen & Cromwell, 2021). Within the art industry, Covid-19 acted as a catalyst for creating novel ideas such as the expansion of customisable features like augmented reality and artificial intelligence (Crow, 2021).

Moreover, marketing theory undergoes constant development as trends in markets constantly fluctuate (Larsen & O'Reilly, 2010; Jaganaru, 2021). Marketing theory demonstrates that a business's success is based on the prior identification and prediction of consumers' motivations and needs, thus an understanding of the basic elements of consumer behaviour (Larsen & O'Reilly, 2010;Jaganaru, 2021). It is up to the business to re-imagine its arts marketing strategy during times of crisis, by understanding that consumer behaviour will change in these times (Larsen & O'Reilly, 2010; Jaganaru, 2021). Thus, further emphasising the importance and need for design thinking as it ensures the consumer is central to all business decisions.

These behavioural changes, such as the sudden shift to online platforms, can create opportunities for a business, whereby a shift in marketing and branding is pertinent to the success of the company (Larsen & O'Reilly, 2010; Ding & Li, 2021; Jaganaru, 2021). Creative methodologies must be implemented in order to integrate innovative strategies that aim to increase revenue, brand awareness and ensure integrated brand communication (Larsen & O'Reilly, 2010; Jaganaru, 2021; Orzan, et al., 2021).

In conclusion, the literature addresses agile branding and the importance it has for the successful performance of a business during Covid-19. However, it does not elucidate the effects of agile branding and innovation within a South African context. There is a lack of information on Covid-19 and its influence on the art industry, especially within a South African context and this requires further research.

Innovation in the art industry during Covid-19

Innovation is the implementation of ideas that have been formulated through a creative approach, resulting in a tangible product or service that a consumer can use (Cohen & Cromwell, 2021).

In order to combat the challenges caused by Covid-19 within the art auction industry, a digitised market sphere was introduced (Buchholz, et al., 2020; Pieper, 2021). Although breakthrough innovations were necessary to create a disruptive impact within the art market during Covid-19, some literature indicated that the lack of in-person contact had a detrimental effect (Buchholz, et al., 2020). Due to the art world's dependence on the collective effervescence felt whilst experiencing art, experts in the industry believe the online platforms are aesthetically lacking as there is limited fulfilment (Buchholz, et al., 2020; Crow, 2021). The inability to socialise with like-minded individuals and develop new connections by networking, results in a lack of engagement, which negatively impacts this industry (Buchholz, et al., 2020). Thus, it was noted that digital platforms are a valuable supplement to support the art industry during a crisis but should not be considered a replacement for the physical world (Buchholz, et al., 2020; Crow, 2021).

The term 'imposed service innovation' was formulated to emphasise the strategic actions that were needed after extreme disruptive changes occurred within the surrounding environment (Heinonen & Strandvik, 2021). It can be explained further as a term that denotes critical responses to disruptions that require a transformation of the business model (Beaumont, et al., 2017; Heinonen & Strandvik,2021). Imposed service innovation, was a crucial process for businesses during the pandemic. As a result of their breakthrough innovations and wholesale reorganisation of the business model, Strauss & Co sold its largest volume of lots and earned a turnover of R316.6 million from 12 online sales (Kilbourn, 2020; O'Toole, 2020).

Since its inception, 2020 was its second most profitable year, indicative of the benefits of agile branding and innovation as it had a positive effect on consumer behaviour during the pandemic (Kilbourn, 2020; O'Toole, 2020).

After evaluation of the literature on innovation in the art industry, during Covid-19, it can be said that there is a limited amount of academic literature pertaining to innovation within a South African context. Thus, there is not a clear link that identifies the relationship between innovation during the pandemic, within the art industry, and its effects on consumer behaviour.

Consumer behaviour within the art industry

Consumer behaviour is the amalgamation of steps that occur when individuals or groups select, purchase, use and dispose of products or services, in the hope of satisfying an innate need or want (Solomon, 2010; Fernandes & Panda, 2019). Consequently, marketers have to be aware and have an in-depth understanding of the consumer's social environment, as this influences consumers' final products or brand decisions (Fernandes & Panda, 2019). It is important to understand the social environment and how it influences art collectors, as it can uncover the reasons why collectors continued to purchase expensive art during the pandemic (Fernandes & Panda, 2019). Furthermore, it will help to discover consumers' motivations behind purchasing from the luxury goods industry.

The rapid spread of the Covid-19 virus in 2020 produced great uncertainty and anxiety that quickly impacted markets (Baur, 2020; Koch & Schermuly, 2020). As a consequence, the value of owning a piece of fine art significantly increased as a form of alternative investment (Baur, 2020). During times of uncertainty, investing in the art market results in investors not only diversifying their portfolios but diversifying the risk component within their portfolios (Aye, Gil-Alana, Gupta & Wohar, 2017; Baur, 2020). High value art with a strong track record can be an investment that avoids risk, as it preserves its value and culture and serves as an icon of economic strength (Baur, 2020). Due to the importance of fine art as an investment during times of uncertainty, collectors were more inclined to purchase expensive art (Aye, et al., 2017; Baur, 2020). This explanation, coupled with their early adoption of digital technology and agile branding during the Covid-19 pandemic, might explain why Strauss & Co was successful during the pandemic. Collectors will continue purchasing art based on the market's ability to store value, thus driving sales within the art industry during the pandemic (Baur, 2020).

Another aspect of consumer behaviour within the art industry is the ability of artworks to evoke emotions. The experience of art has the capacity to unlock strong emotions, among them nostalgia (Sehgal, 2016; Crow, 2021). However, due to Covid-19 and the shift to digitised platforms, there was an inability to connect emotionally to artworks. According to the literature, collectors felt nostalgic or wistful for the pre-pandemic art world (Crow, 2021). In addition, during the months of lockdown, collectors viewed and purchased art online, without being able to experience the works in person (Buchholz, et al., 2020; Crow, 2021).Thus, a potential reason for the continued purchasing of expensive art could be a combination of the increased amount of time collectors had to attend online sales as well as the need to experience the emotional connection to artworks and to combat boredom (Crow, 2021).

On the other hand, in the absence of physical co-presence with experts in the art world, some collectors were hesitant to purchase art, due to a lack of trust (Fernandes & Panda, 2019; Buchholz, et al., 2020; Crow, 2021). The lack of co-presence increased the perceived risk of purchasing an artwork, thus negatively affecting the trust-based relationship between the auction house and client (Asamoah, Chovancová, De Alwis, Kumara & Guo, 2015). As a result, this impacted the consumers' purchasing behaviour as they were less inclined to purchase artwork from an auction house during a pandemic.

Lastly, social reference groups have an effect on consumer behaviour as they are external influences that can impact another individual's behaviour and social cues (Gergen & Gergen, 1986; Fernandes & Panda, 2019). Due to individuals conforming to group behaviour, consumers may be influenced by certain 'aspired' groups that they wish to have a sense of belonging in (Shibutani, 1955; Asamoah, et al., 2015; Fernandes & Panda, 2019). Thus, affecting their behaviour, as art collectors may continue to purchase expensive artworks to reach a higher social power within a group or show off their social status to other members of their social reference group

(Shibutani, 1955; Asamoah, et al., 2015; Fernandes & Panda, 2019).

According to current literature, there is a lack of information around why collectors buy expensive art, more specifically during the pandemic. Furthermore, theinfluence of social reference groups and fine art as an investment on consumer behaviour, has been covered by literature, however there is no research within a SouthAfrican context on the topic - indicating a gap for this research paper.

Conclusion

After conducting the literature review, the researcher was able to evaluate available literature and place the research topic under investigation into perspective. The gaps in the literature were identified and explored further. Furthermore, it was noted that agile branding in the art industry during the pandemic, in a South African context, isnot covered by current literature. However, agile branding was proven to be a successful tactic for companies to implement in order to survive the pandemic and positively affect consumer behaviour. In addition, innovation was seen to have a positive correlation to increase sales and encourage brand loyalty.

Interestingly, consumer behaviour can be linked to three main themes: investment, emotive reasons, and social acceptance (self-esteem). Investment, as a motive to purchase art during the pandemic, was covered in detail by current literature, however there were gaps in the literature pertaining to purchasing art and its influence on social acceptance. Thus, the researcher aims to fill the gap of current literature by investigating the effects of agile branding in the art industry and how it influences consumer behaviour, during the pandemic.

Section 3: Methodology

Research Paradigm:

The research makes use of the interpretivism paradigm, as it values the interpretation and understanding of human behaviour (Creswell, Ebersöhn, Eloff, Ferreira, Ivankova, Jansen, Nieuwenhuis, Pietersen and Plano Clark, 2019). The power of interpretivism is found in the ability it has to address and understand the complexity of situations (Black, 2006). As a consequence, this research serves the purpose of adding to knowledge in the field of research it pertains to (Black, 2006). This paradigm was created to study human beings, while simultaneously taking into consideration environmental influences and their effects on human behaviour (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014). An in-depth understanding of human action is required for this research report, due to its qualitative design, and the importance of interpreting the respondents' realities (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014).

As a consequence of the context specificity of the interpretivist paradigm, symbolic interactionism is a relevant factor to consider (Wright & Losekoot, n.d.). Symbolic interactionism focuses on why things happen and the ability of respondents to interpret their social world (Wright & Losekoot, n.d.). The interpretivism approach, with a focus on symbolic interactionism, will enable the researcher to understand the social processes and influences that affect consumer behaviour decisions, more specifically the buying behaviour of art collectors during the pandemic (du Plooy-Cilliers,et al., 2014). This paradigm is associated with action, intervention and constructive knowledge, all important factors when analysing agility in marketing strategies and the perspectives of consumers towards them (Goldkuhl, 2017). In addition, the primary endeavour of this paradigm is to perceive the subjective human experience, thus further aiding the researcher in 'entering' the world of the respondents and interpreting their answers to the specific questions (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Interpretivism can further be explored through epistemological and ontological positions. The epistemological approach looks at how interpretivists understand the nature of knowledge and the different ways of knowing (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). This avenue of interpretivism focuses on the notion that people are guided by 'common sense' (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). Thus, to understand human behaviour, the researcher needs to comprehend what people view as common sense (du Plooy-Cilliers,et al., 2014). In addition to this, knowledge is viewed as dependent on the system it is situated in, thus the researcher understands the entirety of the art world and the participants' comprehension of their subjective truths. This is important to be able to interpret the meaning of the behaviour of the respondents and their responses to questions asked, pertaining to their behaviour during the pandemic (Black, 2006).

Lastly, the ontological position of interpretivism explores reality as a subjective experience, whereby the social world is defined as how people perceive it individually (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). Thus, due to individuals' perceptions of the social world constantly changing, reality is considered to be fluid and fragile (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). In relation to this research project, there is focus on the important hidden meanings that are buried in the details of the voice, behaviour or environmental factors that influence the respondents (Black, 2006). Furthermore, individuals' experiences and definitions of reality are complex and influenced by an amalgamation of different factors (Black, 2006). It is important to acknowledge the way in which the respondents answer questions during the interview, thus guiding the researcher in the inductive thematic analysis.

It is pertinent to this study to understand the interaction of the respondents with themselves, their friends, their culture and society, as these all have an influence on consumer behaviour and can guide the researcher in understanding why the respondents continued to purchase art during a pandemic (Black, 2006). The interpretivist paradigm will ensure a thematic analysis of answers from the respondents. It will also ensure that the strategies behind Strauss & Co's implementation of agile branding are explored and understood from an interpretivist perspective.

Research Approach and Design:

In this research project, a qualitative research design was utilised, whereby the data was analysed using an inductive thematic process. Inductive thematic analysis allowed the researcher to identity patterns within the data, which guided the researcher in creating a greater theoretical concept (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014). The process enabled the researcher to form themes derived from the findings, to thus create insights. The inductive process allowed the researcher to make generalised conclusions based on the specific interviews with the respondents (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014).

The choice of research design worked in conjunction with the chosen paradigm. Thus, the researcher was able to fully interpret the data to understand the opinions of the five art experts on the influence the pandemic had on the art industry. The interpretivist paradigm guided the researcher in this exploratory research paper, thus deeper insight and understanding from the in-depth interviews were possible. Exploratory research is relevant as this research is highly interactive and there is not much information on the topic (Formplus, 2013). In addition, it approaches the research from the viewpoint of the participants, thus focusing on the experience of the participant. This is an important viewpoint as the opinions from the different experts within the art industry were analysed holistically. In order to remain in accordance with the interpretivist paradigm, data was collected from respondents through in-depth interviews, ensuring an understanding of their realities and perspectives. Lastly, this research report was cross-sectional in its design due to the time constraints (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). The cross-sectional design meant that the researcher could gather data from different individuals at a specific point in time, instead of analysing over longer periods of time like that of a longitudinal design (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014).

Population:

According to Wiid and Diggines (2013), a population, within the context of research, is the total group of social artefacts or people from whom information is required. Thus, a population parameter was used to define the population within the study and is made up of the number of people and shared characteristics between the individuals. This research paper's population parameters were focused on all individuals (people), within the South African and international art industry, and the specific roles they have. These individuals all play a significant role in the art industry and know of the art auction house, Strauss & Co.

Adding to this, the population for this research project was divided up into the target population and the accessible population. The target population includes all of the people who fall into the population parameter criteria (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). In this case, that included all South African, upper socio-economic; art collectors, sellers, and experts in the art industry. These 'experts' included but were not limited to, all art auctioneers, art specialists, gallerists, art critics, artists and journalists.

The accessible population are individuals who can be included within the study (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). These respondents were individuals who were able and willing to participate during the data collection period. All but one live in Cape Town, or could be contacted via an online platform (e.g. Zoom) and are experts in the art industry or play a significant role within the industry, and have a strong relationship or affiliation with Strauss & Co. The respondents who were asked to take part in the interviews had a good understanding of Strauss & Co, which allowed the researcher to fully evaluate the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on this business. These individuals understood the challenges the art industry faced during the pandemic and were able to provide deep insight into strategies implemented by Strauss & Co and the art industry at large.

Sampling:

A sample refers to a subset of the population in question and is considered to be a representation of the population (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014).

Non-probability Sampling:

This research paper made use of non-probability sampling, as the research is qualitative in nature. The sample was known to the researcher, ensuring time-effective and cost-effective data collection (Glen, 2020). Non-probability samples are based on a non-random selection of respondents, which may result in inaccurately representing the entire population as the results are not usually generalised (Trochim, n.d.). In qualitative research, emphasis is placed on ensuring that the data saturation point is reached by having enough respondents and data (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). The sample of respondents were chosen from the accessible population, thus there was no 'equal chance' or specific probability of an individual to be chosen or not. This was important for this research paper, as specific individuals and experts within the art industry needed to be selected, due to their knowledge of Strauss & Co and ability to provide an in-depth understanding of the topic at hand.

Sampling Method:

The chosen qualitative sampling method was purposive sampling, as this technique ensured that the respondents required for the research paper were specific individuals with unique descriptors, who were contacted through connections formed with Strauss & Co. This non-probability sampling method ensured that respondents were not selected randomly, but rather selected based on unique characteristics that were desired for the qualitative data (Oppong, 2013). The respondents were chosen based on their expertise, experience, and knowledge of the South African art industry and the art industry at large and so their contributions and input to questions asked by the researcher were beneficial to the study. Furthermore, critical case sampling, a subtype of purposive sampling, was utilised, as its goal is to gain information and collect cases from respondents who are the most likely to give valuable, quality informationon the phenomenon being studied (Glen, 2020). This was the case with the interviews as experts in different segments of the art industry were asked to take part.

Sample Size and Description:

The sample size refers to the number of respondents involved in the study (Kibuacha, 2021). For this research paper specifically, the sample size was made up of 5 respondents who are either directly involved in Strauss & Co or are art dealers, art critics, journalists, collectors and experts in the secondary market. The reason for 5 respondents making up the sample size, was to ensure a wider scope and range of opinions from experts of this industry. Furthermore, it ensured different viewpoints from different segments of the art industry, thus increasing awareness, knowledge, and insight around the study. Five different perspectives from influential individuals in the art market explored varying opinions on the agile branding strategies implemented by Strauss & Co and its effectiveness. Lastly, interviewing individuals from various segments of the art industry meant that the researcher gained a deeper understanding of how the art industry dealt with the challenges of the pandemic. Thus, the art industry as a whole was explored, not only the secondary art market.

Data Collection Method:

Data collection is the process whereby qualitative or quantitative information is gathered based on specific variables, with the goal of evaluating the outcomes as well as forming insights (Dimagi, 2019). This research was conducted through in-depth interviews. This technique was adopted to gain insight on the opinions of the respondents and beliefs around why they continued to purchase art, or why they thought consumers continued to purchase art, which was only available unseen and online, throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. The purpose of this study was to investigate how certain brands attempted to remain agile and relevant throughout the pandemic. This study also interpreted the views of specific art world actors to gain insight into the effects of the pandemic and the benefits of strategies implemented to combat them. Lastly, the paper explored the manner in which Strauss & Co, was able to remain relevant by ensuring its approaches were client-focused.

As a result, this data collection method was chosen based on the nature of the research paper being qualitative and interpretivist in its viewpoint, and because of the purpose of the study. In this qualitative research, emphasis was placed on understanding the social reality of the respondents as they had directly experienced it and to understand the "why" of the explained phenomenon (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). Furthermore, this in-depth conversation with different players in the art world allowed information to be obtained, based on open-ended questions, to explore how Covid-19 affected the art industry and how agile branding strategies ensured the survival of this industry during the pandemic.

The primary goal of in-depth interviews was to obtain information, as it was a conversation with the respondents (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). The in-depth interviews occurred in person and via the online video communication tool, Zoom. Furthermore, when the interviews were completed in person, appropriate Covid-19 protocols were put in place to ensure the safety of the respondents and the researcher. The ability to have a conversation with the respondents created a relaxed atmosphere in which the researcher collected valuable information (Boyce & Neale, 2006). The advantage of the respondents feeling comfortable allowed for the researcher to ask for further information, thus gaining more insights and allowing for more flexibility in the research process (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014).

On the other hand, the researcher was aware of the potential for bias during the interviews, as they may be unconsciously influenced or consciously influence the respondents (Boyce & Neale, 2006; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015).

Application of Data Collection Method

The in-depth interviews allowed the researcher to formulate an understanding of each participant's perspectives, attitudes and beliefs towards the topic at hand. Additionally, the researcher was able to explore the topic at hand further, based on how the respondents answered questions about the strategies that Strauss & Co and the art industry implemented throughout the pandemic.

Respondents were contacted via email and offered various time slots, whereby they could choose which was most convenient to them. The in-depth interviews were scheduled for a time and date that were suitable for the researcher and respondents. The respondents were informed about confidentiality and anonymity and asked to sign the consent documents pertinent to them (see annexure C & D). They were briefed on consent before taking part in the interview and they were made aware that all data collected would only be used for data analysis. Furthermore, to avoid missing any valuable information, the interviews were recorded and transcribed soon after, which the respondents were made aware of. If the respondent could not meet in-person, a Zoom call was organised by the researcher. These meetings proceeded differently to the in-person meetings, whereby a meeting was scheduled and a link, as well as all relevant consent forms, were sent to the respondent an hour before the meeting. Furthermore, confidentiality and verbal consent was established, and then the audio of the interview was recorded.

The questions of the in-depth interviews were standardised so that the same set of questions were asked of all the respondents (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). Although some questions were added for those who work at Strauss & Co, as these were more direct and related to the business. This aided the researcher in analysing the information, as views and beliefs of the respondents could be easily compared in a more organised manner (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). However, the answers of the respondents were not truncated or guided, as they were encouraged to express themselves in a free-flowing manner.

The first questions were asked to gauge the current roles and occupations of the respondents within the art industry, and whether they knew of the art auction house Strauss & Co. Following this, the participants were asked how they thought the art industry was affected by the pandemic and whether the industry's strategies were effective to combat the challenges faced. These questions allowed the researcher to explore the respondents' views on the strategies adopted in the art industry, whether they were effective or ineffective, and to see how different segments of the art industry survived the pandemic. Following this, the interviewees were asked about the business models Strauss & Co implemented to remain relevant and client-focused. Thus, enabling the researcher to understand how experts from different segments in the art industry, viewed the innovative strategies implemented by Strauss & Co. Furthermore, the participants were questioned on their understanding of the psychological motivations behind buyers continuing to purchase expensive art during the pandemic. This meant that the researcher gained insight into the reasons behind collecting art, from the perspective of experts involved in different areas of the art industry. Thus, ensuring a wide range of perspectives, which aided the understanding of the researcher. The advantage of a wide range of perspectives from art world experts meant that the researcher could develop a holistic evaluation of the phenomenon under study. Furthermore, it allowed the researcher to enhance the credibility of the data by examining the research topic from all angles.

The respondents enjoyed the interviews and responded well to them, as many led the conversation. This resulted in factors and insights, that the researcher had not yet taken into consideration about agile and innovative strategies implemented by Strauss & Co, to be taken into account. All of the above-mentioned factors and questions allowed the researcher to grasp a detailed understanding of the effects the Covid-19 pandemic had on different segments of the art industry. Furthermore, it guided the researcher in gaining insight as to why experts in the art industry believed that agile branding strategies and innovation led to the success of Strauss & Co. Lastly, it allowed for increased scope and understanding of the reasons why the respondents believed collectors continued to buy expensive art, during the global Covid-19 pandemic.

Data Analysis Method

Once all of the in-depth interviews were completed with experts in the art industry, the data was analysed in order to formulate further insights and answer the research objectives. To analyse the qualitative data the researcher made use of thematic analysis that followed an inductive approach. This approach utilised thematic coding, whereby themes were identified to reduce the data (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). An inductive approach describes a process whereby the researcher reasons from the 'specific' to the 'general' (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). Thus, the inductive thematic analysis utilised the raw data specific to the analysis to derive a structure and develop themes, without using preconceived theories or conceptual frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006; du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). As the researcher analysed the data repeatedly, themes emerged, which indicated strong links between the data and the themes identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes such as agile branding, innovation during times of crisis and strategies the art industry implemented were identified by the researcher. This process of structuring the data into categories allowed the researcher to code the data, which eventually lead to contributing to the overall findings of the research paper (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014).

This process allowed the researcher to identify the main themes that were formulated during the in-depth interviews, which added depth and meaningful insight to the research. These themes guided the researcher in exploring and thus answering the research question and objectives. Furthermore, as the researcher analysed the data, more themes began to emerge, which was expected due to the inductive thematic analysis (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). Themes such as agile branding within the art industry and innovation were prevalent during the analysis process.

Adding to this, inductive thematic analysis was chosen by the researcher due to its theoretical freedom and ability to provide a detailed account of the data (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017, cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, it was a useful method to explore the different perspectives of the art experts, as it highlighted differences and similarities as well as generated unexpected insights (Nowell, et al., 2017 cited in King, 2004). On the other hand, the researcher was aware of the problems that could have occurred using this method. It was noted and kept in mind, that due to the flexibility of this approach, inconsistencies and lack of coherence could develop during data analysis (Nowell, et al., 2017, cited in King, 2004; Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Application of Data Analysis Method

The inductive thematic analysis involved six steps that included familiarisation with data, generation of initial codes; searching for themes among codes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and creating the final report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 1: Touching on each step, familiarisation with the data involved reading through the transcribed interviews a few times in order to become familiar with them and to start becoming familiar with the themes and categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher used a transcription website called Otter, however once the audio was transcribed the text was edited further by the researcher. This step involved repeatedly reading through the transcribed data, whilst searching for patterns and deeper meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, the researcher then marked the main ideas and took notes for the coding process that would occur later (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 2: Next, the generation of the initial codes, occurred after the researcher was familiar with the data and had formulated a list of what was noteworthy from the interviews, including but not limited to agile branding, strategies implemented by Strauss & Co and the psychological motivations behind why consumers continued to purchase art (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This phase included the generation of the initial codes from the data, thus commencing the coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher then identified patterns within the data and thus, collapsed the data in order to create categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A critical step in this phase was that the researcher coded all data extracts and collated them together with a corresponding code, whilst ensuring that no context was lost in the process (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 3: The researcher then made a list of all the different codes that were identified throughout the data analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An important step in this phase was when the researcher refocused the data analysis onto the wider scope of themes, rather than only codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher used visual representations, including colour coordinated mind maps, to sort the codes into the various themes. Therefore, this aided the researcher in thinking about and creating the relationships between both the themes and codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, the researcher referred back to the notes that were taken during the interviews, in order to truthfully report back on the answers of the respondents. This phase ended once main themes and sub-themes had been collected, however, the researcher made sure not to abandon any other important information (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is common, as at this stage the researcher may be unsure as to which themes remain as is, or need to be combined (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 4: This phase started once the researcher reviewed the themes to ensure they were coherent and understandable (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, during this phase, the researcher refined the themes further, whereby some themes were removed or collapsed into each other (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This phase is divided further into two levels, the first of which included the reviewing of the coded data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Since the data was coherently forming a pattern, the researcher moved onto level two, which involved the consideration of the validity of the themes in relation to the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After completing this phase the researcher had a clear understanding of what the main themes were and how they fit together (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It was through this process that agile branding, innovation within the art industry and consumer behaviour emerged as the main themes for this research project.

Phase 5: Following this, the themes were then each defined, named and explored further to contribute to the understanding of the data and thus the overall research question and objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This step involved the identification of the essence of each theme and consequent detailed analysis of the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An important step in this phase was to consider and decide how the themes fit into the overall story that the data depicted (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This ensured a holistic view of the themes, thus guiding the researcher in answering the research question and objectives.

Phase 6: Lastly, the researcher had verified all of the themes, whereby the themes that provided the most meaning to the research were confirmed and then described in order to link back to the findings and formulate insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following this, the final report was formulated and then produced.

Trustworthiness:

Trustworthiness in research, based on qualitative data, refers to the degree of confidence in the data, methods, and interpretations (Connelly, 2016). In qualitative research, numbers and analytics are not utilised, thus particular phenomenon are used to understand specific contexts instead of creating generalised results that are applied to the broader population (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). As a result, trustworthiness in qualitative research is based on different criteria, to validity and reliability in quantitative research (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). Trustworthiness is divided into credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014, cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility is the accuracy with which the researcher analysed and interpreted the data, provided by the respondents (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). The more time the researcher spent with the respondents during the in-depth interviews the more credibility was increased, as the researcher gained deeper insights and understood the respondents better (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). Furthermore, the credibility of this research paper may have been affected due to there being only one research method: in-depth interviews. However, the respondents were chosen based on specific characteristics, ensuring a holistic view of the art industry and in-depth knowledge on the research topic.

Transferability is the ability to apply findings from the research to a situation that is similar in nature, achieving similar results (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). The questions asked in the in-depth interview were open-ended, thus the findings from the research were more likely able to be applied to situations of similar topics; such as other agile branding strategies and the ability of these strategies to ensure a business remains relevant during times of disruption. The findings of this research can also be applied to other businesses, giving them insight as to how to remain relevant and the benefits of agile strategies in branding.

Dependability is a term that describes the quality of integration between data collection, data analysis, theory, and insights formulated from the data (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014, cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004; Collis & Hussey, 2003:278–279). In this research paper, the researcher clearly defined both the data collection method and data analysis method in detail, as well as explored the applicable theory that linked to the findings. Thus, the researcher has ensured coherency and integration between the above-mentioned factors. Furthermore, once insights were drawn from the in-depth interviews, the researcher ensured integration of the findings from the data, thus making the research paper dependable.

Confirmability refers to how well the researcher's findings and interpretations supported the data collected (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). The researcher ensured confirmability in the study as a detailed description of the research process was provided. This will assist other researchers, with interest in the field of study, to evaluate the research design and potentially draw similar conclusions (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014).

Section 4: Findings

Presentation of Findings:

In order to analyse and explore the research question, the importance of agile branding in the art industry and how it influences consumer buying behaviour during a worldwide crisis, five experts within the art industry were solicited to participate in in-depth interviews. The findings helped to guide the researcher in answering the research objectives, which will be discussed and interpreted using the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Thus, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control and attitude are the three components that will be used to formulate deeper insights from the findings. Furthermore,the three main themes - agile branding, innovation and consumer behaviour - were identified within the interviews and will be discussed and interpreted in this paper.

Participant	**Occupation**
Participant 1	An avid art collector
Participant 2	Chairman of an international art auction house
Participant 3	Senior executive at Strauss & Co
Participant 4	Senior executive at Strauss & Co and avid art collector
Participant 5	Art critic, journalist and editor

Figure 1: Table Indicating the Participants and their Occupations

Indicated in figure 1 is a mix of art world experts, making up the sample for the interviews. This included two senior executives at Strauss & Co, the chairman of an international auction house, as well as an avid art collector. Additionally, an art critic/journalist/editor was also included in the sample to represent additional views within the art world. The diversity of occupations ensured that the researcher was able to glean the perspectives and expertise from key members of the art industry.

Figure 2: Overview of main concepts addressed by the interviewees during the interviews

Figure 2, as depicted above, showcases concepts such as innovation, agile branding and disruption in the market, which were mentioned by all five participants. This highlights their salience on a spontaneous level. In addition, two of the respondents also mentioned that Strauss & Co was able to ‘expand’ its ‘offering’ and thus foster stronger ‘interpersonal connections’, this illustrated that agile branding had the ability to grow and maintain their loyal customer base during the pandemic.

The three core components of the TPB are depicted in the figure below, whereby each component has a relevant quote from some of the interviewees' answers in their interviews. Depicting the findings in this way guided the researcher in interpreting them and formulating deeper insights (Figure 3).

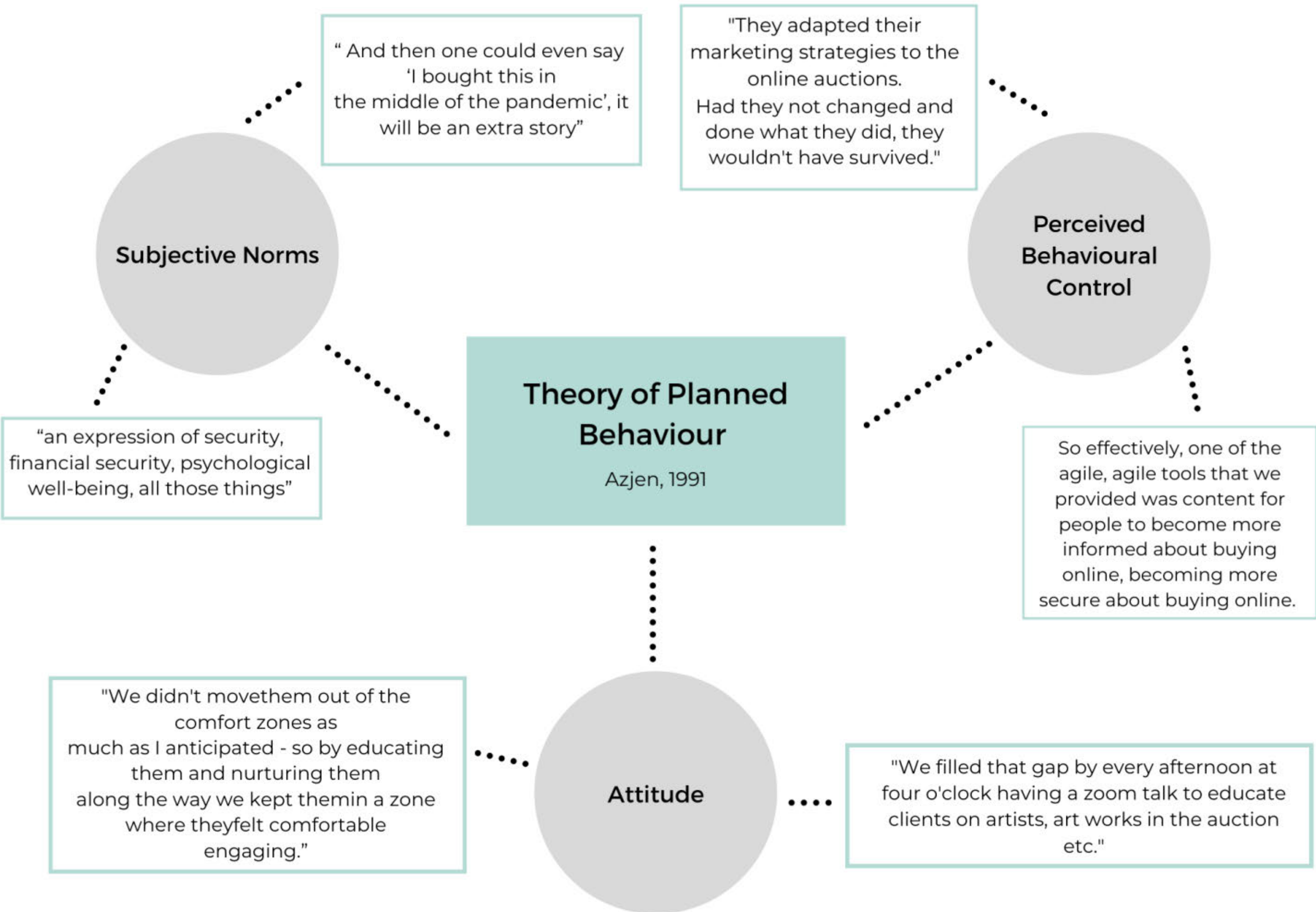

Figure 3: Link between answers from respondents and the Theory of Planned Behaviour

Interpretation of Findings

Theme 1:

<u>Perceptions on the importance of agile branding strategies during the pandemic among art industry experts</u>

The Covid-19 pandemic caused unpredictable business environments that contributed to market uncertainty and increased risk for companies (Koch &Schermuly, 2020). It can, therefore, be said that agility in marketing and branding during the pandemic enabled businesses to navigate this tumultuous time, in particular by rethinking their traditional procedures and operations, and pivoting to hybrid digitised models (Kilbourn, 2020; Crow, 2021; Ding & Li, 2021). Participant 1 confirmed this by expressing that if Strauss & Co had not implemented agile strategies during the pandemic, as efficiently and effectively as it did, the company would not have survived. Consequently, Participant 4 further expressed that they were able to adjust to the changed social and economic circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic without losing the core message and essence of the brand. This was a critical moment for Strauss & Co, as expressed by Participant 2, because they implemented their new strategies with confidence and agility. These strategies resulted in their clients being even more "trusting towards Strauss & Co because of how it dealt with the pandemic". This confirmed the fact that companies that were slower in adopting agile practices during the pandemic performed significantly worse than those that were innovative and flexible (Pieper, 2021). For Strauss & Co, this was not the case, as 2020 was "their second most profitable year since its inception, ten years ago", indicative of the effect of agile strategies on consumer behaviour during the pandemic (Kilbourn, 2020; O'Toole,2020).

The ability of Strauss & Co to confidently navigate through this tumultuous time, notably by introducing new digital platforms, had a significant impact on its stakeholders. Clients were inspired by the agile changes introduced by the company, as it instilled self-belief and hope that the pandemic could be managed, according to Participant 4. As a result, this can be further substantiated through the TPB, whereby the intention of a specific behaviour is influenced by attitude, perceived behavioural control and subjective norms (Azjen, 1991). This in turn can be utilised to understand how agile strategies, performed with confidence, positively affected the attitudes of clients towards both Strauss & Co as a brand as well as a business enterprise.

Furthermore, the digital hybrid models implemented by Strauss & Co, resulted in other companies within the market implementing similar strategies. Strauss & Co's agile response to the Covid-19 pandemic further entrenched its position as the leaders in the industry. As a result, their clients and competitors recognised Strauss & Co as trailblazers within the South African art industry, whereby many of its competitors began to use the same digital strategies during the pandemic, according to Participants 1-3. The larger art industry approved of the auction house's actions as there were clear, measurable results. The consequence of this had a positive and direct effect on the behaviour of its clients, whereby the combination of positive attitudes towards the brand as well as Strauss & Co becoming the approved subjective norm led to an influx of new clients and more purchases of art during the pandemic. Thus, as a result of Strauss & Co's breakthrough innovations and wholesale reorganisation of its business model, clients continued to purchase high-value and collectable art (Kilbourn, 2020; O'Toole, 2020).

In addition to this, Strauss & Co implemented an innovative online strategy, whereby every weekday during the months of heavy lockdown (March through May 2020) it hosted educational Zoom talks conducted by its experts that, in effect provided in-depth information on highlights in upcoming auctions. According to Participant 5, this enabled a sense of community and conversation in the absence of it during the pandemic. The Zoom talks provided clients with the critical tools to understand their art collections and feel more knowledgeable and self-assured when explaining them to their friends or family. Thus, by delving further into the benefits of the agile strategies Strauss & Co put in place, as they created confidence within their clients. Consequently, affecting the clients' perceived behavioural control, as this strategy empowered them.

This in turn influenced the control over its clients' specific actions/behaviours, in this case whether or not to continue to trust and continue buying from Strauss & Co, thus leading to influencing their intention (Azjen, 1991). As a result, this strengthened the intentions of clients, leading to the increased likelihood of following through with the behaviour, which was to continue to purchase from Strauss & Co during the pandemic. This is substantiated by Participants 3 and 4, as the first auction hosted by Strauss & Co during heavy lockdown was 100% sold.

The benefits of agile strategies are potentially limitless, however the strategies implemented by Strauss & Co during the Covid-19 pandemic produced successful results for the company. In particular, they led to increased customer loyalty as they focused their agile strategies towards strengthening the bonds with their clients and maintaining strong relationships by instilling trust and confidence. Thus, influencing the buying behaviour of its clients, as Strauss & Co was able to positively affect their attitudes, their perceived control of their behaviour and their subjective norms. In addition to this, the auction house remained relevant due to its efficient shift to an online business model, whilst still being client-focused and ensuring personal connection with their clients.Therefore, Strauss & Co's agile branding approaches incorporated design thinking, as it was consumer-centric and resonated with its clients in a time of crisis (Pieper, 2021; Heinonen & Strandvik, 2021).

The above findings established the importance of agile branding strategies, during times of crisis, and its influence on consumer behaviour, thus answering the research question. Furthermore, it can be said that the above interpretation of findings also answers one of the sub-questions related to the benefits of agile and innovative business strategies that were implemented by the art industry during the pandemic. Moreover, it explores the other research sub-question that relates to how art world experts interpreted the influence that the pandemic had on the art industry. (See Annexure A for an in-depth presentation of the findings).

Theme 2:

Perceptions on the importance of innovation in the art industry during Covid-19 among art industry experts

In order to combat the challenges caused by Covid-19 within the art auction industry, a digitised and innovative market sphere was introduced by businesses globally (Buchholz, et al., 2020; Pieper, 2021). Although breakthrough innovations were necessary to create a disruptive impact within the art market during Covid-19, some literature indicated that the lack of in-person contact nonetheless had a detrimental effect (Buchholz et al., 2020). However, this can be argued, as Strauss & Co managed to combat the effects of the pandemic by being "incredibly innovative" in ways that substantially,"transformed [their] industry", according to Participant 5. This included the implementation of multilocation online auctions, educational Zoom talks and, for a period of several months, shifting their public-facing business operations completely online. As a result of Strauss & Co's innovation and agility during the first waves of the pandemic in 2020, the company reported one of its most profitable years. This emphasises the importance of innovation during uncertain times, as it led to Strauss & Co gaining new clients globally. The company had previously struggled to compete in an international marketplace, largely due to the physical, in-person nature of the art auction business, but as a result of the widespread uptake of digital platforms they utilised during the pandemic, Strauss & Co significantly grew its international reach and client base.

Innovation ensured that Strauss & Co remained relevant to its clients, while adjusting to the changing circumstances without losing the core message of the brand. It can be noted, that due to their innovative and agile strategies, consumer behaviour was positively affected, which is emphasised by the success of the company.

Strauss & Co was the first art auction company to introduce a multilocation, live online auction in South Africa, which in a conservative industry, was unexpected according to Participant 3 and 5. This breakthrough innovation was accelerated and implemented due to the challenges the company faced during the pandemic. While the pandemic severely disrupted the art market, it was established that if effective and agile methods were implemented the company would thrive. This in turn resulted in highlighting the importance of innovative strategies and their effects on consumer behaviour.

Strauss & Co's behaviour can be associated with the TPB, whereby, its attitude towards the behaviour of implementing new and innovative strategies, was guided by the subjective likelihood that performing this behaviour would have resulted in a positive outcome (Azjen, 2020). Furthermore, the perceived social pressures to be innovative and agile also played a significant role whilst Strauss & Co was deciding how to navigate through the pandemic (Azjen, 2020). Lastly, perceived behavioural control related to factors that could facilitate or impede the behaviour, however the combination of the leaders of Strauss & Co instilling confidence in their staff and access to the needed resources, allowed for Strauss & Co to introduce new strategies to combat the effects of Covid-19 (Azjen, 2020). Thus, the attitude towards the behaviour, the subjective norms, and the perceived behavioural control all positively influenced the intention towards the behaviour and as a result the innovative and agile actions were implemented.

This further establishes the importance of innovative and agile strategies. If implemented correctly, these strategies can positively affect consumer behaviour. Therefore, this finding answers one of the research sub-questions related to the benefits of agile and innovative business strategies implemented by the art industry. Furthermore, it explores the other research sub-question that relates to how art world experts interpreted the influence that the pandemic had on the art industry. (See Annexure A for an in-depth presentation of the findings).

Theme 3:

Psychological motivations behind purchasing expensive art during the pandemic according to art industry experts

Art is an investment that avoids risk, as it preserves its value and culture and serves as an icon of economic strength (Baur, 2020). Due to the importance of art as an investment during times of uncertainty, collectors were more inclined to purchase expensive art (Aye, et al., 2017; Baur, 2020).This was confirmed by Participant 2 and 5. They both agreed that good quality art will always be an investment and an expression of financial security. However, Participant 1, the avid art collector, stated that purchasing art stems from a deep emotional connection with the art, and is not motivated by economic reasons. Based on current literature, during times of uncertainty, investing in the art market resulted in investors not only diversifying their portfolios but diversifying the risk component within their portfolios (Aye, Gil-Alana, Gupta & Wohar, 2017; Baur, 2020). It can thus be said that the value of owning a piece of fine art significantly increased as an alternative investment, although some collectors may purchase art due to an emotional connection, the majority of collectors invested in the art industry for economic purposes (Baur, 2020). An artwork is ultimately a store of wealth which can, at the same time, be enjoyed.

According to literature, in the absence of the physical co-presence with experts and auction houses, some collectors were hesitant to purchase art, due to a lack of trust (Fernandes & Panda, 2019; Buchholz, et al., 2020; Crow, 2021). This increased the perceived risk of purchasing art, thus potentially negatively affecting the trust-based relationship between the auction house and client (Asamoah, Chovancová, DeAlwis, Kumara & Guo, 2015). However, after analysing the interviews, it was noted that due to the established relationships Strauss & Co has fostered over the years with its clients, it was able to maintain trust and brand loyalty. According to Participant 1, Strauss & Co has a reputation that precedes it, which has resulted in positive brand associations and deep trusting relationships. Furthermore, Strauss & Co ensured that when it transitioned to a hybrid digital model, it presented the content in a way that was “not intimidating”.Clients felt encouraged to engage with the content and the new online models and were trusting towards Strauss & Co due to the way it dealt with the pandemic.

In addition to this, another potential reason for the continued purchasing of high-value art could be a combination of the increased amount of time collectors had to attend online sales and educate themselves (Crow, 2021). This was confirmed by Participant 3, as it was made clear that clients had time to “stop and learn about the art market”, which they would “not have been able to do in the past”. As a result, this positively influenced their attitude towards the behaviour of purchasing art during the pandemic. This in turn affects the intention towards the behaviour of purchasing art, resulting in the increased likelihood of clients purchasing art during the pandemic.

Lastly, social reference groups have an effect on consumer behaviour as they are external influences that can impact an individual’s behaviour and social cues (Fernandes & Panda, 2019; Gergen & Gergen, 1986). Due to individuals conforming to group behaviour, clients were influenced by certain ‘aspired’ groups that they wished to belong to (Shibutani, 1955; Fernandes & Panda; Asamoah, et al., 2015). The aspirational value affected their behaviour, as art collectors continued to purchase expensive artworks to reach a higher social power within a group or ‘showoff’ their social status to other members of their social reference group (Shibutani, 1955; Fernandes &Panda; Asamoah, et al., 2015). Participant 4 expressed that in addition to being influenced by aspired groups, collectors continued purchasing art to have ‘an extra story’ about their artwork and be able to say that they bought it in the middle of the pandemic. Thus, contributing to the societal norm and normative beliefs within the clients’ reference groups, as it became an expectation to buy art. This contributed to the perceived social pressure of expressing financial security and consequently influencing the behaviour (Azjen, 2020).

The above findings explore and answer the research objective of the psychological motivations that drive consumers to buy art, more specifically during a pandemic. Furthermore, these findings aim to guide the researcher in answering the main research question which relates to the importance of agile branding in the art industry and how it influenced consumer buying behaviour during the pandemic. (See Annexure B for an in-depth presentation of the findings).

Summary of Interpretation of Findings:

Drawing on the above-mentioned findings, it can be noted that Strauss & Co innovatively implemented new strategies to combat the punishing business effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Not only were they the first art auction house in the industry to incorporate digital strategies into their business model, but they also managed to achieve this without taking their existing clients out of their comfort zones. Consequently, this resulted in the behaviour of their clients being affected as the subjective norms, attitude towards the behaviour and perceived behavioural control were positively affected; furthermore, this resulted in a consequent effect on the intention to perform the behaviour. It can be said that the agile strategies reassured their clients and maintained the trust-based relationships, which lead to the increase in buying behaviour. Furthermore, buying art during an economically unstable time emerged as a way for collectors to exhibit their financial security. It was also noted that although collectors usually purchase art for investment reasons, for some collectors it is not the driving motivation; emotional reasons such as nostalgia may play an equal or even dominant role. Based on these findings, the researcher was able to answer the research question, the research sub-questions and objectives after interpreting the findings.

Section 5: Conclusion

Answer to Research Question and Objectives:

What is the importance of agile branding in the art industry and how does it influence consumer buying behaviour during a worldwide crisis? This was the main research question of this research project, which has been analysed and explored throughout the paper.

In order to explore the research question further, the research sub-questions and objectives were used to guide the researcher. In this case, the first objective was to explore the benefits of agile and innovative strategies implemented to combat the effects of the pandemic, and this was analysed in-depth. It can be said that these agile and innovative branding strategies positively affected the confidence of Strauss & Co's clients, which in turn resulted in increased levels of trust, thus improving on the attitude towards the behaviour. The positive attitude of clients led to increased buying behaviour of artworks during the pandemic. Agile strategies helped Strauss & Co to remain relevant and successful during the pandemic, and with these new innovative strategies it can to continue to be a trailblazer within the art industry in the future. The strategies were able to instill confidence and trust, whilst also empowering its clients. This resulted in one of their most profitable years, during the pandemic, thus further establishing the importance of agile branding strategies as it proves that a business is willing to remain flexible to the fluctuating market conditions and results in a higher turnover.

The breakthrough innovations made by Strauss & Co, during the months of the heavy lockdown, were acknowledged and praised by the art industry at large and by its loyal client base. These agile changes to their business model remained user-friendly and 'unintimidating', which improved the perceived behavioural control of its clients and their ability to continue to purchase high-value art on an online platform. Thus, it is important to note that if a business implements agile and innovative strategies, these strategies need to remain client-focused and easy to use, as this boosts the overall confidence of the clients' abilities. It can be said that agile and innovative strategies were paramount for the art industry, during the global pandemic, as they reassured clients and kept the business relevant without losing the core message of the brand.

The second objective was to understand and interpret the views of other art world actors in order to gain insight into the effects of the pandemic. The opinions of art world experts allowed the researcher to gain a holistic view of how different segments of the art world were affected during the pandemic. Five experts were interviewed, providing in-depth knowledge about the topic at hand. These experts were able to give insight as to why they believed clients continued to purchase art from Strauss & Co. It was noted that the main psychological motivations behind purchasing art during the pandemic, according to the interviewees, included the increased amount of time collectors had to attend online sales and educate themselves, emotional reasons, investment reasons as well as conforming to certain 'aspired' group behaviour. The art world experts therefore answered the last research objective which was to explore what psychological motivations drive consumers to buy art, specifically during a pandemic.

In conclusion, the main research question was answered, whereby the implementation of agile branding strategies was an important strategic move for Strauss & Co, as it positively influenced consumer behaviour, which resulted in an increase in sales of artworks. Thus, for the art industry as a whole, it was an important learning moment to notice the innovative and flexible changes Strauss & Co made. Its changes served as inspiration for all other businesses within the art industry, as Strauss & Co quickly became and maintained the title of being trailblazers within the South African art industry. In summary, while focused on an exceptional event, the Covid-19 pandemic, this study details how innovative business strategies, when firmly implemented, can lead to positive behavioural changes in consumers as well as produce unexpected consequences, for Strauss & Co growing its international and local network of buyers.

Anticipated Contributions:

This study provides in-depth insight into how a company within a niche luxury industry successfully managed to remain relevant and effective, as well as substantially prosper, during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study adds to existing literature on business and branding strategies adopted by the art industry in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The research provides an in-depth understanding of the South African art industry, due to the wide range of perspectives from actors representing different segments of this industry. Furthermore, the research highlights the importance and advantages of innovative and agile business processes and branding solutions during a major global health and business crisis (Covid-19 pandemic). The research findings provide a comprehensive understanding of consumer behaviour, in particular related to art collectors, and addresses why they continued to purchase high-value passion objects (art) during a pandemic. This study could be of potential interest and value to the broader art industry, as well as to actors within the luxury goods industry. Businesses within the luxury goods industry can use the strategies Strauss & Co implemented as inspiration and guidance to remain relevant and client-focused.

This research paper not only adds to the existing body of knowledge within the art industry but it provides an opportunity for further research into the trends of agile branding strategies. The report is a thought starter to provide insight into the innovative strategies that the art industry, although traditional, can implement to create disruption and remain relevant. In addition to this, the research can be taken further and also be used to guide other industries in attempts to remain flexible during the constant fluctuations of market conditions.

Ethical Considerations:

According to the IIE ethical guidelines document, three fundamental principles guide ethicalresearch; “Respect for persons”, “Beneficence” and “Justice” (The Independent Institute of Education, 2021). Thus, ethics in research is the moral code of conduct that formed the framework from which the researcher based their attitude and behaviour (du Plooy- Cilliers, et al., 2014). Ethical issues will impact both the participants as well as the researcher, so it is important to explore them prior to the study to ensure appropriate behaviour and procedures throughout.

Participants’ Ethical Considerations:

Informed consent, refers to the fact that the respondents involved were aware that they were taking part in a research study (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). The researcher ensured that all participants signed a consent form prior to the research being conducted and were clearly briefed about the requirements for the research.

Collecting data from participants was monitored in such a way as to ensure the physical and psychological comfort of the respondents (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). Furthermore, all respondents in this research study were informed as to how their identitieswill be protected (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). Lastly, because of the high profile and industry expertise of the respondents, the researcher ensured that their time was efficiently used and the in-depth interviews appropriately structured and organised (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014).

Dealing with sensitive information is an important factor to consider in research ethics (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). Thus, the researcher ensured that respect was implemented throughout the in-depth interview. For example, when the researcher sensed discomfort in respondents answering questions about why they continued to purchase expensive art in a global crisis, the question was skipped.

Confidentiality and anonymity were assured to each of the respondents. While the researcher knew the identity of the respondents, their identity will remain anonymous to the reader. This was implemented by referring to the respondents as “Participant 1”, for example. Furthermore, the findings will be kept confidential, thus only the researcher and supervisor will have access to them. Due to the use of the purposive sampling method, the identities of the respondents have to be known by the researcher. Furthermore, the researcher will be able to match the respondents’ responses to their identities, due to the nature and methods of this research study (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014).

The Researcher’s Ethical Considerations:

Bias is an important factor to consider when interviewing respondents as the researcher may be unconscious of their influence on them (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). Thus, the researcher ensured that leading questions were not used to influence the responses. Furthermore, “avoiding undue bias” and ensuring “integrity” whilst interviewing the respondents was a priority for the researcher (The Independent Institute of Education, 2021). The researcher aimed to put aside their own assumptions and entered and understood the lived realities of the participants.

Lastly, **misusing information** in research is a risk for both the researcher and the respondents, thus it is important that any data collected cannot be used for other purposesunless the respondents have given prior permission to do so (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014).The researcher was aware of this, if data was ever to be required for additional purposes outside of this study.

Limitations:

Limitations, in research, are constraints that are out of the researcher's control. This includesbut is not limited to; time, access to information and many more (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). Another limitation, which may affect this study, is that due to the nature and subject of this study the findings may not be able to be generalised to the broader population. To try and combat this limitation, the researcher interviewed individuals from different segments of the art industry to increase the scope of the research and ensure a variety of different perspectives. In additionto this, the research made use of a qualitative methodology, which allowed the researcherto gain in-depth understanding and create beneficial insights. However, the limitation is noted, as a mixed-method approach would improve the likelihood of data accuracy and would have enabled a stronger interpretation of results. The researcher made sure that all data was analysed in-depth, creating strong and beneficial insights that will be of use to individuals potentially interested in this field of research. Lastly, time constraints were a relevant limitationfor this study, as all the in-depth interviews had to be done in person, as well as transcribed and analysed in a short period of time. The researcher was organised throughout the data collection process to aim to combat the time constraints.

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Annexure

Annexure A: Presentation of Findings Relating to Agile Branding and Innovation

Presentation of findings relating to agile branding and innovation

Interview Question	Theme Name	Explanation	Important Quotes from Interviews	Objective
What do you understand by the term 'agile branding'?	Agile Branding	Agile and innovative strategies were essential during the pandemic, as without them many companies would not have survived.	**Participant 1**: "I understand agile as being adaptive to the changing conditions." "…change the brand to suit what is happening in the market." **Participant 4:** " the ability to adjust to circumstances without losing the core message that your brand is about - to take your consumers, your customers and clients along the journey of change at a speed where they recognise the change, they adopt the change, and they still trust your brand."	To explore the benefits of agile strategies implemented to combat the effects of the pandemic
How was the art world affected during the pandemic?	Agile branding and Innovation	The art world relies heavily on the physical co-presence with art and experiencing it in person, however this was disrupted during the pandemic.	**Participant 1**: "You can't go to big gatherings, you can't go to fairs, you can't gather at events organised by galleries. So clearly, your interaction becomes a lot less physical." **Participant 3**: "So by signing up with digital partners that we signed up with, is that we have the ability to then tap into a huge network" **Participant 4**: "the art world was severely disrupted, because there's a particular rhythm in the annual calendar of the artworld, and events such as art fairs" "It prompted us to open up an incredible market for us it and by teaming up with international platforms such as invaluable we opened a whole new range of clients - a whole universe of clients that were not previously available to us." **Participant 5**: "Was there a business interruption for the auction industry? Was it significant? I wouldn't say so. It required a bit of tweaking and adjustment"	To understand and interpret the views of other art world actors in order to gain insight into the effects of the pandemic

What did Strauss & Co do to remain relevant and client-focused during the pandemic? (e.g. any specific strategies)	Importance of agile branding and innovation during the pandemic	Strauss & Co ensured that their clients felt comfortable and as though they were part of a community, during a time where everyone felt disconnected. They focused on strengthening the interpersonal connections with their clients	**Participant 1:** " They adapted their marketing strategies to the online auctions" " They had an organic transition to digital. I think this basically catapulted them to be able to do much more. And they went a step further by introducing an education factor as well." **Participant 4:** "I thought we were very innovative as we started the series of zoom talks at basically at four o'clock every afternoon, because we realised people were already disrupted. And their normal routines were disrupted, which means they had an opportunity to listen to us. So we filled that gap by every afternoon at four o'clock having a zoom talk to educate clients on artists, art works in the auction etc." "We went live online, we decided to expand our online offering and extend it to do the live auction and have a hybrid of the two, where you still have an auctioneer, auctioning the lots but people can bid digitally and people consume the product digitally." "So we were the first auction company to have the multilocation live online auction. We had to use quite a lot of new technologies." "We were really incredibly innovative. I mean, especially given that we are, by nature, conservative industry, so you know, the auction houses we're not known for innovation necessarily, and digitalisation came to us slowly but then it came to us rapidly" **Participant 5:** "But it was capable of being retooled in an extraordinary time using innovative digital properties and Strauss I certainly think they proved themselves capable and willing to do it"	To analyse the manner in which Strauss & Co was able to remain relevant and ensure a client-focused approach

Annexure B: Presentation of Findings Related to Consumer Behaviour

Presentation of Findings related to Consumer Behaviour

Interview Question	**Theme Name**	**Explanation**	**Important Quotes from Interviews**	**Objective**
Why do you think clients continued to purchase from Strauss & Co, during the pandemic?	Consumer buying behaviour during times of crisis	In order to understand why agile and innovative strategies were successful it is important to understand what encouraged consumers to invest in the art industry	**Participant 1:** " I think it falls under interpersonal connections. I am close with many of those who work at Strauss. The loyalties are to people - not so much to the auction house." **Participant 3:** "But the thing is that a lot of clients told us that because they had time to stop, they had been meaning to learn about the art market, they had heard a lot about it. They just didn't have time" "because they realised the format in which we presented the content wasn't intimidating. So they were engaged. And I think as soon as you've got engagement, people then feel the opportunity to ask questions and try." **Participant 4:** "We didn't move them out of the comfort zones as much as I anticipated - so by educating them and nurturing them along the way we kept them in a zone where they felt comfortable engaging."	To explore what psychological motivations drive consumers to buy art, specifically during a pandemic
What do you think are the psychological motivations behind buying expensive art/(especially during the pandemic)	Consumers' psychological motivations	Why consumers continued to purchase expensive art during a pandemic	**Participant 1:** " it's always an emotional connection - we have a deep connection with the art work. Collecting art is a passion that we've always had for ourselves" **Participant 2:** " because it is a good investment when speaking about good art, it is a way to be happy" **Participant 4:** " And then one could even say 'I bought this in the middle of the pandemic', it will be an extra story"	To explore what psychological motivations drive consumers to buy art, specifically during a pandemic

			Participant 5: "an expression of security, financial security, psychological well-being, all those things" " it is as economic as much as psychological."	

Annexure C: Example of Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants
To whom it may concern, My name is **Isabella Watterson** and I am a student at **IIE Vega School, completing my BA Honours in Strategic Brand Communication.** I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Carol Affleck about the exploration of agile branding in the art industry, during times of crisis, and its influence on consumer behaviour. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of the benefits of agile branding and innovation during the pandemic, and how these changes prompted individuals to continue buying expensive art. I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.
What will I be doing if I participate in your study?
I would like to invite you to participate in this research because you play a pivotal role in the art industry, and will add value to the data in this research. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to have an in-depth interview with you, whereby I will ask questions based on the art industry and how it thrived through the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, I will be recording the interview in order to analyse it afterwards. You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.
Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?
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 might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your experiences in the art world, during the pandemic. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.
Do I have to participate in the study?
• Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary; • If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so; • Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.
Will my identity be protected?
I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a

confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at IIE Vega School, will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.
What will happen to the information that participants provide?
Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my BA Honours in Strategic Brand Communication. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.
What happens if I have more questions about the study?
Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate. You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed. My contact details are as follows: Isabella Watterson [redacted] The contact details of my supervisor are as follows: Carol Affleck [redacted]

Participant or respondent consent	
I, ____, agree to participate in the research conducted by Isabella Watterson about the exploration of agile branding in the art industry, during times of crisis, and its influence on consumer behaviour. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • I agree to be interviewed for this research. • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private. • My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research. • I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview. • I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.	
Signature	**Date**

Annexure D: Example of Consent Form for Audio Recording

CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO OR VIDEO RECORDING

Consent form for participants	
I, ____, agree to allow Isabella Watterson to audio record my interviews as part of the research about the exploration of agile branding in the art industry, during times of crisis, and its influence on consumer behaviour. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private; • The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer; and • Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.	
Signature	**Date**

Annexure E: Example of Measurement Instrument

In-Depth Interview Questions

Good morning/ good afternoon (interviewee), I greatly appreciate the time you have taken out of your day to give me your input, perceptions and insight into my thesis.

Onto the logistics, do I have your consent to record the audio of the interview – it can only be accessed by myself and my supervisor for research purposes only. I will begin the recording and will re-introduce myself again.

As part of my BA Honours degree in Strategic Brand Communication, I am investigating agile branding in the art industry, during times of crisis, and its influence on consumer behaviour. Thank you [name of respondent], for taking the time to participate in this in-depth interview, it is greatly appreciated. The information collected will be used solely for data analysis that will be utilised in this research study to draw conclusions and insights. Your information will remain confidential and anonymous.

1. What is your role/occupation currently, in the art industry?
2. What do you understand by the term 'agile branding'?
3. How was the art world affected during the pandemic?
4. What measures did different segments of the art industry put in place to remain relevant during Covid-19?
5. Do you know of the art auction house, Strauss & Co?
6. What did Strauss & Co do to remain relevant and client-focused? (Did you notice any specific strategies etc.?)
7. How do you think the art industry should have responded to the pandemic – and what could it have maybe done more effectively? What could Strauss & Co have done more effectively.
8. Why do you think clients continued to purchase from Strauss & Co, regardless of the pandemic?
9. How do you think brand repositioning, during a pandemic, affected clients' purchasing of artwork?
10. What do you think are the psychological motivations behind investing in the art industry, buying expensive art etc ?

Questions specifically for individuals who work at Strauss & Co.:

1. How many new buyers were gained during 2020?
2. Were you surprised by the success of Strauss & Co or did you expect it?
3. What were the reasons for Strauss & Co's success during the pandemic?
4. Do you think Strauss & Co would have survived the pandemic without shifting online, and using other strategies?

Annexure F: Ethical Clearance Letter

Date 24 June 2021

Student name: Isabella Watterson
Student number: [redacted]

Campus: Cape Town IIE Vega School

Re: Approval of RESE8419 Proposal and Ethics Clearance

HONOURS ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus research panel, a subcommittee of The Independent Institute of Education's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.

Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns and your supporting documents and instruments are in order to proceed. We hereby provide you with permission to proceed with your research.

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

We wish you all the best with your research!

GENERAL CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED IN RELATION TO RESEARCH

Permission is granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted.

Please note: The panel has not considered the merits, accuracy or ethical soundness of the research. The only merits examined are the use of The IIE as a sample.

Permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. The researcher(s) will need to obtain informed consent in writing from all of the participants in his/ her sample if the study is not anonymous.
2. The researcher(s) may only use the data collected for research purposes and in no other way.
3. Photographs of human subjects may only be taken if relevant to the research, informed consent was obtained, and even with informed consent, the photographs may not be published on any online platforms.
4. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend

on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.

5. No names or identifying information of participants may be used within the research and the research must be voluntary.
6. Please make it clear that the information will not be used punitively in any way and participants may in no way be counselled/advised based on this.

Supervisor and Campus Postgraduate Coordinator (CPC) name: Carol Affleck

Signature:

[redacted]

Annexure G: Concept Document Template

TITLE: An exploration of agile branding in the art industry during times of crisis and its influence on consumer behaviour

Research Purpose/ Objective	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors/ Sources	Literature Review – Conceptual Framework	Paradigm	Approach	Data Collection	Ethics	Key Findings	Recommendations
To determine the effects of agile branding and its influence on consumer behaviour, within the art industry, during times of crisis. The goal is to gain in-depth understanding of the psychology behind buying art, and if agile branding played a major role in buying behaviour during covid.	How did agile branding result in the success of a company, that relies heavily on in-person interactions, during a pandemic?	It is important to investigate the benefits of agile branding within the art industry and its effects on consumer behaviour, as this had a major impact on the art auction house, Strauss & Co. It is important to investigate how and why a brand, that remained agile, lead to success during Covid-19.	1. Azjen, 1991	**Theme 1:** Agile branding in the art industry during Covid-19 **Theme 2:** Innovation in the art industry during Covid-19 **Theme 3:** Consumer behaviour within the art industry	**Interpretivism:** **Epistemology** Knowledge is subjective and based on understanding. It is thus imperative to understand the behaviour and reasoning behind the clients of Strauss & Co. **Ontology** Reality is dynamic and interpreted by individuals and their interactions and behaviour. It is thus a subjective experience and cannot be grasped entirely.	Qualitative approach **Population** Target population: South African upper socio-economic, art sellers and collectors Accessible population: Experts in the art industry such as art auctioneers, gallerists and journalists	In-depth interviews – with open-ended questions	**Participants:** Informed consent, ensuring the comfort of participants when collecting data, ensuring sensitive information is respected and confidentiality and anonymity abided to. **Researcher:** Researcher was aware of avoiding bias and preventing the misuse of the respondents' information. Consent forms were signed by each respondent	Agile branding strategies resulted in one of Strauss & Co's most successful years. Disruptive innovations are important for a brand to remain relevant during times of crisis. Agile branding is necessary in a traditional industry to remain client-focused and top-of-mind, especially during a pandemic. The main psychological motivations behind purchasing high-value art are investment reasons, emotional reasons, conforming to a certain aspired group and the increased amount of time and disposable income buyers had.	Businesses should constantly be implementing agile and innovative strategies in order to remain relevant. These strategies, depending on the industry, should be consumer-centric and user-friendly. Disruptive innovations are important for all businesses. It is important for the art industry to understand the psychological motivations behind why collectors buy art, as this will help with marketing strategies as well as agile branding strategies. Other industries can use this research paper to guide them in dealing with crisis moments. This research paper can be used to guide the luxury industry and understanding consumer motivations.

Research Problem	Secondary Questions	Key Concepts	Key Theory	Sampling	Data Analysis Method(s)	Limitations	Key Contribution
The advent of Covid-19 removed every opportunity for in-person experiences, this was a problem within the art industry. The challenge for auction houses was to endeavor to continue to engage with clients in an effort to secure sales. The problem was for the art industry to remain relevant and how they achieved this through agile branding.	What are the benefits of agile, innovative business strategies that the art industry implemented during the pandemic? How do art world experts interpret the influence the pandemic had on the art industry? What are the psychological motivations that drive consumers to buy art during a pandemic?	Agile Branding Consumer Behaviour Primary art Market Secondary art market	1. Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)	Non-probability sampling method used due to the qualitative nature of the research. Purposive sampling - critical case sampling (sub-type of purposive sampling was utilised) Size: 5 Individuals with specific characteristics within the art industry e.g. art collectors, gallerists and art auction houses.	**Unit of Analysis** People, more specifically, individuals within the art industry who are experts within their field or have a lot of knowledge in the industry Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data.	Not being able to generalise to the broader population. Only using one research approach and not a mixed-method approach. Time constraints.	The research highlights the importance of innovative and agile business processes and branding solutions during a major international health and business crisis (Covid-19 pandemic). The research findings provide a comprehensive understanding of consumer behaviour, in particular related to art collectors, and addresses why they continued to purchase high-value passion objects (art) during a pandemic. This study could be of potential interest and value to the broader art industry, as well as to actors within the luxury goods industry