

Identity Projects of Design Professionals - Identity Construction Using Social Media

Marketing
Master's thesis
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2013

IDENTITY PROJECTS OF DESIGN PROFESSIONALS – Identity construction using social media

Objective of the study

The aim of this study is to research how a group of design professionals construct and evaluate their identity projects and what kinds of processes are involved in their identity work. This study also looks at how possible identity conflicts are resolved and what kind of roles does social media play as a part of these processes.

Research method

This research is qualitative and interpretive in nature. Transcripts of 8 semi-structured interviews were used as data for this research. All interviewees were currently working or had worked within design. The interview transcripts were analysed using hermeneutic logic starting from categorizing emerging overall themes, and moving on to careful analysis of parts of the text. Through a series of part-to-whole iterations, a deep understanding of the text and its themes was sought. As a result of my analysis I found two major identity conflict themes that I used as a central structure for my findings.

Findings

Although identity projects can emerge in a variety of ways there are similarities in what kinds of meanings are attached to being a design professional. The identity seems to be socially constructed as most informants narrated it as belonging or alternatively distancing themselves from a social group. Being a design professional seems to be a very conflicted identity project with a constant struggle of staying creative but simultaneously succumbing and fulfilling the very different business needs. This showed as integrity and efficacy concerns. Social media and other digital sources help designers speed up the exploration phase of design and enable them to find inspiration faster or even store it in the forms of pictures and texts on their social media profiles.

The other major conflict had to do with social categorisation and belonging to the design community, but distancing yourself enough as to stay individual and maintain your own unique perspective. This entailed using different types of social media services for different parts of the identity such as separating your professional and personal identities with the use of different social media profiles. This also meant constant editing of the profiles so that they stay appropriate to their audience.

Keywords

Consumption and identity, Identity project, Identity conflict, Social media

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1. Introduction

Social media is increasingly the interest of researchers and marketers because more and more people spend time online in different web environments. Online people may act very differently from how they would in the physical world. It is possible to create completely new identities for yourself in online environments and social media, without the limitations of the physical world. Our profiles or representations of ourselves in social media offer interesting insights into who we are, and even more importantly, how we would like to be perceived. I chose social media to be a part of my research because it is becoming a hot topic of academic research and it offers an interesting context for identity projects. In this study social media offers the context or the space where identities of design professionals are acted out. Previously social media has been studied for example related to market research, new product development and word-of-mouth marketing. Although some research has looked at the issue of how people actually use social media for instance in self-representation, a wide variety of issues still remain untouched. One of them is linking the concept of identity projects to social media. The aim of this study is to look at how a group of design professionals construct their identity projects using social media as a tool. I chose design professionals as a focus because design as an industry is filled with creativity and keeping up-to-date with current trends. Therefore being a design professional is a constant identity project conflicted with a changing environment and conflicting demands. This study sheds some light on how professionals working in the industry cope with such pressures and conflicts while working on their identity projects and what role social media plays in this process.

1.1 Background

Marketers are increasingly interested in the variety of ways how consumers express their identities (Ahuvia, 2005, 179). This can be seen in practice for example through the spreading of one-to-one marketing and mass customization. Also the rapid growth of social media and peer-to-peer communications offer another form of self-expression. Social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter provide a space for the consumer, where they can augment their identity, by making their opinions heard and socialize with people of similar interests (Chernev et al. 2011). Many researchers agree that consumption activities are important in maintaining and developing a self-concept or an identity (E.g. Belk, 1988, Zackariasson et al., 2010; Schouten, 1991). Identities

are made tangible by associating themselves with certain possessions or places. (Schau and Gilly, 2003) This is particularly clear in social media where profiles and status updates can be linked to locations, people, issues and causes constructing a representation of an identity online.

Social media is a topic increasingly in the focus of marketing professionals and the subject of research among academics rising in popularity. Previous research has focused among other things, on how to use social media in market research or as a part of new product development (Kozinets, 2002; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), as a communications tool (Rowley, 2001), looked at trust and privacy issues in online communication (Dwyer et al. 2007), or focused on the use of this relatively new field of communications tools (e.g. Donath and Boyd, 2004; Walker, 2005; Robards and Bennett, 2011). Social media is a broad term for technologies and platforms that range from virtual worlds to social networking sites to content sharing sites and the range of services is continually evolving. Potentially social media can open up a dialogue between marketers and individual customers or customer groups. This opening of dialogue has the potential to build trust and loyalty creating long-term customer relationships (Gillin, 2007). The interest in customer social networks and social media can also be seen as a larger shift to a more customer centric marketing (Barwise and Meehan, 2010). The firm-centric view of the world that has been refined in marketing for the last 75 years is being challenged by communities of active, empowered, informed and connected consumers (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Boyd and Ellison (2008) have stated that like other online contexts that offer individuals a possibility to create an online representation of self, social networking sites comprise an important research context for investigation of process of impression management, self-presentation and friendship performance. As social network sites were the preferred social media by all of my informants most of this study will be focusing on them. Another context that was named by the informants was blogs that my informants used as a source of inspiration by people working in design.

Social media also enables individuals to manage and manipulate their image or profile that is visible to others online. Kleine et al. (2009) have stated that marketers have a tendency to look at buying decisions as discrete choices, leaving the importance of the larger self-developmental context to the background. In this study I am linking social media consumption with the identity project construct. Contemporary marketing views consumers as sort of identity shoppers who constantly renew their identities by shopping and buying products and services (Nuttall, 2009). My aim is to link

consumption of social media to the concept of identity by looking at the identity projects of a group of design professionals. Design as an industry is very competitive and design professionals wanting to succeed have to meet the right people, but also stand out and be unique and creative with their work. Thus being and having success as a design professional can be seen as an identity project consisting of many conflicting goals in itself. This project can have many linking subprojects, such as networking, getting accepted by the design community or starting a company of your own.

1.2 Focus of the Study

The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of how a group of design professionals engage in identity work and build their identity projects through the use of social media, while also solving identity conflicts related to these projects. This means finding out what being a design professional means for these individuals and how such an identity is constructed using marketplace resources such as social media. In order to gain insights into the matter, the study will be conducted as in-depth semi-structured interviews using Skype. I chose this tool for the interviews to gain a bigger geographical reach and national diversity and because a video call through Skype resembles a personal interview situation in many ways. From these personal consumption narratives I have extracted similarities and differences through careful reading and thematic categorization.

Central to my findings are the meanings linked to “being a design professional”, the role that social media plays in the identity construction and the informants responses to a multitude of identity conflicts that endanger identity project continuity. This study can help marketers gain new insights into the construction of a professional identity and maintaining a professional identity in a creative field in general. It also gives a new perspective to the lives of design professionals that occupy such a visible place in the modern culture by partly shaping trends in the marketplace.

1.3 Research Problem and Research Questions

In this study I will attempt to find out how a group of design professionals construct their identities using narratives of their work and social media practices. I will look at the central evaluations that make them pursue certain identities and discard or temporarily forget others. Also I am interested in what the central conflicts are that following these identity projects creates and how these active

agents resolve them. Also, I will look what kinds of meanings design professionals ascribe to social media and what kinds of roles social media plays in these identity projects. The viewpoint is that of the design professionals, but this study also offers marketers interesting insights to applications of social media as design professionals can be considered front-runners and innovators within their communities that set and influence the setting of future trends. Since the view of identity adapted here is that identity is socially constructed, the social media dimension is an interesting addition. It is also a very current issue that has not been widely researched especially from an identity project perspective. This study is interpretive in nature and it is interested in motives, meanings and reasons and subjective experiences of people that are context and time bound (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988).

The main research question is:

What kinds of meanings are attached to becoming and being a design professional and what are the central evaluative criteria that motivate individuals to pursue such an identity project?

Two further research questions are also considered:

What kinds of identity conflicts do design professionals have and how are they resolved and negotiated?

What is the role of social media and social networks in design professional identity projects and what kinds of meanings do they have?

All the interviewees are design professionals working in different fields of design. In this study I call my interviewees informants, because this choice of wording reflects further the theoretical standpoint of this study and that understanding consumer behavior starts by listening to the consumer and their stories about their lives in their own words. Informants' choice of narratives has shaped the direction of the research greatly. Such an approach is common to interpretive research where the study is allowed to unfold assisted by the informants in an emergent manner (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988).

1.4 Outline of the Study

The first part of this thesis presents the theoretical background for this study discussing consumer culture theory and the identity project research stream. In the third chapter the theoretical framework for the identity project model is presented with the help of social identity theory and discussion on identity conflicts. The fourth chapter explores different aspects of social media. The fifth section discusses the methodology and presents the data that has been the raw material for my thesis. The sixth chapter presents the findings and chapter seven links the findings to a broader scientific discussion. Chapter eight summarizes my conclusions and suggestions for future research.

2. The Self-concept and Consumption

The theoretical background of this study owes its central concepts to the consumer culture theory research stream (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The cultural approach to marketing research studies, for example the ways that people use certain products or services for creating and sustaining social relationships. It helps to draw attention to ways in which marketplace actions may involve cultural contestation and even political struggle. The cultural approach is concerned with the processes and practices through which marketplace actors produce and make use of products and services as cultural artifacts or symbols (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). Consumer culture theory has been described as a body of theoretical perspectives addressing the dynamic relationships between consumer agency, the marketplace and cultural meanings (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). The writers state, “consumer culture denotes a social arrangement in which the relations between lived culture and social resources, and between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend are mediated through markets. “ Thus putting consumption to a central role in how we socially construct our life worlds and how we socially interact with other human beings. In this study the consumer agents are the design professionals and social media represents the marketplace, where symbolic resources are exchanged.

2.1 Possessions and the Sense of Self

A research stream that is considered a part of the consumer culture theory stream (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) is the research of identity projects. One of the earliest attempts to link consumption and identity comes from Belk (1988), who claimed that we tend to regard possessions as parts of ourselves. In his much-cited article, Belk examined the relationship between possessions and sense of self. This relationship becomes visible especially when we lose a possession through theft or loss and the resulting diminished sense of self. Belk (1988) presented the idea of a core self that consists of the body, internal processes, ideas and experiences. The core self is expanded to include items such as things, people and places. An example of such a possession is a uniform that enables us to feel confidence in a role and can help convince others of this identity as well.

Belk used the work of Sartre to suggest that possession can be incorporated into the extended self, using three ways. We can link objects through appropriation or control of that object, such as

purchasing a product or mastering a technology. Another way is by creating a possession one self, like writing a journal, and the third is by knowing someone or something. Additionally a possession can become part of the extended self through positive or negative contamination via proximity or habituation, such as the extreme example of rape or through exchanging clothing. The relationship between a person and an object is never a two-way relationship, but a three-way person-thing-person relationship, meaning that our possessions communicate aspects of ourselves to others (Belk, 1988). A self-concept on the other hand can be defined as “set of meanings we hold for ourselves when we look at ourselves. It is based on our observations of ourselves, our inferences about who we are, based on how others act toward us, our wishes and desires, and our evaluations’ of us” (Stets and Burke, 2000).

Since Belk’s article publication, issues related to consumer’s use of products in constructing identity have pervaded interpretive consumer research (Ahuvia, 2005). Chernev et al. (2011) have stated that brands can be linked to at least three self-expressive goals: to identify, to differentiate and to assimilate. The first refers identifying to an ideology or a value system and the second two have to do with compliance to community norms. Some researchers suggest that there is a core self or one cohesive identity that individuals strive for, whereas others suggest an existence of multiple selves or identities. These two ideas are presented next together with previous research on identity projects.

2.2 Single Identity vs. Multiple Identities

Belk’s (1988) view was that people have a single identity where certain possessions are more or less central. This view is contested for example by Kleine et al. (1993), who raise the idea of multiple identities and that different possessions contribute to the creation or maintenance of different parts of personalities. I agree with the overall tenet of Belk that possessions are an important part of who we are, but my angle to consumption is less focused on physical objects. I look at consumption in the form of using social media services. Naturally one can argue that a social media profile is a possession, but using Belk’s classification it would overlap on all three incorporation processes. A Facebook profile is in a sense provided by a company created by the consumer in the confines of the service provider and becomes meaningful first when it is linked to other people in the persons social network. Belk suggested more research on other people as a

symbolic possession and claimed that some people choose potential mates seeking a person who will show them in a favorable light. The same can be argued for a person's social network and this issue becomes very relevant in the context of social networking sites. In this study I have adopted Kleine et al. (1993) idea that we all can have multiple identities that can vary in importance and over time. A social media profile can therefore be more central to some parts of our personality or we may choose to exhibit only some parts of ourselves to other people.

Solomon (1983), who is often cited as one of the pioneers of the symbolic interactionism research stream, agrees with Belk's notion that possessions are important to how we see ourselves. Symbolic interactionism is interested in the process that helps individuals understand the world around them. One assumption of this theory is that people interpret the actions of others, instead of merely reacting to them. Thus the self is seen a social object and self-definition happens through interacting. Symbols acquire meaning through a process called socialization and these cultural symbols are important to the interpretation of social reality. Individuals are seen as role-players and cultural symbols enable the role player to assign meaning to the world. Accordingly, we group these symbols as sets, to guide our behavior. Thus possessions or objects also shape our behavior especially when we are uncertain or new with a role and its expectations and we seek additional confirmation from others through possession of role-appropriate objects (Solomon, 1983). Following this line of thought, Swann (1987) argues that self-conceptions function like lenses, through which individuals understand the world around them and make sense of it. The link to Belk (1988) is clear for example in the case of a uniform as a symbol strengthening a certain identity, but emphasis somewhat different. The common tenet for both Belk (1988) and Solomon (1983) and the view that I have adopted for this study is that identities develop in social interaction with our environments and that our consumption choices can be used to look at how we see ourselves and how we would like to be seen by others. Symbolic interactionism is very clearly linked to the identity theories and can be seen as their predecessor. There already exists a great article on the development of these paradigms and therefore I will not go into detail here (Stryker, 1987; Stryker and Burke, 2000). Rather I will look at the more current developments in consumer culture theory and continue towards the identity theories.

2.3 Consumer Culture Theory Research

Arnould and Thompson (2005) write that consumer culture theorists have shifted attention to the relationship of consumer's identity projects and the structuring impact of the marketplace. The

marketplace produces certain kinds of positions that the consumers can then choose to inhabit and while individuals can and do pursue personal goals, they do this through these positions simultaneously enacting and personalizing cultural scripts that align their identities with the requirements of the global consumerist economy. Identity projects have been studied in the consumer culture theory (CCT) stream from many different consumption aspects: moralistic protagonism highlighting ideology (Luedicke et al. 2010), dominated migrant acculturation (Üstüner and Holt, 2007), loved objects importance in resolving identity conflicts (Ahuvia, 2005), transformational consumption choices (Kleine et al. 2009; Thomsen and Sørensen, 2006), consumption of authentic objects in relation to personal goals (Beverland and Farrelly, 2009), meaning of style (Kjeldgaard, 2009) and consumption subcultures (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Most studies have focused on physical possessions, whereas I am focusing on a form of media, where the consumer has at least partial content control. The social media aspect brings a fresh new viewpoint to this discussion. The view I am taking is closest to Ahuvia (2005) and Kleine et al. (1993), in that I attempt to identify identity conflicts and threats from my informants' ongoing identity project narratives and see how they solve these using marketplace myths and cultural discourses. Social media is seen as a part of a new digital marketplace that offers symbolic resources that help to enact identities online and offline.

3. Identity

We are currently in the middle of a fundamental societal change that started in the late 1900 century. A structural change is shaping our modern societies changing and reshaping our social individual's previous static classifications or identities in terms of class, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, race and national culture. With the changing of such cultural structures our individual identities and our beliefs of ourselves as homogenous subjects are set in motion. In a sense the stable self-concept is disappearing (Hall, 1993). Hall also distinguished a change through time in how identity is viewed from the very stable and individual self in the enlightenment period, to the more complex sociological subject of the symbolic interactionism. According to this view the identity is formed in the interaction of the self and the society. The postmodern subject on the other hand has no stable or static identity, but is shaped constantly in relation to those ways we are represented or addressed in the surrounding cultural systems. It is historically bound and the subject takes on different identities at different times, without them grouping around a cohesive self (Hall, 1993). A similar view is evident in the research of Arnould and Price (2000) that offer three postmodern forces that have led to this fragmentation of the self. They posit that it is a result of globalization technologies that are de-contextualization, deterritorialization, (meaning the disappearing of master narratives such as what constitutes a national culture) and hyperreality that blurs reality from the image that we see everywhere in media.

In order to give a coherent picture of the construct of identity I will use this chapter to first present different definitions of identity and to present the identity project model that I base my analyses and discussion on. The next section aims to define the concept of identity. First I discuss the Identity theory, after which I introduce the social identity theory. Kleine and Kleine (2000) have argued that social identities are of interest to consumer researchers, because they offer a position from which to understand how people use identity-related consumer goods and services. The third section establishes a framework for the identity project construct and the final two sections look at identity conflicts as well as online identity

3.1 General Definition and the Identity Theory

There is a vast amount of literature to be found on identity and the concept has been given various

definitions. For the purposes of this study we focus not so much on the psychological research on identity, but rather take a consumer research view and link the concept together with consumption. In the footsteps of for example Kleine et al. (1993), I look at the self as an organizing construct through which people's everyday activities such as consumption choices can be understood.

The two major identity research streams are Identity theory (e.g. Stryker, 1980) and Social Identity theory (Tajfel, 1978). They share many similarities and both posit that the self is situated in a structured society and interacts with it. Also similar is the view that the self is reflexive and can take itself as an object and compare it to other social categories (Stets and Burke, 2000). The two theories describe motivational processes and social contexts where identities are created and evolve. In social identity theory close social networks are seen as contexts and relational structures influence individual's motives for identity change.

According to identity theory the self is consisting of role identities and these are switched according to salience of that role identity in relation to context (McFarland and Pals, 2005). As such, identity theory can be used as a predictor of behavior because the more dominate an identity is in the hierarchy; the more likely people's decisions are going to favor that identity. People understand themselves and their environment through knowledge of the roles that they and people around them assume in the society (Cable and Welbourne, 1994). The same writers propose that individual's behaviors and their identity hierarchies are linked. Life events are given different meanings, because of these identities and also due to the fact that the identity hierarchy is different for every individual, our reactions to life-events can differ greatly (Cable and Welbourne, 1994). The main difference for these two theories is that the self-classification bases are group/category for the social identity theory and roles for the identity theory (Stets and Burke, 2000). In identity theory the identity is born through a process of identification and instead of groups the person's occupy roles. Stets and Burke (2000) state that "the core of an identity is the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role, and incorporating, into the self, the meanings and expectations associated with the role and its performance" (Stets and Burke, 2000). Being a design professional could be seen as a role, but my data showed a much larger tendency for the design professionals to narrate their identities by telling which groups of designers they were a part of and categorize themselves within design subgenres or belonging to a certain group of people. Therefore the next section looks at this strand of identity related theories next in detail.

3.2 Social Identity Theory

Tajfel (1978) defined social identity as the part of a person's self-concept, which is derived from their knowledge of membership of a social group and the value and emotional significance that is attached to that membership. Three components contribute to a person's social identity: a cognitive component (self-categorization or awareness of a group membership), an evaluative component (group self-esteem) and an emotional component (affective commitment to a group). According to the social identity theory (SIT) the self-concept consists of a personal identity that includes idiosyncratic characteristics such as bodily attributes and abilities and a social identity that links the individual to salient groups (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). It is the interpersonal contexts that implicate us as individuals and intergroup contexts as group members (Tajfel, 1978). Following the logic therefore we always compare ourselves to others and define ourselves in relation to something else. The self-concept grows out of the evaluations of people around us; therefore we direct our behavior to obtain positive reactions from the significant references around us. In this process people use tools such as consumer goods through which the individual communicates meaning about himself to others (Grubb and Gratwohl, 1967).

Social Identity theory describes two identity change contexts: category and network. Category traits may influence individuals' motives and the identity selections over time. Individuals learn to evaluate category desirability by using in- and out-category comparisons (McFarland and Pals 2005). Similarly to Grubb and Gratwohl (1967), McFarland and Pals (2005) go on to state that we strive for positive affiliation and self-efficacy and this motivates us to maintain or exit categories. When we are attached to a category, however we are more likely to view that category better and therefore category comparisons, but also in-group bias, are motives for identity change. This is a valid point, but as this bias is a natural part of the human psyche and in my opinion it is naïve to assume that the category evaluation process is rational to begin with.

According to Kleine et al. (1993) individuals' social identities are linked to an internal representation or schema and an external social network of people where the individual performs and cultivates the identity. The person's social identities are organized hierarchically and form together the global- or overall self. The identities that are evoked at certain times depend on identity importance that is the relative ranking of a social identity within the hierarchically organized self-concept (Kleine and Kleine, 2000). The three related schemas explain a person's role perceptions:

the role schema, the ideal schema and the identity schema (Kleine et al. 1993). The schemas are used to guide having and doing in relation to a societal role or personal identity (Kleine and Kleine, 2000, p. 279). The role schema is a stereotypical perception of the typical or average person performing the role resulting from socialization, media exposure and meeting people occupying such roles. The ideal schema on the other hand represents the vision of a person of how they would ideally act as someone in the role. The role schema shapes the ideal schema together with perceived personal competencies. The identity schema represents people's perceptions of themselves with respect to adopting a role-identity. The ideal schema has an impact on this vision of "how I am now" as this person and the identity schema functions as a frame of reference for engaging in this particular role (Kleine et al. 2009, 56). An example of such a schema, could be a design professional having a role schema that highlights certain kinds of stereotypical behavior and appearance for this line of professional. The ideal schema would then be an interpretation of how they would ideally be design professionals and the identity schema would represent their idea of themselves as design professionals. If there are discontinuities between these schemas, role-conflict can occur and that is one of the areas of interests for this study: looking at how these schemas differ for our informants and how possible conflicts are negotiated. I will look at identity conflicts after the next section where I present the identity project model that is a core part of my theoretical framework.

3.3 Identity Project Evaluation and Lifecycle

People organize and create their lives as active agents through what may be called as identity projects. They are schemas that we hold in our minds of ourselves in relation to the world around us, such as being a good student or achieving success at work (Harré, 2007). Schau et al. (2009) state that in a postmodern world, everyone can create and recreate their identities throughout their lifetime and choose how consistent the new identities are with the old. Identity projects can emerge from social or collective contexts and events as well as from our personal context (e.g. family and background). Another important factor is our personal characteristics such as values, cognitive capacity and physical characteristics. Projects can start gently, or they can emerge suddenly as a result from changes in the environment. They can be planned or unplanned, conscious or subconscious. Slightly from a different angle, Mick and Buhl (1992) state that the sociocultural background and transformative experiences have great influence on the emergence of life themes

that then affect what sort of life-projects people take on. Whereas life-themes remain quite stable throughout a person's life, life-projects can be in a constant flux. Borrowing from the work of psychology researchers, Harré (2007) points out that apart from basic biological concerns four higher level concerns are important in people's evaluation of their experiences of identity projects. These are 1) belonging, 2) stimulation, 3) efficacy meaning meeting goals or expectations and 4) integrity meaning being true to one self. These define the level of commitment and also action that is taken for each project. Harré's identity project model is presented below.

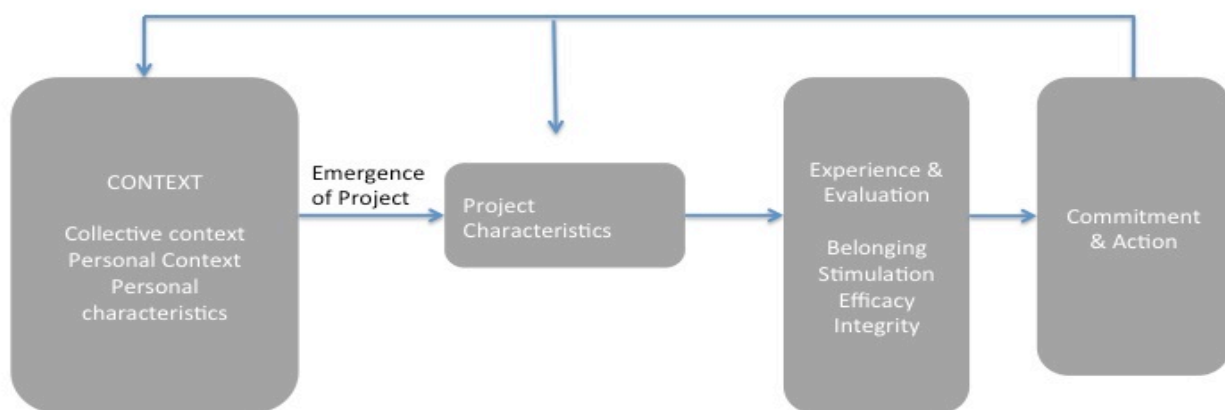


Figure 1: Identity project model (Harré, 2007)

Kleine and Kleine (2000) proposed another conceptual model of the identity project life cycle. Their view of identity projects is evolutionary and in their model a social identity evolves through phases of pre-socialization, discovery, construction, maintenance, latency and disposition. They also state that it is possible for an identity to be cast aside for a while and later be rediscovered and reconstructed. Schau et al. (2009) found support for this notion when studying retirees' identity projects and stated that identity projects do not reside in just one temporal sphere, but move between the past, the present and the future in an iterative, nonlinear way the multiple identities of a person differ depending on contexts and the life cycle stage. People can find multiple attributes and symbols appealing and situate them as a part of their ideal, but all of them ultimately reflect their

view of themselves (Zackariasson et al. 2010). Somewhat similarly Schouten (1991) wrote in his study of plastic surgery as symbolic consumption that while people spend most of their lives with relatively stable self-concepts, a triggering event could provoke a need for change. Such an identity reconstruction process starts with a separation from a role, a relationships or components of the extended self. In this process people form new possible selves and engage in identity play to weigh the outcomes of adopting such a new identity. Possible self-schemas are based on the past selves and various role models and are assembled according to goals, values and expectations of how the social environment will react. Motivation to actualize depends on situational factors, congruence with the self-concept, attainability and desirability. In the context of a human's life, our living of an identity project and our decisions shape and change the project changing also the agent in charge of that project. Thus our lived projects shape the contexts that shape new projects (Harré, 2007).

3.4 Identity Conflicts and Threats

Petriglieri (2011, p. 644) defines individual level identity threats as “experiences appraised as indicating potential harm to the value, meanings, or enactment of an identity.” This definition is clear in that it outlines identity threat as an individual's subjective appraisal of signs in the present that might be harmful for their identity in the future. Also it takes into account the different aspects of identity: value, meanings and enactment of it. The concepts of identity threat and identity conflict are used as synonyms in this study. Petriglieri's view is supported for example by Bayton (1958) who states that motivation to act stems from tensions systems that create a state of imbalance for an individual. This acts as a trigger for a series of psychological events that are aimed at selecting a goal that the individual anticipates would release this tension and following actions that could help reach this goal. According to social identity theory the individual seeks memberships in groups or categories that verify the view of themselves that they hold. This can be an ideal self or how others see them compared to how they see themselves. In any case the motivation to change stems from an individual's perception of an inconsistency (McFarland and Pals, 2005).

An example of such conflicts or tensions was studied by Schau et al. (2009) when they studied identity work that happens after people retire from work and thus has to experience a major life transition that potentially threatens many aspects of their current identity. They concluded that an identity renaissance can be triggered by any major change and may include a loss of a significant sub-identity and simultaneously entail a potential for identity growth. Consumption enactments are

thus seen as outcomes of such identity renaissance that are used to bridge the gap between the old diminishing identity and the new emerging one. It is interesting to think that even at older age our identities can still be in constant change and that identity project research in all age groups is necessary for consumer researchers to understand the complexities of the construct. Another example of such an identity transition is offered by Mehta and Belk (1991), who studied Indians immigrating to the U.S. and found that their possessions brought with them played an important role in their reconstruction of an immigrant identity observed for instance in the preservation of rituals, celebration of Indian holidays as well as food and clothing choices. In addition to these there might be other reasons as to why a certain identity is not acted out. We might not for examples have the resources to play out a certain identity or because we do not have the strategies to express the complex facets of some of our identities (Schau and Gilly, 2003, p. 387). In such cases we must choose how to handle such an identity conflict or a threat.

One example of the way that this happens is through use of myths in re-framing parts of the identity. Luedicke et al. (2010) studied Hummer enthusiast that have chosen the car moralized by many as polluting and as a symbol for excessive consumption. In the face of moralizing critics the Hummer owners defended their choices by reframing themselves as defenders of true American values and as heroic moral protagonists. This way they could still drive the car with pride and with a sense of coherent identity (Luedicke et al. 2010). Following a similar line of thought Petriglieri (2011) has found two main types of responses to identity conflicts. The first one is aimed at the source of the conflict and is called identity protection responses such as in the case of the Hummer owners, whereas the second type targets the threatened identity and changes it to avoid more harm and is called identity-restructuring responses.

The three types of identity protection responses are:

- 1) Derogation: framing the source of the conflict as invalid protects the threatened identity. An example of this could be labeling a person of a differing opinion of being unreliable or unintelligent, thus reducing or making any harm coming from that source irrelevant.
- 2) Concealment: This response may be used in a context where a particular identity is threatened by pretending not to possess such an identity or by pretending to be someone else.
- 3) Positive distinctiveness: The threatened identity is not hidden rather individual's present information that makes their identities appear in a more positive light and educate others.

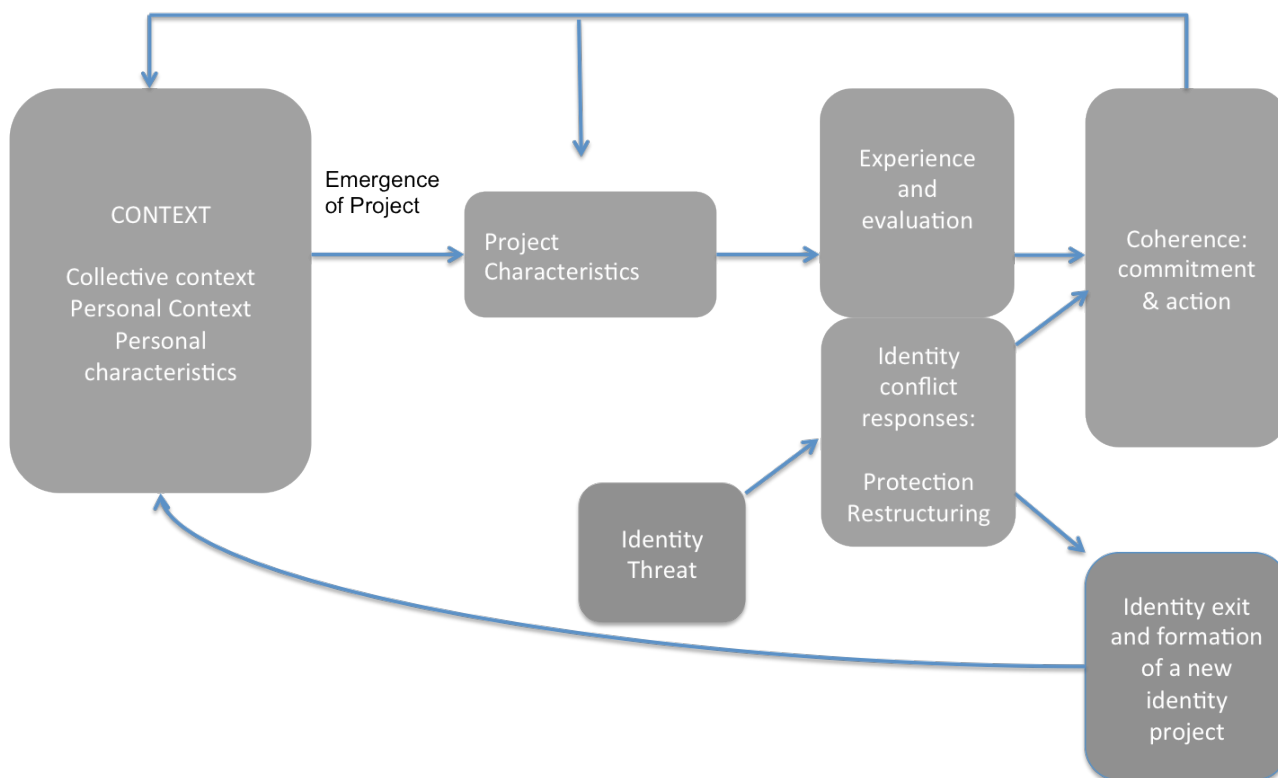
There are also three types of identity restructuring responses:

- 1) Changing the importance of the threatened identity: Reducing salience of an identity.
- 2) Changing the meanings linked to the threatened identity: For example re-framing what it means to be a good student.
- 3) Identity exit or abandonment: For instance changing profession.

Revised after Petriglieri (2011)

Similarly Ahuvia (2005) found that people used love objects to resolve identity conflicts in order to narrate a coherent sense of self through three processes, which he calls demarcating, comprising and synthesizing. The first means using loved objects to demarcate the boundary of oneself and identities individuals wish to reject. Loved objects can also support identities that possess conflicting aspects of the self and help in compromising. Sometimes loved objects assisted in synthesizing a completely new identity. Although I find Ahuvia's (2005) central concept fascinating and his notion that people strive towards a coherent sense of self true, I will be utilizing Petriglieri's identity threat model in my framework, because I find it more developed and it offers more variety in terms of response strategies. I argue that such responses are central to the negotiation of identity conflicts and will present support for this argument in the analysis part of this study. As active agents, the acting out of an identity project is not merely a linear process, but constantly influenced by the interplay of the social context and our self-concept. Therefore we are forced to re-evaluate our identities in conflicting situations daily. What we choose to do in terms of the threatened identity shapes how committed we are to the identity project at any given time and may even lead us to abandon such a project completely. Based on Harré's (2007) work I have revised her identity project model and this revised version will serve as the Framework for my analysis.

Figure 2: Revised identity project model



I will discuss the framework in more detail in the findings and discussion parts of this study, as they were central in the identity conflict negotiation process of my informants. The last section of this chapter looks at identity in an online context and lists sum previous findings in the research area.

3.5 Online Identity

On the Internet, people are able to communicate with each other without being physically in the same space and even completely anonym. McKenna (2007) suggests that in such conditions people are able to share aspects of their inner or true self that might be more difficult to express in the physical world. One can therefore create a different self-presentation online and similarly be perceived differently by online acquaintances. This is due both to differences in the way we present ourselves, but also differences in the communication modalities, i.e. features of and use of the communications medium. Schau & Gilly (2003) seem to share this notion, when stating that the web space offers limitless digital symbols and may allow researchers to see the selves consumers wish they had. Every time we choose a nickname for an online service we are doing an act of self-presentation. In visual environments we have to create a visual icon to present ourselves and this can be seen as a kind of self-portrait. The same is true for textual forms of online sites like weblogs

and online diaries, where entries form a cumulative self-presentation and self-reflection of the writer. In fact the online tools give us the possibility to choose how we represent ourselves instead of acceding to the mass mediated generalizations (Walker, 2005). We find our place in our culture and in our social worlds through consumption of stories and images. These representations of ourselves are connected to cultural templates that we can adopt, adapt to or reject. When we create representations of ourselves in social media we also have to respond to these cultural stereotypes in some way.

Robards and Bennett (2011) present a notion that social media sites like Facebook or MySpace do not so much reshape social relationships or systems of identity and belonging, but they expose and structure existing social practices thus making such everyday dimensions of the human life more visible. Boyd (2007) states that a social networking profile can be seen as a form of digital body, where individuals write themselves into being. We tend to present the side of ourselves that we expect to be positively received by our peers. Because the links to others are public our associations on social network sites also provide others with information of us, or how we would like to be seen. Identity can be seen as a social process that is fluid and contingent on the situation and in social networking sites an individual's perceived audience provides such a situation or context (Boyd, 2007). In other words, our actions on social network sites are shaped by who we think will see them. Similarly (Donath and Boyd, 2004) claim that the networks of connections are displayed as integral parts of an individual's self-presentation and that an extended network may validate identity information that is presented in a person's profile. Social Network sites make it necessary for individuals to make sense of what they constitute as self-identity and it can be expected that this process will strengthen the need for young people to develop a coherent sense of self to be able to take part in digital culture (Robards and Bennett, 2011, 312-313). There is reason to assume that this applies for all age groups participating in digital culture or the digital marketplace.

Walker Rettberg (2009) has studied representations and self-portraits in social media and online in general and she found that the most common ways of organizing representations or information of us online are temporal, social, semantic and geographical. The first refers to a timeline of events, the second is used for instance by Facebook mapping our networks and friends. The third is common in blogs where the most often mentioned words are printed the biggest in a semantic map of issues dealt with in the blog and geographical that shows where we have been. Another characteristic of social media is that the structure of presentation is predetermined and you have to fill in information according to certain structures and requirements. These structures could be

compared to normative cultural templates. As such this sort of mass-customization of information helps us see our lives from the outside and confirm our place in the cultural templates of the world. (Walker Rettberg, 2009)

4. The Digital Marketplace

The end of the 20th century marked the arrival of many new technologies that enable communications on digital platforms. Such computer-mediated environments allow consumers to represent themselves in virtual worlds using digital resources (Schau and Gilly, 2003). Following consumer culture theory tradition (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) the same researchers studied people's self-presentation strategies on personal websites and state that people are communicating online through symbolic, digital stimuli. Personal web spaces give consumers the opportunity to make digital collages using symbols and signs to represent and express themselves. This is equally true for social media. In a sense it is both a tool in identity construction as well as the context where identities are created, expressed and edited. In a digital environment such tasks are fairly easy and fast therefore it provides an interesting arena for studying consumption as identity work. In this section I will present the most important digital contexts that are relevant for this study. I will start with an overview of social media in general. Second I will look at social networking sites that were the most important social media tool for my informants. The third part examines blogs, because almost all informants identified them as a source of inspiration. The final section of this chapter offers a glimpse at some other popular social media services that came up in the interviews.

4.1 Social Media

Social media platforms are a complex interpenetration of the private, public and corporate spheres that typifies the modern culture, where sociality and connectivity are constructed through networked platforms. Communication is informal and social networking sites, such as Facebook and user generated content sites like YouTube, are dividing the communication space in to specialized niches. These platforms are sociotechnical engines of trends that keep on evolving like fashion without ever becoming finished products (Van Dijck, 2012). In virtual worlds individuals have the freedom to experiment with multiple identities (Wood and Solomon, 2009). Facebook, YouTube and Twitter provide customers an environment where they can enrich their social identity by getting their opinions heard and find people that share their interests (Chernev et al. 2011). Some researchers see social media as windows to consumer intentions (Casteleyn et. al, 2009).

In their study of massively multiplayer online games Zackariasson et al. (2010) stated that in the virtual environments participants, or in their case, players are given the chance to create an identity of their choosing. Looking at such identities gives marketers a chance to see how consumers might like to be seen. I find this view compelling and true for all social media, since social networking sites and blogs leave the consumers free to make the content on their pages on their own. Many studies have found that for example bloggers seem to fall in to certain categories in terms of what kind of picture they want to give of themselves and what kind of purposes or motivations the blog serves. This is a very fascinating idea, when it comes to consumer behavior research. More generally for marketing studying social media is important with the Internet rising in importance as an online marketing channel (Wu, 2002). Many theories of where to place social media in the marketing communications mix are being created. Prominent is the issue of control that has traditionally been in the hands of the marketer and is shifting in social media to the customers. This creates challenges for the marketers that have defined their integrated marketing communication strategies with a high level of control. In social media the control over content, timing and frequency of information is eroding and shifting to the consumer (Mangould & Faulds, 2009). Social media is used by companies for example for ideas for New Product development, but it can boost awareness, trial and finally sales: More importantly though companies can get access to a rich and unmediated customer insight faster than was previously possible (Barwise and Meehan, 2010).

4.2 Social Networking Sites

Since their introduction different types of social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn have exploded in popularity (Boyd and Ellison 2008). To illustrate how big the phenomenon is Facebook currently has 800 million active users of which 50% log on at any given day and the average user has 130 friends making it by far the largest and most popular social networking site (Facebook.com). It was also the only social media platform; all of the informants in the study admitted to using and seemed to regard it as a synonym for social media as a whole. Social networking sites can be defined as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a profile of varying degree of publicity within the bounded system, connect with a selected list of users and view and navigate their and others connections (Boyd and Ellison 2008). Similarly Robards and Bennett (2011) conclude that social networking sites are an assortment of user-created profiles, which are linked together and have become an important tool for young people for communication and social interaction.

A social network profile is constructed by filling out forms on the page and answering questions with varying degrees of freedom for modification (e.g. Boyd, 2007; Boyd and Ellison, 2008). One aspect of this interaction is that it seems to happen mostly within an already existing social network in the offline world. Social network sites are based on creating profiles that offer a description of the member of the site. On their profile members can post text, pictures and video that other members can comment on. Also displayed is a public list of people that are identified as friends in the social network (Boyd, 2007). People can invite people as friends by searching them themselves or by looking at whom others know. A confirmation is then needed from the person you have asked as a friend and when accepted, the linkage between these two people becomes visible to all other members of the network. This is in my opinion one of the most notable feature of social network sites: They make our social networks visible to others. However there are also network sites aimed helping strangers connect based on a variety of shared interests or activities (Boyd and Ellison, 2008).

Boyd (2007) states that social networking sites are a form of mediated networked publics separated from unmediated publics by four properties:

- 1) Persistence: The networked communications are recorded allowing asynchronous communication, but also extend the lifetime of communications.
- 2) Searchability: Because expressions are recorded and identities crafted through text, it is possible to find people's "online bodies" by simply searching them.
- 3) Replicability: Anything can be copied and the line between the original and the copy blurred.
- 4) Invisible audiences: Compared to talking to people around us that we can see, it is impossible to identify all the people who might see our expressions in networked publics.

Modified after Boyd (2007, p. 9)

I agree with Boyd's properties, but there are currently also ways on social networking sites to restrict access to one's profile and thereby also our expressions. Basically it is possible to choose the public that you communicate to on social networking sites, but this requires effort from the member in terms of setting privacy settings.

4.3 Blogs

Blogs have become a popular form of social media and have taken on roles previously owned by traditional print media. Blogs can be for example personal journals on the Internet that facilitate interactive computer mediated communication through text, images and other multimedia elements (Huang et al., 2007). According to the Blogpulse website by the Nielsen company by October 2011 there were over 170 million blogs on the Internet with the number rapidly growing by over ten thousand blogs a day. The popularity can partly be explained by how blogs give individuals a channel to express their voice in a personal, easy and highly controllable way. They are also very visible to readers in search engines because of the use of permalinks in the text (Gillin, 2007).

The popular blog directory Technocrati conducts an annual “state of the blogosphere study and in their 2011 report found that blogging continues to grow in popularity and that the bloggers are using more and more time updating content simultaneously gaining more influence over more people (Technocrati, State of the Blogosphere 2011). As to the reasons why people Blog, Huang et al. (2007) propose five main motivations that are self-expression, life documenting, commenting, forum participation and information seeking. These in turn affect two different blogging behaviors that are information-oriented behavior and interaction-oriented behavior. The researchers propose that different communication strategies and tactics by marketers should serve different motivations. These relate pretty well with Gillin’s (2007) categorization. He finds that blogs are mostly of four categories: online diaries (life documenting), topical blogs (self-expression), advocacy blogs (commenting) and link blogs (forum participation and information seeking). Naturally the categorizations can also represent more than one motivation.

4.4 Other Types of Social Media

One type of social media emerging on the Internet is virtual worlds. In their case study of Second life Majewski et al. (2011) found that perceptions of community, trust and reciprocity were important factors in maintaining and growing virtual communities in immersive environments. There are two types of virtual worlds: detention worlds, that are different from physical worlds, such as games (e.g. Massively multiplayer online games), and extension worlds that extend the

physical world to virtual worlds (Zackariasson et al. 2010). Such virtual reality games offer consumers a chance to express their identity, but also to create completely new ones (Chernev et al. 2011). Other forms of social media include for example file sharing (YouTube, Flickr), information sharing (Wikipedia, News sharing sites), picture sharing (Instagram, Pinterest) and micro blogs (Twitter). As the spectrum of social media is so wide and constantly evolving and because most of my informants seemed to relate social media mainly to social networking sites and blogs, they are of biggest interest in the current study.

5. Methodology

This study is interpretive in nature. As such it does not seek to find definite answers or truths, but to understand the studied phenomenon and offer explanations to why some things might be. The next section gives a description of the research process. I will firstly discuss the interpretive approach to research, then present the sample and describe the interview process. The last two sections look at the interpretation and the analysis of the data as well as the limitations for such research.

5.1 The Research Context

In my study I am interested in the conflict filled processes of identity project formation by a group of design professionals. I look at how identity projects are born and how they evolve through active evaluation and identity conflict negotiation. I am interested in how my informants explain their choices and how they describe their own work and social media's role in it. Although there are a variety of studies on social media and identity work, none of them have looked at the role social media can play in an identity project. Thus my study fills a gap in the identity related research of social media. This study is also unique in that it offers a glance at a group of professionals not very well represented in organizational studies: the designers. The theoretical context was described by my framework and is multidisciplinary in nature covering aspects of consumer behavior as well as social psychology. This is a very broad approach, but necessary in order to understand the how the identity projects of design professionals come to be and evolve through time. I let my informants be the voice and narrate their own stories around these issues. The researcher's part is that of the listener and the interpreter.

5.2 The Interpretive Approach

This study is interpretive in nature and the purpose is to understand or interpret the studied phenomenon and offer a view in to the world of our informants. Therefore the voice of the informants or their consumption narratives is at the center of this study. The Interpretive paradigm sees the nature of reality as socially constructed and contextual (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). The idea that there can exist multiple realities is consistent with the view that an individual can have

multiple identities and their centrality or importance varies according to situational factors (E.g. Zackariasson et al. 2010). Interpretive research also sees social agents as proactive and seeks to understand their behavior instead of predicting or explaining it like the positivist approaches. No amount of inquiry will converge on one single reality because of the existence of multiple realities and their constant change (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988: 509). Thus I do not seek for definitive answers but a rich understanding of the studied phenomenon.

There is an increasing amount of research that views consumer's sense of identity as structured in terms of narratives (Thompson, 1996). In addition to seeing a person's identity as a list of attributes, these attributes are linked in memory to key episodes in a person's life. These episodes are the building block of a life story. Such a storyline allows people to make sense of who they are and provides a connected identity from past to present and into the imagined future. Other people inhabit different roles in these narratives and can be cast as good or bad to explain their inclusion/exclusion (Ahuvia, 2005). It is these stories from the interviews that I will use as the data for my analysis and interpretation. Before I describe the data in detail I will present the source of that data: my sample of informants.

5.3 Sample

For this study 8 design professionals of various nationalities were interviewed. At the time of the interviews the informants were living in Germany, Sweden, Great Britain and Finland. Due to the great geographic spread of the interviews I had to revert from my original plan of doing personal interviews and conducted them using Skype. Skype is a program that enables free calls through broadband Internet and offers calls with video. This resembled a personal interview to a large extent in that it enabled both audio and live visual image of the interviewee. Two of the interviews conducted in Finland were personal face-to-face interviews. The sample was a convenience sample (e.g. Schau et al. 2009) and the interviewees were found through personal networks mostly in social media. I contacted friends and acquaintances that work within fashion or design and asked them to forward my request. The purposive sampling criterion (Thompson, 1996) was that each informant be working within the field of design ranging broadly from graphic design to fashion.

The collected contacts were contacted either by email or on social media and asked to participate in a university study about the consumption of social media. All expect one willing to participate, expressed large interest towards the subject and felt that it was personally relevant in their lives. This was also later found to be a source of positive bias towards the subject since some informants expressed a slight confusion and asked for the final report for reading so that they could get ideas for their work. I was also a source of some bias in that some of the interviewees seemed to regard me as a social media expert and was seeking reassurance for their views on social media. I tried to rid this by telling that there were no right or wrong answers and they should feel free to talk about their experiences as they wished. Because of these possible bias issues, I have attempted to be extra critical in the analysis to shut out the popular “common knowledge” answers and focus on the attitudes and beliefs that are at work behind the informants described social media activities. There was also one informant: Robert that lacked interest in the subject and even expressed some disdains and suspicion towards social media. A dislike for technology dominance was visible as a theme in his narratives as well.

All in all, eight design professionals agreed to give me their time and to be interviewed. The resulting sample was a varied one in terms of age and nationality and is befitting since all design professionals seemed to be quite geographically mobile and ready to work and think outside their homeland borders. The informant profiles are summarized in the table below. The sample is medium sized for a qualitative interpretative study, but it provides sufficient depth for a study of this nature.

Table 1: Informant profiles

| INFORMANT PROFILES | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-----|--------|-------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
| Pseudonym | Age | Gender | Nationality | Interview Lenght | Follow-up interview | Area of design |
| Mike | 43 | Male | Swedish | 46 | x | fashion, textiles and prints |
| Susan | 26 | Female | Finnish | 55 | | fashion, shoes |
| Peter | 33 | Male | New Zealand | 49 | | concept design, graphics |
| George | 26 | Male | Estonian | 36 | | graphics |
| Kim | 29 | Female | Australia | 45 | x | fashion, sportswear |
| Robert | 40 | Male | Finnish | 48 | | industrial design |
| Kate | 28 | Female | Estonian | 55 | x | fashion, underwear |
| Tom | 38 | Male | Finnish | 54 | | fashion, styling |

Before the actual interview the informants were told that we would discuss social media and their profession freely and I assured that all answers would be confidential and anonym. With the informants' permission, the interviews were recorded and later transcribed verbatim. I also made notes during the interviews as to have a base of comparison. I conducted the Skype interviews from the computer and out of the two personal interviews; one was conducted at the informant's workplace and the other at the informant's home. The interviews took place in English or Finnish and were semi-structured following a loose set of themes, but mostly guided by the informants choice of stories. I will discuss the structure of the interviews in more detail in the next section. The interview thematic structure can be found in the appendix section.

5.4 The Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured and all that was prepared for them was a thematic map of different subjects that were considered important. The main themes were background (early life, education) work life and social media. Through probing and follow-up questions people were encouraged to elaborate and go deeper into interesting themes. The interviews ranged between 36-55 minutes in length. Two were conducted personally and six were conducted using Skype.

All informants were first asked to tell generally about their backgrounds including education, place of origin and work life. After which the discussion went on steered by the informant's choice of stories about their work as design professionals. Interview questions were formulated during the course of the interview based on these stories. This naturally means that the informants mostly set the course of the dialogue and follow-up questions were used for gaining clarification and further elaboration of their experiences (Thompson, 1996).

After first stage analyses, I felt that the data was not complete in the case of some informants and as a result I asked three informants for additional clarifications. Two additional Skype interviews were conducted with Kim and Mike, both being just less than 30 minutes in length. These additional interviews greatly helped in getting deeper in the role of social media in the informants lives. Also Kate agreed to answer to some written questions sent by email. All in all the interviews garnered a data that consisted of just under 7 and half hours of verbatim recorded audiotapes which were transcribed to produce 70 single spaced pages of text to analyze. Additionally there were some 40

pages of notes. I will explain the interview analytic process using a hermeneutic logic (e.g. Arnold and Fischer, 1994) in the next section.

5.5 The Hermeneutic Approach in Interview Analysis Process

A main theme in hermeneutic philosophy is that people's understanding of their life experiences reflect a broader cultural system and are implicitly expressed through language (Thompson et al. 1994). In this research the interview transcripts are seen as a sort of identity narratives or stories told by the informants about their lives and their professional identities. In line with Thompson (1996), "these lived meanings are seen as personalized narratives that express a broader system of cultural values, meanings, beliefs and often internal conflicts that exist within this cultural network" The symbolic arena of language are where these meanings are formulated. Thus hermeneutics in a very broad sense is about understanding and interpreting texts. As a method and as philosophy hermeneutics is very old. In this chapter I will not go in depth into hermeneutic philosophy, (see for example Gadamer, 1975) or history of, which Gadamer also gives a very detailed account. A more recent summary on the history of hermeneutics can be read for instance from Prasad (2002).

People are seen as actively interacting and shaping their environments (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Thus Identity can be seen as a list of attributes that are linked in memory to key life episodes that are threaded into a story. Such stories enable people to make sense of who they are and provided their identities a continuum from past, to present and to the future (Ahuvia, 2005, 172). People form self-narratives when they project the fabricated past into the imagined future and they select what parts to include in their narratives as they construe and include the real events in the progress of their lives (Üstüner and Holt, 2007). It is assumed in the hermeneutic paradigm that individuals interpret their experiences in a way that enables a coherent identity narrative (Thompson, 1996). Following such logic, anything that threatens this coherence, such as a threat to an identity, must somehow be explained. Therefore my theoretic framework and the analytical methodology complement each other well.

Verbatim transcripts from the audiotaped interviews were used as the base for further analysis. Each transcript was first read through to gain a sense of the whole (Thompson, 1996). The interpretation was done using hermeneutic logic (Arnold and Fischer, 1994). In practice this means an iterative

process that included reading, documenting and systematizing the interview transcripts. This starts with a close reading of each transcript to gain a sense of the whole and for initial notes of patterns of meaning to be made. Then commonalities and thematic relationships are derived. This thematic structure is then again challenged and compared to the accounts of the informant to make sure that it reflects the real experiences (Thompson, 1996). This part-to-whole circular process is often illustrated with of the concept of the hermeneutic circle (Prasad, 2002). The hermeneutic circle has meaning also beyond mere methodological processes of text interpretation in that it is also a part of the philosophical view of the research process and a general model of how the process of understanding works in this method. On the research process philosophy level, the logic is that a more thorough understanding of the informants' life worlds gives more depth to the interpretation. On a more general level of understanding the hermeneutic circle model sees understanding as always situated in a network of culturally shared socio-historic meanings (Thompson et al. 1994). Prasad (2002) gives the example that sometimes in order to understand a sentence in the text; we need to read the whole paragraph as to grasp what the writer wants to say. We have to have a context for the understanding.

Such a context has to be actively defined by the researcher and there can be differing levels comprehensiveness (Prasad, 2002). For example in my analysis I have both tried to understand the design professionals from their unique standpoints and against their life-experiences. On the next level I could choose to look at them as a professional group of people or go even higher and look at the profession of design and how it is shaping in the contemporary society. All these levels of analysis are present in my analysis, although I do not point it out quite as clearly as in this section. I wholeheartedly agree with Prasad's (2002) notion that a researcher must understand the history of the phenomenon studied and issues around it. I tried to familiarize myself with the area of design so that would understand what the history is and could understand how the profession was developing. Equally important is to be aware of your own socio-historical situatedness and own prejudice in good and bad towards the subject and I also kept this in mind during interviews and analysis.

A hermeneutic approach has been used widely in the study of consumption of identity (see for example Thompson, 1996; Ahuvia, 2005; Luedicke et al. 2010). The approach sits in the interpretive research paradigm (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988) presented in the beginning of this chapter. Hermeneutic philosophy underscores that all understanding is linguistic and explores how the subject-object dichotomy can be bridged by an interpreter involving the "other" through a reading that is grounded in the readers (pre) understanding, but not completely determined by it

(Arnold and Fischer, 1994). Pre understanding simply means that prior to any interpretation made both the interpreter and the object exist and before any reflection we belong to a cultural world. So the interpreter and the object are linked by a context of tradition that they both know and constitute. In the context of this study for example, I as the interviewer, have certain ideas of the design profession, as do the informants. In this approach instead of trying to remove all this prior understanding, the interpretation process is actively shaping it.

The meanings that consumers attribute to their consumer experiences are thought of as stories or narratives. Consumption meanings are interpreted both in relation to a consumer's sense of personal history as well as a broader context of historically recognized meanings. People's stories of their consumption experiences are at the heart of the discovery (Thompson, 1997). It is important to add that the interpretive research views understanding as a process that is never-ending that can be depicted by the aforementioned hermeneutic circle, where each new understanding enters into current interpretations and the current interpretations will influence ones made in the future (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988: 510). Thus the data shapes the analysis process and vice versa in an emergent manner.

5.6 Limitations

This hermeneutic interpretation seeks to describe and understand identity projects and conflicts that arise from being a design professional. Additionally of interest is the role of social media in these identity projects and in relieving identity conflicts. These interpretations are supported by textual data but by no means are they exhaustive or to be generalized outside the context of this study and are not an exhaustive account. The study is focused on a particular group of people that share similar educational and professional backgrounds and is linked to the sociocultural meanings of these individuals. The study could be expanded using ethnographic methods such as netnography observing the actual behavior of the informants online. Also a quantitative approach could be possible if the issue would be confined to a few variables and the context narrowed down to only one social media service. My study has however raised new views in the life worlds of design professionals and how people who work with making new trends manage their own identities online. As such it hopefully contributes to research on identity projects and identity conflicts.

Because of the nature of such qualitative research the findings rely on the researchers understanding and are subject to my own interpretation. My sincere hope is that I succeed in giving a cohesive and in-depth description of the studied phenomenon. Because the study is qualitative and the views presented in the interviews subjective accounts, the results cannot be generalized outside of context. Generalizations can however be made within the context of this research about the patterns and shared meanings (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988), of my design professional informants. This study offers its biggest contributions to the understanding of this specific group of professionals and the meanings they ascribe to social media. Marketers can also gain insights in many ways by finding new aspects to these services.

6. Findings

Out of analyzing the interviews two central themes that were common to all informants emerged. Both will be presented next along with illustrative quotes from the interviews. For reasons of readability, I will present the findings in the same structure as the identity project model (Harré, 2007) from left to right and first look at how the informants narrate their becoming design professionals. This entails looking at informant backgrounds such as families, early hobbies and education choices leading to their careers. After that I will present the major project characteristics of a design professionals identity project consisting of descriptions of the work and lives that the design professionals live and their own evaluations of the importance of their work. The third part is centered on the informants' identity conflicts from the data and shows the kinds of responses or solutions my informants have developed to these. Likewise I will look at social media use within these themes. The final section presents some additional findings in terms of informant social media practices that help widen the perspective and offer fertile ground for further research on social media. It is to be noted that there are many ways to interpret the text and my way of categorizing it is only one way of looking at these stories. In the discussion part I will ground my analysis to the theoretical framework and the overall theoretical paradigm.

6.1 Becoming a Design Professional

In their narratives all of my informants confessed to having had art or design in their lives since childhood and they seemed to suggest that it is an innate quality to them. Some even claimed that they always knew they would work with design or art in a way or another. In this light, personal characteristics seem to be an important context for a design professional identity project, since all of the informants contributed their success in the profession and told their narratives in a way that highlighted their special attributes or talent. Almost all contributed some aspects of their current success to chance and meeting the right people, but equally or more so to their innate characteristics of being creative and being a hard worker. Equally often they told stories of how their environments had shaped their career choices. The different main types of context that led my informants to pursue a career in design are presented in the next section.

6.1.1 Design as a Personal Characteristic

According to Harré (2007, p.712) identity projects can emerge from personal characteristics such as concerns, values or cognitive capacities. This became very apparent in the interviews as many of the informants told stories of how they drew designs of either houses or clothes as early as in their childhood or early teenage years. Illustrative of such a story of always having design as their dream career is Kim.

Kim is a 29 year old originally Australian active wear and handbag designer that owns her own company in London. She is a former athlete and works on the side as a trainer and group training instructor. Kim has had fashion design as a hobby and a dream all her life. Although she is currently balancing between a part-time job and working with her brands, she is determined to make it in the industry. Her answer to how she ended up having a career in design is illustrative to almost all of my informants. They all confessed to drawing designs of either houses or clothes dating back to their childhood or early teenage years.

Kim: Always. I'm Australian originally, I moved to the UK in 2002. My first trip home, I went through all my stuff, I still had all these files from when I was 15. And I found all these little designs, I just always knew I wanted to be a designer, and I had all these little designs and a business plan that I'd scribbled when I was about 15. The name of the brand was different back then, but it was essentially the same idea. I always wanted to launch a brand of sportswear and clothing, because I used to be an athlete, so I guess that's why I went in that direction. But yeah, it was never really a big question; it was more a question of when I'll do it rather than whether or not I would.

After moving to London to pursue a career in sports she decided to give the design career a chance and started her own brand of sportswear. She has come ahead by using the contacts from the training business since she feels that she has a disadvantage to those with a formal education. This is partly because the design world puts so much value on education and because exposure to the markets requires knowing the right people. This is probably one of the reasons why Kim chooses to

frame herself as an entrepreneur almost more than a designer. She dreams that one day she can hire someone to do the designs and focus more on the business side herself.

The narratives of my informants seem to imply that a designer identity can be something hidden inside us and awoken at a certain age. After having had discussions with many people working in design it seems that the ones really relying on it as careers are very verbal about how they almost did not choose to become design professionals, but rather “it chose them”. This can be seen as a way of romanticising their choice and the hard profession that is their everyday life, but it can also be a discourse that is a part of the myth of being a designer. The discourse is instilled in young designers at school, through social interaction and through media and thus becomes a part of their identity narratives.

6.1.2 Collective and Personal Contexts

Harré (2007) points out that people may simply slip into identity projects for example through social networks. Identity projects can emerge through our collective or personal contexts that include our social environments, family background and previous experiences. This is similar to Kleine and Kleine (2000) identity project lifecycle that starts with a pre-socialization phase. They state, “An identity derives from immersion in, and changes in, social structural factors, such as social connections” (Kleine and Kleine, 2000, p. 281). Analyzing the interview data it became apparent that the social networks of our informants have shaped their career choices. That was the case of Tom. In his case his career as a stylist started when a friend that was double booked for a job asked him to fill in and his career has snowballed from this first job through photographers and clients.

Tom is a 44-year-old stylist residing in Finland. He has studied clothing and fashion design at University level, but never graduated. He chose instead to design his own collection and drop out of school. Since then he has worked for a major Finnish label as a designer for menswear, but is currently self-employed entrepreneur employing also one full-time assistant. His story of how he ended up in the design industry illustrates how no identity project emergence can be contributed to a single factor, but is a combination of many influences. His story is still a good example of how a person can end up in a different direction in their careers through social networks.

Interviewer: *Has it always been clear to you that this is what you want to do?*

Tom: *Yes it has. I have since early childhood; let's say that I have been drawing princesses since I was a kid. I have always had an interest in the visual and especially perhaps clothes. It has perhaps extended later on to other things but early on it was more specifically clothing. In fact I did apply to a school to study architecture and passed the math part, but failed the drawing side, (laughing) which is in a sense a little weird.*

Interviewer: *How did you get started in the business?*

Tom: *It was an accident. There was another stylist that needed help and called if I could do it. They said that they liked my taste and my style and although they know that I have not done this sort of thing before, but if I could do this one gig for them, they just can't think of anyone else on such short notice. They also implied that it might not be necessary to tell the client that it was my first time (laughing). I did the job. The photographer liked my work and asked me to do the next one and then the one after that was... I think it was Nokia or some other commercial. The Artistic Director liked it and asked me for a next gig and so it started snowballing forward.*

Also when the influence of the collective context was not this strong or apparent all of the informants admitted to having gotten support from their family and friends for their career choice. Sometimes this support was received after a somewhat skeptic start, but they received it nonetheless. Many informants had also weighed other options and some had even had a second career choice such as architecture or law, but either their own characteristics such as failing to make requirements of the math used in architecture or the influence of their collective contexts drove them on a design path. In Peter's case he was studying in a law school when his friends that had seen his designs begged him to apply to design school.

Peter is a 35 year-old graphic designer from New Zealand currently residing in London. Peter works with branding and graphic design. When he started he first worked with packaging, but has since moved on to corporate work. Until recently Peter worked at one of the major brand design and concept companies in London, but a month ago he decided to start contracting. Thus Peter is in the midst of a major identity transformation and still seeking balance. His narrative of how he came to study design demonstrates the influence the social environment can have on the emergence of an identity project.

Peter: I applied actually, I was in law, I was studying to do law, and my friends begged me that I... I was doing design as my (fun) on the side. And so they begged be to apply, and I did, I got in, so I left law school and went to there.

It seems that although a gift or an inclination for visual- and design thinking is narrated as an innate quality, the process of becoming a design professional is explained by the design professionals as a mixture of personal characteristics, collective and personal contexts. Even in the case of Tom and Peter they both told the story of early childhood designs and added later the situational and collective influences on their careers. This section has told stories of how the informants became interested in design. In the next part I will look at how the informants have actually gone ahead to pursue these identity projects and what are their most important characteristics.

6.2 Being a Design Professional

Analysis of the interviews revealed multiple different approaches to pursuing a career in design and many different factors that influenced the choices. Between the lines there were three themes that came up with all informants. They all described how 1) being a design professional is a constant struggle, 2) it is a passion and that 3) the design profession is divided into very different subgroups and group membership or not belonging to another group or category is an important part in defining their identities as designers. To sum up, work in design seems to be a combination of hard work, determination, pure luck and meeting the right people. This networking aspect of design is one of my central themes later and I will look at in more in depth in the experience and evaluation part in the next section.

6.2.1 A Struggle and a Passion

In this next section I have collected informants' views on the design profession and what it means for them. The first theme is that almost all of the informants felt that to be a design professional meant somehow struggling at least in the beginning. It seems that there exists a commonly shared perception that the fashion world is fiercely competitive. Kim had even had her designs stolen by another independent designer, but could not do anything about because the fight would take all her

resources. The struggle was more apparent with the entrepreneur and freelance designers whereas the designers working for companies did not express similar concerns.

Secondly all informants seemed to share a passion for design and for the strange and new. In all of the interviews the informants indirectly framed a part of their success to creativity and the ability to think differently. As an example of this, Kate is a 30 year-old fashion designer that owns her own lingerie company in London. Her concept is to combine lingerie with loungewear and although the company is a startup and been running only for three years, it is now starting to grow gradually. She is originally from Tallinn Estonia and has studied business in an Estonian University before moving to London to get a degree in Fashion marketing.

***Kate:** Um... It's very hard to say, 'cause I think it's a combination. And I still don't know. I mean, every time I hear that, "you're so different" or "you're doing something so different", and "you're in London where everything should have been done already", and. I just haven't really figured out why or, it's probably, I've always been interested in things that are different, and so... maybe it's just in me.*

The other designers expressed a similar sort of thinking, but in a less direct way. Also it was indicated by some that if such inspiration has to be blatantly sought (instead of it coming naturally) one has somehow lost his/her own voice as a designer. When designers were asked about their sources of inspiration, they had a hard time explaining where it comes from. The most common answer was that everything around you could give ideas about something. Only one of the informants Kim actually described the process and tools such as mood boards that she uses in the process. Another interesting remark came from Peter explaining how he uses his Facebook as a sort of inspirational library collecting text, pictures and links of interest that he can then access later on.

***Peter:** Yeah, I use Facebook, mostly for personal, but I do actually put photos... I've changed it now, I haven't, I don't really use it so much for personal now, I'm, just use it to throw things up that I find interesting, I'll put it on my wall and then it becomes just a collection of stuff that I remember, I can go back to it. What else? LinkedIn is good for the business side, so updating the profile... sometimes you'll get work out of that but, it is just to, good to see, for other contacts, but it's much more business-focused.*

There also seems to be a design ideal of innate creativity: Being a design professional means seeing the world with the eyes of a stranger and constant observing of things. This fits well with the becoming myth of somehow possessing a tendency towards art and design since birth. At the same time it is rather difficult to have innate creativity without being influenced by your surroundings and these pioneers of thinking still have to exist in the same physical world as the rest of us. Therefore living up to such ideals is a possible source of identity conflict, as I will posit later.

6.2.2 Subgroups of Design

The third and theme identified from the data that was important in framing the identity project characteristics were different group memberships. The designers seemed to be very much aware of the design subgroups that they belonged in and made it sure to clearly distinguish their membership from others. It seems that the design worlds is fragmented from early on in the design schools to very different groups of people that have a strong tendency to evaluate the group they belong to as better as the others. The use of stereotypes was also common in setting the others apart. Peter offers an explanation at how this division to subgroups starts at school.

Peter: Maybe. All right. The Wellington School, if it was an art school at the same time, did you feel like, because I've talked to some other graphic designers as well and they sometimes feel that. The artsy fashion design people are very different from graphic design people, and people that work with concept and brand design.

Interviewer: How do you feel about that? Was there a division already in the school, or...?

Peter: Um, yeah they were, everyone's quite... the personalities and the culture is all quite different. I was doing, it was called visual communication so, underneath it was graphic, products and packaging, three-dimensional, furniture, as well as digital. All of those, and interior as well. And fashion. So, all of those people were just. they go into these completely different worlds and they become very different people in very different industries.

Others experience that they are not even part of the design community, but rather looked down on because they have the wrong background and no formal education. This seems to imply that group membership is an important aspect of the design professional identity.

Kate: Yes. Totally. Because I went on to actually study business, not fashion. And I think it was more like a protest in Estonia, because everyone thought that you can't be a designer unless you go to this specific school. So it was really just nice to go the other way. And of course it was really hard to blend in with all the other designers because they think, you know, you're not a real one.

Kate implies that she has not gotten the same chances in the London fashion circles because she has not gone to the right schools. At the same time she still manages to frame this as an opportunity, claiming that she has more knowledge in the business side of things and a unique point of view. She goes as far as to claim that everyone working with fashion and design in Estonia think exactly alike and that she might not be a designer if she had not gotten out of there in time.

To sum up, it seems that being a design professional means having passion for design and the new and strange overall. It is a struggle to make it, but still worth it because there is the ultimate price of making it by getting the approval and admiration of other designers. This seems to be one of the main motivators along with a need to create and a love for the work that these designers do. Even as the designers are very much aware of how dependent they are on others working in the industry for success it seems that there are sharp divisions between different areas of design, that each share have a strong professional pride and perhaps a slight overlooking of the others. This division seems to form as early as in school and works two ways. The people within the design subgroup concentrate on cultivating relationships with each other and use these connections to get ahead. At the same time other design groupings are framed as less important or somehow less attractive. This helps in achieving better self-esteem professionally and also by making operating in this complex social hierarchy simpler. The designers that did not have a formal education are regarded as lower in status and left to make use of contacts that they might have and trust that their work speaks for them. They suffer from a lack of contacts, but it seems that they are also met with actual discrimination and have to prove themselves constantly to industry people. The picture that my informants give is that being a design professional is not an easy career choice as it involves constant self-development and gaining approval from others. I will look more specifically at the identity conflicts/threats that designers face in their identity projects and the responses that help them cope with them in the next sections.

6.3 Identity Conflicts and Informant Responses

After school every design professional faces the choice of deciding whether to aim for a commercial or a more independent career or put in other words: to work for someone else, start freelance work or to start an own company. Some of my informants had gone the way of working for large fashion houses and for some an entrepreneurial path was the first choice. In the process of living out the identity project individuals evaluate them constantly. Naturally biological basic level needs have to be satisfied or alternatively not endangered, but after that people evaluate their experiences through three major concerns: 1) belonging 2) stimulation, 3) efficacy and 4) integrity (Harré, 2007). I will be combining these with some of the identity threats that were pointed out by Petriglieri (2011) and show the responses that my informants seemed to use. For the purposes of this study I will position, that identities can be actively evaluated, but identity conflicts and threats make such evaluation even more apparent and critical for the continuation of the identity project. I choose to use the word conflict because it is less loaded with emotion than threat and it implies that a conflict can remain unresolved for a substantial period of time without disappearing. I will first discuss the tension or conflict and the meanings related to it and in the end show responses that helped the informants cope with these tensions. The first theme or conflict has to do with being unique and creative versus succumbing to the realities of the business world and making a living. I have decided to call this first group of conflicts creative freedom vs. business. Before I present the theme, however I want to provide the reader's a more detailed view of the context and offer a brief explanation of the changing design profession the pressures that are shared in the design communities today.

6.3.1 A Changing Industry

In order to properly understand all the stories of how ideals meet the realities of work, one needs to know how the industry has changed and keeps changing and how the design industry as a whole is experiencing and coping with the current financial situation. This issue was mentioned in many informants' narratives but in a variety of ways. Kim actually framed it as an opportunity explaining that instead of being shunned by manufacturers because the small size of her business, she found that she could choose her manufacturers and at a lower price than she would have had to pay earlier, because manufacturers are struggling with excess capacity.

Peter's explanation offered a very different view of the situation that was apparent in the informants' narratives the worked with companies and especially with graphic or industrial design.

Peter: *Over the last few years it's definitely gotten worse. There's still work going on, but I think clients want a lot more out of you for a lot less, so the pressure's on to deliver. And basically they pay a lot less for what you give them. You used to have two weeks on a project, now you have four days, and you probably have 30 percent less money for, than you would be normally getting. It's always like cutting, cutting, cutting, and it's like, we can't afford it, can't afford it. It's trimming, so, you have to kind of fight against it.*

Such comments on diminishing resources and tighter time constraints were coupled with comments on how the profession of design has evolved over the years from analog artisanship to highly digital and conceptual. Some designers seemed to think that the current breed of designers does not even know how to sketch or draw anymore, but the computer does everything. At the same time all my informants also welcomed aspect of the information era and admitted to using social media as a tool for inspiration. Mainly for such purposes the design professionals used blogs, forums and just random picture searches sometimes leading them to YouTube or other video sharing sites. It is a feature of our time that people spend more time online and a common notion that requirements at work are hardening and especially in times of economic hardship people and companies want value for their money. What was a new finding for me was that social media played a part in relieving such time and resource constraints. A partial shift in designer work to online environment can be attributed to the fact that surfing for inspiration online saves time.

Peter: *Yeah, definitely. It's very much part of the process in the beginning, as just when you are, when you're looking for stuff the Internet is the best source. Well, it's become more and more that way. People still use magazines and archives and going out in the street taking photos and things like that but. A lot of the time, because of the. That you don't have a lot of time. You have less time for exploration phase that, people tend to just go straight onto the Internet, around places that they've been to before, and then just start downloading and finding stuff. That's definitely the latest generation of designers. They won't sketch, they will collate stuff, they collate images (to give their own ideas).*

Also understanding how designer's work is crucial to properly analyze this tension. Such work is often carried out in cross-functional teams where the contractor designer or subcontracting design company is only one part of the puzzle. My informants often expressed that the clients do not understand design and have unrealistic expectations for it. One such expectation is towards time. The creative process was described, as something that takes time and it is hard to rush. All informants could name several sources of information with social media being one of them, but also they had a hard time describing the process. George is 26-year-old Estonian advertising agency owner that explains this potential source of conflict between the design people and the marketing people.

George: *Okay, main difference of course is, marketing people are more rational and designers are more creative, and that's the main conflict actually, all the time. But, I think, none of these. Or, creativity or rationalism can't cancel one another, because they have to go together, I think. And this is what you have to explain all the time. In every project. And if your client don't understand you or don't want to understand, or usually marketing people have to. Prove themselves to their own bosses. And company owners so, they have to, or they want to. They want advertising agencies usually do what they have planned or something like that. Do you understand?*

So conflicting goals seems to be one sources of this tension. For the client the piece of design they are paying for is just another piece in the project that needs to get done, whereas for the designer it is something more personal in that they put their own ideas and creativity in the projects that they do. Against this backdrop it is easy to understand why some of my informants were dreaming of a more independent career or shifting more towards art, or why some had already made the choice of working on their own. The following comment from Mike offers a gateway to the first major identity conflict theme in my study: creative freedom versus business needs. An introduction for Mike is provided later in this chapter.

Mike: *Yeah, I don't want to have any door closed, I'm interested in many things. And, yeah, absolutely. I think that for me art and design is... closely connected and, I don't mind doing, on a freelance basis design tasks as well. But what... what made me leave the design area right now is that I felt that, you have to follow the brand you're working for so much, and everyone is so afraid of not selling maximum all the time and you are, you have so little freedom as a designer, when you work for a company. And, I felt so tired of that. I really wanted to do my thing, what I*

believe in. But if someone would ask me for doing something for them, and give me a free choice to follow what I believe in, then absolutely.

6.3.2 Creative Freedom vs. Business Needs

When looking at the central themes it seems that in the evaluation of the identity project integrity and efficacy were very central for my informants. Integrity refers to the likelihood of success of the individual's project and efficacy to how consistent the project is with the core parts of the self (McGregor and Little, 1998). This is natural human behavior as we all have the need to feel that our life has meaning and it is also a cultural myth reflected in movies and the media. Habermas and Bluck (2000) refer to this phenomenon as causal or explanatory coherence, explaining that they are important in explaining connections between the self and life events. There are both explanations of circumstances and explanations of personal discontinuity. This means explaining one's life choices either through validation by external factors or by personal characteristics. Both can be found in the informants' narratives of their career development.

Robert is a 40-year-old industrial designer and runs a successful design company with his partner that he met in school. His life narrative revealed somewhat of a dislike towards social media but I will use his excerpts to highlight the categorizations and stereotypes that design professionals' use when evaluating and explaining their life choices and their profession. Consider this extract from Robert's interview.

***Interviewer:** You said that you were always interested in art and for example design of automobiles, were they your hobbies even early on?*

***Robert:** Yes, especially before this (design) became my profession. The weird thing is that when you start doing something professionally you lose the hobby aspects of it. I've had this interest in pottery all my life and that was what I thought I would end up doing. Then, I guess it was some kind of realism that it would be hard to support yourself with and therefore industrial design seemed more appealing. Partly it was also because it felt more modern. I have taken on pottery now again as a counterbalance for the work. Maybe because in the form that this work is currently done you are constantly striving for goals, because work is done as projects and commissions and in many ways you are unable to define many aspects that are predetermined by*

the client. Pottery is a good counterweight because it is so tangible and no one tells me what to do or how to do it.

Later Robert added on that although he is running a successful company. He could easily see himself in the future devoting more time to his art and working only part time. He was shaken himself by the revelation during the interview, as it was apparently an unconscious tension that dawned on him, only when discussing it. He seemed to idealize the romantic craftsman that works with his hands and he later went on to express his disdain for the current generation of designers who do not even know how to sketch without the computer. In this light it will not come as a surprise that he was very skeptical of social media and admitted to using it very little and mostly to personal purposes. He was the one out of my informants that probably had the least interest in social media in general and was somehow put off by the digitalization of his profession. His longing to work with his hands and taking up pottery as a hobby can be seen as a way to relieve that tension.

The theme of having art as a hobby or a background appeared in different forms in all of the informants' interviews. All of them had had art or design as a hobby and especially the ones that worked for commercial companies felt a tension between their artistic needs and the needs of the clients. The informants that worked as independent designers seemed better off, but even they had to succumb to the realism of making a living and had been struggling financially at times. It seems that in a "perfect world" with no financial liabilities they all would be just working with art. Some used the myth of a free independent entrepreneur in order to positively distinct their choice as the best one and thus eliminate a possible identity conflict. One of the informants had chosen to exit his designer identity and was in the middle of a major life transition of changing professions from a textile and pattern designer to an artist. His interview excerpt offers an example of these efficacy and integrity concerns.

Mike is a 43-year old Swedish pattern and textile designer living in Frankfurt. He has worked for a number of years for a wallpaper company as well as done some freelance design work for a Swedish underwear brand. Currently he is the midst of a major life transition starting a career as an artist. You could also say he is going back to art, since he even went to an art school for one year before he started design school. He describes his change of school resulting from a rational choice seeing art world as risky. Art and patterns have been something that he has always been interested in so he still sees that he was following his heart when choosing design school.

***Mike:** It was definitely my passion. That's wha-, yeah. That's something I've been interested in since I was a little kid. So that was, I've always been painting and so all my life and... I mean, pattern is of course a way of painting pictures, so... yeah. I didn't think, how do you, strategically at all, it was just, follow my heart.*

Now he has chosen to change careers and is striving to become a painter. He explains the decision:

***Mike:** So I haven't done any painting for almost 20 years, but now I really felt like, I think it has been growing in my head for some years that I really would like to do it and I feel like, now maybe, I'm 43 years old and feel like I, if I should do it or try it, I should do it now.*

Another informant Peter is also in the midst of a major career change after working for years for a brand agency he just started contracting work a couple of months ago. Thus Peter is in the midst of a major identity transformation and still seeking balance. He is now learning how to be a contractor working through agents.

***Peter:** It takes some getting used to, which I'm slowly getting my feet, into it, because it's like, you don't know what's around the corner, and you can have a job one day and then all of a sudden they say "oh no, we're not gonna start that for another month", so, you know. It's very up-in-the-air, where I'm working next and what's coming around the corner. So I have to get used to that."*

He's narrative for dealing with the situation is that it is a temporary solution before he sets up shop or starts working for a company and a process of learning that he can ultimately use for his advantage. Another narrative that helps to reconcile this uncertainty is that it helps him to maintain his wide-range of skills and not get compartmentalized like it is common in the industry:

***Peter:** Yeah, I think it's probably the only, if I had waited any longer then I would have lost some of my skills in actual design work. If I had stayed doing design directing for another year or so, so I wouldn't be able to actually, I don't think I would have been as fast or as good with computers for example. So now was the best time.*

It seems that being an entrepreneur or a self-employed non-compromising designer is somewhat of an ideal in the design community. My informants expressed a longing for the work to speak for

itself instead of getting too involved in the business side of things. Ways of dealing with this conflict are numerous among our informants. Some just justify it as a part of the business or something that makes their work more challenging. Two informants, Kim and Kate, even admitted to loving the business side of things and seemed to regard it as their strength in comparison to other designers. A possible coincidence but nonetheless intriguing aspect of the two females standing out in this case is that they were both self-taught designers and seemed to be in a constant battle of proving themselves as designers. Therefore emphasizing the business side of the designer identity enables them to have a better self-esteem and to maintain a coherent sense of self.

Susan on the other hand seemed to resolve her conflict by accentuating the risks regarding being an entrepreneur in her narrative. Susan is a 26-year-old designer who was born and studied fashion design in Finland, but is currently living in Sweden working for a major fashion label. Becoming an entrepreneur seemed to interest her, but she was unsure if she wanted to try it. The security of a company to work for and getting experience seemed to weigh more at the moment.

***Susan:** And then if I have analyzed this with my friends that if you want a more artistic career as a designer, it is really hard anywhere in the world and the people who make it are like on percentage and they are someone like Alexander McQueen. But even that requires money. The people that make it are either backed up by money or they are discovered by someone and sponsored. In a way it all has to do with money and what you really want. There are so many talented people that have not gotten the chance to make it big and then there are people who do not want to make their brands global, but rather just stay underground, which is in my opinion a good choice as well. It depends on what you want and what your goals in life are.*

In the next section I will look at how my informants dealt with these expressed identity conflicts with different strategies and what role social media played in this process.

6.3.3 Informant Responses to Integrity Conflicts and the Role of Social Media

In terms of this study, a revelation out of this tension between business needs and creativity was that social media was used by the informants to alleviate the tension. Social media was used in the process of seeking inspiration, by utilizing blogs and design forums. I argue that this is because it offers convenience and speed and therefore a way to alleviate the tension between the requirements

of the day-to-day work on the less controllable design process. Borrowing from Petriglieri's (2011) identity threat responses, it seems that the responses of my informants to this particular tension or conflict were twofold. On the other hand there was a derogation of the business community or the marketing people who do not understand design and have to be educated on its value and on the second hand informants changed the meanings linked to the threatened designer identity. This changing of meaning response works when an association between a threatened identity and its current meanings are unsustainable in the future (Petriglieri, 2011). Instead of framing design as the ultimate goal in itself the informants framed their input as an important part of the project and their ability to meet the clients goals as a part of their success requirements as design professionals. Thus they could be proud that they were designers who understood the rules of the business and could service their clients' needs. Robert sums up this tension and illustrates how the identity restructuring response works when asked whether he has accepted the business requirements of the work.

Robert: *I understand that they are a part of this job. I mean, it would be weird to think that, or I don't, I feel that essentially design and industrial design are done in order to enhance the client's business. There are certain things that are central to this work. If you plan on doing it (being a designer), you need to admit these realities or otherwise you are not doing a very good job. Another question is then whether it is what you would personally like to do. Of course such challenges also make this job more interesting. They are the restraints and the measures for success. I do think more and more also about that it would be very different and would feel somehow easier and nicer to do only more artistic work.*

Also other responses were seen like Mikes identity exit to art and Susan that had chosen a more commercial path in a big company framing the life of a more artistic fashion designer as a constant struggle and almost unattainable. I found also a second popular use of social media that was following designers or important brands to stay in touch with what was happening in the field. This seemed to be a double edged sword though as a designer is required to show originality and it leads us to our second theme or conflict that I will discuss in the next section.

6.3.4 Belonging vs. Standing Out

Another reoccurring theme or a possible source of identity conflict in the interviews is the need to

know the right people in order to get ahead in the business. It seemed important to be recognized and accepted by the design community, but at the same time the informants were very detailed in telling what sets them apart. Some went even as far to admit avoiding spending their spare time with design people, because they felt that the company of people working with other professions was more stimulating for them. For example Peter explains:

***Peter:** Yeah, I think so. Yeah, it's definitely, the more that I'm... the last month, the more that I realize that it's definitely who you know, and your relationships are really important as well. It's not necessarily just the wo-, the work is... the work on its own is not gonna get you.. It'll get you so far but it's, definitely those relationships that you need to build and nurture. Actually, you know, staying mates with the recruiters that you've known for the years and, just keep in contact with people, keep in contact with your old colleagues, see what's happening. 'Cause they'll send work your way, 'cause they know you. They know... you know, you always work with people that you know that's going to deliver, that you have a good relationship with. People are comfortable with circles of colleagues that they've worked with before.*

In design people seem to work a lot through personal contacts with people they know they can trust. This can naturally be an asset if you know the right people but for people coming from outside the design community it can be hard to be accepted as a member. Also the people that had gone to design schools and had contacts admitted that they sometimes find this networking aspect of their careers challenging, because it might not be who they naturally are as a person. For example, when Peter was asked how he feels about this side of the work he concluded that:

***Peter:** No, it doesn't actually, it doesn't come naturally. [chuckles] It takes a lot of effort. Because I'm quite shy and I don't really, I'm not like a... I'm social when I have to be, but otherwise I'm quite happily in my own company. Which is, completely introverted.*

All informants had gotten ahead on their careers because of contacts with other industry people and actively took steps in nurturing their client relationships, but they were also very clear in how they distinguished themselves from other design groups. In order to be a design professional you have to fill to conflicting goals of following what others are doing to have a sense of the whole and maintain social networks with peers and colleagues to get ahead, but at the same time maintain your own point of view and stay original. This requires seeing things in a new light and being constantly interested in the strange, different and new. The design industry is also fiercely competitive;

especially the fashion side of it and there is a division within design. On the other hand there are the artistic designers that are the voices of their generation, the craftspeople that want to stay true to their handwork and the commercial designers that acknowledge the commercial requirements and in the words of Robert: make all the money. It seemed that all the informants new somehow their place in the design community and their own strengths in relation to others. For Kim and Kate that are entrepreneurs it was their business background that provided them with a sense of competitive edge against others. They had often faced doubt from the design community whether they could make it because they lacked a formal education. Kate's way of explaining the situation was that this was essentially how she was able to think outside the box and had not succumbed to the through patterns common in other designers.

Education seemed not to be such a crucial part of the design professionals' current identities in the knowledge dimension, but rather the culture and networks of people it had provided were deemed important or even crucial. It seems that the division to design subcultures or fields starts in school and is experienced by all working in the field. On the other hand the time in school was credited as a fruitful time to make connections and to develop a network of people. Kim felt that this was the biggest advantage of people with a formal education compared to her and also Mike explained that those networks had played a crucial role in his career.

Mike: I would say it just happen naturally by meeting people. I think I was a little naïve maybe when I was there I didn't think, that this could be of importance to, how to say, grow this social networking thing. But I realised after I finished design school that that was actually maybe the biggest advantage of going there. Of course you learned a lot of things also but, many things you can also learn from starting working with it, and after a while, I mean. So I think this networking, connecting with people and getting know people in the business was the biggest advantage of going there.

Peter's next comment gives good views on how conflicted these two sides of the business were for most of my informants. Becoming a design professional on your own requires a lot of effort and there is an aspect of fame involved, but it is not something that all of designers strive towards. It is in this comment that I noticed that the tensions of commercialism and art and the theme of managing a social network of getting ahead are somewhat blurred. On the other hand it is about having to take time from what you love (the design) and spending it on budgets and marketing and

on the other hand about securing your next work from a network, when the ideal position would perhaps be just letting the design talk for itself.

Peter: And that's just the way that it is. So, there is this kind of, designers that I know that are amazing, they really (shun it, and are known, but then) these other ones that really, they make it work for them. And so, I'm still, to be honest, I'm still deciding whether I'm gonna go one way or the other. Whether it's necessary to embrace it completely or you just do your own thing and then, what happens... you know. You can look for fame, but then you can also just, it can be a byproduct of what you do. But, I think there is definitely a balance of making sure that you have good contacts and you stand out, and you're still promoting what you do, to a certain degree, but not get kind of lost in it, I guess.

6.3.5 Responses to Conflicts Rising Out of Managing Networks and the Role of Social Media

It is a common narrative in business that it is important to grow a network of people that will get you ahead on your career and that you can share information and knowledge with. In the building the identity of a design professional this is absolutely crucial since the community essentially decides whether a designer makes it and gets visibility in the media. This showed for example in the fashion designers narratives as talk of being discovered or gradually attaining more visibility. Such an effort to cultivate relationships towards other designers was more natural to others and made easier to the ones that had gone to design schools, because they already gained substantial networks during their student years. The tension or the identity conflict in this sense rises from two sources the first is that not all design people are extroverted and social by nature and would naturally like to devote their time to socializing with clients and industry people. Secondly there is a thin line between following what other's are doing and copying, so that inspiration has to come from within. In a way inspiration must be innate and come from sources outside the design community in order to stand out, but to get these ideas into commercially viable products, designers need to be actively involved in the community. This is a conflict that I call belonging vs. standing out.

One of the responses that the informants seemed to use was derogation or discrediting the source of the conflict by creating stereotypes of the design community people. This gives them a chance to structure their life-worlds by signaling which groups they are a part of and which groups not. The graphic designers for example juxtaposed their community with the much more style oriented and

competitive drama of the fashion designers. Even the fashion designers distanced themselves of the stereotypically dramatic fashion stereotype by casting themselves as members of subgroups such as lingerie designers (Kate) or active wear designers (Kim). The next excerpt from Mike's interview gives a view on this conflict and his response to it.

Mike: A friend of mine is an architect. So he's of course also in the business, and he's one of my best friends and I think we are a little the same. We have a little the same point of view and, he is not spending so much time either with other architects or interior designers or whatever. I think there are some stereotypes, at least, yeah that's what I think. I don't know, I don't wanna be a part of that and many times I don't, I don't agree with them or... it is a little, I don't know what you call it in English, it's just like a little pond with fish, you know, and everyone knows everyone and... yeah. I prefer to look a little outside this Gothenburg area or textile area or design area or whatever it is.

Another response to this conflict was the separation of the professional identity from the personal. In their identity projects of being a design professional these two became substantially intermingled, but all informants seemed to be aware of the boundaries of these two identities. This division enabled them to keep the personal life sphere where they retrieve their inspiration from as separate from the professional sphere where they earn their money. Because social media offers people the chance to create multiple identities and some social media services are there to provide particular services. Social media was one tool to enact this division.

All informants admitted to using at least Facebook. This was actually the main platform that they even considered as social media. Some admitted to using twitter or at least being interested, but somehow felt that it would require extra effort on their part. All the entrepreneur designers had separate professional and personal pages although they admitted that most of their professional contacts were also their personal friends. They all manifested awareness to their social media profiles in that they knew to the type of content that was appropriate for the personal profile and separated that from the more serious business side of the professional pages. For the informants that did not have a separate business profile they were perhaps even more editing towards their posts on their profile. For example Tom that had just undergone surgery was vary of not posting too much about his impediment and stated that even if he is traveling a lot for work he does not want to talk too much about it online and avoid giving a picture to potential clients that he is not available. The difference in the personal and professional profiles was explained so that the professional profile

was very much about work with postings on events and pictures, whereas the personal profile could be funnier and show a different side of them. Since social contacts are so important in the business some seemed to think that this is a good balance so that their clients also get to see their more relaxed side.

Again the identity restructuring response of changing meanings linked to a conflicted identity were seen here as well in that people regarded the competitiveness of the industry as a basic premise that they had to live with. In a sense also identity concealment was hinted in that for example Kate and Robert explained that they sometimes had to put on a fake smile to try and please clients or contacts that they thought were downright unpleasant. One important Social media tool that helped with the division of the personal and professional was LinkedIn. This service is positioned as a professional networking space, where people create profiles complete with resumes and can get recommendations from others. The informants concluded that for them it is a viable source of work and at least two of the entrepreneurs had even used it for hires. Facebook was still the most important social media service for all my informants and it seemed that a snowball effect of friends joining the service had led them to it. Kim illustrates this effect in explaining her first contact to social media:

***Kim:** For me it was Facebook. One of my friends kept, she kept emailing me the invite to Facebook. And I was like oh, what is this, blah blah. But then my hairdresser told me about it as well, because he had actually been to some really cool party organized on Facebook, and he told me, oh, it's this really cool thing, blah blah blah. And then, because I'd heard of it through him, and then my friend who had moved to New Zealand kept emailing me saying it's a great way to keep in touch, that's when I signed up for it. And then I realized how good it was, and then I got all my friends in Australia to sign up. It was, I can't remember when, it was a good couple of years ago.*

Such a story was common amongst by participants and seems to support the notion of Boyd (2007) that people join social networking sites usually through a recommendation or an invitation from a friend. Peter's narrative of joining Facebook highlights this well:

***Peter:** It was a handful of people, and the first thing I noticed was this, tag your image. And then, there was a work friend of mine, and he put a cursor over some face and a name popped up, I was like "what are you doing, what is that?" He's like, "oh this is Facebook, you should*

join". And so I started doing it, and it was great, because I used, we were messaging each other, adding friends and, it became a real social thing.

So to sum up, it seems that the division of the design field into subgroups with different group identities helps the designers in making sense of their profession and feeling pride of what they do inside the design community. In order to alleviate the tension of maintaining a unique perspective and remaining creative the professional and private spheres were separated, sometimes with the help of social media services. The networking with colleagues was seen as something that you have to do to get ahead and to stay on top of what is happening in the field, but a private sphere of people from outside the industry was kept separate. Social media helps with this separation since it enables selection of friends and there is a possibility to create multiple profiles for different purposes.

6.4 Informants Other Social Media Practices

In this section I will present other social media practices that my informants told about in the interviews. They help in grasping a deeper understanding of how the design professionals juggle with conflicting roles and identities. Together these findings give a fascinating picture of what kinds of roles such new platforms of representation can play in the lives of people and more specifically people working in design.

Although some used social media and Facebook for marketing purposes on the professional and personal pages more important was to socialize with people. More specifically; with people that they already know. Previous studies of social networks have found peoples online networks resembling largely their real-life social networks. The logic is that when someone gets a request for a contact in a social network as Facebook one evaluative criteria for accepting the person, as a contact is to look at whom they know. Because social media makes our social networks visible, people seem to imply by their choices that other people are equally aware of this and would not accept people as contacts that are unwanted contacts. Having common friends works on Facebook like a reference. On the opposite people admitted to actively rejecting contact requests that showed no common friends and even thought of them as odd. This sort of behavior can be a common feature in social media, but it seemed to be at work also in the design industry as a whole with people working usually with people that they deemed trustworthy from other sources. For instance Kate admitted to working a lot with people of the same nationality.

Kate: No, it's actually funny because at first when I moved here, I moved here just to get away from Estonian, let's be honest. But, the more you're away and the more you see that, you know, all the French are, they are working together, and all the Germans are working as a team and, and then you actually feel that you have a very special connection with other Estonians. And, you know, everyone who has come to London, they come here for a reason to kind of make a change in their life, get the experience. And... I mean, very many Estonians who know here in London right now I didn't know in Estonia. So we've actually met here, and something is kind of connecting us. But the, the team that we worked with right now... yeah well, my photographer is Estonian, and she lives here. The guy who made the video, he's Estonian but he just came to visit. [chuckles] And, but all the other ones, I mean we, some of them I know from back from Estonia, but some of them not. So it's sort of a mix. But yeah, it's very weird. It's like a small Estonian mafia.

This same theme was also vivid in the informants' narratives whose identity projects had been largely shaped by getting jobs through other designers or people working in the industry. So it seems that common social practices are at play in the social media as well, but they take on a slightly different role and they work more on a cognitive level. Naturally we meet most of our social network through other people, but online this meeting does not have to take place. All that might be needed for contact to be initiated are a few common friends that work as a reference for the validity of the connection.

We may choose our friends and mates in a way that gives a more favorable image of us to others (Belk, 1988). Often in work life this issue is portrayed through the importance of networking: how knowing the right people will get you ahead on your career. This view was certainly supported by my informants' accounts on their careers, but also when narrating their design professional identity in the interviews. In almost all interviews a theme of being accepted by the design community emerged at least in the form that making it big requires connecting with the right people. At the same time however a design professional cannot be a follower. They have to be original and lead the way.

Tom: I guess it is yes... Or I would say that it is important. You forget it every now and then, but I would say that it makes a difference. You are in some ways your own business card, but on the other hand I have said that the worst make up artists are the ones with the most make up. There

is this... You have to be original and somehow out of the ordinary to stand out, but you need to you know look like a leader and not a victim. If you look like a fashion victim it does not work. So you need to look like a frontrunner of fashion or a professional or like you do not care. But even that needs to be conscious. It is (your appearance) upgraded reality what it is and not all fantasy. It has to be somewhere between the truth and the ideal.

The concept of upgraded reality in social media is a fascinating one. Quite on the opposite, McKenna (2007) has argued that the Internet facilitates the expression of our true self. The true self-concept refers to qualities that a person currently has, but is not able to fully express in social life. Internet helps because it offers anonymity. The risk for sanctions for voicing stronger opinions is lower and also it is easier to find people that share similar interests. Internet takes also away the impact that the physical appearance has on people's judgment of each other reducing the initial bias that people form of each other based solely on appearance. An additional aspect is that people have greater control over self-presentation and can edit both text and picture before they send it. Also the non-verbal cues are missing from the communication and therefore the self-presentation can be more strategic.

I found more support for the latter argument, but it did not lead to presenting true selves on social media for my informants but rather it gave more control to edit what you show others and to whom. My informants seemed to be very aware of the tonality of their communication online and also about the limits of what they wanted to share. A sort of audience analysis or editing was present in many narratives. For example Peter did not want to write anything that might be disturbing to his young niece.

Peter: *Yeah, I'm pretty aware of my public profile. So, I won't put anything on there that I know that if, my niece is going to be looking at. (it's all) G-rated, you know.*

Similarly Tom was very aware of the tone that he wanted to have for the posts on his Facebook profile. He described his tone as distorted funny. When asked what he meant by this, he elaborated.

Tom: *Of course it's always edited reality and not the whole reality. I think that social media in general... I mean I don't gen... I have even deleted people that are always negative and complain about their issues. I feel that people have enough to deal with here up north in the dark*

and therefore I don't want to post something negative in social media where people go from free will. I think it should be light and fun. Sometimes I post pics of travels although that can be seen as bragging and of course they can upset people in the dark Finnish winter. But that's not the point. My way of being in social media is personally funny. I am very serious when I'm working and my clients kind of know that and it is in a way a counterbalance to that.

Somewhat surprisingly privacy issues did not come up as a big concern for my informants. Even the more skeptic ones had learned how to use the sites for their own purposes. Social media and different services were a big part of my informants' online behavior and all of them had a social networking profile or several. Social media should in my opinion become of increasing interest to researchers because of the identity construction possibilities it possess. I will discuss possible areas for research in the discussion chapter next as well as in the concluding chapter.

7. Discussion

In the discussion section I will be linking my findings to my theoretic framework and to previous research on identity projects and use of social media. I have already included some discussion in the findings sessions and here I will be making more general points to areas of my framework that did not get so much attention in the previous chapter. I will first provide some insights to the identity project model based on my research. Secondly I will be looking at the findings in the light social identity theory. After that I discuss contributions to the study of social media and online environments. I conclude this chapter with thoughts on how this study shapes the picture of the postmodern design professional.

7.1 Design Professional Identity Projects

When the interviews were analyzed with the help of Harré's (2007) identity project model it became apparent that the contexts that gave birth to informants identity projects towards working as a design professional were very varied. The three contexts that Harré suggested were collective-, personal context as well as personal characteristics. In some cases the emergence of projects was very random and situational. A triggering event (Schouten, 1991) could be friends that encouraged switching schools or a referral to a job from a colleague from where the identity project spirals forward. Kleine and Kleine, (2000) refer to a discovery or a pre-socialization in a beginning of an identity project. Their view is more consumption focused but nonetheless my finding support their model as well in that social interaction played a significant part in learning role schemas pertaining to a certain identity and evaluation of the social acceptability of such identities. Although becoming a designer is perhaps not considered the most traditional career choice, all the informants had either received support for their role from family or friends or received support from close social groups later. Kleine and Kleine (2000) also mention the importance of bridge persons that have inside information on an identity and it seemed that enculturation with similarly minded people had played an important role in my informants' identity project formation.

Kleine and Kleine (2000) also argue that in the identity construction phase individuals use products and obtain information and experience with role-related products and behavioral patterns. Design education is an important part in shaping the design professional identity and it can make it hard for

non-educated designers to be adopted as group members of the design community and therefore they have to rely more strongly on the personal contacts they have. As I will discuss later: forming such contacts can also be more difficult for designers that have not gone to schools because strong groupings of design cliques form early on in school.

A strong need to obtain the right group membership becomes somewhat of a paradox coupled with the informants' visible strive toward integrity and efficacy in the design professionals identity narratives meaning that they have to find their own inner voice and be true to themselves to succeed as designers. The ideal is to be independent, but the reality is that no one really is. Only by gaining a superstar designer status, can one start to truly fulfill ones destiny as a designer. Some even find such conflicting pressures so strong that they choose to either momentarily disengage from an identity or to completely exit that identity. This was the case with Mike switching careers to art. To use Kleine and Kleine (2000) concept it seemed that all informants had at some point struggled with compatibility of their ideal schema and identity schema. The first refers to how they see themselves enacting a role and the latter as to how they would like to be perceived enacting a role. I am not implying that this would be a novel notion, but it proved to be a central source of identity incongruence for my informants. Because social interaction was such a central theme in the interviews I will link my findings to social identity theory aspects next and then consider the literature on identity conflicts in relation to my findings.

7.2 In-group and Out-group Categorization

Stets and Burke (2000) write that according to social identity theory a set of people that share a common social identification or view themselves to be a part of the same social category are called a social group. Through social comparisons similar people are labeled as belonging to an in-group, persons that are different from the self are categorized as out-group. Social identity forms through two processes that have different outcomes. They are self-categorization and social comparison. Self-categorization leads to emphasizing similarities to the in-group and the self and on the opposite side distancing oneself from the out-group by accentuating differences. This accentuation affects everything from values, beliefs and norms to actual behavior. The social comparison process leads accentuation towards self-enhancing outcomes for the self. (Stets and Burke, 2000). In other words when we feel that we are a part of the right category our self-esteem is improved.

This process of building a social identity as a designer using self-categorization was particularly visible in the narratives. As I showed in the findings section, the designers told stories of how different design people start to divide already at school level to different subgroups with different interests and values. All the informants were much aware of where in these groupings they sat themselves. For an outsider like me, it was at times surprising how particular these groupings were. For instance, I had in my mind labeled Kate and Kim as Fashion designers, but they insisted different. Kim identified herself as an active wear designer and told a supporting narrative that this line of design was only recently gaining acknowledgement thanks to known fashion designer's collaborating with sportswear brands. Similarly Kate saw herself first and foremost as an underwear designer and talked a lot about the group dynamics of this small group. Both stated that their design areas were very competitive, but at the same time they seemed to be very proud of their own areas of expertise. They were driven to these areas of design due to their own interests and felt pride in designing fashion that they were passionate about. Likewise there seemed to be a strong in-group bias (Brewer, 1999) within the graphic designer community that tended to tell stories of the very competitive and somehow slightly vague and crooked fashion designers. Group membership is a central concept of the social identity theory and my findings suggest that it is an important construct of what it means to be a design professional.

In an interesting article by Eckert et al. (2010) the researchers sought to understand the similarities of designers work and brought together designers from different areas. The results showed that the knowledge and discourses for all the designers were the same as many of the issues in the daily work. I also felt that the designers had a very similar way of talking about their work and the design process, but were still inclined to silo themselves in a field of design pretty strictly. This might be a result of how the education is structured. As Peter mentioned, the grouping starts at school in lunch tables and different designers start to move away into their own areas. It could be just a learned narrative that has developed from the need to feel special and to highlight your special skills as a certain type of designer or create a new market for a different sort of design as to make more room for the growing profession. It could also be a combination of all these things.

Brewer (1999) suggests that social differentiation of people into in-groups and out-groups has its roots in our evolution and has provided people with a benefit in terms of safety and food supply continuity. As another explanation she offers optimal distinctiveness theory that group identification is a product of the opposing needs of inclusion and differentiation from others. This juxtaposition of assimilation and differentiation was very apparent in the designers' narratives. My

findings suggested that the designers were struggling at finding a balance between staying true to themselves and maintaining a network with their colleagues that they relied on for work and chances to make it big. Also the grouping to different sub-groups of design is in my opinion a proof that these needs are at play when people identify with a design area.

7.3 Identity Project Evaluation, Conflicts and Responses

Harré (2007) explained that after physical and biological needs, people seek to fulfill four higher level needs. These were 1) belonging, 2) stimulation, 3) efficacy and 4) integrity. Particularly important factors for my informants were efficacy and integrity concerns. Efficacy means meeting ones goals and integrity being true to you. In cases where these two needs were unfulfilled, identity conflicts were apparent. According to Ahuvia (2005) we strive towards a coherent sense of the self. When we ultimately find ourselves between binary oppositions that create identity conflicts we need to find a way to resolve them. Harré's model continues with commitment and action after the evaluation phase but I argue that it can also lead us to exit, abandon or to momentarily put on hold an identity project or an aspect of it. Identity conflicts or threats (Ahuvia 2005; Petriglieri, 2011) can act as triggers for a need to evaluate an identity project and identity conflicts can arise out of the project characteristics. I found such identity inconsistencies in my informants' narratives and it seemed that they always elicited a response. In some cases it meant an identity exit either partially to working as a contractor to avoid pressures from business needs and sometimes completely parting a profession from designer to artist.

A perceived identity inconsistency or imbalance stems from the context of individuals, meaning category traits in terms of social identity. Belonging to a social network affects self-verification and self-efficacy. Individuals belonging to homogenized groups receive affirmation and support for their identity from peers. Likewise a person in a homogenous group possessing a different identity from everyone else feels a strong inconsistency and a pressure to conform (McFarland and Pals, 2012). Such a mechanism could be a partial explanation to why the designers seemed to be so narrowly divided into subgroups of design. Also the inconsistency of not fitting in in the case of Mike for example could have contributed to his decision to exit his identity project.

At least some of Petriglieri's (2011) identity threat responses were perceived. Derogation was used to reframe the source of the conflict as invalid when business needs were threatening the integrity

of the designer. To be more specific Petriglieri presents three types of anticipated identity harm that were devaluing an identity in the future, changing meanings of an identity and preventing enactment of an identity. I find all three to be combined in the business needs versus being creative dilemma since giving more power to the client can devalue the designer identity, change the meanings or make them unsustainable and potentially also change the way the work has to be done preventing enactment. Also concealment responses were apparent in social media practices towards clients as well as when networking when people had to put their true feelings aside and mingle with industry insiders or buyers. On the restructuring side of responses my informants narrated changing the meanings of the threatened identity as well as partial or whole identity exit. What was interesting about the identity exit phenomenon is that identity projects are an iterative process where old selves are used as inspiration for new identity projects. Schau et al. (2009) have stated that when a life narrative is revised people may use past selves as an inspiration on building the new identity. Such a revision could be seen in Mike's return to the art world where he had started.

7.4 Social Media Practices

Boyd (2007) suggested impression management is easier online, because physical bodies do not restrict individuals, in giving out identity cues to our environment. At the same time the online image of a person is always much cruder and more prone for misinterpretation. Through our social media profiles we can express salient aspects of our identities to others. Because the majority of people we have as "friends" online are also in our social networks offline, people have a tendency to present information that they think will be well received by their audience." (Boyd, 2007)

The informants in my study seemed to be very aware of the kind of picture that they were giving out in social networking sites such as Facebook. A good example was Tom that did not want to post about his operated shoulder because he might miss work opportunities or not appearing to be too busy by posting about work and travel because then his client connections might revert from booking him. Similar stories of intricate lines of thought and a sort of editing around what to share online were consistent in all informants' accounts. What was also evident was a strong desire to appear interesting and active. My informants did not find it necessary to write about their everyday struggles or mundane tasks, but were more inclined to share content that made them appear funny, interesting, well off and overall in a positive light. Thus positive expected feedback guides our behavior and we use possessions or in this case digital images, text and more in order to

communicate aspects of ourselves to others just as Grubb and Gratwohl (1967) anticipated. They were naturally talking about face-to-face communication, but the common logic of the identity theories seems to apply online as well. My findings can also be seen to support Schau and Gilly's (2003) notion, that the web space offers limitless digital symbols and may allow researchers to see the selves consumers wish they had.

I also found support for Donath and Boyd's (2004) claim that people are inclined to communicate with their existing networks online. All of my informants confessed to being very picky to choosing friends and had mostly included people they already knew from the offline world. Approaches by people they had never met were found slightly unnerving. The logic of accepting people, as friends seemed to concentrate on how many common friends the informants had together with the contact taker. If they shared many friends, it was more socially acceptable to befriend an unknown, but if they shared no connections making contact was seen as strange and unfitting. Donath and Boyd (2004) have stated that due to the visual nature of the connections online they provide others with information of who you are. In other words: you are whom you know.

This dynamic could also be at play in choosing which social media to join. All of my informants admitted to finding for example Facebook through friends that had recommended it to them. Some like Peter endured many pleas from different people before deciding to join the service and some seemed to have done it unwillingly as was the case with Robert that was very skeptical to social media at large. Thus I found evidence for Timmor and Katz Navon (2008), who explain that one reason to join large groups regards to information technology might be a network effect where the overall popularity of a service grows exponentially because the more people a person can reach through this network the more beneficial group membership becomes. An example of this in regard to my study would be joining Facebook. My findings support the logic that a person will be more inclined to join the site when a lot of people they know already are members of the network making it more appealing in terms of what it can do for them.

More novel approaches also explain how in social media you can create representations of who you are (Walker, 2005), but actually such sites can also instead be seen to create representations of us (Walker Rettberg, 2009). In her example she discusses specific services that are aimed at giving a picture or a report of our activities such as Dopplr that gives an annual report on your travels that you have logged on the service. The link to Belk talking about physical possessions is tantalizing "The possessions in our extended self also give us an archive or museum that allows us to reflect on

our histories and how we have changed” (Belk, 1988, 159). Such ideas are indirectly linked to Peter that gave an account on how he used his Facebook profile as storage for links, pictures and other content that he had found online and stored in his profile for later use. In a sense he was gathering an inspiration archive for him to maybe use in his work, but posting it online for his network to see makes it simultaneously a representation of things that he finds interesting for himself and for others.

Although Belk’s (1988) article of identity and consumption is older, it is almost as if he wrote it about social media. He described three ways that objects are incorporated into the extended self. 1) Appropriation: gaining control or ownership, 2) creation: such as baking or writing 3) knowing someone or something. In social media all three are possible simultaneously. You create a profile or a blog, write text and post pictures to bring it to life and then connect to others. A slight difference is that the service provider restricts the control over your profile and the technical platform and everything written or posted online can have a life of its own afterwards being replicated, copied and reposted. It seems that identity is becoming much more visible through social media. But managing it is also becoming more complex due to the multitude of platforms and consideration of invisible audiences (Boyd, 2007). It would be interesting to compare social media practices of the older users with the younger. I would assume that those who have experienced an alternative way of playing out an identity only in the offline probably have a much more cautious way of using social media.

7.5 The Postmodern Design Professional

In the information age, information is increasingly digital, and designers make use of computers and software in their work. Robert that represented a more old-school view of design expressed disdain over the growing inability of designers to sketch by drawing on paper. On the other hand, informants narrated social media and web overall as a space where they find inspiration. Before, inspiration was sought by interacting with the physical marketplace by going to cinemas and cafes and looking at the world with own eyes. Naturally even through own eyes all observations are subject to the value systems of the observer and never objective, but consider the current situation. All digital content is by nature already filtered by someone. Someone has chosen to upload a picture, write a weblog or post a story. This pre-filtering and further sifting of information can lead

to trends becoming increasingly unified because certain popular phenomena are amplified. They are shared and used by new designers for inspiration. This homogenizes the trends and design discourses and leads to a similar design aesthetic all over the world.

Other factors influencing might be globalization, and commercialization of design, but nonetheless it would be interesting to study whether design is becoming narrower and more homogenized because of the increasing interaction with pre-filtered symbols of the digital marketplace. It might be that the designers in my study were overly nostalgic about the previous times, but the question I am raising is nonetheless real.

8. Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research

The aim of this study was to understand how design professionals construct their identity and identity projects, what kind of meanings are attached to these, what kinds of conflicts they pose and what is the role of social media in these identity projects and conflicts. I find that marketers can learn a great deal about consumers by looking at symbolic consumption and I hope to have contributed new perspectives to the study of social media consumption and identity projects. Through interviews and hermeneutic analysis of 8 designer narratives I have attempted to give a description of the realities that the designers inhabit. The task was not simple but I have managed to find occurring themes that give a glimpse to the meanings attached to being a design professional. How those meanings are socially constructed and how a designer identity is inherently linked to group and category membership. The identity project model proved valuable in giving a structure for the narratives of becoming and being a designer and I found supporting narratives for active evaluation of those identity projects. There seems to be a need for a cohesive identity and therefore identity conflicts threatening an identity or a part of it are major issues that affect the agents' commitment and identity enactment and can even lead to identity exit. As a whole I hope to have given the reader a glimpse into these designers lives and advanced understanding of the realities of these trendsetters of our culture.

As mentioned earlier this a study could have benefited from ethnographic methods such as online observation of their social media profiles to contrast narratives with observation on actual behavior. Also it would be interesting to compare social media practices on a larger scale to see whether there exists a difference between different age groups. It is an interesting finding that social media functions as an inspiration source for designers and helps negotiate conflicts between being creative and the needs of the business side of design. Also different social media services can be used to separate the personal and private spheres and can help alienate the tension between distinction as a designer innovator and immersion in and acceptance by the design community at large or smaller subgroups.

Further studies on design education could research how the education planning and cross-functional teamwork could help diminish the division into design subgroups that starts at school level. It can, however, also be argued that this division has a function of giving meaning and improving self-esteem of design sub communities. Either way this issue has potential for further social research.

Also I found clues that the profession of design is changing due to digitalization of the ways of working. It would be interesting to study in depth how this is impacting the trends and narratives of design. I hypothesized that it might have a homogenizing effect and it would be interesting to test this assumption.

This has been a study on consumption with the context being social media and I have managed to find support for previous studies on social media practices. Future studies should look at the mirroring effect of social media more in detail and look at how social media profiles can also function as windows to ourselves and tell us who we are as well as to others. It seems that although the actions online are restricted by technical issues and logic of the sites people work around them and can find novel approaches to using social media for example by storing inspiration for later use. Only by understanding the multitude of ways by which identity work is carried out online can we understand what social media can truly mean in the future with more and more social interaction carried online. Does it have a supportive and extensive function for the physical world interaction or does it create a completely new form of interaction?

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Appendix 1. The Interview frame

1. Background

- **Can you tell me a little about your background?**
- Where did you go to school?
- What was your family like?
- What did you dream of becoming as a kid?
- Where do you live now?

2. Work

- **What do you work with?**
- What does your everyday work include?
- How social is your work?
- What does design mean to you?
- How has the design profession changed?
- What is the meaning of education in design?

3. Social Media

- **What social media do you use?**
- What does it mean to you?
- How do you use it?
- For what purposes do you use social media?
- Why do you use it?

*Questions in bold were used to start the discussion. The rest of the discussion flowed freely from there.