Building Brand Equity through Brand Identity in the Architectural industry

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Abstract

The lack of differentiation between firms in the South African architectural industry has led to the virtual commodification of architectural services. This commodification has resulted in increased competition and decreased profitability in the industry (Allix, 2012).

The objective of this research is to explore the manner in which B2B architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands use brand identity to build the foundation of brand equity, in order to secure competitive advantage, by differentiating themselves. In contrast to South African firms, Dutch architectural firms receive the highest compensation and employees receive the third highest salaries in the industry in the European Union. This research thus examines the differences between B2B architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands, through the lens of the B2B Service Brand Identity Network by Coleman, de Chernatony and Christodoulides (2011) and the B2B Consumer-Based Brand Equity model (Kuhn, Nigel & Pope, 2008).

A qualitative study was conducted, involving in-depth interviews with eight South African and five Dutch architectural firms. A deductive and subsequent inductive analysis was conducted on the data, using the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. The study found that Dutch firms concentrated more on resonance with their communities, while South African firms focussed on building credibility through brand judgement. Both countries showed a lack of formal resource allocation to branding and a lack of formal incentives to employees. Two new themes were identified in relation to brand identity in this industry. Consequently, the study proposes a new version of the B2B Service Brand Identity Network. This proposal provides a brand identity network for B2B service firms which produce tangible objects as a result.

Key Words

Business-to-business, B2B, brand equity, brand identity, architecture
Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria.

It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination to any other university. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

_________________________________________  ____________________________
Alet Verster                     Date
Dedication

To my grandfather, Piet Naudé, who despised architects,
and ended up with three in the family.
Acknowledgements

To my fiancé, Sebastian. Thank you for encouraging me to continually improve myself. We make a great team, and I am excited to see what else we will accomplish together.

To my parents, Martin and Claudine. Thank you for raising me to have a curious mind and always supporting me in my various interests. You are incredible parents and magnificent people.

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To all the participants of this study. Thank you for taking the time to discuss your firms and your views with me. I found it immensely interesting and I hope that it will contribute to the improvement of our industry.
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Chapter 1 – Introduction to Research Problem

1.1 Introduction

Brand identity research has largely focussed on business-to-consumer (B2C) firms (Lilien, 2016) marketing their products (Coleman, de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2011), presenting an opportunity for new research into the branding activities of service firms in business-to-business (B2B) industries (Glynn, 2012; Leek & Christodoulides, 2012). In addition, the lack of differentiation between respective firms in the architectural industry has led to the virtual commodification of architectural services (Kotler & Keller, 2016). This commodification has resulted in increased competition and decreased profitability in the industry (Allix, 2012). South African architects do not seem to succeed in developing strong brand identities to differentiate themselves and to create a competitive advantage (Reid, 2008).

It is proposed that firms can differentiate themselves by developing a distinctive brand identity (Coleman et al., 2011), to combat this commodification and subsequently generate competitive advantage. Coleman et al. (2011) further identified the opportunity for research into brand identity in B2B service firms from a management perspective, internal to the firm, as opposed to from the external perspective of consumers.

The aim of this research is an in-depth analysis of the building of brand equity through developing brand identity in the architectural industry, from a management lens. The B2B Service Brand Identity Network by Coleman et al. (2011) and the B2B Consumer-Based Brand Equity model by Kuhn, Nigel and Pope (2008) are used as guides. This research provides a greater understanding of how architectural businesses develop brand identity in order to build brand equity, and adds to the basket of qualitative research into B2B service firms. It gives managers of B2B service firms insight into the branding activities of architectural businesses, in order to generate competitive advantage and differentiate themselves.

This chapter demonstrates the problem in B2B professional service industries, specifically the architectural industry. The background to the problem is illustrated, with a focus on the difference between the industry in the Netherlands and in South Africa. Thereafter, the research problem and objectives are discussed, followed by relevance and scope of the research. Finally, an outline of the rest of the research report is provided.
1.2 Background to the problem

Architecture is a professional service in the construction sector, and refers to the act of designing and constructing buildings, which is both an art and a practice (Stevenson, 2010). Kotler and Keller (2016) define a service as an intangible performance which does not result in the ownership of anything, that one party can offer another. This performance may result in a physical product in some cases. Architecture offers the service of designing and overseeing the construction of buildings, which results in a physical product, namely a building (Mitrache, 2012). Architectural firms that operate in the B2B industries serve business clients (i.e. to design a public building, such as a library), as opposed to private clients (e.g. to design a family house). This study focusses on the B2B architectural industry in South Africa and the Netherlands.

1.2.1 The architectural industry in the Netherlands and South Africa

The Netherlands is internationally known for its innovative architecture, and has become a hub where architects concentrate, with Rotterdam housing the main cluster of architectural firms (Kloosterman & Stegmeijer, 2004). The architectural industry in the Netherlands appears to be a vigorous one. The country’s architects have the highest charge-out rate for principal architects in Europe, and individual architects are the third highest paid in the region, after Switzerland and Luxembourg (Mirza & Nacey Research, 2015) – this conclusion is based on the principle of Purchasing Power Parity across nations. The Netherlands has almost twice the number of architects per capita than South Africa, averaging at one architect per 1 544 people (Mirza & Nacey Research, 2015).

The Netherlands is also classified as a ‘developed country’ by the World Trade Organisation (WTO), while South Africa is classified as a ‘developing country’ (WTO, 2016). In 2014, South Africa had a GDP growth rate of 1,5% (Marketline, 2016), while the Netherlands had a GDP growth rate of 0,9% for the same period (Marketline, 2015). In conjunction with the growth of South Africa’s middle class, it could be argued that the South African architectural industry should be better off financially than that of the Netherlands, due to GDP growth requiring a growth in infrastructure.
The South African architectural industry does not seem to be in the same favourable position than that of the Netherlands. This problem seems to be two-fold – the public is largely ignorant of the role of architects (a lack of brand awareness of the industry), and architects themselves do not see the value of marketing and branding, which exacerbates the problem (Vosloo, 2015). Vosloo attributed this problem to the fact that architectural professionals are not equipped to envision, start or manage viable and enduring firms. This extends to the function of marketing. The low level of branding and marketing present in the industry, illustrated by Reid (2008), indicates that there is little differentiation between the services rendered by architectural firms.

In South Africa, advertising in this industry was highly regulated until the promulgation of the new Architectural Act 44 of 2000, until which time no architect was permitted to advertise his/her services (Mitrache, 2012). This fed into the culture of “gentlemanly fair play” (Mitrache, 2012), the legacy of which lives on to this day. The amended legislation has changed the way the market functions, yet architectural firms have been slow to change their ways. The traditional method of word-of-mouth and relationship marketing persists in the industry (Alecsa & Popescu, 2015). In a study conducted by Karam (2003), 38% of architectural firms sampled found marketing to be “not necessary” and 33% found it to be necessary “from time-to-time”. Since then, the global financial crisis has hit, which has affected architectural practices negatively (Allix, 2012). It seems that not much has changed in terms of architects’ mindset regarding the importance of marketing and building a brand.

According to Alecsa and Popescu (2015), in the unusual cases where architectural firms do market themselves, they tend to confuse their target market by directing efforts at other architects instead of at clients. Although 74 percent of architectural firms surveyed by Karam (2003) have had their work published, most of these were in architectural publications catering to architectural professionals. In order to be effective, marketing should be directed at those who are likely to contract the services of the architect.

It is clear that the South African architectural industry suffers from low brand equity. Brand equity is the result of the client’s awareness of the brand. If the client is unaware of the brand, it will compete on price, rendering it a commodity, which is the case in the architectural industry (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Stronger brands improve the firm’s competitive positioning, by its link to greater client loyalty and revenue, larger profit margins and less vulnerability to competition (Kotler & Keller, 2016).
The South African architectural industry is suffering financially, despite the fact that it is intrinsic to the provision of shelter which has always been, and will always remain, a basic human need. It is not uncommon for architectural firms to discount their fees between 65 to 70% in order to secure tenders from metropolitan councils in South Africa (Pather & Jacobs, 2011). This can result in either a compromise on quality or the eventual collapse of the firm in question. According to Alecsa and Popescu (2015) many of the industry’s problems can be ascribed to the practice of making price the sole selection criterion for architectural service providers. In an industry that produces permanent structures that affect the lives of millions of people, competition based on price is short-sighted. Quality of work should be the driver of competition, resulting in the design and execution of quality buildings, with cost as a secondary driver.

In other professional services industries, such as law and medicine, clients expect to pay for quality service. Top-tier law firms like Weber Wenzel and Bowman Gilfillan charge up to four times more than middle-tier firms (Pickworth, 2013). In architecture, conversely, the biggest firms secure their market position by charging lower fees than their competition (Pather & Jacobs, 2011).

Rapid and continuous urbanisation and the growth of the middle class in South Africa is a great opportunity for the architectural industry. The fact that the government has also committed to increased infrastructure spending until 2030, through the National Development Plan (National Planning Commission, 2011) also generates opportunities. In addition, professional services have become the fastest growing field in the world (Bello, Radulovich, Javalgi, Scherer & Taylor, 2016). Despite this, there has been a drop in registered architectural professionals and architectural firms since the turn of the century (Vosloo, 2015), to such an extent that the industry has been listed on the Provisional National Scarce Skills list of the Top 100 Occupations in Demand (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2014). Additionally, architectural professionals as a percentage of the population are fewer in number than that found in countries with similar levels of socio-economic development. South Africa has one architect for every 3 650 citizens, while Chile has one for every 667 citizens (Vosloo, 2015).

One of the symptoms of the low brand equity of the architectural industry is the relatively low salaries earned by employees, in comparison with other professions. In 2011, engineers were paid an average annual salary of R420 000 per year after five years’ experience, while an architect with the same experience was remunerated with R320 000 (Pretoria Institute for Architecture, 2011). In addition, only 27% of architectural
firms contributed towards employees’ pension and medical aid. In order to practise as a registered architect, the completion of three degrees and two years’ working experience is required, after which two board examinations are to be written (Architectural Profession Act no. 44, 2000). In contrast, to practise as an engineer, one four-year degree is required. Engineers may register as professionals, but this is only required by law for a few cases, and involves no additional exams (Engineering Council of South Africa, 2016). This seven-year process of becoming a professional architect creates a high barrier to entry into this industry, and keeps the threat of new entrants low. Low employee salaries persist despite these barriers to entry.

The last ten years in South Africa has seen the rise of vertically integrated engineering firms which also perform the tasks of architects; private individuals often build structures without professionals or municipal planning permission or employ unregistered draughts people, and some property developers have in-house architects. This indicates that the threat of substitutes for the service is high. Growth in the industry was low following the financial crisis of 2008, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 2.5% between 2008 and 2012 (Marketline, 2013). This illuminates the vulnerability of the industry to changes in economic conditions globally. The contrast between the industry in the Netherlands and in South Africa illustrated above, provides a strong base for the comparison of the two geographies in this study.

1.3 Research problems and objectives

The problem of commodification in the South African architecture industry has resulted in increased competition and decreased profitability (Allix, 2012). This commodification suggests that architectural firms need to differentiate themselves, in order to increase the brand awareness of the industry (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The apparent low brand equity signifies that architects can no longer solely rely on relationship marketing to illustrate their value proposition and to differentiate themselves, but need to expand beyond that to creating brand equity through the building of brand identities. The building of a strong brand identity has been shown to contribute to competitive advantage and the differentiation of firms (Persson, 2010) and thus could address this problem of commodification.
The objectives of this research report are:

1.3.1 Primary objective

To determine the manner in which architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands, respectively, use brand identity to build the foundation of brand equity, in order to secure competitive advantage.

1.3.2 Secondary objectives

1.3.2.1 To determine the branding activities that respective architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands employ to build brand identity.

1.3.2.2 To discover the management perspective of respective architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands on the effect that brand identity has on their competitive positions.

1.3.2.3 To determine the extent that respective architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands deliver on the five dimensions of the Coleman et al. (2011) B2B Service Brand Identity Network.

1.4 Relevance and motivation for the research

The existing literature dealing with the B2B service industries is scant (Glynn, 2012, Leek & Christodoulides, 2012). Although there has recently been an increase in literature being published on the B2B market from an industrial products perspective, research on branding has focussed largely on the B2C market (Marquardt, 2013).

Coleman et al. (2011) illustrated the gaps in existing literature and highlighted that there is a need for research into the branding of B2B service firms, specifically into their brand identity, and how this could contribute to competitive advantage. Additionally, Marquardt (2013) emphasized the gap in the literature for research into the branding of B2B services pertaining to future-based services, particularly those which offer a hybrid of services and products in their offerings. Dimensions of brand image have been studied from a consumer perspective, but not from the perspective of management (Coleman et al., 2011).
The B2B Service Brand Identity Network was developed by Coleman et al. (2011) for the analysis of B2B service brands as an alternative to existing B2C brand identity models. This network provided an alternative means of analysis of the brand identity of B2B service brands for future research. To the researcher’s knowledge, the B2B Service Brand Identity Network has only been tested once by its original authors (Coleman, de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2015) in a quantitative study involving the B2B Service Brand Identity Scale associated with the B2B Service Brand Identity Network. In combination with the gap in research on the brand identities of B2B services firms, this also indicates an opportunity for a qualitative investigation into this topic, using the B2B Service Brand Identity Network as base.

This research aims to improve understanding of brand identity and brand equity in B2B service industries, through insight into the implementation thereof in the architectural industry. This is viewed through the lens of Coleman et al.’s Brand Identity Network (2011) and Keller’s Brand Equity Model (2003), as adjusted for the B2B context by Kuhn, Nigel and Pope (2008).

The B2B service industry will benefit from an in-depth study into the branding identity practices and views of architectural firms. This study adds to the current literature by filling the information gap about the brand identities of B2B professional service firms, especially those in the unique industry of architecture.

1.5 Scope of the research

This research report investigates brand identity in the B2B service industry, specifically of architectural firms, and its resulting brand equity. The scope of the research spanned the geographical locations of Johannesburg and Pretoria, South Africa, and Rotterdam in the Netherlands. These two contexts were identified for their potential to provide insight into the possibly different brand identity practices in the developed economy of the Netherlands versus the developing economy of South Africa. The results are applicable to managers in architecture firms in both South Africa and the Netherlands, as well as to academics and business students in these contexts. The literature examines marketing and branding of B2B service firms, specifically focusing on the themes of brand equity and brand identity.
1.6 Structure of the research report

- **Chapter 1: Introduction to research problem**
  This section introduces the study and the need for the research. It illustrates the relevance of the study in the academic and business research context, and outlines the research objectives.

- **Chapter 2: Literature review**
  This section reviews the existing literature on the marketing of B2B service firms, focussing on the themes of brand equity and brand identity.

- **Chapter 3: Research questions**
  This section highlights the research questions and the research objectives of this research report.

- **Chapter 4: Research methodology and design**
  This section focusses on the research methodology employed in the research report, and the design of the study. The chapter includes the data collection, population and sampling, data analysis and limitations of the research.

- **Chapter 5: Research results**
  This section analyses the data collected and presents the results.

- **Chapter 6: Discussion of results**
  This section relates the results of the research to the existing literature in a detailed discussion.

- **Chapter 7: Conclusion**
  This chapter highlights the findings of the research and recommendations for business and academia, as well as avenues for future research.
Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The problem of the commodification of the architectural industry, as illustrated in Chapter 1, indicates that architectural firms need to differentiate themselves in order to increase the brand awareness of the industry (Coleman et al., 2011). The apparent low brand equity suggests that architects need to build brand equity through developing brand identities and can no longer solely rely on relationship marketing to differentiate their firms.

This section provides an overview of the relevant literature on marketing and branding in B2B service firms, with a focus on brand equity and brand identity from a resource-based view. The literature on branding focussed largely on the B2C market (Marquardt, 2013), however, literature has recently increasingly been published on the B2B market from an industrial products perspective. Between these studies, very little literature has dealt with the B2B service industries (Glynn, 2012, Leek & Christodoulides, 2012). This research report aims to address that gap, by investigating the brand identity of B2B service firms and the brand equity of these firms.

This chapter provides an overview of the existing literature on the marketing of B2B service firms and its differences to the literature on marketing B2C firms or product-based firms. Consequently, the branding of B2B firms is discussed, with a focus on B2B service industries. The importance of branding in B2B services as a tool for is explored, and culminates in the exploration of the role of brands as a guarantee of quality, as well as their role as a resource and an asset, from a resource-based view. Subsequently, the concept of brand equity in B2B service firms is examined, focussing on Keller’s (2003) Consumer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, adjusted by Kuhn, Nigel and Pope (2008) for the B2B industries. The components of the adjusted CBBE model are discussed, and lead into the main topic of the research report, and the foundation of brand equity, namely brand identity. The role of brand identity in differentiating firms is explored, paying particular attention to the Brand Identity Network by Coleman et al. (2011). This network is examined in detail, and its components discussed. The chapter reviews the relevant literature from a broader B2B services marketing perspective to focussing on the vital topic of the research report, the brand identity of B2B service firms.
2.2 B2B services and the marketing of B2B services

Business-to-business firms are distinct from most firms, due to their dual differences to B2C firms and to product-based firms. Services firms provide intangible performances that offer value to another party, instead of tangible products (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Services rendered in the B2C markets are rendered by firms directly to clients, such as commercial banks (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). In B2B markets, services are rendered between firms (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). Services and goods fall on a scale between pure tangible goods to pure intangible services, while some offer a mix of tangible and intangible components (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Architectural firms offer services which result in objects (buildings), and thus offer a mix of tangible and intangible benefits (Mitrache, 2012).

B2B markets differ from B2C markets in the nature of the transaction and the parties involved (Herbst & Merz, 2011; Glynn, 2012). Differences between B2B and B2C markets influence the manner in which they are marketed. B2B transactions usually involve bigger purchases that happen less often than in B2C markets, and are often governed by long-term contracts that are negotiable. Purchasing decisions are often taken by a committee instead of by individuals (Hutt & Speh, 2014). Members of such purchasing committees are usually qualified professionals who tend to make decisions based on logical reasoning (Herbst & Merz, 2011; Kumar, Cohen & Rajan, 2015). This influences the manner in which marketing is approached. Historically, B2B purchasing transactions were considered to be more transactional in nature, but have since been proven to be more relational (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006, Hutt & Speh, 2014).

Hutt and Speh (2014) argued that business relationships fell on a scale between transactional exchange and collaborative exchange. The authors clarified that transactional exchange involved the timely exchange of simple products, resulting in competitive market prices. Transactional exchange generally occurred in competitive markets with low purchase complexity. Collaborative exchange involved the linkages and mutual commitments made between parties in the anticipation of long-term benefits. Collaborative exchange occurred in markets with low competition and high purchase complexity. In between the two extremes lie value-added exchanges, in which the focus switches from attracting clients to keeping them (Hutt & Speh, 2014). The building of long-term business relationships with stakeholders contributes to a strategic advantage over competitors, and forms a vital part of the marketing strategy of B2B firms. Relational skills reside in people, which thus makes employees valuable assets in the marketing of B2B firms (Glynn, 2012; Leek & Christodoulides, 2012).
Within this difference between B2B and B2C markets, professional service firms (PSFs) add another layer of complexity. The marketing of services in B2B markets differs from that of the marketing of products. Hutt and Speh (2014) argued that very few pure products or pure services exist, and thus most services fall in-between the two opposites. The authors classified professional services as predominantly intangible with some elements with tangible properties, and added that they are consumed as they are produced. Services can therefore be classified as a perishable product which cannot be stored for future use. Amonini, McColl-Kennedy, Soutar and Sweeney (2010) added that professional service firms often face short deadlines and constant demands from clients, and their services offer little standardisation. factors, in combination with the intangible nature of the service, fosters uncertainty in the minds of clients and adds to the complexity of the decision-making process for clients (Amonini et al., 2010; Tsai, 2011).

Branding falls under the marketing mix under the category of the product decision (Kotler & Keller, 2016). This illustrates the importance of branding as part of a holistic marketing strategy. The following section investigates the branding of B2B service firms, and illustrate the pivotal role it plays in differentiating firms.

### 2.3 Branding of B2B service firms

Branding is not only relevant in the B2C markets, but also in the B2B markets (Davis, Golicic & Marquardt, 2008, Glynn, 2012, Backhaus, Steiner & Lügger, 2011). Lindgreen, Beverland and Farrelly (2010) emphasised the important role of brand equity in B2B firms. The authors argued that brands have long been used as means to competitive positioning and differentiation in B2C industries, while branding in the B2B industries only started gaining traction in the early 2000s. Despite the differences between the two industry types, Lindgreen, Beverland and Farrelly (2010) maintained that there is a place in B2B markets for branding. Some of the top ten brands on the Interbrand Best Global List in 2015 were B2B brands, including brands such as Microsoft, IBM and GE (Interbrand, 2015).

In B2B service markets, the firm that provides the market offerings is often more important than the individual services it sells than in B2C markets (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006; Davis, Golicic & Marquardt, 2008; Herbst & Merz, 2011; Santos-Vijande, Del Río-Lanza, Suárez-Álvarez & Díaz-Martín, 2013), as brand equity accrues through corporate brands rather than individual brands (Davis, Golicic & Marquardt, 2008; Herbst & Merz,
2011). This has led to the interchangeability of the term ‘brand’ for ‘corporate brand’ in B2B literature (Herbst & Merz, 2011). This study follows that precedent. It is furthermore necessary to define branding for the purposes of this study.

2.3.1 Branding definition

The American Marketing Association defined a brand as “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller… to differentiate them from those of competitors” (Kotler & Keller, 2016, p.146). Kotler & Pfoertsch (2006) expanded on this definition that brands were a successful means to communicate the advantages and value a service can deliver. The authors stated that brands are a guarantee of quality, source and capability, and thus increases the perceived value and decrease the risk and complexity involved in the buying decision.

Leek and Christodoulides (2012) agreed with this definition, adding that brands have emotive value and personalities, and captures customers’ imaginations. Thus, the value of brands lies in delivering the emotional qualities which help the client in the decision-making process, in addition to their functional qualities (Leek & Christodoulides, 2012). Additional to these benefits, branding also serves as an indicator of quality of products and services rendered (Backhaus, Steiner & Lügger, 2011).

2.3.2 Brands as a guarantee of quality

Trust reduces the perceived risk involved in the buying process, and strong brands help to reduce that perceived risk (Herbst & Merz, 2011). The authors argued that the building of trust can be facilitated by building an emotional connection with clients, which can be achieved both through relationship marketing and branding. The authors added that a strong brand adds intangible value to a firm which is difficult to replicate, and thus adds to competitive advantage in the market.

Santos-Vijande et al. (2013) stressed the importance of studying the process of creating and maintaining strong brands in knowledge-intensive business services, a category within which professional services falls. The authors argued that brand orientation is a mind-set, a type of organisational culture that ensures that the brand will have a dominant role in the firm’s strategy.
The brand provides a cue to the client of the quality to be expected, and in this manner assists in reducing the perceived risk (Backhaus, Steiner & Lügger, 2011). Additionally, clients are more likely to be attentive to the brand in high risk situations (Leek & Christodoulides, 2012). Security and reassurance in brand communications would thus be strategically advantageous to B2B professional service firms (Leek & Christodoulides, 2012).

A positive brand image may also contribute to the building of the client’s corporate image. By the client employing a certain service firm to work for them, their corporate brand is enhanced, for example hiring a famous architect to design their corporate head offices (Backhaus, Steiner & Lügger, 2011). B2B brands thus have the opportunity to project the desired corporate brand image for benefit of the client’s brand. This connection between the client and the firm is what leads to competitive advantage.

However, clients are not the only ones viewing and experiencing brands; brands also reach other stakeholders. The opinions of peers and professional networks were often called in when making purchasing decisions in the B2B market, and here the brand of the firm plays a pivotal role in managing stakeholder perceptions (Glynn, 2012). This wide scope assists with the establishing of the brand image of the firm in the public forum (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006).

Branding forms part of the holistic marketing activities of the firm, but rather should not be viewed as an expense, but as a long-term investment (Santos-Vijande, Del Río-Lanza, Suárez-Álvarez & Díaz-Martín, 2013). Brands represent the values and the main business activities of a firm. This holistic view of branding is supported by (De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003), and goes as deep as recruiting staff whose values align with those of the firm’s. Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) emphasized the importance of an integrated branding strategy, in order to align resources in the firm to ensure its success. The authors viewed branding as not just a part of a marketing campaign, but an all-encompassing base for the strategic and marketing management of the firm. This view included the role of branding as an important resource and asset to the firm.
2.3.3 Branding as a resource and asset

Glynn (2012) argued for the importance of the resource-based view of the firm, which regards brands as an asset to the firm. The author states that this theory attempts to explain the success of brands from the perspective of the resources allocated to and utilised by them. The brand performance is contingent, not only on the allocation of those resources, but also on the application thereof. Resources can contribute to competitive advantage, because they can be difficult to imitate (Glynn, 2012).

Kotler and Keller (2016) affirmed that brands and brand equity are strategic assets, forming the basis for long-term strategic advantage. Successful management of the brand is only possible through the active management of brand equity (Burmann, Jost-Benz & Riley, 2009). Tangible marketing communications are utilised to promote a brand (i.e. logos, jingles), but a brand reaches beyond that into the intangible realm (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Successful brand management requires the alignment of resource allocation, structure and financial accountability around this intangible asset. This is the best way to take advantage of the competitive advantage afforded by successful branding (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). This enhanced market performance due to successful business relations with customers will be reflected in the brand equity of the firm (Glynn, 2012).

Additionally, the presence of a strong brand can mediate client uncertainty. Brands contribute to the building of trust by communicating the value proposition of the firm (Davis, Golicic & Marquardt, 2008). Brands have a much wider reach than relationship marketing, as they reach beyond clients to all stakeholders, and can form the basis for future relationships (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). B2B service brands reduce the complexity of decision-making (Glynn, 2012) and create a point of differentiation for firms, which may lead to competitive advantage (Davis, Golicic & Marquardt, 2008). Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) echo Glynn by stating that services or products can be easily imitated, but a brand cannot.

Successful branding translates into brand equity, which is reflected in the way that clients feel and act in respect to the brand and in the market, and can be measured in the profitability and prices that the firm can command (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The following section examines the concept of brand equity in more detail.
2.4 Brand equity

Brand equity is defined as “the added value endowed on product and services… reflected in the way consumers think, feel and act with respect to the brand, as well as in the prices, market share and profitability the brand commands” (Kotler & Keller, 2016, p.147). Marquardt (2013) added that brand equity manifests in the willingness of customers to pay a price premium on a known brand, as opposed to an unknown brand. High levels of brand equity are the key for building trust, a key consideration in B2B professional service markets (Marquardt, 2013).

Branding is imperative for professional service firms as a way of transferring knowledge about that company to stakeholders and making them aware of the firm’s value proposition (Kumar, Cohen & Rajan, 2015). A brand promise in B2B firms needs to go beyond what is offered and how the offering is distributed, to what a firm stands for (its brand identity) and how it acts as a business partner (Persson, 2010).

In accordance with the literature on branding, literature on brand equity also places emphasis on the role of relationships in B2B marketing. In this context, however, the relationship refers to the customer’s relationship with the brand as opposed to with the firm. Santos-Vijande et al. (2013) agreed with Leek and Christodoulides (2012) that the brand was more than a physical entity which identified the firm’s products, but was an important intangible, strategic resource which was based on social relationships. The authors applied this definition especially to service firms, due to the nature of their interactions with clients relating to experiences rather than physical products.

Lindgreen, Beverland and Farrelly (2010) also supported this view, arguing that decisions in B2B industries are made based on emotional benefits, despite organisational systems being in place to ensure rational decision-making. Lindgreen, Beverland and Farrelly’s (2010) findings emphasised the critical role that satisfaction, trust, commitment and relationship quality played in buying decisions in B2B future-based industrial goods.

The attitude of clients towards the brand is important in building brand equity, but the relationship between the firm and its clients is more important, when not viewed in isolation from each other (Marquardt, 2013). Marquardt (2013) discovered that relational resources were improved as the quality of the firm-client relationship moved from transactional activities in low quality relationships to collaborative activities in high quality relationships.
The relationship between a customer and a brand may also be the main reason behind a customer’s willingness to pay a price premium for that brand (Persson, 2010). This does not contradict the importance of relationships or branding, but rather illustrates their interrelationship. Zaichkowsky, Parlee and Hill (2010) argued that branding could add another dimension to the usual relationship management focus of B2B marketing literature. As opposed to previous research on the topic, Persson (2010) explored relationship marketing as a distinct component of brand image, instead of separate from it. Despite the literature on B2B marketing placing great emphasis on relationship marketing as driver of strategic advantage (Glynn, 2012; Davis, Golicic & Marquardt, 2008), relationship marketing and branding are not mutually exclusive, but rather have a multiplier effect (Glynn, 2012). The brand acts as a resource that enables and directs the relationship between a firm and its clients (Glynn, 2012). Brands can thus be said to act as initiators of relationships, while enhancing the client’s perception of the seller (Glynn, 2012).

In contrast, however, Biedenbach, Bengtsson and Wincent (2011) observed that relationship marketing might assist with retaining existing clients, but has limited scope for acquiring new clients or building brand equity. Contrary to the relational view on branding and its effect on competitive advantage, Wang and Sengupta (2016) concluded that relational strategies to the marketing of B2B firms would not necessarily translate into tangible gains in brand equity. The authors found that stakeholder relationships do contribute to intangible gains, such as the development of valuable capabilities, but this might be contingent on other resources, such as organisational culture and industry characteristics. The authors concluded that the firm’s unique strengths, resources and culture should be prioritised in its branding activities.

Firms need to internalise the strategic importance of the brand (brand orientation); to align employee behaviour to the meaning of the brand (internal branding); and, most importantly, to allocate resources to the long-term management of the firm’s brand efficiently (strategic brand management) (Santos-Vijande et al., 2013). Marketers in B2B firms, whether they are managers or employees, require the resources to conduct marketing activities properly. They require the available time, staffing, and budgets for research, training, and client relationship management (Reid, 2008).
Brand management is critical for B2B service firms to sustain credibility and to maintain long-term competitive advantage (Santos-Vijande et al., 2013). In the development of their brand management system, the authors emphasized the importance of brand orientation, internal branding and strategic brand management in the process of building brand equity.

Two main approaches to measuring brand equity are evident in the literature, namely financial based brand equity and consumer based brand equity (De Oliveira, Silveira & Luce, 2015). Keller’s (2003) seminal article on building brand equity, which was the base for much of the literature on brand equity (Kuhn, Nigel & Pope, 2008) focussed on consumer-based brand equity. The author devised a model for the measurement of brand equity, the Consumer-based Brand Equity (CBBE) model.

Figure 1: Keller’s Consumer-Based Brand Equity model

According to Keller (2003), the basic premise of this model was that the power of a brand lies in the consumer’s perceptions of it. This model represented a series of consecutive steps. Brand identity (“who are you?”) made up the base, followed by brand meaning (“what are you?”), brand response (“what do I think or feel about you?”) and culminating in brand relationship (“what kind of connection would I like with you?”). According to this view, each step is contingent on addressing the previous step, and thus a firm cannot reach brand meaning, brand response or brand relationship without covering the foundation building block viz. brand identity.
Keller’s CBBE model was based on the B2C industries, and its applicability to B2B industries was questioned by researchers (e.g. Kuhn, Nigel & Pope, 2008; Zaichkowsky, Parlee & Hill, 2009). However, there was no competing B2B model (Kuhn, Nigel & Pope, 2008). Kuhn, Nigel and Pope (2008) studied this model in the B2B context, and adjusted the model to suit this context. The major difference discovered was that Keller’s model focussed on individual brands, while B2B brands often related to the corporate brand. The study also stated that salience, reputation and judgement were relevant in B2B contexts, while it replaced emotions with sales force relationships.

This revised model has been applied in research since then (Zaichkowsky, Parlee & Hill, 2009) and has been found to be suited to the B2B industries. However, the study Kuhn, Nigel and Pope (2008) was based on the highly tangible industry of electronic tracking devices, and thus some of its finding might not overlap with the intangible nature of services. Service firms, and especially professional service firms, might not have sales forces, but its employees act as the first point of contact with clients (De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003), and thus could be applied to sales force relationships. The following section explains the building blocks of the adjusted B2B CBBE model (Kuhn, Nigel & Pope, 2008).

Figure 2: A revised Customer-Based Brand Equity model for B2B

Source: Adapted from Kuhn, Nigel and Pope (2008, p.50).
2.4.1 Salience

Salience refers to the brand identity of the firm, which is addressed in section 2.5, to follow. Brand salience occurs when the brand identification needs of the client are satisfied (Keller, 2003). Brand salience forms the foundation for brand equity, and affects the strength of brand associations that give the brand meaning (Keller, 2003).

2.4.2 Performance

Salience alone cannot guarantee the developing of brand equity, and thus brand meaning (performance and reputation) forms the second step in the ladder to brand equity. Performance relates to the primary characteristics and secondary features of the firm; the reliability, durability and serviceability of the service; the effectiveness, efficiency and empathy of the service; and the style, design and price of the service brand (Keller, 2003).

2.4.3 Reputation (Imagery)

The reputation of the firm’s brand is based on the user profiles, the personality and values of the brand and its history, heritage and relevant experience (Kuhn, Nigel & Pope, 2008). Reputation also refers to the manner in which the brand endeavours to meet consumers’ psychological and social needs. This relates to the associations consumers form with the brand, including who else purchases it and where it originates from (Keller, 2003).

2.4.4 Judgements

Brand response forms the subsequent step on the ladder to brand equity, and comprises of the components judgement and sales force relationships. Judgements of the brand are based on the quality and credibility of the firm’s services, and the consideration and superiority of the firm (Keller, 2003). These are based on the client’s personal opinions and evaluations of the brand (Keller, 2003).
2.4.5 Sales force relationships

Employees in the firm’s sales force act as brand ambassadors. Purchasing decisions are thus not only based on the clients’ assessments of the functional benefits of the product or service, but also on the company’s employees (Kuhn, Nigel & Pope, 2008). Sales force relationships are comprised of the feeling of security it encourages in clients; the communication and negotiation quality between the sales force (or front-line employees) and the clients; and the technical assistance and knowledge presented by the sales force (Kuhn, Nigel & Pope, 2008).

2.4.6 Partnership solutions (Resonance)

The culmination of the adjusted CBBE model, is the resonance built up with stakeholders, via being part of a community; the brand engaging with stakeholders; and clients and stakeholders feeling a sense of loyalty and attachment to the firm’s brand (Keller, 2003).

The building blocks of Keller’s adjusted CBBE model all work in conjunction with the others to build up brand equity. Thus, a firm cannot reach brand meaning, brand response or brand relationship without covering the foundation building block, brand identity (Keller, 2003).

Since brand identity is the main building block towards developing brand equity (Klopper & North, 2011), the building of brand equity depends on the development of brand identity. Brand identity is explained in the following section, and the elements comprising brand identity are discussed in detail, particularly in relation to the B2B Service Brand Identity Network by Coleman et al. (2011).

2.5 Brand identity and the brand identity network

Building brands involves the development of a unique meaning that holds value, which is also known as brand identity (Klopper & North, 2011). Brand identity shapes the cornerstone of the brand strategy and represents the value the brand adds to people’s lives.
Brand identity refers to the internal measures taken by a firm to promote the perception of its brand (Coleman et al., 2011). The authors defined B2B service brand identity as “the strategist’s vision of how a B2B service brand should be perceived by its stakeholders” (2011, p.1064). Much of the literature merged the concepts of brand identity with brand image (Coleman et al., 2011). Brand image represents the view of the firm’s brand from the perspective of the client (Da Silveira, Lages & Simões, 2013). Whilst brand identity is a long-term strategic asset, brand image is a medium-term tactical asset which is subject to change (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). The difference between brand image and brand identity are illustrated in Figure 3, below.

**Figure 3: The difference between brand identity and brand image**

![Diagram illustrating the difference between brand identity and brand image](source: Researcher, adapted from Burmann, Jost-Benz & Riley, 2009)

This view of the brand from the client’s perspective (brand image) gives direction to management on how to structure the brand identity to match up to the client’s expectations, which should lead to being able to charge a price premium (Persson, 2010). Brand image can affect business buyers’ perceptions of the quality of products and services, and thus their value (Lindgreen, Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). The authors argued that brand image, including the dimensions of brand familiarity, attention to service, and relationship management, plays an important role in the willingness of customers to pay a price premium.
The development of brand identity precedes, and thus forms the base for, brand image (Burmann, Jost-Benz & Riley, 2009). Brand management is only possible through the management of brand identity, as this is the image of the brand that the firm wants to project into the world (Burmann, Jost-Benz & Riley, 2009). Brand identity plays a pivotal role in maintaining the client’s trust, which forms the foundation for long-term brand loyalty and client relationships (Burmann, Jost-Benz & Riley, 2009). Strong, positive brand identities in firms leave a favourable impression with clients which is difficult to imitate and expensive to compete against, which results in a powerful competitive advantage (Davis, Golnicic & Marquardt, 2008).

A strong brand and stakeholder knowledge of the firm increases trust in the intangible purchase of a service (Kumar, Cohen & Rajan, 2015). While relationships play an essential role in maintaining repeat clients, brand identity is the first touch point for new clients (Keller, 2003). Brand identity informs stakeholders about the identity of the firm, and thus plays an important role in the sourcing of new clients (Kumar, Cohen & Rajan, 2015).

Coleman et al. (2011) developed the B2B Service Brand Identity Network as an alternative to existing B2C brand identity models, for the analysis of B2B service brands. This network provided an alternative means of analysis of the brand identity of B2B service brands for future research. The B2B Service Brand Identity Network consists of five dimensions (Coleman et al., 2011), as illustrated in Figure 4.

**Figure 4: The B2B Service Brand Identity Network**

![Diagram of the B2B Service Brand Identity Network](source: Adapted from Coleman et al. (2011, p.1069))
Given that brand identity forms the base of brand equity, as demonstrated in section 2.4.6, the conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 5, below, is proposed to illustrate this relationship. Subsequently, components of the B2B Service Brand Identity Network are examined in more detail.

Figure 5: Conceptual framework of brand identity in relation to brand equity

Source: Researcher, adapted from Kuhn et al. (2008) and Coleman et al. (2011)
2.5.1 Human resources initiatives

Human resources initiatives are a function of the importance that a firm places on its marketing function. This translates into the marketing culture. The marketing culture of the firm is improved by the human resources incentives the firm offers its employees for their focus on marketing the firm. Coleman, De Chernatony and Christodoulides (2015) in an empirical study of the effects of the B2B Service Brand Identity Network, identified two aspects to human resources initiatives – training and performance measurement.

In B2B professional services firms, employees become the face of the firm as they are the first point of contact for stakeholders (De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003). Employees function as brand representatives and are vital in building relationships with clients (Glynn, 2012, Leek & Christodoulides, 2012). Coleman et al. (2011) noted that the building and nurturing of a supportive marketing culture was as an effective way of creating and maintaining employee satisfaction. This mediated the varying nature of human behaviour in services branding.

Dedicated employees form the basis of successful client relationships. Employee loyalty to the firm is earned via investment in training and development, providing challenging career paths and aligning incentives to employee performance (Hutt & Speh, 2014; De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003).

2.5.2 Employee and client focus

Relationships play an important role in the branding of B2B professional services due to the relational nature of client-firm interactions (Coleman et al., 2011; Kotler & Keller, 2016). Trust is built through establishing emotional connections with clients (Herbst & Merz, 2011). This aspect of the branding requires the commitment of employees, and their commitment to the needs of the client (Coleman et al., 2011). Employees form the original source of brand equity in B2B service firms and thus are an essential component of identity-based brand equity (Burmann, Jost-Benz & Riley, 2009). Making use of emotional brand benefit associations has become all the more important in the increasingly commoditised B2B environment (Herbst & Merz, 2011).
A strong consumer orientation enhances the brand image of service firms (Davis, Golicic & Marquardt, 2008). Every interaction between the firm and its stakeholders in a B2B service market contributes to the brand image. It is thus of pivotal importance that employees align their behaviour to the brand identity of the firm. Clear communication of the value proposition of the firm is of paramount importance (Davis, Golicic & Marquardt, 2008). The identification of consumer-derived value and its amalgamation with the firm’s value proposition, as well as its clear communication, serves to successfully build the brand image (Davis, Golicic & Marquardt, 2008; Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006).

2.5.3 Consistent communications

The extent to which a firm communicates consistently measures the firm’s understanding of marketing communication channels, and of how to communicate in a way that presents a consistent brand identity (Coleman, de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2015). Consistent communication conveys the value of the brand to stakeholders. Horan, O’Dwyer and Tieran (2011) suggested that the consistency of the message and method of communication is vitally important in order to have a significant effect on the brand identity. The study by Leek and Christodoulides (2012) maintained that consistent communication of the brand strategy to employees would result in the consistent communication of the brand identity to clients. Service brands have more points of contact with the client than product-based brands, which makes consistent communication even more crucial (De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003).

2.5.4 Corporate visual identity

The corporate visual identity of a brand provides visual cues to distinguish the brand, such as logos, uniforms and the design of the premises. These concrete objects give a tangible aspect to the intangible nature of professional services and convey the brand identity more clearly to clients (Coleman et al., 2011). These brand elements are developed with the anticipation that they will become rich in meaning and be instilled in the public perception of the brand. Visual elements hold the possibility of maintaining continuity of the brand, creating cultural significance and finding emotional resonance with stakeholders (Klopper & North, 2011).
2.5.5 Brand personality

Coleman et al. (2011) highlighted the importance of securing an emotional connection with clients via a brand personality. Brand personality refers to the personality of the brand, if it were to be a person (Coleman et al., 2011). It provides a way to differentiate a firm from competitors, while promoting emotional and functional brand value associations. It also assists in the perception of the firm as a trustworthy partner (Herbst & Merz, 2011).

In the quantitative application of this network by Coleman, de Chernatony, and Christodoulides (2015), it was concluded that brand personality and human resources incentives drove brand performance, while corporate visual identity and employee and client focus had no effect, and consistent communications had a negative effect. However, to the researcher’s knowledge, this network has never been applied in a qualitative study of the brand identity of service firms, and thus an opportunity exists for an in-depth study into this network.

2.6 Conclusion

Architectural firms need to differentiate themselves in order to increase the brand awareness of the industry (Coleman et al., 2011). This assists in addressing the problem of the commodification of this service, as illustrated in Chapter 1. The literature suggests that architects can no longer rely solely on relationship marketing, but need to extend their marketing strategies to the building of brand equity through developing their brand identities.

As professional service firms, architectural firms operating in the B2B industry offer predominantly intangible services also involving the production of tangible products (Mitrache, 2012). The mostly intangible nature of this industry results in client uncertainty (Amonini et al., 2010; Tsai, 2011). This uncertainty can be countered by a strong brand identity, as this serves as an indicator of quality products and services rendered (Backhaus, Steiner & Lügger, 2011). Marquardt (2013) emphasized the gap in the literature for research into the branding of B2B services pertaining to future-based services, particularly those which provide a hybrid of tangible and intangible offerings.
Although marketing in B2B industries has largely focussed on relationship marketing (Glynn, 2012; Davis, et al., 2008), Glynn (2012) and Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) argued that brands reach wider stakeholders than relationship marketing. The authors, in conjunction with De Charnatony and Segal-Horn (2003), argued for a more holistic view of marketing in the B2B industries, involving the strategic allocation of resources and an integrated brand strategy. From a resource-based view perspective, brands are regarded as strategic resources that can assist in the differentiation of firms and add to their competitive advantage (Glynn, 2012).

A strong brand is reflected in brand equity (Kotler & Keller, 2016), which results in the willingness of the buyer to pay a price premium (Marquardt, 2013). Kuhn, Nigel and Pope (2008) proposed a B2B version of Keller’s (2003) CBBE model, which highlights the components of brand equity. These components form a series of steps towards building brand equity, starting with brand identity (salience). In addition, Coleman et al. (2011) built a B2B Service Brand Identity Network, which illustrates the components of brand identity. As the conceptual framework, Figure 5 in section 2.5, indicates, the components of brand identity feed into brand equity, and thus building brand identity leads to improved brand equity, as argued by Keller (2003).

Coleman et al. (2011) further identified the gap for research into brand identity in B2B service firms from a management perspective, internal to the firm, as opposed to from the external perspective of consumers. Despite quantitative studies on the network, there does not seem to be any in-depth studies into the network and the management perspective of these components in the B2B service industries, to the researcher’s knowledge. This study aims to add to the current literature by studying the brand identities of B2B professional service firms, especially those in the unique industry of architecture, using the B2B CBBE model and the B2B Service Brand Identity Network. The following chapter sets out the research questions based on the problems illustrated in Chapter 1 and the findings in the literature, as illustrated in this chapter.
Chapter 3 – Research Questions

This research aims to answer one main research question and three secondary questions. These questions have been derived from the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

3.1 Main question

As evident from Chapter 1, architectural services are often viewed as commodities. Coleman et al. (2011) propose that competitive advantage through differentiation can be generated to combat this commodification, by developing a distinctive brand identity. This brand identity, in turn, builds the foundation for brand equity (Keller, 2003). The resultant main research question therefore is as follows:

*How do architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands, respectively, use brand identity to build the foundation of brand equity, in order to secure competitive advantage?*

3.2 Secondary questions

3.2.1 Chapter 1 illustrates how architectural firms in the Netherlands are better off financially than their South African counterparts. Subsequent to the proposition by Coleman et al. (2011) above, follows the first secondary question:

*What branding activities do architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands, respectively, employ to build brand identity?*

3.2.2 Reid (2008) illustrated the reluctance of South African architectural firms to engage in marketing or branding. This reluctance, in conjunction with the difference in the South African and Dutch context, as illustrated in Chapter 1, leads to the next secondary question:

*What is the management perspective, respectively, of architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands on the effect that brand identity has on their competitive positions?*
3.2.3 Reid (2008) indicated that there is little differentiation between the services rendered by architectural firms in South Africa. Strong, positive brand identities in firms leave a favourable impression with clients which is difficult to imitate and expensive to compete against, and thus result in differentiation and a powerful competitive advantage (Davis, Golicic & Marquardt, 2008). Thus follows the last secondary research question:

*To what extent do architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands, respectively, deliver on the five dimensions of the Coleman et al. (2011) B2B Service Brand Identity Network?*

3.3 **Primary objective**

To determine the manner in which architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands, respectively, use brand identity to build the foundation of brand equity, in order to secure competitive advantage.

3.4 **Secondary objectives**

3.4.1 To determine the branding activities that respective architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands employ to build brand identity.

3.4.2 To discover the management perspective of respective architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands on the effect that brand identity has on their competitive positions.

3.4.3 To determine the extent that respective architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands deliver on the five dimensions of the Coleman et al. (2011) B2B Service Brand Identity Network.
3.5 Conclusion

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the brand identity and brand equity of B2B architectural industries in South Africa and the Netherlands. This is achieved through studying architectural firms through the lens of the research questions outlined in this chapter. The ensuing chapter discusses the research methodology, design and analysis processes followed in this study in order to achieve the research objectives.
Chapter 4 - Research Methodology and Design

This chapter discusses the research methodology followed in this study. The research design is discussed, followed by the data collection method and measures taken to ensure the validity and reliability thereof. This section concludes with the data analysis process and limitations to the research.

4.1 Research design

In order to get an in-depth perspective of the brand equity and brand identity of B2B service firms, this study was a qualitative study, making use of a mono method and interpretivist philosophy (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). The qualitative research design followed opened up opportunities to investigate the topic in-depth, and to represent the real-world views of participants (Yin, 2011). A quantitative study would have allowed for statistical description of the data, but would have lacked the depth of insight that a qualitative study could provide, due to the structured nature of its questionnaires and surveys (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Qualitative research lends itself to exploratory studies (Creswell, 2014). As not much research has examined the brand identity and brand equity of architectural firms (Glynn, 2012, Leek & Christodoulides, 2012), this exploratory method enabled the researcher to listen to the participants and build an understanding based on what was heard (Creswell, 2014).

An interpretative philosophy was followed, which allowed the researcher to study the phenomenon of brand identity in the natural environment of the participants. This assisted in gaining a deeper understanding of the unique and complex situations of the participants (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). This philosophy also acknowledges the involvement of the researcher in the research, and requires the process of reflexivity and declaration of background and possible biases of the researcher (Creswell, 2014). These are discussed in more detail in section 4.8 and 4.9.

The research strategy included survey semi-structured personal interviews. Semi-structured personal interviews were used to collect data, in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the issues. The purpose of these interviews was to investigate how architectural firms operate in relation to the Coleman et al. (2011) B2B Service Brand Identity Network, feeding into the B2B version of Keller’s (2003) CBBE model (Kuhn, Nigel & Pope, 2008). Additionally, management insights were explored on how brand identity and brand equity are viewed in these firms.
Interviewing experts is a good way of conducting an exploratory study of a topic that in order to assess said topic in a novel way (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Whilst this study relied on the guidance of the Brand Identity Network and B2B CBBE model, it also aimed to find deeper insight into the management views on brand identity and brand equity.

The exploratory nature of this research, in conjunction with the framework provided by Coleman et al’s network and Keller’s model, lent itself to the organised, but flexible mode of semi-structured interviews. Structured interviews provide no manoeuvring space to adjust questions to follow the conversation, or persuade participants to divulge more in-depth information. Unstructured interviews are more suited to Grounded Theory research (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). An interview guide was set up, with questions and probes to coax participants to offer more information. Participants were allowed to deviate from the interview guide, and sometimes additional questions were asked, or questions omitted, depending on the situation (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Open-ended questions allowed for a more conversational flow of interviews, in order to get more in-depth responses (Yin, 2011).

The approach followed in this study was both deductive and inductive. Deductive analysis was conducted to identify the extent to which architectural firms delivered on the B2B Service Brand Identity Network, and to establish how these firms build brand equity according to the B2B adjusted version of Keller’s CBBE model. This deductive method, based on existing theory, provided a structure for the analysis. Following this process, an inductive analysis process was followed, to identify potential new concepts from the data (Yin, 2011). The value of qualitative research lies in the opportunities it presents to discover new insights into a topic (Yin, 2011), and thus including this additional inductive approach aimed to contribute to the depth of the study.

A cross-sectional time horizon was followed for this study. This allowed the researcher to get a ‘snapshot’ into the context of the participants, and allowed insight into the situation as it was at a specific point in time (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). A longitudinal study requires the continual study of a particular topic over a period of time, and follows changes in context (Saunders & Lewis, 2012) – an approach that was not required for this study.
4.2 Scope

As illustrated in section 1.5, the scope of the research spanned the geographical locations of Johannesburg and Pretoria, South Africa, and Rotterdam in the Netherlands. These two contexts were identified for their potential to provide insight into the possibly different branding practices in the developed economy of the Netherlands versus the developing economy of South Africa.

4.3 Universe

The universe of the study relates to the total population of the group studied. Clearly defining the universe is pivotal for data collection and analysis (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Since this research report focusses on the B2B service industry of architecture, the universe for this study was all architectural practices in the provinces of Gauteng, South Africa, and of Holland in the Netherlands.

Although no figures have been published of the number of architectural firms in Gauteng, this province had the largest number of registered professional architects in South Africa - 1,913 architects at the end of 2015 (South African Council of the Architectural Profession, 2015), accounting for 52 percent of the country’s registered architects. The Netherlands had 10,900 registered architects in 2014, of whom most are based in North and South Holland (Architects’ Council of Europe, 2014). The major cities focussed on were Johannesburg and Pretoria in Gauteng, and Rotterdam in South Holland, as economic activity clusters predominantly around urban areas.

4.4 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis of a study refers to the participants or groups that were studied (Creswell, 2014). These units need to appropriately reflect the main topic of the study (Yin, 2011). To ensure this alignment between the research topic and the units of analysis, the unit of analysis for this study was the opinions on brand equity and brand identity of senior partners or marketing specialists, where applicable, in architectural practices in Pretoria and Johannesburg, South Africa and in Rotterdam, the Netherlands.
Reid (2008) determined that, in small firms, marketing activities were often undertaken by a senior partner, while in big firms, these activities were managed by marketing specialists. Consequently, the units of analysis of this study can vary according to the size of the firm.

4.5 Sampling

4.5.1 Sampling technique

Non-probability sampling was used, since there was no sampling frame. A sampling frame refers to a comprehensive list of the universe to select a sample from (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). This lack of sampling frame resulted in the inability of the researcher to calculate the probability of any specific participant being chosen (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Purposive sampling was employed, which involves the purposeful choice of participants founded on the researcher’s judgement, based on their ability to answer the research question (Yin, 2011). This sampling technique was deemed to be the most relevant to the study, as snowball sampling would have resulted in a homogeneous sample, since participants were likely to have suggested other participants with common interests (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Self-selecting sampling might also have resulted in the selection of participants with strong opinions on the topics (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Thus, the purposive sampling method was considered to be the best suited to the study, as it allowed for the filtering of participants through a set of selection criteria (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Participants were selected on the basis that they would yield the most relevant and rich data (Yin, 2011).

The first selection criterion related to the size of firms. The iterative process of research (Yin, 2011) resulted in the changing of this criterion from small and large firms, to the size being limited to firms with 20 employees or less.

This was due to two considerations:

4.5.1.1 Too many variables impacting on the study. During the process of research, the focus was shifted to be on the in-group differences between architectural firms in different geographical regions - South Africa and the Netherlands. The variable of firm size would have compromised the clarity of the research. Reid (2008) reported in-group differences between big and smaller architectural firms in their approach to branding, and these differences would have clouded the study.
4.5.1.2 High non-response rate from large firms. Eight South African big firms were approached for interviews, and only three responded to the request, despite continuous effort by the researcher. This very small sample would not have provided sufficient in-depth data, and its generalisability would have been compromised;

The second selection criterion was based on the type of client the firm serves. Firms that focussed mainly on single-family residential clients were not included, due to this representing the B2C market. Instead, the study focussed on firms that operate in the B2B market, with an institutional, commercial and corporate client base.

South African participants were purposively selected by the researcher, based on the selection criteria above. Due to the researcher being an outsider to the Dutch architectural industry, an insider was contacted to facilitate the selection process of participants in the Netherlands. The researcher contacted a lecturer at the local architecture school, the Rotterdamse Academie van Bouwkunst. Being experienced in conducting research and being part of the architectural community, this lecturer provided invaluable information on which firms to select to participate in the research. Following discussion of the selection criteria, the lecturer put the researcher in direct contact with six participants, chosen purposively to adhere to the selection criteria. Five of these participants responded positively, and were consequently interviewed.

4.5.2 Sample size

No precise formula exists for the number of units to be included in the sample (Yin, 2011), although Creswell (2014) suggested between three and ten units, and Saunders and Lewis (2012) recommended about ten, suggesting that the sample size is dependent on the population of the study. Consequently, this study aimed at reaching data saturation to determine the sample size, instead of depending on a formula or guideline.

Data saturation is reached when there is sufficient information to replicate the study and when no new codes are forthcoming from the data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Information for the replication of this study is partially contained in the appendices (refer to the interview schedule in Appendix A) and further data are available upon request. Saturation was reached when subsequent interviews did not add additional value to the study. This was discovered through the number of new codes that came to light with each analysis.
Figure 6 and Figure 7, below, illustrate the number of new codes generated per participant. Since the data were compared between South Africa and the Netherlands, new codes were analysed per country. The number of new codes generated fell sharply after the second South African participant. New interviews were conducted until new codes reached a plateau, after which one more interview was conducted to ensure code saturation. For the participants from the Netherlands, new codes fell sharply after the first participant, and reached a plateau at the fourth. As with the South African group, one more interview was conducted, which only generated two new codes. This served to illustrate that code saturation was reached (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

Figure 6: New codes generated per participant – South Africa
The sample size of firms included in the study was of 13 firms overall – eight in South Africa and five in the Netherlands - until code saturation was reached (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Altogether, 17 interviews were conducted. The low response rate of bigger firms, as well as the possible complication of the added in-group difference variable, as discussed previously in section 4.5.1, resulted in three interviews with bigger firms being excluded from the dataset, in addition to the initial test interview. Table 1, below, illustrates the interview participants, with participants whose data was excluded from the dataset italicised.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Method of Contact</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14 August 2016</td>
<td>Director [excluded]</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>15 August 2016</td>
<td>Member/ MD</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>16 August 2016</td>
<td>Director [excluded]</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>17 August 2016</td>
<td>PR Manager [excluded]</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>22 September 2016</td>
<td>Associate, Head of Communications [excluded]</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>11 October 2016</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>12 October 2016</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>13 October 2016</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>13 October 2016</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>14 October 2016</td>
<td>Media Manager</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>17 October 2016</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>18 October 2016</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>19 October 2016</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>20 October 2016</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>21 October 2016</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>25 October 2016</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>27 October 2016</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.6 Research instrument/measurement

4.6.1 Design

As indicated in section 4.1, a qualitative data collection method was used, in order to facilitate the deeper exploration into the brand identities and resulting brand equity of B2B service firms. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews in order to get answers to a set of standard questions, while leaving flexibility (as mentioned in section 4.1) to find out more about certain topics as they were raised by the participant (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

4.6.2 Pre-testing

Two pilot tests were conducted. The first test was conducted with an architect who did not qualify for the study, due to the sampling rules. The second test was conducted with a participant of the study and was used as part of the data, as suggested by Rowley (2012).

These pilot tests evaluated the responses of the participants, and allowed the researcher to adjust the interview guide to address the research questions more specifically. The test interviews indicated weak points in the interview guide (Rowley, 2012). After the test interviews, the following adjustments were made to the original interview guide (refer to Appendix A):

4.6.2.1 The interview guide was made less structured. The pilot tests indicated that the original interview guide was too structured and guided the responses of the participants too much. This structure also had the effect of shortening the responses, resulting in too little data. The interview guide was subsequently adjusted to be more open-ended, guided mostly by the responses of the participants and by probing for more information as required,

4.6.2.2 a description of the way that this research approaches branding was included at the start of the interview, to prevent the participant’s understanding of branding being limited to logos and images,

4.6.2.3 academic terms were changed to layman’s terms, to make the meaning more apparent to the participants, who did not necessarily have a Marketing education or background,
4.6.2.4 redundant and repetitive questions were eliminated.

4.7 Data collection

Thirteen in-depth interviews were conducted. One face-to-face interview was conducted in Johannesburg, South Africa, along with the test interviews as described in section 4.6.2. While the researcher was based in the Netherlands, five face-to-face interviews were conducted in Rotterdam, the Netherlands and six telephonic or Skype interviews to Pretoria and Johannesburg, South Africa. These interviews ranged between 22 to 74 minutes in length, each, as shown in Table 2. On average, interviews conducted face-to-face in the Netherlands lasted longer than those conducted via Skype or telephone call to South Africa. Table 2, below, illustrates the length and word count of the interviews by participant.

Table 2: Length of interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Length (min)</th>
<th>Word count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SA1</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA2</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA3</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA4</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA5</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>9276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA6</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>6607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA7</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA8</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>5369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average SA</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>39</strong></td>
<td><strong>5433</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL1</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>8651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL2</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>6690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL3</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL4</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>8651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL5</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average NL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>46</strong></td>
<td><strong>6763</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>43</strong></td>
<td><strong>6098</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants were initially contacted via email. The email stated the researcher’s background and the purpose of the study, and included the benefits of taking part in the study (Rowley, 2012). Participants were assured that their data would not be linked to their identities or the identity of the firm. Once participants responded positively, a date and time suitable to them was set up for the interview. In the Netherlands, the researcher travelled to the participants’ offices. For the South African interviews, the researcher contacted the participants over Skype or telephone call. Possible lack of trust from participants, due to telephone interviews was mediated by the researcher and participants having met face-to-face previously (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

During the interview, the researcher introduced herself (where necessary) and talked about the participant’s office environment or something similarly neutral, to create a conversational atmosphere. Before starting the interview, the participant was asked to sign the consent sheet (refer to Appendix B), and the content was explained where asked for. The researcher obtained the participant’s permission for recording the interview. The researcher guided the participants through the structure of the interview, before commencing with the questions. She also explained that any question could go unanswered, were the participant to feel uncomfortable providing an answer.

Interviews were conducted by following the interview guide in an adaptable manner, as explained in section 4.1. The participants were allowed the freedom to lead the discussion in related directions, and the order of questions asked was changed to follow the flow of conversation (Yin, 2011). In cases where questions were redundant, they were not asked. The researcher asked related questions that were not on the interview guide in some cases, if the participant had mentioned something different that the researcher deemed interesting to enquire more deeply into. Prompts were used to get more in-depth answers, where needed, or to guide the conversation back to the main topic (Rowley, 2012). Interviews were concluded by asking the participant if they wanted to add any other information, and then thanking them for their time (Creswell, 2014).
4.8 Validity and reliability

Validity refers to the proper collection and interpretation of data in order for the findings to accurately reflect the real world (Yin, 2011). The following steps were followed to ensure validity of the data:

4.8.1.1 Interviews with participants were recorded and transcribed, which reduced the necessity for triangulation of the data (Yin, 2011). Triangulation involves the collection of convergent data from different sources in order to corroborate the evidence (Yin, 2011). Since data were collected directly from the source and recorded instantly, this mediated the need for triangulation.

4.8.1.2 Field notes were taken for the purposes of respondent triangulation. These noted the interviewer’s observations during interviews, which were later used for the purpose of reflexivity, to reflect on the influence of her own background and perceptions on the topic.

4.8.1.3 Researcher biases were declared. As the primary research instrument in qualitative research, the researcher’s background and her biases should be acknowledged and made explicit. Candidly stating these biases contributes to the rigor of the research (Yin, 2011). Reflectivity on her biases, from the researcher is demonstrated below, in section 4.9 (Creswell, 2014).

4.8.1.4 Quasi-statistics were used (Yin, 2011). The research was reported in numbers instead of adjectives, i.e. referring to ‘three participants’ instead of ‘a few participants’.

4.8.1.5 A comparison was made between different contexts (Yin, 2011). This comparison was across participants from South Africa in relation to participants from the Netherlands.

Reliability can be achieved if the process can be replicated by other researchers and produce similar results (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). This research report aimed to achieve reliability in the following manner:

4.8.1.6 Transparency in the analysis process. The process is explained in section 4.1.1, below. This methodological analysis process also assists in building the trustworthiness of the research and reinforcing its academic rigour (Kuckartz, 2003).
4.8.1.7 Interview guides, included in Appendix A, to facilitate replication of the study. Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed, and these audio and text files were submitted with the research report (Kuckartz, 2003).

4.8.1.8 Interview transcripts were checked in relation to the recordings, and any errors were corrected, to secure the accurate recording of participants’ responses (Creswell, 2014).

4.9 Bias

The process of reflexivity serves to identify biases in the research process and to describe the assumptions, beliefs and biases of the researcher (Creswell, 2014). The researcher is an architect who has spent 13 years studying and working in the architectural field. This might result in researcher bias (Saunders & Lewis, 2012), as the shared background between the researcher and the participant might result in rapport being built quickly. The researcher might also have existing pre-conceptions of the nature of the industry, due to her own experience. Additionally, her background as South African might have influenced her perception of Dutch participants and their responses, viewing it from a South African perspective.

As the architectural industry is a small community, the researcher was familiar with most of the South African participants. The researcher did not know any of the Dutch participants before the research, and this might thus have resulted in a skewness in the amount of information the participants were willing to reveal (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

The researcher’s background in the architectural industry might have led to her interpretation of the data leaning towards her personal views. Having experienced the reluctance of architectural firms to partake in marketing and branding identity activities, the researcher had to be conscious of her own biases in that regard, while analysing the data (Creswell, 2014). A prescribed data analysis process was followed (refer to section 4.11, below), to attempt to reduce the effect of these biases on the research.
4.10 Ethical considerations

Firstly, ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) before the start of the data collection phase. The research proposal, research methodology and interview guide were issued to the GIBS ethical clearance committee, and ethical clearance was obtained (refer to Appendix C).

Secondly, participants were requested to sign the interview consent form, and the content was explained to them when queried. Participants were informed of their right to withhold answers to questions that they did not want to answer (Rowley, 2012). In cases where it was requested, the interview guide was sent to participants prior to the interview, to ensure clear communication (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Confidentiality was maintained by separating the identity of the participants and their firms from their responses in the research report. The pseudonyms that were assigned to participants was also assigned randomly, to not relate to the sequence in which interviews were conducted (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

4.11 Data analysis

4.11.1 Analysis tool

Thematic content analysis was applied to identify, analyse and report patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process of analysis is generally linked to inductive analysis, but due to its flexibility it suited the mixed analysis method used in this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis results in rich and complex data, which reinforces the validity of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2014).

Data analysis was conducted with the help of the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. Interviews were transcribed and entered into the software. Codes were identified from the literature and used in the deductive study of the transcribed interviews. Subsequently, inductive coding was utilised to capture additional data, which is a widely-recognised manner of mixed method analysis (Kuckartz, 2014). Using a deductive approach only could have led to the premature loss of new information resulting from the real-world events being studied (Yin, 2011), and thus additionally analysing the data from an inductive perspective had the benefit of discovering new themes.
4.11.2 Transcript preparation

Voice recordings of the interviews were sent to two specialists for transcription, to facilitate time saving. Once the transcripts were received, the researcher performed a cleaning of the data by listening to the interview, while adjusting the transcript to correct errors and omissions, and to remove filler words, such as ‘uhm’. In places where the recording was inaudible, the researcher adjusted this to fit her memory and the context of the conversation.

Transcripts were converted into Rich Text Format for compatibility with Atlas.ti. The recorded name of the participant was changed to suit the pseudonym allocated to it, and the interviewer’s text was highlighted in bold, to facilitate analysis. This process took about 2 hours per interview.

4.12 Method of analysis

Transcripts were loaded onto Atlas.ti, a computer-aided qualitative data analysis software programme. A thematic qualitative text analysis process was followed (Kuckartz, 2014). This is a systematic analysis of the content of the data, creating categories (or themes) from the data, and analysing the data according to those categories (Kuckartz, 2014). The process suggested by Kuckartz (2014) was followed in order to achieve rigour in the research. The steps in the process were:

4.12.1 Initial work with the text

Each data set, in text format, was prepared as mentioned in section 4.11.2, above. The text was carefully read and notes made on relevant topics (Kuckartz, 2014).

4.12.2 Develop main thematic categories

A code manual was developed for the deductive analysis of the data. This manual was developed a priori from the main research question and the theoretical concepts. The codes were based on Kuhn, Nigel and Pope’s B2B CBBE model (2008) and Coleman et al.’s B2B Service Brand Identity Network (2012). This would function to address the primary research question, “How do architectural firms use brand identity to build brand equity for competitive advantage?”
Definitions of the codes were drawn from the B2B CBBE model and the scale that accompanies the B2B Service Brand Identity Network, the B2B Service Brand Identity Scale (refer to Appendix E) to enable the consistent application of themes. Table 3, below, illustrates a sample of the code manual.

**Table 3 – Sample of code manual**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BE: Partnership solutions</td>
<td>Loyalty, attachment, community, engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE: Judgement</td>
<td>Quality, credibility, consideration, superiority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE: Sales force relationships</td>
<td>After-sales service support, staff honesty, ability to contact company representatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE: Reputation</td>
<td>Primary characteristics and secondary features, product reliability, durability and serviceability, service effectiveness, efficiency and empathy, style and design, price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE: Performance</td>
<td>User profiles, purchase and usage situation, personality and values, history, heritage and experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE: Salience</td>
<td>[Not coded as part of brand equity, rather coded in components of brand identity]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4.12.3 Coding all the categories according to the main categories**

A two-fold analysis of the data was conducted. Firstly, a deductive analysis was performed. The existing theory, as analysed in Chapter Two, was condensed into main topics, and these were used as codes to analyse the data.

This code book was first tested on the first pilot interview, to ascertain whether these codes would adequately represent the data (Kuckartz, 2014). Once this process was completed, the deductive data analysis was repeated for each interview, to ensure all data had been captured.
4.12.4 Creating sub-categories for inductive coding

An inductive method was subsequently followed to capture the data that did not fall under the existing theory themes, in the form of emerging codes (Creswell, 2014). Inductive analysis was consequently used to facilitate a deeper understanding of the data. This was an iterative process - as new codes were created, they were also applied to previous data sets as relevant (Kuckartz, 2014). Appendix D displays the list of deductive and inductive codes.

4.12.5 Cleaning of codes

After coding was applied and reviewed, a process of cleaning up codes was followed. Codes with similar or overlapping meanings were merged into one and redundant codes were unlinked from the data. This facilitated the data analysis process.

4.13 Research limitations

Limitations of the research originated from the research design (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). The following limitations applied:

4.13.1.1 The research focussed only on architectural practices in the B2B services industries, which limits its applicability to other industries. As illustrated in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, the unique location between services and products in the B2B industry positions architecture in a niche;

4.13.1.2 The length of time required from participants in order to engage in interviews resulted in a higher non-response bias from managers. Out of the 27 possible participants contacted, only 16 responded, of which three were discarded due to sampling rules (refer to section 4.5.1);

4.13.1.3 As the researcher is an architect herself, participants might have been affected by social desirability bias. The presence of the researcher might have resulted in participants tailoring their answers to what they thought she wanted to hear;

4.13.1.4 The small sample size used for exploratory research (n = 13) might impact negatively on the scalability of the findings. The bigger the sample size, the higher the confidence in the research findings (Yin, 2011);
4.13.1.5 Some interviews were conducted via telephone or Skype, which limited the number of visual cues the researcher could observe. While visiting the offices of participants in the Netherlands, the researcher had the opportunity to observe their physical context. In telephone conversations, or even Skype calls, the scope of visual cues was limited to zero;

4.13.1.6 Cultural differences between the researcher and the Dutch participants might have resulted in culture bias affecting the interpretation of the data. Humans view the world through the lens of their own cultural background, and this could have resulted in the researcher and participants misunderstanding the meaning of the other’s responses;

4.13.1.7 Some Dutch respondents struggled to find one or two words in English, which the researcher then translated from Dutch, due to her familiarity with the similar language Afrikaans. This might have had an effect on the direction and flow of the conversation;

4.13.1.8 This research report focussed on the effect of branding on competitive advantage, and excluded any external factors that could influence it;

4.13.1.9 The size of the firms included in the research could have an effect on the generalisability of the findings, as in-group differences exist between firms of different sizes in the architectural industry (Reid, 2008);

4.13.1.10 The limited amount of time available to conduct the research, resulting in a cross-sectional time horizon, could influence the depth of data gathered. A longitudinal study could provide more insight, by studying participants over a period of time, and observing their actions over that time.

4.14 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research design and analysis method followed in this study. This research was a qualitative study, making use of a mono method and interpretivist philosophy. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted for the collection of data, and Atlas.ti was used to assist in the deductive and inductive analysis of the data. The following section discusses the results of the research, conducted according to the design discussed in this chapter.
Chapter 5 – Results

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the study according to the research questions that were articulated in Chapter 3. The findings of the analysis of the data is presented in this section, through discussion of the themes assembled from personal interviews with the managers or marketers of architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands. The chapter sets out the context of the data collection, followed by a thematic analysis of the data, and concluding in new themes identified from the data.

5.2 Summary of contextual information collected

This research studied architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands with fewer than 20 employees and which operate in the B2B industry. At the start of each interview, contextual data were collected from participants, in order to gauge the background of the firms. This also served to confirm that the firms complied to the sampling rules. The data collected related to the annual turnover of the firm, the number of employees, the role of the participant in the firm, the type of clients served, the history of the firm and the basis on which fees are charged.

Four of the 13 firms were younger than 10 years old, while four of the firms were older than 20 years old. The firms from the Netherlands were the oldest on average, with an average age of 21 years, while those in South Africa had an average age of 18 years. One firm which has been operating for 52 years, skewed the average age of South African firms, without which the average age would be nine years. The length of experience in an industry adds to knowledge of that industry and successful strategies for staying competitive, and valuable insight could thus be gathered from the participants from older firms.

All participants conformed to the sampling rules, serving businesses (B2B) more than individual clients (B2C). The smallest firm had two employees, while the largest firm had twenty. Nine of the firms had an annual turnover of between R1 million to R10 million, and seven of the firms based fees on their own scale, loosely based on a suggested fee scale.
5.3 Transcript analysis through word count

The text was analysed to compare the most regularly occurring words, to triangulate the findings of the thematic analysis. The Word Cruncher tool in Atlas.ti was used to find a list of the total words and their frequency of occurrence. This was exported to an Excel spreadsheet, where all conjunctions (e.g. ‘the’, ‘and’, ‘but’) were removed. The data were then filtered in descending order, to identify the most occurring words, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 - Total word count – All participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Total Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>firm/ company/ office</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>people</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>project/s</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clients/ developers</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>architects/ architecture</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work/ing</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>building/s</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brand/ing</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>know</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>different/ly</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since themes were deducted from the theory and were applied globally, the word count was not split into the two geographical groups, but analysed altogether. Participants mentioned their firms the most, which indicated an internal focus. This is congruent with the study of the firm’s actions and managerial view, which manifest in brand identity (internal), as opposed to the customer’s perspective, which relates to brand image (external).

The theme ‘people’ emerged as the second-most used word. This theme relates to the brand identity theme *employee and client focus*, as does the term ‘clients/ developers’. ‘People’ also relates to the brand equity theme *partnership solutions* which seems to testify to the relational focus of B2B service firms.

The themes ‘project’ and ‘work/ing’ relate to the partly intangible nature of the architectural industry, which entails the completion of projects. As does the theme ‘architecture’. ‘Building’ builds upon that, highlighting the tangible result of this intangible act of ‘working’ and of completing projects.
The term ‘know’ relates to the brand equity theme of *judgement*, which entails the credibility of a firm, and its reputation for being credible. Interestingly, the tenth most used word, ‘different/ly’ seems to relate to the competitive positions of firms, and how they strive to differentiate themselves in order to create competitive advantage. Overall, the prevalence of these ten words were consistent with the thematic analysis findings, discussed in detail below.

### 5.4 Thematic analysis

A thematic analysis was conducted to deductively confirm themes present in the data. Given the apparent differences between the architectural industry in South Africa and the Netherlands (see section 1.2.1), the findings of the two countries were compared, to identify any differences in the manner in which brand identity is viewed in these contexts.

South African participants’ data were adjusted for the difference in the number of participants in each country, in order to compare these frequencies on an equal basis. This process of post-stratification weighting data is a widely-accepted method to attempt to eliminate sample bias due to the overrepresentation of one group over the other, owing to the sample size being bigger (Olsen, 2012; Grover & Vriens, 2006). The frequency counts of the bigger South African group (n=8) was adjusted by dividing the frequencies by eight and multiplying by five, to match the sample size of the group from the Netherlands (n=5). The results of the thematic analysis are discussed below, structured according to the research questions.

#### 5.4.1 Using brand identity to build brand equity for competitive advantage – The difference between South Africa and the Netherlands

The overarching question of this research related to how B2B service firms viewed brand identity and how it fed into building brand equity, so that these firms could build competitive advantage, and to the differences between South Africa and the Netherlands.

The interview guide referred to the elements of brand identity and brand equity in an indirect manner, in order for participants to identify these elements without explicit guidance from the researcher. These included open-ended questions such as, “How do you communicate your brand to the public?” and “How is everyone in the office involved?” The answers to these questions were used to analyse the focus placed on
each dimension of brand equity and brand identity, to give a global view on the topic, before delving into the details in the consecutive research questions.

Individual components of brand identity (as per Coleman et al’s Brand Identity Network, 2011) were compared to individual components of brand equity (as per Keller’s CBBE model, 2003), in order to gauge the importance of the individual components of the model and network in relation to each other. This is illustrated in Figure 8, below.

**Figure 8: Differences in frequency: Brand equity and brand identity**

As illustrated in Figure 8, above, the largest differences in the frequency of mentions between South Africa and the Netherlands occurred in the themes of judgement, employee and client focus, brand personality, partnership solutions and consistent communications. South African participants placed more emphasis on *judgement* and *employee and client focus*, while Dutch participants focussed on *partnership solutions* and *reputation*. The section below addresses these themes by order of importance, as illustrated in Figure 8. The components of the Brand Identity Network are subsequently discussed in more detail in section 5.5.
5.4.1.1 Brand equity

The frequency of occurrence of the components of Keller’s CBBE model was compared for South Africa and the Netherlands. As ‘salience’ was coded into the individual components of Coleman et al.’s B2B Brand Identity Network, they were condensed into one component to compare with the other components of brand equity on equal terms. The frequency of individual components of brand identity were condensed into one item by adding them up, and dividing the total by the number of components (five). Figure 9 illustrates the frequency of brand equity themes.

The findings were ranked according to the highest overall frequency of the themes in the text. These results indicated that judgement was the most important to South African participants, while partnership solutions was most important to Dutch participants. Performance was the least important to both groups, in conjunction with sales force relationships for the South African group.
Judgement had the highest overall frequency, and performance had the lowest. The biggest in-group difference was related to judgement and partnership solutions. Partnership solutions was deemed more important in the Netherlands, while judgement was deemed more important in South Africa, to a similar level.

5.4.1.1.1 Judgement

The theme judgement occurred in data from all participants and was mentioned 28 times by South African participants. Participants stressed how the credibility of their firms led to referrals for new projects. SA4 stated that “I think, before you meet the client, some of the work comes in because of work that's been done and so it's a grapevine.”

SA8 referred to how they successfully approached getting new work through building on their credibility, “My first strategy was to get people that knew me the best in the industry, knew what I was capable of and punted me where they believed I would be successful…”

SA4 illustrated their knowledge ('judgement') of the business and of the client (employee and client focus) by stating, “What I try to communicate to them is to do it properly because they get a return if the design is done properly. They get the value back… the resell value is better.” They also stated that they “…don’t find it very difficult to convince people what to do. So sometimes they’ll come at strange ideas, but it doesn’t take long to convince them to do the right thing.”

The importance of a company profile to illustrate credibility was also explained by SA4, “But it becomes easier if you’ve done three or four larger projects. You don’t have to convince people if you can do the work. You can just put the CV in front of them and not seem desperate. The profile sort of speaks for itself.”

SA7 commented on getting new work, “…it’s got to do with the reputation and the professional service… From the way we conduct ourselves with the client all the way through to our meetings, site meetings, minutes on email etc. So, that full package is quite important to clients and that’s something that we’ve managed to establish.”

Dutch participants also valued the building of credibility through judgement. As NL1 stated, “…we are mostly judged on the quality we deliver, so if we do a project for a client and he’s really happy, the client thinks we can be special for him or deliver something that another office cannot do, then it will definitely result in a new project.”
Several sub-themes were identified via inductive analysis, which formed part of the theme *judgement*. These are discussed below.

5.4.1.1.2 **Awards in relation to judgement**

NL1 illustrated the role that winning architectural awards and competitions played in building credibility, and thus in *judgement*, “We won a competition together with another Rotterdam office .... [in conjunction] with the success, let’s say especially after [a famous building] … we were now asked for several projects in Holland.” While four out of the five Dutch participants mentioned awards, only two out of the eight South African participants mentioned them.

SA1 illustrated the effect winning awards had on their competitive position - “We won the award, SAPOA Award a few months ago… and with that there’s a lot of people whose eyes have opened as well.”

During a virtual tour of their offices via Skype, SA5 pointed out the awards they had won, displayed prominently in the entrance hall of their office. SA5 pointed out the awards, and mentioned “In a subconscious way you want someone entering the office to perceive these things.” SA5 reinforced this by mentioning that this was part of their strategy to “to distinguish ourselves and we picked up some awards and that helped to give us – the right word – it just adds credibility.”

5.4.1.1.3 **The role of partnership solutions in sourcing new work**

Dutch firms placed more emphasis on the role of relationships and involvement in their business community, in order to source new clients.

Some South African participants were in agreement on working on client relationships. According to SA1, “it’s a little bit about drinking beer and going out and meeting people and showing them what we can do and what we can’t do and how we do it and what is there,” while SA elaborated that, “that’s how I’m trying to keep a good relationship with clients after the project’s finished. They are actually the best marketing people.” This results in clients acting as brand ambassadors for firms they trust.

One South African participant (SA2) reacted negatively to the concept of building a closer relationship with clients, “Over the years I’ve learned that the client is not your friend. They can be your friend at the end of the project but during the project he’s still not your friend because things can turn very quickly, so I’m not one of those people to go and
drink a beer with a client. That we can do after the project but not during the project, because there’s still a professional relationship. So most of it actually comes, not because we’re friends… you do it because they can deliver.”

The viewpoint of SA4 on partnership solutions related to employee loyalty. “They maybe moved on because they wanted to go to Cape Town or earn bigger salaries at [Company X] or whatever, so I can’t compete with that but most people that worked here would have preferred to come back.” This indicated the firm’s involvement, not only with direct clients, but also with wider stakeholders.

N4L related, however, that they did not build their firm based on relationships. “We came from abroad that we had never had an uncle working for a big company here or for a bank or know no one from the family who could give us a big commission. So we were very much depending on the public market, so it is a bit of the tradition of the company.”

NL4’s focus was more on involvement in the academic realm of architecture, by lecturing and doing research. They linked this to their strong brand presence in the industry, “a very strong focus on the intellectual world of architecture and we did that because of the fact that we liked it very much, we are a part of the… scene, European scene of architects… with a strong cultural position.” NL4 used this to build their competitive advantage – many of the academics also sat on juries, judging competitions. Interestingly, the research that NL4 has partaken in, “…was quite political so… there was even a debate in the Dutch Parliament about the research we did.”

An additional strategy relating to partnership solutions without referring to client relationships, was that of NL3. They hosted architectural tours around the city of Rotterdam, as well as workshops of all kinds, for a “group of potential clients or project relations or interesting people, so they can meet each other, of course.” This points to the added value this firm added to its clients and other stakeholders, by introducing like-minded individuals to each other, for possible future business synergies.

NL2 recounted how a group of satisfied end-users of a residential block were so satisfied with the quality of the architecture, that “all these people who really like to live there they start this book… They were so happy with their houses and they were all different and they asked photographer to make nice pictures and now we have this real coffee table book.” NL5 had a similar experience on a community project, receiving letters of thanks for the building. They stated, “it’s for me the biggest compliment that citizens of that place wrote me, just to thank me.”
Overall, it seemed that the focus of Dutch firms on *partnership solutions* stemmed not so much from attachment (thus close client relationships), but rather from involvement in their greater community and engagement with a bigger group of stakeholders.

### 5.4.1.4 The importance of reputation in the Netherlands

The oldest South African firm studied commented on how their history gave them a competitive advantage - “I guess that experience-- it counts for a lot.”

In the Netherlands, NL1 started a second firm during the recession after 2008, to expand internationally under a different brand, with different values and a different personality. This difference in the personality was so successful, that an existing client did not realise it was the same architect. “So we started this project in Amsterdam for a client. It’s a small apartment building... And at the same time, with my other office, I was asked by the same client to do another building which is just 200 meters [away from the first one].”

Five participants mentioned the alignment of values in their brand. SA8 articulated their focus on values, “I think that we really grasp the meaning of the words that we use in our brand and they’re not airy fairy things. They’re actually true to us. True to our value system. And I think that we very good at displaying that.”

### 5.4.1.2 What branding activities do architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands employ to build brand identity?

Inductive analysis of the text led to the identification of themes relating to the branding activity that participants used to build brand identity. Using the Atlas.ti Codes- Primary Documents Table tool, the frequency of occurrence of these themes were analysed, and sorted in descending order according to the differences between the Netherlands and South Africa. The frequency of branding activities is illustrated in Figure 10, below.
In total, participants from the Netherlands mentioned branding activities at more than double the frequency of their South African counterparts, as illustrated in Figure 10. Figure 10 shows that South African participants mentioned only five themes, while Dutch participants mentioned thirteen themes.

The greatest difference between the two groups presided in the academic involvement and publication of the Dutch firms. Dutch firms also mentioned being published on online design sites, sending out newsletters and leading architectural tours, none of which were mentioned by South Africans. Both groups paid attention to social media to promote their brands, in this case, South African participants mentioned it more (10 times) than Dutch participants (8 times). No Dutch firms mentioned television appearances or passive marketing as part of their branding strategy, while South Africans mentioned these themes two and three times, respectively.
The popularity of social media across the board may be linked to its accessibility and low cost. SA4 illustrated the power of social media, such as having a Facebook page, in gaining new clients, “if you can get your clients to like it, and that’s happened once or twice where a client likes it, and their friends who are potential clients start liking it.”

NL1 illustrated the impact of this shift towards an online presence, “So, let’s say 10 years ago everything was in magazines, but at the moment it’s more important to be on important design and architectural websites, than to be in a magazine.”

Some of the Dutch firms seemed to do many different forms of branding activities. NL4 was a good example, explaining “from time to time, we publish a book” and “we also write articles, we publish articles from time to time, about very different issues in different magazines” on top of their involvement in academics, research and they “also lecture to potential clients and…city administration.” They also illustrated how these activities put them in contact with different markets, “…the research projects are also interesting, because you have the opportunity to talk with a lot of different people for a certain reason, but you can also help to discover new markets.”

SA7, “I’ve given quite a few speeches as well. It’s an interesting marketing thing, but you know if you talk at university I’ve given a speech in the State Theatre. I’ve given a speech at Decorex, places like that. I think the more you do that, the more your brand gets [attention].” They compared it to Coca Cola, which is ever present in physical form and consequently in the minds of its consumers.

NL5 explained the link between sending out an online newsletter and building resonance, “right now we’ve been sending a newsletter yesterday and this morning we checked who has been looking at the newsletter. Then I decided either I give them a phone call and I arrange a meeting and sometimes there are clients, who I recently have met.” They are also active on social media, with “almost 3 000” followers on LinkedIn, as well as actively promoting their work, “What I do is, every project I try to have it published and I do quite a lot of interviews.”

NL2 also mentioned having many followers on social media due to being very active. They elaborated on their successful tactics, which they also applied to their online newsletter, “… we do not only say, ‘We finished this project, we’re building on this project.’ We really try to make news that’s interesting for them so we also give tips, good advice.”
SA4 illustrated their commitment to continuous improvement, “We are completely redesigning our website now to adapt to a cell phone. We redesigned our website four years ago and that responsive technology wasn’t there. That you could view it from a cell phone, so we have to redesign it again now an we’re completely changing it to be more visual, because people don’t read.”

SA4 highlighted the futility of aiming marketing activities at other professionals, instead of at clients, “you know if you advertise in the Visi or House and Leisure, it’s just people who are in the design world who buy those magazines and they don’t have money. We should actually advertise in the Financial Times and things like that, rather, I think.”

As the only participant to mention passive branding, SA7 explained, “They [the client] actually developed this project as a marketing tool and so by default we were involved in the whole marketing campaign. It went from TV to commercials to videos to magazines to published materials, etc. So, we tapped into that and benefitted from that.” SA7 related the appearance on television and being published to adding to the firm’s credibility, “It helps your reputation, if you get a new client they look at things like this and it confirms your credibility and your reputation, so in that sense we’ve benefited quite a lot.”

Only one participant did not spend time on branding activities. SA3 continued explaining about their lack of branding, “We do have a website and it’s not even a great one.”

Overall, the bigger variety and higher frequency of branding activities employed by the Dutch participants might have a positive effect on their competitive positions. This is described in the section below.

5.4.1.3 Management perspective of architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands on the effect that brand identity has on their competitive positions

The combination of the themes competitive advantage and brand identity was mentioned 23 times in the data, by 11 of the participants. Only one out of each of the groups did not remark on this relationship; seven out of the eight South African participants and four out of the five Dutch participants mentioned these themes together.

The managerial view on the importance of branding in B2B service firms was identified, as was a holistic view on branding. These are discussed below.
Managerial view on the importance of branding

Only one participant expressed a negative opinion about the importance of branding in architectural firms. SA3 did not view branding as vital, “To us a brand is really-- it’s not that important. We’ve got to a size and amount of work that we like to have and it works well.” They continued that they rather “…rely a lot on our history and our longevity. Or repeat clients and give good service and they’ll come back. We rely on that probably 95%” in order to get work.”

One participant expressed their hesitance to ‘over-brand’. SA7 stated that “I think, if you overdo it then your credibility or reputation goes down. It’s a fine balance that we’re trying to achieve.” They continued, “…what we’re doing is we’re now continuously more aware of our, what would you call that, face to the outside world – our face, our image to the outside world. So every time something comes up, it can be used to build our image a little bit more, and tap into the reputation and the image that we’ve built, we use that. So, we’ve come a long way with that, we don’t like flaunting ourselves, that’s not the way we want to do things, but now we can at least get into a bit of that.”

In contrast, SA1 jested they were “not... scared to flaunt, in the sense our sort of dealings. So a friend of mine calls me the master of self-promotion, but that’s what it’s about.” There seemed to be differing views on what constitutes the most important part of the firm’s brand.

NL1 highlighted a new tendency in property development – the appointment of branding specialists to work on the brand identity of the new development. They elaborated, “It’s more and more important as an architect, you need to be able to address this kind of thing, to address the identity, to address the unique selling points with things that you do especially in pitching and tender phases.” They explained how the concept of branding a property development might be alien to some architects, due to the professional nature of the industry, “So, for us it was not like new science, but for a lot of architects I think, if you are only thinking of architecture as from the built environment and the physical structure and maybe the program or even the social impact of the building that you do, then this is a whole new development.”

NL1, “I think it works together. I don’t see it as a thing that is pushing architecture away or pushing serious [branding], because you can have the attitude that architecture is a serious mature science and business, and you should not think about branding. But I think it can go together.”
Two participants did not spend any time on branding, as they felt that they did not need to, due to having enough work. Both of them contended that they would work on their branding if they saw work diminishing. SA6 stated, “It’s not that branding is not important, it’s just that it’s not important now.” And elaborated on why they could not claim that branding was important, “it is very difficult for me, because of the nature of architecture to make a division between the brand and the people, because it’s such a personal thing that to work with things on a personal basis, that the brand and the people are so intertwined that I can’t really see myself separate that.”

SA6 viewed the brand as important in conjunction with partnership solutions, “…once you’ve got a client and the relationship you’ve got with them and building the brand through that, it’s very important.”

5.4.1.3.2 Resource allocation as an indication of branding importance

Participants were asked about how they allocated resources to the brand identity of the firm. This could serve to triangulate their accounts about the importance of branding. No prominent difference was found between South African and Dutch participants.

Five of the participants viewed branding as integral to their everyday activities, as they viewed the buildings that they produce as a tool for branding. SA6 illustrated the general consensus, “It’s difficult to say how much time we spend on it, because I think in just doing your work that is doing that branding.” They continued, “Every time you go into a meeting and you explain to your client what you’re trying to achieve, what you’re trying to do… that’s when you are building that brand. It’s not something that I come back to my desk and I say, “Okay guys, let’s think about what presents we are going to send out for Christmas and what kind of branding we are going to put on there.”

Three others mentioned that they spent “as much time as needed” working on the brand. SA7 stated, “I don’t know, I think it’s got to do with opportunities. And then you don’t really have much of a choice of how much time you spend.”

Five others, three of whom were from South Africa, indicated that giving attention to the brand was last on their priorities list. This was due to more pressing factors, such as deadlines and making ends meet. SA2 explained how it was always a trade-off between covering costs and allocating funds to branding. “If there’s enough money, if I see we made enough money, in a few months we’ll take out an advert or we’ll do something else and if there’s no money we don’t do it, although that’s actually the time when you need to do it.”
SA7 added to this, “We just want to sit down and work. We don’t have time to sit and think up how we are going to market this.” Furthermore, no participants referred to the brand as an asset.

The data thus illustrates that firms in both South Africa and the Netherlands do not allocate resources to branding in a formal manner. The data also shows that branding activities were often the last priority to participants, due to the pressures from everyday operations taking precedent.

5.5 How architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands deliver on the five dimensions of the Coleman et al. (2011) B2B Service Brand Identity Network

Participants were asked to discuss the components of brand identity individually. Due to the open-ended nature of the interview guide, the questions did not address the components explicitly, but rather asked the participants’ opinions. An example of a question is “How do you communicate your brand to the public?” as a guide to discuss the corporate visual identity of the firm. The frequencies of each component were analysed, and the data were ranked according to the highest overall frequency, as shown in Figure 11, below.
Figure 11: Frequency of brand identity

Figure 11 illustrates that *employee and client focus* had the highest occurrence overall, which was influenced by it occurring most in the South African group of participants. The striking difference between South Africa and the Netherlands was the distribution of the frequencies. In South Africa, the most occurring theme was mentioned more than double the number of times than the next theme. Most of the other themes were mentioned with similar frequencies, seemingly indicating that they were of equal value to participants. The frequency in the Netherlands was distributed evenly, with the most focus placed on ‘Consistent Communications.’

*Corporate visual identity* was mentioned the least in both South Africa and the Netherlands, indicating low importance in both contexts. These components of the Brand Identity Network are discussed in detail, below.
To examine the data in a comprehensive manner, the frequency of themes was recorded using the Atlas.ti Codes-Primary Documents tool. This data were exported into Excel, where it was depicted visually using pie charts, as shown in Figure 12. The striking difference between the Netherlands and South Africa, is the evenly distributed frequency of the Netherlands, while employee and client focus dominates the focus of the South African group.

5.5.1 Employee and client focus

All participants from South African and the Netherlands mentioned a focus on employees and clients, although two placed more emphasis on it than most. SA1 mentioned it 12 times and SA2 was close behind, mentioning it 11 times. All the other participants only mentioned it two to six times, much less than the outliers. This indicates a serious focus on employees and clients present in SA1 and SA3, while the other participants might not have assigned it as much attention. No participants mentioned a connection between employee and client satisfaction.
SA1 emphasized the autonomy they afforded to employees, and how they illustrated that autonomy and trust in them, “I’m trying to do now, is I’m wanting to start using the Facebook page in a way is making people aware of other people in the office. So doing, I want to do a once a week slot on the page saying meet [this employee].” They continued that, “I think recognition is a very important thing to anybody, especially in our sort of industry.”

SA3 explained their focus on employee satisfaction, “There’s a nice culture of the firm where we all contribute, all enjoy, all get involved in everything….and we know the staff’s strengths, that this one is good at this and we point in them in the right direction.” Their focus was also on the client and their needs, SA3, “We’re very reactive. You want it yesterday, you get it. So we’re very user friendly and because we’re small so we can be. We’re very personal.” They continued to explain how they listen to clients, “We don’t have that attitude I guess that some architects have that it’s our way or the highway. We don’t. We’re user friendly.” They also explain how the office culture feeds into this, “There’s a nice culture of the firm where we all contribute, all enjoy, all get involved in everything.”

Another pattern that was identified was the education of clients, in order to help them to understand the firm’s value proposition. SA4 commented on how they have the client’s best interests at heart, while using their knowledge (judgement) to convince the client to adjust their ideas, “I think by the time people come to you, when they meet you and start working, I don’t find it very difficult to convince people what to do. So sometimes they’ll come at strange ideas, but it doesn’t take long to convince them to do the right thing.”

SA4 also seemed to understand the way that clients view value and tailored their proposition to that, “What I normally try to do is - see people understand figures more than pictures. People that can pay for houses or buildings. They look at figures more. I normally use [a specific project] as an example, and when I use that example, people understand it.” They also link this back to educating the client about the value the firm adds, “What I try to communicate to them is to do it properly because they get a return if the design is done properly. They get the value back on day, the resell value is better.”

NL1 pointed out that the culture of the architect as master builder had changed in the Netherlands, to a more open culture, “If you are just an old-fashioned architect who is only dealing with building or aesthetics, or is very much still going for its own style, and if clients want something else you make a big problem... This is not the way it works anymore.
You see, with a very successful office like BIG from Denmark, they completely turned this around. It's not that as an architect you're a prima donna and this is what developers say or clients in general about architects, they never do what you ask. And this is the old school position. I notice in Holland this is not accepted anymore.”

NL5 agreed with that, “Because often an architect - it’s better now - but when I studied architecture… it was all about you [the architect]. And now, I see that you are now with clients, you have to try to listen more. And so, ja, listen first and then ask questions, what the client wants, and then you have to find a link, what are you sharing with the client.”

NL1 expanded on the trade-off between the architect’s wishes and those of the client, “…our big challenge as architectural office is to still make what you want to make, and to go for very strong and good quality, but at the same time you are able to better address the wishes of the client. And if the client wants it differently, I always say we are creative people, if he wants it differently, we do it differently, but we do it at least as nice as we did it before.” NL1 also focussed on the employees in order to get this done, “we try to get everybody involved to say everything you send out, should be a certain quality.”

NL4 also focussed on adding additional value to the client, “…we build a building for them, but we always focus also on that what we can offer to the clients outside the brief.”

5.5.2 Brand identity – Corporate visual identity deemed least important

*Corporate visual identity* featured in the lowest frequency amongst both groups, indicating a seemingly low focus on the physical characteristics of the brand, and favouring community relationships *(partnership solutions)* and credibility *(judgement)* over visual brand cues, like the firm’s logo.

Despite the evidence in the frequency of the code, participants still mentioned the logos of their brands, some viewing it as “critical.” SA2 used branding elements to convey the value of the firm, “People need to know about the brand, they need to know what they’re buying into. They need to know they’re buying into a quality or good service.”

SA2 argued that their logo made the firm recognisable, stating that, “We’ve had branded jerseys and that made... people have picked that up. I’ve walked into a supplier’s store who recognise our brand without me and they don’t know who I am, and I don’t tell them, they recognise the logo.”
NL1 stated, “We make booklets, if it’s presentational booklets, or project booklets, we really want to do it nice. Everything goes how it should, should look really nice. The same for websites or publications or this kind of things, if we do photos, we do professional photos by professional photographers. We tend to spend a lot of time and energy on it.”

SA8 viewed the logo as the physical manifestation of their value proposition. “First on the logo - very important… I spent a lot of time with my logo. It was important to me is to make sure the logo is linked to what I envisaged the company to be and that is to be a strong form. It needed to be a very strong entity in the architectural environment but an entity that … has infinite possibilities.”

Thus, the low frequency could be misleading, as nine of the thirteen participants mentioned the theme, and the thickness of the participants’ responses indicated the relative importance of corporate visual identity in illustrating their firms’ value propositions.

5.5.3 Consistent communications

Eleven participants referred to consistent communications, mostly referring to presenting the same clear message to all stakeholders. SA1 linked this to the nature of architectural firms as design firms, “It’s about the presentation, it’s about taking it through the invoice to everything, so it all talks to the same language. Ultimately, it’s an architectural firm, so it’s about design, so you’ve got to have that that thing going through.”

NL1 focussed on the quality of the communication that went out, “In general I see that if you want to radiate quality, if you want to say “I do nice things, I make nice projects,” you need to radiate this in all the things that you send out. So if it’s a business card, or a nice presentation, or a booklet, you just want to radiate quality in all aspects of your firm, actually.” Overall, it seemed to be a point of pride to the participants that their communications with stakeholders have a consistent quality. None of the participants made any mention of communication of the firm’s strategy to employees, to ensure consistent communication thereof to clients.
5.5.4 Brand personality

Seven of the participants mentioned brand personality, four of which were from South Africa. SA1 told the story of how they were tired of dressing up by the end of the year, and went to a client “…wear[ing] my shorts. And it was good shorts, good shoes… and as I… wanted to walk into the boardroom, one of the developer’s other architects walked out with a suit and tie and everything and as I walked in the owner of the company said “that’s the way an architect should dress [like SA1].” The brand personality of the firm’s protagonist had influenced the brand personality of their firm, and what the client expected of all architects.

NL1 elaborated on their two firms with different personalities, discussing their vision of turning it into a similar concept than Hugo Boss, with two divisions, Hugo and Boss. They discussed the Hugo Boss brand personalities, “one is maybe a little bit more informal, the other one is maybe better for a little bit cheap or for party dressing. But if you buy one of these brands, you know what you get. The quality is the same.”

NL2 talked about their brand personality as “dynamic and innovative and active. Energetic. And I think everyone is aware and everyone feels this.” This point was illustrated by a group of employees, who were conversing excitedly about the design of a building at the table next to where the interview with NL2 was taking place.

5.5.5 Human resources incentives

Ten of the participants mentioned human resources incentives, although not related to any formal systems, as NL4 emphasized, “there is not very clear policy about that”. Participants rewarded employees in less orthodox ways, such as SA1, who stated, “at least once a month have a lunch together and we’ll go out and go to Gold Reef City… or have a beer,” thus creating a more relaxed company culture as an incentive to employees.

SA8 emphasized the importance of employees in their firm, and their continuous training, stating, “I’m very passionate in growing the people I have in the office and keeping them excited about what they’re doing.” NL2 also emphasized the importance of continual training, “we also make time to let employees go to meetings and congresses.”
Participants also mentioned mentoring young employees, as SA1 illustrated, “we’ve initiated a thing in the office where we give everybody a chance to present a project and make sure that they get their presentation skills up, but also making them more relaxed to do it.”

SA3 mentioned how employees were given autonomy to communicate directly with clients, resulting from “a lot of trust, I suppose. But we do watch everything. The trust is there but we are copied in on everything,” thus monitoring employees’ performance in the process.

5.6 Additional themes identified

Themes that were identified inductively, were grouped into super-families, using the Atlas.ti families tool. The frequencies of those families were organised in a descending order. Figure 13, below, illustrates the most frequently occurring inductive themes, in descending order.

Figure 13: Frequency of inductive themes
Additional sub-themes that came to the fore fell into one of two groups – the sub-theme either correlated with the main deductive themes, and was integrated into that theme; or the theme did not relate directly to branding, and was judged not to be relevant to the study. Two important themes were identified from the data, as frequently co-occurring with the theme competitive advantage. These two themes are discussed below – the building as the brand and the personal brand of the protagonist.

5.6.1 The building as the brand

The unique position of the architectural industry in the B2B realm is that it produces a service (intangible) which leads to a product (tangible). The inductive theme of ‘the building as the brand’ identified in the data seemed to support this. All of the participants from the Netherlands, and half of the South African participants mentioned the concept of the building acting as a brand image for their firms. SA6 stated that “I think a lot of the work that comes to us or where we get new clients from is because of what we’ve built.”

SA7 illustrated the importance of judgement, with secondary focus on partnership solutions to South African participants, stating that, “We’ve already managed to establish a certain reputation and in terms of that reputation which we’ve touched on, having a reputation of good design, having a reputation of good service, having a reputation of being professional and also having a reputation of some kind of an academic basis, where we take our work seriously and it’s actually grounded. All of that works together. And then once we start working with our clients and you know the project takes a year, sometimes two years and sometimes four years, we’ve always managed to build a kind of relationship where the clients realise on a continuous basis that this is what they’re still getting. And they understand it more and more.”

Two of the South African participants did not agree with the concept of the building as the brand, rather focussing on the role of individuals in building up the brand identity. SA6 stated, “I don’t see architecture as such a brand because I think in architecture, people work a lot with individuals and the individual tends to be the brand.”
5.6.2 The personal brand of the protagonist

The brand personality and the personality of the protagonist seems to be interlinked. Nine of the participants from both countries mentioned their personal brand in relation to the brand personality of the firm.

SA1 illustrated this concept, “[a relative] is an architect as well and we had a discussion about it and he said he’s always found, doesn’t matter what you call it, people generally appoint people. Not companies. And so… I ended up choosing [the firm’s name] which is [related to my name].”

NL2 mentioned how integral the director of their firm was to the firm’s brand, “[the director of the firm] has a really strong personality. He’s very present so he’s part of our brand.” And commented that this was driven by “his vision and his visibility.” NL5 also related how their presence added to the story of how their firm came to be, “When I was a bigger firm we had some training in…. selling the company, but it was quite difficult because somehow when they were telling the story it didn’t come over. It’s something quite personal. I’m the one that has to tell the story. When I tell it really, it comes over somehow.”

One South African participant mentioned that, in order to grow their business, they realised that they had to “…punt the firm instead of myself, because the firm has a lot of value in it right now. [Interviewer: The firm is overtaking your brand?] Correct, my brand. My personal brand, which is what I focussed on in the beginning.” This illustrated the important role the personal brand of the protagonist plays in the B2B architectural industry.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter addresses the results of the research questions regarding the brand equity and brand identity of B2B architectural firms. Contextual information is first presented, to give an overview of the background of the firms. Subsequently, a transcript analysis is provided, indicating that the most frequently mentioned words correlate to the nature of the deductive codes. Finally, a thematic analysis is conducted, and the results presented according to the research questions. The results of this chapter are discussed in more detail in relation to the literature in Chapter 6.
Chapter 6 – Discussion of Results

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 outlined the results of the research, based on the research methodology discussed in Chapter 4. This chapter relates the results of the research to the existing literature, as examined in Chapter 2, in order of the research questions. Some results correlated with the existing literature, while new insights were gained from others. As per the research objective, this chapter discusses the results of the research into the management perspective of the brand identity and brand equity activities of B2B service firms, specifically architectural firms.

6.2 Discussion of the results of Main Research Question:

How do architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands, respectively, use brand identity to build the foundation of brand equity, in order to secure competitive advantage?

The main research question aimed to identify how architectural firms build brand identity, according to Coleman et al.’s B2B Service Brand Identity Network (2011) and how this leads to building brand equity, according to the B2B version (Kuhn, Nigel & Pope, 2008) of Keller’s CBBE model (2003). This question aimed to provide an overview of the topic, while the sub-questions addressed the detailed components of this question. The findings regarding brand equity are discussed below, while brand identity is discussed in Sub-Question 3, in section 6.5, to follow.

6.2.1 Brand equity

Individual components of brand identity (as per Coleman et al.’s Brand Identity Network, 2011) are compared to individual components of brand equity, as per Kuhn, Nigel and Pope’s (2008) B2B version of Keller’s (2003) CBBE model, in order to gauge the importance of the individual components of the model and network in relation to each other.

In the case of determining the method used by architectural firms to build brand equity, the results show that South African firms and Dutch firms focus on different elements of brand equity and brand identity, as illustrated by Figure 8 in section 5.4.1.
Judgement is of primary importance to South African, especially regarding the credibility of their firms. Dutch firms primarily focus most on partnership solutions, with emphasis on belonging to a community, as illustrated in section 5.4.1.3. The second most important component to South African participants is employee and client focus, a component of brand identity, and to Dutch participants is the brand equity component reputation, as shown in Figure 8 in section 5.4.1.

The findings from the Netherlands support the statement by Glynn (2010) that the opinions of peers and professional networks were often called in when making purchasing decisions in the B2B market, and thus the brand of the firm plays a pivotal role in managing stakeholder perceptions. Participants from the Netherlands utilise this by building on their networks in the industry in order to secure competitive advantage (section 5.4.1.1.3). Dutch participants are very active in their communities, organising architectural tours, lecturing at universities and doing research, amongst others (see section 5.4.1.2).

Lindgreen, Beverland and Farrelly's (2010) findings emphasise the critical role that satisfaction, trust, commitment and relationship quality play in buying decisions in B2B future-based industrial goods. The results of this study partially support these findings, as Dutch firms focussed on partnership solutions (relationship quality) and South African firms focussed on judgement (trust). The components are discussed below, according to their prominence, as identified in the research results.

6.2.1.1 Judgement

According to Keller (2003), the concept of judgement relates to brand response (“what do I think or I feel about you?”). Findings indicate that the South African firms place prominence on brand response, especially the role of credibility, in relation to building brand equity (see section 5.4.1.1). Backhaus, Steiner and Lügger (2011) claim that branding also serves as an indicator of quality of services rendered, and the prominence of the credibility of the firm supports the authors’ findings. The credibility of the firm reduces the client uncertainty when making buying decisions, which is integral to B2B industries, involving future-based services and products (Backhaus, Steiner & Lügger, 2011). The findings indicate that the building of trust with clients leads to the credibility of the firm, and this plays an important role in reducing this perceived risk (Herbst & Merz, 2011).
The results of the inductive analysis highlighted the prominent role of awards in relation to judgement and the building as the brand (see sections 5.4.1.1.2 and section 5.6.1). These two themes are discussed in detail, below.

6.2.1.1 Awards in relation to judgement

The findings indicate that awards are a physical manifestation of the credibility that firms have earned, and awards play a significant role in the architectural industry, as shown in section 5.4.1.1.2. Dutch firms place more emphasis on the winning of awards and the differentiation effected by them, as four out of the five participants mentioned their importance in securing competitive advantage, as opposed to only two out of the eight South African participants (see section 5.4.1.1.2).

The results show (section 5.4.1.1.2) that the winning of awards increase the brand awareness of architectural firms. A number of participants referred to the role of awards in sourcing new work. The results indicate a high occurrence of this theme in conjunction with competitive advantage, highlighting the important role awards play in securing competitive advantage for architectural firms.

6.2.1.2 The role of partnership solutions in sourcing new work

Conversely, the results of the study show that the focus of participants in the Netherlands was not on judgement, but on partnership solutions, as illustrated by Figure 9 in section 5.4.1. This is indicated to be due to their involvement in their community, more than the building of relationships with clients. This is in agreement with Kotler & Pfoertsch (2006), who stated that brands have a wider reach than relationship marketing, and reach beyond clients to other stakeholders.

According to Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) and Hutt and Speh (2014) this wider audience of all stakeholders, as opposed to just clients, assists in building the brand image of the firm, and thus leads to strategic advantage over competitors. This illustrates an important difference between Dutch firms and South African firms, and could partially explain the difference in the architectural brand awareness in the Dutch context, as illustrated in section 1.2.1.
This focus on resonance with their community often results in end-user satisfaction, as illustrated in 5.4.1.1.3, where end-users of buildings responded positively to their buildings by writing letters to the architects and publishing books about them. This links back to the theme the building as the brand, discussed in section 5.6.1.

Findings from the South African group indicate divergence of opinion, with some participants arguing that “drinking beer” with clients help the relationships, and thus in securing new work from these clients, and others expressing hesitance to cross the line between professional and friendly contact with clients (see section 5.4.1.1.3).

An interesting finding from the data (as shown in section 5.3.1.1.3) was the concept of added value (at no additional cost) to clients and other stakeholders. Branding activities undertaken, as illustrated below, in section 6.3, include organised architectural tours, adding useful information to newsletters and giving lectures. Additionally, two participants assisted clients in finding suitable sites for new business ventures. This illustrates the improvement of relationships with stakeholders in an indirect fashion.

6.2.1.3 The importance of reputation in the Netherlands

The findings show that, while Dutch firms focus on the brand equity component reputation more than their South African counterparts, the South African nevertheless also add some importance to it, as illustrated in section 5.4.1.1.4. Interestingly, the effect that different branding could have on client perception was illustrated by the two different firms that belonged to the same participant, who branded them differently, and that even existing clients didn’t know were related. This illustrates the differentiating power of branding, in agreement with Davis, Gollicic and Marquardt (2008). Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) highlight this power by stating that services or products can be easily imitated, but a brand cannot, which the findings support.

Five participants referred to the alignment of brand values and the values of the firm, as shown in section 5.4.1.1.4. This supports the findings that branding is imperative for professional service firms as a way of transferring knowledge about that company to stakeholders and making them aware of the firm’s value proposition (Kumar, Cohen & Rajan, 2015). The findings also support Persson’s (2010) statement that a brand promise in B2B firms needs to go beyond what is offered, to what a firm stands for, and illustrates the link between the values of the firm and its brand identity.
6.2.2 Conclusion

As opposed to Kuhn, Nigel and Pope’s (2008) findings that salience, reputation and judgement were most relevant in B2B contexts, this study confirms the importance of judgement and reputation, but negates the importance of salience in relation to the other elements of Keller’s adjusted model. Partnership solutions is added as an important component in the Dutch context.

The results indicate that Dutch architectural firms, as B2B service firms, improve their competitive position by engaging with a wider range of stakeholders in their community (partnership solutions), whilst South African firms place more emphasis on their credibility (judgement). The findings further illustrate the nature of this B2B industry, as depicted by Backhaus, Steiner and Lügger (2011), which relate the future-based nature of service goods to the creation of uncertainty in clients. The building of partnership solutions and judgement fosters the building of trust with clients and other stakeholders. This illustrates the interlinked nature of the brand and relationships in this context, as shown by Herbst and Merz (2011), who argue that the building of trust (judgement) can be reinforced by building an emotional connection with clients. This can be achieved both through relationships (partnership solutions) and branding.

Additional findings indicate that many of the components of brand equity, according to the B2B CBBE model (Kuhn, Nigel & Pope, 2008), overlap with the elements of brand identity, as defined by Coleman et al.’s (2011) B2B Service Brand Identity Network. This illustrates the wider network of stakeholders involved in the brand equity process, not only outward-looking towards clients, but also inward-looking towards employees.

The results of this study indicate that firms in both South Africa and the Netherlands focus more on the higher order items – partnership solutions, judgement (and reputation as a secondary focus) than on the base of salience (brand identity). This illustrates the gap in focus on sales people relationships, performance and most importantly, salience (brand identity). This gap could be attributed to the relatively small sample present in this study, skewing the data towards certain components of Keller’s model (adjusted by Kuhn, Nigel & Pope, 2008).
The main finding in relation to the main research question is that South African firms are more internally focussed than Dutch firms. Their focus on judgement is based on the credibility of the firm, and thus how it performs. The same conclusion can be drawn from these firms’ emphasis on client and employee focus and especially on employees, as indicated in Figure 9, and further discussed in section 6.5.1, below. In contrast, the management focus of Dutch firms was found to be on external stakeholders, such as their community. Their focus on reputation (imagery), however, also alludes to an internal focus, indicated by a focus on the personality, values and history of the firm, and how that is illustrated to stakeholders. This illustrates an arguably more balanced outlook on the building of brand equity.

6.3 Discussion of the results of Sub-Question 1:

Sub-Question 1: What branding activities do architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands, respectively, employ to build brand identity?

The secondary research questions aimed to address the detailed components of the main research question. This sub-question interrogated the internal measures taken by a firm to promote the perception of its brand, as defined by Coleman et al. (2011).

Figure 10 illustrates that, in total, participants from the Netherlands mentioned branding activities at more than double the frequency of their South African counterparts. In accordance to their involvement in their community, as discussed in section 6.2.1.2 above, Dutch firms are highly involved in the academic realm of the industry, as illustrated by Figure 10. Dutch firms also apply many different forms of branding, as one participant illustrated – they publish books, lecture and publish in magazines, amongst others. This wide network of brand identity activities would reach a wider audience, and could account for the higher brand awareness of architecture in the Netherlands, as illustrated in section 1.2.1.

Social media also showed some prominence, with this being mentioned by most participants from both countries, as shown in Figure 10 in section 5.4.1.4. In accordance with the findings illustrated in section 6.2.1.2, firms also partake in value-added activities, which assists in building resonance with their communities and clients.
These findings once again relate to the building of resonance with stakeholders by Dutch firms, as illustrated in section 6.2.1.2. The wide range of branding activities facilitates in building the brand image in the public realm (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006), thus increasing brand awareness. This facilitates the building of a strong brand, that adds intangible value to a firm which is difficult to replicate, and thus adds to competitive advantage in the market (Herbst & Merz, 2011).

6.4 Discussion of the results of Sub-Question 2:

Sub-Question 2: What is the management perspective, respectively, of architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands on the effect that brand identity has on their competitive positions?

6.4.1 Managerial view on the importance of branding

In contrast with the results of the studies by Vosloo (2015) and Reid (2008), this research indicates that most participants in both South Africa and the Netherlands view branding as very important to their competitive advantage. This discrepancy could be attributed to a social desirability bias, as the study was conducted by a fellow architect (as mentioned in section 4.13.1.3), and covered the topic of branding. Only two of the participants did not view branding as important to their firms’ competitive position. Branding was not viewed negatively by these participants, but the securing of new work was rather attributed to relationships with clients and other professionals operating in the industry or through the firms’ reputation (refer to section 5.4.1.3.1).

The findings also indicate the lingering presence of the culture of “gentlemanly fair play” (Mitrache, 2012) in the South African industry (as mentioned in section 1.2.1) by those not wishing to “flaunt” their firm and “overdo” branding (see section 5.4.1.3.1). No consensus was reached on this view, as other South African respondents responded positively to the ‘flaunting’ of their firms.
6.4.2 Resource allocation as indication of branding importance

The investigation into the allocation of resources serves as a triangulation tool to check the real importance of branding in architectural firms. A key finding (see section 5.4.1.3.1) is that most firms across both geographical locations view branding activities as integral to their everyday activities, especially related to creating buildings. This relates back to the theme the building as the brand, identified in section 5.6.1.

The findings indicate that the two participants who did not allocate any resources to branding did this due to not needing to, as illustrated in section 5.4.1.3.1. These firms had a standing strong competitive position, originating from the building of long-term relationships with clients. This supports Lindgreen, Beverland and Farrelly’s (2010) findings that decisions in B2B industries are made based on emotional benefits, and the critical role that relationship quality plays in buying decisions in B2B future-based industrial goods or services.

Another finding is the view that branding is supplementary to the running of the firm, if time and funding allow for it (refer to section 5.4.1.3.2). This seems to indicate a trade-off, between daily operations and the ‘add-on’ of marketing activities. Some participants acknowledged needing to spend more time and funds on marketing, but admitted to being pre-occupied by day-to-day demands. This illustrates the possible lack of prominence given to marketing, and thus points to a non-holistic and non-strategic view taken on the marketing function.

These findings go against the findings of Santos-Vijande et al. (2013) that branding forms part of the holistic marketing activities of the firm and should not be viewed as an expense, but as a long-term investment. The management perspective of architectural firms, both in South Africa and the Netherlands, seems to be that branding is very important, but lack of resource allocations illustrates that it is not viewed as a strategic resource (see section 5.4.1.3.2). This is in contradiction with the affirmations of branding importance made by participants, illustrated at the beginning of this section, and supports Vosloo’s (2015) findings that architectural professionals are not equipped to envision, start or manage viable and enduring firms, which extends to the marketing function of the firm.
The main finding on the management view on branding in architectural firms, is that, whether participants view it as integral to everyday operations, or additional to them, not much strategic thinking goes into the marketing function of the firms. This indicates a lack of brand orientation in architectural firms in both South Africa and the Netherlands, and could result in a loss of potential competitive advantage (Santos-Vijande et al., 2013).

In addition, no evidence was found for the concept of the brand as an asset to the firm (see section 5.4.1.3.2), in contrast to Glynn’s (2012) argument that for the importance of the resource-based view of the firm. The author states that the resource-based view of the firm attempts to explain the success of brands from the perspective of the resources allocated and utilised to them. The brand performance is contingent, not only on the allocation of those resources, but also on their application.

An interesting finding from the results is the new practice in the Dutch industry to appoint project-based branding specialists, to brand new property developments, as illustrated by section 5.4.1.3.1. This highlights the importance that property developers put on branding, and as these developers are often architects’ clients, could indicate that they would react positively to a strong architectural brand.

6.4.3 Conclusion

Despite the reports to the contrary (Vosloo, 2015; Mitrache, 2012), most participants deem marketing and branding to be of pivotal importance to their competitive position, as illustrated in section 5.4.1.3.1. However, very few of them related it to strategic assets, getting new work or retaining existing clients. The lack of allocation of resources also contradicts this point, and illustrates the lack of formal business practices used in most architectural firms, in agreement with the findings by Vosloo (2015) and Mitrache (2012). The research design could have influenced this, since the sampling rules restricted the size of the firms to less than 20 employees. This discrepancy could be due to the more informal corporate cultures of smaller firms, as opposed to more formal corporate cultures of bigger firms, and not necessarily representative of all architectural firms. The management view that branding activities are integrated into daily operations also counters the argument for formal resource allocation, and supports the theme of the building as the brand, as illustrated in section 6.5.6, below.
The results show that there is no fixed allocation of resources to branding in either South African or Dutch architectural firms. These firms view these activities as either integral to the running of their businesses, or as a last-resort measure, if time and money allow. The findings also reveal a gap in the literature for future research into resource allocation as indication of branding importance of B2B service firms of all sizes, especially in the architectural industry.

6.5 Discussion of the results of Sub-Question 3:

Sub-Question 3: To what extent do architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands, respectively, deliver on the five dimensions of the Coleman et al. (2011) B2B Service Brand Identity Network?

The final sub-question sought to determine the extent to which architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands delivered on the B2B Service Brand Identity Network, by Coleman et al. (2011). The results indicate that certain factors overlap with brand equity components, and thus reinforce their value.

The results reflect that employee and client focus rank the highest, due to its prominence in the South African group of participants, as illustrated in Figure 11. Strikingly, the difference between South Africa and the Netherlands lies in the distribution of the focus, as indicated by Figure 12. As illustrated in Figure 12, the findings show that South African architectural firms place much more emphasis on employee and client focus, while Dutch firms place more equally distributed emphasis on all the components of brand identity, with a slightly higher emphasis on consistent communications. This could indicate a more balanced outlook on brand identity, as opposed to a skewed focus on one component thereof, as in the case of the South African firms. The least important component to both groups, as illustrated in Figure 11 and Figure 12, is corporate visual identity. The findings are discussed below, according to each component of the network.
6.5.1 Employee and client focus

The findings demonstrate the importance of trusting employees, and giving them autonomy, as illustrated in section 5.5.1. Employee satisfaction is deemed to be important, and is cultivated through an emphasis on company culture. This aligns with the findings by Burmann, Jost-Benz and Riley (2009) that employees form the original source of brand equity in B2B service firms and thus are an essential component of identity-based brand equity.

The outcome of the results (see section 5.5.1) also illustrates a focus on client satisfaction, which includes the tailoring of propositions to clients. This indicates an understanding of what is important to clients, and supports Davis, Golicic and Marquardt’s (2008) argument that a strong consumer orientation enhances the brand image of service firms. This also supports Backhaus, Steinder and Lügger’s (2011) argument that by a client employing a certain service firm to work for them, their corporate brand is enhanced, and thus B2B brands have the potential of projecting the desired brand image for the benefit of the client’s brand. According to Backhaus, Steinder and Lügger (2011), this connection between the client and the firm is what leads to competitive advantage.

An interesting finding from the results of the South African group is the concept of educating clients, as illustrated in section 5.5.1. Participants used their prior knowledge to convince clients to do what was in the clients’ best interest. Moreover, an interrelationship is indicated again between brand identity components and those of brand equity, as this links to the concept of judgement, from Kuhn, Nigel and Pope’s (2008) B2B CBBE model.

The education of clients in South Africa illustrates a prominent finding in the difference between the South African and Dutch architectural industry, as illustrated in section 5.5.1. Dutch firms highlighted the changing role of the architect in relation to clients, by referring to the progression from the architect as the master builder, to a more egalitarian relationship with clients, where co-creation takes place (see section 5.5.1). This is in contrast with the South African view of having to educate clients.
The results of the study indicate no mention of any connection between employee satisfaction and client satisfaction (as shown in section 5.5.1), and thus do not relate to Coleman et al.’s (2011) findings to that effect. This could be attributed to the open-ended nature of the interview guide, which did not address the connection directly, and this thus cannot be concluded with full conviction.

The results highlight that South African firms understand the important roles that employees play in the competitive advantage of the firm, as shown in section 5.5.1. This supports the view by De Chernatony and Segal-Horn, (2003) that employees are the first point of contact with clients, and thus play an important role in the brand identity of the firm. This also reinforces the resource-based view of the firm, as promulgated by Glynn (2012), which views employees as important resources. One participant even referred to their employees as “assets” to the firm, illustrating a strong focus on employees.

This importance of employees to architectural firms (especially in South Africa) highlights an interesting opportunity for future research into the effect that employees have on the brand identity and brand image of architectural firms.

6.5.2 Brand identity – Corporate visual identity deemed least important

The lowest amount of evidence for brand identity components was found for corporate visual identity, as illustrated by Figure 11. Despite the low prominence of this theme, participants still attributed importance to it. The brand logo was identified as the conveyor of the values of the firm, as illustrated in section 5.5.2. Some participants viewed the logo as the physical manifestation of the values of the firm, in accordance with the findings by Santos-Vijande et al. (2013) and its role as differentiator of the firm.

One participant demonstrated the potential impact of the logo, and acknowledged it as being the identifier of the firm’s brand, leading to stakeholders identifying the brand logo more easily than the protagonist (see section 5.5.2). This diverges from the more prominent findings that the personal brand of the protagonist can also be the corporate brand, as illustrated in section 6.5.7, below. This can be attributed to the small sample size, and the limited generalisability thereof. It also illustrates that there is no one universal truth, especially relevant in qualitative research, as stated by Yin (2011). This importance of the brand logo also agrees with the research by Coleman et al. (2011) that the logo and other brand objects give a tangible aspect to the intangible nature of professional services and convey the brand identity more clearly to clients.
6.5.3 Consistent communications

The prominence of booklets and presentations to clients and other stakeholders also came to the fore in the results, as shown in section 5.5.3, as an integral part of the everyday production of the firms, as an expression of the value of the brand. The consistent quality of these communications was emphasized, indicating the link to the nature of architectural firms as design firms.

Most participants referred to the importance of the quality of the message that goes out to stakeholders (see section 5.5.3). This aligns to the arguments by Davis, Golicic and Marquardt (2008) and Horan, O’Dwyer and Tieran (2011) that clear communication of the value proposition of the firm is of cardinal importance. This also relates back to the theme of judgement, and supports Keller’s (2003) argument that judgements of the brand are based on the quality and credibility of the firm’s services, and the consideration and superiority of the firm. The findings also reinforce Backhaus, Steiner and Lügger’s (2011) statement that the brand provides a cue to the quality of the service to be expected, and in this manner assists in reducing the perceived risk involved in making buying decisions in B2B service industries.

Participants neglected to make any mention of communication of the firm’s strategy to employees, in order to ensure consistent communication thereof to clients. This supports the findings as shown in section 6.4.2, that that architectural firms do not view branding as part of strategic planning.

These findings support the crucial nature of consistent communications in a service firm, which has many points of communication with stakeholders, as highlighted by De Chernatony & Segal-Horn (2003). Additionally, the findings also support the importance participants placed on employees, as illustrated in section 6.5.1, above.

The brand identity component of consistent communications measures the firm’s understanding of marketing communication channels, and how to communicate in a way that presents a consistent brand identity (Coleman, de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2015). This communicates the value of the brand to stakeholders. Horan, O’Dwyer and Tieran (2011) suggest that the consistency of the message and method of communication is vitally important in order to have a significant effect on the brand identity.
6.5.4 Brand personality

Evidence for the personal brand of the protagonist in relation to the brand personality of the firm is found amongst the majority of the participants, relating to brand identity as discussed in section 5.5.4. Interestingly, this supports the definition of brand personality by Coleman et al. (2011) as the personality of the brand, if it were to be a person. As mentioned in section 5.6.2, this unique personal brand, as the brand personality of the firm, also serves to differentiate the firm, in agreement with the research by Herbst and Merz (2011).

Half of the participants mentioned the personality of their brand in the discussion, and one participant related how this personality connected to a client, as illustrated in section 5.5.4. This supports Coleman et al.’s (2011) statement of the importance of securing an emotional connection with clients via a brand personality, as it provides a way to differentiate a firm from competitors, while promoting emotional and functional brand value associations (Herbst & Merz, 2011).

6.5.5 Human resources initiatives

The findings indicate a lack of formal human resources initiatives present in architectural firms, both in South Africa and the Netherlands (refer to section 5.5.5). This once again correlates with Vosloo’s (2015) findings that architectural professionals are not prepared to envision, start or manage viable and enduring firms.

Despite this lack of formal initiative, the findings indicate that employees play a very important role in South African firms, as illustrated in Figure 11 and Figure 12, in section 5.5. Mentoring, continuous training and a focus on the company culture emerged as prominent themes relating to human resources initiatives. Thus, despite a lack of formal structure, initiatives are offered to employees in an informal manner. This prominence supports the literature (Hutt & Speh, 2014; De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003) that employee loyalty to the firm is earned via investment in training and development, providing challenging career paths and aligning incentives to employee performance.

The importance of a supportive company culture was also emphasized by some participants. This supports Coleman et al.’s (2011) view that the building and nurturing of a supportive culture is an effective way of creating and maintaining employee satisfaction.
6.5.6 The building as the brand

The theme the building as the brand emerged as a prominent inductive theme from the data, as shown in section 5.6.1. This represents the physical product as reinforcing the brand of the firm, and is an interesting finding that does not seem to be represented in the current literature. This relates to the unique position that the industry of architecture occupies between services and products. This theme constitutes an addition to the literature on B2B service branding, specifically the architectural industry. The building as the brand in the context of the architecture industry represents a tangible product resulting from a service in the wider B2B service industries (refer to section 7.1.3).

This illustration of the nature of the industry is in line with Mitrache’s (2012) claim than the industry offers a mix of tangible and intangible benefits. However, the concept of the building also being the brand is a new one, and lends itself to the extension of the concept of brand identity – management develops the brand identity by working on the products delivered by the firm, and thus this could be another component of the B2B Service Brand Identity Network, specifically for industries which occupy this niche position.

The findings also indicate a small deviation from this theme. Two South African participants illustrated the link to the personal brand of the protagonist, by stating that this was more prominent than the building as the brand (see section 5.4.1.1.3).

The findings indicate that the building as the brand also links to the brand identity theme of corporate visual identity, as it constitutes a visual object as representation of the brand. The positive feedback from end-users on buildings designed by participants, as highlighted in section 5.4.1.1.3, support Klopper and North’s (2011) findings that visual elements create cultural significance and find emotional resonance with stakeholders. The sheer scale of buildings means that they have the potential to have even bigger impact on stakeholders than other visual brand objects.
6.5.7 The personal brand of the protagonist

Another new discovery from the data is the interlinking of the protagonist of the firm and the brand of the firm, as illustrated in section 5.6.2. In most cases, the brand of the firm originates from the personal brand of the protagonist. In this way, the personality of the protagonist plays a key role in the brand personality of the firm (also part of the B2B Service Brand Identity Network). This was found amongst the majority of the participants, both in South Africa and the Netherlands (see section 5.6.2). This personal brand assists in differentiating the firm, due to the uniqueness of each individual person.

This is supported by Kotler and Pfoertsch's (2006) claim that a brand cannot easily be imitated and thus adds to the differentiation of a firm. A personal brand is even more difficult to imitate, and thus should contribute to the competitive advantage of the firm. Current literature does not refer to this link between the personal brand of the firm's protagonist and the corporate brand, and thus this constitutes a new addition to the literature.

6.5.8 Conclusion

The results indicate that Dutch B2B architecture firms have a more balanced outlook on the components of brand identity, as illustrated in section 6.5.1. South African firms, by contrast, place the most emphasis on employee and client focus. This coincides with the finding that employees form the original source of brand equity in B2B service firms (Burmann, Jost-Benz & Riley, 2009).

An intriguing finding from the study is the seemingly changing role of architects in relation to their clients, as discussed in section 6.5.1. While South African participants reported having to “educate” clients, Dutch participants referred to the co-creation that takes place with their clients. This difference introduces an interesting topic for future research.

Despite the results indicating a low focus on corporate visual identity, participants did mention that logos and tangible branding was important to their brand identities, as shown in 6.5.2. Additionally, the consistent communication of the brand and its values is shown to be pivotal in both the South African and Dutch context (see section 6.5.3), in agreement with Davis, Golicic and Marquardt (2008) and Horan, O’Dwyer and Tieran (2011).
The findings resulted in new findings that contribute to the existing literature on B2B service brands, specifically to those firms which offer services while producing products. These are the building as the brand (tangible product from service) and the personal brand of the protagonist. These two themes relate to the brand identity of firms by contributing to stakeholder perception of the brand, whilst being a component which management can strategically direct. The next chapter discusses these findings and their implications on academics and management.
Chapter 7 – Conclusion

This chapter discusses the findings as presented in Chapter 6, and provides a proposed network that attempts to summarise the results of this research. Implications for management and academics are discussed, followed by the limitations of this research. Finally, suggestions are made for possible avenues of future research.

7.1 Principal findings

7.1.1 Summary of the findings

The main objective of this research was to explore the manner in which B2B architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands use brand identity to build the foundation of brand equity, in order to secure competitive advantage. The B2B Service Brand Identity Network by Coleman et al. (2011) was used as a guide. The differences between South African and Dutch firms were analysed to identify differences between the contexts, if any. The Netherlands is internationally renowned for the quality of its architecture (Kloosterman & Stegmeijer, 2004) and architects in the country have the highest hourly fee rate in the European Union. In contrast, in South Africa, it is not uncommon for architectural firms to discount their fees between 65 to 70% in order to secure tenders from metropolitan councils in South Africa (Pather & Jacobs, 2011).

The severe discounting of fees could be attributed to the lack of differentiation between firms, which has led to the virtual commodification of architectural services (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Increased competition and decreased profitability has resulted from this commodification (Allix, 2012). Coleman et al. (2011) suggested that the development of a distinctive brand identity could combat this commodification and generate competitive advantage. The authors devised a B2B Service Brand Identity Network which highlighted components of brand identity.

The results of this research indicate the different perspectives of architectural firms in South Africa and the Netherlands in relation to brand equity and brand identity. South African firms focus more on building credibility through the brand equity component judgement, while Dutch firms emphasize their relationship to their communities, through partnership solutions.
In relation to brand identity, Dutch firms have a more equally distributed focus on the components, while South African firms place the most emphasis on employee and client focus. These differences illustrate that South African firms have a more inward-looking outlook on branding, while Dutch firms have a more balanced perspective.

Additionally, the findings indicated that Dutch firms partake in almost double the amount of branding activities than their South African counterparts, and this could be linked back to the greater brand awareness in the Netherlands. Dutch firms also spread their focus on brand identity components evenly, while South African firms focused primarily on employee and client focus.

The results also indicated commonalities between South African and Dutch architectural firms. The findings also showed that neither Dutch nor South African firms formally allocated resources to branding or human resources incentives. This indicates a lack of a holistic and strategic view on marketing and branding. In order to achieve competitive advantage from building brand equity through building brand identity, the firm’s unique strengths, resources and culture should be prioritised in its branding activities (Wang & Sengupta, 2016).

An addition to the existing literature on brand identity, the results indicated the prominence of the building as the brand and the personal brand of the protagonist in the findings. The building as the brand illustrates the nature of the industry as a service industry which results in tangible objects (buildings), and these buildings act as brand images for the firm. The personal brand of the protagonist often functions as the brand of the firm, and thus the brand personality of the firm relates to the personality of the protagonist in this context. These two themes relate to the building of brand identity in B2B service firms that also produce tangible products, and thus should also be included in the B2B Service Brand Identity Network.

### Proposed B2B Tangible Service Brand Identity Network

Section 5.6.5 and 5.6.6 in Chapter 6 discussed the new themes relating to brand identity in B2B architectural firms revealed in the findings – the building as the brand (tangible product from service in the wider B2B service industries) and the personal brand of the protagonist. This study proposes a new B2B Tangible Service Brand Identity Network, specifically tailored to B2B service industries that offer services that result in the production of a product.
Klopper and North (2011) profess that brand identity relates to the unique value of the brand that holds meaning, and refers to the internal measures taken by a firm to promote the perception of the brand (Coleman et al., 2011). Thus, components of brand identity should reflect these characteristics. The proposed network is illustrated in Figure 14, below, and subsequently discussed in more detail.

**Figure 14: Proposed B2B Tangible Service Brand Identity Network**

![Proposed B2B Tangible Service Brand Identity Network](image)

*Source: Researcher, based on Coleman et al.'s (2011) B2B Service Brand Identity Network*

### 7.1.3 Tangible product from service

The results of this study show that the physical product created through B2B architectural services, the building, also acts as an image that represents the brand of the firm, and thus contributes to their differentiation, as shown in section 6.5.6. The creation of this product is an internal measure of the firm to promote its brand, in accordance with Coleman et al.'s (2011) definition of brand identity components. This study argues that the alignment of the image of this product to the values of the firm as well as to the image the firm wants to project into the world, namely brand identity, (Burmann, Jost-Benz & Riley, 2009) ultimately results in increased brand equity.
7.1.4 Personal brand of protagonist

The findings indicate that the personal brand of the protagonist is a pivotal component in shaping the brand identity of the firm, as illustrated in section 6.5.7, and thus is an important component of the proposed network. As a personal brand is very difficult to imitate, it assists in differentiating the firm (Kotler & Pf, 2006). This difficulty to imitate originates from the unique meaning of this component, and thus forms part of brand identity, as defined by Klopper and North (2011). Internal measures can be taken by the firm to promote the perception of this personal brand (Coleman et al., 2011), further emphasizing the personal brand of the protagonist as a component of brand identity.

7.2 Recommendations and implications

7.2.1 Recommendations for management

The research findings illustrated that there is a difference between the management approach to building brand equity through brand identity in architectural firms of South Africa and the Netherlands. Chapter 6 illustrated these differences, and this section aims to consolidate this into recommendations for management.

7.2.1.1 Brand orientation and the importance of strategic brand management

Both South African and Dutch managers should develop brand orientation within the firm, to align strategic decisions to the brand identity of the firm, in order to build competitive advantage. Managers should consistently communicate this brand strategy to employees, in order for them to consistently communicate this to clients and other stakeholders (Leek & Christodoulides, 2012).

Most importantly, managers should take a holistic view on the branding of the firm, as opposed to viewing it as an add-on, for when time and funds allow. The importance of the brand as a strategic asset should not be overlooked. Successful brand management requires the alignment of resource allocation, structure and financial accountability around this intangible asset. This is the best way to take advantage of the competitive advantage afforded by successful branding (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006).
7.2.1.2 Allocate resources to branding

Managers in both geographies should formalise the allocation of resources to branding. This links to brand orientation within the firm, and a more holistic view on branding, as mentioned in section 7.2.1. The brand of a firm is an asset to that firm, and the allocation of resources increases its power as differentiator. Marketers in B2B firms, whether they are managers or employees, require the resources to conduct branding properly. They require the available time, staffing, and budgets for research, training, and client relationship management (Reid, 2008).

7.2.1.3 Wider stakeholder focus and building the foundation of brand equity

South African management can learn from their Dutch counterparts with regard to their focus on their communities. While South African firms concentrate on building trust with clients, Dutch firms focus on building a wider network with a range of stakeholders. This wider focus results in a broader brand awareness and increased competitive advantage. In addition, Dutch firms focus not only internally, but also externally in order to build brand equity. This balanced perspective on building brand equity seems to assist them in building competitive advantage, and could be helpful to South African firms, who focus mainly on internal measures to build brand equity.

Both South African and Dutch firms can benefit from working more on the base of brand equity – salience (brand identity), and performance, especially. Firms seemed to concentrate on the higher order components of judgement and partnership solutions, and neglecting the foundation of brand equity could have negative effects on their competitive position (Keller, 2003).

7.2.1.4 Increase branding activities

South African managers can learn from their Dutch counterparts and increase their branding activities. Active branding management is the best way to secure differentiation through branding (Burmann, Jost-Benz & Riley, 2009).

7.2.1.5 A balanced view on brand identity

South African management should aim to ensure that all five components of brand identity are addressed in their branding activities. A more balanced perspective on these components could result in a more effective brand identity.
Dutch management can learn from South African firms’ understanding of the important role of employees in B2B service firms. Dutch firms could work on building healthy company cultures to improve employee satisfaction (Burmann, Jost-Benz & Riley, 2009).

Management in South Africa and the Netherlands could improve their human resources practices, by formalising incentives to employees. As employees are assets to service firms, their motivation and satisfaction is paramount to maintaining competitive advantage (Hutt & Speh, 2014; De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003).

7.2.2 Implications for theory

This research highlights two previously unexplored components of brand identity in B2B architectural firms, namely tangible products resulting from services, and the personal brand of the protagonist. Due to its exploratory nature, this study necessarily involves a small sample size for in-depth study. The findings make a contribution to the literature on B2B service firms, while highlighting the opportunity for further study. In order to determine the generalisability of the results of this research, the researcher recommends further empirical study on the proposed network in similar B2B service industries, such as advertising, which produce tangible outcomes. Further opportunities for future research are discussed in section 7.4, below.

7.3 Limitations of the research

As previously mentioned, limitations of the research originated from the research design (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). The following limitations applied:

7.3.1 The research focussed only on architectural practices in the B2B services industries, which limits its applicability to other industries. As illustrated in Chapter 1 and 2, its unique position between services and products in the B2B industry places architecture in a niche;

7.3.2 The length of time required from participants to partake in interviews resulted in a higher non-response bias from managers. Out of the 27 possible participants contacted, only 16 responded, of which three were discarded due to sampling rules (refer to section 4.5.1);
7.3.3 As the researcher is an architect herself, participants might have been affected by social desirability bias. The presence of the researcher might have resulted in participants tailoring their answers to what they thought she wanted to hear;

7.3.4 The small sample size used for exploratory research (n = 13) might impact negatively on the scalability of the findings. The bigger the sample size, the higher the confidence in the research findings (Yin, 2011);

7.3.5 Some interviews were conducted via telephone or Skype, which limited the number of visual cues the researcher could observe. While visiting the offices of participants in the Netherlands, the researcher had the opportunity to observe their physical context. In telephone conversations, or even Skype calls, the scope of visual cues was limited, to zero;

7.3.6 Cultural differences between the researcher and the Dutch participants might have resulted in culture bias affecting the interpretation of the data. Humans view the world through the lens of their own cultural background, and this could have resulted in the researcher and participants misunderstanding the meaning of the other’s responses;

7.3.7 Some Dutch respondents struggled to find one or two words in English, which the researcher then translated from Dutch, due to her familiarity with the similar language Afrikaans. This might have had an effect on the direction and flow of the conversation;

7.3.8 This research report focussed on the effect of branding on competitive advantage, and excluded any external factors that could influence it;

7.3.9 The size of the firms included in the research could have an effect on the generalisability of the findings, as in-group differences exist between firms of different sizes in the architectural industry (Reid, 2008).

7.3.10 The limited amount of time available to conduct the research, resulting in a cross-sectional time horizon, could influence the depth of data gathered. A
longitudinal study could provide more insight, by studying participants over a period of time, and observing the implications of their actions over that time.

7.4 Academic suggestions for future research

There is a need for future research into the brand identities of B2B service firms, as very little research exists on the topic (Coleman et al., 2011). The following gaps in the literature were identified through the results of this study, and would contribute to this field if studied further:

7.4.1 A quantitative study to empirically test the proposed network in the B2B architectural industry, which includes the components of product and personal brand in the network.

7.4.2 The importance of employees to architectural firms (especially in South Africa) highlights an interesting opportunity for future research into the effect that employees have on the brand identity and brand image of architectural firms.

7.4.3 A quantitative study of the brand identities of B2B architectural firms, in the same geographies, to test the findings on a bigger scale. The small sample size in this study could have affected the results, particularly relating to the CBBE model and brand equity.

7.4.4 The resource allocation as indication of branding importance of B2B service firms of all sizes, especially in the architectural industry. The results of this study show that there is no fixed allocation of resources to branding in either South African or Dutch architectural firms. These firms view these activities as either integral to the running of their businesses, or as a last-resort measure, if time and money allow.

7.4.5 The difference in the role of the architect in relation to the client between South Africa and the Netherlands highlights a compelling topic for future research.
7.4.6  A consumer-based qualitative study into the topic of building brand equity through brand identity in B2B service firms, to investigate the consumer view on each component of the Brand Identity Network.

7.5  Conclusion

The South African B2B architecture service industry seems to be suffering from the commodification of its services. Current literature shows that building the brand identity of B2B service firms leads to differentiation and competitive advantage, which assists in addressing this commodification (Coleman et al., 2011). Despite this, little of the literature deals with this topic of B2B service brand identity in depth (Glynn, 2012; Leek & Christodoulides, 2012). This research aimed to contribute to reducing this gap in the literature. The results of the research from 13 in depth interviews gave insight into the brand identity activities of B2B architectural firms. New insights from the study were included in the Service Brand Network (Coleman et al., 2011), resulting in the proposed B2B Tangible Service Brand Identity Network. This proposed network aims to account for B2B service firms that provide intangible services that result in tangible objects, such as architectural firms.

This study contributes to the literature through in-depth research into the brand identity and brand equity activities of B2B architectural firms, and the management perspective thereof. It is hoped that this research will serve as a guide to managers in the B2B architectural industry, on how to improve and direct their brand identity practices to improve their brand equity, and in that way to improve their competitive advantage.
References


Department of Higher Education and Training (2014). Call for comments on the national scarce skills lost: Top 100 occupations in demand, 308.


Appendices
Appendix A - Interview Guide

Building Brand Equity through Brand Identity in the Architectural industry

Company (confidential): _____________________________________________

Date: _______________________________________________________________

Get to sign confidentiality, ask if recording is all right. Explain that information is confidential.

a. Introduce yourself
b. Make small talk about something you observe, like a picture of their kids on their desk or the design of their office.
c. Explain the reason why you are here, the research topic and why it interested you, the confidentiality of their identifiers; ask them to sign the consent form and tell them that the interview will be recorded.
d. Explain the way that this study looks at branding. Mention some or all of this:

Brand building goes far beyond creating awareness of your name and your customers promise. It is a voyage of building a corporate soul and Infectiously communicating it inside and outside the company to all your partners, so that your customers truly get what your brand promises.

They facilitate the identification of products, services and businesses as well as differentiate them from the competition. They are an effective and compelling means to communicate the benefits and value a product or service can provide. They are a guarantee of quality, origin, and performance, thereby increasing the perceived value to the customer and reducing the risk and complexity involved in the buying decision.

Part 1 – Background information [short answers]

1. What is your role in the organisation?
2. What is the history of the firm?
3. How many architectural professionals work here?
4. What kind of clients do you serve? I.e. institutional, single family residential? Which % would you say is non-residential?
5. What is the annual turnover of the firm, in approximate brackets? R0 – R1 million; R1 – R10 million; R10 million +
6. On which basis do you charge fees for your services? Percentage of project value as per SACAP fee scale? Hourly rate? Own rate based on construction value or something else?

Part 2 – In-depth questions
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. How do you view the marketing of your firm? | • Is it important?  
• Does it form part of your strategy?  
• How do you allocate resources to it?  
• Who is involved?  
• Can you expand a little on this?  
Can you tell me anything else?  
Can you give me some examples? |   |
| 2. Do you see marketing as important to your firm? | • Why/ why not? |   |
| 3. Can you tell me about the firm’s brand? | • What does it represent?  
• Who is involved? |   |
| 4. How much of the firm’s strategy to perform well in the market relates to the development of the brand? | • Do you view the brand as important to doing well?  
• Do you discuss the brand during management meetings? |   |
| 5. How do you communicate your brand to the public? | • What do you communicate?  
• How is it represented?  
• Which images represent it and how? |   |
| 6. How is everyone in the office involved? | • Who handles the branding?  
• How do employees communicate with clients? |   |
| 7. How do you motivate employees to represent the brand consistently? | • Do you induct/ train them?  
• Does it form part of the firm’s culture?  
• Is there a conscious effort to make employees feel proud of the brand? |   |
| 8. How do you spread out the amount of time spent working on the brand, the number of people, and the time spent? | • Funding  
• People |   |
| 9. What do you do in the firm to promote the brand? | • How do you illustrate to the public and clients what value you add? |   |
| 10. How do you think the way you work on representing your brand influences your competitive position in the market? | • Does it help in getting new clients?  
• Does it reinforce relationships with existing clients?  i.e. confidence in the brand and its reputation? |   |
| 11. Is there anything you would like to add? |   |   |
| 12. Do you have any questions for me? |

Thank you for your time and insight.
Appendix B – Interview Consent Letter

I am conducting research on the branding activities of architectural firms. To that end, you are asked to take part in a face-to-face or Skype interview to discuss the marketing and branding activities of the architectural firm you are employed by. This will help us better understand brand identity in architectural firms, and should take no more than one hour of your time.

Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. All identifiers will be kept confidential. By participating in the interview, you indicate that you voluntarily participate in this research. If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Researcher: Alet Verster  
Email: alet.verster@gmail.com  
Phone: 

Supervisor: Prof. Danie Petzer  
Email: PetzerD@gibs.co.za  
Phone: 

Signed by ________________________________ at ____________________ on ________________________________

.................................................. ..................................................
Signature of participant Signature of researcher
Appendix C – Ethical Clearance Letter

Dear Alet Verster,

Protocol Number: Temp2016-01732

Title: Building Brand Equity through Brand Identity in the Architecture Industry

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been APPROVED.

You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

Kind Regards,

Adele Bekker
Appendix D: List of Codes Used for the Study

**Code-Filter: All**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legend</th>
<th>Inductive Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BI</td>
<td>Brand Identity Component</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE</td>
<td>Brand Equity Component</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>Branding Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mnmnt</td>
<td>General Context - Management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Networks
- *AC: Branded goods
- *AC: Academic Involvement
- *AC: Committee
- *AC: Design sites
- *AC: Direct marketing
- *AC: Events
- *AC: Exhibitions
- *AC: Newsletters
- *AC: Passive marketing
- *AC: Publication
- *AC: Research
- *AC: Social Media
- *AC: Tours
- *AC: TV
- *AC: Workshops
- *Adapt to context
- *Awards
- *Brand and relationships
- *Brand Awareness
- *Brand Image
- *Branding Importance
- *Branding specialists
- *Building as Brand
- *Business Focus
- *Business Skills
- *Client attributes
- *Co branding
- *Co operation
- *Commodity
- *Company Culture
- *Competitions
- *Competitive Advantage
- *Consistency
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<th>*Continuous Improvement</th>
<th>*Craftsmanship</th>
<th>*Creative Identity</th>
<th>*Differentiation</th>
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<td>*Diversify</td>
<td>*Education</td>
<td>*Experience</td>
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<td>*Feelings</td>
<td>*Firm growth</td>
<td>*Flexibility</td>
<td>*Focus on people</td>
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<td>*Focus on quality</td>
<td>*Hiring filter</td>
<td>*Holistic marketing</td>
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<td>*Innovation</td>
<td>*International activities</td>
<td>*Leading by Example</td>
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<td>*Lack of business training</td>
<td>*Long term</td>
<td>*Marketing Importance</td>
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<td>*Marketing vs Advertising</td>
<td>*Mentoring</td>
<td>*Nature of industry</td>
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<td>*Personal brand</td>
<td>*Process</td>
<td>*Resource Allocation</td>
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<td>*Selective</td>
<td>*Societal Role</td>
<td>*Stakeholder engagement</td>
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<td>*Succession</td>
<td>*Value Proposition</td>
<td>*Values Aligned</td>
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<td>*Women in architecture</td>
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<td>BE: Judgement</td>
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<td>BE: Performance</td>
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<td>BE: Sales Force Relationships</td>
<td>BI: Corporate Visual Identity</td>
<td>BI: Brand Personality</td>
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<td>BI: Consistent Communication</td>
<td>BI: Employee and Client Focus</td>
<td>BI: HR Initiatives</td>
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<td>Mgmt: Clients</td>
<td>Mgmt: Fees</td>
<td>Mgmt: History</td>
<td>Mgmt: Nr of employees</td>
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<td>Mgmt: Role</td>
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<td>SA: Fees</td>
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<td>Trade off</td>
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Appendix E: Detailed Service Brand Identity Scale and B2B Brand Equity Model

Service Brand Identity Scale

| Employee & client focus | Our organisation treats each employee as an essential part of the organisation  
| | Our employees will help clients in a responsive manner  
| | Our organisation responds to our clients’ needs  
| | Our top management is committed to providing quality service |
| Corporate visual identity | The font we use is an important part of our visual identity  
| | Our logo is an important part of who we are  
| | The corporate visual identity is helpful in making our organisation recognisable |
| Brand personality | The associations making up our brand personality are extremely positive  
| | Our clients have no difficulty describing our brand personality |
| Consistent communication | The people managing the communications programme for our organisation have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of all major marketing communications tools  
| | Our organisation’s advertising, PR and sales promotion all present the same clear consistent message to our stakeholders |
| Human resources initiatives | Our employee training programmes are designed to develop skills required for acquiring and deepening client relationships  
| | Our organisation regularly monitors employees’ performance |

Source: Adapted from Coleman et al. (2011, p.1068)
Figure A: Detailed B2B CBBE model

Source: Researcher. Adapted from Keller (2003) and Kuhn et al. (2008)