

# Master Thesis

A qualitative research on narrative identity work of female digital  
entrepreneurs

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## ABSTRACT

More and more entrepreneurs use digital media to express themselves. How you decide to portray yourself online has an impact on your business, as it is highly influencing your level of authenticity, and influences the sense of connection you establish with your target audience. Previous research has shown that there is a gender gap in the field of entrepreneurship (Swail & Marlow, 2017; Ahl, 2006; Bruni et al., 2004). Furthermore and strikingly, female entrepreneurs are often seen as less than their male counterparts and therefore suffer from gender discrimination (Sarfraz et al., 2014). Therefore, digital platforms play a key role for the emancipation of female entrepreneurs because they have a low barrier for usage, and therefore often are used to overcome several challenges they face when starting their own business (Wally & Koshy, 2014). Therefore, the current research focuses on how Dutch digital female entrepreneurs form their entrepreneurial identity with the usage of narrative identity work on Instagram. The current research took a qualitative approach and interviewed Dutch digital female entrepreneurs and gathered insights by using a semi-structured interview format. The interview explored different topics as entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial identity, Instagram usage, and the told narrative. The data retrieved from these interviews show that personal details are often included in the narrative, although there is a clear boundary whereas relevance is of utmost importance, and there is a clear focus on sharing positive elements. This shows that female entrepreneurs do include personal elements into their narrative which forms their entrepreneurial identity, however they do make it positively focused and leave out negatively focused elements on purpose. Aside from this, some elements are purposely left out depending on the context and situation the entrepreneur finds herself in, such as age or private life details. These elements that are included in the narrative or excluded from the narrative impact the construction of the entrepreneurial identity, and therefore how the entrepreneur is perceived by others.

**KEYWORDS:** Instagram, entrepreneurial identity, narrative identity work, female entrepreneurs

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# Preface

In front of you lies the thesis: 'Master Thesis: A qualitative research on narrative identity work of female digital entrepreneurs'. This thesis has been written to fulfil the requirements to obtain all points for the course CM5000: Master Thesis, and therefore retrieve all points in order to graduate from the Media Master: Media & Creative Industries. The entire process of the research for this thesis took from December 2021 until the end of June 2022.

The topic of the research and research questions have been derived from my personal experiences as an entrepreneur, in combination with my expertise on social media marketing. The research was very intriguing and all qualitative data collected helped me to answer the research question.

I would like to thank Sven-Ove Horst, for all his help, support and guidance during the entire process. His enthusiasm on the topic helped me a lot as well. Furthermore, I would like to thank all participants who participated in this research and shared all their thoughts and insights with me. Without them I would not have been able to write this thesis, conduct the research and conclude such interesting results.

I hope you enjoy reading this thesis as much as I enjoyed writing this thesis.

# 1. Introduction

The development of identity with the usage of digital media is a growing topic of academic interest (Buckingham, 2007; Gálik, 2019; Poletti & Rak, 2014; Davis, 2013; Terras, Ramsay & Boyle, 2015). This is due to the rise in popularity of digital media and the influence it has on our understanding and making sense of the world (Deuze, 2011). With the availability of fast internet, smartphones and social media, digital media takes its place within everyone's daily life and routines (Couldry & Hepp, 2013). The daily usage of digital media impacts the constructions and development of identity of the self: either professionally or personally. Digital media encourages its users to share personal insights of their lives (Alsos et al., 2016), through features such as Instagram stories and Instagram feed posts. This allows people to inform others and even let them participate in what they are doing, reviewing, thinking about and struggling with. According to Alvesson (2001), these features and other media characteristics enhance and shape how identity work is needed in order to create a personal, professional or entrepreneurial identity. Identity work is considered as complex and unpredictable (Pullen, 2005). According to Musson and Duberly (2006) identity work is defined as the 'manufacture of identity' (p. 1050) and is seen as an ongoing cycle that never ends. This conception allows us to focus on how (entrepreneurial) identities are formed on and through digital media.

How you portray yourself online is a hot topic in society, and has a big impact on your business as well. Especially as social media platforms have been considered as too perfect or fake throughout the years (Tymulis & Caunt, 2020). As a freelance social media manager myself, I see and know a lot of strategies for being visible online, as well as sharing your personality and identity with others in order to establish a connection with your target audience. This connection is the first step in the customer journey, and therefore very important to many digital entrepreneurs for lead generation. This connection is needed and can be created for the Know Like Trust marketing concept that is becoming more and more relevant for social media. This marketing concept focuses on letting the potential clients get to know the 'you' behind the brand, which is the basis of connection and familiarity (Ring, 2021). This marketing concept is an essential concept for relationship and community building.

As mentioned before, from my professional perspective as a freelance social media manager, I can notice a difference in culture among all different social media platforms entrepreneurs present themselves on. LinkedIn seems to be the platform for entrepreneurs, but there is a more formal and professional culture on this platform. On the other hand, Instagram has a more open and informal culture where entrepreneurs feel more free to share not only about their business, but on the face behind the brand as well.

## 1.1 Academic relevance

The **academic relevance** is growing in tandem with this professional and practical surge for guidance and understanding in how to perform yourself on social media. The identity work of entrepreneurs online is expanding (Giones & Brem, 2017; Horst, Järventie-Thesleff & Perez-Latre, 2019; Kraus et al., 2019; Li, Su, Zhang & Mao, 2017; Nambisan, 2018; Shen, Lindsay & Xu, 2018). From this field we know that the continuous developments in technology due to digitization (Giones & Brem, 2017), ask for continuous adaptation. The rapid transformative changes in regards to digitalization are of importance to entrepreneurs due to emerging opportunities that arise for them (Kraus et al. 2019). According to Horst, Järventie-Thesleff and Perez-Latre (2019), the usage of digital media helps entrepreneurs in the development in a strategic way. However, there is a paucity of studies focused on understanding the identity work of female digital media entrepreneurs. The current studies that focus on female entrepreneurship do not focus on understanding digital female entrepreneurs. Instead, they highlight the role of leadership within female entrepreneurship (Lewis, 2015), the work-family life balance (Gherardi, 2015), or look at the career development of a female entrepreneur (Bowen & Hisrich, 1986). Because female entrepreneurs often feel that they face more barriers to start a business (dos Santos et al., 2019) digital platforms provide a level playing field - or even actively encourage female entrepreneurship. For example, according to Kamali (2008), Instagram is a low barrier for female entrepreneurs to start with entrepreneurship. It therefore often is one of the first steps within an entrepreneurial journey. This is confirmed within the research of Alghamdi (2021), which showed that Saudi female entrepreneurs used Instagram for their businesses, in order to overcome several challenges they face when starting a business. Furthermore, the research of Wally and Koshy (2014) showed that Instagram is popular amongst Emirati female entrepreneurs as well. The female entrepreneurs indicated that they felt they could engage more freely in their business without any social pressure, due to Instagram.

To learn more about how the identity of digital entrepreneurs is constructed, this study uses a qualitative methodology and analyses how these digital female entrepreneurs reflect upon their identity work with their followers and entrepreneurial stakeholders. The focus on female entrepreneurs is due to the lack of gender equality within entrepreneurship and as research showed, digital platforms often help them within the masculine dominant field of entrepreneurship. Therefore, this makes them an interesting group to study. Furthermore, as a digital entrepreneur myself I have access to a lot of other female digital entrepreneurs, in many different sectors.

## 1.2 Societal relevance

The **societal relevance** of this research is to better understand how entrepreneurial identity is formed in relation to active audiences on social media , and in what way the digital platforms contribute to this. If we have a better understanding on how female digital entrepreneurs create their identity, we –as a society– can develop better ways of supporting female entrepreneurship. We can learn how people are transforming their sense of self in relation to others by using social media for entrepreneurial endeavours. This would also provide more insights on the field of entrepreneurship in general, and on the socially constructed gender stereotypes within the field of entrepreneurship. If the female digital entrepreneurs would have more knowledge on how to effectively create their own entrepreneurial identity, it would help them stand out and therefore increase their chances of becoming a successful entrepreneur, and closing the gender gap in the field of entrepreneurship.

Therefore, this research will focus on the following research question: *How do Dutch digital female entrepreneurs develop their entrepreneurial identity through narrative identity work on Instagram?*

## 1.3 Chapter outline

To investigate the development of entrepreneurial identity through narrative identity work on Instagram amongst Dutch digital female entrepreneurs thoroughly, this study is divided into different chapters. Following this introduction is the second chapter, an extensive literature review that dives into previous studies, papers and other academic sources that are related to the topic of this research. The literature review covers topics as identity, narrative identity work, identity work in an entrepreneurial field, and female entrepreneurship. The third chapter shows the foundation of the research, as it presents the methodological

choices made for the research. The fourth chapter shows the results of the current study, supported with quotes derived from the interviews. The following chapter is the fifth chapter that discusses the findings, compares them to the findings from the literature, and discusses other relevant aspects to answer the research question. Lastly, the sixth chapter will conclude the study and discuss limitations and set a future research agenda.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents an extensive review of literature which provides a solid foundation for the theoretical perspective of this study. The chapter explores core concepts related to the research question and will be looked into extensively. Core concepts such as identity and narrative identity work are explored, both from a general perspective as from an entrepreneurial perspective.

An important note to add is that most academic literature retrieved is grounded in a western perspective. This shows that the explanation and elaboration on the concepts and ideas are rooted in a specific set of cultural understandings, economical systems and societal infrastructures from the West. For this current study this is of no issue as the main focus is on Dutch entrepreneurs.

### 2.1 Identity as a process

The ever-changing social world continuously calls for changes to our identities and actions (Jaspal & Breakwell, 2014). Examples of societal change are advances in science, technology and medicine, political uproar, and economic developments. These societal changes can impact how we live our lives, our self-perspective, and the way we tend to communicate. Furthermore, individual psychological changes such as getting a new job, growing old or being diagnosed with an illness do not only have an impact on the way we live our lives, but affect our sense of self as well. This can make us reconsider our identity, our relationships with others and how we tend to behave in specific contexts. Therefore, social and psychological change have the power to affect our identity and actions.

Identity is defined as an organised set of self-perceptions and attached feelings that an individual has about the self (Cass, 1984). Furthermore, the concept of identity can be seen as a cognitive construct. According to Stone (1962) identity refers to an organised set of characteristics and individual perceives as definitely representing the self in relation to a social situation. There are different understandings of what identity is: some relate identity to paper-identity with all the different documents that exist to establish identity (Schachtel, 1961).

One area of identity research understands identity as something that is non-permanent in nature. This orientation describes identity as something that is continuously changing: it is always in process, negotiating and adapting (Dunne, 1995). The ongoing process included interacting with internal and external motives and dealing with pressure and expectations (Ybema et al., 2009). This is similar to the definition of identity by Jaspal and Breakwell (2014) who mention that the different societal and psychological

changes that happen over time continuously affect the self-perception of identity. Furthermore, the structure of self-identity should be conceptualised in two different processes: the absorption of information and the adjustment to take place to make it part of the structure (assimilation-accommodation process), and the view in regards to meaning and value on the contents of identity (evaluation process) (Jaspal & Breakwell, 2014). According to Beech et al. (2012), identity can be adjusted in response to tensions, and therefore Identity is something that is considered as fluid. This shows that identity is considered as a constantly developing, adapting and constructing activity.

According to Gecas and Burke (1995), the importance of identity is the place an individual takes within society, in relationship to others based upon the meanings individuals adopt for themselves. To build on this, when talking about the construction of collective identity, this is considered as a process due to the interactive and shared definition which is constructed and negotiated through a repeated activation of the relationship that connects and links individuals or groups (Melucci, 1995).

According to Mallett and Wapshott (2012), claiming a particular identity (e.g. being a specialist) creates an expectation of a moral demand for others, of feeling valued and being treated in the way that other similar persons could expect. These types of expectations create a tension between both the individual and the broader workplace or environment.

When talking about professional identity, it is defined as someone's professional self-concept which is based upon a set of attributes, beliefs, norms, values, motives and experiences (Ibarra, 1999; Schein, 1978). It has been a popular topic within research, as career success is often related to professional identity construction (Arthur et al., 1999; Hall et al., 2002). However, someone's professional identity is not only based on the experiences in a traditional workplace, social context is associated with it as well (Piore and Safford, 2006). Professional identity is based on self-views, which are created in three different ways: the result of the socialisation process and rhetorics (Fine, 1996; Hall, 1987), adjusting and adapting based on periods of career transition (Ibarra, 1999; Nicholson, 1984), and life and work experiences (Schein, 1978). An occupational identity is often used within society. An occupational identity can be considered as an identity that individuals have taken from their 'work' experiences and the career expectations (Adamson et al., 1998). This identity is based on the process an individual faces in career context, through gaining experiences by a series of jobs and work, and is the base of a work identity. According to Illeris (2004) work identity can be defined as a subset of the individual's overall identity, based on their working experience and how they define themselves as a working individual. Furthermore, the career identity combined with a personal identity affects the perception of work, place in life and motivations for engagement in work related pheres (Watson, 1994). When looking at the

existing literature, most of it takes the outlook of that work identities separate themselves from other dimensions of a person's life. When looking at entrepreneurial identity, entrepreneurial 'work' can not be conceptualised without taking the personal and social lives of the entrepreneur into account (Ettl & Welter, 2011; Shelton, 2006; Welter, 2011).

## 2.2 Narrative identity work (identity work and the focus of communication)

According to Mallett and Wapshott (2012), identity work can be defined as following: 'The dialectic between a self-reflective internal sense of identity and an outward facing external engagement and development of social identities' (Mallett & Wapshott, 2012, p17). Social identity is often supported by the creation of ingroups, and therefore can be found in the niche areas where knowledge workers operate in. The social identities can put a pressure on the individual to conform themselves to the other group members. Multiple attempts have been made to specify 'generic' processes in regard to identity work, however there is little consensus on these.

Human beings are storytellers, and love to share stories (Polkinghorne, 1988). When looking at narratives in general, they have different functions. Narratives entertain (Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1982), engage human emotion, and provide instructions on how to live a good life (Coles, 1989). Furthermore, stories stimulate social experience (Mar & Oatley, 2008). Stories let us observe human social interaction up close, into detail. Therefore, it is considered that narratives *teach us how to be human* (McAdams, 2015).

When talking about narrative identity work, it combines two elements: the self that you are now, and the self you are aiming to become. This shows the function of *integration*, as narrative identity combines both synchronic as a diachronic sense (McAdams, 1985). Furthermore, narrative identity involves different elements such as social roles, values, attitudes and performance. Narrative researchers put an emphasis on the fact that identity work goes along with processes of identifying archetypal characters, turning points, literary genres and more (Gabriel, 2000). Other narrative researchers have argued that identity work takes more than just talk, but also revolves around physical appearance and the choice of association with other individuals and groups (Snow & Anderson, 1987).

According to Bluck and Alea (2011), people share narratives to either serve social, directive or self functions. Stories can promote social relationships, provide guidance (directive) for life, and include promoting self-continuity (self).

As mentioned before, identity is considered as a concept that is a process. Therefore, using a narrative approach helps with a sense of continuity (Rasmussen, 1996). Sharing a story about ourselves shows that we create meaning, coherence and continuity in our lives (Giddens, 2020).

Narrative identity can be seen as a type of self-experience (Eakin, 2006). With the usage of a narrative, it helps to evaluate actions from an agency perspective and therefore provide meaning to action (Dunne, 1995). The concept of narrative identity work is more and more accepted as a process approach to self-development in different fields (McLean, 2008). According to McLean (2008), who studied adolescent identity development through narrative identity work, narratives do not only tell the stories of a certain event that occurred at a particular time and place, but they also include an evaluating elements in relation to the self. The study by McLean (2008) showed that events can be considered as catalysts for seeing things in a different light and for self-discovery, which leads to the emergence of a founded identity which can be considered as explored, pondered and earned. The main take-away is that the reflective part that comes through narrative identity work is one of the main elements by which identity emerges (McLean, 2008).

According to Larty and Hamilton (2011), narrative identity work helps to get a grasp on some of the complex elements of entrepreneurship. The study of Johansson (2004) already highlighted the importance of narratives in the construction of entrepreneurial identity, understanding entrepreneurial learning and reconceptualizing entrepreneurship. According to Bruner (2004), the autobiographical narratives we share about are lives, also works the other way around. We can *become* the narrative we are sharing. Additionally, human agency and imagination also have an influence on how a story is told, and what is included or excluded (Riessman, 1993). This has an influence on how the narrator wants to be portrayed in regards to which particular audience the story is shared to (Polkinghorne, 1996).

## 2.3 Identity work in an entrepreneurial field

For the current study, there is a focus on digital entrepreneurs. According to Horst and Hitters (2020), digital media entrepreneurship can be defined as offering products or services in any sector or industry, and facilitating these through digital media technologies (Horst & Hitters, 2020).

Within the digital entrepreneurial field, many entrepreneurs focus and work with one specific expertise. Therefore, they also can be considered as knowledge workers. The claims of a specific expertise (e.g. creative work or skill set) are an important element of the

knowledge workers' identity (Alvesson, 2001). There is said that entrepreneurs hold different characteristics in comparison to employees (Kollman, n.d.). Among these characteristics are the desire for independence, a risk-taking mentality, stress resilience and innovative thinking (Kollman, n.d.; Werthes et al., 2018). Important to note is that not all entrepreneurs aim for financial profit, as some social entrepreneurs rather aim to find solutions to societal issues (Achleitner, n.d.)

As mentioned before, the entrepreneurial field is considered predominantly masculine, and therefore a stigmatised culture. According to Goffman (1963), a stigmatised cultural identity is an identity where members of a group are assumed to be inferior, which results in an identity that prevents easy inclusion. The result of a inferior group of people in society is economic or interpersonal discrimination (Crocker and Major, 1989).

When taking a closer look at how entrepreneurial identity is formed, there are different outlooks. According to Down (2006) entrepreneurial identity is a form of identity that cannot be categorised, but is fluid while dependent on space, time and relation to others. Furthermore, Fletcher (2003) adds to this by indicating that entrepreneurial activities, features and characteristics should not be seen as objects, as they do not possess a fixed or static ontological status. They are rather seen as dynamic and constantly emerging while being realised, shaped and created by social processes (Fletcher, 2003). Furthermore, some entrepreneurs deal with multiple micro-identities (Ashforth et al., 2000; Pratt & Forman, 2000), while trying to find a balance between belongingness and distinctiveness (Shepherd & Haynie, 2009). Individuals have the need to feel unique and different from others (Brewer & Pickett, 1999). This need for uniqueness is the foundation for the development of a sense of distinction, which is a key element in the development of identity itself (Brewer, 1991; Fromkin & Snyder, 1980). According to Teal and Carroll (1999), distinctiveness serves as the foundation for unique identity construction. On the other side, a perceived lack of distinctiveness makes individuals behave differently to ensure they differentiate themselves (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Furthermore, the hunt for distinctiveness is liked as a driver for individuals to enhance their self-esteem (Abrams & Hogg, 1988), as it is considered as a universal human motive (Brewer & Pickett, 1999). This motive enables the comparative appraisal and self-definition in regards to identity (Brewer, 1991).

When looking at belongingness, the need to belong is considered as a powerful motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Belongingness is often focused on the element of inclusivity, as being a member of a group and being attached to other people (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). According to Tajfel and Turner (1979) the element of belongingness also adds to the feelings of self-worth. According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), the need for belongingness is one of the two elements an entrepreneur deals with. The article of Essers

et al. (2021) investigated this topic amongst Muslim Moroccan female entrepreneurs based in The Netherlands. This article shows that the participants of the study did not intend to risk their relationship with their family or community. Aside from that, the study shows that the participants are in need of recognition and acceptance of both their family as community, to feel a sense of belonging as an entrepreneur, and therefore sustain their business (Essers et al., 2021).

When relating these elements directly to entrepreneurship, we see that having an entrepreneurial role often enables individuals meet the need for distinctiveness, as an entrepreneurial role provides individuals autonomy (Akande, 1994), and having influence in the development of their business, and control over their lives (Kolvereid, 1996)

According to Farmer et al. (2009), different elements such as aspirations and strength of the aspirations play an important role when looking at entrepreneurial identity. The model of entrepreneur identity aspiration created by Farmer et al (2009) examines the congruence between self-view and perceived views on entrepreneurship, the strength of the entrepreneur identity aspiration, the prior start-up experience, and how the entrepreneur identity aspiration affects nascent entrepreneurial behaviours such as discovery and exploitation. According to Lewis et al (2016), elements such as identity conflict, role congruence and reciprocal identity creation play a critical role in entrepreneurship, aside from identification, self-verification and identity enactment.

The research of Duffy and Hund (2015) focussed upon self-branding among fashion bloggers. Their research explored the idea of how female entrepreneurs present their branded persona on social media. From their research, the concept 'Glam life' was created. This concept illustrates a lifestyle spectacle, which is highly visible within the content of celebrities, fashion designers and influencers. The concept is visible as the content includes parties in a jet-set-like setting. It combines the aspects of labour and leisure, as elements for a self-branding strategy. The concept of glam life has an influence on the way identity is presented in a digital context.

According to Ufuk and Ozgen (2001), some entrepreneurs put their relationships in personal context at risk. This causes them to feel a sense of isolation (Hannafey, 2003), loneliness, and chronic stress (Akande, 1994). The research of Gumpert and Boyd (1984) reported that more than half of 210 small business owners claimed to feel a sense of loneliness frequently, and experience higher stress levels. According to the authors, the feeling of loneliness could be attributed to the specific role of entrepreneurs, as they do not have a confidant with whom they can share their worries.

## 2.4 Female entrepreneurship (and identity work of female entrepreneurs)

Early research focussed on female entrepreneurship was all about essential gender traits, relationships with gender and entrepreneurial growth (Ahl, 2006). The research of Bruni et al. (2004) showed that entrepreneurial identities are seen in a social and cultural environment. These environments made the gender norms and essential gender traits visible. Both the researches of Ahl (2006) and Bruni et al. (2004), showed that there is a gender gap within the field of entrepreneurship, as it normalises masculine traits to be central. According to Ahl (2006), the prototypical entrepreneur is a self-made man who is daring, not hesitant to make decisions, ambitious and has the will to conquer. Contrary to this is the female entrepreneurial stereotype which is portrayed as maternal, caring, nutrition and struggling to balance work and personal life responsibilities (Brush, 1992; Bruni et al., 2004; Machold et al., 2008), and considered as less successful and less innovative in comparison to male entrepreneurs (DuRietz & Henrekson, 2000; Bruni et al., 2004; de Tienne & Chandler, 2007). According to Fischer et al. (1993) and Weedon (1987), female entrepreneurs do not perceive themselves as how they are portrayed in literature. According to Orlandi (2017), female entrepreneurs tend to struggle with identifying themselves as entrepreneurs due to the misalignment in discourses on female entrepreneurs' identity. Furthermore, the research of Leung (2011) shows that female entrepreneurs tend to have a strong identification with their family roles, in specific motherhood. Aside from this, the research of Elliott, Mantler and Huggins (2021) shows that women are underrepresented in the field of entrepreneurship and therefore less female students are inspired to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams. It also confirms the masculine entrepreneurial stereotypes, although it argues that change will come soon as a more gender-inclusive vocabulary of entrepreneurship is slowly developing, whereas most male and female students agree on the most salient attributes of an entrepreneur (e.g. risk-taker, innovative, well connected).

This shows that female entrepreneurs are seeking to claim legitimacy in the entrepreneurial field. According to Swail and Marlow (2017), to claim this legitimacy female entrepreneurs undertake specific forms of identity work to form a bridge between femininity, legitimacy and entrepreneurship. For example, feminised social roles or priorities are often attached to the entrepreneurial role, creating metonymies such as 'mumpreneur' (Duberly and Cohen, 2010). Other roles that the female entrepreneurs have to undertake are masculine roles, presenting a 'hard core' attitude in order to gain legitimacy, which is considered as a compensation strategy (Alsos and Ljunggren, 2017), as adopting the masculine role counters their femininity. On the other hand, this masculine role can also be

considered as competitive and aggressive, which causes people to consider this attitude as a 'bitch reputation'. Those who decide to not adopt a masculine role are often emphasising feminised qualities as gentle and soft. This adoption of feminised qualities is done to avoid gender threat (Swail & Marlow, 2017).

When talking about the epitome of female identity, motherhood, the research of Swail and Marlow (2017) showed that balancing motherhood and entrepreneurial activities are often seen as a struggle. Aside from that, motherhood is considered as a difficult element to establish a professional entrepreneurial identity, due to the particular masculine prototype.

## 3. Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative research was to retrieve insights on how Dutch digital female entrepreneurs develop their entrepreneurial identity through narrative identity work on Instagram. The current study is a cross-sectional study as it examines the entrepreneurial identity at one specific point in time. In this following chapter, the entire research design and choices are elaborated on. Aspects such as research approach, choices and method of data collection, process of data analysis and sampling strategy all are discussed in this chapter.

### 3.1 Research design

#### 3.1.1 Qualitative research design

The nature of this research is of qualitative nature because it is explorative and interested in understanding how people construct and make meaning as part of their entrepreneurial development that is driven by mediated communication. This study uses interviews to build a deeper understanding of the thought process behind the development of entrepreneurial identity. As the concept of identity and narrative identity work are considered as highly personal, a qualitative approach, which aims to understand the potentially complex personal narratives, experiences and reflections of the respondents, is considered most appropriate (Malterud, 2001; Marshall, 1996) for the current study.

In order to answer the research question, qualitative data has been collected. According to Baskarada (2014), qualitative research concentrates on understanding varying beliefs, meanings and disciplines. In addition, according to Strauss and Corbin (1994) qualitative analysis helps to understand and describe a phenomenon. Therefore, the current study has retrieved insights by collecting qualitative primary data with the usage of in-depth interviews. The choice for interviews is based on the explanation of Hermanowicz (2002), who explains that in depth interviews are a useful tool in order to uncover the attitude and experiences of people, and understanding those. Especially for identity work, it is of high importance to retrieve deeper insights. Interviews are a method often used within qualitative research and are seen as a tool to stimulate conversations with participants about their experiences and the meaning of their experiences (Schwandt, 2000).

This study focuses on Dutch digital female entrepreneurs and aims to learn how they create their entrepreneurial identity. With these interviews, I have been able to retrieve extensive descriptions on the thought process behind the entrepreneurial identity. In these interviews, the female entrepreneurs have been able to discuss all aspects related to

entrepreneurship, creation of identity, Instagram, and how identity is created with the use of narratives on Instagram. When looking at other forms of research, I have concluded that these research forms are not able to provide the right data in order to explore the research question, as they do not dive into the topic of thought processes, identity creation, experiences, and meaning making. Therefore, other research forms have been declared as non suitable for the current study and I have decided to use a qualitative approach with Interviews.

### 3.1.2 Semi-structured in-depth interviews

In order to find the structures of self through the narratives shared, semi-structured in-depth interviews have been used. The advantage of such an interview style is to adopt an informal tone of voice and invite the interviewee for an open response (Longhurst, 2016). This supports the study as it provides a more personal approach (Dumitrica & Pridmore, 2019). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are considered as more flexible (Babbie, 2013; Bryman, 2016). Especially for this topic, flexibility is needed to ensure retrieving the right answers to answer the research question, to find deeper meaning behind answers provided, and the ability to adjust the interview structure if necessary. The entire interview should flow based upon the responses of the participants, to avoid adhering to a predetermined order of asking questions (Babbie, 2013; Bryman, 2016). Furthermore, for this research I opted for a semi-structured form to ensure being able to follow up leads or clearing up ambiguous answers, to make sure to obtain as much information as possible which help lead to interesting nuances (Babbie, 2013; Bryman, 2016).

## 3.2 Data collection

### 3.2.1 Process of data collection

The data collection has taken place during spring of 2022. Due to the aftermath of COVID-19 restrictions and tight schedules of the participants, the interviews have taken place online, with the usage of video conference software Zoom. These online calls have been recorded, and these recordings have been used to transcribe the interviews. The interviews have been conducted with the usage of a semi-structured list of interview questions. This interview guide covered various questions to cover all elements this research is about. However, the interviewer will follow the lead of the interviewees and allow them to develop ideas rather than sticking too much to the interview guide. Furthermore, the interview guide will help to maintain accuracy, validity and reliability, but to ensure extensive data is retrieved, probe questions have been used as well. To ensure the interviewee feels at

ease and comfortable to talk about the topic, rapport has been created among the participants and interviewer. The interview itself has started with a clear introduction and ending. The used interview guide can be found in Appendix A.

Each participant was interviewed with the usage of online video conference software Zoom. This software helped to record the interview as well. Due to the limited time of both me and the participants, and the aftermath of COVID-19, the interviews could not take place in person. Aside from this, the online interview allowed convenient transcription of the recorded interview. To encourage the creation of rapport during the interview, I decided to conduct the interview in Dutch. Therefore, the interviews were firstly transcribed in Dutch, with the usage of A.I. transcription software Descript. The interviews were supervised and manually verified by myself. After this step, the interviews have been translated to English with A.I. translation software DeepL and again, these have been manually verified and supervised. The English translated transcripts were put into qualitative data software Atlas.TI. With the usage of Atlas.TI all transcripts were analysed with the usage of thematic analysis.

### 3.2.2 Consent form

Before conducting the interview, the interviewee was asked to sign a consent form in order to ensure they are participating voluntarily in the interview, and approve that their answers will be used for research purposes. Within the consent form, the data collection, data analysis and reporting has been explained, in order to inform the participants completely on what and where they were participating in. Furthermore, the consent form asked for explicit consent for the usage of the name of the participant. Not all participants agreed on this, and therefore some pseudonyms have been used in this research. In total, the interviews took approximately 45–60 minutes per interview which depended on how quickly and extensive the participant answered the questions. The used consent form can be found in Appendix D.

## 3.3 Participants

The participants of this research are Dutch digital female entrepreneurs. This means that the sample for this study consisted of different sampling criteria: female, entrepreneur, dutch nationality, digital operations in regards to entrepreneurship and usage of Instagram. These sampling criteria have been essential to ensure validity for the current research.

### 3.3.1 Sampling Strategy

The current study aims to retrieve deeper insights into the personal experiences and narratives that are related to the construction of the entrepreneurial self. To retrieve these deeper insights, a qualitative approach has been chosen. In contrast to quantitative research, a sample for qualitative research does not have to represent a large population, as the aim of qualitative research is to provide an understanding of complex issues related to personal behaviour (Marshall, 1996).

The participants of this study were recruited with the use of purposive sampling, due to the fact they need to fit to the sampling criteria ((online) entrepreneur, dutch nationality, female gender, and usage of Instagram). This sampling criteria was set beforehand to ensure a homogenous sample which was required to ensure validity. The participants all operated in different sectors (e.g. graphic design, virtual assistance, law, web design, and photography). Furthermore, all participants had a different number of followers on Instagram, and different years of experience with entrepreneurship.

The sample was taken with the usage of homogenous purposive sampling, as the participants were handpicked. This was done to ensure all participants met the sampling criteria, as well as to ensure a clear focus on a particular subgroup is created, where all members of this subgroup have similar characteristics and demographics (Brennen, 2017). Furthermore, the sample was taken with the usage of snowball sampling, by asking the interviewees if they know other potential participants, and therefore avoid researchers' bias. Due to limited time for this research, the total sampling size consists of 12 participants.

The participants were hand picked as the participants were recruited through Instagram, in order to ensure they met the sampling criteria of Instagram usage. After ensuring they meet all other sampling criteria, the (potential) participant was reached out through Instagram DM and asked if she was willing to participate in the research. After the participant agreed to participate, the consent form with all information on the interview and research was shared by email beforehand of the interview, and a meeting invite for the interview was sent.

**Table 3.3.2***Table presenting participant information*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Level of education</b>	<b>Place of Residence</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Field of expertise</b>
Fleur van Leijsen	22	Female	Bachelor of Arts	Dongen	Dutch	Creative lifestyle products
Tamara Kluskens	30	Female	Bachelor of Science	Weert	Dutch	Boudoir Photography
Liesanne Lieverse	28	Female	Master of Arts	Utrecht	Dutch	Webdesigner
Emma Verschure	23	Female	Master of Laws	Amsterdam	Dutch	Accountant / Tax advisor
Joanne Rosbak - Berndsens	41	Female	MBO certificate (post-secondary vocational education)	Apeldoorn	Dutch	Virtual Assistant / Coach
Frances Blomberg	33	Female	Master of Science	Valkenburg	Dutch	Illustrator
Vera Lauret	31	Female	Bachelor of Science	Prinsenbeek	Dutch	Pinterest Marketing
Linda Verheijen	38	Female	Master of Science	Rosmalen	Dutch	Custom clothing
Jessica*	25	Female	Master of Science	Volendam	Dutch	Webdesigner
Sylvia*	29	Female	Master of Laws	Utrecht	Dutch	Jurist
Julia Wisse	20	Female	Bachelor Communication	Koudekerke	Dutch	Graphic design & Social Media

Floor van Bergen	20	Female	MBO Crossmedia Graphic Design	Heesch	Dutch	Social Media Marketing
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\*= pseudonym

### 3.4 Operationalization

In this study, the concepts that have been explored in Chapter 2, narrative identity work, Instagram usage, perceptions on Instagram and development of identity are being measured. Although these concepts cannot be directly measured, they are operationalized in different ways. These concepts are used to construct a topic list that fits the scope of the research and are used for the data analysis and coding of the data.

The concept of Identity is operationalized by creating interview questions based upon the researches of Dooly (2017), Fornäs and Xinaris (2013) and Kasperuniene and Zydziunaite (2019). As the research by Kasperuniene and Zydziunaite (2019) showed, identity is divided into professional identity as cognitive structure and professional identity as a social construct, and the merge of public and private identities. Therefore, questions regarding professional context, family context and friends context were used to see if there are any differences between these different contexts and how the identity is portrayed depending on these contexts. Aside from this, identity was examined by asking the interviewee about their own perceptions on their own identity with the usage of the study by Fornäs and Xinaris (2013) who specified approaches on defining identity from a media perspective.

The concept of narrative was operationalized with the usage of the article by Dooly (2017) as she claimed to see that someone 'performs' multiple identities whereas this could also be considered as sharing different narratives. Therefore, questions in regards to narrative have been added such as how they would describe their own narrative, how the narrative changes depending on who you tell the narrative to, and how this narrative has changed over time.

When operationalizing the identity work concept of this research, most questions focused on changes in identity forming, dependent on experience, time, different persons, different contexts, and own changed perceptions.

The concepts of identity, narratives and identity work are all concepts that can be considered as broad. For this study, these concepts have been perceived in combination with social media, specifically Instagram. Therefore, the studies of Archer (2019), Archer and

Harrigan (2016) and Brydges and Sjöholm (2018) have helped operationalize how to examine the concepts of identity and which narratives are shared in a social media context.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

Before proceeding to the analysis part for this research, the interviews had to be prepared for analysis. As the interviews have been conducted in Dutch, the transcripts have been translated to English. This translation was done with the usage of A.I. translation software Deepl, whereas I went through all translations to double check and refine the total translated transcripts. The collected data through interviews has been analysed with the use of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is seen as a method that has been used before by many scholars in social science research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Herzog et al., 2019). For the coding process both the data and literature have been used for the naming of the codes. The coding process helps to take a systematic approach to the data and separate and divide the data into meaningful parts (Boeije, 2010). The analysis of this research took an inductive approach as the analysis was driven by data and the codes have emerged from the data transcript, rather than working with a pre-existing coding frame (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process was started by open coding all content, and therefore labelling the interviews transcripts. Codes that emerged from this step included codes such as feeling afraid for a burn-out, descriptions of the interviewees as an entrepreneur, and more. The next step includes categorising all codes within axial codes to get a clear overview on all codes and themes. In this process of axial coding, the codes were grouped to generate an overview and retrieve more insights in patterns for this research. The last step consists of selective coding which provides clear themes which will help answer the research question (Boeije, 2010). During the selective coding 3 main themes have emerged which are the following:

The rich emotional journey of becoming an entrepreneur, the performance of the entrepreneurial self on Instagram, and importance and characteristics of Narrative Engagement.

The step by step thematic coding process helped to fully understand all insights out of the retrieved data, and see how the fragments relate to each other by grouping and categorising them. The entire analysis process has been conducted with the use of qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. The usage of Atlas.ti helped to go through all transcripts and code all relevant fragments for the open coding part. For the axial and selective coding the Network groups function of Atlas.Ti together with Google Spreadsheets were used to organise and categorise all codes into a structural coding scheme. The organising element of the analysis helped to create an overview on what the results indicate

and what they mean for this particular study. A visualisation on the coding scheme can be found in Appendix C.

## 3.6 Quality criteria

According to Flick (2007) “Quality in qualitative research is the result of efforts in planning, conducting and reporting qualitative research” (p.66). Therefore, the following sub chapter will provide more clarity about the actions taken to enhance and ensure the quality of the current study.

### 3.6.1. Reliability

The concept of reliability is all about how replicable a study is, considering that future researchers can re-conduct the same research, and come up with the same results (Silverman, 2011). To ensure reliability, different authors (Flick, 2007; Silverman, 2011) suggest transparency about the research design, the data analysis approach, and the theoretical framework. The transparent description on the research approach for the current study has been elaborated on in this chapter, and additional documents such as an interview guide and consent form can be found in the appendices.

### 3.6.2. Validity

When talking about the concept of validity, it is often defined as ensuring accuracy of the concept. Are you measuring what you intend to measure (Silverman, 2011). To ensure validity in the current study, the research is based upon different researches related to the different concepts and overall topic. These researches can be found in Chapter 2 where all literature in relation to the concepts and topic are explored, and Chapter 3.4 which explores the operationalization of the concepts.

One critical note towards validity is the recognition that my role as a researcher, including my personal experiences as an entrepreneur, could have influenced the interaction among me and the participants, and therefore the objectivity and accuracy of the research.

## 4. Research results

The main objective of the current study is to retrieve insights on the development of entrepreneurial identity through narrative identity work on Instagram by female digital entrepreneurs. The experiences, understanding and perspectives of the participants helped with retrieving insights on the research question of the current study. With the usage of interviews, and using listening, probing, and analysing, valuable and insightful information was obtained and collected. This chapter will address the results obtained out of all interviews.

### 4.1 Demographics of Participants

All 12 entrepreneurs of this study can be considered digital media entrepreneurs in the broadest sense. This means that they either work (partly) digitally, or sell products digitally. The participants all are entrepreneurs who operate (partly) digitally. The entrepreneurs come from different regions of The Netherlands. All participants who participated in this study participated voluntarily and signed a consent form beforehand of the interview.

To remain accurate, the interviews were transcribed within a couple of days after the interviews took place. The days and times all interviews took place varied due to the different plannings of all participants. All interviews were conducted in the period of 31 March 2022 until 23 May 2022.

### 4.2 Research Results

From all data retrieved, three main themes have emerged. The analysis shows that three broad themes are important when discussing the identity work of Dutch female entrepreneurs: The rich emotional journey of becoming an entrepreneur, the performance of the entrepreneurial self on Instagram and importance and characteristics of Narrative Engagement. Each theme is discussed in detail down below. This chapter is structured by discussing each theme which is identified from the interview data. The entire coding scheme and structure can be seen in Appendix C: Visualisation of coding scheme.

## 4.2.1 The rich emotional journey of becoming an entrepreneur

In the interviews the participants were asked about their experience with entrepreneurship so far, and all elements that belong to entrepreneurship.

### 4.2.1.1 Reasons of starting as an entrepreneur

All participants indicated different reasons why they started their own business. There was one thing in common amongst all participants: they wanted to create the life they desire. All of them felt like this was something they couldn't do in a salaried job. Struggles they faced in a salaried job were lack of satisfaction, lack of freedom, and lack of independence. These elements drove the participants to pursue their own entrepreneurial journey, in order to make an attempt to create the life they envision.

*“He often balances on the edge of life and death, so to speak. And that made me realise that you have to do what you like. Life can be over soon. So then I cut the knot. I just wasn't happy in my current job. It was a job in which I had not graduated. And besides that, I like to be creative, so with photography and developing recipes. I noticed that I could not combine those two things if I had a salaried job. So I thought Fuck it. I'm just going to quit my salaried job and go all out for myself. Yes, because it's important to me that I'm happy and doing what I love.” - Sylvia\**

This quote shows that one of the main drives to become an entrepreneur is to create the life you want for yourself, and therefore obtain elements you can not obtain within a salaried job (such as creativity and happiness for Sylvia\*). The quote also talks about combining an entrepreneurial journey alongside a salaried job which according to Sylvia\* is hard to combine.

### 4.2.1.2 Entrepreneurial descriptions

The participants were asked various questions on their perspective on entrepreneurship. Different elements came forward such as perseverance, ambition, passion and motivation. An element of entrepreneurship most participants really liked is having autonomy to decide on what you're going to work on, how you do this, and when you do this. This is clearly illustrated by Julia Wisse (@juulsbranddesign) in the interview conducted:

*“I've always found it kind of interesting to be your own boss. And to have no one above you, so to speak. And to be able to do anything you want in terms of expressing your*

*own creativity. And no one is saying, "shouldn't you do it this way? You can do it all by yourself. And that's what I really like about it. " - Julia Wisse*

This means that aside from the main motivation to start as an entrepreneur (creating the life you want) having autonomy is one of the main elements of entrepreneurship that entrepreneurs tend to value the most.

#### 4.2.1.3 Online entrepreneurship

The current study focuses upon digital entrepreneurs, and therefore indirectly is about online entrepreneurship. As this is still a relatively new concept, I have decided to ask for definitions of online entrepreneurship to all participants. Some participants declared online entrepreneurship as working online, including the element as retrieving online clients, having online meetings and working location independently by working in online environments. However, other participants defined online entrepreneurship as having online focused marketing, and selling online for example by selling online courses. One thing became clear out of all interviews: online entrepreneurship is an important element for all businesses, which has been shown with the COVID-19 Pandemic where most offline elements of businesses were not allowed anymore. This occurrence has forced some businesses to rethink their business model and shift to (partly) online entrepreneurship.

*"I did find it very difficult at the beginning. But because of corona, it just really couldn't be helped. So I was forced into it." - Emma Verschure*

This quote shows that online entrepreneurship was somehow forced to most entrepreneurs, as the COVID-19 pandemic caused a lack of possibilities for offline entrepreneurship.

Amongst most interviewees mainly positive experiences were related to online entrepreneurship. However, in contrast to this was the need to connect, as online entrepreneurship can get lonely.

*"But what's least fun about it is that it can get very lonely. If you don't guard against that. So you can also lock yourself at home. I did that in the winter. That can get lonely. So you really have to guard against that as well. That you arrange physical meetings with colleagues. Or co-working with other people. Because otherwise you end up sitting on an island." - Liesanne Lieverse*

As the quote of Liesanne Lieveise shows, online entrepreneurship is considered as a cause for loneliness in entrepreneurship. Most entrepreneurs therefore tend to actively seek out physical meetups to avoid the feeling of loneliness.

#### 4.2.1.4 Creating connections

As mentioned before, the interviewees feel that online entrepreneurship can get lonely. During the interviews, we have discussed the topic on how the entrepreneur feels about entrepreneurship in different contexts such as family and friends. Most entrepreneurs indicated that not everyone in their inner circle understands what they do, or can relate to entrepreneurship. This causes a sense of feeling unheard by the participant.

*“Yes, if for example I'm in a project group or something. And then I have something to do for the company, for example, a meeting with someone, or I have to work on it. Then I sometimes find it difficult. To explain that, because they don't understand when I say I have to work.” - Julia Wisse*

The sense of feeling unheard was shared by many participants, as it is illustrated by the quote of Julia Wisse. Aside from this, some participants also felt not taken seriously. They mentioned that they got comments from family members and friends who were indicating that they were not making enough money. These negative comments created a feeling among the entrepreneurs of not bringing up anything entrepreneurial related.

*“I sometimes think that if I go back to work after six months, he'll ask: Wow, you've had a good hobby for the last six months and now you're going to work again? He knows that I see it as more than a hobby. But he is not convinced that I would be able to manage if I said to him: Well, maybe I'll sell those wardrobes for five thousand euros. Then he really looks at me like cuckoo. While I'm sure there are people who think it's worth it.” - Linda Verheijen*

This quote shows the struggle some entrepreneurs face in regards to their family and friends context. The sense of feeling not taken seriously and not feeling understood, which can be considered as negative comments cause the issue of entrepreneurs not feeling worthy enough to talk openly about their business.

Interesting to note is that almost all entrepreneurs mentioned facing difficulties in regards to their entrepreneurship and personal context. Most of them also mentioned a solution for feeling unheard and misunderstood: they decided to seek out fellow entrepreneurs who see and understand the challenges they face.

*“So I have my hashtag colleagues for that now. For the things you struggle with, or the people you talk to in the DM on Instagram, I discuss more things with that, business-wise. The business struggles, so to speak.” - Joanne Rosbak - Berndsen*

*“Very variable. I'm now also part of a business network club, for women entrepreneurs, so to speak. And I notice that what I miss in my friends, I can find very much in there.” - Floor van Bergen*

These quotes show that the lack of support from direct contacts such as family and friends does not fix the need of feeling seen. Therefore, the entrepreneurs tend to reach out to fellow entrepreneurs where they can talk openly, and therefore feel heard and understood.

#### 4.2.1.5 Setting boundaries

A common topic that was derived amongst all interviews is the topic of setting boundaries. This can be divided into two sub topics: work-life balance as well as client relationships. For the work-life balance it appeared to be a hot topic for the entrepreneurs who are experiencing motherhood. It became clear that these entrepreneurs specifically wanted to make time for their families, aside from their business.

*“Now when I'm at work, I'm at work. And when I go home I don't actually open the laptop anymore. Until Ene is asleep. Or if he's on the iPad or something. Then I want to do something for a quarter or half an hour. But the time that I am at home for my child, is now really for my child.” - Joanne Rosbak - Berndsen*

The quote of Joanne Rosbak - Berndsen shows the set boundaries in order to protect work-life balance. The specific and conscious choice of creating time for family shows the thoughtfulness of how to schedule your time as an entrepreneur, and what your main priorities are as an entrepreneur, but as a mother as well.

Aside from this, the boundaries element came forward as well in regards to client relationships. The interviewees stated that they have to set certain boundaries towards their clients in order to remain professional and work efficiently.

*“But also in situations where a client does things that don't make you very happy. Then you have to indicate your boundaries.” - Emma Verschure*

This shows that boundaries are not only relevant in relation to private life or work-life balance, but also in regards to relationships with clients. Emma spoke about avoiding a 'too personal' relationship with her clients as she feels it does harm or impact the business activities she is hired for. An example for this is meeting specific deadlines.

#### 4.2.1.6 Money

Money became an interesting element among all interviewees. When talking about successful entrepreneurship, every interviewee mentioned that financial stability is one important element related to success.

*“Success I think is that you yourself are at least satisfied with what you bring in. Also in terms of salary and income.” - Vera Lauret*

*“And success for me is also being able to live comfortably. For me success is not necessarily, it would be nice, but it's not necessarily to get 10K every month. But I do want you to earn enough money to be able to live a carefree life. That's it, especially carefree enjoyment. Do nice things.” - Frances Blomberg*

These quotes clearly show that money is indeed an important factor when considering successful entrepreneurship. Especially the stability of how much money comes in is important, to ensure living comfortably. This was considered as the main criteria amongst the participants. Although some mentioned they did fancy a higher income and would not decline more money, they did not mention they have the ambition to become e.g. a millionaire.

Although all interviewees value money in regards to success, most interviewees also mentioned that money is not the most important factor in relation to successful entrepreneurship.

*“Yeah. So being successful is having your own freedom to do what you want and doing what makes you happy. So that you enjoy going to work every day. Or that you almost don't have to see it as work anymore. Because you are so happy with it. Then it doesn't really matter how much money you make. Because every day you do what makes you happy. That is actually the best thing there is, I think.” - Floor van Bergen*

As illustrated in the quote by Floor van Bergen, enjoyment is often seen as more important than money. Enjoyment was often described as enjoying your work, and feeling happy in your business.

*“That’s tricky. Yeah. In terms of money, of course you want to achieve something. But I also think that even if you earn a few tons. Then I think you should still have fun. Otherwise I think you have no success.” - Jessica\**

The contradiction in this is an interesting element to note, that although the interviewees mention that financial stability is important to them, they also value enjoyment very high. This could be related to one of the main reasons for starting a business: having autonomy and creating the life you desire to ensure enjoyment, while the financial stability is ensured by having paying clients.

## 4.2.2 The performance of the entrepreneurial self on Instagram

### 4.2.2.1 Feelings on Instagram as a platform

During the interview the platform Instagram itself was discussed with the interviewees. Some of these insights are valuable for the current study.

One of the main elements that was mentioned in the introduction is the difference in culture among different social media platforms. This was confirmed by some interviewees, as they experienced the same thing. The main element derived from this cultural difference is the different thresholds the platforms have. LinkedIn was often seen as a career focussed platform, and therefore considered as a higher threshold to use. Contrary to this, Instagram was considered as an open platform, easy to use and more aligned with their own vision.

*“Liesanne: Whereas on Instagram or something like that, I don’t have that. But on LinkedIn that threshold is very high.*

*Kyra: And what makes you feel like that threshold is so high?*

*Liesanne: Because that’s where the audience is still so busy with career focus. And making more money every year. And the second car in front of the house and things*

*like that. I just feel like there's a huge misunderstanding between us. And then I'd rather avoid it than confront it."*

This quote shows that LinkedIn is considered having a different culture in comparison to Instagram. This could be due to the different focuses of the different platforms, as LinkedIn is focussed on networking for professional purposes, whereas Instagram is considered as a photo-sharing app.

On the other hand, Instagram also was sometimes questioned by the interviewees. Some of them wondered how authentic Instagram was, and that the content published on the platform often can be seen as fake. As one mentioned, it can be seen as a 'love-hate relationship'.

*"On Instagram you had to show that everything was going well. ... And everyone saw how fantastic it went. When in fact it wasn't going fantastic for you at all. And then go tell them that, that that was all fake. It's not that easy" - Emma Verschure*

This quote somehow confirms the questionable integrity the users of the platform experience, although it is an element that is changing. Furthermore, Instagram is often used as a marketing platform for (digital) entrepreneurs. However, this comes with its challenges as well. Aside from the elements mentioned above, the entrepreneurs interviewed also struggled with elements as feeling the need to be online 24/7, and feeling that Instagram is a must in order to be successful:

*"Having to be online 24/7. That you actually have to have your continuous interaction. If you didn't post for a few weeks, that would be a waste. Sometimes I find that a bit unfortunate. And on the other hand, I like that. I have a little love-hate relationship with Instagram. On the one hand I think: Yes, I get customers from it. And on the other hand I think: I have to share something to stay in the rotation, so to speak. But I think a lot of people have that." - Vera Lauret*

This means that there is a feeling of having to be online all the time, and this provides a certain pressure to the entrepreneurs of maintaining their online visibility.

#### 4.2.2.2 Presentation on Instagram

One of the elements of the interview was how the entrepreneurs showed their entrepreneurial identity on Instagram. The answers derived regarding this element differ per

interviewee. However, there is a clear distinction visible in the type of content that is shared online, and type of content that often is not shared online.

The content that often is shared online can be seen as entrepreneurial content. This is content that is related to the entrepreneurial identity, as well as to the business itself. This content was often specified as content about the entrepreneurs experience with entrepreneurship, or general information about the field of expertise. All interviewees agreed on sharing such content on their Instagram profiles.

*“Well, of course, what I do in terms of work. the photos I take, customer reviews, that sort of thing” - Tamara Kluskens*

The content that differed the most among all participants was the content that is shown. There was a clear group of interviewees that did not share private life content. This type of content ranged from family problems, up until private life details such as having a burn-out, or feeling ill.

*“So if I'm lying in bed with a hot water bottle because I have a stomach ache. I'm not going to put that out there. While it does make me more human. But if I slip up, for example, I'd be more likely to leave that in. Because it is more human, but still businesslike, so to speak.” - Floor van Bergen*

This quote illustrates that showing weakness (e.g. feeling ill) is considered as something you do not share online as an entrepreneur. On the other side, it is recognized as something that is considered human, but not businesslike.

The main element that showed the distinction in what is shown, and what is not shown online is the dependency on relevancy to the business. All entrepreneurs mentioned that they always think twice in regards to content they publish, to double check if it is relevant enough and it will contribute to their business.

*“ But I liked to share on a day what I like to share that day. If it's not relevant that day I'm not going to share it either. “ - Vera Lauret*

*“If I want to share something then I post it.... And on the other hand I do think of yes, is it relevant to share my family on a web designer's website?” - Jessica\**

These quotes show that relevancy is an existing criteria to determine what content is shared, and what content is not shared online. Relevancy in this context is related to what the entrepreneur thinks their target audience consider as relevant for them to see.

### 4.2.3 Importance and characteristics of Narrative Engagement.

#### 4.2.3.1 Personal Branding

As mentioned before, relevancy is a topic that is always in an entrepreneur's mind when thinking about what content you show, or do not show on your Instagram profile, and how it fits with the entrepreneurial identity and narrative you want to show online. As mentioned in the beginning, the relevancy differs per interviewee. This also has to do with personal branding.

Personal branding was often considered by all entrepreneurs as important for their business. Some mentioned that they thought it was important to retrieve some sort of recognizability through brand colours, whereas others felt like it was of high importance so potential clients already get to know you a little.

*“They don't come to you for nothing, because they already know who you are. They know how you talk. They know what your energy is, so to speak. And they also know what you're good at. and I think that's the real advantage of creating your own brand on Instagram. Your customers immediately know who you are and what they're dealing with.” - Floor van Bergen*

*“I think it's a useful way for people to, first of all that you're recognizable. If you use a certain style and certain colours then you're recognizable, but it also sticks around longer.” - Frances Blomberg*

This shows that the entrepreneur considers Personal Branding as an element to introduce yourself and your personality with the usage of narrative identity work.

Aside from this, the interviewees also mentioned that they feel as if the personal branding element is helping them with clients, due to the fact they feel it creates connection and trust among their following:

*“I do try to do videos sometimes. I need to do it more. But yeah. I know it's very important to show your face. Also because then you build a connection with someone.” - Sylvia\**

*“Yes. I think that, for me, but also for so many others, that's the best way to gain the trust of clients. Because if you're shooting really nice pictures, but nobody knows who you are, then it's much harder to get a connection with somebody. And I think nowadays you don't buy from the company, you buy from a person. And then showing yourself in stories or whatever is essential to that. I think so.” - Tamara Kluskens*

Although the participants feel that personal branding (including showing yourself) is important as the previous quotes have shown, they often tend to struggle a lot with showing themselves. There are different reasons for these struggles, whereas some of them can be caused by insecurity, and others can be caused by the fear of the opinions of others.

*“Joanne: Yes, but I just don't do reels, because I just have something against that.  
Kyra: Hahaha, why do you have anything against that?  
Joanne: I don't know about that, my head is always so weird on a reel.” - Joanne Rosbak Berndsen*

*“At first I had a hard time with that and started muting everyone. I had that in my employment especially with former colleagues. They were all in such a way that they could not see my stories, but only my feed posts. And because they often had an opinion about everything that I didn't like” - Vera Lauret*

The previous quotes display that especially the video format for content online is perceived as scary. The video format is available in many different forms on Instagram, such as Instagram Stories, Instagram Reels, Instagram video posts and Instagram Live.

*“Yeah, same story. And especially if you're there yourself. Julia: Yeah. With a movie, it's even less than in the movie. I find a video even scarier than a post. Definitely.” - Julia Wisse*

Most entrepreneurs have declared to struggle with video content in combination with showing themselves in this type of content. However, some entrepreneurs mentioned that although they struggled with this at first, they managed to overcome this, get outside of their comfort zone and now feel okay with producing this type of content.

*“You just have to do so many things that are out of your comfort zone. I'm someone who used to stay in my shell and didn't dare talk on video and things like that. So I started a*

*year ago or so and you actually notice that a lot of opportunities come your way.” - Tamara Kluskens*

Among all participants there still is a difference in who is feeling more comfortable with creating video content, and who are not ready for this yet, which can be dependent on different variables such as experience, personality type, etc.

#### 4.2.3.2 Showing yourself

Building on the personal branding element, during the interview we've discussed what type of content is shown online. As mentioned before, relevancy is a main criteria for all interviewees. Some of the interviewees value adding a personal element into the mix of content. Different elements such as motherhood, and other private life content are shown by some. Reasons to do this can be related to creating a sense of recognition.

*“Yes, I do share private things. So when we go do something fun with my daughter, I share all that stuff.” - Vera Lauret*

*“Sometimes I also let my little daughter come back in it. Not always really all the way with her face and everything, but a little subtle.” - Frances Blomberg*

This shows that the personal element is similar to the type of narrative the entrepreneurs share, and the type of entrepreneurial identity they create and share online. Whereas some of the participants easily share about themselves online, others do not.

*“I don't pretend to be different on Instagram than I actually am.” - Vera Lauret*

*“I just try to be myself.... It is... I do always leave the positive sense maybe a little too much, because obviously it's not perfect. But I just try to be myself” - Liesanne Lieverse*

The quotation of Liesanne Lieverse shows that there is a distinction in what is shown online: the positive elements are shown more often. Aside from this, there is a difference among the participants in regards to how comfortable they feel with sharing personal elements, or showing their true self.

*“Frances: Yeah. I also do show more personal things, my experiences with*

*entrepreneurship. Again through visuals I show those. I like to show the struggles as well. But I do like a bit of humour. I don't fake that it's all perfect. And all so nice and all. But just the ups and downs. But I wouldn't show myself completely crying.*

*Kyra: Maybe always something more with a positive undertone?*

*Frances: Yes, a positive undertone or with a joke and a little humour yes.” - Frances Blomberg*

The quote by Frances Blomberg shows that even when sharing a struggle, humour is added into this narrative that is shared. Some entrepreneurs choose to also show imperfection as they feel it makes you more humane and therefore creates connection. Again, the boundary here lays with relevance for the business.

*“I do think you can share negative things as well. Look, if I have a very nice client who says I don't want it anymore. Then I would feel free to share that. But I wouldn't share more personal negative things. ... Yes, it's always exciting to share. But I think it does bring you more than by just showing positive things. Yeah, that's all too good to be true. And those negative things do just make you human, I think.” - Vera Lauret*

*“Yes, yes. Only I think if you also share negative things, you come across as a little more reliable as well. What if something went wrong with a design or something like that, or with the delivery time? That you then also share that, like, sometimes things go wrong, you know? So that you then also come across as a bit more reliable. Because yes, with no one, with no company, everything goes completely right.” - Julia Wisse*

This shows that although sharing imperfection is considered as humane and creates connection which is illustrated by the quotes of Vera Lauret and Julia Wisse. However, not all entrepreneurs easily share imperfection online. They tend to struggle with it as they are scared it will affect their professionalism.

*“But what I tell a lot less is in the moment when things go wrong. If I get a pair of pants where someone ripped out, I won't put that widely on social media.” - Linda Verheijen*

*“Yes look, I consciously share things on my stories or not. If, for example, I got up late one day, then I'm not going to share that.” - Floor van Bergen*

This illustrates that the fear of impact on their professionalism or how they are perceived as an entrepreneur is based on what elements they share in their narrative they

share online. This shows a conflict that although it is considered as humane and a basis for the creation of connection, it is also considered as a lack of professionalism.

When talking about vulnerability, it seems to be a topic most entrepreneurs struggle with as it is more related to personal content than entrepreneurial content. Examples of this are showing yourself crying, or opening up about a sensitive topic.

*“ Oh yes, I think I would never do that. No, that's a bit too personal.*

*Kyra: Is that maybe also because there's a bit of vulnerability involved?*

*Julia: Yeah yeah. I've never been someone who would cry in public or anything anyway. I used to always hold it in when I was crying as a kid. So then I wouldn't put it online at all huh.” - Julia Wisse*

*“But I think I share a lot, even when things are not going so well. I also see people crying on camera sometimes, but I find that a bit too intense. But if I have a bad day, I put it on there too.” - Tamara Kluskens*

Combining this with the previous element of showing imperfection, these quotes show that showing vulnerability is an aspect that is often not shared due to the intensity of vulnerability, and feeling not comfortable enough to share this online but rather keeping this to your inner circle.

#### 4.2.3.3 Different narratives in different situations

The narratives the entrepreneurs share about themselves differ per situation. As mentioned in 4.2.1.4 Creating Connections the entrepreneurs experience feelings of feeling unheard in family and friends context. This has an influence on the narrative they share in this specific context. Many entrepreneurs therefore decide to not speak about their entrepreneurial journey, or provide a filtered version of the narrative.

*“That they don't really understand the choice of free enterprise. So, it's not like I'm twisting it, but people really have to consciously ask about it. And otherwise I just keep my mouth shut. Because I just know there's misunderstanding. So, yeah that a little bit.” - Liesanne Lieverse*

This shows that a different narrative is shared depending on the person the narrative is told to. Aside from this, there is also the fear of being not interesting enough. Some participants spoke about being talked over, or being walked away from, strengthening their fear of not being interesting enough.

*"I don't really have to bring that up with other family members, because they don't find it interesting. ... Yes, that they just do talk about it quickly. Or that they just walk away." - Tamara Kluskens*

Again, the quote by Tamara Kluskens confirms that the narrative shared is highly dependent on with whom the narrative is shared. When talking about which narrative is shared in a professional context, there are different elements that have an impact on how the narrative is presented. An example of these elements are limiting beliefs. One participant felt like her narrative and how she presented herself changed as she was afraid that she did not have enough expertise.

*"But in the beginning I was quite insecure. And then I noticed that if you had clients who were a bit 'above your range', that I could occasionally become insecure. But more because they asked such direct questions. That I sometimes had no answer. That I didn't have the knowledge of that, maybe more that way." - Jessica\**

As the quotation of Jessica indicates, another element is the connection with the client. The setting of the client meeting is an important factor for the type of narrative that is shared. Elements that come along with this are either informal / formal settings, as well as the need to feel equal with the client.

*"Of course you pay more attention to your words when you go to clients" - Floor van Bergen*

*"I also often hear, Vera, you're just to the point and direct. And I'm also kind of with humor in it. I don't think it all has to be so strict and businesslike. I think you should be able to be yourself. I also really believe that I'm just really myself. If I do a clumsy thing, I do it." - Vera Lauret*

*"I did notice in the beginning that sometimes I could be intimidated by the client who already had a lot of experience or is already a big name on Instagram." - Frances Blomberg*

All these quotes show that what elements are included or excluded from the narrative is dependent on who you tell your narrative to. These examples are in a physical context, where it is easy to get a sense of who you tell your narrative to.

#### 4.2.3.4 Student entrepreneurs

Among all participants, a few participants have declared to be enrolled in an educational programme aside from their entrepreneurial journey. These participants decided to not necessarily mention to potential clients they are a student as well, due to negative responses to this.

*“I do mention that I'm a student, but with very little charge.... Because I really don't want to emphasise it. I don't know if you recognize that yourself, but people don't necessarily look at it very positively when you say you're still studying.” - Emma Verschure*

This shows the negative response when sharing the fact of being enrolled in an educational programme. Aside from this, age plays a part in this negative experience as well. The interviewees who experienced this felt as if a young age is seen by others as if they are not experienced enough:

*“What I do to let come back in it is that I'm still young. I think that in itself is a key element. So that people immediately think, okay, she is young, fresh and different. And while on the other hand, with some people I just leave it out. Because I know that some see it as a weakness and not as a strength. And that's more often than not.” - Floor van Bergen*

As mentioned in the quote by Floor van Bergen, due to the negative experience with sharing her age she decided to not include this in her narrative anymore. This shows that what is included or excluded from a narrative is dependent on responses and experiences as well.

## 5. Discussion

The current study was conducted to retrieve a better understanding on the creation and formation of entrepreneurial identity on Instagram through narrative identity work by Dutch digital female entrepreneurs. Whereas the previous chapter presented the results of the data analysis, this chapter will address the key findings, interpret these and discuss the findings in relation to the theory and literature discussed in Chapter 2, the theoretical framework. This chapter ends with addressing limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

### 5.1 Discussion

As discussed in the theoretical framework, Identity can be considered as a process: it is continuously changing over time (Dunne, 1995). Taking a narrative approach to identity helps with a sense of continuity (Rasmussen, 1996). When looking at the results in combination with the literature in order to provide an answer to the research question, we see that different elements pop-up, whereas we could summarise these into three themes: The rich emotional journey of becoming an entrepreneur, The performance of the entrepreneurial self on Instagram, and Importance and characteristics of Narrative Engagement.

#### 5.1.1 Identity formation on Instagram

We see that all entrepreneurs' identities are different: not only when comparing them to each other, but also depending on the situation they are in. When relating this to Instagram, the researches of Kamali (2008), Alghamdi (2021), and Wally and Koshy (2014) already showed that Instagram is an important platform for female entrepreneurs. In the current study, Instagram shows to be an important platform as well due to the difference in culture when comparing the platform to other social media platforms. The participants of the current study experienced Instagram as open, and having a low threshold, whereas LinkedIn was considered as more career-focussed and a high threshold to contribute on this platform.

Aside from the differences in culture amongst different social media platforms, Instagram was often perceived as non-authentic, or fake. However, although all interviewees did admit this feeling, they wanted to challenge this image on Instagram by showing themselves.

### 5.1.2 Narrative identity work: what is shared and what is not shared

The identity the female entrepreneurs show on Instagram is created through a narrative. The narrative of all participants differed among all participants, as some shared more than others. Some participants felt okay with sharing private life details, such as family life and motherhood. However, other participants do not want to share anything personal. One thing all participants mentioned is that they always try to take a positive approach to all content they publish and the narrative they tell about themselves. This is often done with the usage of humour.

When talking about where the boundary is to what is shown, and what isn't shown, it all comes down to the concept of relevance. Relevancy is considered as the main criteria for content, as it has to have some sort of connection to entrepreneurship, or the business of the entrepreneur. Although imperfection and vulnerability are perceived as positive elements by the participants as it creates a sense of relatability and connection, they all struggle with showing these elements in their identity and narrative. Examples such as chaos, illness or being late are often left out of the narrative shared online. Showing 'non-positive' emotions, such as crying, is something the participants claimed to never do, and never will do as they find it too personal. This can be related to the article of Alsos and Ljunggren (2017), that states that female entrepreneurs adopt a compensation strategy to form a bridge between feminine qualities against the masculine stereotype in the entrepreneurial field.

When talking about motherhood, the participants of this study claimed to often include this in their narrative, while including a connection to their business / entrepreneurship in general. According to Swail and Marlow (2017) motherhood is considered as a difficult element when trying to establish a professional entrepreneurial identity due to the masculine prototype set in the field of entrepreneurship. It could be that feminised characteristics such as motherhood claim a more prominent place in the narrative depending on the context with whom the narrative is shared, and sometimes terms as 'mumpreneur' is used specifically (Duberly & Cohen, 2010).

### 5.1.3 Entrepreneurial identity in a personal context

As discussed in chapter 2, entrepreneurs aim to find a balance between belongingness and distinctiveness (Shepherd & Haynie, 2009). The article by Essers et al. (2021) already illustrated that some female entrepreneurs do not want to risk their

relationships in personal context (families and communities), but are in need of recognition and acceptance of their personal surroundings, which shows and confirms the finding of the entrepreneur feeling unheard at times. This can be related to the lack of recognition and acceptance of their surroundings. This current study shows that there is a lack of recognition amongst all participants, varying the context. Some feel not understood by family, whereas others feel not supported by their friends.

Furthermore, the research by Hannafey (2003), showed that entrepreneurs can feel a sense of isolation, loneliness and chronic stress (Hannafey, 2003; Akande, 1994). This has been confirmed in this study as well, as multiple participants reported feeling isolated, especially when being a digital entrepreneur as you do not necessarily need to go somewhere, and can work from the comfort of your own home.

## 5.2 Future research

For future research, there are different elements that have arisen from this study to be explored into more detail. It would be recommended to further explore this topic through a longitudinal study to clearly see how this change, in regards to the narrative shared and presented, occurs and changes over time. To expand on this, it is recommended to study the development of an entrepreneurial identity over time, especially from when someone is starting as an entrepreneur and how the entrepreneurial identity develops over time when the entrepreneur gains more knowledge and experience. From the interviews, experience was derived as an element that made the narrative change over time.

Furthermore, for future research it is recommended to pick a specific age group as sampling criteria, to be able to see differences in the forming of entrepreneurial identity through narrative identity work depending on age as the age correlates with lifestyle and important life events. Some participants of this study talked about involving motherhood in their entrepreneurial identity, whereas other participants are not involved with parenting or motherhood yet due to a different life phase.

Additionally, the current study has focused on Instagram specifically, but during the interviews it was confirmed that the participants felt that there is a difference in culture amongst different social media platforms. Therefore, it would be interesting to research how the entrepreneurial identity through narrative identity work changes depending on the platform they present themselves on, which builds upon the phenomenon of identity changes dependent on the situation someone finds himself or herself in.

## 6. Conclusion

In this chapter, all information gathered and retrieved in the chapters before will be used to provide an answer to the research question. The previous chapters were needed to construct and formulate all information and insights needed. The following chapter will conclude the research and therefore answer the research question where this research is based upon. This study is aimed to answer the following research question:

*How do Dutch digital female entrepreneurs develop their entrepreneurial identity through narrative identity work on Instagram?*

### 6.1 Conclusion

To provide a clear answer on the research question, we can see that Dutch digital female entrepreneurs share different narratives on Instagram, to define their entrepreneurial identity. Overall, they tend to show more personal elements in their narrative, to establish a connection. However, there is a clear boundary to what extent personal elements are told: it always has to have a connection or relevance with the business. Aside from this, this study shows that sharing more 'negative' elements such as illness or chaos is something that is left out of the narrative on purpose, as the participants are afraid this will get back to them later on, and will be used against them. This backlash is not always visible directly, as the participants mention they feel that these negative elements will scare off potential clients. Therefore, the participants mentioned that they all tend to focus on sharing positive elements of their narrative, or turning something negative into something positive (e.g. by sharing this with a sense of humour). Furthermore, some elements are purposely left out of the narrative that was shared. Some participants mentioned they do not mention their age, or the fact that they are a student entrepreneur, as they have received negative responses to this.

Therefore, we can conclude that when forming an entrepreneurial identity with the usage of narrative identity work, the way people respond to certain elements included in the narrative is of utmost importance to decide what narrative an entrepreneur shares to establish its entrepreneurial identity.

The theoretical relevance of this study is the contribution of perspectives on different topics regarding female entrepreneurship. Aside from retrieving insights on how entrepreneurial identity is constructed through narrative identity work by female entrepreneurs, it also gave some other potential topics to explore, as they tend to face these. Some of these topics are the lack of being taken seriously as a student / young

entrepreneur, the struggle on showing imperfection and vulnerability as an entrepreneur, and the differences on what is shared in the entrepreneurial narrative to establish the entrepreneurial identity. This current study can therefore be considered as a starting point to explore many different topics related to female entrepreneurship which were not the primary focus of the current study.

For societal relevance, it is interesting to note that female entrepreneurs decide to include personal life elements into their narrative, with the side note that relevance is highly dependent on what is shared and what is not shared. The personal life elements add to the Know Like Trust marketing concept as explained in the introduction. The concept is aimed at creating a connection with potential clients, and therefore is a marketing concept aimed at lead generation. To retrieve a clear image on the gender gap in regards to lack of equality in the field of entrepreneurship, it would be interesting to research what elements are used to form an entrepreneurial identity through narrative identity work for male entrepreneurs and how they use the Know Like Trust marketing concept. Aside from this, the introduction shared more on the differences in culture among all different social media platforms, which was also confirmed in the interviews of the current study. For future research it would be interesting to see if the entrepreneurial identity created through narrative identity work changes depending on the social media platform.

The practical contribution of the current study is the outcome that shows that female entrepreneurs tend to use Instagram to share their narrative in order to establish their entrepreneurial identity, but that it is more than just talking about entrepreneur related elements. The participants tend to share more about their personality in general, aside from private life details. However, there is always a certain boundary in regards to what is relevant. When considering the underrepresentation of women in the field of entrepreneurship due to the lack of acquaintanceship with the image of an successful entrepreneur (Elliot, Mantler and Huggins (2021), the current study shows that the current stereotype image of an entrepreneur causes a lack of inspiration for female students to explore the field of entrepreneurship. It is important to therefore stimulate gender-inclusive curricula and include entrepreneurial courses to close the gender gap and inspire the next (female) generation to become an entrepreneur.

During the interviews, it became clear that the narrative the participants share has changed over time the longer they are an entrepreneur. An element mentioned often is the increase in experience which causes an increase in confidence among the entrepreneurs, causing them to portray themselves more confidently.

## 6.2 Limitations

When reflecting on limitations, different limitations are related to the current study. Due to the limited time scope for this research, a sample size of only 12 participants could be obtained. For further research it is recommended to enlarge the sample size for a more reliable and generalizable outcome. Aside from this, the current study has been executed by a female researcher, who is an entrepreneur herself. Although this gives benefits, this also means that I am partly biased on this topic as I have my own perspectives, opinions and beliefs on this specific topic. Although I have tried to be as objective as possible in this research, a human is subjective by human nature and therefore it could be that the perspectives, opinions and beliefs have had an influence on this study, either in the scope of the topic or the setting during the interviews.

## 6.3 Future research

As briefly discussed in Chapter 5.2, the exploratory nature of the current study has created new perspectives which are interesting to explore for future research.

According to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, female entrepreneurship in general is still a developing field due to the fight against dominant male stereotypes in the field of entrepreneurship (Sunderland, 2005; Harrison et al., 2015). This gender gap has an influence on the formation and portrayal of entrepreneurial identity. Therefore, it is of high importance to keep track of both the current existing gender gap in combination with the formation of entrepreneurial identity of female entrepreneurs, and see how the current misalignment in regards to discourses on female entrepreneurs' identity (Orlandi, 2017) will change overtime.

Furthermore, the digital environment is developing all the time and claims its place in our daily life and routines (Couldry & Hepp, 2013). The rapid developments of this industry are of high importance to the entrepreneurial identity portrayed on different digital platforms. Therefore, it is suggested to keep track of all developments within the digital industry, and repeat this study on formation of entrepreneurial identity on different aspects within this digital industry, e.g. different (social media) platforms

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# 8. Appendices

## Appendix A: Topic guide

(Archer, 2019; Archer & Harrigan, 2016; Brydges & Sjöholm, 2018; Dooly, 2017; Fornäs & Xinaris, 2013; Kasperuniene & Zydziunaite, 2019)

### ***Introduction***

- Welcome + Thank You
- Short introduction about me
- About this interview
- Confidentially answers
- No good/wrong answers
- If you want to stop, you can let me know
- If you don't want to answer a question, let me know
- Length of interview
- Consent form
- Do you have any questions before we begin?

### ***Introduction of interviewee***

#### **Warm up**

- How would you describe a normal work day?
- How do you organize/structure your work?
- What are projects you are currently working on?
- What is your experience with:
  - freelancing
  - entrepreneurship
  - Combining entrepreneurship with a salaried job/ something else.
- How would you describe entrepreneurship in your own words?
- In your opinion, what are the skills an entrepreneur needs?
- How do you become a successful entrepreneur in your opinion?
- What helped you realize you wanted to be an entrepreneur? / When did you realize you wanted to become an entrepreneur?

## **Identity**

- How would you describe yourself as an entrepreneur?
- Do you see yourself as an online entrepreneur? What is the definition of online entrepreneurship for you?
- Can you describe to me your experience as an online entrepreneur?
- Do you have specific goals you are working on? (e.g. this year, upcoming 5/10 years).
- How do you plan to achieve these goals?
- How do you see your future?
- Do you see a certain trend/pattern in your future?

## **Your image as an entrepreneur:**

- Does your image as an entrepreneur ever change depending on certain situations?  
(Example customer relations)
- Do you feel that sometimes you need to play a different "role"?
- Have you changed last year?
- How did you become aware that something was changing?

## **Identity work**

- How did you cope with these changes?
- How do you present yourself to others?
- How do you present yourself in the following situations:
  - family context
  - Friends context
  - Professional context
  - Instagram

## **Narrative**

- If you had to describe yourself as in a story to others, how would you describe yourself?
- What are elements that you mention in your story?
- What are elements that you leave out on purpose in your story?
- Are you intentional about how you tell "your" story to others?
- Is there anything that has changed this story over the years?
- What does your story mean to you?

## Instagram

- How do you feel about self-branding on Instagram?
- To what extent do you showcase yourself?
- What kind of stories do you share about yourself on Instagram?
- How does Instagram help you share your own story?
- What was the trigger to change your story about yourself?
- Do you feel like there is a difference between how you present yourself on Instagram versus real life?
- Are there things you would never post on Instagram?

## Closing

- Are there any things you'd like to add to our conversation that you haven't had a chance to do before?
- Do you have any feedback for me?
- Are there any other entrepreneurs you think would also like to help with this research?

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## Appendix B: Overview of respondents

The first participant is Fleur van Leijsen, a 22 year old female living in Dongen, Noord - Brabant. She operates under the name Fleur Concepts, where she works as a creative entrepreneur and freelancer, but she also has her own line of day planners. Aside from this, she is also a student.

The second participant is Tamara Kluskens, a 30 year old female living in Weert, Limburg. She has her own photography business specialised in boudoir photography. Her company is named De Boudoir Studio.

The third participant is Liesanne Lieverse, a 28 year old female living in Utrecht, Utrecht. She is a web designer and travel blogger. She mainly helps other entrepreneurs with web design with her business Liesje Digital.

The fourth participant is Emma Verschure, a 23 year old female living in Amsterdam, Noord - Holland. Emma is an influencer, as well as an accountant / tax advisor with her business Emma's Tax Law. Aside from this, she is pursuing a master's degree.

The fifth participant is Joanne Rosbak - Berndsen, a 41 year old female living in Apeldoorn, Gelderland. Joanne has experience in having her own webshop, but switched from this to working as a virtual assistant under the name of JoanneHelps.

The sixth participant is Frances Blomberg, a 33 year old female living in Valkenburg, Zuid - Holland. Frances helps other entrepreneurs with professional drawings to visualise certain processes / business elements.

The seventh participant is Vera Lauret, a 31 year old female living in Prinsenbeek, Noord - Brabant. Vera helps with her business The Pin Branding other businesses with their Pinterest Marketing.

The eighth participant is Linda Verheijen, a 38 year old female living in Rosmalen, Noord - Brabant. Linda helps other women by creating custom designed and fitted clothing with her business named Relax 'm Mode.

The ninth participant is Jessica\* (pseudonym), a 25 year old female living in Volendam, Noord - Holland. Jessica is a web designer and helps other entrepreneurs with their websites.

The tenth participant is Sylvia\* (pseudonym), a 29 year old female living in Utrecht, Utrecht. Sylvia is a lawyer and helps other entrepreneurs to ensure they have all the right legal documents needed.

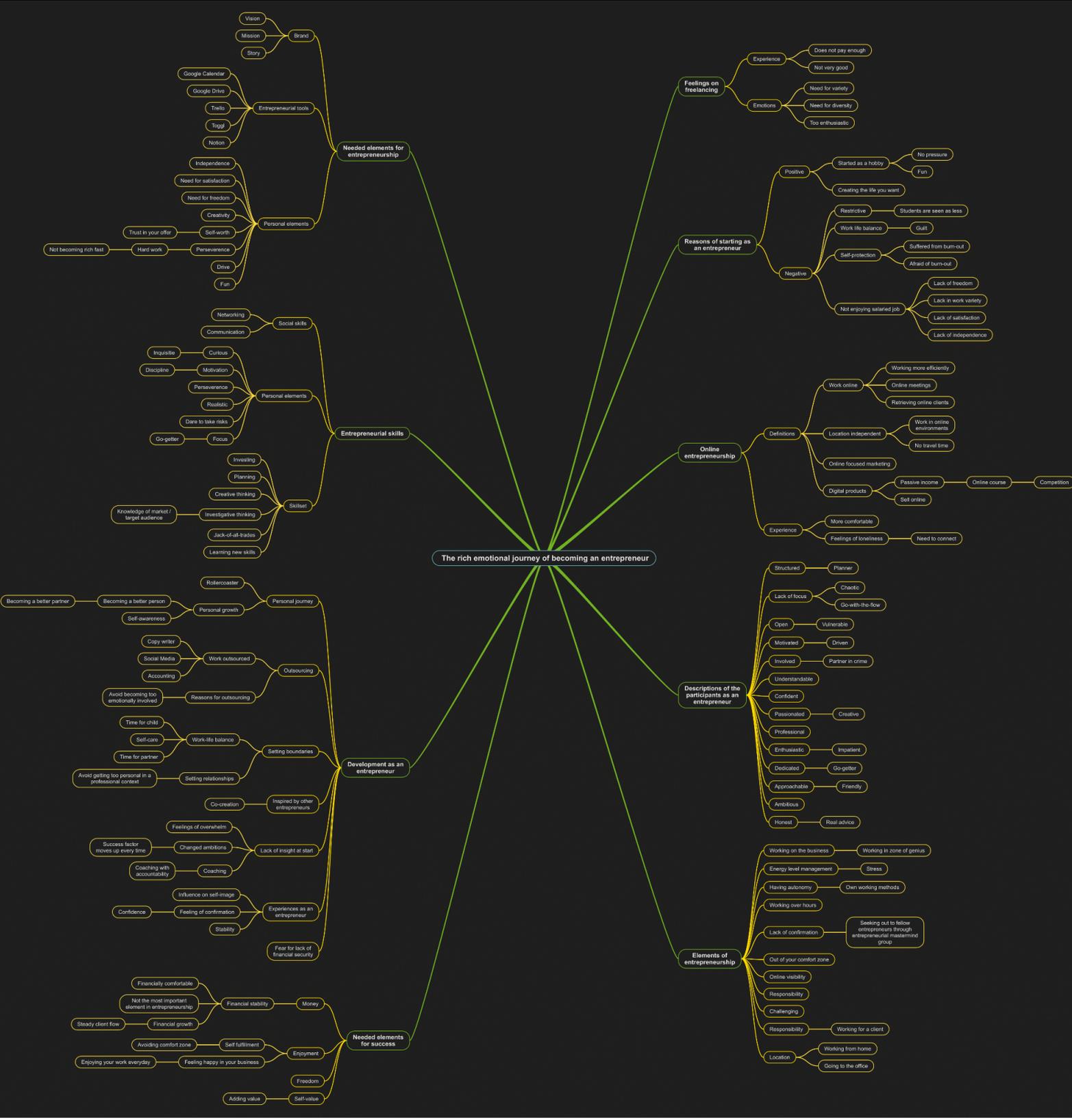
The eleventh participant is Julia Wisse, a 20 year old female living in Koudekerke, Zeeland. Aside from being a student she recently started her business as a graphic designer and social media manager with the name Juul's Brand Design

The twelfth and last participant is Floor van Bergen, a 20 year old female living in Heesch, Noord - Brabant. Floor has her own business, Little Flower, where she does photography and social media marketing for local entrepreneurs.

## Appendix C: Visualisation of coding scheme

**The rich emotional journey of becoming an entrepreneur**

# The rich emotional journey of becoming an entrepreneur

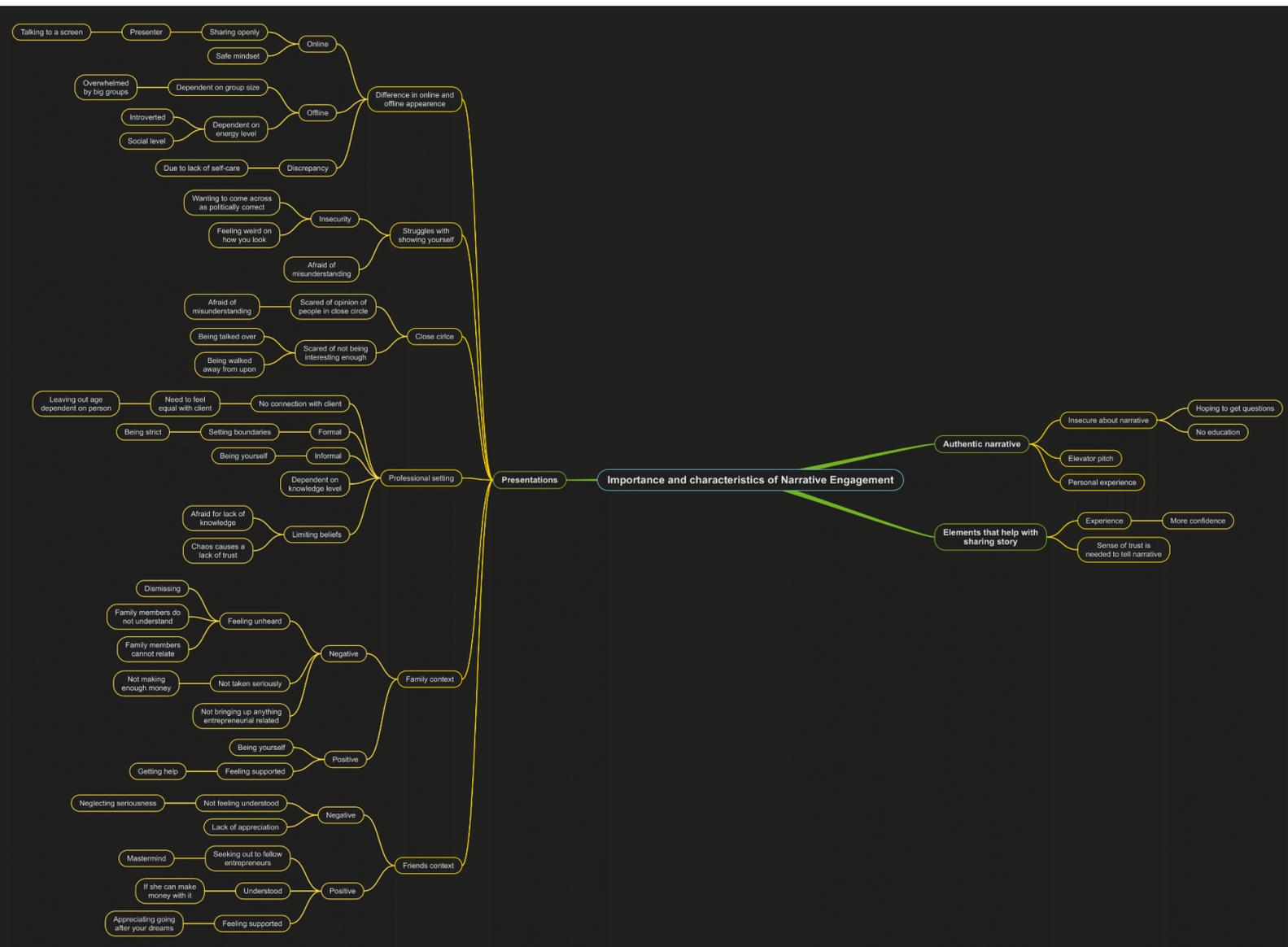


## The performance of the entrepreneurial self on Instagram





# Importance and characteristics of Narrative Engagement



## Appendix D: Consent form

### **CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH**

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:

Kyra Tamminga  
583814kt@eur.nl

#### DESCRIPTION

You are invited to participate in a research about narrative identity work of female digital entrepreneurs on Instagram. The purpose of the study is to understand how Dutch female digital entrepreneurs portray themselves on Instagram.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms, my questions will be related to entrepreneurship and usage of Instagram, and the two of those combined. Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will make a recording of the interview.

I will use the material from the interviews exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

#### RISKS AND BENEFITS

As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. Depending on your preference, I will use your name or pseudonyms in the study. Participants in the study will be referred to with real names or pseudonyms, and in terms of general characteristics such as age and gender, etc.

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

#### TIME INVOLVEMENT

Your participation in this study will take 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 participation in this project, 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 particular questions. 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 this study, you may contact –anonymously, if you wish– Sven-Ove Horst, horst@eshcc.eur.nl

#### SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM

You DO NOT NEED to sign this form. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be recorded during this study:

Name

Signature

Date

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

Name

Signature

Date

This copy of the consent form is for you to keep.