

Chapter 6

Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

“ It’s a way of thinking”

Jean-Marie Dru

6.1 Introduction

Chapter Six will commence with a brief reflection on and reinforcement of the focus and architecture of this study. The purpose is to ensure that the context in which the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning is developed and applied, is evident and clear.

The chapter will then proceed to present the collective key findings of the qualitative exploratory research study. These findings are the result of a planned and focussed primary research study based on research propositions and objectives derived from a comprehensive study of literature. The key research findings present the variables to the development and design of the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning. The key research findings also present guidelines to the development of hypotheses for future empirical research studies. Individual variables within the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning or the model as a whole, can therefore be further researched to produce more finite empirical research results.

In conclusion to Chapter Six and this study, the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning will be presented and discussed. It is envisaged that those companies and agencies in industry that recognise and are responsive to the explorative and experimental nature of the alternative brand contact and alternative brand contact planning, will find the model meaningful and immediately applicable in own planning terms.

Recommendations for future research studies will be offered in conclusion to the study.

6.2 A Reflection on the Focus and Architecture of the Study

The focus of this study is the alternative brand contact and the planning thereof. The literature study presents the alternative brand contact as a planned form of contact with the brand that is experienced by consumers as unexpected and unconventional. The aim of the alternative brand contact is defined in the study of literature as to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.

The nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact are explored on two levels. Firstly through an investigation of literature and secondly, through a three-phase qualitative exploratory research study conducted in the South African marketing and communications industry, hence the title of the study – **The role of alternative brand contact planning in the South African marketing and communication industry.**

The theoretical context and foundation to this study is set in Chapter Two with the outside-in approach to Brand Contact Management. It is established that a brand is built through every level of contact, through product, service, planned and unplanned points of contact, in consumer and customer markets. Every form of contact communicates and either adds to, or erodes the value of the brand in consumers' minds.

The brand contact approach pursues an outside-in (consumer oriented) thinking and planning pattern. Because consumers do not differentiate between the myriad of contact point experiences, all points of brand contact must be integrated to communicate and reinforce the core identity of the brand. The strategic aim is to take ownership of a consumer relevant and differentiated brand positioning on a clear-cut and singular level at every point of contact. The more focussed the brand positioning, the greater the brand contact synergy or integration.

It is within the context of the outside-in approach to brand contact management and the introduction of a dedicated cross-functional Brand Contact Task Team that the need for a zero-based planning platform that is based on consumers' current experience of points of brand contact, is motivated in Chapter Two. The Brand Contact Audit is consequently presented as a platform neutral foundation to brand contact planning. The aim is to identify the key contact issues facing the brand, from an outside-in and zero-based planning perspective (no preconceived ideas), and accordingly to develop appropriate brand contact objectives, contact strategies and bottom-up budgets. The development and implementation of a Brand Charter is then also promoted. The purpose is to codify the brand identity and brand positioning strategy. The Brand Contact Task Team implements the Brand Charter as the strategic guide to the process of integrated brand contact planning and management.

According to several authors, outside-in, zero-based and cross-functional brand contact planning is enhanced as the advertising agency is involved as an objective and valued strategic partner, in the process. Chapter Two is concluded with the argument that to play a meaningful role and to add value, the traditional advertising agency will have to evolve into a strategic partner that delivers integrated brand communications solutions.

Thus the need for Integrated Communications Agencies that comprises of cross-functional account teams that provide holistic, integrated communications solutions, profound strategic advice and outside-in and zero-based planning, is argued. The truly Integrated Communications Agency thus delivers effective, integrated planned brand contact strategies but also has the skill and expertise to compliment and advise on the holistic integration of all points of brand contact. A partnership philosophy between the Brand Contact Task Team and cross-functional account team within the Integrated Communications Agency is then made possible and the process of integrated brand contact management is optimised.

Of importance to this study is that the alternative brand contact is positioned as a means to break through commercial clutter barriers to achieve impact, to communicate and reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand. The alternative brand contact must ultimately achieve branded impact, to contribute to the integrated brand contact strategy and the process of brand building. Chapter Two is thus regarded as a sound and valuable foundation to this study. The alternative brand contact is furthermore introduced on the grounds of integrated brand contact thinking, in other words, outside-in and zero-based thinking.

With Chapter Two as a theoretical foundation, Chapter Three investigated the concept of alternative brand contact as a planned point of brand contact, through the study of literature, in context of clients increasing need for innovative planned brand contact solutions that will break through increasing communication clutter barriers.

It is firstly argued that the concept 'alternative' is greatly applied in the marketing and communications industry from the inside-out, from the practitioner's point of view in context of industry media classifications, such as above-the-line mass media versus below-the-line 'alternative' media. Based on the outside-in and zero-based brand contact planning philosophy, it is established in Chapter Three, that it is the nature of contact with the consumer that establishes the alternative brand contact appeal and not the use of one medium as opposed to another. In keeping with the outside-in and zero-based planning approach, the alternative brand contact is media neutral and qualifies as any unconventional or unexpected point of contact, whether in a traditional or non-traditional media environment.

Two key motivators for the growth of alternative brand contacts were investigated. Firstly, clients are increasingly seeking innovative brand contact solutions within and beyond the traditional scope of brand communications. Secondly, and in support of the first, rising levels of expected communications clutter is resulting in target audiences increasing their commercial defenses, in the form of selective exposure and attention measures.

Chapter Three proceeded to argue that advertisers should not only rely on the creativity of the planned brand communications message to break through clutter. Creative strategic thinking must be applied to produce alternative brand contacts that will reach audiences that have become jaded by the brand communications onslaught. The challenge, as is argued, is to move beyond, or to manipulate traditional communication vehicles to target consumers in an unconventional manner, when and where they least expect to encounter a brand message and when they are in a susceptible state of mind.

To attain this goal, Chapter Three continued to reason that innovative thinking and creative strategic planning is required. Hence, Dru's (1996:54; 2002:19) theory of disruption and the need to apply creative strategic thinking to develop contact solutions that will break through clutter to build the brand, is investigated. Of importance is that Dru's disruption theory reinforces that to develop alternative brand contact solutions, the account team will have to move from the outside-in, from a zero-base and media neutral planning platform and apply creative-strategic thinking in the process of doing so.

Chapter Three proceeded to explore the concept of creative strategic thinking and specifically the nature of creativity therein. The outcome reveals that the mindset and sense of purpose of the team involved in the creative process, is the critical factor. It is established that the mindset of the account team and its sense of purpose are more important in alternative brand contact planning, than the development and implementation of creative techniques to produce creative solutions.

The nature and role of the account team within the Integrated Communications Agency, is therefore revisited in Chapter Three, as the make-up and planning environment of the account team will inevitably affect its mindset and sense of purpose in alternative brand contact planning. The integrated and cross-functional account team, with the confluence of strategic, media and creative resources, is found to present an organic environment conducive to innovative creative strategic thinking and thus alternative brand contact planning. It is also argued that an environment or culture that

welcomes and stimulates exploration and experimentation is required to undertake alternative brand contact planning and to produce alternative brand contact solutions.

Finally, to ensure that an objective assessment of the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact is achieved, also in context of the purpose of integrated brand contact management, Chapter Three identified a number of barriers to the concept and process. These were identified as:

- The departmentalised agency structure
- Inside-out thinking in brand contact planning
- Media biased and commission based brand contact planning
- Total reliance on message creativity
- Reliance on media planning systems and measurement data

An integrated assessment of the barriers revealed that the greatest collective barrier to alternative brand contact planning, prove to be mindset. An inside-out, departmentalised, media-biased and research bound strategic planning mindset, lacking in creative strategic purpose and thinking is not conducive to alternative brand contact planning.

In response to the above barriers, Chapter Three next identified and concluded with alternative brand contact requisites. Given the vital influence of mindset, the requisites are based on the premise that an outside-in, zero-based, media-neutral and creative strategic planning mindset and sense of purpose is encouraged and practiced by the client, Integrated Communications Agency and account team. The requisites identified are as follows:

- Impact and the novelty of the alternative brand contact
- Impact and the communication effectiveness of the alternative brand contact
- Impact and communicating a single-minded brand identity

- Impact and target audience relevance
- Continued impact of the alternative brand contact

The primary outcome of the study of literature on the approach to brand contact management and the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact revealed that:

The unconventional and unexpected point of planned brand contact can break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.

The above stated suggestion consequently presented the **central proposition** to the primary qualitative exploratory research study and also the research problem to the study. That is, it remained to be seen, whether the alternative brand contact is perceived by the South African marketing and communications industry as such.

The study of literature however also revealed that the ability of the alternative brand contact to break through commercial clutter barriers, to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand is found to depend on a set of requisites. The research problem thus became more layered as integral research propositions were developed to encapsulate the identified alternative brand contact requisites. The purpose of the primary research study, as discussed in Chapter Four, was therefore to explore the central and integral research propositions in real world terms.

The research methodology to the primary research study was developed in Chapter Four through motivated research steps, to present the process of research. As motivated in Chapter Four, the central and integral research propositions and related primary and supporting research objectives to the primary research study, were pursued through a three-phase qualitative exploratory research design that involves self-report data source selection methods in the form of exploratory focus groups and semi-structured depth

interviews. The core purpose of the three-phase qualitative exploratory research study was to explore attitudes, opinions and motivations toward the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact in depth.

The sample of six Integrated Communications Agencies was identified through non-probability sampling and specifically purposive judgment sampling. The Managing Directors of the agencies identified a senior account team in their agency. The samples of key clients (Marketing and Brand Managers) and key players in senior account teams, evolved organically from the sample of senior account teams.

Chapter Five was devoted to the real world dynamics encountered in the implementation of the three-phase qualitative exploratory research study, the analysis of data as assisted through thematic content analysis as an instrument and finally, the results produced through the three phases of research.

Exploratory focus groups were conducted with the six senior account teams from the sample of Integrated Communications Agencies, in the first phase of the research. The results produced in this first phase of research lead to the development of enriched research propositions and objectives, which were integrated into the design of the interview guide to the second phase of research. The second phase of research entailed semi-structured depth interviews with ten key clients of the sample of senior account teams. The results produced in this phase of research lead to the further enrichment of research propositions and objectives. This measure revealed a high correlation in senior account team and key client opinions and attitudes. It was concluded, at this point in the research study, that the senior account teams and key clients agree to the central research proposition and the vast majority of integral research propositions (Table 5 in 5.7 of Chapter 5). The primary research objective and most of the supporting research objectives were thus achieved in completion to the second phase of research.

Consequently, a more focussed interview guide was designed to the final phase of research - the semi-structured depth interviews with key players in the senior account teams. The researcher thus had the opportunity to focus on, and explore the propositions that did not reveal complete correlation in senior account team and key client attitudes and opinions and the propositions that were newly identified by key clients in the second phase of research.

The collective key findings of the qualitative exploratory research study will next be presented to lead to the development of a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning.

6.3 The Key Research Findings

Research results were progressively produced and propositions and objectives were progressively enriched through the stages of data analysis, as a result of the three- phase design of the qualitative exploratory research study.

The key findings of the qualitative exploratory research study present the variables to the design of a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning. Importantly, the findings also present guidelines according to which hypotheses for future empirical research can be formulated. Sixteen key findings were produced through the three-phase exploratory study.

The sixteen key findings will next be presented as one primary finding and fifteen supporting findings. The primary finding addresses the key finding to the central research proposition and related primary research objective. The supporting findings present the key findings to the integral research propositions and related supporting research objectives.

6.3.1 The Primary Finding

The central research proposition and primary research objective was confirmed and addressed by all of the senior account teams and key clients interviewed. It can thus be concluded, based on this qualitative exploratory research study, that:

The unconventional and unexpected point of planned brand contact breaks through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers, to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.

This first key finding, in answer to the primary research objective, presents the **primary finding** produced by the qualitative exploratory research study.

6.3.2 The Supporting Findings

The following fifteen key findings were produced through the qualitative exploration of the original and thereupon the enriched integral research propositions, in the pursuit of achieving the supporting research objectives to the qualitative exploratory research study. These key findings, as stated, present the **supporting findings** produced by the qualitative exploratory research study and the variables to the design of a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning.

- 1. The alternative brand contact differentiates the brand because it is perceived as unconventional, but must communicate what the brand stands for.**

All of the senior account teams believe that the alternative brand contact differentiates the brand because it is experienced by consumers, as different from the norm. The use of an alternative brand contact per se, is perceived as a brand differentiation tool. All of the key clients interviewed agreed, but

insisted that what the brand stands for (single-minded brand positioning), must be communicated effectively. The aim is not only to position the brand as different, but also to communicate and achieve meaningful brand differentiation.

2. Alternative brand contact planning is a brand communications planning philosophy and involves the disruption of brand communication norms to break through clutter.

Four of the senior account teams are of the opinion that alternative brand contact planning should not be confined to tactical communication opportunities, but should be positioned and practised as a brand communications planning philosophy that “*spans all media*”. Three of the four senior account teams furthermore reasoned that alternative brand contact planning involves the disruption of brand communication norms to break through clutter.

All of the key clients interviewed are in agreement that alternative brand contact planning is a brand communications planning philosophy that should, as respondents for example argued, “*be applied in all brand communication contexts*” to “*disrupt the expected in order to deliver the unexpected*”.

3. Alternative brand contacts generate word-of-mouth and publicity, but it must contribute to the process of brand building.

Five of the six senior account teams believe that because of its unconventional and unexpected status, the alternative brand contact draws the attention of consumers to get talked about and the attention of the media to be reported about. All of the key clients interviewed agreed but elaborated that the talk value and publicity gained must contribute to the process of brand building. The alternative brand contact fails in its communication effectiveness

if it is solely recalled and talked about for its creative and unconventional approach and not also for its brand appeal.

4. The alternative brand contact is more memorable, but memorability must carry brand meaning to be of value.

Three senior account teams described the alternative brand contact as more memorable than traditional and expected points of brand contact, because of its unconventional and unexpected appeal. All of the key clients agreed, but were again (as is the case with word-of-mouth and publicity), concerned that the alternative brand contact may be remembered for its unconventional and not also its brand appeal. To be considered of value, memorability must, according to all key clients, carry brand meaning.

5. The alternative brand contact in ambient media form is more focussed and cost efficient, but must reinforce the brand identity and integrate into the brand communications strategy to add value.

According to three of the senior account teams the ambient alternative brand contact delivers strategic focus on target audiences – “*where they are*” and “*where they really live their lives*” and therefore achieves impact cost efficiently.

All of the key clients agreed but elaborated that to add value, the ambient alternative brand contact must reinforce the brand identity to integrate into the brand communications strategy. The ambient alternative brand contact that fails to achieve brand relevance is “*simply a gimmick*” that will be experienced by consumers as an “*intrusion*” or an “*invasion*”.

6. To achieve impact the alternative brand contact must be relevant to the consumer in terms of lifestyle patterns, interests and state-of-mind.

All of the senior account teams believe that the target audience relevance of the alternative brand contact is critical to its ability to break through clutter to achieve impact. The relevance of the alternative brand contact to the lifestyle patterns, interests and state-of-mind of the target audience, were addressed by the senior account teams in indirect terms.

However, all of the key clients, in context of the need for outside-in thinking in alternative brand contact planning, directly addressed the relevance of the alternative brand contact to the lifestyle patterns, interests and state-of-mind of the target audience, as a requisite to achieving impact. As one respondent concluded, *“you must engage with their lifestyles, their day-to-day experiences, what they think and feel, their outlook, what they will and wont appreciate at a point in time, to present relevant and effective alternative brand contact solutions”*.

7. To create meaningful impact the alternative brand contact must in message content and form communicate a relevant, distinctive and single-minded positioning of the brand.

All of the senior account teams are of the opinion that brand relevance is a critical alternative brand contact requisite. The teams established that the alternative brand contact must communicate and reinforce a single-minded or focussed brand positioning in terms of message and form of contact, to integrate into the brand contact strategy and contribute to the process of brand building. All of the key clients interviewed, perceived this to be a given. As one of the respondents stated, *“the brand is everything and brand relevance and integration must be achieved on every level”*.

8. The alternative brand contact must be novel to be noticed and expressive of meaning to attain impact.

The two integral propositions: To achieve impact the alternative brand contact must be novel to be noticed, and: The alternative brand contact must be expressive of meaning to attain impact, are integrated into a single key finding. The motivation for doing so is found in senior account teams and key clients' responses to these measures.

Both propositions were positioned and discussed as implicit alternative brand contact requisites by all respondents. Senior account team and key client responses revealed that it is a given that the alternative brand contact must be perceived as novel by consumers to be noticed and that it must be expressive of meaning, to successfully communicate and reinforce a focussed brand positioning.

Also, the alternative brand contact that is noticed by consumers because of its novelty, but fails in its expression of meaning, in the expression of a single-minded positioning of the brand, is relegated by respondents, to the level of a 'gimmick' that merely increases clutter and potentially damages the brand. All respondents and in particular key clients expressed this concern in more than one context on more than one occasion.

9. An outside-in, zero-based, brand-based, media neutral and creative strategic planning mindset supported by an integrated and cross-functional account team and fee or performance based agency remuneration systems.

The above key finding is clearly multi-faceted. It is presented in this form because the concepts involved were perceived by the senior account teams as related and by the key clients as totally inter-related.

The mindset of alternative brand contact planning was found to be of paramount importance by senior account teams and key clients alike. The literature finding that mindset and sense of purpose are more important in alternative brand contact planning than the development and implementation of creative techniques to produce creative solutions is thus reinforced.

All of the senior account teams identified the need for consumer oriented, outside-in thinking in alternative brand contact planning. Five of the senior account teams furthermore believe that a zero-based and media neutral mindset is a requisite to alternative brand contact planning. All of the key clients are in agreement, but elaborated that alternative brand contact planning must be zero-based to produce unconventional ideas, yet brand-oriented to ensure that the idea is relevant to the brand and what it stands for. In the final phase of research all of the key players in senior account teams acknowledged that alternative brand contact planning is both zero- and brand-based.

Five of the senior account teams and all of the key clients reasoned that the alternative brand contact results from creative strategic planning and that an integrated and cross-functional account team environment, is therefore a requisite to alternative brand contact planning. The confluence of creative and strategic expertise and skills in the integrated and cross-functional account team is found to produce creative strategic thinking.

Five of the senior account teams identified a media commission-based agency remuneration system as a barrier to zero-based, media neutral thinking and thus alternative brand contact planning. All of the key clients, in agreement, are adamant that a fee or performance-based agency remuneration system is a requisite to media neutral and creative strategic thinking and thus alternative brand contact planning.

All of the senior account teams and key clients devoted considerable time to discussing the mindset of alternative brand contact planning. The majority of requisites and barriers that were introduced by the senior account teams and

key clients also relate to the mindset of those involved in alternative brand contact planning. It can thus be concluded, based on a collective assessment of the opinions, attitudes and motivations of the senior account teams and their key clients, that the mindset of alternative brand contact planning is more critical a factor than the development of specific creative techniques to produce creative ideas.

10. Agency and client confidence and an integrated client-account team relationship.

Five of the senior account teams reasoned that agencies must have the confidence to undertake alternative brand contact planning and to present unexpected and unconventional solutions, to their clients. Clients in turn must, according to the senior account teams, have the confidence to implement alternative brand contact solutions. According to three of the senior account teams confidence in alternative brand contact planning and unconventional contact solutions will grow if an integrated client-account team relationship is developed, to encourage joint-decision making and to establish trust.

All of the key clients acknowledged that agency and client confidence in alternative brand contact planning is needed and that an integrated client-account team relationship is a requisite to alternative brand contact planning. However, according to key clients an integrated account team relationship is needed more so, to ensure that alternative brand contact solutions that are relevant to the brand are produced.

It is in this regard that six of the key clients interviewed introduced a counter argument. According to six of the key clients, their confidence to undertake alternative brand contact planning is linked to one key barrier and that is that despite their integrated and hands-on approach in building a relationship, agencies often fail to present alternative brand contact solutions that are relevant to the brand. This issue was addressed and further explored in the

final phase of research with key players in the senior account teams. The next key finding presents the outcome.

11. Alternative brand contact planning must be based on a single-minded brand positioning strategy and a shared set of criteria.

Four of the senior account teams identified lack of client confidence, as a barrier to alternative brand contact planning. According to these teams, clients lack the confidence to implement unconventional brand contact solutions, greatly as a result of the lack of evidence of their effectiveness.

Six of the key client interviewed however reasoned that they would employ alternative brand contact solutions, despite the lack of evidence of their effectiveness, if they do demonstrate the potential to break through clutter to achieve branded impact. The barrier, according to these six key clients is rather that agencies fail to present alternative brand contact solutions that are relevant to the brand.

This issue was addressed in the final phase of research with the key players in the interviewed senior account teams. Ten of the fourteen key players acknowledged that clients do perhaps/maybe have a point. However, the key players identified two causes of the lack of brand relevance in alternative points of brand contact. Consequently, two further requisites to alternative brand contact planning are introduced in the final stage of research. Firstly, a single-minded brand positioning must be in place. As one of the key players stated, *“vague brand positioning strategies make for a lethal relationship”*. Secondly, a shared set of criteria must be set by the client and account team, from which alternative brand contact ideas can be developed and assessed – *“We need to affirm criteria before the process starts. It’s very difficult to evaluate new alternative ideas if you don’t know what you are evaluating it against”*.

A holistic assessment of research data and key findings produced, reveals that the introduction of a single-minded brand positioning platform and a shared set of criteria from which alternative brand contact solutions are developed and assessed, may address many of the identified concerns and barriers to alternative brand contact planning. Branded impact can be achieved if alternative brand contact planning resumes from and is evaluated against a single-minded brand positioning platform and a shared set of criteria. Thus clients will, given previous research results, have the confidence to implement alternative brand contact strategies, despite the lack of evidence of their effectiveness. It is also possible that less time and energy will then need to be invested in persuading parties involved, of the merit of an alternative brand contact strategy as arguments can be developed from and against the criteria set.

12. The unconventional status and impact of the alternative brand contact must be maintained. 'Great' alternative brand contact concepts leverage brand communication spaces to maintain impact - proactive innovative thinking is required.

All of the key clients interviewed believe that the alternative brand contact must maintain its unconventional status to ensure it consistently breaks through commercial clutter barriers to achieve impact. According to clients innovative thinking is required to leverage or improve on alternative brand contact concepts.

All of the key players were in agreement and elaborated that 'great' alternative brand contact concepts demonstrate the potential to leverage brand communication spaces. To attain this goal and to ensure impact is maintained, the key players believe, in agreement with clients, that proactive innovative thinking is required.

13. Alternative brand contact strategies are in general not more costly and focus should be on the cost-benefit.

Four of the key clients interviewed raised the cost of implementing alternative brand contact solutions, as a concern. Ten of the interviewed key players in senior account teams' however argued that in general, alternative brand contact strategies are not more costly to implement.

A closer investigation of the research data reveals that in essence no real conflict in client and account team opinion exists. Clients primarily raised cost as a concern with reference to alternative brand contact strategies that are implemented in magazines, as did four of the key players in the senior account teams. Two of the key players furthermore reasoned that the loaded costs encountered in implementing unconventional brand contact ideas in print publications, is sure to be less of a concern in future as *“print owner are coming to the party”*.

Also, three of the four key clients stated that they are prepared to invest in alternative brand contact strategies if they do demonstrate the potential to achieve branded impact. The cost-benefit argument that is presented by the key players within the senior account teams, as a requisite to alternative brand contact planning, is thus in keeping with client opinion.

14. Alternative brand contact planning requires open-minded media planners and media owners.

Four senior account teams confirmed that conventional media planning will constrain creative strategic planning and therefore does present a barrier to alternative brand contact planning. Four of the senior account teams also identified the resistance of media owners to implement unconventional brand contact solutions, as a barrier to alternative brand contact planning. All of the key clients were in agreement that media planners who work within the comfort zone of conventional media planning frameworks and that media

owners who solely operate by their medium's placement 'rules', will present definite barriers to alternative brand contact planning. Respondents argued that alternative brand contact planning requires open-minded media planners and media owners.

15. The planning and implementation of alternative brand contacts is time and energy consuming.

Three of the senior account teams experience alternative brand contact planning as time and energy consuming. Although the account teams view alternative brand contact planning as a "*planning philosophy and a passion*" and insist that they "*will persevere*", they are continuously challenged to invest time and energy in persuading clients and media owners, of the merit of an alternative brand contact strategy. Eight of the key clients however commented that they are quite prepared to take the risk involved in implementing an alternative brand contact strategy, given certain requisites, but are likewise challenged to invest time and energy in persuading their management of the value of an alternative brand contact approach.

An objective and holistic assessment of data reveals that this barrier can perhaps be alleviated. The concern of both clients and senior account teams is the time and energy that is required to convince respective parties of the merit of an alternative brand contact strategy. If, as previously argued (finding 11), alternative brand contact planning is based on a single-minded brand positioning strategy and is developed from and assessed against a shared set of criteria, this barrier or challenge will in all probability be addressed. It can be reasoned that armed with a single-minded brand positioning strategy and a shared set of criteria, all parties involved are working from the same planning platform and can equally so employ such a platform in the process of persuading other parties, such as client management and media owners.

A more valuable finding to employ as a guideline in the development of a hypothesis for future research might thus be:

Alternative brand contact planning is less time and energy consuming in terms of persuading parties involved of the merit of an alternative brand contact strategy, when a single-minded brand positioning strategy and a shared set of criteria from which alternative brand contacts are planned and evaluated, is employed.

The above key findings, as previously motivated, confirmed the central and addressed the enriched integral research propositions and present the primary finding and supporting findings produced by the qualitative exploratory research study. It is the researcher's opinion that further research on any one of the above findings will contribute to a deeper understanding and possibly deliver empirical evidence of the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact.

Of immediate significance is that the key findings present the variables to the design and development of a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning. The agencies and companies who recognise and are comfortable with the experimental nature of alternative brand contact planning, can apply the proposed model in own planning terms. Those companies and agencies that are in need of empirical evidence can apply the key findings as guidelines in the formulation of hypotheses for future research, to then confirm or improve upon the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning.

Chapter Six will now be concluded with the design and discussion of a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning.

6.4 A Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning

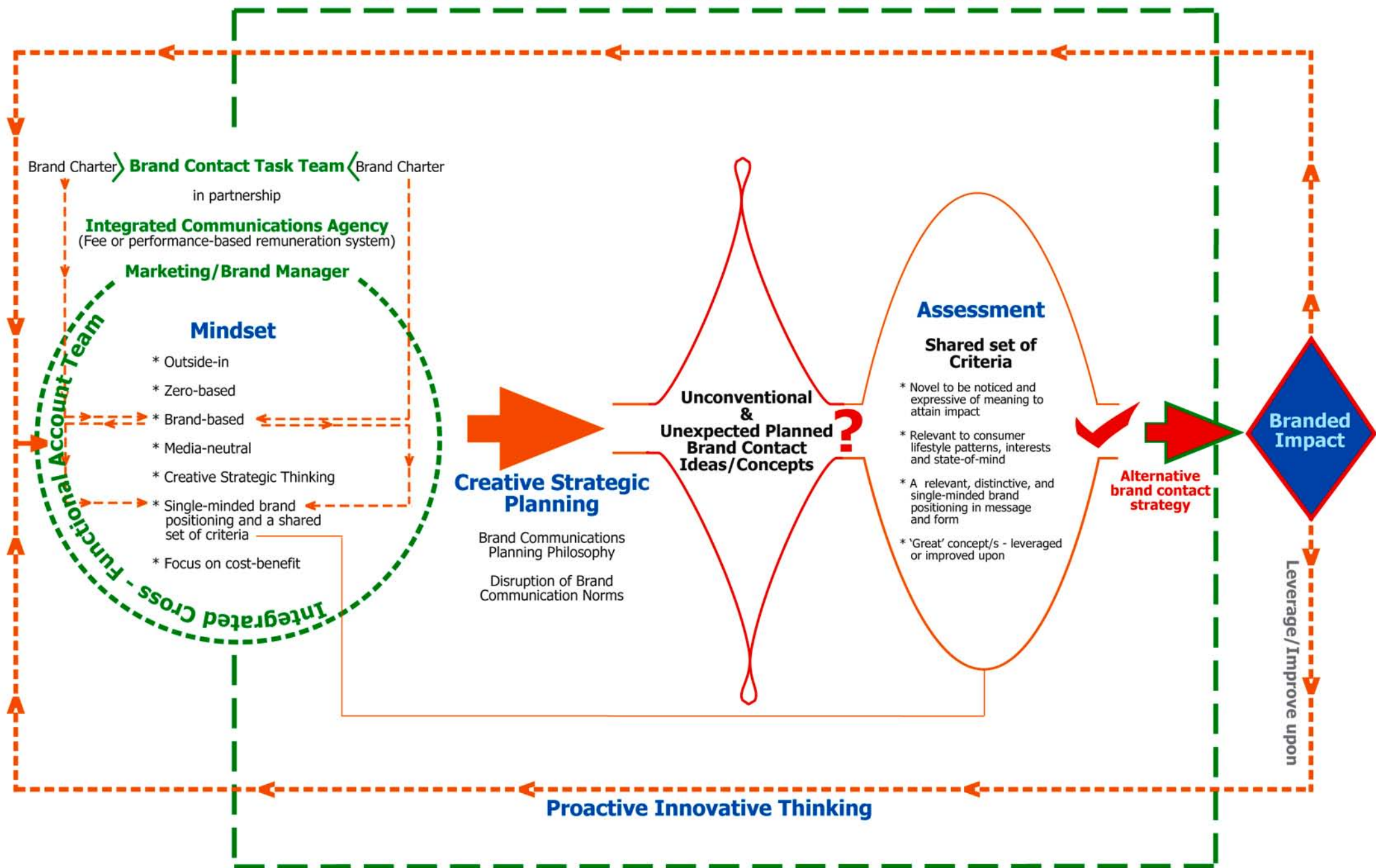
The Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning is designed in context of the nature and purpose of integrated brand contact management, to address the nature and role of alternative brand contact planning, as defined through the study of literature and the qualitative exploratory research study.

The Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning thus aims to ensure that unconventional and unexpected points of planned brand contact that break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers, to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand, are produced.

The primary finding delivered by the qualitative exploratory research study is the focal point and envisaged outcome of the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning. The supporting findings present the variables of the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning. The design of the model therefore acknowledges and reflects the supporting findings as they contribute to the desired outcome – the primary finding.

Model 1: A Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning.

Planned Brand Contact Environment & Commercial Clutter Barriers



Model 1: A Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning

The proposed Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning identifies four core constructs namely,

- The mindset of the integrated cross-functional account team and client.
- The process of creative strategic planning.
- The assessment of unconventional and unexpected planned brand contact points.
- Branded impact and the need for ongoing proactive innovative thinking.

The Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning is discussed by means of the four core constructs, with respect to the key findings produced by the qualitative exploratory research study. The model with its constructs and planning process flows from left to right.

6.4.1 The Mindset of the Integrated Cross-functional Account Team and Client

The model establishes that alternative brand contact planning is pursued in context of the nature and purpose of integrated brand contact management. The study of literature and the qualitative exploratory research study confirm that the alternative brand contact strategy must contribute to the integrated brand contact strategy, to support the process of brand building. Alternative brand contact planning is also based on the outside-in and zero-based planning philosophy of integrated brand contact management.

For this reason the model presents the integrated client-account team relationship as representative of a strategic partnership between the Integrated Communications Agency and the Brand Contact Task Team. The model thus enforces that alternative brand contact planning is undertaken with the Brand Charter as the codified planning context. As is discussed in Chapter Two (2.5.7), the brand charter or brand manual captures brand learnings, the brand identity and brand positioning strategy, to serve as the strategic guide

to the process of brand contact planning. The Brand Contact Task Team with its Integrated Communications Agency as a strategic partner, implements the Brand Charter to ensure that all points of brand contact communicate in a consistent voice.

The model therefore also qualifies the status of the Integrated Communications Agency. The Integrated Communications Agency delivers holistic integrated brand communications solutions and exhibits the strategic and creative skill to add value on all levels of brand contact (Chapter Two – 2.6). The Integrated Communications Agency furthermore comprises of integrated cross-functional units (account teams), to ensure that effective integrated brand communications solutions are produced. In context of alternative brand contact planning, the study of literature and the qualitative exploratory research study also establish that the confluence of strategic and creative skills into cross-functional account teams, is conducive to the development of alternative brand contact solutions that are both novel and relevant to the brand. The model also positions the Integrated Communications Agency, as an agency that operates on fee or performance-based remuneration systems. The study of literature and the qualitative exploratory research study confirm that zero-based and media neutral planning are only made possible if the agency is not constrained by a biased media-commission based remuneration system.

The aim of the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning is to assist agencies and clients to develop unconventional and unexpected planned points of brand contact that will break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers, to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand. The qualitative exploratory research study establishes that an integrated client-account team relationship and a mindset that is conducive to alternative brand contact planning are requisites to attaining this aim. The mindset of the agency, client and account team is found to be of paramount importance, more so than the development of specific creative techniques to produce unconventional solutions.

The **mindset** to alternative brand contact planning as identified in the model and determined by the study of literature and the exploratory research study requires:

- **Outside-in thinking**

Alternative brand contact planning is consumer oriented, as it is the consumer base (target audience) that will determine what is perceived and experienced as unconventional and unexpected.

- **Zero-based thinking**

Alternative brand contact planning is platform neutral and based on consumers current experience of the brand contact environment and therefore does not demonstrate contact prejudices, preconceptions or preconditions.

- **Brand-based thinking**

Alternative brand contact planning is brand-based in that the focus is on communicating or reinforcing a single-minded positioning of the brand or as so many of the respondents in the qualitative exploratory study argued, “what the brand stands for”, “a focussed brand positioning”.

- **Media-neutral thinking**

It is the nature of contact with the consumer that establishes the alternative brand contact appeal and not the use of one medium as opposed to another. The alternative brand contact is not defined by media type. As one of the senior account teams in the exploratory research study argued: “We shouldn’t be thinking in media moulds we should be thinking of communication spaces”. Alternative brand contact planning must therefore also not be constrained by media biases or, as previously argued, biased media commission-based remuneration systems.

- **Creative strategic thinking**

The alternative brand contact is, based on the study of literature and the qualitative exploratory research study, the product of creative strategic thinking. The aim is to produce points of brand contact that are novel and relevant to the brand. It is for this reason that a cross-functional account team environment and an integrated client-account team relationship were identified in the qualitative exploratory research study, as requisites to alternative brand contact planning.

- **A single-minded brand positioning strategy and a shared set of criteria from which alternative brand contact ideas are developed and assessed**

Based on the qualitative exploratory research study alternative brand contact planning must depart from a single-minded brand positioning platform and a shared set of criteria (co-developed by the client and senior account team), from which alternative brand contact ideas can be developed and assessed. Thus, brand relevance can be achieved and a focussed brand identity created.

The Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning identifies the need for a single-minded brand positioning strategy and a shared set of criteria in the core construct: The Mindset of the Integrated Cross-functional Account Team and Client. A critical link is created on this level with the third core construct in the model namely: The assessment of unconventional and unexpected planned brand contact points, to demonstrate that the development and evaluation of the alternative brand contact is conducted against the same set of criteria. The need for a single-minded brand positioning strategy and a shared set of criteria in the development and evaluation of alternative brand contact concepts will receive close attention with the introduction of the third construct to this model.

- **A focus on cost-benefit**

The qualitative exploratory research study establishes that alternative brand contact strategies are in general not more costly to implement. Also, research findings reveal that clients are prepared to invest in alternative brand contact solutions, if they demonstrate the potential to break through clutter to achieve branded impact. Client approach is thus in keeping with account team attitudes that when cost is considered, the focus in alternative brand contact planning should also be on the benefit gained, that is the potential to break through commercial clutter barriers to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.

With the mindset of the integrated cross-functional account team and client as the first and paramount core construct to alternative brand contact planning, the model shifts into the process of creative strategic planning, the second core construct to the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning.

6.4.2 The Process of Creative Strategic Planning

The alternative brand contact is presented in the study of literature and the qualitative exploratory research study as the product of creative strategic planning. Creative strategic planning, as previously stated, entails the development of unconventional and unexpected or novel solutions that are relevant to the brand. The challenge is to move beyond, or to manipulate traditional brand communication vehicles to target consumers in an unconventional manner when and where they least expect to encounter a commercial message and when they are in a susceptible state of mind.

The model identifies a further key research finding in relation to **creative strategic planning**. Alternative brand contact planning is identified as a brand communications planning philosophy that involves the disruption of brand communication norms to break through clutter. Based on respondents' attitudes in the qualitative exploratory research study, creative strategic

planning must be undertaken in all brand communication spaces, to disrupt brand communication norms and develop alternative brand contact solutions that will break through clutter.

The study of literature presents an investigation of the nature and purpose of disruption, as coined and explored by Dru (1996:56; 2002:19) and elaborated on by others (Chapter 3 – 3.4).

Disruption (Strategie de rupture) according to Dru (1996:54), is about finding the strategic idea that breaks and overturns marketplace conventions. It is evident that a clear line of synergy exists between the notion of creative strategic planning, as defined and researched in this study, and the premise of disruption, as introduced by Dru. This perhaps also clarifies why many respondents referred to alternative brand contact planning as a brand communications planning philosophy that involves the disruption of brand communication norms to break through clutter.

The study of literature reveals that disruption requires a three-step process:

- **Insight into the conventional:** Strategic ideas and activity that maintain the status quo and are therefore hardly noticed are identified.
- **Disruption:** Creative strategic thinking is applied to purposefully break with conventional strategic methods to produce unconventional ideas.
- **Brand Integration:** The ideas/concepts that most effectively communicate the brand positioning strategy are identified.

Dru's three-step approach to disruption seemingly also points at the need for outside-in, zero-based and media-neutral thinking (step one: insight into the conventional), creative strategic planning (step two: disruption) and brand-based thinking (step three: brand integration), in the development of unconventional strategic solutions.

The concept of disruption (step two), was not pursued in greater depth, in the qualitative exploratory research study, greatly because the mindset toward alternative brand contact planning was treated by respondents as of paramount importance and consequently, consumed most of the research time. Also the study of literature pointed out that mindset and sense of purpose is more important than the development and implementation of structured creative techniques to produce creative ideas. However, a worthy future research area exists in that the actual nature of creative strategic thinking and disruption can be investigated more closely in real world terms, to contribute to the planning of alternative points of brand contact.

6.4.3 The Assessment of Unconventional and Unexpected Planned Brand Contact Points

Creative strategic planning, as established, is undertaken in all brand communication spaces, to disrupt brand communication norms to develop alternative brand contact solutions that will break through clutter. The qualitative exploratory research study however revealed that clients are concerned that agencies present alternative brand contact solutions that are not relevant to the brand. Agencies (senior account teams interviewed) in turn, are concerned that alternative brand contact planning is undertaken with no single-minded brand positioning strategy and shared set of development and assessment criteria in place. Hence the following key finding was produced:

Alternative brand contact planning must be based on a single-minded brand positioning strategy and a shared set of criteria.

The Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning positions the need for a single-minded brand positioning strategy and a shared set of criteria from which alternative brand contact ideas can be developed and assessed, as critical to alternative brand contact planning. This measure is introduced in the first core construct to the model namely: The mindset of the

integrated cross-functional account team and client, and is elevated and reinforced as the third core construct of the model: **The assessment of unconventional and unexpected planned brand contact points.**

To ensure that branded impact is achieved, alternative brand contact planning must be based on a single-minded brand positioning strategy. The qualitative exploratory research study revealed that clients and senior account teams alike believe that the unconventional and unexpected point of brand contact must break through commercial clutter barriers to achieve impact, to communicate or reinforce a *“focussed”* brand positioning, as so many argued.

To undertake creative strategic planning, to produce ideas that are both novel and relevant to the brand, the account team must have clarity on what it is that the *“brand stands for”* or what it aims to *“take ownership of”*, as respondents stated. Equally so, the alternative brand contact concept or idea can hardly be assessed for brand relevance and potential branded impact, if a single-minded brand positioning strategy does not exist. As one respondent commented, a vague brand positioning strategy will make for a *“lethal relationship”*.

The proposed shared set of criteria to be considered by the account team and client in the process of alternative brand contact planning, is based on the premise that a single-minded brand positioning strategy is in place. The proposed set of criteria is furthermore constructed from the key findings produced by the qualitative exploratory research study. As indicated in the model the account team and client thus have the opportunity to assess whether the alternative brand contact concept is:

- **Novel to be noticed and expressive of meaning to attain impact?**
Supporting finding: The alternative brand contact must be novel to be noticed and expressive of meaning to attain impact.

- **Relevant to consumer lifestyle patterns, interests and state-of-mind?**
Supporting finding: To achieve impact the alternative brand contact must be relevant to the consumer in terms of lifestyle patterns, interests and state-of-mind
- **Communicates a relevant, distinctive and single-minded brand positioning in message and form?**
Supporting finding: To create meaningful impact the alternative brand contact must in message content and form communicate a relevant, distinctive and single-minded positioning of the brand.
- **A 'great' concept that can be leveraged or improved upon?**
Supporting finding: The unconventional status and impact of the alternative brand contact must be maintained. 'Great' alternative brand contact concepts leverage brand communication spaces to maintain impact – proactive innovative thinking is required.

The Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning suggests that alternative brand contact concepts that are approved, based on the above proposed set of shared assessment criteria, have the potential to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers, to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.

6.4.4 Branded Impact and the need for ongoing Proactive Innovative Thinking.

The Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning is concluded with the intended outcome of alternative brand contact planning and thus culminates in the primary finding produced by the qualitative exploratory research study. The alternative brand contact concept that measures up to agency and client assessment against the proposed set of shared criteria, has the potential to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on

consumers, to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.

The term **branded impact** is applied in the model to reflect the language used by respondents. The term branded impact was also applied in the study of literature. Darroll (2002) reasons that brand contacts can only be considered effective if they succeed to break through clutter to achieve branded impact – “to communicate in the name of the brand”, meaning that a relevant, distinctive and single-minded brand positioning is communicated to consumers.

The model identifies a further key finding produced by the qualitative exploratory research study with reference to branded impact and specifically the maintenance thereof. That is, that proactive innovative thinking is required to leverage the alternative brand contact concept in its brand communication spaces, to ensure it maintains its unconventional status and consistently delivers branded impact. The model thus suggests that alternative brand contact planning is an ongoing process. **Proactive innovative thinking**, as indicated in the model, is required with a mindset and planning approach that is conducive to alternative brand contact planning and is consistently focussed on the intended outcome – branded impact.

The qualitative exploratory research study produced a number of key findings that are not directly identified in the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning. Based on these key findings, the unconventional and unexpected point of brand contact delivers further value, if the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning is pursued as proposed. It thus stands to reason that the alternative brand contact strategy has the potential to:

- Differentiate the brand because it is perceived as unconventional and to effectively communicate what the brand stands for (single-minded brand positioning).

- Generate word-of-mouth and publicity that contributes to the process of brand building.
- Create memorability with brand meaning – brand memorability.
- Introduce target audience focussed and cost efficient ambient alternative brand contacts that reinforce the brand identity and integrate into the brand communications strategy.

Equally so, it stands to reason that the implementation of the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning, with its focus on achieving branded impact from a single-minded brand positioning and a shared set of criteria planning platform, will potentially grow and achieve:

- Open-minded thinking from media planners and media owners.
- Less time and energy consumption in terms of persuading parties involved of the merit of an alternative brand contact strategy.

The Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning captures and reflects on all of the key findings produced by the qualitative exploratory research study. It can thus be applied on an experimental level by agencies and clients in the planning of alternative brand contact strategies. Also, further research on any one of the core constructs in the model or specific key findings produced by the qualitative exploratory research study can lead to empirical evidence of the nature, role and planning of alternative brand contacts, to contribute to the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning.

Chapter Six and this study will next be concluded with future research recommendations.

6.5 Conclusion and Future Research Recommendations

This study explored the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact on two levels. Firstly through an investigation of literature and secondly, through a three phase qualitative exploratory research study conducted in the South African marketing and communications industry, hence the title of the study – **The role of alternative brand contact planning in the South African marketing and communication industry**, has been addressed.

The qualitative exploratory research study confirmed the central research proposition and thus achieved the primary research objective to the study. The sample of Integrated Communications Agencies (senior account teams) and key clients that were interviewed in this study by means of exploratory focus groups and semi-structured depth interviews, are in agreement that:

The unconventional and unexpected point of planned brand contact breaks through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers, to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.

This key finding presents the primary finding produced by the qualitative exploratory research study. A range of supporting findings was also produced by the qualitative exploratory research study, in answer to the integral propositions and related supporting objectives to the study.

The study culminates in the design of a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning. The Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning is designed in context of the nature and purpose of integrated brand contact management, to address the nature and role of alternative brand contact planning therein. The primary finding delivered by the qualitative exploratory research study presents the focal point and envisaged outcome of the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning. The supporting findings are applied as variables in the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand

Contact Planning. The model thus reflects in full on all of the key findings produced by the qualitative exploratory research study.

It is envisaged that the Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning can be applied on an experimental level, by agencies and clients in the planning of alternative brand contact strategies. Further research can be focussed on any one of the key findings produced by the qualitative exploratory research study to present empirical evidence of the nature, role and planning of alternative brand contacts. The Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning can thus be evolved and improved upon.

Given the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact as presented in this study, the researcher believes that future research in the following areas will also add further value to the understanding and application of alternative brand contact planning. The proposed research areas then also reflect the limitations of this study.

- The study defines and explores the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact from the outside-in, that is, from the consumers point of view. It will be of value to launch an empirical study that investigates the perceptions of the consumer toward the alternative brand contact and the possible influence of the unconventional and unexpected contact strategy on consumer behaviour.
- As previously reasoned, the qualitative exploratory research study did not investigate the concept of disruption in greater depth. A worthy future research area exists in that the actual nature of creative strategic thinking and disruption can be investigated more closely in real world terms, to contribute to the planning of alternative points of brand contact.
- Specific requisites and barriers to alternative brand contact planning may emerge in specific fields of brand communications for example, Sponsorship and Event Marketing, Customer Relationship Marketing,

Corporate Social Investment Marketing, On-line Marketing etc. In other words, the possibility that specific fields of brand communications activity may present alternative brand contact planning requisites and barriers that are unique to the field does exist.

- Alternative brand contact planning was explored in this study in the context of planned points of brand contact. The researcher believes that the principle and premise of alternative brand contact planning is also applicable to service points of brand contact. The proposition is that unconventional and unexpected service contacts can break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers, to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.
- This study explored and motivated a strategic partnership between clients and Integrated Communications Agencies in context of the nature, role and planning of alternative points of brand contact. The advent and growth of brand communications consultancies in South Africa present a new and fresh dimension to the brand communications industry. A research study that is focussed on the mindset of the brand communications consultancy toward alternative brand contact planning may produce valuable insights and especially so if compared to that of traditional advertising agencies and Integrated Communications Agencies.

