Cultural & Creative entrepreneurs, Identity and the COVID-19 Pandemic

An exploratory analysis of identity work with consideration of digital media in an unprecedented context

Student Name: Suzanne Ros
Student Number: 528310

Supervisor: Dr. Sven Ove-Horst

Media & Creative Industries
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master Thesis
June 2021

Cultural & Creative entrepreneurs, Identity and the COVID-19 Pandemic

An exploratory analysis of identity work with consideration of digital media in an unprecedented context

ABSTRACT

The global COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented changes in all spheres of life. Looking at the Netherlands, the cultural and creative industries operate as one of the top sectors, contributing significant value to society, economy and culture. Noting how the cultural and creative industries comprise primarily of entrepreneurs and SMEs, concerns arise about how these entrepreneurs have been managing in disruptive times. This study presents findings resulting from a thematic analysis conducted on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 11 cultural and creative entrepreneurs in the Netherlands. Particular attention is set on how digital media is leveraged for managing tensions and communicating about their sense of self. In order achieve this, the concept of identity work is adopted, which is a thriving, but under researched area - especially in relation to digital media use. Where identity work is context dependent, and digital media is found to make entrepreneurial activities easier and more efficient, this research contributes to a unique research field. Hence, the research question is presented as: *What kind of identity tensions have creative and cultural entrepreneurs experienced during this time of COVID-19, and how do they manage these identity tensions as part of their entrepreneurial identity work through digital media?* The findings of this study contribute to, and expand upon limited extant scholarship relating to identity work and digital media, further advancing new avenues for continuation of research. The findings of this research underscore the importance of context as a point of reflection, self-assessment and entrepreneurial development contributing to identity work. Due to a loss of context, compensation was found through digital media, specifically Instagram. The COVID-19 pandemic can be seen as a catalyst of change in advancing digital capabilities, yet also contributing to the complexity of identity in such that extreme or heavy digital dependencies lead to tensions in media management and identity work.

KEYWORDS: *Identity work, cultural & creative entrepreneurship, COVID-19, context, identity tensions*

Table of Contents

Introduction

The Netherlands is a nation that fosters entrepreneurship (Trouw, 2021). This drive is evident in creative and cultural entrepreneurship in the Netherlands, which is, since recently, considered one of the top sectors (Grotenhuis et al., 2020). Since 2005 the Minister of Economic Affairs explicitly nurtures the infrastructure of the creative sector. As a result, the cultural and creative industries (CCI) is now one of the top sectors due to its potential for the future of society and its strong relation to innovation that attracts significant research interest (Bhansing et al., 2020; Nielsen et al., 2018; Rae, 2014). In 2020, 2-3% of the Dutch GNP was represented by the CCI, making it the smallest top sector. In spite of this, the industry represented 150,000 companies, which in turn made it the largest in terms of the number of companies operating in the sector (Grotenhuis et al., 2020). However, this large number of companies leads to a complexity of business models and different ways of how entrepreneurs develop, ranging from independent artists to owners of businesses operating across the globe (Björkegren, 1996). Broadly speaking, the creative environment in the Netherlands can be defined as "dynamic and complex" (Küttim et al., 2011, p. 376). It is characterized by "rapid technological and social change, extreme competition, and transient relationships with customers" (Rae, 2014, p.493). Therefore creative and cultural entrepreneurs need to be dynamic and flexible in order to cope with the context in which they operate.

Despite these inherent struggles and tensions, COVID-19 has created unprecedented challenges for entrepreneurs operating in the CCI. Where the sector held its advantages in being flexible, small-scaled, and innovative, the uncertainty of COVID-19 brought many of the related entrepreneurs in peril. Many creative and cultural entrepreneurs are often hired for assignments by big companies, but as a result of COVID-19, these assignments were the first to be cut (Grotenhuis et al., 2020). To illustrate, 48,000 of the 100,000 jobs in the event sector were at stake as a result of the pandemic in the Netherlands (GESAC & EY, 2021; Grotenhuis et al., 2020). On European scale, the CCI made average losses of over 30% in revenue, making it the most impacted sector in the EU (GESAC & EY, 2021).

Surprisingly, and despite these harsh effects of the pandemic, many entrepreneurs operating in the CCI have managed to stay operational. But how? What made these entrepreneurs respond well? Towards this aim, this research focuses on better understanding how these entrepreneurs managed tensions brought by the pandemic. These tensions also connect with broader challenges of digitization, which have changed the general landscape of the CCI. Specifically digital media have become more integrated into the work of entrepreneurs (Achtenhagen, 2017; Elia et al., 2020; Horst et al., 2019; Nambisan, 2017; Olenrewaju et al., 2020; Sahut et al., 2019; Steininger, 2018). For example, digital tools allow entrepreneurs to organize better, connect with audiences and reduce the overall entry-level barriers to starting a successful venture (Horst et al., 2019; Steininger, 2018). Prominent digital tools leveraged by nascent and existing entrepreneurs are social media (Caliandro and Graham, 2020; Elia et al., 2020; Horst et al., 2019; Olenrewaju et al., 2020; Sahut et al., 2019).

To name a few, entrepreneurs today have been found to use (a combination of) Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube as tools for communicating and connecting with others, access to information, as a marketing channel and as a source for (crowd)funding (Olenrewaju et al., 2020). However, the way in which these tools work to facilitate the development of individual entrepreneurs is not sufficiently understood. This brings us to the need to understand the use of digital and social media more (Caliandro & Graham, 2020). Specifically, the way in which entrepreneurs develop themselves through social media needs further investigation (Horst & Hitters, 2020; Horst et al., 2019). In order to do so, the concept of identity work can be used for understanding the use and challenges of digital and social media and how entrepreneurs develop themselves in relation to these (Brown & Coupland, 2015; Coupland & Brown, 2012; Nielsen et al., 2018; Rae, 2014; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). This brings us to the theoretical relevance related to this study.

1.1. Scientific relevance and theoretical gap

To understand the challenges and developments creative and cultural entrepreneurs experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, we focus on how entrepreneurs use digital media for managing and communicating about their sense of self, how they develop in relation to this communication, and how this shapes their entrepreneurial journey. In order to achieve this, this research draws on the conception of "identity work" (Brown, 2017; Horst et al., 2019; Winkler, 2016). Specifically, the focus will be on the management of tensions and challenges that are part of this identity work as cultural and creative entrepreneurs, which is a thriving, but under-researched area (Beech et al., 2012; Manto et al., 2010; Pradies et al., 2021; van Grinsven et al., 2019). Therefore, it becomes important to learn more about the tensions they experience, and how they manage these, in order to establish a deeper understanding of identity work, and in turn understand more about the developments of entrepreneurs in media contexts.

Where several interpretations and definitions have been given to identity work, a general consensus among scholars is found in such that the concept relates to how people see themselves, how they and others contribute to the conception of self through communicative interaction, which remains an ongoing process of social interaction and practical conduct (Coupland & Brown, 2012; Horst et al., 2019; Nielsen et al., 2018; Rae, 2014; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Identity becomes a process and flow that is not static but may have recurring practices and enduring elements (Coupland & Brown, 2012; Fachin & Langley, 2017). Through this understanding, identity becomes something that is highly context-dependent, and a product of continuous identity work. Therefore, identity is not singular, but rather multifaceted, complex, idiosyncratic and sometimes extremely fluid (Coupland & Brown, 2012; Horst et al., 2019). These tendencies are proliferating and shaped by the affordances of different social media platforms. (Bhansing et al., 2020; Horst & Hitters, 2020; Horst et al., 2019).

Building upon tensions in identity work, there appears to be a lack of agreement among scholars about what an identity tension or threat entails (Coupland & Brown, 2012), yet a general line of

reasoning states that identity tensions can be experienced from within, or from the surrounding context (Beech et al., 2012; Bahnsing et al., 2020; Horst et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2018; Porforio et al., 2016; Price et al., 2017).

Taking note of the considerable impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the working context of individuals and entrepreneurs worldwide, it can be concluded that the working context has experienced significant struggles and tensions in relation to managing these struggles (Pradies et al., 2021). Together with the complexity of identity work, its relation to the individual and the context, this research aims to contribute to our understanding of identity work, specifically the management of tensions as part of this identity work, by investigating the behavior of CCI entrepreneurs and their reflections about their development.

Together with the novel context, understanding how these entrepreneurs adopt and use digital media to manage tensions will expand on the existing literature relating to digital media and its capabilities, perhaps as a strategy of risk management in a crisis context (Horst & Hitters, 2020; Steininger, 2018). Furthermore, Caliandro and Graham (2020) describe social media to be an understudied phenomenon in terms of the significant impact it has on people's lives and therefore deserves "rigorous academic attention" (2020, p.2). Hence, the research question is constructed as follows:

What kind of identity tensions have creative and cultural entrepreneurs experienced during this time of COVID, and how do they manage these identity tensions as part of their entrepreneurial identity work through digital media?

1.2. Societal relevance

For scholars and individuals agreement is found in such that the impact of COVID-19 has not been insignificant (Jones et al., 2021; Pradies et al., 2021). While scientists have clarified that pandemics are a part of life, and that the COVID-19 pandemic was not the first (Deutsche Welle, 2020), we can concur that the impact of the pandemic has been unprecedented. Seen as a consequence of our fast-paced globalized world, the spread of disease is almost uncontrollable, leading to a worst-case scenario; a global pandemic (Antràs et al., 2020).

Because of the immense impact the pandemic has had on society and economy (Jones et al., 2021; Pradies et al., 2021), it is important to study the context and its effects on entrepreneurs in order to develop a deeper understanding of their experiences and needs. Taking note of the crucial role entrepreneurs play on the individual and collective level (O'Brien & Hamburg, 2019), it is important to study entrepreneurs in terms of economic and social struggles to understand how they manage tensions and continue to develop. As a result, a broadening in the understanding of tensions and struggles entrepreneurs face will be developed. This in turn can support scholars specializing in

identity work of cultural and creative entrepreneurs, along with extending insight to academics and individuals whom support entrepreneurs.

1.3. Chapter outline

In order to investigate the tensions and struggles creative and cultural entrepreneurs have faced in terms of their identity and development over the last year, this paper is divided into six chapters. Following the current introduction, the second chapter addresses extant scholarship relating to the topic under study. Particularly paying attention to the topic of identity work and how this will be employed in such to understand the struggles cultural and creative entrepreneurs have experienced in relation to their identity work, and how digital media has offered new avenues for development. Following, the third chapter lays the foundation of the methodological choices for this research, ensuring to adopt rigor throughout the research process. The fourth chapter presents the results of the analysis, supported by quotes from the entrepreneurs. Then, chapter five discusses the findings, elaborating on the most relevant aspects of the analysis in such to answer the research question. Lastly, chapter six presents the conclusion of this study along with addressing the limitations and avenues for future research.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter presents the literature review which lays the foundation for the theoretical standpoint of this research. In this chapter, core concepts relating to the research question will be elaborated upon through addressing extant scholarship. In this, a critical perspective will be applied. Core concepts such as creative and cultural entrepreneurship will be introduced, along with assessment of identity work and its relation to context and social media. Specifically, the framework builds towards an understanding concerning struggles in identity work with a consideration of the context brought by COVID.

Noteworthy is how the most of the scholarship relating to the key concepts in this study are grounded in western perspectives. This means, the focus is on the concepts and ideas that are rooted in certain cultural understandings, economic systems, and societal infrastructures of the West. However, for this research, this is acceptable because the focus is on entrepreneurs developing in the Netherlands.

2.1. Conceptualising entrepreneurship and its different forms

In our contemporary society, entrepreneurship has become increasingly difficult to define. Especially in the past decade, entrepreneurial activities have experienced rapid change (Achtenhagen, 2008; Horst et al., 2019; O'Brien & Hamburg, 2019). A driver for this change has been the exponential development in technology, contributing to fast paced digitisation and globalisation. As a result, entrepreneurial roles and activities have diversified and become increasingly complex (Achtenhagen, 2008; Horst et al., 2019; Nambisan, 2017; O'Brien & Hamburg, 2019).

To theorize and define entrepreneurship, the longstanding definition formed by Schumpeter (1947), albeit a broad definition, is still relevant today (Cunningham & Lischeron, 1991; Nielsen et al., 2018). For him, entrepreneurship is seen as: "the doing of new things or the doing of things that are already being done in a new way" (p. 151). Building upon this definition, contemporary scholars have added dimensions such as adding digital value and incorporating digital technologies into the entrepreneurial process (Achtenhagen, 2017; Nambisan, 2017; Sahut et al., 2019). As a result, contemporary entrepreneurship is studied (often) by default in relation to new media and digital technologies (Achtenhagen, 2017; Horst et al., 2019). This shows that a general shift has occurred away from entrepreneurship only being studies in the business realm, but opening up towards an appreciation of contemporary entrepreneurship being "embedded in all disciplines and levels of education" (O'Brien & Hamburg, 2019, p.534). As a result, entrepreneurship is considered a competency encompassing a variety of skills which contributes considerably to local economies and innovation (O'Brien & Hamburg, 2019)

The following subsections will focus on the entrepreneurial types relevant for this study. First entrepreneurs will be defined in relation to the cultural and creative industries. Followed by a subsection on digital entrepreneurship.

2.1.1. Cultural and creative industries and their related entrepreneurs

Since some time, the cultural and the creative industries (CCI) has been addressed synonymously in recent scholarship (Bhansing et al., 2020; Grotenhuis et al., 2020; Rae, 2014; Werthes et al., 2017). Therefore, this study will follow that approach and use cultural and creative entrepreneurship interchangeably.

Bujor and Avasilcai (2014) describe the CCI to "combine the creation, production and commercialization of creative elements and are becoming increasingly important components of our contemporary world" (p. 151). In other words, cultural and creative entrepreneurs value creativity and improving the world in one way or another through their product or service. This makes them unique members of society and part of an industry that is fragmented into a large number of small and medium enterprises operating at the local level. It suggests that a big portion of creative entrepreneurs are self-employed or operating as a small business (Küttim et al., 2011; Rae, 2014). This demonstrates an intimate role of the entrepreneurs in society in relation to the local context and calls for specification in context when studying within the CCI realm. As a result, the cultural and creative industries have become an established economic sector due to its "positive impact on the economy and employment" (Chapain et al., 2018, p.7).

Taking note of the context of the CCI, scholars have labelled the creative environment as dynamic and complex (Küttim et al., 2011), due to rapid development in technology and society together with high levels of competition and inconsistencies in modes of work, these entrepreneurs have been found to struggle in managing these tensions (Bujor & Avasilcai, 2014). It is important to keep these aspects in mind when developing the concept of identity work, because the contexts have a considerable influence on the identity development of cultural and creative entrepreneurs (Bhansing et al., 2020; Horst et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2018; Porforio et al., 2016; Price et al., 2017; Rae, 2014; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

Similarly, Hesmondhalgh's (2008) calls for merging the cultural and creative industries when conceptualising creativity. Where the output of the related entrepreneurs relates mostly to symbolic goods, the need for specification in relation to what 'creativity' means is necessary. In their article, Bujor and Avasilcai (2014) distinguish between four types of creative entrepreneurs, being, creative service providers, creative content producers, creative experience producers and creative originals producers (see table 2.1.2).

Table 2.1.2

Table from Bujor and Avasilcai (2014) defining four types of creative entrepreneur and their characteristics

Creative Entrepreneurs	Creative Domains	Main Characteristics
Creative service providers entrepreneurs	Advertising agencies, Design consultancies, Architecture practice, New Media Agencies	Provide creative services for clients Direct interaction with user's demand Earn revenues Exchange of their time for Intellectual Property products Highly influenced by technology and digitization Mostly project-based Mostly private or self-financing
Creative content producers entrepreneurs	Film, television and theatre production companies Computer and game development studios, Music Labels Books and magazine publishers Fashion designers	Producers of Intellectual Products Develop creative projects Mostly project-by-project based Upfront capital investment Highly influenced by digitization, mostly for "creation" and user-interaction Mix of self-financed and subsidized sectors (audiovisual and games, books) Experience threats of piracy from digital market and peer to peer exchange
Creative experience providers entrepreneurs	Theatre, opera and dance production companies Live music organizers and promoters Live spectators sport Festivals Cultural institutions Tourist promotions	Sell the right for consumers (no initial ownership of work) Frequently pay for other's copyright Mostly on contract basis Digitization is mostly for dissemination and as communication tools
Creative originals producers entrepreneurs	Visual arts Crafts Designer-makers Antiques	Mostly subsidized and concerned by the cultural value of their work Not mass-produced, but usually one-off or in-limited products and services Mostly on contract basis Artisan-based rather than industrialized

These definitions will be used throughout this research in a reflective manner and used as a reference in considering different creative entrepreneurs and their related characteristics.

2.1.3. Digital entrepreneurship

Taking note of how contemporary entrepreneurship is most often studied in relation to new media and new technologies (Achtenhagen, 2008; Horst et al., 2019; Nambisan, 2017; O'Brien & Hamburg, 2019), it is imperative to take note of scholarship relating to digital entrepreneurship. In short, the key differences between traditional entrepreneurship and digital entrepreneurship are the ease of entry, low capital requirements, accessibility to global markets and low operational costs (Bahcecik et al., 2019; Hull et al., 2007; Nambisan, 2017; Sahut et al., 2019; Steininger, 2018). Furthermore, digital technologies have created a new channel by which entrepreneurs can have close contact with their target audience and/or customers (Bahcecik et al., 2019; Horst & Hitters, 2020; Horst et al., 2019). Furthermore, the ecosystem in which digital entrepreneurs find themselves in have been outlined by Elia et al. (2019) to be a 'collective intelligence system' fostering interaction between people and machines. These aspects sensitise us that digital technologies make entrepreneurial activities, or starting an entrepreneurial venture more efficient and easier (Bahcecik et al., 2019; Elia et al., 2020; Sahut et al., 2019).

However, this new wave of entrepreneurship brings new challenges. Where Nambisan (2017) showed that the structure and uncertainties around entrepreneurship have changed as a result of digital tools. Thus means, entrepreneurs operating digitally are found to be caught in a context of heightened insecurity, and are less contextually bound (Elia et al., 2020). As a result, entrepreneurs

need to be resilient and flexible to succeed (O'Brien & Hamburg, 2019), for example through flexible work-contexts and global virtual teams (Hull et al., 2007).

Scholars in the field of digital entrepreneurship claim it is reductionist to consider digital entrepreneurship as a new 'breed' of entrepreneur (Horst et al., 2019; Sahut et al., 2019), rather, it has become inconceivable to study contemporary entrepreneurs without regard of digital technologies (Horst et al., 2019). To categorise the extent to which an entrepreneur operates digitally, Hull et al. (2007) developed a framework by which identification of the extent of digital use is incorporated into the entrepreneurial activities can be identified (Table 2.1.3). Digital entrepreneurship can range from mild, moderate, to extreme. Together with the framework on creative entrepreneurs by Bujor and Avasilcai (2014) (Table 2.1.2), the entrepreneurs for this study will be assessed and categorised, by which associated characteristics can support in-depth and critical analysis.

Table 2.1.3

Table from Hull et al., (2007) defining four three degrees of digital entrepreneurship

	Category of digital entrepreneurship		
Activity	*Mild*	*Moderate*	*Extreme*
Marketing	Website as supplement	Digital marketing is primary mode	Digital marketing is only mode
Sales	Product may be available for sale digitally	Product can be purchased digitally, possibly exclusively	Product is only available for sale digitally
Product (good or service)	Product is non-digital	Product may or may not be digital	Product is digital
Distribution	Product is delivered by physical means	Product may be delivered physically or digitally	Product is delivered digitally
Stakeholder management	Traditional interactions, may include e-mail	Significant levels of digital interactions; traditional interactions also common	Digital interactions are primary; traditional interactions seldom or never occur
Operations	Primarily physical location(s), traditional interactions, may include some virtual team interaction	Primarily physical location(s), traditional interactions, probably includes some virtual team interaction	Strong virtual presence, physical location and traditional interactions possible but not required

Essentially, where digital entrepreneurship is labelled as "the reconciliation of traditional entrepreneurship with the new way of creating and doing business in the digital era" (Le Dinh et al., 2018, p.1 in Sahut et al., 2019). For this research, a synthesis of definitions will be used to outline the entrepreneur relevant for this study by combining cultural, creative and digital entrepreneurship. Where cultural and creative entrepreneurs value creativity and improving the world in one way or another through their product or service, their ways of working are not exclusively online. Thus, the inclusion of the of digital entrepreneurship realm will be added to address and understand how they

make use of digital tools and platforms in the running of their business and in relation to their identity and identity work in the novel context brought by COVID.

2.2. Similarities in entrepreneurship and its current challenges

As mentioned earlier, entrepreneurs operating in the CCI work closely with their local context. In other words, the context in which the entrepreneur is active shapes the entrepreneur, and the entrepreneur shapes their surrounding context (Küttim et al., 2011). Taking note of the novel conditions brought by the COVID-19 pandemic over the past year entrepreneurs faced many challenges, especially CC entrepreneurs (Grotenhuis et al., 2020). Thus, it is important to study the context along with the entrepreneurs in this study.

To appreciate the complexities as well as inherent and new challenges of the context of CC entrepreneurs an approach for studying tensions in organizational contexts called "paradox theory" can be used (Schad et al., 2016). A paradox can be defined as "contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time" (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 382). This definition addresses two aspects of paradox, being, underlying tensions, and responses that grasp tensions simultaneously. This approach is valuable for this study as it sees tensions as emerging from the context in which the entrepreneur is active and sees the individual as an active sense maker (Pradies et al., 2021). This conception can allow addressing how an entrepreneur perceives, frames, feels and reasons about tensions experienced in relation to the challenges brought by the pandemic (Pradies et a., 2021). As stated by Pradies et al. (2021) "in the current crisis, a paradox mindset it is a helpful way of thinking. Acknowledging that our life and work have become more challenging in many ways and that tensions are here to stay, adopting a paradox mindset is even more necessary for our productivity, creativity, and well-being" (p. 8)

2.2.1. Innovation and creativity

Where Price et al. (2017) claim "all forms of entrepreneurship require some form of innovation" (p.14), cultural and creative entrepreneurs are seen as unique to entrepreneurs in other industries due to their ability to balance aspects relating to managing a business, together with creating "quality, aesthetics and newness" (Bhansing et al., 2020, p. 7). This requires continuous balancing and creativity to maintain a successful venture. Scholars have found cultural and creative entrepreneurs to hold creativity at the core of their being (Bhansing et al., 2020; Nielsen et al., 2018) insofar that their identity and self-concept is constructed in accordance with their creative approach (Elsbach & Flynn, 2013).

As a result, often, creative entrepreneurs are seen as retaining a strong individualistic approach to work and are often deemed highly independent, and in some cases, antisocial (Bhansing et al., 2020; Elsbach & Flynn, 2013; Nielsen et al., 2018). However, in their study, Elsbach and Flynn (2013) found that creative entrepreneurs did not express antisocial behaviour. Rather, the scholars concluded that the willingness to collaborate with others depended more on the relation the collaboration had to

their self-concept. This suggests that CCI entrepreneurs require shared ideals, passion or an overlap in creative approaches in order to (successfully) collaborate with others (Elsbach & Flynn, 2013).

What limits these findings relates to the entrepreneurs studied and the environment. The findings are specific to toy designers operating in one firm. The authors suggest further research across different types of organizations is necessary in order to determine the transferability of their results. For the current research, it can be interesting to assess the degree to which collaboration is invited and how it fosters creativity among different CC entrepreneurs.

Similarly, through social media platforms, new channels have emerged by which entrepreneurs can interact and co-create with others, such as their target audience, customers or other entrepreneurs, leading to innovation in their business (Horst et al., 2019; Olenrewaju et al., 2020). It is important to address digital tools, such as social media, in relation to creativity as the phenomenon is still relatively understudied in academic research and the possibilities of social media for entrepreneurs continues to grow (Olenrewaju et al., 2020).

Building upon the notion of creativity and innovation working at the heart of CCI entrepreneurs, tensions are often experienced in balancing creativity and the need for entrepreneurial and business-related skills (Nielsen et al., 2018; Werthes et al., 2017). As business and finance may be felt to contradict or hinder creativity, Nielsen et al. (2018) found CC entrepreneurs to reject the entrepreneurial identity as it 'violates' their creative identity. To reduce the gap between the creative and entrepreneurial identity, scholars have developed the concept of entrepreneurial learning, by which CC entrepreneurs can learn and develop skills in specific contexts to learn and improve their business skills (Bhansing et al., 2020; Küttim et al., 2011, Nielsen et al., 2018; O'Brien & Hamburg, 2019; Rae, 2014). The following subsection will elaborate on this concept.

2.2.2. Entrepreneurial development

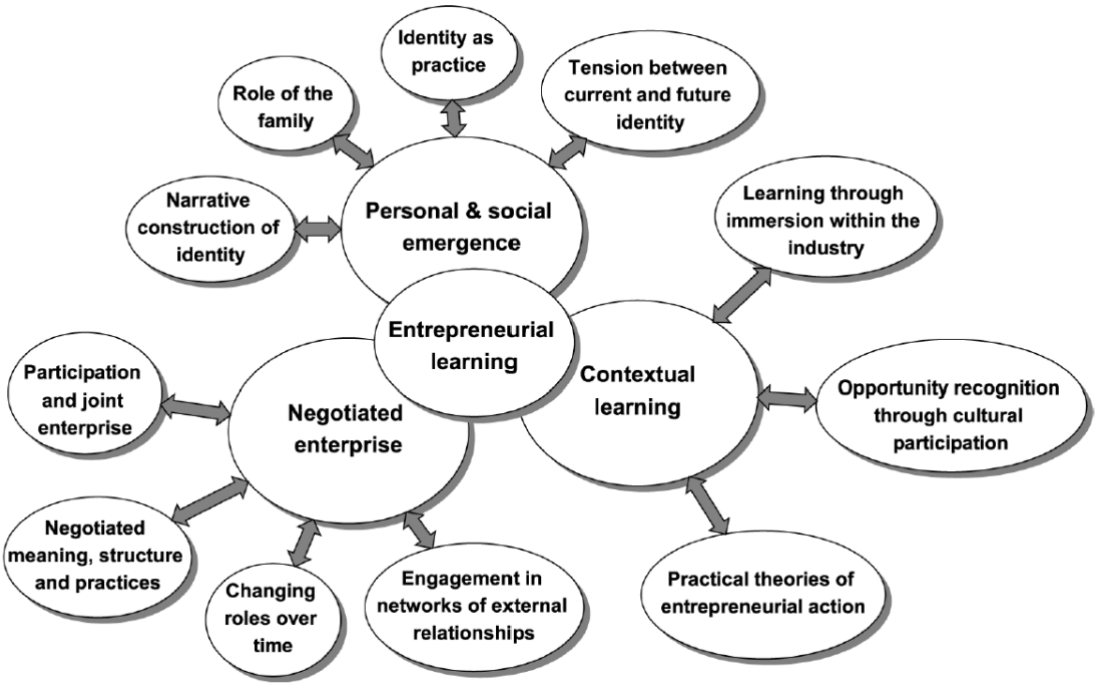
Before elaborating on how CCI entrepreneurs develop their entrepreneurial competencies, it is important to know what entrepreneurial competencies are. O'Brien and Hamburg (2019) outline entrepreneurial competencies as "empathy, creativity, financial literacy, taking initiative and identifying opportunities" (p. 525). It goes without saying that CCI entrepreneurs are masters of their own creativity, whereas aspects such as financial literacy and negotiation are areas of conflict for CC entrepreneurs (Küttim et al., 2011; Nielsen et al., 2018; O'Brien & Hamburg, 2019).

An approach to improve these competencies for CCI entrepreneurs have been identified by scholars as enterprise education (Küttim et al., 2011; O'Brien & Hamburg, 2019) co-working spaces (Bhansing et al., 2020) and entrepreneurial learning programs (Nielsen et al., 2018; Werthes et al., 2017). In each form, the context in which the entrepreneur is, plays a significant role for how the entrepreneur learns and develops their identity.

In the same vein, Rae (2014) developed a triadic model which illustrates entrepreneurial learning (see figure 2.2.3).

Figure 2.2.3

Triadic model of entrepreneurial learning from Rae (2014)



The three drivers constituting entrepreneurial learning, and thus, entrepreneurial identity development are personal & social emergence, contextual learning, and negotiated enterprise, each with related sub drivers. Personal & social emergence refers to questions of 'who am I?' and 'who do I want to be?' (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). This driver also takes note of past experience, education (Küttim et al., 2011), and social relationships. In short, identity formation is seen as an ongoing process which is formed through activities, practices and by social interaction (Bhansing et al., 2020; Nielsen et al., 2018; Rae, 2014). Secondly, contextual learning is described as the process by which an entrepreneur compares and relates to others in a particular context. Through this, shared meaning and co-constructing identity take place (Bhansing et al., 2020; Coupland & Brown, 2012; Nielsen et al., 2018; Rae, 2014; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). The last driver refers to the negotiated enterprise, by which interpersonal relationship are considered in relation to the venture. Actors mentioned relate to customers, investors and co-actors such as employees and partners. Together, these three drivers set entrepreneurial learning and identity development in motion.

This model summarizes the aforementioned scholars in the sense that a consensus is found in such that self-reflection, working with others and the working context enable entrepreneurial learning for CC entrepreneurs, and thus drive entrepreneurial development (Bhansing et al., 2020; Küttim et al., 2011; Nielsen et al., 2018; O'Brien & Hamburg, 2019; Rae, 2014; Werthes et al., 2017). This model will be referenced throughout the data collection and analysis.

Limitations to keep in mind are the methods used in studies and thus the transferability of the findings for this research. For example, Werthes et al. (2017) and Nielsen et al. (2018) studied CC entrepreneurs active in educational programs aimed at improving necessary entrepreneurial

competencies. In their study, Werthes et al. (2017) worked with a small sample of eight CC entrepreneurs and were studied with close interaction with the local (German) context. A similar case relates to the study by Küttim et al. (2011) in such that the results focus on Estonia, Latvia, Finland and Sweden. Furthermore, the study by Nielsen et al. (2018) gathered micro-stories and fragmented accounts of design entrepreneurs participating in an entrepreneurial learning program. Despite these practical differences, some patterns are visible in such that entrepreneurial education needs to be re-assessed to adhere better to contemporary business practices such as problem-based learning and design thinking (Küttim et al., 2011; O'Brien & Hamburg, 2019).

Taking note of the importance of context and interaction with others for the entrepreneurial development of entrepreneurs in the CCI, one can wonder how CC entrepreneurs have continued their entrepreneurial learning without these contexts and interactions with others. Due to the pandemic, access to such resources was restricted if not cancelled all together. Understanding how these entrepreneurs managed to develop themselves without access to co-working spaces, other entrepreneurs or programs will be key.

2.3. Mediatisation of entrepreneurship and its relevance for the development of entrepreneurship in the CCI

Due to a significant loss in context due to the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of work, collaborating with others, and balancing work and private life spheres (Pradies et al., 2021) the focus and use of digital tools becomes imperative. One could argue that CC entrepreneurs have adopted and integrated more digital tools in their modes of work to overcome contextual challenges brought by the pandemic for continuing their entrepreneurial development.

First, social media platforms will be addressed and the purpose they serve will be presented through extant scholarship. Followed by looking at the development of entrepreneurs in relation to mediatization and digital tools. Then, the concept of identity work will be introduced, followed by looking at the struggles CCI entrepreneurs experience in relation to their identity work.

2.3.1. Social media platforms and use

In contemporary entrepreneurship, digital tools and media are considered enablers of entrepreneurial activity (Elia et al., 2020). More specifically, social media platforms have advanced entrepreneurial activities in such that starting a venture has become easier (Bahcecik et al., 2019). Furthermore, new avenues for communication, strategy and development have emerged through social media (SM) (Alkowaiter; 2016; Bahcecik et al., 2019; Horst et al., 2019; Olanrewaju et al., 2020). A point to consider is the fragmented academic research conducted in relation to SM and cultural and creative entrepreneurship. Accordingly, Horst et al. (2019) call for further research in understanding the dimensions of social media and how entrepreneurs can leverage such platforms and related tools in developing their entrepreneurial identity further.

Thus far, academic research has mentioned social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and Youtube as platforms useful for entrepreneurs (Bahcecik et al., 2019; Horst & Hitters, 2020; Horst et al., 2019). In an elaborate review of 160 papers, Olanrewaju et al. (2020) concluded that SM fulfills many roles for the contemporary entrepreneur. Beyond marketing, SM has come to fulfill the role of "business networking, information search and crowdfunding" (p. 90). As a result, adoption of SM by entrepreneurs delivers outcomes of value creation, enhancing entrepreneurial business processes, improving business performance and driving business innovation (Olanrewaju et al., 2020). These values illustrate the value of SM for entrepreneurs. These points are important for assessing whether creative entrepreneurs reveal the same uses and outcomes, and if perhaps, new uses and outcomes have developed through restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

One social media platform that is prominent in academic research is Instagram (Alkhowaiter, 2016; Bahcecik et al., 2019; Caliandro & Graham, 2020; Henninger & Zhao, 2019; Horst et al., 2019; Olanrewaju et al., 2020). Where the initial purpose of Instagram was to enable everyday individuals to share pictures with ease. The platform has grown to invite for many different forms of interaction. Interestingly, selfies, which relate to the everyday pictures someone could post, account for just 0.7% of the content uploaded on the site (Caliandro & Graham, 2020). This suggests that there is a vast amount of content and uses for the platform that are remain to be discovered.

A few scholars have investigated the incentives for entrepreneurs to use Instagram. Findings relate to the ease of use, in such that interaction with the platform is easy and does not take a lot of time or effort, accessibility and popularity of the platform (Alkhowaiter, 2016; Henninger & Zhao, 2019). As a result, entrepreneurs operating via Instagram claim to balance their personal and work life easier in such that they can run their business from home (Alkhowaiter, 2016). Together with adopting consistent design principles, Henninger and Zhao (2019) explain the importance of consistent design in relation to the brand. A note to add here in relation to the studies and their findings relate to the methodology used. Alkhowaiter's (2016) study was conducted in Saudi Arabia focusing on six female entrepreneurs, in this, a remark should be made in terms of transferability and the age of the study. Since 2016, many features have been added to Instagram (Caliandro & Graham, 2020) and the context under study is in stark contrast to the West. Additionally, Henninger & Zhao's (2019) findings focus on a case study of a hairdresser using Instagram in 2016. Hence, may not be applicable to cultural and creative entrepreneurs. These aspects should be kept in mind in the analysis of this current study in such that new findings can be expected.

Bearing in mind the fast pace in which technology advances, Instagram is seen as a dynamic platform which continues to evolve and adapt to provide its users with "the latest market and cultural trends" (Caliandro & Graham, 2020, p. 2). In their article, Bahcecik et al. (2019) discussed several features within Instagram which internet entrepreneurs leverage for their business. Starting with the 'bio section', entrepreneurs are able to communicate their industry and the product or service they provide. This section is a prominent communication feature on their profile. Another feature are the

hashtags, these are seen as the most important feature in connecting content to potential audiences and specify the content (Bahcecik et al., 2019; Caliandro & Graham, 2020). In line with hashtags, Caliandro and Graham (2020) mention "mentions, likes, captions and geotags" as other forms of quantifiable features within Instagram relating to connecting and interacting with content. It is relevant to be aware of the features useful to entrepreneurs within Instagram in order to develop an in-depth understanding of how Instagram serves or challenges entrepreneurs and how this influences their identity development, this brings us to the following subsection.

2.3.2. Development of entrepreneurial identity through digital media

It is imperative for entrepreneurs to create their self-identity as this represents their brand (Horst et al., 2019). What stands out here is the verb 'create', revealing that identities are shaped by the individual themselves, and don't simply emerge (Coupland & Brown, 2012). This requires conscious and active involvement by the individual, and is considered a continuous process (Coupland & Brown, 2012; Horst et al., 2019). Individual, identity refers to one's 'personal' or 'social' identity, which encompasses how we see ourselves as members of social categories in society (Coupland & Brown, 2012; Nielsen et al., 2018). In short, identity refers to the question of "who am I?" and "who do I want to be?" (Coupland &, Brown, 2012; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

Although the question is direct, the answer is less so. Some scholars claim that it is reductionist to state that entrepreneurs have one single identity (Coupland & Brown, 2012; Horst & Hitters, 2020; Horst et al., 2019; Nielsen et al., 2018) and describe how entrepreneurs experiment with 'possible' and 'provisional' selves in dynamic contexts, leading to entrepreneurs maintaining multiple identities (Coupland & Brown, 2012; Horst et al., 2019; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

Looking at identity in relation to digital media, extensive academic reporting appears to be lacking (Horst & Hitters, 2020; Horst et al., 2019). Where context, self-reflection and interaction with others have been identified as the main drivers for identity development, these drivers are similarly present in a digitized form (Horst et al., 2019). Through digital tools, entrepreneurs can interact with others, reflect upon their online presence – alter these when necessary - and are shaped by the digital environment in which they operate (Horst & Hitters, 2020; Horst et al., 2019).

As a result, entrepreneurs operating digitally are seen as media managers, which is seen to be entangled in the identity of the entrepreneur (Horst & Hitters, 2020; Horst et al., 2019), further advancing the complexity of entrepreneurial identity. Through media management, entrepreneurs cater to their followers in providing and interacting with content (Horst et al., 2019). The more an entrepreneur relies on digital media, the less control they have over their identity development independently (Horst & Hitters, 2020). A substantial online presence means that meaning making is co-constructed through interactions with others who contribute to the identity formation of the entrepreneur and brand (Horst & Hitters, 2020). In sum, *digital media entrepreneurship can be seen as a strategic practice by which the entrepreneur manages media in relation to their identity*. These

aspects are important for understanding the extent to which entrepreneurs under study maintain individuality and agency in their identity development and how much influence their followers/online community has in their identity development.

2.3.3. The concept of identity work

Identity work "refers to people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of their sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.1165). Moreover, identity work is a continuous process by which self-doubt and self-openness set conscious identity work in motion (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002), suggesting that unconscious identity work is also an aspect of identity work.

Identity work is seen to be triggered from within and by the surrounding context. For example, a tension experienced from within can relate to disparities between the current and future identity (Rae, 2014). Alternately, identity work can also be set in motion by disruptions in the workplace or uncertain contexts (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). In short, identity work is a process by which individuals attempt to address, make sense of-, and resolve conflicts (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). For the current research, identity work is a useful perspective to adopt as understanding can be developed in how entrepreneurs have experienced and dealt with tensions from within and through the context brought by the pandemic (Beech et al., 2012).

Where identity has been deemed multifaceted (Coupland & Brown, 2012; Horst et al., 2019; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), for creative and cultural entrepreneurs, identity work is found to be especially complex and fragmented. Not only do cultural and creative entrepreneurs need to maintain a form of stability in their dynamic context, they also need to balance their creative identity with their entrepreneurial (professional) identity (Bhansing et al., 2020; Nielsen et al., 2018; Werthes et al., 2017). Furthermore, the mediated realm of identity work adds a dimension to the process in that entrepreneurs also need to manage and balance their online and offline identities (Horst & Hitters, 2020; Horst et al., 2019). In scholarship, findings vary in understanding the extent to which cultural and creative entrepreneurs internalize their entrepreneurial identity. A consensus exists in such that cultural and creative entrepreneurs struggle with identifying with their entrepreneurial identity (Nielsen et al., 2018; Werthes et al., 2017), however, through self-reflection, fusion between the cultural and creative identity together with the entrepreneurial identity is possible (Werthes et al., 2017). Alternately, Nielsen et al. (2018) argue for a violation in the creative identity through transitioning into the entrepreneurial identity. While being aware of methodological differences in research approaches, these findings highlight the strong personal connection identity work has to the individual and the way these identities are expressed are unique to the individual.

Overall, this shows that internal and external triggers are important for understanding the identity work of cultural and creative entrepreneurs. Their self-reflection, their communication with other entrepreneurs and their context will hence be addressed in the analysis.

2.3.4. Understanding struggles of entrepreneurial development through the concept of identity work

The cultural and creative entrepreneurs may have undergone considerable re-construction and re-formulation in their identities over the past year. As already mentioned, identity work is set in motion through tensions experienced – from within or from the surrounding context (Beech et al., 2012). This last subsection will delve deeper into the struggles and tensions cultural and creative entrepreneurs may have experienced in relation to their identity work, in general terms and in relation to the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

A contextual challenge experienced over the past year can be seen as the closure or limited access to co-working spaces for entrepreneurs. As these environments provide CC entrepreneurs the opportunity to interact with other entrepreneurs and co-construct their identity, tensions can be seen to emerge as a point of reference has been lost (Bhansing et al., 2020). As a result, the entrepreneur can experience increased feelings of insecurity in themselves and in their context (Brown & Coupland, 2015) and experience difficulties in balancing work and private life (Omrane et al., 2018; Pradies et al., 2021).

Moreover, Omrane et al. (2018) discuss the risks of entrepreneurial burnout. Nascent entrepreneurs are seen as running a higher risk of burnout as often, they are limited in key resources. Key resources are defined as financial, social and informational and are determinants of success for a nascent entrepreneur. Through the loss of context where these resources can be accessed (such as co-working spaces or incubator programs) the question arises of how nascent cultural and creative entrepreneurs have managed or maintained the access to these key resources in the novel context of the pandemic. By lacking in any of these resources, Omrane et al. (2018) describe how the entrepreneur can experience a burnout, and ultimately, failure in their venture. These can be seen as significant tensions emerging from within in the identity development of the entrepreneur.

Through digitization and adopting a digital media entrepreneurship strategy, cultural and creative entrepreneurs can work to overcome tensions in access to resources (Horst & Hitters, 2020; Horst et al., 2019). Through the adoption of digital tools, new avenues for identity work are possible (Horst et al., 2019). Such as access to entrepreneurs, online learning and mechanisms to construct their online identity, which are also considered as strategies to overcoming entrepreneurial burnout (Omrane et al., 2018). However, tensions emerge through this as well. First, continuous technological advancements mean cultural and creative entrepreneurs have to manage their identities in dynamic contexts offline, accompanied by fast-paced turbulent environments online (Elia et al., 2020; Horst et al., 2019). Furthermore, if an entrepreneur relies heavily on digital technologies, autonomy is lost in their meaning-making of their identity in such that their identity becomes a co-constructed phenomenon due to the interaction with others online (Horst & Hitters, 2020). As a

result, the identity work and formation of the entrepreneur becomes increasingly fragmented and more complex.

To conclude, this theoretical framework has contributed to better understanding the development of the entrepreneurial identity of cultural and creative entrepreneurs through developing the concept of identity work. Many scholars have identified the many different aspects which contribute to-, and strain the development of identity, in such that continuous work is necessary to maintain a balance between the creative identity, professional identity and their online versus offline identity. Jones et al. (2018) highlight the importance of researching new contexts in which entrepreneurial behavior is enacted to improve the quality of knowledge about how entrepreneurs manage and develop their identity. With reference to scholarship mentioned throughout this framework, the research question is re-stated as follows:

What kind of identity tensions have creative and cultural entrepreneurs experienced during this time of COVID, and how do they manage these identity tensions as part of their entrepreneurial identity work through digital media?

The table below presents a summary of the definitions of the concepts used for this research operationalised through the theoretical framework.

Table 2.4

Overview of operationalised terms, concepts and phenomena developed through the theoretical framework for this study

Term	Definition	Source(s)
Entrepreneurship	"the doing of new things or the doing of things that are already being done in a new way"	Schumpeter, 1947, p. 151
Cultural and creative entrepreneurship	"combine the creation, production and commercialization of creative elements and are becoming increasingly important components of our contemporary world"	Bujor & Avasilcai, 2014, p. 151
	4 types of creative entrepreneurs: Creative service providers, creative content producers, creative experience providers, and creative originals producers	Bujor & Avasilcai, 2014

Digital entrepreneurship	New wave of entrepreneurship by which digital technologies are leveraged for organizational purposes	Hull et al., 2007; Horst et al., 2019
	3 degrees of digital entrepreneurship: mild moderate and extreme	Hull et al., 2007
Digital media entrepreneurship	Strategic practice by which the entrepreneur manages media in relation to their identity	Horst & Hitters, 2020
Paradox theory	A perspective by which assessment can be made of how an entrepreneur perceives, frames, feels and reasons about tensions experienced from their surrounding context.	Pradies et al., 2021
Entrepreneurial competencies	"empathy, creativity, financial literacy, taking initiative and identifying opportunities" (p. 525) Resilience and flexibility	O'Brien & Hamburg, 2019
Entrepreneurial learning	Process by which entrepreneurial competencies are learned. Personal and social emergence, contextual learning and negotiated enterprise.	Triadic model by Rae, 2014
Identity	Ongoing process of answering questions related to 'who am I?' and 'who do I want to be?'	Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003
Identity work	"People being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of their sense of coherence and distinctiveness"	Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.1165
Identity tensions	Struggles accompanied through conceptualizing, perceiving and shaping identities	Horst et al., 2019

3. Methodology

This following chapter elaborates on the research design and choices adopted for this study. Starting with outlining the qualitative approach, the choices and method of data collection will be described. Followed by the process of data analysis and the steps used to analyse and interpret the data. The chapter ends with detailed consideration of quality criteria such as reliability, validity, transferability and ethics. Throughout this chapter sufficient detail was incorporated to ensure qualitative rigor (Goia et al., 2012) in order to avoid any misinterpretations or misreading of the eventual results (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006).

3.1. A qualitative approach

To start, when addressing qualitative methods, researchers should take note of the diverse, complex and nuanced nature of the approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Because of this, it is paramount for the researcher to construct a clear and transparent procedure in practice and use of the selected method(s).

In order to investigate the identity tensions cultural and creative entrepreneurs have experienced in the current context brought by COVID-19, and to understand how these entrepreneurs managed these tensions as a part of their identity work through the use of digital media, qualitative research methods were applied. Specifically, a cultural studies perspective within organizational theory was adopted. Alasuutari (1996) described the cultural studies perspective in such to "particularise understandings of the social" (p.372) in such that an elaborate account of the local situation in which the individuals are active in can be created. Combined with organisational studies which see the world as socially constructed (Goia et al., 2012) this perspective enables a rich account to be developed in relation to the phenomenon under study. Departing from the traditional approach to organization study, the adopted approach in this study focused on developing concepts, which is a "more general, less well-specified notion capturing qualities that describe or explain a phenomenon of theoretical interest" (Goia et al., 2012, p.16). Considering the novelty of the COVID-19 pandemic, a more general approach was necessary in order to grasp elements unique to the context and the ways individuals interacted with it resulting in a detailed account of the local context, which is at the crux of qualitative research (Goia et al., 2012).

Taking note of how qualitative research relates to the interpretation of social phenomena, and the important role language and thought play into the process of meaning making, it is clear that qualitative interviews were necessary to gather data for this study (Babbie, 2013; Brennen, 2017). Adopting such a method enables researchers to investigate human behavior and to dive deeper into underlying motivations, personal motivations and particular assumptions held about a particular topic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) in such that the experience of the individual is the focus of the research rather than quantifying frequencies in measurable occurrences (Goia et al., 2012).

As a result of adopting these perspectives a dual-outcome can be expected; a better understanding of entrepreneurs and their identity work and tensions in the novel context brought by

COVID-19 together with forming a theoretical framework which can initiate or contribute to the investigation of other phenomena (Alasuutari, 1996).

3.2. Semi-structured in-depth interviews

Building upon the notion that identity work relates to questions of 'who am I?' and 'how do I want to be seen?' (such as Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) in order to delve into the constructions and tensions individuals hold in relation to their identity discourse is necessary. Scholars have labelled discourse to be the principle "means by which organization members create a coherent social reality that frames their sense of who they are" (Mumby & Clair, 1997, p. 181).

So as to tap into these structures of self and the meanings associated with them, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were adopted. Advantageous of such an interview style is the ability to adopt an informal tone and the conversations invite for an open response by the participants (Longhurst, 2016). This aids in the process of establishing rapport which invites for more personal accounts from the respondent (Dumitrica & Pridmore, 2019).

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are flexible in nature (Babbie, 2013; Bryman, 2016). In this study, flexibility is necessary as in situations where the organisational context is changing, in this case, due to COVID, it is imperative that adaptations in theory or approach to the interviews can be changed (Buchanan & Bryman, 2007). Also, the researcher should express flexibility, for example in adjust the interview structure where necessary. The structure of the interview should flow with the responses of the participant, rather than adhering to a pre-determined order of asking questions (Babbie, 2013; Bryman, 2016). Additionally, ensuring to follow up leads and clearing up any ambiguous answers ensure a rigorous approach to obtaining as much information as possible and can lead to interesting nuances (Babbie, 2013; Bryman, 2016).

3.3. Sampling strategy

In qualitative research, any individual can account as a unit of analysis (Babbie, 2013). Seeing as this research focuses on creative and cultural entrepreneurs, purposive sampling was adopted. Due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, access to eligible participants was a challenge. In response to this, purposive sampling was combined with convenience sampling through the primary network of the researcher, as other sampling tactics were less feasible (Babbie, 2013).

Building on the way identity and entrepreneurship are personal (Nielsen et al., 2018; Rae, 2014) despite the sampling strategy adopted, enough variation in response among different entrepreneurs could be expected and therefore enough promise of rich data could be anticipated.

Due to COVID, access to entrepreneurs was mostly conducted online through various channels. In total, 25 entrepreneurs were contacted via platforms and tools such as direct messaging on Instagram, Facebook messenger and email. In some cases, the potential participant denied the request for an interview, while some never responded, also after a follow-up request. In total, 11

entrepreneurs were willing to take part in this research. The most effective strategy in accessing entrepreneurs willing to partake in an interview were accessed via the primary network of the researcher.

3.4. Data analysis

In order to analyse and interpret the data collected, thematic analysis (TA) was applied. TA has been labelled as a method in its own right and is seen as a foundational method by many scholars in social science research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Herzog et al., 2019). Coding enables the researcher to systematically approach the data and separate the data into meaningful parts parts (Boeije, 2010). Noteworthy is that data analysis is a continuous process and began once the first interview was conducted. In qualitative research, analysis starts when the researcher "begins to notice, and look for, patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.80).

Qualitative analysis is characterised by a recursive and iterative process, by which the researcher continuously jots down ideas, adapts and adds to these from the beginning of data collection through to the final results, constantly flowing back and forth across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is important that enough time is permitted in this process as the recursive nature of TA requires time.

The analysis in this research was carried out inductively, meaning the analysis was data driven by which the researcher closely read and coded from the data transcript rather than working with a pre-existing coding frame (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In relation to this, the research question is able to evolve as a result of analysis. This was applicable to this research as the context under study remained uncertain. Due to the flexibility of TA, the analysis was able to guide the process effectively as TA is not bound to any pre-existing theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

TA is similar to grounded theory (GT), yet differences exist between the approaches. They share the general idea of analysing qualitative data through interpretive coding, leading to developing themes from this analysis. The difference is that GT aims to generate new theory from these empirical findings, whereas TA stops in describing the themes. Often, GT may be slightly more inductive. While TA can also be used inductively, the analytic process leads the themes to be interpreted in relation to (existing) theory "is an attempt to theorize the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.84). Additionally, GT works to build new theory, with little regard to existing theory, and demands considerable knowledge of technological approaches – making TA a more attainable method to use (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Yet, both techniques come from different traditions but their protocols remain very similar for constructing interpretation from qualitative data in systematic manner. The steps that this research followed were: 1) creating a general understanding of the data, 2) open coding, 3) axial coding, and 4) selective coding. For further elaboration on each individual stage of data analysis, see Appendix A4 to A7.

Figure 3.4.1

Summary of coding outcomes

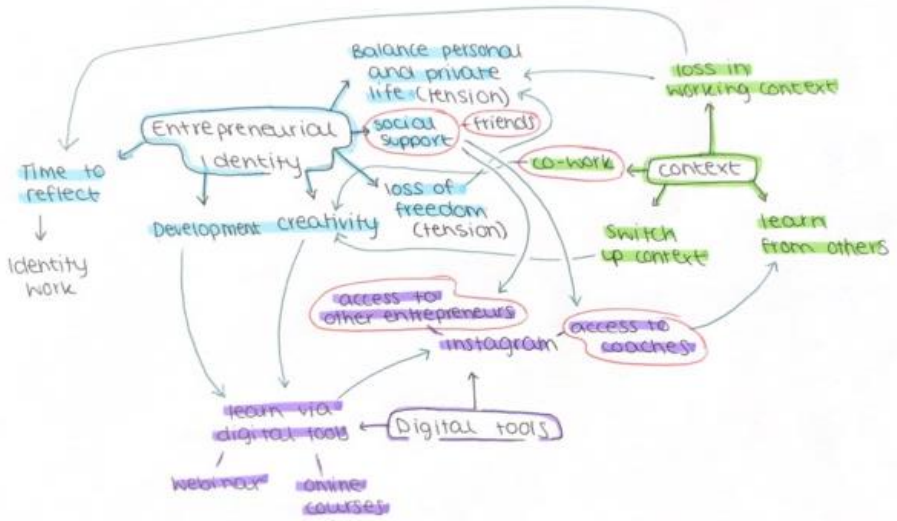


Figure 3.1 presents the final mapping of the analysis. The final mapping demonstrates the most relevant aspects found from the analysis. From this, the four themes answering the research question were developed. The first theme considers context and approach to work and reflects upon changes in processes and work due to the pandemic. The second theme looks at the entrepreneurial identity, taking note of entrepreneurial learning and tensions experienced due to the pandemic. The third theme addresses digital tools and what these have brought the CC entrepreneurs, and considers struggles as a result of use. The last theme was formed through identifying the role of others, in such that support and interactions with others formed the last theme, demonstrated by the red circles around aspects.

The green lines added illustrate the links between the elements, for example, before restrictions of the pandemic were present, some entrepreneurs would learn from others in shared working contexts. Due to the loss of these contexts, digital platforms such as Instagram enable connections with other entrepreneurs through as a form of social and professional support. In turn, this plays into the identity of the entrepreneurs. This maintains the strong interconnected nature of aspects relating to identity work and thus reinstates the complexity of the phenomenon.

4. Results

This following chapter presents the results of the data analysis by which four themes were developed with related subthemes. Each subtheme will be discussed with support of participant quotes. The four themes which together answer the research question are: changes in context and approach to work, entrepreneurial identity, adoption and use of digital tools as a mechanism for identity work, and lastly, interaction and support from others.

4.1. Changes in context and approach to work

Identity is context dependent, thus, it is important to understand what has changed in the working context of entrepreneurs due to COVID. Where the pandemic brought restrictions for work, this section addresses the situations and related perceptions the entrepreneurs experienced in relation to these contextual changes. In general, the entrepreneurs expressed resilience and flexibility in dealing with tensions and developed strategies to maintain a good approach to work and creativity.

4.1.1. The pandemic enabled space and time for reflection

The first subtheme was consistent among all participants. The restrictions resulting from the pandemic gave the participants space and time to reflect, reassess and re-strategize their identity. Keeping in mind that participants had developed their ventures to varying degrees, identity work was set in motion, impacting the participants to varying degrees. For some, the pandemic was the reason to start their own venture, for others, the pandemic brought the space and time to re-strategize and re-define their goals, and for a few other participants, they were able to fine tune their work:

> *"We took our time...so we could leave it for a moment and then pick it up [again]…that's a different way of working. Normally you compress things in a very short period. And that needs to expose the result. And now, we digest and develop and it was interesting."* (Marc, 2021)

Another example labelled the pandemic as something of a blessing rather than a burden: *: "Yeah, but actually COVID was the best thing that happened us haha"* (Hector, 2021). Through operating digitally, together with forming a collaborative creative hub in the first lockdown, they were able to elevate themselves to the next level. This case reinstates the success of co-working and co-creating with others in improving entrepreneurial skills and competencies (Nielsen et al., 2018; Werthes et al., 2017) and thus, constructing a strong identity (Bhansing et al., 2020; Rae, 2014).

In contrast, a few participants experienced a loss in clientele and assignments. However, instead of this loss leading to tensions, some participants were able to spend more time developing personal projects:

> *"…we worked full time before and we're still working full time [now]. But it's changed in the sense that we're focusing also more on stuff that we're making for ourselves, so the shop stuff, because that's not on assignment. It's just what we are making and what we want to make. Um, and I guess we had a bit more time on our hands, because of COVID. So that's why we had the space to start thinking about doing that. Before, it was always busy with assignments. So it wasn't that much space, for making our own stuff."* (Caitlin, 2021)

In sum, the effects of the pandemic created opportunities for the participants to re-assess their current identity. The hasty development of entrepreneurs was slowed down and allowed them to think about how they wanted to continue in terms of the products and services they offer, how they are perceived by others and reflecting upon this in so to experiment with other identities.

An interesting finding of the analysis was that contrary to my expectations, in which I believed the contextual elements of COVID would result in insecure and anxious entrepreneurs, as Brown and Coupland (2015) would suggest. Astoundingly, the impact of COVID on their context was less of a burden for the entrepreneurs than expected. Instead, the pandemic set identity work in motion in such that many participants connected to their creativity to resolve the struggles in loss of work. Through self-reflection, assessment was made in terms of where they currently were and where they wanted to go. This represents resilience and flexibility, labelled strong entrepreneurial competencies by O'Brien and Hamburg (2019).

4.1.2. Changes in the working context

Furthering the flexibility and resilience of the entrepreneurs, most of the entrepreneurs confessed to experiencing tensions due to working from home. A proactive response of many participants was to switch up the working context. Whether it be a different room in the house, working at a friend's house or paying for a co-working space once in a while, a change in working context was necessary to work effectively and foster creativity. Hector illustrated this point well when discussing work contexts and the importance of working in different contexts outside of the home: *"Oh, definitely. From time to time, you need you need that change of environment. I think the creative juices grow stagnant if you're constantly on the same the same spot"* (Hector, 2021).

Furthermore, of the participants who were active before the pandemic, all but one had a fixed workspace prior to the lockdown measures. This suggests that before the pandemic, some participants were already adaptable in their working context. Depending on the assignment, working would alternate between their home-office, and the office of their client, or a co-working space. Considering this, most participants were able to manage the restrictions of the pandemic relatively well.

> *"Yeah, I'm totally focused [working in different contexts]. And it's also depends like the environment, right. So because, like, sometimes you're really focused, but sometimes there's like, just too many people in the in the client's office, and then you are more socializing than being productive. So I like to go when it's for a certain purpose. Like, for example, we have a brainstorm session, we have to check some things. Or I have a presentation for them. Like, or we really have to sit down. So for these things when really it's like working together rather than just like sit there and just work - that I can also do at my house. And it's easier. I see it goes better, yeah."* (Shewska, 2021)

In some cases, losing physical contact with clients was enabled increased productivity, such as calling for a project rather than meeting at the office. While in some cases, such as for co-creating, brainstorming or giving a presentation, the physical aspect lacked, and impacted the quality of the work. Overall, the entrepreneurs were working in a flexible and adaptable manner, and responded fluently to the changes they faced in their work habits and context. This continues to express a flexible and resilient approach to work (O'Brien & Hamburg, 2019) and demonstrates the context independent nature of digital entrepreneurship (Elia et al., 2020; Hull et al., 2007).

Where creativity is central to CC entrepreneurs, it is important for them to develop strategies to foster it. Through adopting a paradox mindset (Pradies et al., 2021; Schad et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011) some entrepreneurs are able to manage the contextual tension and deal with the problem in a practical manner to maintain a creative approach to work.

4.1.3. Working creatively in the COVID pandemic

Considering how creativity is a fundamental part of the identity of cultural and creative entrepreneurs, understanding how the participants tackled possible tensions around their approach to work and creativity could help emerge tensions they may have experienced, in terms of their identity or surrounding context. What stood out was how all of the entrepreneurs expressed the necessity of having a good structured and organized approach to work.

> *"But I know I need to … this nine to five discipline, otherwise, you can be creative, you can…be freewheeling but in the end… projects need to have a deadline, the project needs to have a timeline as well. And you have applications that you need to send, so you just need to sit behind the computer. So yeah, I think flexibility is a good word for it, and really be patient, which is quite hard for me. Because sometimes it's, yeah, sometimes it's, it's really hard."* (Duy, 2021)

Furthermore, the analysis showed that creativity is personal and creativity is fragile. Each entrepreneur had a unique approach to fostering creativity:

> *"[Having a structured work approach was] for the better, like now, it's really nice to work because then on Wednesdays, I know like okay, the administrator things - I leave that for Monday. I don't have to worry about that. I can be creative. So it's like it's like nice to separate the business side and the creative side"* (Yorbi, 2021)

In a different manner, more than half of the participants shared that creativity was enhanced by working or collaborating with others. The ways in which the participants co-created, and the degree to which, depended on their sector and specific product or service. Six participants closely collaborated with their business partner(s) in creating ideas.

> *"It goes really naturally. Like it just works the way it works. But the way we work is usually that we both, like, when we get an assignment or a briefing, you both get a lot of ideas, and then we start sketching separately, then when you're one of us is stuck a bit or when it's like, okay, we've been working on it for a while now let's like look at each other's work. And then you get new ideas. And usually that becomes like something really good really quickly. So then we pass it over to each other. And then usually, there's like three sketches that we send and when there's one that is something of both of us, that's the one that gets picked. And now, we sort of know that bit better. So we know how to switch over quicker. I also work with like, building sort of an archive of imagery. And then we both build from that archive, like so we build new stuff from it."* (Caitlin, 2021)

Overall, by working in a structured and organized manner, the entrepreneurs revealed how they were able to keep tensions in creativity and work approach at bay. What is interesting is how there is no mention of the importance for structure or organisation in entrepreneurial scholarship as a skill or competency (O'Brien & Hamburg, 2019). Furthermore, entrepreneurs working with others were found to have less creative blocks or tensions in working creatively. This adds to the results of Elsbach and Flynn (2013) in such that creatives are not individualistic by nature, rather, shared passion, interest and an overlap in creative approach is necessary in order to work with others.

4.2. Entrepreneurial identity

The second theme of the analysis looks at the entrepreneurial identity of the participants and how they internalized the role. Looking at how they accommodate towards their organizational structure,

past experience and background, entrepreneurial learning, and the tensions they experienced in the time of the pandemic.

4.2.1. Company structure and past experience influence identity

From the analysis it was clear that the company structure of the entrepreneur and their background has considerable influence in the way they operate, and thus, on their identity. For example, several entrepreneurs were registered as foundations (not for profit), showing they tend more towards societal and cultural growth rather than monetary gain.

> *"…we are social brand. And so we are in a position that we can work with subsidies. So we are not solely reliant on the sales numbers. Because we also work with young people. And at the moment, we're still waiting for some subsidy so we can pick up all those plans. So that also means that we're really limited to a tight budget…"* (Yorbi, 2021)

Furthermore, some of the other entrepreneurs started their venture part time - next to their studies. Once their studies were finished they continued to work and build their venture, taking Hector as an example*: "I was fortunate enough to not have to get a job after I graduated. Because I had the company."* (2021). Not only does easing into the role of an entrepreneur appear to be a successful approach for several participants, it also suggests that a number of participants had internalised the identity of an entrepreneur without actively taking the step to consider other options for work or income. For comparison, one participant was still a student and did not internalise the entrepreneurial identity:

> *"Um, yeah, not really. I actually, yeah, I do say I have my own company and I do this next school, but I'm also a student. So I really think of myself more as a student that does some jobs on the side."* (Kim, 2021)

What stands out here is the complexity of identity in such that being a member of different social categories such as student and designer can cause a fragmented perception on identity (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). This individual case stood out in such that all the participants shared to identify with their professional, entrepreneurial identity.

Another factor influencing the identity of the entrepreneur was their past experience, such as work, internships and educational background. A general consensus was present that although (some) studies did not directly relate to their entrepreneurial ventures, their academic background had established a good basis in terms of acquiring skills and overall management.

> *"I look up to the company I did my internship at the last half year, because yeah, I really got to see up close how they manage their start-up, and they work really hard. And they're also really good. So it's really nice to see how they grow. And yeah, I think I get a lot of inspiration from them too. And, yeah, I got to look at how you can grow your company."* (Kim, 2021)

In comparison, one participant shared not to have had these experiences and as a result, struggled in discipline for work:

> *"…yeah, it's, it's for me, it's everyday a fight, because I didn't start in a in a real office job. And I see a lot of people coming from an office job and starting from them for themselves. It gets a little bit easier in a way because you already have this this this discipline."* (Duy, 2021)

These quotes reiterate the work by Küttim et al. (2011) in such that past experience and education are found to be the most fruitful ways to enhance entrepreneurial competencies. For example, being a student secures a certain environment where there is less financial and social risk. By easing into the entrepreneurial role and experience by starting part-time, their confidence grows along with their work experience which in turn, grows the confidence to make it through and adapt to the context brought by the pandemic. What is interesting in this section is how all but one of the entrepreneurs shared to identify with the role of an entrepreneur. This contradicts the claims by Nielsen et al. (2018) in such that creative entrepreneurs in fact do not appear to feel tensions in accepting their professional role. This case builds upon the need to secure key resources as a nascent entrepreneur discussed by Omrane et al. (2018) in such that starting the venture part time next to studies enables the development of such resources.

4.2.2. Entrepreneurial learning

Looking at entrepreneurial learning, two distinct themes were identified. First, in terms of growing as an entrepreneur, the most prominent approach to learning was through learning while doing.

> *"I think it's mostly by doing because I don't really think there's one [way to do it] – I think the one entrepreneurial tip is to like follow your heart…it's not like there's a one size fits all…It's just trial and error. And it just takes a lot of time. And you really learn by doing…you're really doing what you think is right with the knowledge that you have, and I mean, you really have to fail, although it's miserable. It's really bad. But in the end, it's just gonna make you a better person."* (Ninarosa, 2021)

Secondly, another avenue was identified in the analysis for entrepreneurial learning related to learning from others.

> *"I think it's Warren Buffett that says, learn from mistakes, but they don't have to be your mistakes, right? So it's like, these people are out there. And they are…where you want to be. And they f*cked up along the way. So why do I have to make those mistakes? Might as well like, know what to avoid, you know"* (Hector, 2021)

The findings suggest that through digitisation and social media, the access to information has become more open and accessible, which is a tendency that other scholars have also observed in such that entrepreneurial activities become more efficient and easier (Bahcecik et al., 2019; Elia et al., 2020, Sahut et al., 2019). For example, *"…you try to look at what others are doing [online], just to see how you can apply that to you."*(Jess, 2021). From this we can take away that tailored entrepreneurial courses and incubator programs may not be as deciding for CC entrepreneurs and their development of professional competencies as first thought (Nielsen et al., 2018; Werthes et al., 2017). Instead, a combination of online resources such as YouTube, Instagram and other materials suffice in helping entrepreneurs learn while doing. Also, the notion of 'learning while doing' relates to the problem based learning discussed by O'Brien and Hamburg (2019) as being an effective approach to developing entrepreneurial competencies.

4.2.3. Identity tensions in the pandemic

Almost all of the participants experienced tensions in relation to finance as a result of the pandemic. While it was more common for the non-profit ventures to struggle as they rely more on subsidies and applying for grants, the majority of the private companies also struggled.

> *"With the freelance assignments, you're not sure you have an income. So at this moment, I don't have another job on the side, in the past I did. But now I have like this month, I only have one assignment. And now I don't really have an income. So I really have to watch my money. So that's a struggle too"* (Kim, 2021)

As a response, the impacted participants responded to the situation with a proactive approach and were able to relativize the situation to different degrees.

> *"But now, everyone I know in my branch is having a really hard time. A lot of people are having a really hard and heavy time. They dont have much and can't do much, which in turn means I can't do much either."* (Mitchel, 2021)

Despite the insecurity, it was clear that the entrepreneurs valued freedom which was a strong driver in their identity: *"…that's why I'm also an advocate for creativity, because it helped me to get to get my freedom and to create my own freedom"* (Yorbi, 2021). However, as a result of restrictions and regulation, tensions were experienced by some entrepreneurs as their freedom was restricted, thus, restricting their identity.

> *"What I really struggled with was…[how life] felt a little bit goalless…it just felt like okay, so I have all this time and I have this money. I don't really know what to do with it, you know. And at the end of the day, when I was finished working…there was just not so much that I could do."* (Ninarosa, 2021)

Another example of a tension experienced related to difficulties in balancing their private life and their work life as a result of the pandemic.

> "*I think the hardest has been being aware. So overworking, so burnout, being aware of your limits…we're not at an office until a certain time, [it's easy] to just keep going and keep going and not stop. And it's easy to do that for a long time. So that it has like effects on your health. And when you reach that point that you burn out all your fuel…you become a liability for your own company…that will be the hardest thing that I've struggled with a little bit. And I've seen a lot of people struggle."* (Hector, 2021)

A consensus about the work-life balance and struggling in managing this was present among the entrepreneurs, representing an internal and contextual challenge. Where Omrane et al. (2018) stress the importance of maintaining a balance between work and private life in order to minimise the risk of entrepreneurial burnout, some entrepreneurs were aware of this and made sure to take conscious steps to prioritise their mental and physical health. Illustrated in short: *"you have to stay healthy to be wealthy"* (Hector, 2021).

This section demonstrates struggles experienced by the entrepreneurs such as insecurity in assignments, and tensions experienced as outcomes of operating digitally. Differences are found in tensions experienced by entrepreneurs in relation to the different types of creative entrepreneurs by Bujor and Avasilcai (2014) and the degree to which the entrepreneur was operating digitally (Hull et al., 2007), with an overall contribution to the claim by Elia et al. (2020) that operating digitally increases insecurity for the entrepreneur. Yet, managing these tensions through relativisation and adopting a constructive mindset (illustrated by Mitch) relate to adopting a paradox mindset (Pradies et al., 2021; Schad et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011).

4.3. Adoption and use of digital tools as a mechanism for identity work

The analysis shows that digital tools and social media are important mechanisms that the participants rely upon. Among the participants, Instagram was the primary platform for the participants to use for many different purposes. The extent to which social media strategies were adopted and integrated into the company varied. The primary reason for this was due to a (lack of) time and tensions in structuring content.

Besides Instagram, the respondents mentioned Facebook as a platform they used, but admitted that they don't do much with it, and also don't plan to use it more. Generally, Facebook was considered an 'aged' platform. Alternately, LinkedIn was seen as a professional platform which supported their personal brand, reaching potential customers and for recruiting talent.

Overall, social media played into the identities of the participants in different ways, exemplifying the complexity and adaptability of digital tools and social media in identity work. The following subsections will focus on Instagram as the platform stood out significantly.

4.3.1. Instagram as a tool to manage identity tensions

Instagram was the most preferred and primary platform used among all the participants and was considered useful as; a landing page or portfolio, reaching (potential) clients, keeping existing contacts warm, being in touch with other entrepreneurs for advice, entrepreneurial support and learning, a marketing channel for direct and indirect advertising, collaborations and promotions, a source of inspiration, and as an (indirect) sales channel, these aspects expand slightly the uses identified by Olanrewaju et al. (2020). The most prominent qualities of Instagram according to the participants were the strong visual elements on Instagram, the tools and the informal environment present on the platform. These three aspects will be elaborated on interchangeably in this section.

Firstly, the strong visual element about Instagram was favoured by entrepreneurs as often, they work with-, and produce visual products and services. *"…it's your image towards other people and all, if you really sell it as your identity, it's your identity"* (2021).

Consistent among the entrepreneurs found in the analysis is the informal environment within Instagram and how this enhanced the connection with their audience, for example, through Instagram stories:

> *"I think it's nice that we can show behind the scenes, because I think a big part of us as designers is that we are actively doing stuff ourselves and making stuff ourselves, which is a social part,[and] also a big part of what we do."* (Caitlin, 2021)

Furthermore, in terms of communicating on the platform, informality was seen as benefit with the direct messaging (DM) tool as several entrepreneurs used this as a new strategy in communicating with others:

> *…what makes it easy is that it's not as formal as an email, [such as] cold emailing or cold calling. [Through DMs you can say] 'Hey, how're you doing?' 'Hey, I like that post that you did'. 'That's dope. Do you have a website?' 'We can help you with this'…and then establish a more informal conversation and we see a lot of people are reacting good to that".* (Hector, 2021)

Also in terms of seeking support from other entrepreneurs, the DM tool worked as a medium which enabled entrepreneurial support:

> "*So sometimes we just, like, direct message for a whole evening like 'okay, so this is what I've been doing this week, what about?' [You share] struggles that you run into, and 'how's it going?' 'How's it going with your motivation'?* (Laura, 2021)

These quotes illustrate the different ways in which the participants make use of the same tool in different ways to suit their needs, and are effective in doing so.

Another tool within the platform are the post insights. Among the participants, different attitudes were found. For some, the post insights helped them in knowing when was to post content. Whereas for others, the insights were seen as a hassle which created a tension in what they wanted to post versus what they felt they should post.

> *"Yeah, I sometimes click on it, but then I'm like, heh,… I know a few kinds of things that work pretty well, usually…I don't let it influence me too much. Because we also don't want to be this Instagram that only does the same thing all the time."* (Caitlin, 2021)

A unique case which stood out among the entrepreneurs was one participant who found TikTok more user friendly and generally better than Instagram. She identified the power of SM in such that "*my brand would not have any other type of recognition if it wasn't for social media"* (Jess, 2021). While there is no mention of TikTok in scholarship relating to SM and entrepreneurship (Bahcecik et al., 2019; Horst et al., 2019; Horst & Hitters, 2020) the analysis showed how the pace at which technology and SM advances continues to open new avenues for research.

This section describes the different ways the participants interact with the same tools in Instagram. It shows that SM is broad in its uses and can be leveraged by the entrepreneur unique to their needs. The notion of co-constructing identity through relying on digital media is evident here in

such that those who rely heavily on digital media can experience tensions in developing their online identity and in some cases, experience a loss in agency as their audience and the digital environment influences the process of identity development (Horst & Hitters, 2020).

Moreover, scholars have mentioned enhancing business innovation through digital media, this section expands upon the ways in which entrepreneurs can achieve this through tools not mentioned thus far in scholarship relating to Instagram such as calls to action, stories and behind the scenes (Bahcecik et al., 2019; Caliandro & Graham, 2020; Henninger & Zhao, 2019).

4.3.2. Struggles as a result of Instagram use

Although social media in general, and specifically Instagram, continues to grow and expand in its uses and features (Caliandro & Graham, 2020), effectively managing content, responding to followers, and maintaining a stable presence on Instagram was labelled as being a job in itself.

> *"…in terms of how powerful social media is… We would eventually be able, and should do more with more platforms but - look, if I were to do that, I would hire someone in for that. Otherwise its not manageable, with TikTok and all the works, yeah, I'm not going to do that. It's not something I feel at home in and its also something I dont really like, so then I would really hire someone in for that. But in terms of…the personal side, outside the fact that previously you would be called, you also get all the social media where you have to be busy with, that has made it more difficult. There are so many [communication] channels now."* (Mitchel, 2021)

As a result, it appeared difficult to prioritize work for the entrepreneurs as delivering assignments or creating is their primary product, yet maintaining a consistent identity online is also necessary in order to remain relevant:

> *"…our responsibility is delivering client work…So that takes up most of our time…handling the social media, the posting and automating the process has been [a challenge]. We have tried and we have…managed to automate [the content for] let's say, two months in advance. But when it gets to like shit, where's our content? Then it takes a couple of weeks to get that content and then scheduling it and stuff like that…automating that part of the business as is has been the challenge. And because it's so important…posting once a week is not going to cut it, it needs to be at least once a day, every day…in order to even be relevant to the algorithm"* (Hector, 2021)

In an attempt to manage these tensions, adopting a social media strategy was identified as useful among some entrepreneurs:

> *"I did a strategy call with the social media marketeer and…my designer made templates. My VA is going to post it but I did like the copywriting and stuff…that part I like but everything else I don't so I first want to be more active and more consistent on Instagram and I can see it growing…it's really nice"* (Ninarosa, 2021)

However, in some cases, significant identity tensions were experienced for CC entrepreneurs who did many things as part of their venture, making it difficult to effectively convey who they are on Instagram.

> *"Yeah, it's too like a mess. In the end, you could think oh, maybe we post some more. Now we have the balance between shop and assignments, [but if you post too much stuff only about the store, then you're a store on Instagram, and not the graphic design duo. And you're like, do people understand we also make books? Maybe not, okay, maybe we should post a book again?"* (Caitlin, 2021)

This particular case was resonated among a few of the participants. What stands out here is how the digital realm of identity contribute to the complexity of identity work. Also, the process of continuous identity work and the intricacy of media management entangled in identity work is visible in this case (Coupland & Brown, 2012; Horst & Hitters, 2020; Horst et al., 2019).

The incentives of using Instagram for entrepreneurs have been discussed by several scholars, however, this section contributes to-, and contradicts different findings. Overall, Instagram was consistently seen as something that is time consuming and a hassle in managing media and creating content which contradicts the work of Alkhowaiter (2016) and Henninger and Zhao (2019). Yet, the importance of a design strategy for content, such as mentioned by Henninger and Zhao (2019), was reinstated. Overall, this section elaborates on the notion of digital tools enabling and restricting entrepreneurs in constructing and working on their online identity as mentioned in Horst et al. (2019).

4.4. Interaction and support from others

The last theme formed related to the interaction and support the participants received and how this supported their identity work and managing tensions. Throughout the preceding themes there has been mention of how entrepreneurs work with others in terms of fostering creativity, working in different contexts, and also looking at how entrepreneurs support each other through contact created via Instagram. The following subthemes specifically address how the entrepreneurs managed their

identity tensions in relation to the interactions and support received around them. First, the support systems the respondents shared will be introduced and how these supported their identity work. Followed by looking at the entrepreneurs who had a business partner or a team and what impact this had, with reflection upon the solo entrepreneurs. The last subtheme introduces the approach and mindset the respondents had in relation the adoption and use of digital tools and their reflection upon these in relation to the context brought by the COVID pandemic.

4.4.1. Support systems to manage identity tensions

Looking at identity work, the analysis shows that friends are a prominent source of support for the entrepreneurs in managing identity tensions. For example, for several participants, their reason for starting their entrepreneurial journey was due to support from friends:

> *"It did also really help that some friends said to me, 'why not start something now?' Like, a lot of people knew that that was something that I wanted to pursue…I sat down with a lot of friends like, 'okay, what do you see me doing?' and a lot of people really know… something creative, full stop"* (Laura, 2021)

Moreover, looking at business processes, many entrepreneurs relied on friends for ideation and feedback:

> *"I also have a lot of friends around me so when I have ideas I usually let my ideas loose on people around me and I ask for feedback, so I'm definitely someone who doesn't keep stuff to himself. It's not like I flaunt it around but I do make sure that I hear feedback from many different sides".* (Mitchel, 2021)

These quotes illustrate the valuable role friends play in identity development of the participants at different stages. Where the entrepreneur may feel insecure or uncertain about a certain aspect of their work or ideas, they rely on their friends for honest feedback and support. This adds to the framework by Omrane et al. (2018) in such that social support is imperative to avoid entrepreneurial burnout and in turn constructively experiment with 'possible' and 'provisional' versions of identity (Coupland & Brown, 2012; Horst et al., 2019; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

Advancing further, three participants worked closely with their romantic partner.

> *"My girlfriend, of course, she's a good support. But at the same time, we work a lot together. So that really comes into conflict sometimes as well. And since I have an office at home, you know, it's quite hard sometimes. But I get great support from her"* (Duy, 2021)

Looking at a similar context, a contrasting case highlights the complexity of the situation:

> *"I enjoy being alone. I don't mind that at all…My girlfriend is also an entrepreneur. So she understands…so far it's good. It's in balance. I think I think that helps"* (Hector, 2021)

What is visible here is how the experience and struggle are very specific to the individual and the relationship. Other factors such as the age of the relationship and the age and personality of the individual influence how tensions are experienced. These cases provide an additional avenue relating to Elsbach and Flynn (2013), in such that shared passion and interest foster collaboration between CC entrepreneurs. Also, tensions increase in balancing the work-private life spheres when needing to balance the relationship, furthering the claims by Pradies et al. (2021) in relation to the context brought by COVID.

4.4.2. Working with others and approach to teamwork

Previously in this chapter the preference of working with others creatively was discussed. This subtheme focuses specifically on the desires and tensions the solo entrepreneurs experienced compared to how the entrepreneurs interacted with their business partner or team and how this supported their identity work throughout the pandemic.

Despite working as solo entrepreneurs, the respondents operating alone shared they did enjoy for the collegial aspect and context:

> "*I don't have…entrepreneurs around me, yet. I'm trying to…build more of a tribe of people that are doing similar things around me. Because I think that really helps as well. Because yeah…you shouldn't compare but I think it's human to sometimes compare, like, if you then compared to all your friends, they're all having full time jobs and stability and, like, stable monthly incomes and all that kind of things. Yeah, that can be discouraging. So I think it's good to surround yourself with people that are doing similar things"* (Laura, 2021)

For some solo entrepreneurs, they experienced tensions in relation to their identity as they are still learning and making mistakes in their journey, and can feel that they are alone in these struggles. This in turn influences their identity as they feel uncertain or insecure in their situation. What stood out was the strength entrepreneurs experience through sharing stresses and struggles, which in turn helped them in not feeling alone in their situation. The sense of feeling alone was not uncommon as a result of being essentially stuck in the home context due to the restrictions of the

pandemic. While support from friends helped most of the entrepreneurs, it became clear that being able to share tensions and receive support from others who are in the same situation was a desire some participants had. As a result, the desire for a context in which other entrepreneurs are present, such as a co-working space was shared, contributing to the work by Bhansing et al. (2020) and Rae (2014).

Compared to other participants who worked with a business partner or team, what stood out was how none of the respondents shared they had a strategy for working together, rather, the team works well together organically, supported by a structure of some sort which naturally emerged over time. Furthermore, where entrepreneurship is driven by passion, in line with Elsbach and Flynn (2013), having shared interests and passions were good indicators of effective team work among the entrepreneurs:

> *"…in the committee of The Office People is one friend of mine, Jan Willem, he's really supportive…he's a great consultant and analyst. But he really is also into the things I do…so that's a great support as well".* (Duy, 2021)

This extract incorporates the aspect of friends for support together with the effectivity of shared passion and interest as constructive to their work and identity formation. By working in a team, pair, or committee, an observation was formed in that these entrepreneurs were more steady in their identity, as their identity was co-constructed and backed by the team support and interaction. The team aspect can be seen as an extra pillar for the entrepreneur as support and reflection.

4.4.3 Support or restrictions through the use of digital tools

In terms of online support and tools, about half of the participants shared that they used online courses, resources and webinars. Of the entrepreneurs who made use of such resources, all but one used free resources as these were sufficient for solo entrepreneurs or small teams. A struggle experienced in relation to this was the medium for learning and the difficulty to engage.

> *"If I have my notebook with me and I can write and stuff then I can really focus. But when it's just like a conversation or something like that. Yeah, it's not the same…for me, it doesn't work. It just online, you know…I work with my phone…when I'm not working…I don't want to have my phone. So for me to socialize through the phone or like to do this network events it's...no. Unless it's a masterclass,…it's like an online course type of thing, that works for me"* (Shewska, 2021)

A common struggle identified was the difficulty to engage with webinars or online networking due to working in a safe environment (such as being at home). As a result, almost all of

the participants confessed to not prioritizing networking over the past year, or at least not seeking out or participating in online versions of networking. Instead, the majority of the participants worked on keeping their pre-pandemic network warm.

Alternately, one participant reflected upon an online networking event:

> *"…the thing [with] online events is that it's mostly sending, and yesterday actually was the first real event I attended that had breakout rooms…And then afterwards, you went into breakout rooms with one of the presenters. So it was really intimate. And then you can really like send and really get into the talks with the presenter, but also with the other people in the breakout rooms, so I really loved it"* (Duy, 2021)

What appeared was that although online networking did not compare to networking in real life. Adopting and leveraging tools available in digital media meant the disparities between online and offline could be reduced, such as break out rooms.

Similarly, Yorbi was in a comparable stage and context with his venture as Duy, but managed to grow his network considerably over the last year by adopting a different approach. He labelled Rotterdam as "*a big village",* where he experienced a domino-effect in continuing to meet people. He had an effective strategy in such that he focused on meeting people in person.

> *"I have done Zoom meetings. But if I do that, I always follow it up with a face to face meeting. I always say…for me, it's important to also meet each other face to face, especially if we want to do something together…especially now everything is becoming digital and stuff like that because of COVID. So [it's] even more important to have like, this counter movement of a more personal approach"* (Yorbi, 2021)

Where digital tools indeed appear to make entrepreneurial activities easier and more efficient (Bahcecik et al., 2019; Elia et al., 2020; Horst et al., 2019; Sahut et al., 2019), the dominant ideology remained among the participants that physical interaction was most constructive for their entrepreneurial development, learning and identity work. Seeing as identity work at the individual level works by making sense of the self through identification with social categories (Coupland & Brown, 2012) this was difficult to develop when essentially being 'stuck' at home, separated from social institutions. Thus, identity work and development is hindered, leading the entrepreneur to, in some instances, feel insecure and anxious (Brown & Coupland, 2015).

5. Discussion

This research was conducted to evaluate and understand the identity tensions cultural and creative entrepreneurs experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, further looking at how these tensions were managed with consideration of digital media in such to support their entrepreneurial development. Where the previous chapter presented the results of the analysis, this final chapter will address the key findings, interpret these and discuss implications in relation to theory used from the theoretical framework. This chapter ends with addressing limitations of this study and suggesting future avenues for research.

In short, the results of this research reveal that CC entrepreneurs experienced tensions from within, from their context (and the changes in their context), and through the use of digital media as a result of the restrictions brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to manage these tensions, a constructive (paradox) mindset and competencies such as resilience, flexibility, structure and organization were found to be productive in overcoming tensions. Furthermore, social support and digital tools, such as Instagram, were found to serve the entrepreneurs as well in managing tensions.

This last chapter will expand upon these findings. First, three subsections will address tensions experienced by the CC entrepreneurs and how these were managed, relating to contextual tensions, tensions from within and tensions from digital media. Furthermore, in appendix B1, further discussion assessing a reformulation of the creative entrepreneur with reference to the conceptualizations of Bujor and Avasilcai (2014) for digital entrepreneurs and the definitions of creative entrepreneurs by Hull et al. (2007) is presented.

5.1. Contextual challenges and the management thereof

This research underscores that context and the successful management of contextual challenges are essential for entrepreneurial development. This is connected with our general understanding of identity work in which the surrounding context shapes the development of any entrepreneur (Beech et a., 2012; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Rae, 2014). Working in a context with similar entrepreneurs is therefore constructive for identity work (Bhansing et al., 2020; Nielsen et al., 2018; Werthes et al., 2017). For example, bearing in mind the varying degrees of development of the entrepreneurs. Some shared to have profited from co-working spaces in the past, or during lockdown. On the contrary, others had not (yet) experienced such a setting, but shared they would want to if the opportunity arose. This means that some of the entrepreneurs in this study had lost a point of reference for their identity work, while others never had one to begin with. As a result, some entrepreneurs felt insecure in their identity as a reflection of the insecure context brought by the COVID-19 restrictions (Brown & Coupland, 2015).

Moreover, many of the entrepreneurs indeed were flexible in their work setting, reinstating the benefits of digital entrepreneurship by Elia et al. (2020) and Hull et al. (2007). Where (before COVID-19) many entrepreneurs would work in the offices or locations of their assignment provider, these contexts were lost. This contributes to an uncertain context in which the entrepreneurs have to

work. Not only did they lose working contexts, they lost contexts for recreation and sources of inspiration, such as museums, craft markets and parties.

A commonly shared approach in attempt to overcome these tensions related to social support, specifically, friends; for their identity work, feedback, ideation and as a working space. Where Alvesson and Willmott (2002) state identity work is set in motion through self-doubt, combined with uncertain contexts (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) the research revealed that all the entrepreneurs underwent identity work as a result of the restrictions brought by the pandemic. For example, in a few cases, the entrepreneurs would rely on their friends for support in re-assessing and formulating their future identity (Rae, 2014). Where scholarship has mentioned identity being co-constructed in co-working spaces with other entrepreneurs (Bhansing et al., 2020; Coupland & Brown, 2012; Nielsen et al., 2018; Rae, 2014; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), or via digital media in relation to the audience (Horst & Hitters, 2020; Horst et al.,; 2019), no mention of how identity work can be supported through a personal network, such as friends, of the individual is mentioned. Where people are social beings, this research shows that identity work is personal to the individual, but is not constructed individually per se.

Lastly, where scholars have labelled CC entrepreneurs as often lacking professional skills such as financial literacy and negotiation (Küttim et al., 2011; Nielsen et al., 2018; O'Brien & Hamburg, 2019) it is difficult to contribute to-, or refute these findings as the context the entrepreneurs were in was unprecedented. Due to the uncertainty, many bigger companies took caution and cut assignments, leading to a loss in work for many entrepreneurs (Grotenhuis et al., 2020). Because of this, it is difficult to assess the extent to which the loss of assignments, or the attempt at reconciling these losses was due to (a lack of) professional skills, or whether the entrepreneurs simply had no control over the situation.

To soften the financial struggle the entrepreneurs faced, the Dutch government extended financial support to CC entrepreneurs. This aspect highlights the importance of studying a specific context in relation to the effects of COVID-19 on entrepreneurs as each country and government handles the situation differently. This way, the tension and extent of struggle can be assessed as each entrepreneur was able to receive a similar package, depending on whether they operated for profit or as a foundation.

5.2. Tensions experienced from within and the management thereof

Narrowing towards the individual level, this section addresses the tensions found to be experienced from within among the entrepreneurs. In this section, two prominent tensions will be addressed; the tension of losing freedom – something found to be held closely to the identity of the entrepreneurs. And the tensions in balancing their personal- and work-life spheres. These two tensions will be discussed along with how the entrepreneurs managed these.

Where the previous section mentioned restriction in work and recreational contexts leading to tensions, this led to some entrepreneurs experiencing tensions from within as the restrictions

contradicted what they valued most: freedom. A strong motive for choosing entrepreneurship among the participants was retaining their freedom. Freedom in where to work, when to work and how to work were drivers found among the entrepreneurs. As a result of the COVID-19 restrictions, many entrepreneurs felt their freedom was negotiated and thus, experienced tensions relating to their identity. These insights are novel when looking at the theory used in this research. Where scholars have highlighted the importance for creativity among CC entrepreneurs (Bhansing et al., 2020; Nielsen et al., 2018), there appears to be a gap in addressing other motives, such as freedom. A possible explanation for this resides in the methodological choices and scope of previous scholarship. In this research, many entrepreneurs related to new media entrepreneurship and operated almost entirely online and independently. Comparing this to previous scholarship such as Bhansing et al. (2020), Nielsen et al. (2018), and Werthes et al. (2017), their studies were targeted at CC entrepreneurs in specific contexts, such as co-working spaces or entrepreneurial learning programs, and often focused on different creative entrepreneurs such as designers and artists. Noting the importance of context and interactions with others for identity work and development, it is difficult to relate to their findings. Nonetheless, creativity was also found to be a central aspect of their identity, in a particular case, freedom was attained through creativity, so to say that freedom can be seen as an extension of creativity.

Furthermore, where Omrane et al. (2018) highlight the importance of balancing personal and work life as a strategy to combat entrepreneurial burnout, this notion became increasingly important during the pandemic. Taking note of the abrupt changes in work routines due to COVID-19 restrictions, many entrepreneurs confessed to experiencing struggles in relation to their work context, creativity and productivity as a result of having to work from home. This lead to many struggling in maintaining a healthy balance between the work and private life spheres while working and living in the same context. In particular, the entrepreneurs who worked and lived with their romantic partner experienced more struggle. Overall, two comments are to be made in relation to past scholarship. First, the majority of the CC entrepreneurs in this study worked in pairs or small teams, going against the claims of Bhansing et al. (2020) and Nielsen et al. (2018) in such that CC entrepreneurs are often highly individualistic. This leads to the second point, in such that CC entrepreneurs in fact are very capable of working with others. Contributing to the findings of Elsbach and Flynn (2013) is what appears to be necessary for CC entrepreneurs to collaborate and co-create with others are shared passions and an overlap in creative approach. This was evident among all the duo or team entrepreneurs. While none had a strategy for working together, their shared passion and creative approach sufficed for fruitful collaboration. Interestingly, what shows is that by working in a duo or team, the turbulence of identity work is steadied in such that there are support pillars present which back the CC entrepreneur in maintaining steadfast in who they are, what they deliver and how they operate. In short, tensions appear to feel less tense when they are shared.

Consistent among the entrepreneurs in managing these tensions from within, and tensions in general, was through expressing resilience and flexibility, contributing to the entrepreneurial

competencies listed by O'Brien and Hamburg (2019). In such that a long term perspective helped the entrepreneurs manage the current tensions, knowing that the situation was uncertain yet temporary. Flexibility is expressed through adapting to working from home and seeking alternative solutions, such as working at friends' homes mentioned above. A shortcoming in scholarship to mention is the lack of attention on the importance of structure, organisation and discipline as entrepreneurial competencies. Consistent among the entrepreneurs, the research has shown that through a disciplined and structured approach to work, the entrepreneurs are able to manage tensions such as balancing administrative and creative tasks and as a strategy to maintain a balance between their personal life and work needs.

In a similar way, it was found that some entrepreneurs adopted a paradox mindset as introduced by Pradies et al. (2021). It seems that for those who thought paradoxically about the current crisis were able to reduce the intensity of struggles experienced in such that they were able to relativise the situation and acknowledge the struggles as being part of the crisis, not their venture.

5.3. Tensions experienced from digital media and the management thereof

This last section highlights the way in which DM alleviates tensions for entrepreneurs (Alkowaiter; 2016; Elia et al., 2020; Bahcecik et al., 2019; Horst et al., 2019; Olanrewaju et al., 2020). Yet, further represents the way in which DM brings new tensions with it it (Horst & Hitters, 2020; Horst et al., 2019). Thus, the findings show how DM is contradicting as a medium in the sense that entrepreneurs benefit but also experience tensions as a result.

To start, a few entrepreneurs took advantage of (mostly free) webinars and online coaches. To an extent, this can be seen as replacing entrepreneurial learning courses and programs in such that the CC entrepreneur is able to source the necessary information they need, rather than being part of a program or a particular group. However, it is difficult to draw conclusions here as comparison remains difficult. What stays, is how being part of a learning course, program or co-working space, the entrepreneur can assess themselves among other entrepreneurs in a working context which contributes to constructing their identity (Bhansing et al., 2020). In the context of this study, the entrepreneurs did not have these reference points, thus, it is oversimplified to claim learning courses and programs are no longer relevant or that DM replace these. Instead, the context in which the entrepreneurs have operated during the pandemic highlights the value of DM for entrepreneurs, such as stated by many authors in the field (Bahcecik et al., 2019; Hull et al., 2007; Nambisan, 2017; Sahut et al., 2019; Steininger, 2018).

A shortcoming of DM to note is the need for literacy and understanding of using the available tools appropriately. A few entrepreneurs shared to struggle with educators and coaches not leveraging the available tools properly, for example, not using breakout rooms in Zoom to invite for discussion. In many cases, the webinars felt as a form of one-way communication sending out information, but not inviting for engagement. Several entrepreneurs confessed to not take part in webinars because of this, suggesting that in-person alternatives are more fruitful. Furthermore, where

scholars have mentioned the fast pace at which technology advances, what appears is how, in some aspects, technology advances faster than people can adapt to it.

Looking specifically at social media, this research adds detail to-, and expands upon the uses of Instagram for entrepreneurs outlined by several scholars, such as Horst et al., (2019) and Olanrewaju et al. (2020). The findings from this study show how the entrepreneurs use Instagram as: a landing page, reaching clients, building a relationship with clients, keeping contacts warm, access to other entrepreneurs for contact, advice and support, marketing and sales, and collaborations and promotions. While most of these uses have been identified by scholars, the extent to which the entrepreneurs relied on these appeared to be more than previously observed. An obvious reason being the lack of other alternatives such as meeting in different physical contexts.

Moreover, this research has surfaced several features within Instagram leveraged by the CC entrepreneurs not mentioned in extant scholarship. Where Bahcecik et al. (2019) discuss Instagram features useful for the entrepreneur, such as the bio section and hashtags, together with the likes, captions and geotags by Caliandro and Graham (2020), the findings of this research contribute new features to their work, being, direct messaging, post insights and stories. Building on these features, what promotes them is the informal environment within Instagram and the benefit this has for the aforementioned uses. For example, instead of sending an e-mail, entrepreneurs can reply to a story or direct message a potential customer or other entrepreneur and easily respond to something they posted. Combined with the strong visual element of Instagram, the platform is very well suited to CC entrepreneurs in such that it enables a new form of interaction for them to leverage. In addition, post insights provide the entrepreneur with additional information about their content and how their audience interacts with this. What stands out here, is the more the users rely on these insights, the more they trade in their agency for their identity construction, moving towards co-constructing their identity together with their audience, adding to the work by Horst and Hitters (2020). Lastly, Instagram stories are shared as being a great communication tool for the entrepreneurs to use. Combining the informal environment and strong visual elements, stories are shared as being a tool for which CC entrepreneurs can show their creative process and co-create with their audience, resulting in business innovation and increasing their value to their audience (Horst et al., 2019; Olenrewaju et al., 2020).

Despite these advantageous features, the research revealed the entrepreneurs to experience most tensions in relation to Instagram. Where scholars such as Alkhowaiter (2016) and Henninger and Zhao (2019) found entrepreneurs to enjoy Instagram as it did not consume a lot of time, the result of this research are in starkly contrast their findings. The most striking tensions found relate to Instagram being extremely time consuming and a hassle to manage. A plausible reasoning for this difference in findings can be due to the increased amount of features present within the platform. These findings build upon the work of Horst and Hitters (2020) in such to illustrate further the complexity of media management for entrepreneurs, and thus, identity work. As a result, many entrepreneurs shared to struggle with balancing and prioritising their work activities versus

Instagram content needs. On Instagram, a user needs to post regularly to stay consistent with their brand and online identity. Because of this, a common struggle was found in such that it was difficult to balance these needs.

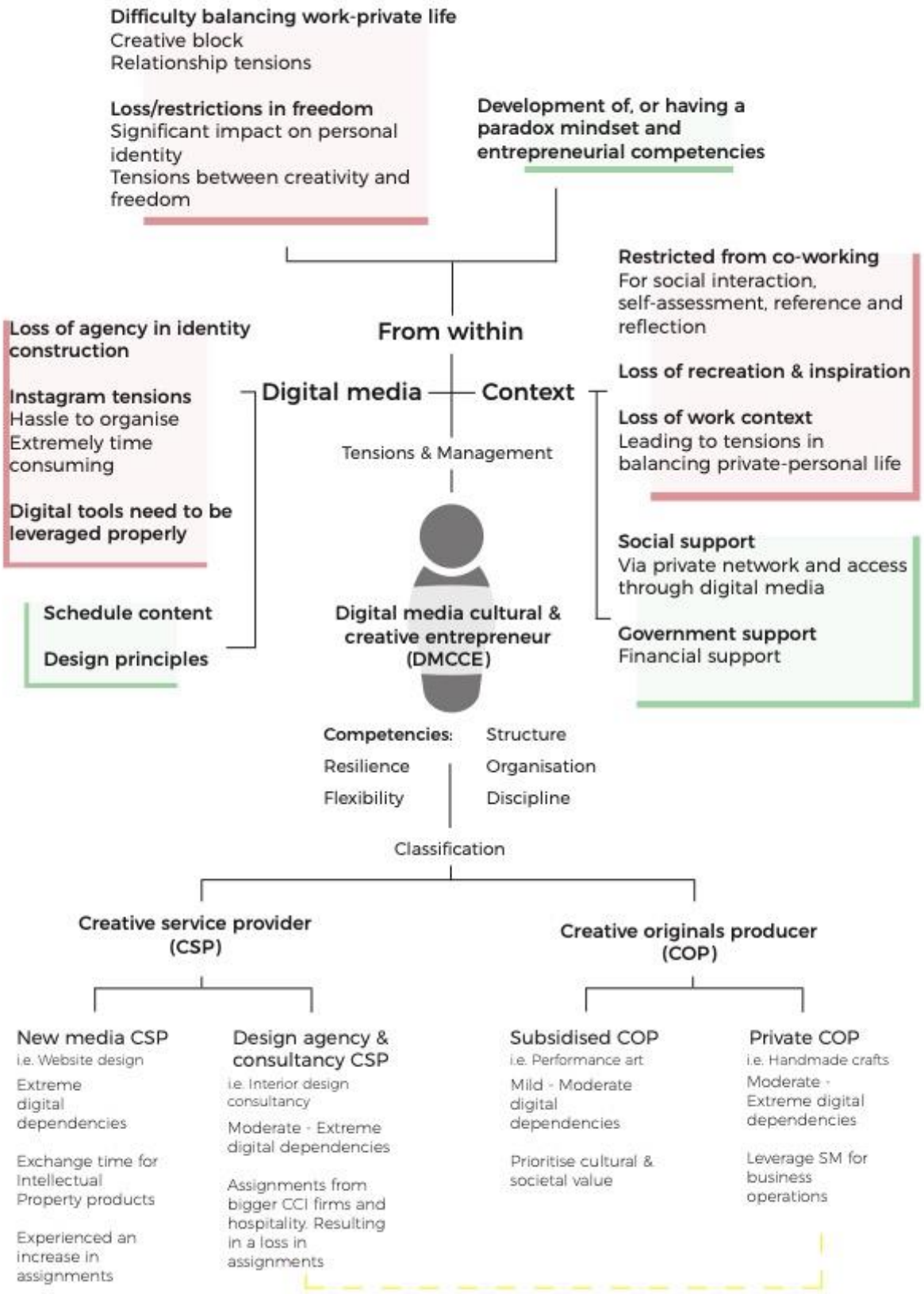
In an attempt to promote consistent content, Henninger and Zhao (2019) suggest to adopt consistent design principles to maintain consistency for content. In line with this, a small number of entrepreneurs shared to attempt scheduling content together with design principles to make creating content easier and more efficient. Despite the attempts, none of the entrepreneurs had achieved this successfully. One particular entrepreneur struggled considerably with content and consistency. In their case, their venture offered various products and services, which is very difficult to convey effectively on a two-dimensional platform. Together with all the features, such as post insights, the overall experience on Instagram felt overwhelming and like a big hassle. Their technique to manage this tension was to not take the platform too seriously and to work with the challenges incrementally, reflecting characteristics of a paradox mindset discussed by Pradies et al. (2021).

In sum, where Elia et al. (2019) define the digital entrepreneurship ecosystem as a 'collective intelligence system' a connection can be made here with Horst & Hitters (2020) in such that digital identities are co-constructed through shared meaning making with other actors. These findings have contributed to several scholars, and overall highlighting how digital media enable and constrict identity work, as stated by Horst et al. (2019).

5.4. Summary model of results

Figure 5.4.1

Summary of results: tensions and management and further classification of cultural & creative entrepreneurs



Concluding this chapter, the model above summarises the core findings of this study, also illustrating areas in which further research is necessary. In short, this study has contributed to exploring the tensions CC entrepreneurs experience in their identity work with close consideration of disruption in context. The lower field of the model presents the expansion upon the classification of cultural and creative entrepreneurs by Hull et al. (2007) with reference to the classification of digital entrepreneurship by Bujor and Avasilcai (2014). Further research here can offer new insights as this study expanded upon only two of the four classifications of CC entrepreneurs, leading to the new concept of DMCCEs. This means that further investigation could lead to deeper insight into the development of DMCCEs. For example, this research advanced the concept of CSP and COP entrepreneurs, but also found that these overlap (illustrated by the yellow dotted line). Not only does this illustrate the multifaceted character of identity (Coupland & Brown, 2012; Horst et al., 2019), it also demonstrates the way digital tools and media break down barriers of entrepreneurial activity, thus increasing the complexity of identity and identity work (Horst & Hitters, 2020; Horst et al., 2019; Steininger, 2018).

The upper half of the model presents the most prominent tensions experienced by the CC entrepreneurs in this study (illustrated with a red border), along with the most occurring techniques and approaches to managing these tensions (illustrated with a green border). What shows is how the tensions and management thereof are interrelated and influence each other, further demonstrating the complexity of identity work. In addition, this model highlights the need for further research in exploring and understanding how CCI entrepreneurs experience new digital tools and social media as these are continually evolving. Thus, new areas for research emerge by which identity can develop.

6. Conclusion, limitations and future research

6.1. Conclusion

This thesis worked to investigate and understand the ways in which CC entrepreneurs approached their identity work with consideration of the COVID-19 restrictions. Taking note of what tensions they experience and how these are managed through assessing their digital media use. This study developed from the assumption that due to the closure of co-working spaces and learning programs, CC entrepreneurs would experience setbacks and struggle as a response to highly uncertain context. Based on a qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with 11 CC entrepreneurs in the Netherlands, it can be concluded that identity tensions were experienced in relation to context, digital media and from within, which extends extant scholarship. The results show how certain competencies such as resilience, flexibility, structure and discipline are key skills to have in managing identity work in uncertain contexts. In a similar vein, a paradox mindset is a constructive approach to managing tensions and reasoning with the uncertainties that comes with entrepreneurship. Next to this, interaction and support from others, such as friends and other entrepreneurs via digital channels support the identity work of the CC entrepreneurs. This research has extended extant scholarship relating to entrepreneurship in the cultural and creative industries, identity work, and contributes new insights in relation to digital media use and the ways in which entrepreneurs can grow and develop their identity through leveraging digital media and tools, such as Instagram. The findings reveal how entrepreneurs have considerable agency in managing their struggles, bringing us to question the extent to which entrepreneurial learning programs remain as constructive for entrepreneurial development. Instead, the vast array of tools and information online have shown to be beneficial for entrepreneurial learning and identity work.

6.2. Limitations

However, inherent to qualitative research are limitations which require reflection. First and foremost, what makes the results of this study difficult to transfer to other contexts is the highly personal aspect of identity and identity work together with the unprecedented context brought by the pandemic. Each person is unique in their identity, and personal attributes such as family dynamics, past experiences and personality are factors that influence someone's identity. Taking note of the many influences, it is difficult to grasp and touch upon all the elements equally when studying identity and identity work. As a consequence, it may occur that a conclusion is stated that may not be accurate as investigation about a particular aspect may have been overlooked or misinterpreted, such as personality. Furthermore, identities are multifaceted, in constant state of flux and are considerably influenced by the context. What is tricky here is how the context has already changed from when the interviews were conducted. Meaning that the interview captures a moment in time of the individual based on the information shared, but the identity may have evolved or changed as a result of the context changing, making transferability of results tricky.

Reflecting upon methodological choices and restrictions, several details should be mentioned. Where various scholars discuss reliability and validity in qualitative research, a limitation for this study can be pointed out in such that just one form of data collection was used. By adopting a mixed methods approach more information can be obtained working to create a comprehensive account of the topic under study (Buchanan & Bryman, 2007; Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). For example, adding a content analysis of the CC entrepreneurs and their digital platforms can expand upon the data and provide further information about their online identity. Such an analysis can emerge topics to address in the interviews contributing to creating an in-depth inquiry of identity and identity work during the pandemic.

Regarding methodological restrictions, due to COVID-19, it was not possible to conduct interviews in person. Although scholars have pointed to video-conferencing being a suitable approach to data collection and works to create a similar interaction as face to face, I felt that online interviews jeopardised the data collection in some instances. Where ideally, the researcher has control over the interview setting, this was lost due to collecting data online. Issues of connectivity, interruptions from pets and package deliveries were some situations that hindered a natural flow in conversation. Furthermore, in some instances, the participant would google something or use their phone to research or look up a definition. As a result, the co-construction of meaning between participant and researcher was hindered as external tools were used instead. Despite this, throughout the data collection I ensured to be consistent and not conduct some interviews in person (as this was a possibility requested by the entrepreneur). So, although online interviews were not ideal, active steps were taken to ensure all data was collected in the same way.

6.3. Future research

The exploratory nature of this research has opened up several avenues interesting for future research. While the COVID-19 pandemic and the related restrictions may be slowly disappearing, studying the development of identity for CC entrepreneurs remains highly important. Seeing how CC entrepreneurs appear to have evolved to combine competencies related to digital entrepreneurship, further investigation in the field of digital media and identity work is necessary. Where scholarship has investigated specific aspects of how social media plays an important role for entrepreneurs for factors such as marketing, there appears to be a gap in research dedicated to assessing tools within digital platforms, what they mean for the entrepreneurs and how these hinder or promote their identity work. In general, social media and it's relation to entrepreneurs remains an understudied subject, where studies looking at Instagram alone also lack coverage (Bahcecik et al., 2019; Caliandro & Graham, 2020; Olanrewaju et al., 2020). Further investigation in this area is necessary as this study has highlighted the important role Instagram plays for entrepreneurs, and how it may even replace existing approaches to learning.

Moreover, a fruitful addition to this research would be following up with the entrepreneurs once the restrictions have dissipated. This adds a comparative element to the research which is

currently lacking. Through such an approach, insights can be gained in understanding entrepreneurial identity work as access to certain contexts, such as co-working spaces, can create new opportunities for self-reflection and identity development. Do the entrepreneurs adopt new strategies for development and approach to creativity? Through this, stronger conclusions can be made by comparing the efficacy of learning digitally versus contextual learning.

References

Achtenhagen, L. (2008). Understanding entrepreneurship in traditional media. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, *5*(1), 123–142. https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2008.11073463

Achtenhagen, L. (2017). Media Entrepreneurship—Taking stock and moving forward. *International Journal on Media Management*, *19*(1), 1–10 https://doi.org/10.1080/14241277.2017.1298941

Alasuutari, P. (1996). Theorizing in qualitative research: A cultural studies perspective. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *2*(4), 371–384. https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049600200401

Alkhowaiter, W. (2016). The power of Instagram in building small businesses. *Social Media: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, *9844*, 59–64. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-45234-0_6

Alvesson, M., & Willmott, H. (2002). Identity regulation as organizational control: Producing the appropriate individual. *Journal of Management Studies*, *39*(5), 619–644. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6486.00305

Antràs, P., Redding, S., & Rossi-Hansberg, E. (2020). Globalization and pandemics. *National Bureau of Economic Research*. Published. https://doi.org/10.3386/w27840

Archibald, M. M., Ambagtsheer, R. C., Casey, M. G., & Lawless, M. (2019). Using Zoom videoconferencing for qualitative data collection: Perceptions and experiences of researchers and participants. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *18*, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919874596

Babbie, E. R. (2013). Paradigms, methods, and ethics of qualitative field research. In *The Practice of Social Research* (13th ed., pp. 324–355). WP.

Bahcecik, Y. S., Akay, S. S., & Akdemir, A. (2019). A review of digital brand positioning strategies of internet entrepreneurship in the context of virtual organizations: Facebook, Instagram and Youtube samples. *Procedia Computer Science*, *158*, 513–522. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2019.09.083

Beech, N., Gilmore, C., Cochrane, E., & Greig, G. (2012). Identity work as a response to tensions: A re-narration in opera rehearsals. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, *28*(1), 39–47. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2011.12.005

Bhansing, P. V., Wijngaarden, Y., & Hitters, E. (2020). Identity work in the context of co-located creative entrepreneurs: how place influences professional identity. *International Journal of Arts Management*, *22*(1), 7-23

Björkegren, D. (1996), The Culture Business: Management Strategies for the Arts Related Business, Routledge, London.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brennen, B. S. (2017). Qualitative research methods for media studies (2nd edition). New York, London: Routledge

Brown, A. D. (2017). Identity Work and Organizational Identification. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *19*(3), 296-317. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12152

Brown, A. D., & Coupland, C. (2015). Identity threats, identity work and elite professionals. *Organization Studies*, *36*(10), 1315–1336. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840615593594

Bryman, A. (2016). Interviewing in qualitative research. In *Social Research Methods* (5th ed., pp. 465–498). Oxford University Press.

Buchanan, D. A., & Bryman, A. (2007). Contextualizing methods choice in organizational research. *Organizational Research Methods*, *10*(3), 483–501. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428106295046

Bujor, A., & Avasilcai, S. (2014). Creative entrepreneurship in Europe, a framework of analysis. *Facility of Management and Technological Engineering*, *1*, 151–156. https://doi.org/10.15660/auofmte.2014-1.2960

Caliandro, A., & Graham, J. (2020). Studying Instagram beyond selfies. *Social Media + Society*, *6*(2), 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120924779

Chand, S. (2013, December 8). *Classification of entrepreneurs: Timing of venture creation; socio-cultural variables and entrepreneurial activity*. Your Article Library. https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/entrepreneur/classification-of-entrepreneurs-timing-of-venture-creation-socio-cultural-variables-and-entrepreneurial-activity/13429

Chapain, C., Emin, S., & Schieb-Bienfait, N. (2018). Cultural and creative entrepreneurship: Key issues of a still emergent research field. *Revue de l'Entrepreneuriat*, *17*(1), 7–28. https://doi.org/10.3917/entre.171.0007

Coupland, C., & Brown, A. D. (2012). Identities in action: Processes and outcomes. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, *28*(1), 1-4. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2011.12.002

Cunningham, J. B., & Lischeron, J. (1991). Defining entrepreneurship. *Journal of small business management*, *29*(1), 45-61.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2008). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (pp. 1–43). Sage Publications, Inc.

Dethridge, L. (2018, August 17). *Global focus for cultural entrepreneurship*. Vizaca. https://www.vizaca.com/global-focus-cultural-entrepreneurship/

Deutsche Welle. (2020, December 26). *COVID-19 will not be last pandemic: WHO*. DW.COM. https://www.dw.com/en/covid-19-will-not-be-last-pandemic-who/a-56065483

Dumitrica, D. & Pridmore, J. (2019). Qualitative Interviews & Sampling. Qualitative Interviews & Sampling. *Qualitative Methods Supplemental Texts.*

Elia, G., Margherita, A., & Passiante, G. (2020). Digital entrepreneurship ecosystem: How digital technologies and collective intelligence are reshaping the entrepreneurial process. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *150*, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2019.119791

Elsbach, K. D., & Flynn, F. J. (2013). Creative collaboration and the Self-Concept: A study of toy designers. *Journal of Management Studies*, *50*(4), 515–544. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12024

Evans, A., Elford, J., & Wiggins, D. (2008). Using the internet for qualitative research. In C. Willig & W. Stainton-Rogers (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology* (pp. 315–333). SAGE Publications.

Fachin, F. F., & Langley, A. (2017). Researching organizational concepts processually: The case of identity. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Business Management Research Methods: History and Traditions*, 308.

Gehman, J., & Soublière, J. F. (2017). Cultural entrepreneurship: From making culture to cultural making. *Innovation*, *19*(1), 61–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/14479338.2016.1268521

GESAC & EY. (2021, January). *European recovery: The cultural and creative sector before and after the corona crisis*. http://dutchcreativeindustries.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/2012SG133-Etude_GESAC_v01_09_Extrait-ES-8-pages_V2.NL3_.pdf

Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2012). Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research. *Organizational Research Methods*, *16*(1), 15–31. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428112452151

Gobal Entrepreneurship Monitor. (2020). *Entrepreneurship in the Netherlands*. GEM Global Entrepreneurship Monitor. https://www.gemconsortium.org/economy-profiles/netherlands

Grotenhuis, F., Ballintijn, M. R., Fesel, B., & Ehler, C. (2020). *Perspectives on cultural and creative industries*. Lulu.com.

Hanna, P. (2012). Using internet technologies (such as Skype) as a research medium: A research note. *Qualitative Research*, *12*(2), 239–242. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794111426607

Henninger, C. E., Zhao, X., & le Normand, A. (2019). Unravelling a mystery: Selling an entrepreneurial perspective through instagram. *Social Commerce*, 135–152. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03617-1_8

Herzog, C., Handke, C., & Hitters, E. (2019). Analyzing talk and text II: Thematic analysis. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Methods for Media Policy Research* (pp. 2–18). Palgrave Macmillan.

Hesmondhalgh, D. (2008). Cultural and creative industries. *The SAGE Handbook of Cultural Analysis*, 552–569. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848608443.n27

Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (2003). Active Interviewing. *Postmodern Interviewing*, 66–80. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412985437.n4

Horst, S.-O., & Hitters, E. (2020). Digital Media Entrepreneurship: Implications for Strategic Identity Work and Knowledge Sharing of Beginning Entrepreneurs. *Nordic Journal of Media Management*, *1*(1), 23–44. https://doi.org/10.5278/njmm.2597-0445.3612

Horst, S. O., Järventie-Thesleff, R., & Perez-Latre, F. J. (2019). Entrepreneurial identity development through digital media. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, *17*(2), 87–112. https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2019.1689767

Hull, C. E., Hung, Y. T. C., Hair, N., Perotti, V., & DeMartino, R. (2007). Taking advantage of digital opportunities: A typology of digital entrepreneurship. *International Journal of Networking and Virtual Organisations*, *4*(3), 290–303. https://doi.org/10.1504/ijnvo.2007.015166

Jones, L., Palumbo, D., & Brown, D. (2021, January 24). *Coronavirus: How the pandemic has changed the world economy*. BBC News. https://www.bbc.com/news/business-51706225

Jones, P., Klapper, R., Ratten, V., & Fayolle, A. (2018). Emerging themes in entrepreneurial behaviours, identities and contexts. *The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, *19*(4), 233–236. https://doi.org/10.1177/1465750318772811

Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2005). Toward critical media literacy: Core concepts, debates, organizations, and policy. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *26*(3), 369–386. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596300500200169

Küttim, M., Arvola, K., & Venesaar, U. (2011). Development of creative entrepreneurship: Opinion of managers from Estonia, Latvia, Finland and Sweden. *Verslas: Teorija Ir Praktika*, *12*(4), 369–378. https://doi.org/10.3846/btp.2011.38

Longhurst, R. (2016). Semi structured interviews and focus groups. In *Key Methods in Geography* (3rd ed., pp. 143–156). SAGE Publications Ltd.

Manto, G., Constantine, A., Marianne, W. L., & Amy, E. I. (2010). Managing creatives: Paradoxical approaches to identity regulation. *Human Relations*, *63*(6), 781-805. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726709342929

Ministry of Economic Affairs. (2015, August 26). *Supporting ambitious entrepreneurs and startups*. Enterprise and Innovation | Government.Nl. https://www.government.nl/topics/enterprise-and-innovation/supporting-ambitious-entrepreneurs-and-startups

Moisander, J., & Valtonen, A. (2006). Evaluating cultural research. In *Qualitative marketing research: A cultural approach (Introducing qualitative methods series)* (1st ed., pp. 21–41). SAGE Publications Ltd.

Mumby, D. K., & Clair, R. P. (1997). *Organizational discourse.* In T. A. van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse as social interaction: Discourse studies: A multidisciplinary introduction, Vol. 2* (p. 181–205). Sage Publications, Inc.

Nambisan, S. (2017). Digital Entrepreneurship: Toward a Digital Technology Perspective of Entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, *41*(6), 1029–1055. https://doi.org/10.1111/etap.12254

Nielsen, S. L., Norlyk, B., & Christensen, P. R. (2018). 'Salesman? Hell no!' Identity struggles of nascent design entrepreneurs. *Creativity and Innovation Management*, *27*(3), 358–369. https://doi.org/10.1111/caim.12275

O'Brien, E., & Hamburg, I. (2019). A critical review of learning approaches for entrepreneurship education in a contemporary society. *European Journal of Education*, *54*(4), 525–537. https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12369

OECD/EU. (2018). *Supporting Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Higher Education in the Netherlands*. OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris/EU, Brussels. https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264292048-en

Olanrewaju, A. S. T., Hossain, M. A., Whiteside, N., & Mercieca, P. (2020). Social media and entrepreneurship research: A literature review. *International Journal of Information Management*, *50*, 90–110. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2019.05.011

Omrane, A., Kammoun, A., & Seaman, C. (2018). Entrepreneurial burnout: Causes, consequences and way out. *FIIB Business Review*, *7*(1), 28–42. https://doi.org/10.1177/2319714518767805

Pradies, C., Aust, I., Bednarek, R., Brandl, J., Carmine, S., Cheal, J., Pina E Cunha, M., Gaim, M., Keegan, A., Lê, J. K., Miron-Spektor, E., Nielsen, R. K., Pouthier, V., Sharma, G., Sparr, J. L., Vince, R., & Keller, J. (2021). The lived experience of paradox: How individuals navigate tensions during the pandemic crisis. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, *30*(2), 154–167. https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492620986874

Price Schultz, C. J., & Jones, M. (2017). You can't do that! A case study of rural and urban media entrepreneur experience. *International Journal on Media Management*, *19*(1), 11–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/14241277.2016.1274994

Rae, D. (2004). Entrepreneurial learning: a practical model from the creative industries. *Education + Training*, *46*(8/9), 492–500. https://doi.org/10.1108/00400910410569614

Sahut, J., Iandoli, L., & Teulon, F. (2019). The age of digital entrepreneurship. *Small Business Economics*, *56*(3), 1159–1169. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-019-00260-8

Schad, J., Lewis, M. W., Raisch, S., & Smith, W. K. (2016). Paradox research in management science: Looking back to move forward. *Academy of Management Annals*, *10*(1), 5–64. https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2016.1162422

Schumpeter, J. A. (1947). The creative response in economic history. *The Journal of Economic History*, *7*(2), 149–159. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022050700054279

Smith, W. K., & Lewis, M. W. (2011). Toward a theory of paradox: A dynamic equilibrium model of organizing. *Academy of Management Review*, *36*(2), 381–403. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2009.0223

Steininger, D. M. (2018). Linking information systems and entrepreneurship: A review and agenda for IT-associated and digital entrepreneurship research. *Information Systems Journal*, *29*(2), 363–407. https://doi.org/10.1111/isj.12206

Sveningsson, S., & Alvesson, M. (2003). Managing managerial identities: Organizational fragmentation, discourse and identity struggle. *Human Relations*, *56*(10), 1163–1193. https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267035610001

Trouw. (2021, January 6). *Nederland ondanks lockdown duizenden bedrijven rijker*. https://www.trouw.nl/economie/nederland-ondanks-lockdown-duizenden-bedrijven-rijker~ba54939e/

van Grinsven, M., Sturdy, A., & Heusinkveld, S. (2019). Identities in translation: Management concepts as means and outcomes of identity work. *Organization Studies*, *41*(6), 873–897. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840619866490

Werthes, D., Mauer, R., & Brettel, M. (2017). Cultural and creative entrepreneurs: Understanding the role of entrepreneurial identity. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, *24*(1), 290–314. https://doi.org/10.1108/ijebr-07-2016-0215

Whittemore, R., Chase, S. K., & Mandle, C. L. (2001). Validity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, *11*(4), 522–537. https://doi.org/10.1177/104973201129119299

Winkler, I. (2016). Identity work and emotions: A review. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *20*(1), 120–133. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12119

Appendix A: Further information: Methodology

A1. Context description

Keeping in mind the strong relation identity and identity work has to context (Bhansing et al., 2020; Horst et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2018; Porforio et al., 2016; Price et al., 2017) the decision was made to focus on cultural and creative entrepreneurs in the Netherlands. This ensures all participants in this study adhere to the same, or very similar, organisational discourses, policies and possible support packages offered by the government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As mentioned in the introduction of this research, the Netherlands fosters entrepreneurship through policy and by expressing an international orientation (Ministry of Economic Affairs, 2015). Together with the context-specificity of qualitative research and the novel context entrepreneurs have operated in during the pandemic it is most appropriate to select a distinct context.

A2. Sampling characteristics

Before accessing entrepreneurs for this study, several participant characteristics were necessary to define. While Sveingsson and Alvesson (2003) did not find gender to appeal to conscious identity work, Coupland and Brown (2012) reflected upon how permanent influences such as ethnicity, gender and national identity had unquestionable weight on the sense of self. For this reason, a balance between male and female participants was striven for. Among the entrepreneurs, 5 males and 6 females took part.

Also, classification in what a creative or cultural entrepreneur was needed in order to access participants. In this research, creative entrepreneurs were considered whom were active in fields such as advertising, art, crafts, design, film and video, publishing, and software (Gehman & Soublière, 2017). Together with cultural entrepreneurs who were operationalized as individuals who strive to leverage business in order to improve society (Dethridge, 2018), such as a socially oriented brand or foundation.

A comparative element which was recorded but was not a criteria per se (due to sampling feasibility) was the age of the venture. Where the age of the venture influences, for example, the size of the entrepreneur's network and experiences (Chand, 2013), reflection upon this in relation to the experiences and accounts shared by the participant could add an interesting comparative dimension in the interpretation of data.

A strength with the sample in this research is the overlap of the participant characteristics and that of the researcher. Through similarities in nationality, age, interest and context, shared cultural repertoires were similar in so far that the participant and researcher were able to co-construct meaning within a similar framework and share similar cultural codes (Kellner & Share, 2005), this enabled the creation of rich data and contributed to maintaining rapport throughout the interview (Dumitrica & Pridmore, 2019).

The table below presents the relevant information in relation to the entrepreneurs and the interview conducted.

Table A2.

Table presenting participant and conducted interview information

Participant name	Profession / Sector	Agency name	Operating since	City	Date and time	Interview duration
Laura (F)	Digital interior design consultancy	Brond	2020	Amersfoort	14.4, 16:00	01:14
Duy (M)	Performance art	The Office People	2019	Rotterdam	23.4, 11:00	00:56
Jess (F)	Handmade earrings	Studio Vaia	2020	The Hague	26.4, 11:00	01:37
Kim (F)	Graphic design	Waart	2017	The Hague	27.4, 11:00	00:32
Mitchel (M)	Handcrafted drinks	Van Linschoten	2019	Rotterdam	30.4, 16:00	00:58
Ninarosa (F)	Digital marketeer	Denkfabriek	2017	Remote / NL	3.5, 15:00	01:13
Hector (M)	Design & development	Intellegends	2018	The Hague	4.5, 9:00	00:56
Caitlin (F)	Graphic design +	Glitter Studio	2014	The Hague	10.5, 13:00	00:46
Shewksa (F)	Digital marketeer	Shewksa SMV	2019	The Hague	13.5, 12:00	01:07
Yorbi (M)	Social streetwear	HEDONE	2020	Rotterdam	21.5, 11:00	01:00
Marc (M)	Dance with Parkinson's	Marc Vlemmix Dance	2020	Rotterdam	26.5, 14:00	00:50

A3. Interview conduct

Each interview was planned in accordance with the entrepreneur, meaning an exchange of information was possible prior to the interview. First, an email was sent to the participant with information relating to the objective of the research and explaining the rights of the participant (see appendix C). The start of each interview was structured the same; first the opportunity was extended to the participant to ask any questions they may have followed by the request to record the interview.

After this, the recorders were turned on and verbal consent was requested again on record. The researcher started with an introduction in which the motivation for the research was shared along with a personal introduction and past entrepreneurial experience was shared. The aim of this introductory start was to establish rapport between the researcher and the entrepreneur (Dumitrica & Pridmore, 2019).

Prior to each interview, familiarisation of the entrepreneur in terms of digital media was conducted. This advanced some aspects of the interview as instead of the entrepreneur explaining they have a website or an Instagram page, deeper discussion was possible about specific elements within such platforms.

Due to COVID restrictions, the interviews were to be conducted online. For this, Zoom was used. Due to the HD video and audio quality, ease of use, and minimal lag, it was a suitable approach in attempting to create the most real-life setting possible (Archibald et al., 2019).

In terms of interview process, in qualitative methods, it is important to address the unavoidable position of the researcher (Babbie, 2013), in such that "technical skills and knowledge of the researcher, but also the role of personal interests, preferences, biases, prejudices and creativity" can have complex influences on the research process (Buchanan & Bryman, 2007, p.497). As a result, the researcher must recognise their possible influence in the research and aknowledge themselves as co-creators of meaning together with the participants in the study (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). Hence, both the researcher and entrepreneurs were viewed as knowledgeable agents. The participants were perceived as information-rich experts in their areas by which agency was extended to the entrepreneurs in being able to explain their thoughts, intentions and actions, and that the researcher has knowledge and experience to make sense of these thoughts, intentions and actions, and holds the ability to interpret these (Goia et al., 2012).

In sum, throughout the interviews, the focus was on extending an outlet for the entrepreneurs in relation to their situation, thoughts and experiences, enabling the researcher to express their voices with the goal of creating fruitful discoveries rather than affirming existing concepts (Goia et al., 2012).

A4. Creating a general understanding of the data

After each interview was conducted, a summary was written about the participant and any initial insights which emerged in the interview, it was imperative to conduct this straight after the interview as information was still fresh and initial ideas could be noted down. This meant that an accessible document was available per participant instead of only having the full interview transcript. This helped maintain an overview of the data collection process and assisted in the first stage of coding.

The interpretation process started by familiarisation of the data. Once one interview was conducted, the audio file was imported into transcription software Otter.ai. Instead of spending a considerable amount of time listening to a slow-paced version of the interview in order to transcribe,

through Otter.ai, it was possible to listen to the interview in real time and edit the transcription where necessary. Through this approach it was possible to engage with the data more effectively in such that preliminary analysis was possible. Next to the summaries of the interviews, this stage enabled elaboration on notes, and often, more ideas were noted down. At the same time, this process enabled the transcripts to be elaborate and written in verbatim, meaning all utterances were transcribed, resulting in rich data.

A5. Open coding:

The first stage of coding in TA is open coding. In this stage, close reading of the transcripts and thorough, inclusive and comprehensive codes were given to data items. This first stage of coding is broad, open and descriptive. The table below illustrates open codes assigned to data items in the transcripts.

Table A5.1

Examples of semantic open codes given to quotations from the interview transcripts

Interview data fragment	**Assigned open code**
"So yesterday was really like the inspiration seeking part. And that means just getting drawings out, getting magazines, getting Pinterest, just really the thinking more freely part."	Creative process
"Sometimes I'm trying to detach myself a little bit more, but it's more for the work life balance, you know, because I don't want to work like, all the time."	Balance work and personal life
"Just accepting it and that you can't do much about it yourself. But that's not to say that I wasn't affected by it… I wasn't able to do much about it myself. I continued to work hard and just kept going."	Entrepreneurship is perseverance
"Um, well, it's, it's really different, because it's just two of us, which is different, because we used to share a space as well, which was also really nice, because you had lunch together, and you could discuss stuff."	Co-working spaces bring social interaction

I think it's important because it's like, what I'm doing is digital. So you can basically help anyone with an internet connection.	No boundaries due to operating digitally
"It's nice to have like chats at the coffee machine, but you also have to pay a price for that…you don't have the freedom to organise your days accordingly…I just don't like being told what to do, where to do it and how to do it."	Values freedom in entrepreneurship
"Just comes back to the fact that you're an entrepreneur by practising and doing and, yeah, it's okay." *"But we didn't have the experience, right. So we're just kind of learning as we went with it."* *"I learned on the way by making mistakes, how it works."*	Learn while doing
"No, no, no, I'm really bad at working at home for example, I'm really bad at that."	Cannot work from home
"It's a skill of planning. You need to be a really good planner, I think it's so easy to have, like a long to do list. But if you don't plan, when to execute it's just gonna stay long, forever."	Structure approach to work
"Also, the collaboration just works really well. Like we have an endless stream of ideas, and we can just have it as an output, you know, and I can also always get like, outlet."	Good team work
"I think it's nice that we can sometimes show behind the scenes, because I think a big part of us as designers is that we are actively doing stuff ourselves and making stuff ourselves, which is, like a social part, also a big part of what we do."	Instagram for behind the scenes
"Okay, what do I want? What am I looking for? What is my ideal job? And is this maybe the time to start my own company?"	COVID context gave time to reflect

"So I thought like, in this time, let's just like, redefine and refocus and then we will start again with a new goal."	
"Yeah for sure, I'm definitely an entrepreneur yeah"	Identifies with the role of entrepreneur

A6. Axial coding

The second stage of coding re-assessment and organisation takes place. In this stage, the open codes are organised into themes (Boeije, 2010). In this stage, overlapping codes are grouped together based on similarities. In this process 17 axial codes were formed. The table below illustrates some examples of open codes and how these were grouped to form axial codes.

Table A6.1

Examples of categorizing open codes

Open codes	**Axial codes (categories)**
Co-creates with others	Approach to creativity
Pinterest for inspiration	
Creative process	
Balance personal and work	Approach to work
Structured work activities	
Alter working context	
Entrepreneurship is perseverance	Beliefs about entrepreneurship
Organisation/structure is crucial	
Need for discipline	
Co-working spaces provide social interaction	Co-working context
Wants to work in a co-working space	
Co-working space cost money	
Paid for one online course	Digital tools
Important to know how to use digital tools/features effectively	
Use free online resources	
COVID gave time to reflect	Effects of COVID
COVID brought more time for personal projects	
Hard(er) to balance work and private life	
Cannot live the 9-5 life	Entrepreneurial identity

Always had an entrepreneurial spirit	
Values freedom	
Needs to plan better	Entrepreneurial struggles
Financial restrictions	
Matching online and offline identity	
Instagram for visibility	Instagram tools
Post insights are useful	
Business coaches on Instagram	

A7. Selective coding

In the final stage of coding the axial codes were assessed and combined to construct the themes which would formulate an answer to the research question. In the scans below you can see that several themes were developed. To illustrate, one selective theme was labelled *'entrepreneurial learning'* by which axial codes which represented aspects of how the entrepreneurs attained knowledge which enabled them to grow as entrepreneurs. This process was highly recursive, going back and forth between different codes and themes.

Figure A7.1

Scans illustrating the initial mapping of selective codes into themes

Following the first mapping shown above, refinement took place in such that the most relevant aspects were mapped in relation to the research question. In this process, development took place in looking at possible links between codes and groups. The iterative approach is visible here as the initially grouped items above were mapped in a broad sense to assess whether other interpretations were possible.

Figure A7.2

Scan illustrating mapping relevant codes and groups in relation to the research question

As a result, an overview was mapped, combining the general mapping together with the mapping in relation to the research question. Strong relations were made visible through the connecting green lines and identity tensions were starred with a purple asterisk. Through this process, prominent aspects from the data were identified such as the importance for organisation and structure in several areas of work. The decision to focus on Instagram in terms of social media also resulted from mapping. Therefore, in the final mapping, focus is set on Instagram with an additional note commenting on social media platforms in general.

Figure A7.3

Scan illustrating processual mapping leading to identifying the most relevant aspects

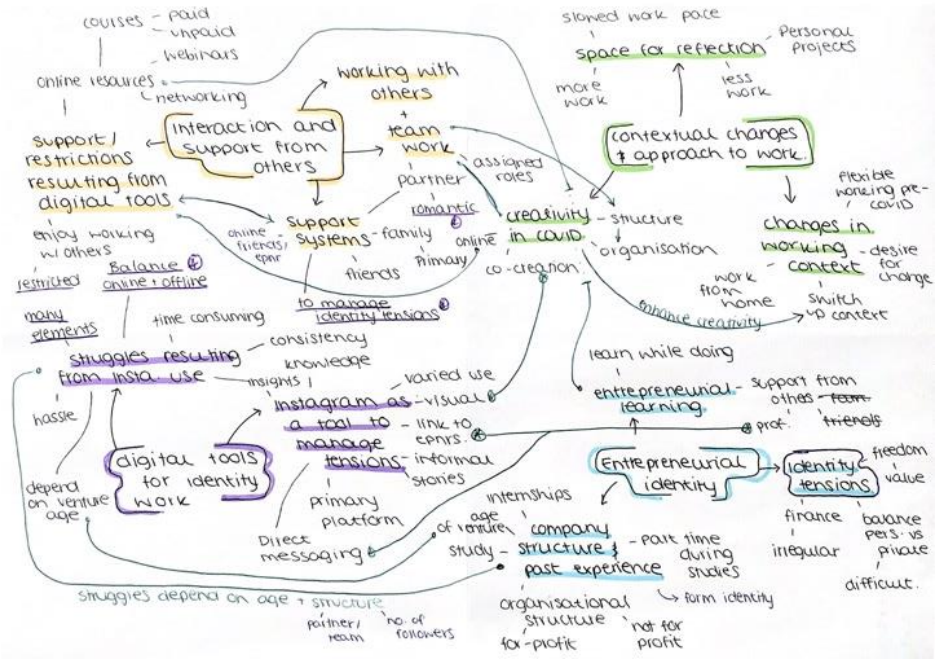


Figure A7.3 above shows the process of mapping the most prominent aspects in relation to answering the research question. There was an iterative moment through linking aspects in their relations to other elements (visible through green marking). Through this is shown how aspects relating to identity work are intrinsically linked to each other. Because of this, refinement was necessary, illustrated in figure 3.6.6.

A8. Ethics, reflexivity & quality criteria

In order to avoid systematic misinterpretation of the analysis and findings of this study, it is important to express reflexivity, particularly in regard to validity and transferability (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). Furthermore, when dealing with individuals, ethical considerations must be met. The following sub-chapters will address these points individually.

A8.1 Reliability and validity

Being alert to the differences between quantitative and qualitative methods, the assessment of quality with reference to reliability and validity is addressed differently (Brennen, 2017).

Reliability

In qualitative methods, reliability, similar to quantitative research, considers replicability. In the sense of assessing "the degree to which the findings of a study are independent of accidental circumstances of their production (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006, p.26). However, wat may be seen

as a shortcoming in qualitative research is the "anything goes" approach (Herzog et al., 2019) in such that the subject of study are experiences and meanings unique to individuals. On top of this, the researcher is also has to balance two positions; as a cultural member and a cultural commentator (Braun & Clarke, 2006) about the social phenomenon under study. In an attempt to overcome this, the researcher must be as transparent as possible and clearly outline the methodological practices and processes used throughout the study. Thus, adopting a systematic and rigorous approach throughout the research process improves the reliability of the study (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006).

Several steps were made in this study to promote reliability. For example, each interview was recorded with three instruments; a smart-phone, a voice recorder and a screen recorded file. This way, if one recording was lost, incomplete or unclear, other recordings could be used or referenced. Combined with transcription software, the interviews were elaborately transcribed and listened to, this ensured the documents captured all the details shared in the interviews (verbatim).

Furthermore, many supporting documents such as participant notes, mind-maps (see external appendix), and a list of topics and questions (see appendix D) which were used and developed throughout the research process, which contribute to sharing a transparent research process.

However, this study was conducted in a unique and turbulent context which has changed already since the interviews were conducted. Although the study in essence could be replicated, the context in which the study was positioned no longer exists and therefore would probably not deliver similar results. Instead, the findings of this study should be seen and used as starting points for further research next to contributing to the small corpus of research conducted investigating the impact of a global pandemic on entrepreneurial identity work.

Validity

It is important to be aware not to assume validity, hence, the researcher must take action to assess and improve the validity of the study (Whittemore et al., 2001). In short, the researcher must maintain an active role, and acknowledge all aspects in the research process as active decisions, from the literature selected in the theoretical framework, to the chosen methods, through to critically interpreting the results (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Whittemore et al., 2001). A critical approach enables the researcher to consider alternative explanations and take into account other explanations that may be silenced (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006; Whittemore, 2001).

In this study, validity was maintained through critically assessing the selected literature in the framework, ensuring the claims were relevant and not out-dated. Furthermore, throughout the analysis, each claim was reviewed in consideration with the context and other possible reasonings, in an attempt to formulate accurate interpretations (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006).

A8.2 Reflecting on ethics

Understanding that qualitative methods works to construct reality through the interaction with human subjects, it is imperative that researchers ensure an ethical approach to research in such that "researchers must take moral responsibility for what they construct" (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006, p.25).

Ethics in qualitative research focus on ensuring fair participation without coercion or manipulation and ensuring the participant is correctly informed of the research and their rights (such as informed consent and right of withdrawal) (Babbie, 2013; Brennen, 2017; Buchanan & Bryman, 2007). In this study, the interviews were planned and in each case, the participants received a document explaining the purpose of the study, their rights and the way in which their information will be used (see appendix C). Additionally, at the start of each interview, the rights of the participant were repeated by the researcher. This ensured an ethical approach to the data collection (Buchanan & Bryman, 2007).

Often, anonymity of the participant is considered an important element of ethical conduct in qualitative research (Babbie, 2013; Brennen, 2017; Buchanan & Bryman, 2007). Where Buchanan and Bryman (2007) discuss the importance of anonymity in the case of biomedical research, this study was not concerned with personal or private (medical) information and thus no sensitive topics were discussed. Because of this, the participants gave consent to using their name and company name in this research.

A8.3 Reflecting on internationality / transferability

In qualitative research, the notion of generalisability is not applicable as qualitative research focuses on a specific context, often has a smaller sample and the results relate to the situational context in which the study was conducted (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). Because of this, generalizability is not relevant the way it is in quantitative research.

Instead, the concept of transferability is deemed more appropriate for qualitative research (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). Goia et al., (2012) mention transferability in relation to "extracting transferable concepts and principles [which] allows our findings to address a larger audience" (p. 24), such as different contexts or situations (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). Through ensuring thick descriptions of processes and results in research and including detailed processes, the transferability of the research is improved (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006).

As mentioned earlier, this research is context specific, however, through ensuring a comprehensive research process and providing thick descriptions of data, concepts developed in this research can be used and applied to other contexts, these will be discussed in the final chapter of this research paper (See discussion – section 6.3).

A8.4 Assessment of COVID-19 restrictions on the research process

During the period in which the interviews were conducted, the COVID-19 pandemic and the related restrictions in mobility and work had run its course for over 12 months. As a result, the entrepreneurs interviewed were somewhat 'settled' in the situation. Compared to the start of the pandemic, there was a lot more uncertainty and chaos among individuals. Despite this, there were some challenges in reaching and getting through to potential participants for the study. Perhaps due to the comfort in working from home and the anonymity of operating online interaction between people was somewhat more individualistic. Notwithstanding, a representative sample was achieved throughout the process.

In terms of data collection, the interviews were advised to be conducted via video conferencing software, such as Zoom. For some time now, social science scholars have deemed the internet as a sound medium to conduct qualitative research, often as a technique to overcome issues of distance (Evans et al., 2008; Hanna, 2012). Through the use of video conferencing software, the "synchronous nature of real-time interaction" (Hanna, 2012, p.241) is granted, thus offering a practical alternative to face-to-face interviewing. Some scholars claim that due to the mediated interview setting, the interviewee is in a comfortable context (such as their home) and thus, are inclined to share more personal experiences (Bryman, 2016; Hanna, 2012).

A downside to mediated interviews experienced during data collection was the loss of control of the interview context and occasional technical difficulties. While the technical difficulties (such as lag) did not have a detrimental impact on the interview, the inability to control the context did. For example, as the interviews were mediated and in the context of the entrepreneur, interruptions from pets, housemates, other technologies or package deliveries were not uncommon. This disturbed the flow of the interview in some instances, whereby the entrepreneur would lose their train of thought, or google something instead of continuing to co-construct meaning together with the researcher. Had it been possible to conduct the interviews face to face, perhaps in some instances a deeper level of conversation could have been reached together.

Overall, through conducting mediated interviews, less was required of the entrepreneur and researcher in terms of mobility. This resulted in an efficient data collection procedure as both the researcher and the entrepreneur were able to conduct the interview in their own context.

Appendix B: Further information: Discussion

B.1 Fusing the cultural and creative entrepreneur with digital entrepreneurship

With reference to the types of creative entrepreneurs outlined by Hull et al. (2007) together with the degrees of digital entrepreneurship by Bujor and Avasilcai (2014) – through the analysis it is clear that a fusion is necessary in order to expand the classification of CC entrepreneurs. Looking at the authors, it is apparent that renewal in definitions is necessary as considerable technological advancements and societal changes have taken place since their publications. Keeping digital media scholars such as Horst et al. (2019) and Sahut (2019) in mind, it is important to not reduce creative entrepreneurship to digital entrepreneurship. Rather, digital dependencies and uses should be added to the conceptualisation of CC entrepreneurs.

Looking at creative entrepreneurship by Hull et al. (2007), assessment can only be made of the creative service provider (CSP) and creative originals producer (COP) entrepreneurs as these were the only types of CC entrepreneur used in this research. Assessment of the creative content producer and creative experience provider entrepreneur types goes beyond the scope of this study. Looking at CSP entrepreneurs, such as design agencies and new media agencies, six of the participants fit this classification. Most of the CSP entrepreneurs operating in new media did not experience struggles due to a loss in assignments. However, CSP entrepreneurs operating as design agencies or consultancies did experience a loss in assignments, as often, they work on projects for other creative industries or hospitality, which were both hit hard due to COVID-19 restrictions (Grotenhuis et al., 2020). As a response, one particular case transitioned towards characteristics of COP entrepreneurs, thus, illustrating the fluidity of identity.

The COP entrepreneurs and their characteristics varied in relation to the description by Hull et al. (2007). According to the authors, COP entrepreneurs relate to visual arts, crafts, design-makers and antiques, offering limited-produced products and are mostly subsidised. Five of the entrepreneurs related to this category in terms of output (i.e. crafts), of which just two adhered to the characteristics within the framework (i.e. being subsidised). What appears to be missing in this category are private designers selling hand crafted products for revenue. A suggestion in this category is a distinction between COP entrepreneurs for cultural value, such as performance art, and COP entrepreneurs for profit, such as jewellery design and artisanship. A possible explanation for this new COP entrepreneur for profit is due to new digital opportunities making entrepreneurial activities easier to start with limited key resources without being subsidised (Bahcecik et al., 2019; Elia et al., 2020; Sahut et al., 2019).

Looking at the categories of digital entrepreneurship by Bujor and Avasilcai (2014) all the participants relate to moderate and extreme digital activities, in accordance with Horst et al. (2019) in such that contemporary entrepreneurship cannot be studied without regard of digital media. A dimension not considered in the framework by Bujor and Avasilcai (2014) is the way in which information and access to resources is obtained through digital media. For the entrepreneurs, access

to other entrepreneurs and learning tools via digital channels were advantageous to their operations. A limitation to point out here is the way transferability is limited. Due lacking a comparative element, it is difficult to claim whether creative entrepreneurs generally have adopted more digital tools or if it was an effect of the COVID-19 restrictions. Despite this, the findings of this study contribute to the limited corpus of scholarship relating to social media and entrepreneurship (Olanrewaju, et al., 2020) in such that many entrepreneurs showed to depend considerably on social media for their entrepreneurial activities, particularly Instagram and TikTok. This adds to the framework of Bujor & Avasilcai (2014) from looking at digital aspects, to considering digital media. As a result, the concept emerges of digital media cultural and creative (DMCC) entrepreneurs, defined as *cultural and creative entrepreneurs creating products and services of cultural and creative value, leveraging digital media in their operations.* In this study, the degree of DMCC development varied – taking note of the age of the venture, size of the team and their product or service, the extent to which DM was incorporated varied.

What stood out in the findings, contrary to the claims by Nielsen et al. (2018), is how all but one of the entrepreneurs in this study shared to identify with the professional role of an entrepreneur. Furthermore, the entrepreneurs did not make a distinction between their creative identity or entrepreneurial identity, as suggested by Nielsen et al. (2018). Instead, the findings contributed to the results of Werthes et al. (2017) in such that their entrepreneurial identity is incorporated into their creative identity. Even though a few participants became entrepreneurs out of necessity rather than voluntarily, tensions were not experienced in growing into the entrepreneurial role. Through active self-reflection and value assessment, struggles were managed that accompany starting a venture, overall, supporting the findings of Werthes et al. (2017).

Where the goal of this research was not set to re-define and re-formulate the definitions of CC entrepreneurs, assessing the extent to which digital media plays a role in their operations is useful for the analysis in understanding the way digital media make their operations easier and more efficient, and in relation to their creativity. This leads us to the following three sections, in which tensions experienced by the entrepreneurs will be addressed and the ways in which these were managed.

The research showed three prominent struggles in relation to context for the entrepreneurs in this study. The first relates to the lack of contextual reference, in such that by working from home, the entrepreneurs were unable to reflect upon-, and learn from others in such to re-assess their own identities and develop further as entrepreneurs. Building upon this, the second tension found considers the loss in context for work, recreation and inspiration, resulting in the entrepreneur feeling ‘stuck’ in their process. The last theme builds upon the financial struggles CC entrepreneurs face. However, in this case, the financial struggles extend beyond a lack of professional skills and financial literacy, these financial struggles resulted from a loss of work assignments, heightening the overall insecurity the entrepreneurs experienced throughout the lockdowns, and setting identity work in motion as an effect.

Appendix C: Consent request for participating in research

CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH

For questions about the study, contact:
Suzanne Ros, 528310
528310sr@student.eur.nl
(+31) 06 237 404 97

Description
You are invited to participate in research for my Master thesis. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how creative and cultural entrepreneurs manage their business, their identity and creativity in times of crisis, such as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed.
In general terms, the questions of the interview will be related to your process in balancing your business with your creativity, your use of digital media (such as social media) and if/what struggles you have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will use a voice recorder for this interview. The recording will strictly be used for research purposes and analysis.

You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point.

Seeing as my Master is in English, the interview is designed in English. However, if you feel more comfortable talking Dutch that is also possible.
Furthermore, where in a normal setting (i.e. non-COVID) I would interview you face to face in a quiet place, the interviews will be conducted via Zoom. For this I ask you to be situated in a quiet space where you can talk freely and won't be distracted.

Risks and benefits
As far as I am aware, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. Yet, you are free to decide whether I should use your name or other identifying information such as your gender, age or nationality in the data processing. Upon your request I can ensure these details remain anonymous.

Time involvement
Your participation in this study will take between 45-60 minutes. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

Payments
There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

Participants' rights
If you have decided to accept to participate in this research, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer any particular question(s). If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

Contacts and questions
If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of the study, you may contact – anonymously, if you wish – Dr. S. Ove-Horst, my thesis supervisor: Horst@eshcc.eur.nl

Signing the consent form
If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you do not need to sign this form. In order to minimize risk and protect your identity you may prefer to consent orally, this will be asked at the start of our interview, thus, our oral consent will be sufficient.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

Name Signature Date

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study

Name Signature Date

Appendix D: Interview guide

Phase 1: Introduction – formal start

Thank you for seeing me today and offering to take part in this study, I really appreciate it. Did you have time to read through the document I sent you via email?

a) *If yes*: do you have any questions?
b) *If no*: would you like to take a few minutes to read through the documents?

2. Are you okay with me recording the interview? Your answers will remain anonymous and will only be used for research purposes.

Start recording – ask for consent again, on record. The consent form will be verbally signed. I have a few topics I would like to cover in this interview with you, the topics relate to you as an entrepreneur, working with others, your workplace, social media and how you have been managing during the last year with COVID, maybe possible struggles you've experienced. Note that there are no right or wrong answers! I am interested in your personal experience.

Phase 2: Introduction (participant = 'P')

Quick introduction of interviewer: name, age, nationality, study background and personal experience as a social and creative entrepreneur.

2.1. Would you like to introduce yourself?

a) *Make sure to obtain info regarding:*
   - *Age*
   - *Gender*
   - *Nationality (hometown and working context – same or different?)*
   - *Where did you grow up? Which city versus where you operate now?*

Phase 3: Participant work

- Can you tell me about your business?
- How long has your business been running for?
- What sector would you say you are active in?
- Are there projects you are currently working on? Do you have an example?
- How would you describe a normal work day?
- Has your daily routine changed due to COVID over the last year? (if so, how?)
- Do you work with others in a creative manner?

- What are some good habits that you follow for working with others?

Phase 4: Context

- Do you often work with other people?
- Has it become easier or harder to collaborate with others?
- What did you find hardest when you could not work in your normal workplace?
- Can you describe a situation that was challenging for you?
- Where have you been working over the last year? (home? Co-working space? Hotel?)

Phase 5: Identity and digital media

- Are you active on social media? Which social media channels are you active on?
  - What role does social media play for you in your business?
  - Would you say your identity online differs to your identity in real life?
    - If so, how?
- How do you aim to come across through social media? (SM identity)
  - Does this differ to how you present yourself offline?
- What has become easier now, having these channels? What aspects work well?
- Are there aspects about social media that you find challenging?
- What is the best thing that social media has brought you/your business?
- In terms of online communication, what channels do you use to reach potential customers?

Phase 6: Identity

- Do you consider yourself an entrepreneur?
- In your opinion, has it become easier or harder to be an entrepreneur in these times? (if so, how?)
- Are there particular challenges you have experienced personally over the last year?
- Has this affected your personal life? Can you maintain a divide in work and personal life?
- Where do you usually find inspiration?
  - Has that changed since Covid?

- What inspired you to become an entrepreneur?

- In your opinion, what does it take to be an entrepreneur?
- Are there people you look up to in how they do business?
- How or where did you develop your business skills for running your business?
- Who would you say supports you as an entrepreneur?
    - Has this changed compared to pre-COVID times?
- How do you value networking as an entrepreneur?
- How do you network nowadays?