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# Exploration of the Process of Building Brand Equity as a Digital Painter

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Certificate of Approval



Exploration of the Process of Building Brand Equity as a
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This is to certify that the Master's Thesis of


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**Exploration of the Process of Building Brand Equity as a Digital Painter**


by Andrew Lim



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**Table of Contents**

# List of Figures

**Abstract**

The mainstream debut of the World Wide Web in the 20th century has increased the use of branding from its simple origins of being a visual marker into a multi-faceted entity. Branding has evolved to become a multi-faceted effort that creates rational and emotional attributes and can foster interactions and develop and deepen relationships with customers (Rubinstein, 2002).

The boom of the Internet brought forth new inventions and software that affected many industries, particularly the arts. A new emergent form of art known as digital painting emerged where a drawing tablet, stylus and digital image rendering software such as Adobe Photoshop, Corel Draw, and GIMP are used to create a digital painting. Overall the Internet has allowed painters to capitalize on opportunities to build their brand themselves without dependence on galleries and agents.

While many published articles and books about building brands as a company and personal branding exist, there is a lack of research exploring art marketing in terms of digital painters developing their own brand.

The goal of this exploratory study is to provide a theoretical framework of how digital painters can develop their personal brand. Using Bernard's Grounded Theory Approach the study explored the conditions, context, strategies, actions, and results experienced by digital painters who have built their own brand. A semi-structured interview was individually conducted with seven professional digital painters.

Three hired coders analyzed and coded the interviews. A total of 63 concepts, 11 themes and 1 core theme were created. The themes were: Exploration and Take Chances to Your Calling, Personal Drive, Watering Holes, Meeting Influential People, Resisting and Fighting Upstream, Fostering Your Network, Tenacious Value, Genuine Relations, Self-Promotion, The Brand Can Always Expand, and Cautions and Drawbacks. The overall theme that encompassed the more specific themes and conceptual labels was: Identity, Prosperity and Longevity.

**Chapter 1**

**Introduction**

The birth of the World Wide Web in the 20th century has propelled branding to evolve from its simple origins. Once originally just a visual symbol to differentiate persons from their competitors, branding has evolved further to become a multi-faceted entity that associates rational and emotional attributes with the brand and in a way that allows them to interact, socialize, and develop relationships with their customers (Rubinstein, 2002).

Due to the proliferation of devices connected to the Internet through broadband and cellular networks, individuals and companies can access global communications instantly. According to the 2016 U.S. Census, among all households in 2016, 81% reported having a computer with a broadband internet subscription, an increase from the 62% reported in 2001 (Ryan, 2018, p. 3). Information can be produced in larger quantities and be exchanged faster, easier and cheaper.

The arrival of the second generation of the Internet, Web 2.0, propelled the evolution of branding even further. In this  generation, websites evolved from static and read-only websites into an interactive, participatory, collaborative focused platforms.

1

Collaborative and participatory platforms such as blogging, forums and social media began at this time. This enabled a company's brand now to be able to immediately interact and socialize with its customers, create emotional relationships between them and have user-generated content be created by the customers or company and be shared with other users.

Along with the technological boom of the Internet, inventions and software arose, as well. These tools and software would serve to create a new emerging form of art known as digital painting. Using a drawing tablet, stylus and digital image rendering software such as Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, and Corel Draw, digital painters could create paintings rendered on a computer. Distinct from what is termed as computer-generated art, digital painting is painted manually, stroke by stroke, instead of being rendered by a computer algorithm (Hang, 2007).

The Internet has allowed painters to leverage the tools from Web 2.0 and to capitalize on opportunities to build their brand without the dependence on galleries and agents. Historically galleries would provide the financial and reputational means to promote painters to the market; however, with the global and immediate reach of the Internet, painters are now able to take on the role of promoter and dealer. Today digital artists communicate with existing and future patrons, build and curate their own website and online gallery, promote their brand, and identify and locate communities with which to interact.

More and more artists are adopting the role of becoming a brand. As Sara Fitzmaurice said in the "New Pitches: Reframing Artists for a Changing Market" panel, "artists are transparently marketing themselves as brands, with no apologies… just like corporate brands" (Sussman, 2017).

**Statement of the Problem**

The literature is rich regarding branding in the marketing field that applies to building a company's brand; however, the literature regarding artists and brand building only explores the artists' role when they are in a company building a company's brand.

Published articles and books about brand building as a company and personal branding are available, but there is a lack of research exploring art marketing specifically as digital artists in the Web 2.0 digital era. Although branding theories are accessible and available, many artists lack the knowledge to interpret and apply those branding theories to themselves. The goal of this exploratory study is to provide a theoretical framework of how specifically digital painters can develop their own brand. This theoretical framework was created by interviewing digital painters who have built a strong brand, specifically in regard to the conditions, context, strategies, actions, and results experienced by those digital artists in this endeavor. The repeated themes that arose from the data became the grounded building blocks for the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework is documented in a way that can help provide insight for artists.

**Chapter 2**

**Theoretical Basis**

The focus of this exploratory study is to generate a theoretical framework explaining the phenomenon of how digital painters create a successful brand. The Grounded Theory method is used as the theoretical basis in the study. In particular Bernard's (2013) Grounded Theory approach was used as the theoretical framework. Secondly, Corbin & Strauss' (1990) Coding Paradigm Model was used as the theoretical basis for formulating the questionnaire used in the semi-structured interview.

**Grounded Theory**

Grounded Theory is an inductive qualitative method that aims to create a theory explaining a particular phenomenon. A theory is generated by examining the context, conditions, strategies, actions and results of the actor who experienced the phenomenon (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p. 9). The theory is built on empirical data that has been grounded through the repeated emergence of similarities and patterns by the actor who experienced the phenomenon (Bernard, 2013). Three major methods of Grounded Theory have branched from the original work of Glaser and Strauss's 1967 work, Discovering Grounded Theory: (1) Glaser's Classic Grounded Theory (CGT), (2) Strauss and Corbin Qualitative Data Analysis Theory (QDA, now called the Straussian Grounded Theory),

and (3) Charmaz's Constructivist Grounded Theory (Fernandez, 2012). It is important to be aware of these three major Grounded Theory methods because Bernard's approach draws from these three major methods. Bernard states that an actor who experienced a particular phenomenon will have a unique story to tell, but numbers of such stories will reveal similarities and patterns (Bernard, 2013). Grounded Theory provides a systematic technique to be able to collect and analyze qualitative data to construct theories grounded in the data (Charmaz 2006).

**Bernard's Grounded Theory Approach**

In H. Russel Bernard's Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches (2013), a seminal book about qualitative and quantitative approaches that has been cited over 23,495 times since 2014, Bernard writes "Whichever tradition you favor, there are three steps in grounded theory: (1) Coding the Texts for Themes; (2) Linking Themes Into Theoretical Models; and (3) Displaying and Validating the Models" (Bernard, 2013, p. 525).

Figure 1 shows the stages of Bernard's Grounded Theory Approach.

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│            Research Question             │
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│          Coding Text for Themes          │
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│   • Data Gathering                       │
│   • Coding                               │
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Linking Themes into Theoretical Models  │
│   • Theoretical Sampling                 │
│   • Memoing                              │
│   • Constant Comparison Method           │
│   • Theoretical Saturation               │
└─────────────────────────────────────────┘
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Displaying & Validating Theoretical Model │
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│             Theory Creation              │
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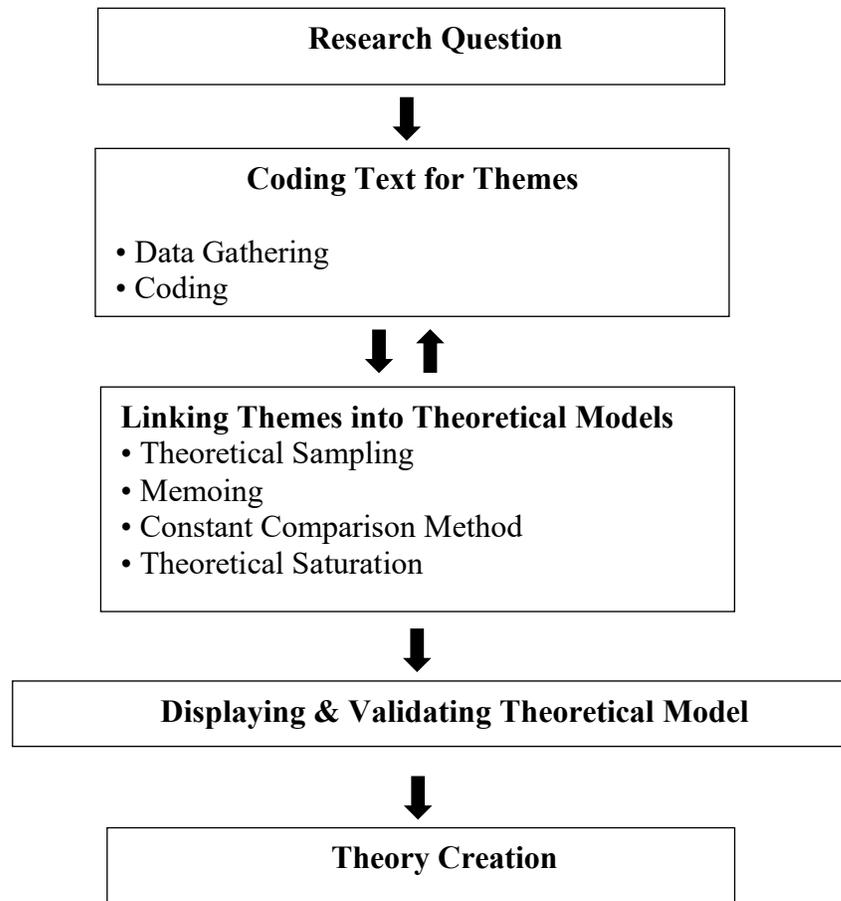
Figure 1. Bernard's Grounded Theory Approach Stages

*Coding the Texts for Themes*

Bernard writes that the first step to creating a theoretical framework is to "begin with

a small chunk of text and code line by line. Identify potentially useful concepts"

(Bernard, 2013, p. 532). The raw data gathered from the study needs to be coded in order

to be used for theory creation. Corbin and Strauss (1990) write "Theories can't be built with actual incidents or activities as observed or reported; that is, from "raw data." The incidents, events, and happenings are taken as, or analyzed as, potential indicators of phenomena, which are thereby given conceptual labels" (Corbin, 1990, p. 7). Bernard (2002) suggests coding in three stages: (1) Open Coding, (2) Axial Coding and (3) Selective coding. These stages are explained as follows: (1) Open Coding: Key phrases that are potentially important indicators of the phenomena are marked and given a conceptual label; (2) Axial Coding: All concepts are pulled together, analyzed how they might relate to one another and  larger conceptual labels known as categories are created to group related concepts together; and (3) Selective Coding: A theme/core category is chosen that represents the overarching theme to the categories and that represents the phenomenon.

*Linking Themes into Theoretical Models*

Stage three of the Bernard's Grounded Theory Approach occurs throughout the coding process of stage two. The purpose of the third stage is to not only identify how the concepts are linked to one another but to also validify these emerging relations so that they are grounded by the data and their repeated occurrences.

Bernard writes that the following four elements are key to linking the emerging code into a theoretical model: (1) Memoing: Continually writing down the thoughts that emerge from reading the text. "The observations can be about the themes that you see

8

emerging or your ideas about how the themes are connected" (Bernard, 2013, p. 532); (2)

Using the Constant Comparison Method: Throughout the entire coding process, any

codes created are compared against the other codes for similarities and differences. The

constant comparison method is used to gather and group similar concepts to develop

categories, a larger conceptual label that groups related concepts together; (3) Finding

Negative Cases: Along with finding similarities, the constant comparison method also

seeks to find any negative cases that "either disconfirm parts of a model or suggest new

connections that need to be made" (Bernard, 2013, p. 532).  Corbin and Strauss (1990)

write that making comparisons assists the researcher in guarding against bias, for he or

she is then challenging concepts with fresh data; (4) Conducting Theoretical Sampling: In

a true Grounded Theory method theoretical sampling is conducted when the researcher

"begins coding with the first interview and select cases for study as concepts emerge and

the theory develops" (Bernard, 2013, p. 532). Bernard writes that in many Grounded

Theory approaches theoretical sampling is not involved; (5) Theoretical Saturation: Once

no new categories or relations among the categories are discovered, theoretical saturation

occurs. The researcher then can proceed onto the fourth stage of the approach.

*Displaying and Validating the Models*

Once the concepts, categories and core category / theme are created and grounded

by the data, Bernard suggests creating a graphic model to represent how the process of

the phenomenon works (Bernard, 2013). He uses Margaret Kearney's 1995

work Salvaging Self—A Grounded Theory of Pregnancy on Crack Cocaine to present an

example of a graphic model showing the theoretical model created from the data. Bernard recommends the usage of exemplar quotes to help lead the reader to quickly understand concepts, categories and theme represented. Exemplar quotes are direct quotes or phrases take "that lead the reader to understand quickly what it took you months or years to figure out" (Bernard, 2013, p. 535). The validity of the model is tested on an independent sample of data by presenting it to respondents familiar with the population, respondents who fit the same criteria or professionals in the field (Bernard, 2013, p. 535).

**Theoretical Basis Used in Questionnaire**

Interviewing digital painters and asking them to describe their experience in creating and building a successful brand has potential to elicit general and very broad answers due to the extensive nature of the subject of branding and its success. In order to provide some guidance and structure, Corbin & Strauss' (1990) Coding Paradigm is used as the theoretical framework to formulate the basis of the questionnaire used in the semi-structured interview; the paradigm  This serves the purpose to help provide talking points for the interview. The coding paradigm that Corbin & Strauss use in their Grounded Theory Method consists of the conditions, context, strategy, actions and results to which the phenomena occurred. They write that the coding paradigm is no different from schemes used in other qualitative research (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p.13). The interview

10

questions for this study relate to conditions, context, strategy, actions and results in which the digital painter was able to build their brand.

**Conclusion**

Bernard's Grounded Theory Approach and Corbin & Strauss' (1990) Coding Paradigm provide the theoretical framework needed for this study's focus on exploring and developing an explanation for the phenomenon of how digital painters create a successful brand. The study aims to find reoccurring themes and occurrences shared by selected digital painters that can be grounded and confirmed by the data in order to create a theory. When compared to the long history of traditional painting, digital painting is still a relatively young and emerging field. The literature of branding for businesses and marketing is rich, but branding for digital painters has yet to be a subject of major interest for the art community. The subject of digital painting and branding has potential to provide value to the art community and benefit digital artists by providing some insight to the subject.

# Chapter 3

## Literature Review

This literature review covered the research topics of Branding, Brand Equity, Brand Equity Perspectives, Brand Equity Models, Brand Equity in Contemporary Times, the Artist's Role in Brand Building, Brand Building as an Artist in the Contemporary Art World, Brand Equity in the Visual Arts, Social Media as a Branding Tool for Artists, and Brand Equity in the Digital Arts.

### Branding

Originally used by livestock owners to simply identify their livestock, branding in the marketing field has evolved into a multi-element asset used to identify and differentiate a company and its products and services from its competitors. The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines a brand as a "name, term, sign, symbol or design, or combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition" (Keller, 2003, p. 3).

Brand elements are components of a brand that come in different forms that are used to identify and differentiate. There is a degree of creativity that can be at play when creating a brand. Keller writes that brands extend further than just to products. Brands can be people, services, organizations, and even locations. The brand itself is an intangible asset that has huge effects on the company and its product. Unlike a firm's

tangible asset (such as a plant's equipment, number of employees, or real estate), a brand is an intangible asset (such as expertise in a field or its marketing skills). The intangible asset is not perceptible by touch, but has significant value for a company and its products (Keller, 2003).

A customer's decision to purchase a product can be heavily affected by the product's brand and its associations. What the brand represents and associates with can change the way customers see and experience the firm's product or service. They can "signal characteristics and qualities to customers" (Keller, 2003, p. 10). When added value is created and provided with the product or service, two identical products can be received totally differently; in other words, one product that has better value-added attributes and associations will resonate better with the customer. "A brand is a perceptual entity that is rooted in reality, but it is also reflecting the perceptions and perhaps even the idiosyncrasies of consumers" (Keller, 2003, p. 13).

According to Keller (2003), building a strong brand has become even more important for companies because of the effects of competitive factors such as globalization, opening a worldwide market, low-priced competition and imitators, existing brands, launching products into new categories, and deregulations of certain industries (Keller, 2003).

Advancements in technology have also pushed certain products, services, and skills into obsolescence. Kodak, Coca Cola, Nike, Apple, Campbells, Colgate, Marlboro, and Xerox are examples of powerful world-renowned brands. Even with the deep, strong, seemingly unshakeable presence and strength of their brand, these companies are

constantly evolving and developing in order to keep their brand's competitive advantage. A company will always need to innovate and further develop their brand. "No matter how strong at any one point in time, it is vulnerable and susceptible to poor brand management" (Keller, 2003, p.34). Keller refers to Winston, an American tobacco company, losing its leadership position in 1975 to Marlboro, and not being able to reclaim its leadership position (Keller, 2003).

**Brand Equity**

A method to measure the value added or subtracted by the brand was needed. Aaker defines brand equity as "a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers" (Aaker, 1991, p. 16). Brand Equity concepts have existed since the 1980s when the Marketing Science Institute (MSI), a research based organization, founded in 1961, listed brand equity "as a priority area for research" (Hampf, & Lindbery-Repo, 2011, p.6). A number of different approaches identifying the important assets needed to be measured to calculate the strength of brand equity have been made.

**Brand Equity Perspectives**

Kim, Kim & An (2003) suggest three major perspectives to use when considering brand equity: Financial-Based Perspective, Consumer-Based, and Combined Perspective.

Financial-Based Perspective. This perspective adopts the value-based technique of the financial market to estimate a firm's brand equity (Simon & Sullivan, 1993). Simon and Sullivan  developed the estimation technique by separating brand equity into tangible and intangible assets, and then valuing them (Simon & Sullivan, 1993). The methodology sums the value of the tangible assets and the intangible assets. They were among the first to calculate a financial model to quantify the total value of the firm's intangible assets.

*Consumer-Based Perspective.* The consumer-based perspective subsumes the two multi-dimensional concepts of brand strength and brand value (Shocker, Srivastava & Ruekert, 1991). Brand strength is based on perceptions and behaviors of customers that allow the brand to enjoy sustainable and differentiated competitive advantages. Brand value is the financial outcome of the management's ability to leverage brand strength via strategic actions to provide superior current and future profits (Kim, Kim & An, 2003, p.337). Many concepts were formed identifying measurable attributes of consumer-based brand equity. Brodie writes of these attributes, "these include consumer preferences, price premiums, consumer perceptions, price trade-offs, residual intangible value, loyalty, awareness, perceived quality, brand knowledge, and consumer learning" (Brodie, 2002, p. 8).

*Combined Perspective.* These comprehensive perspectives incorporate both consumer-based brand equity and financial brand equity, and were designed to make up for the "insufficiencies that may arise when only one of the two perspectives are emphasized" (Kim, Kim & An, 2003, p.338). Dyson et al. described a survey research

system that placed financial values on brand images and associations (Dyson et al., 1996). Motameni and Shahrokhi (1998) proposed global brand equity valuations, which combine brand equity from the marketing perspective and brand equity from the financial perspective (Kim, Kim & An, 2003, p.338).

**Brand Equity Models**

Hampf and Lindberg present a review of the history of branding and brand equity; the major pioneers of brand equity were Farquhar, Aaker, Keller, Simon and Sullivan, and Srivastava (Hampf & Lindberg-Repo, 2011). The sections below discuss the major principles that define the consumer-based perspective models.

*Farquhar's Model*

Farquhar defines brand equity "as the added value with which a brand endows a product" (Farquhar, 1989, p. 24). Farquhar states that this value-added endowment can be seen from the perspectives of the firm, the trade, and the consumer. The three elements Farquhar uses to define a strong brand are: Positive Brand Evaluation, Accessible Brand Attitudes, and Consistent Brand Image.

*Positive Brand Evaluation*. This element looks to create a positive association to the brand. The three associations are Affective Responses (such as association feelings of a familiar friend), Cognitive Evaluations (such as positive inferences that the brand is more effective than others), and Behavioral Intentions (such as positive associations through usage.)

*Accessible Brand Attitudes.* This element refers to the strength of how quickly the individual can retrieve the attitude toward the given brand to mind.

*Consistent Brand Image.* The brand image that is created by the firm is used to differentiate between competitors. Consistent nurturing of the brand image allows for customers to develop a relationship with the brand image.

Figure 2 displays the measurement used for each perspective.

| Perspective | Measurement |
|---|---|
| • The Firm | • Incremental Cash Flow |
| • The Trade | • Trade Leverage |
| • The Consumer | • Attitude Strength |

Figure 2: Farquhar's Brand Equity Measurements.

Farquhar states that the incremental cash flow from associating the brand with the product is the firm's measurement for brand equity (Farquhar, 1989). A strong brand enhances the value of the product beyond its functional purpose, enabling premium pricing and reduced promotional costs, which as a result will increase cash flow to the firm. In the trade's perspective, trade leverage is used to measure brand equity. Having a notable brand allows "easier acceptance and wider distribution" (Farquhar 1989, p. 26). A notable brand can leverage its reputation and awareness to have lower shelving costs and better placement (Farquhar, 1989). The Consumer's perspective uses Attitude as the

measurement for brand equity. The strength of association between the product and particular emotion or memory defines the strength.

*Aaker's Brand Equity Model*

Similar to Farquhar's definition of brand equity, Aaker's (1991) definition holds that brand equity not only provides value to the customer, but also to the firm by generating cash flow.

Farquhar states that positive associations to the brand, the speed which the brand's attitudes can be recalled, and the consistency of the brand image are the three key elements to a strong brand equity. Aaker suggests five categories that build strong consumer-based brand equity: Brand Awareness, Brand Association, Perceived Quality, Brand Loyalty, and Proprietary Assets.

Aaker's dimensions of brand equity have been broadly accepted and employed by many of the academics of brand equity such as Keller, Motameni, and Shahrokhi; Low and Lamb; Prasad and Dev; Yoo; and Donthu (Kim, Kim & An, 2003). Along with being broadly accepted, Aaker's Brand Equity publication has been cited over 16,000 times.

*Brand Awareness*. This dimension is described as awareness that is broken into three levels of recall strength: Brand Recognition (aided recall), Brand Recall (unaided recall), and Top-of-Mind. Brand Recognition is the weakest among the three and requires aid to recall. Brand Recall happens when a buyer is able to recall the brand name without any aide. Top-of-Mind, considered to be the highest form of brand awareness, happens when a brand is the only brand recalled when an unaided recall is requested.

18

*Brand Association.* Brand Association is described as "anything 'linked' in memory to a brand…A brand image is a set of associations" (Aaker, 1991, p. 109). These associations are grouped into meaningful sets to help create a particular image for both the consumer and the brand. Anything can be linked from characters, symbols, feelings, lifestyle, or an object. These associations have a level of strength dependent on the strength of the link and the support of other links. The stronger the associations, the better the positioning of the brand, making it more desirable and differentiating it from their competitors.

Aaker states that associations represent the basis for a purchase decision and for brand loyalty. Associations provide value to both the firm and the customer by helping customers process and retrieve sets of information about the brand easily, allowing differentiation from competitors, creating positive attitudes and feelings that can be attached to the brand and providing specific reasons to customers to buy the brand because of the associated benefits or attributes (Aaker, 1991).

Aaker's method of measuring brand associations uses both direct and an indirect methods of qualitative research (Aaker, 1991). The direct approach pursues in-depth discussions with focus groups or with individual customers. Aaker states that respondents may be unwilling or unable to provide answers to the direct questioning, so that the indirect method should be used to obtain responses.

Aaker provides nine different indirect method approaches to understanding the brand's associations through the customer's lens (Aaker, 1991). Examples of the indirect

method approach include describing the brand as a person, dissecting the decision process when choosing a brand, and describing the brand user.

*Perceived Quality*. This approach is described as a "customer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service with respect to its intended purpose, relative to alternatives. It is a perception by customers" (Aaker, 1991, p. 85). Perceived quality can be measured if the underlying dimensions of the product are identified; these underlying dimensions are the characteristics of the product, such as reliability and performance (Aaker, 1991).

Aaker provides separate criteria for products and services when examining quality. Aaker uses Harvard's David A. Garvin's seven Product-Quality dimensions when examining a product's quality; these are: Performance, Features, Absence of Defects, Reliability, Durability, Serviceability, and Fit and Finish. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry's Service-Quality dimensions (1991) are used when examining a service's quality; these are: Tangibles, Reliability, Competence, Responsiveness, and Empathy.

*Brand Loyalty*. Brand Loyalty is the measure of attachment a customer has to a brand, reflecting the likelihood of switching over to another brand due to a change in price, product feature, or competitive actions to promote switching. Aaker uses five levels to categorize the strength of loyalty: Switchers, Satisfied Habitual Buyers, Satisfied Buyers with a Switching Cost, Friend of the Brand, and Committed Buyer (Aaker, 1991).

Switchers are described as buyers with the mentality "Whatever's on sale or convenient is preferred" (Aaker, 1991, p. 40). Satisfied Habitual Buyers are those that do

not possess enough dissatisfaction to change if the change required effort. Habitual

Buyers are susceptible to competitors that can offer a benefit strong enough promote

them to switch. Satisfied Buyers with switching costs can be won over by a benefit that is

larger than the switching cost, such as time, price, performance, or risk. Friends of the

Brand are buyers that are emotionally attached to the brand; the attachment is rooted by

feelings and emotions. Committed Buyers take pride of discovering and/or being users of

a brand. These customers find the brand important to them either a functional use or as an

expression of who they are (Aaker, 1991, p.40).

The measurements that Aaker uses to measure brand loyalty are: Behavior

measures characterized by purchase patterns, switching costs, measuring satisfaction,

liking of the brand, and commitment.

*Proprietary Assets*. Briefly described, proprietary assets, include such factors as

patents, intellectual property rights, copyrights, established channel relationships (Aaker,

1991).


*Keller's Brand Equity Model*

Shortly after Aaker's development of a brand equity model that describes the five

categories of a successful brand, in 1993, Keller created a model that focused on Identity,

Meaning, Response, and Relationship as the core of brand equity. Keller presents these

main focuses in a visual four-step pyramid. Keller defines customer-based brand equity

as "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of

the brand" (Keller, 1993, p. 2). Keller states that the source of brand equity comes from

brand awareness and brand image. "Customer-based brand equity occurs when the consumer has a high level of awareness and familiarity with the brand and holds some strong, favorable, and unique brand associations in memory" (Keller, 1993, p. 67). Keller presents a conceptual model based on customer-based brand equity in a four-step pyramid; from bottom to the top, they are Identity, Meaning, Response, and Relationship.

Identity relates to the "brand salience" which refers to the strength of brand awareness and how identifiable the brand is to the customer.

Brand Meaning refers to the performance and imagery of the brand, how reliable and effective the brand is, and what do customers think about the "extrinsic properties of the product or service, including the ways in which the brand attempts to meet customer's psychological or social needs" (Keller, 2003, p. 83).

Brand Response relates to the judgments and feelings about the brand. Brand judgement focuses on the customer's personal opinion of the brand, and brand feelings focuses on emotional response and how the brand affects the customer's feelings (Keller, 2013).

Brand Relationship refers to the brand's resonance with the customer and how in-sync they are with the brand; this is categorized by brand loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community, and active engagement (Keller, 2013).

*Shocker and Srivastava's Brand Equity Perspective*

Shocker and Srivastava's approach to brand equity utilizes the two concepts of brand strength and brand value to determine the strength of brand equity Brand Strength is built upon the behaviors and view of customers that allow the brand to differentiate and

have sustainable advantages. (Kim, Kim & An, 2003). Brand Value is measured by financial outcome through the strategic actions of the management's ability (Kim, Kim & An, 2003).

**Brand Equity in Contemporary Times**

There exist world-recognized brands that are earning billions of dollars and employing thousands of employees. This section discusses the brand Nike and reviews their process of building their billion dollar brand.

Valued at $29.6 billion, Nike (founded in 1962) has proven not only to stand the tests of time, but also to excel in becoming the world's leading shoe company. In a Harvard Business Review interview, Co-Founder and Chairman Emeritus of Nike, Phil Knight, narrated Nike's evolution that led them to become the world's most-recognized shoe brand. Clear examples of Aaker's brand equity categories were present in the Nike evolution presented in the interview.

Nike's focus on creating innovative products led them to its $1 billion in sales; however, Knight recounts that just innovation, production, and signing great athletes stopped working, leading them to focus on marketing towards their customers (Willigan, 1992).

Through their marketing ad campaigns, Nike is able to deliver their brand message while showcasing their shoes. The ad campaigns bring brand awareness and have enabled Nike to create and deliver their intended associations to their customers.

The ads have themes of "competition, determination, achievement, fun and even spiritual rewards of participating in those activities [of sports and fitness]" (Willigan, 1992).

Nike delivered high-quality products through their focus on innovation and creating shoes that world class athletes could perform in; this level of quality assured the general consumer that they would also receive high performance quality from their shoes, as well.

Nike has created a cult-like loyalty by connecting their users with the brand through their marketing campaigns. It has created a world-recognized brand through their usage of celebrity endorsements, inspiring advertisements, and innovative technologies. Godin (2019) describes Nike's brand strength by saying "Nike doesn't have a hotel. If it did, you would probably have some good guesses as to what it would be like. That's Nike's brand."

**Artists' Role in Brand Building**

Artists can play critical roles in building brands. In building brands (ranging from place locations, for companies, or for themselves), artists are often key players. Contributing to building brand equity, they create brand assets that help the brand differentiate itself from others. These brand assets can be physical, atmospheric, or intangible.

*Place Branding*

One area of branding in particular is place branding. Rural tourism is key to keeping the countryside alive in the changing urbanized world. Locations create a place

brand as a way to construct a brand identity that can be used to represent a set of elements which are unique regional features, natural resources and environments, the location's history, and the humanmade culture (Mittila, 2013). Leveraging the location's assets (such as regional features, natural resources, its history, and culture) is used to differentiate the location from other locations. The construction of a place identity is the starting point of place marketing; Mittila's (2013) case study focuses on artists who are one group of key stakeholders in the place brand building process.

Joining together with the other key stakeholders, artists seek after the "satisfaction of the needs of the target markets and the satisfaction from the purchases of goods and services from the enterprises and the residences, and the satisfaction of the expectations of potential target markets" (Mittila, 2013, p.144).

Mittila found that artists employ four different ways in contributing and building place brand identity: (1) stories of the artists' lives, history and achievements; (2) artifacts of the artists such as buildings made by the artists, museums and their collections of artwork; (3) atmosphere materialized through the artist's presence; and (4) taking on the role as entrepreneurs by selling goods made by the artist (Mittila, 2013).

The case study concludes that brand building is a team effort and requires multiple players to build a successful place brand identity. The joint effort involves different stakeholder groups, including the city authorities, residents and their association, as well as artists, craftsmen and other entrepreneurs working there (Mittila, 2013, p.149).

**Brand Building as an Artist in the Contemporary Art World**

In the excessive media culture and expansive art market, branding has become a functional strategy in the contemporary artists' emergence on the market. Artists create and establish a brand image for the use of promotion and marketing in the art world and the public world (Tomiuc, 2015). Contemporary artists are creating and building a brand image to gain a lot of media exposure, participate in major branded events, and interact with key players in the art world (Tomiuc, 2015).

Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons are examples of contemporary artists that have created and developed a celebrity level brand image through their usage of performance techniques to garner media attention. Warhol's artwork and himself were subjects of promotion and self-promotion. Koons, too, marketed himself as a brand as much as he did his artwork.

Tomiuc writes that promotion and branding are part of the contemporary artists' identity and that success on the art market can only be the result of a deliberate strategy involving collaboration with galleries, auction houses, art fairs, and collectors. These entities possess the huge financial capital and cultural reputation to elevate an artist and their artwork to a level of a celebrity status (Tomiuc, 2015).

The art system specifically for contemporary art is where the artwork's value is constructed, where "high prices are created by branded dealers promoting particular artists, by a few artists successfully promoting themselves and by brilliant marketing on the part of a branded auction house" (Tomiuc, 2015, p. 11).

The art system is a network consisting of key players and events that are critical to the construction of the value of the artists and their artwork. According to Raymonde Moulin's (2009) theory of the art system, there are key characters that play a role in the art world and are responsible for the financial and social mechanisms of the construction of value within contemporary art (Tomiuc, 2015).

*Galleries*

Galleries are pivotal players because they are the ones with the financial means and the cultural reputation to promote an artist or even an entire artistic movement within a short amount of time, and to mobilize on an international level, an important network of galleries operating in different private markets (Tomiuc, 2015, p. 6).

*Collectors*

Collectors serve the role as dealer, curator, and cultural agent. Collaborating with gallerists, they are the first buyers, purchasing early at relatively reduced prices and in large quantities. The collectors can present their collection to the public either by organizing exhibitions or by opening their own private museums. They assume the role of all the actors that belong to the art world and market, except that of the artist (Tomiuc, 2015, p. 7).

In conclusion, the art world is subject to the impulses and strategies of key players who have financial capital and cultural reputation. In order to interact with the network of key players in the art world, contemporary artists create a brand image that uses

performance techniques to attract the attention of media and news outlets. Through this network, the galleries, collectors and museums are able to elevate an artist's reputation and artwork to the level of a celebrity.

**Brand Equity in the Visual Arts**

Not only contemporary artists but visual artists can be seen through the lens of branding. "Brands, like artists, traffic in meanings and ideas" (Muniz et al., 2014, p. 69). Muniz et al. (2014) suggests that artists share similar tracks in building brand equity as a firm would for their product or service and that "successful artists are powerful brands" (p.68).

Artists, like brands, seek desired ends and means that will develop their brand equity. Crane (1989) states that artists are strategic actors pursuing individual and group ends. This parallels well firms that seek "desired ends and act in ways that they hope will achieve the desired ends" (Muniz et al., 2014, p. 69).

Picasso as a Brand Manager

Pablo Picasso is considered one of the most identifiable modern artists who created a world recognized brand that still remains successful even after his death in 1972. Picasso's strategy to build brand equity coincides with Aaker's model of building brand equity through developing associations, awareness, brand image and loyalty. Muniz explores Picasso as a brand manager and presents Picasso's keen understanding of how to build a successful brand (Muniz et al., 2014).

Picasso's strategy to building his brand equity into a world-recognized and posthumous lasting brand was developed through his ability to develop relationships, to create a top-of-mind awareness through his continuous change to new art styles, and to create a perceived image of luxury through his associations and leveraging of distribution. This ultimately led to a fan base loyal enough to support him well past his lifetime.

Picasso developed long-term relationships with influential individuals that allowed his brand to increase brand awareness. "Picasso developed relationships with critics and journalists,  seeking out exhibition opportunities"  (Muniz et al., 2014, p.68)

On multiple occasions, Picasso was able to develop top-of-mind brand awareness through his pioneering introduction to new art movements; his continuous movement and understanding of the market allowed him to maintain his position as an influential artist. One instance of this occurred when Picasso and the French painter Georges Braque pioneered and introduced Cubism. Picasso then progressed to become a celebrated visual artist in the  Surrealism movement of the 1920's (Muniz et. al, 2014).

Picasso created a perceived image of a luxury brand by exclusive distribution and by associating with "key producers and disseminators of culture" (Muniz et al., 2014, p.71). By building up his perceived image, awareness, and associations, he developed a brand continually strengthened by loyal supporters, art collectors, dealers, and galleries that would last to the present time.

Picasso protected his position through innovation of his art style. He recognized when the market began to saturate and imitate his style and used these signs as a cue to differentiate himself from his competition by creating a new line of products in the form of art style.

**Social Media as a Branding Tool for Artists**

Social media has become a very large force in and a powerful platform for the dissemination of visual information for artists and for the public. One cannot deny the power of social media as a branding tool for artists. It allows artists to share a photo or message with thousands of people in an instant. In Artsy.net, an online platform that sells and promotes art, Tollinson (2014) writes, "With 20 billion photos, and more than 200 million visitors per month, Instagram provides more space for art than any physical gallery."

Artists use social media in varying ways to build their brand. Some artists use social media to create an authentic online persona that creates a relatable connection with their audience (Goetzmann, 2018). Artists share a slice of their life by sharing snapshots of their life; funny things they see, their travels, or visits to a gallery. Creating relatable and genuine connections helps the artist's brand create a stronger and an authentic bond with their audience. Others use social media as a sales platform. Goetzmann (2018) writes about artist Ashley Longshore who received offers ranging from $6,000 to $40,000 for her work.

Social media is a powerful tool that is being leveraged more and more by artists to reach out to a global audience, create an authentic online persona by sharing slices of their life and develop relationships with existing and prospective patrons. Instagram, in particular, has provided artists with the ability to interact with other artists and with high-profile users, find new-art trends, and create a virtual gallery space that shows to a global audience without the burden of high real estate and maintenance costs (Goetzmann, 2018).

**Brand Equity in the Digital Arts**

Digital Art can be described as an art style that emulates traditional painting techniques using digital tools, including the computer, tablet, stylus, and art rendering software such as Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, or Corel Draw.

Art rendering software provides digital art painters with a different set of tools. By using these tools, digital art painters gain a different set of abilities that differentiate them from traditional painters. Notable and evident differences include the capabilities to undo and redo brush strokes, edit layers independently, resize the digital painting's size, color correct, and print.

One artist who utilized digital art to create his own world-recognized art brand is Shepard Fairey. The Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, an accredited art museum founded in 1936 that has exhibited world recognized artists such as Andy Warhol, recognized Shepard Fairey as one the most influential street artists working today. Fairey gained major attention through his iconic stencil of Andre the Giant with the slogan

OBEY that he wheat-pasted on public surfaces in major cities all around the world, as well as through his creation of the 2008 presidential HOPE Poster featuring 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama. Fairey has become an established artist whose artwork has exhibited at world-recognized galleries, such as the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery (Gambino, 2009).

Shepard Fairey demonstrates a keen understanding of branding through his strategic steps in building his brand. He built brand awareness through his guerilla printing tactics, developed a brand image centering around the themes of propaganda and activism, and developed relationships with world-recognized establishments. Fairey has evolved from an artist earning $4.25 from hand printing stickers for skateboards to becoming a successful world-recognized artist and entrepreneur, exhibiting at world famous galleries such as the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, creating a multimillion dollar apparel company OBEY Clothing, and creating a commercial graphic design agency Studio Number One.

To build awareness to his brand Fairey primarily used guerrilla tactics to put up his street art in highly visible places all over the world. Over time with the help of the internet, Fairey's art was seen by millions and his audience began to grow (Reid, 2012).

Fairey's portfolio primarily consists of artwork representing themes of propaganda, activism, and humanitarianism. Figure 3 is an example of his digital artwork.

Figure 3. Greater Than Fear, Shepard Fairey, 2017.

As a result of his consistent work in building his brand, his fans' brand loyalty shows through his success and support of Fairey's endeavors. Seth Godin thus describes the success of Fairey in developing a brand as: "He will post that he has a new limited-edition piece coming out and you can buy it for between $40 and $100. He has to change the time he posts because so many people want to buy it that he needs to make the time random. Many of the people who buy it turn around and resell it for $500 or $1,000 to a collector because everything is limited…" (Simone & Godin, 2012).

**Conclusion**

The impact of building brand equity is present in a variety of fields, ranging from sports apparel to the fine arts. Building brand equity plays a critical role in the success and longevity of a firm. Indicators of strong brand equity is seen in the creation of a loyal customer base, a world- recognized brand, a brand image with multiple positive

associations, and the strength to enhance the value of a product or service, well above its functional value. Evidence has shown that the artist's longevity and success in their career are attributed to how strong their brand was. Master artists of the past and artists from the present times create brand equity.

## Chapter 4

## Research Objectives

The research aimed to explore the conditions, context, strategies, actions, and results experienced by digital painters who have built a successful brand. Gathered data were coded and analyzed for repeated and similar patterns. Using Bernard's well-established procedures for theory development and Corbin and Strauss' (1990) Coding Paradigm, a theoretical framework in this context is established.

**Research Question**

1.  How are digital painters building their own brand equity in the era of social media; that is, what are the main factors shared among them?

## Chapter 5

## Methodology

The methodology seeks to provide a detailed and reproducible procedure for creating a theoretical framework explaining the phenomenon of building a successful brand as a digital painter using Bernard's Grounded Theory Approach. The methodology lists these criteria used to qualify the samples: how the researcher acquires the samples, how data were coded, and how the theoretical framework is created using the data obtained from the interviews conducted.

### The Criteria

The criteria in the current research were created in order to fulfill two objectives: (1) A professional digital painter with a successful brand could be identified, and (2) The criteria could be used and repeated by any researcher. These criteria were created:

1. The majority of artwork created were made using digital art rendering software such as Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, Corel Draw, or GIMP.

2. The painter's main source of income resulted from selling their artwork and/or services.

3. The selected painter completed contract work for a television/movie franchise or created renowned Intellectual Property owned by an entertainment media company.

4. The painter was affiliated with working for, or having created art work for, a television/movie franchise.

5. The selected painter and their work were recognized by at least one specific community. These specific communities could be: (1) a well-recognized corporation (such as George Lucas Studios, FOX, Disney, or Penguin Books), (2) the professional art industry, or (3) the general public.

6. The selected painter had patrons who either repeatedly purchased their artwork or repeatedly commissioned contract work for them.

**The Sample**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven professional digital painters. Interviews were conducted via phone calls, video phone calls or e-mail. In order to provide confidentiality and to protect the painter's reputation, the identities of all participants were coded. No demographic information was collected.

Purposive sampling was used to select the informants. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that deliberately selects an informant based on the qualities the informant possesses (Bernard, 2002). The technique is most effective "when one needs to study a certain cultural domain with knowledgeable experts within (Tongco,

2007, p. 147). The informants were chosen based on the established criteria. The criteria were set on what would make a good informant, and what would make a bad informant (Allen, 1971).

Tongco (2007) writes that the criteria can be shown to "resource people who can help find informants" (p. 151). The study's criteria was shown to a key informant, an expert in the field of digital painting who was then asked for recommendations based on the criteria. Key informants are described as "observant, reflective members of the community of interest who know much about the culture and are both able and willing to share their knowledge" (Bernard 2002).

The key informant used in the study to help recommend the digital painters was the current department chair of the college of entertainment arts at a State University. The researcher has an existing business professional relationship with the key informant, having collaborated in 2014 on gallery exhibits. The key informant holds the title of Corel Painter's Master Elite. He is an officially licensed artist of the Lucasfilm Franchise, and he is an active digital painter working on projects for the entertainment arts industry. The researcher reached out to the key informant, presented the criteria and asked him to recommend digital painters that fulfilled the criteria. A total of 12 digital painters were recommended and seven of the digital painters accepted and participated in the study.

**Interview Questions**

The interview questions below were created using Corbin and Strauss's (1990) Coding Paradigm as a theoretical basis. The questions were created with the purpose of being starting topics for the painters to begin discussing their experiences in building their brand. The open-ended manner of the questions was to allow artists to freely talk about their experiences. The questions were created as open questions in order for the painters to answer comfortably and in their vernacular, because branding terms are subject to being defined differently by each painter. The researcher and the coders took on the task of analyzing the painter's answers and translating them into data that would be used for the theoretical framework using Bernard's Grounded Theory Approach. Following is a list of the interview questions:

Interview Question 01: How did you get started in your professional art career?

Interview Question 02: What are some of the defining moments in your career so far?

Follow-up 2a: What were the events that really got your name out there?

Interview Question 03: How has social media affected your career as an artist?

Follow-up 3a: How do you use social media to connect with your fans?

Follow-up 3b: Have you faced any challenges with the upkeep of your following as you've grown?

Interview Question 04: What advice would you give to talented young artists that are struggling to build names for themselves?

Follow-up 4a: What should they prioritize (e.g. self-promotion, creation of new work, attending events, competitions.) ?

Interview Question 05: How do you protect your intellectual property in the digital era?

**The Coders**

In order to prevent any potential bias, the transcribed interview was coded by three trained coders; they worked independently to ensure that no influence would affect the coder's process. The raw data was read line by line, and any key phrases and important phrases were marked and given a conceptual label. The concepts were placed into five categories: conditions, context, strategies, actions, results. These sections were based on Corbin and Strauss (1990) Coding Paradigm.

**Coding**

Drawn from Bernard's Grounded Theory Approach three coding stages were undertaken in order for a theoretical framework to be created from the data. During Open Coding, the coders read the transcribed interviews line by line and marked/highlighted

any important and potentially useful phrases and quotes. The marked phrases and quotes were given a conceptual label.

The coders were instructed to read over the interviews line by line and highlight any important contextual clues that they felt related to the phenomenon of how the artist built up their successful brand. These clues were told that could be words, quotes, or paragraphs. Secondly the coders were instructed to individually look at each interview and gather any similar clues that they could place together into a larger category/group and to create a short/concise label/name that represents the group of gathered clues.

The coders then proceeded onto the second stage of coding, called Axial Coding, during which the coders grouped the conceptual labels that were created in the Open Coding stage and arranged them into the five categories from Strauss and Corbin's coding paradigm. The five categories are: conditions, context, strategies, actions and results.

After grouping the concepts into these categories, concepts within each category were compared with the other concepts in their respective categories to find a larger conceptual label that would unify all the concepts within each category.

During Selective Coding, the third and final stage of coding, themes were identified, and a core category/theme was chosen that represents the overarching theme of the phenomenon.

**Displaying and Validating the Model**

Graphical models were created that displayed the concepts categorized within Corbin and Strauss' coding paradigm, and another model displayed the theoretical framework. Exemplar quotes were used in the models to help readers quickly understand the concepts, categories and themes present.

**Validity**

The interpretation of a purposive sample is limited to the population under study. As result, more internal validity is provided than external validity (Bernard, 2002). This is acknowledged by the researcher. In order to validate over a greater realm or to form a theory, a study may be repeated for confirmation in a different population, still using a non-probability method (Bernard, 2002). Bernard (2013) also suggests that the model can be tested by checking the validity which entails presenting the model to a respondent familiar with the population and who fits the same respondent criteria. While the theoretical framework will only apply to the population under study, this method creates an opportunity for further study to apply the created theoretical framework on a randomly selected population that fits the study's criteria.

**Chapter 6**

**Results and Analysis**

In this chapter, the results created from the semi-structured interviews are presented. The data has been analyzed and interpreted using Bernard's Grounded Theory approach, and a theoretical framework was created using Bernard's approach.

In the following sections, the results of the three coding steps are presented: Open Coding, Axial Coding, and Selective Coding.

**Results**

During Open Coding, the coders created a total of 62 unique conceptual labels. The conceptual labels can be found in Figure 4.

Axial Coding was performed next as each coder independently placed their conceptual labels into Strauss and Corbin's coding paradigm (Condition, Context, Strategies, Action, and Results). Figure 4 shows each coder's conceptual labels placed in the coding paradigm.

| Coder#1 | Condition | Context | Strategies | Actions | Results |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A#1 | 1. Explore, experiment and take chances 2. Diversify your skills 3. Create brand recognition | 1. Attending Conventions and Shows 2. Introduced to the industry by a mentor | 1. Be social, network, build connections 2. Start with fan art and licensed work 3. Bring Value 4. Be diligent 5. Be confident and independent | 1. Be Genuine 2. Be persistent 3. Market yourself and have a business sense 4. Use the internet and social media | 1. Big Break 2. Accepting failure and moving on 3. Self Improvement |
| A#2 | 1. Explore, experiment and take chances 2. Have passion and enjoyment 3. Build brand recognition | 1. Attending Conventions and Shows | 1. Be social, build network and connections 2. Create fan art or licensed art 3. Be persistent | 1. Market yourself and have a business sense 2. Use internet and social media platforms 3. Build brand recognition | 1. Big Break 2. Accepting failure and moving on 3. Self Improvement |
| A#3 | 1. Diversify as an artist 2. Diligently improving self 3. Having passion and enjoyment 4. Build brand recognition | 1. Posting fan art online | 1. Create fan art or licensed art 2. Be social, building network and connections 3. Be persistent 4. Bring value | 1. Market yourself and have a business sense 2. Use internet and social media platforms | 1. Big Break 2. Self Improvement 3. Spend time wisely 4. Protect your work |
| A#4 | 1. Explore, experiment and take chances 2. Provide service and value 3. Have passion and enjoyment 4. Being confident | 1. Attending Conventions and Shows | 1. Be social, build network and connections 2. Be persistent 3. Be diligent 4. Bring value | 1. Market yourself and have a business sense 2. Use internet and social media platforms 3. Spend time wisely | 1. Self improvement 2. Protect artwork |
| A#5 | 1. Diversify 2. Have passion and enjoyment 3. Explore, experiment and take risks 4. Being confident 5. Build brand recognition | 1. Attending Conventions and Shows 2. Introduced to the industry by a mentor | 1. Be social, build network and connections 2. Pursue your goals 3. Provide service and value 4. Understand Industry Standards | 1. Market yourself and have a business sense 2. Use internet and social media | 1. Self improvement 2. Seek independence 3. Protect your work 4. Accept failure and move on |
| A#6 | 1. Diversify 2. Previous knowledge the product / industry | 1. Attending Conventions and Shows 2. Introduced to the industry by a mentor | 1. Network and Connect 2. Use Fan Art / Licensed Work | 1. Post on Social media and be seen by many | 1. Big Break |
| A#7 | 1. Experiment and take risks 2. Diversify | 1. Attending Conventions and Shows 2. Use fan art and license | 1. Passion and Enjoyment 2. Stay positive 3. Build Brand Recognition 4. Provide Value and Service | 1. Market yourself and have a business sense 2. Attend conventions and shows | 1. Protect Work 2. Diversify |

Figure 4. Coder #1 Axial Coding, Conceptual Labels in Coding Paradigm

| Coder#2 | Condition | Context | Strategies | Actions | Results |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A#1 | 1. Starting off with something you like | 1. Discovery through connections/relationships<br>2. Taking Risks | 1. Socializing with people with common interest<br>2. Establishing connections and relationships<br>3. Hunting down people for opportunity<br>4. Use tools at your disposal<br>5. Directly interact with fans/artists through social media | 1. Self Promotion<br>2. Taking Risks<br>3. Continually Trying<br>4. Utilize Resources<br>5. Be a genuine human being when interacting<br>6. Access Points of Contact | 1. Artist's A-ha moment<br>2. Big Break<br>3. The Brand can always expand |
| A#2 | 1. A turning points for the artist<br>2. Creating Art that is popular | 1. Hopping onto the moving train<br>2. Going Viral | 1. Creating Demand<br>2. Watching out for what kills an artist's vision<br>3. Watching out for what undermines reputation<br>4. Brand inspiration drawn from the artist's life | 1. Self Promotion on platforms<br>2. Create Access Points of Contact<br>3. Representing your artwork | 1. Exposure at convention<br>2. Exposure on social media<br>3. Having an online presence<br>4. Becoming Recognizable<br>5. High Demand |
| A#3 | 1. Sense of Drive<br>2. Frustration<br>3. Moment of Realization | 1. Posting content on platforms<br>2. Creating for the community | 1. Creating art that makes the viewers feel nostalgia and emotions<br>2. Build clientele through hard work | 1. Post on Social Media Platforms<br>2. Self Promotion<br>3. Create Access Points of Contact | 1. Caution towards Social Media<br>2. Recognition<br>3. Going Viral |
| A#4 | 1. Barrier in Talent<br>2. Moment of Realization<br>3. Career Path Choice | 1. Sense of Drive<br>2. Discovery through connections / relationships<br>3. Taking Risks<br>4. Focus on Talent | 1. Creating a brand like setting up a service<br>2. Provide value and service to people<br>3. Connecting with the community | 1. Promotion on platforms<br>2. Attend shows and conventions | 1. Security<br>2. Stability<br>3. Recognition<br>4. Drawbacks to popularity |
| A#5 | 1. Understanding the Brand and Artist's Value<br>2. Moment of Realization<br>3. Career Path Choice | 1. Self Publication<br>2. Attending Conventions and shows<br>3. Turning Point in Career | 1. Leverage social media to connect with world wide audience<br>2. Self promotion<br>3. Clear Mission Goal<br>4. Aim, Create and Maintain | 1. Collaboration<br>2. Utilize available resources<br>3. Utilize your community | 1. Independence<br>2. Fulfilment<br>3. On your own terms |
| A#6 | 1. Career Turning Point | 1. Attending Conventions and shows<br>2. Invited to events through referral | 1. Visibility<br>2. Self Promotion<br>3. Networking | 1. Post on Social Media Platforms | 1. Licensed deals<br>2. Exclusive offers |
| A#7 | 1. Early mentorship | 1. Attending Conventions and shows | 1. Leverage social media to connect with world wide audience<br>2. Relationship building<br>3. Preparation | 1. Create exposure<br>2. Create and share online<br>3. Build accessible and representable content<br>4. Create a access points of contact | 1. Licensed deals<br>2. Exclusive offers |

Figure 5. Coder #2 Axial Coding, Conceptual Labels in Coding Paradigm

| Coder#3 | Condition | Context | Strategies | Actions | Results |
|---------|-----------|---------|------------|---------|---------|
| A#1 | 1. Guidance from Life's Influencing Factors 2. Epiphones / Moments of realization | 1. Conventions and Shows | 1. Social Media (Instagram, Kickstarter, Facebook, myspace, reddit) 2. Conventions and Show attendance | 1. Methods of working (collaboration, experimentation, practices, types of jobs) 2. Networking (working with others, connection,,,) | 1. Hired work by Companies |
| A#2 | 1. Self Motivation 2. Early Influences | 1. Social Media Platforms 2. Conventions and Shows | 1. Create internet presence 2. Genuine relationships with community | 1. Representing your artwork 2. Venturing out and introducing new things to your community | 1. Going Viral 2. Recognizable Artwork 3. Audience building |
| A#3 | 1. Early Influencing Factors (Good/Bad) 2. Moments of Realization 3. Opposition and Conflict | 1. Personal drive to create something new for a community | 1. Create something new and valuable to the community | 1. Being active in a community 2. Staying Relevant 3. Venture out 4. Utilize multiple tools | 1. Many opportunities opening 2. Recognition 3. Legitimacy as a pro 4. High expectations from the online fanbase 5. Inability to protect artwork 6. Relationships and Networking with Companies |
| A#4 | 1. Early Influencing Factors (Good/Bad) 2. Moments of Realization 3. External Forces and circumstances | 1. Exploring and returning back to what you're good at 2. Attending Convention or show | 1. Be of service 2. Committing 3. Observing and learning to grow 4. Preparation | 1. Landing Pages (website, Instagram, Facebook) 2. Mentorship 3. Networking | 1. Freedom 2. Stability 3. Improvement 4. Loyal fanbase |
| A#5 | 1. Early Influencing Factors (Good/Bad) 2. Early belief in one's value 3. Mentorship | 1. Loss of ownership 2. Desire to make your own | 1. Create your own 2. Be your own boss 3. Take ownership in creating your exposure 4. Explore different avenues 5. Tap into world-wide community 6. Don't let fear get in the way 7. Create with purpose | 1. Self Publishing 2. Collaboration 3. Leveraging previous work back to your brand 4. Accept failure and Improve | 1. Independence 2. Ownership 3. Purpose |
| A#6 | 1. Chance and Serendipity | 1. Meeting with someone influential in the field 2. Invitation to an event | 1. Work with the company of a strong brand 2. Utilize social media platforms 3. Attend shows and conventions | 1. Posting on social media (Instagram, Pinterest, Facebook) 2. Create exposure | 1. Opportunities opening |
| A#7 | 1. Mentorship 2. Early Influencing Factors (Good/Bad) | 1. Invitation to an event | 1. Share work through social media | 1. Engage with audience 2. Bring your audience to your points of access 3. Have variety work 4. Create a strong body of work | 1. Commissions 2. New Relationships / Connections 3. Contract work |

Figure 6. Coder #3 Axial Coding, Conceptual Labels in Coding Paradigm

Selective coding was performed once Axial coding was completed. Within each category of the coding paradigm, all three coder's conceptual labels were compared in order for a theme to be created that best represented the group of similar conceptual labels. Figure 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 show the themes created and which conceptual labels were grouped within each theme. There were occurrences where more than one theme was created for each of the coding paradigm category.

**Analysis and Interpretation**

In this section, each of the themes and their respective grouped conceptual labels are presented and explained. An exemplary quote for each theme was created to help readers quickly understand the analysis of the results. An explanation is provided to how the conceptual labels related to the theme.

In the following pages multiple tables show a visual summation of all the concepts, categories and themes created from the code that emerged from the raw data of the semi-structure interviews. Each table, representing one of the categories from Corbin & Strauss Coding Paradigm,  shows the themes, conceptual labels and artist's occurrences. Within each theme name, the conceptual labels that were associated with the theme and which artist the conceptual label occurred are shown. The Themes represent the larger category created from grouping similar concepts together. Conceptual Labels are the codes created by the coders from the raw data of the semi-structured interviews. The Artists Occurrence column shows numbers that denote which artist the particular conceptual label occurred.

| Themes for Condition Category | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Theme Name** | **Conceptual Labels** | **Artists Occurrence** |
| **Exploration and Take Chances to Your Calling** | Chance and Serendipity | 6 |
| | Early Influences | 2,3,5,7 |
| | Moments of Realization | 1,3,4 |
| | External Forces and Circumstances | 3 |
| | Barrier in Talent | 4 |
| | A Turning Point | 1,6, |
| | Explore, Experiment and Take Chances | 1,2,4,5,7 |
| **Personal Drive** | Frustration | 2 |
| | Moment of Realization | 3,4,5 |
| | Having Passion and Enjoyment | 2,3,4,5 |
| | Starting Off With Something You Like | 1 |
| | Mentorship | 5,7 |
| | Diversify as an Artist | 1,3,5,6,7 |
| | Opposition and Conflict | 3 |

Figure 7. Selective Coding for Conditions Category

**Themes for Condition Category**

Among the interviews an exemplary quote was selected for each the themes created for each category of Strauss and Corbin's coding paradigm. The quote's purpose is to provide a quick and effective example to bring the reader up to speed to understand what the themes the means. The section after the exemplary quote provides an explanation of the relationship between the theme and the conceptual labels for that theme. that were coded from the important events and quotes found in the interviews.

*Theme: "Exploration and Take Chances to Your Calling"*

"The stranger I met at the coffee shop said that "I do these conventions, and I was at one last weekend. And people were selling their work and your work is any worse than theirs. It's good, you could make some money". At that time I was "eh, I don't really want to draw cartoons anymore, that's something I wanted to do in high school". Turns out the stranger was an author from out of country and that he's attending all these conventions. We talk for four hours and he seemed like a cool guy. He said, "I just fired my tour manager and don't have a ride to San Diego. If you drive me, we can go check out the scene together." We exchanged contact info and he said ok I'll see you next week."

*Explanation*

The exemplary quote describes an event which represents the theme found of *Exploration and Take Chances to Your Calling* with. The artist is presented with a chance and opportunity for exploration. It is common theme/occurrence shared among the artists that exploring and taking a chance/risk to their calling as an artist was found among many of these artists. Chance meetings, early influences, a turning point of their life, provided an opportunity that allowed these artists to capitalize on such an event. Along with the chance encounters and opportunities, a major force that drove the artist to take this chance was their own personal drive.

*Theme: "Personal Drive"*

"And that I didn't feel like I was learning anything. Yet I got A's, everybody praised my skill and the quality of the stuff, but internally I didn't feel like I had achieved and that successful. There was an internal shift that year that helped me sort of re-reformat my approach and my perspective on how to utilize my time in school. And from there, things started going good and my growth started to resume at a productive and positive pace."

*Explanation*

The exemplary quote describes an event where the artist forms a personal drive as a response to an event that they experienced.  It is a common theme for internal yearning and drive to be shared among the interviewed artists. The  personal drive varied in different forms for each artist; however, this drive was a large force that pushed the artist to pursue and develop their career and brand.

| Themes for Context Category | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Theme Name** | **Conceptual Labels** | **Artists Occurrence** |
| **Watering Holes** | Attending Conventions | 1,2,4,5,6,7 |
| | Posting Fan Art Online | 3 |
| | Personal Drive to Create Something New for a Community | 3 |
| | Use Fan Art and License | 7 |
| | Creating for a Community | 3 |
| **Meeting Influential People** | Introduced to the Industry by a Mentor | 1,5,7 |
| | Discovery Through Connections/Relationships | 1,4 |
| | Invitation to an Event | 6,7 |
| **Don't Fight Upstream** | Hopping Onto the Moving Train | 2 |
| | Going Viral | 2 |
| | Focus on Your Talent | 4 |
| | Self Publication | 5 |
| | Exploring and Returning Back to What You're Good at | 4 |
| | Loss of Ownership | 5 |
| | Desire to Make Your Own | 5 |
| | Turning Point | 5 |

Figure 8. Selective Coding for Context Category

**Themes for Context Category**

Among the interviews an exemplary quote was selected for the themes. The quotes

exemplify the important context with which the artists were surrounded in when building

their brand.

*Theme: "Watering Holes"*

"I didn't know anything about licensing, but I saw that all the biggest licensing companies would be at this convention and spending thousands of dollars on setting up booths trying to sell stuff. I took it with a different approach. I wanted to draw their licensed stuff. So I went to the show and went on foot and started making a bunch of appointments with these companies at the show. I'd show up, shoot the breeze with them, and I'd come out of the show with gigs to do licensed work for like Tarzan, Marilyn Monroe, and other properties."

*Explanation*

The digital painters find that identifying and attending gatherings with people with shared interests attributed greatly to their success in building their brand. These gatherings could be a physical location, an event, or a digital platform found online. These "Watering Holes" provided highly concentrated areas where the digital painter could interact with the community, promote themselves, and also interact with industry professionals and inquire about opportunities to collaborate. This leads into the fourth theme.

*Theme: Meeting Influential People*

"After 11 years of persistently pursuing these lead art directors, receiving feedback and improving, the art director said, 'Hey if you do this gig drawing these sketch cards, I

can get you in to do this big lithograph poster that you get to design for the first of its kind upcoming art show for a major Hollywood franchise.' That was like my big big break that set the ball in motion for the next decade and a half. It led me to working for a leading toy company designing packages and other licensors."

*Explanation*

Interactions with influential people were found to be a shared concept among many of the digital painters. These interactions differed from artist to artist, leading to different outcomes; however, these interactions heavily influenced the future of the artists and their success to building their brand. Examples of these interactions include being discovered by a director of a major film company, being invited by an art director to a prestigious invitation-only event, or having a chance meeting with an author influencing the digital painter to return and pursue art again.

*Theme: Don't Fight Upstream*

"After seven years, I started thinking there're probably things I'm good at that other people can't do. So why am I fighting the stream, for what reason?... I feel the world would work so much faster, if we forgot about ourselves a little bit and thought about other people and how to help them."

*Explanation*

Suddenly losing their job and returning to the arts after a seven-year hiatus and responding to going viral online by creating a storefront to prepare for the next time were some events that artists experienced related to this theme. Many artists share the experiences of following their internal compass, taking chances, and not resisting their calling to utilize their talents in the way they felt it was best. This desire to follow through with their desires contributed their success.

| Themes for Strategies Category | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Theme Name** | **Theme Name** | **Theme Name** |
| **Foster Your Network** | Be Social, Network, Build Connection | 1,2,3,4,5,6,7 |
| | Hunting Down People for Opportunity | 1 |
| | Leveraging Social Media to Connect with Your Audience | 1,2,5,6,7 |
| | Self Promotion | 5,7 |
| | Explore Different Avenues | 5 |
| **Tenacious Value** | Be Diligent | 1,4 |
| | Bring Value | 1,4,5,7 |
| | Be Persistent | 2,3,4 |
| | Pursue Your Goals | 5 |
| | Provide Service and Value | 4,5 |
| | Utilize Social Media | 1,5,6,7 |
| | Aim, Create, Maintain | 5 |
| | Clear Mission Goal | 5 |
| | Visibility | 6 |
| | Preparation | 4 |
| | Take Ownership in Creating Your Own Exposure | 5 |
| | Don't Let Fear Get in the Way | 5 |
| | Observing and Learning | 4 |
| | Committing | 4 |

Figure 9. Selective Coding for Strategies Category

**Themes for Strategies Category**

Among the interviews an exemplary quote was selected for each theme in the Strategies

category. The quotes exemplify the plan of action taken by the artists.

*Theme: Foster your network*

"Some people who have the means of launching your career could be just an Average Joe, or the person that is in control is one contact away and you just so happened to impress the wife, the brother, or even the child of the client. Plant your seeds in different gardens and see where they sprout."

*Explanation*

A shared experience by the digital painters emphasized the importance of how their relations and connections with people attributed to their success. These relationships were fostered actively by searching for specific industry professionals or were passively fostered through social media.

*Theme: Tenacious Value*

"Yeah, man. It was basically being politely persistent and not taking 'No' for an answer for 10 years. And just if not this year maybe next year, maybe we can pursue that let me know what to alter what to change for next year. It was a decade of persistently trying just to get your foot in the door."

*Explanation*

Many of the artists presented a shared quality of tenacity in pursuing their goals, and had the mindset of improvement and preparing for the next opportunity, when faced with rejection or failure.

| Themes for Action Category | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Theme Name** | **Conceptual Labels** | **Artists Occurrence** |
| **Genuine Relations** | Be Genuine | 1 |
| | Be Persistent | 1 |
| | Use Internet and Social Media Platforms | 1,2,3,4,5,6 |
| | Attend Shows and Conventions | 4,7 |
| | Collaboration | 1,5 |
| **Self Promotion** | Market Yourself & Have a Business Sense | 1,2,3,4,5,7 |
| | Post on Social Media Platforms | 1,2,3,4,5,6 |
| | Access points of contact | 1,2,3,7 |
| | Utilize your resources | 1,3 |
| | Take risks | 1 |
| | Represent your artwork | 2 |
| | Have a variety of work | 7 |
| | Create a strong body of work | 7 |
| | Build brand recognition | 2 |

Figure 10. Selective Coding for Action Category

**Themes for Action Category**

Among the interviews an exemplary quote was selected for each theme in the Action category. The quotes exemplify the actions and steps taken by the artist to build their brand.

*Theme: Genuine Relations*

"I feel it's a huge component to success; being able to deal with people on a real realistic level and not having hidden expectations; that's where a lot of folks get into problems, they won't really have a true friendship or working relationship because they're so

57

focused on what they can get. Don't get me wrong it's in the back of my mind too, but it's kinda cool to get to know the person."

*Explanation*

Along with the fostering of their network, creating a genuine and honest relationship with their community, clients, and peers was a shared theme among the artists. Artists used the internet, social media platforms, and attending shows to come in contact with these people.

*Theme: Self Promotion*

"Absolutely. The publishers, usually they'll just give you an advance, yet they still want you to promote it more than them.  You gotta be on social media, go to conventions, you gotta be promoting it all the time.  And then you get capped on the amount of money you can get, and it's just like, 'Why am I gonna give it all to you?  It's my book!' You know so when you do it yourself, and you know that you have to do it anyway, and promote anyway, and share it on social media and do all that."

*Explanation*

Utilizing the available resources of social media and the internet for self-promotion have become even easier, accessible, and recommended. Artists note that self-promoting allows direct connections and control over their decision making. Artists are able to directly interact with their clients, and they are also able to be fully in control of all aspects of the marketing process.

| Themes for Results Category | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Theme Name** | **Conceptual Labels** | **Artists Occurrence** |
| **The Brand Can Always Expand** | Self-Improvement | 1,2,3,4,5 |
| | Accepting failure and moving on | 1,2,5 |
| | Big Break | 1,2,3,6 |
| | Security | 4 |
| | Licensed deals | 7 |
| | Legitimacy as a professional | 3 |
| | Going viral | 2,3 |
| | Independence | 5 |
| | Fulfillment | 5 |
| | Becoming Recognizable | 2 |
| **Cautions and Drawbacks** | Protection of artwork | 3,4,5,7 |
| | Drawbacks to popularity | 4 |
| | Cautions toward social media | 3 |

Figure 11. Selective Coding for Results Category

**Themes for Results Category**

Among the interviews an exemplary quote was selected for each theme in the Results category. The quotes exemplify the results by the actions taken by the artist.

*Theme: The Brand Can Always Expand*

"(Jokingly) oh I'm a greedy son-of-a-gun. I want it all haha. I want to plaster my art on as many things as possible. I mean there's so many cool ways out there. I started noticing when I would walk down the aisle and would see so many applications and it really turned my ears on. Whether it was magazines, or video game cover, t-shirts.

There's art everywhere! Somebodies gotta make art for this and wouldn't it be cool if I did something. It'd be pretty cool to see my stuff on this or on that."

*Explanation*

The theme of The Brand Can Always Expand relates to the theme that there is always room for the brand to improve and grow, even after reaching commercial success and brand success. Artists shared similar experiences and sentiment where they sought after more and different ways to diversify their brand, whether it was to branch out into a new industry or to find new products on which put their artwork onto.

*Theme: Cautions and Drawbacks*

"I've had my artwork stolen and resold so many times. It is what it is. Trying to stop it is too exhausting and counterproductive. I'd rather work on spending my life working on the next art than try to save the couple hundred bucks that these people are profiting off my low-res artwork. I've tried watermark… Aside from printers no one else has access to my high-res files…Another way is to protect it, simply by not releasing it online haha."

*Explanation*

The theme of Cautions and Drawbacks relates to the results of developing a brand during the digital social media generation. Artists shared their costly difficulties of protecting their published digital artwork being stolen and used without permission. Other cautions related to growing in popularity too quickly its effect to freely create.

60

**Theoretical Framework**

Figure 5 presents the theoretical framework representing the categories, themes and core theme discovered from the data gathered from the interviews, using Bernard's Grounded Theory approach.

| Theoretical Framework | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Categories** | **Themes** | **Core Theme** |
| Condition | 1. Exploration and Take Chances to your calling<br>2. Personal Drive | Identity, Prosperity, and Longevity |
| Context | 1. Watering Holes<br>2. Meeting Influential People<br>3. Don't fight upstream" | |
| Strategies | 1. Foster your network<br>2. Tenacious Value | |
| Action | 1. Genuine Relations<br>2. Self-Promotion | |
| Results | 1. The Brand Can Always Expand<br>2. Cautions and Drawbacks | |

Figure 12. Theoretical Framework

The figure above provides a visual framework that displays the conditions which the artists was in when building their brand, the context which lead to their strategies of building their brand, into the actions they took and the results of their actions. The core theme of Identity, Prosperity, and Longevity represents the encompassing theme of all the themes grounded by the analysis.

## Chapter 7

## Summary and Conclusions

The study suggests that digital painters share similar occurrences and experiences related to building a successful brand. Using Bernard's Grounded Theory approach and Corbin and Strauss's Grounded Theory Coding Paradigm, a theoretical framework was created using the coded and analyzed data from the semi-structured interviews. The conditions to identify professional digital artists were presented to a respondents who were a member well versed in the field. Through purposive sampling 12 digital artists were identified, and of these seven digital painters accepted and were interviewed through phone or video call. The analysis was conducted with three hired coders. After analyzing the seven semi-structured interviews, the coders identified 62 conceptual labels encompassed in, ten major themes that coalesced into one core theme. The major themes were: Exploration and Take Chances to Your Calling, Personal Drive, Watering Holes, Meeting Influential People, Resisting and Fighting Upstream, Fostering Your Network, Tenacious Value, Genuine Relations, Self-Promotion, The Brand Can Always Expand. The core theme created was "Identity, Prosperity, and Longevity".

**Limitation of the Study**

The number of artists that could be reached was limited due to the limited time and access to contact them. This limitation suggests opportunity for future research involving more interviews with more digital artists can be interviewed, and the theoretical framework that was created can be additionally tested for validity.

**Implications for the Field**

The study suggests that there are common and repeated themes that occur among digital painters who have built a successful brand. These theme's elements may be described differently by each individual but upon analysis these theme's elements share similarities.

**Opportunities for Future Research**

There are opportunities for future research where the study can be applied in related creative fields. Along with digital painters, the theoretical framework can be used for other professions in the creative fields such as design, the graphic arts, fashion, musicians. Educators in the creative field can use the common themes shared among these successful digital painters to familiarize students in the creative field on how to create a successful brand. In addition, future researchers can conduct a cross sectional quantitative study and design a test instrument to test the framework and measure it.

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