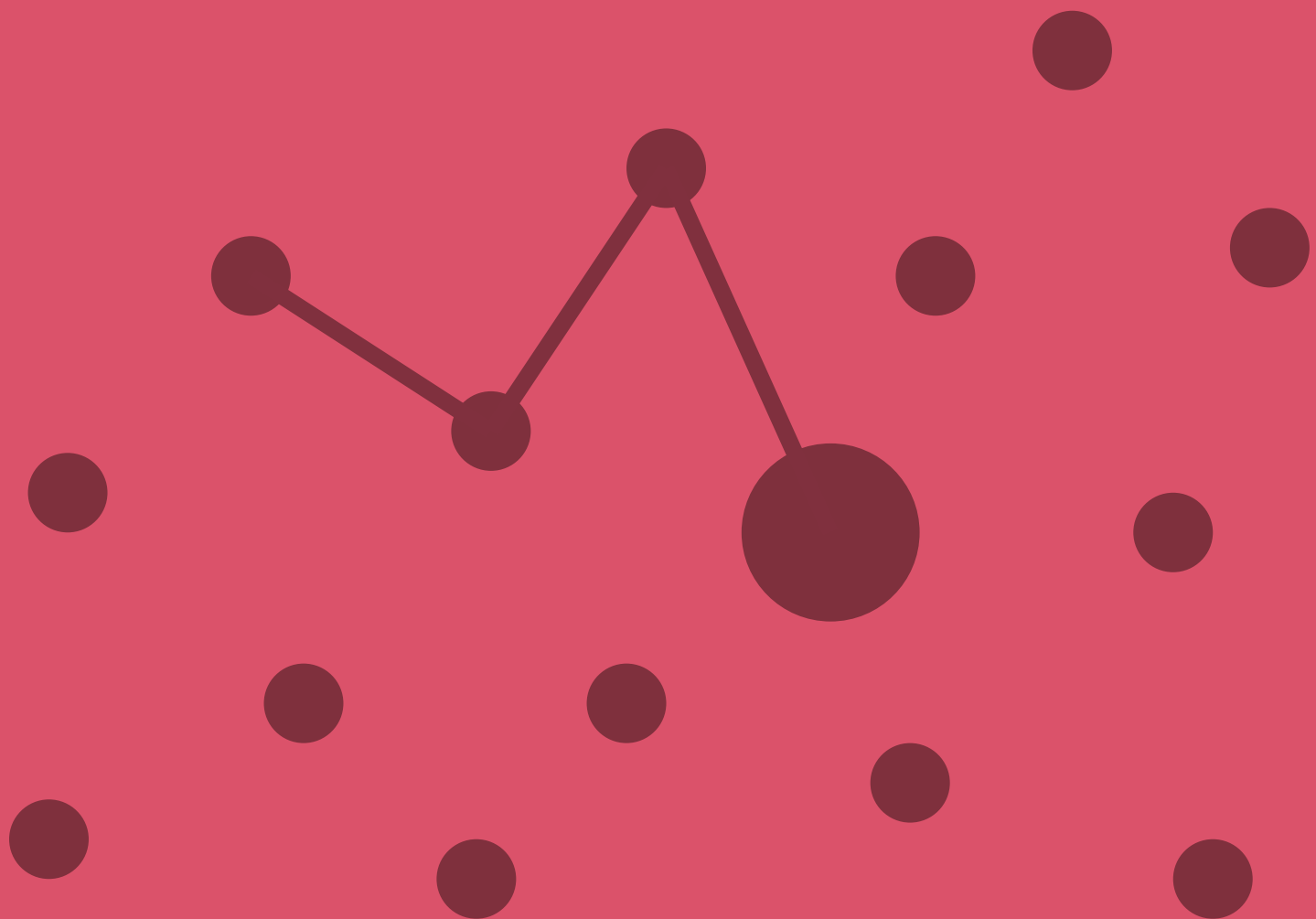# Building meaningful brand relationships in a platform economy

Rens van Mens

pwc

BRAND-CONSUMER RELATIONSHIPS

6 principles for building meaningful relationships
in an emerging platform economy

MASTER THESIS

Strategic Product Design
Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering
Delft University of Technology

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Company mentor: Koert Bakker, Strategy Lead, PwC Experience Center

PREFACE

Dear reader,

The document you are about to read serves as my graduation project's outcome in the master strategic product design at the Delft University of Technology. For the last 100 days, I have worked hard to prove myself a strategic designer by applying the knowledge I gained during my master's degree in this project. This knowledge aided me to translate my brief to the final design principles. Within the project, I tried to challenge myself by exploring new domains and using the insights to navigate a chaotic environment.

The motivation to pursue this project came from a combination of my fascination with the domains of branding and new changing business models. The way business operates is changing more than ever, with digital platforms changing the way we interact with each other more and more. These changes also give rise to fascinating innovations and ideas that were previously unthinkable. Learning to adapt to these changes is therefore imperative to keep on creating value for clients of PwC.

The project was completely done in the context of lockdown restrictions which brought challenges of its own. However, in these difficult times, I felt I had support from all directions. I want to thank you, Jeroen van Erp, for all the fun discussions I had with you. I could always rely on your energy and humour to give me extra motivation. I want to thank my mentor, Sijia Bakker-Wu, for keeping me sharp in this sometimes chaotic process. Your critical notes helped me be a little bit less chaotic. I would also like to thank my company mentor, Koert Bakker. I enjoyed all

the great discussion we had around the topic of branding. Sometimes those discussions could lead to more questions than answers, but having those philosophical discussions were important nonetheless.

Additionally, I would like to thank the various colleagues at the Experience Center who gave valuable feedback to the project and made

A big thanks to the experts who shared their insights and their story, which helped create the project's insights. Thank you for your time.

Lastly, I want to thank some close friends who helped me reach the project's finish line. I would like to thank Seerp Gratema van Andel, Koen Braker, Jard van Lent, Jana Sinitsova and Martine de Haan for participating in my creative sessions and for your continuous support throughout the project. You helped with valuable feedback, but you also helped me through some tough times during the project.

Thank you all for participating, listening, supporting and supervising. I could not have done the project without you!

I hope you enjoy reading it.

Rens van Mens
1st of march, 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARRY

Building a relationship between brands and people is a concept that has been around for a while. It is a way for marketers to raise brand equity and favourably increase customer engagement, brand differentiation and customer loyalty. However, the way customers interact with brands and how brands themselves Crete value is changing. Digital platforms have established themselves as digital mediator between customers and brands. Within a platform economy, value is not merely created by the product or services made by the brand, but the network of participants creates it on the platform. Incorporating this changing economy into brand strategy is vital as 75% of the time, only one platform prevails. The exploration within the field of brand relationships and platform business strategy holds great value to maintain a competitive brand positioning.

The thesis aims to answer the following question; How can the use of new insights and knowledge contribute to creating meaningful customer brand relationships within a future platform economy in the Dutch market?

The project is done in collaboration with PwC's Experience Center. At their Experience Center, they help their clients create innovative product and service offerings with the focus on creating a great customer experience. The exploration of this topic will allow them to be better equipped for upcoming client needs regarding the development of new experiences that help their clients form meaningful relationships with their customer.

Through a literature review, a basic understanding is created of the topics of brand-consumer relationships and platform business model, which aims to establish the domain for future exploration. Through desk research and expert interviews, 176 insights were gathered. Through clustering and a generative session with design students, 12 clusters were identified. These ultimately led to 4 future scenario's. Through further analysis, one future scenario was chosen for further exploration with the following vision.

The interaction between the platform, consumer, and brand should work like a robust ecosystem where all stakeholders live in a symbiotic relationship, each serving their purpose and bringing value to the ecosystem.

This led to the creation of the following 6 design principles aimed to enhance the brand experience for brands operating in a platform economy. (1) Relationships are not built overnight. (2) Collaborate or die (3) No such thing as a virtual hug (4) Branding is 99% emotion. (5) Doing good for society is doing good for branding. (6) Actually, start to listen.

These design principles serve to guide the Experience Consulting team and other strategic designers in the creation of new products and services while deepening the relationship with the customer.
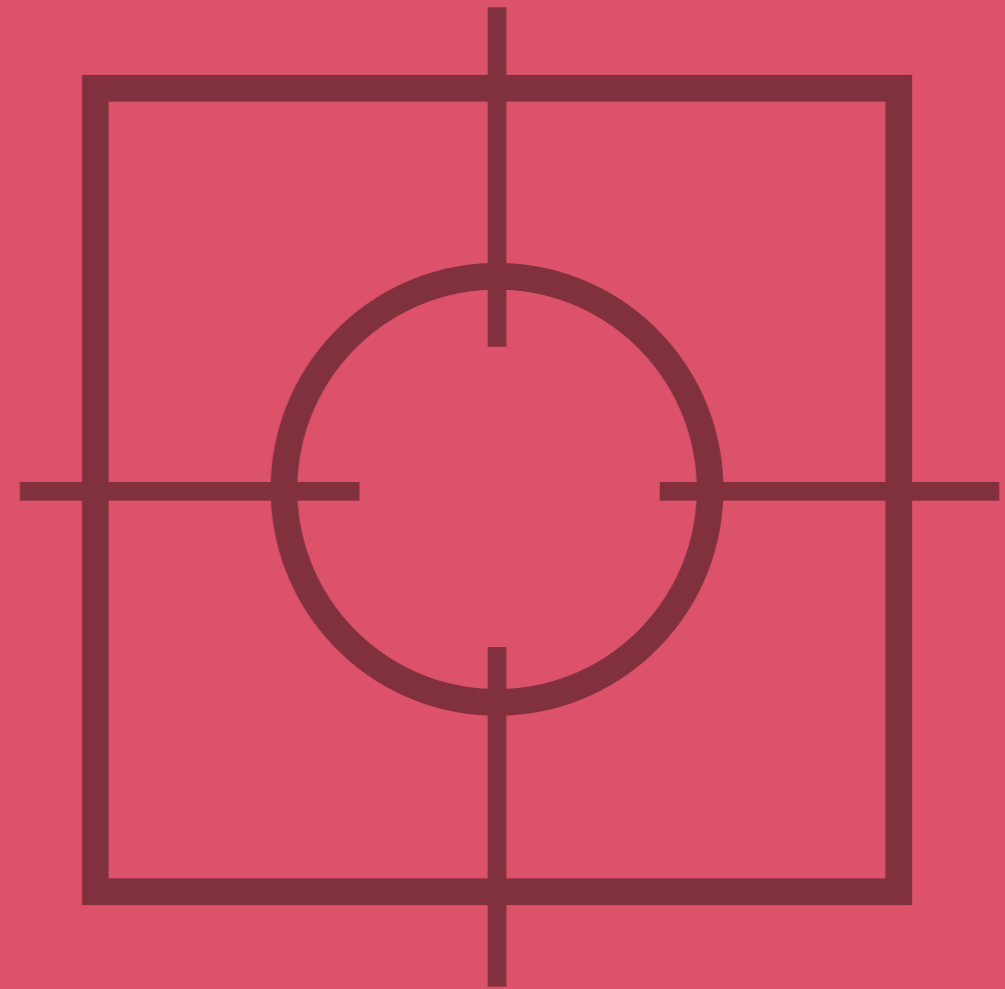
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INTRODUCTION

This section will introduce the main stakeholder in this project: PwC's Experience Center. The topic of the project and the context in which it resides is dressed as well as the other stakeholders that are involved within the project. Lastly, the main research question is introduced.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 PWC'S EXPERIENCE CENTER

1.1 HISTORY

The PwC firm as it is known today was established in 1998 when the merger between Price Waterhouse and Cooper & Lybrand was successful. Both accounting firms were established in the mid-1800 in London. Today PwC operates in 150 countries with an estimated amount of 276.000 employees. Today PwC is the second largest professional service firm network leading behind Deloitte.
PwC The Netherlands is part of an international professional services network that operates under the PwC brand.

1.2 OFFERING

PwC's service offerings are focused around 4 lines of services; tax, assurance, advisory and firms services. Here they operate in 26 different industries ranging from automotive to real estate. With their service offering, they help multinational deal with their challenges and help them grow in the right direction.

1.3 COMPETITORS

Historically the firm competes with other big accounting firms, such as Deloitte, EY, and KPMG, also referred to as the "Big Four". As the service offering broadens new competitors arise. Since they expended their service offering to consult they are also trying to compete with the "Big Three" management consulting firms; McKinsey, BCG, and Bain & Company. As they broaden their service offering to their client's new

competitors will arise.

1.4 EXPERIENCE CONSULTING

The experience consulting team (XC) currently operates within the firm's services lines of services within PwC and operate in the experience center (EC).

The XC team helps its clients by translating their customers' needs into new digital strategies or products and services.

The team consist of 4 unique capabilities that work together in an integrated approach. The 4 capabilities consist of product managers, experience strategists designers and developers.

The experience consulting team is part of a larger network of experience consulting teams across the globe.
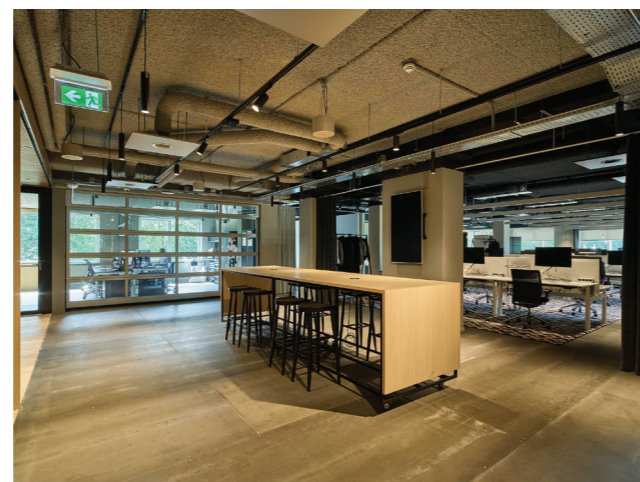
1.2 PROJECT CONTEXT

Building a relationship between brands and people is a concept that has been around for a while. It is a way for marketers to raise brand equity and favourably increase customer engagement, brand differentiation and customer loyalty towards the brand. Brand relationships, as defined by Aaker & Biel, look at the consumer's attitude and behaviours towards the brand and the brand's attitude towards the consumer. In his book "Beyond brand", Tom van den Bergh described brand relationship building as one of the last ways for brands to maintain a competitive advantage, showing the importance of the subject. The rise in market size for CRM software shows the importance of brand relationships for companies. In a report published in 2020 by Grand View Research, the current market size for CRM software is estimated at around 40.2 Billion US Dollar, with an expected annual compound growth rate of 14,2% until 2027. Showing customer relationships is at the top of the agenda of many companies.

However, the way people interact and build relationships with a brand is also changing. Further digitalization of our world has increased the number of ways people can interact drastically. Each year millions of new devices are connected to the Internet. In research done by Transforma Insights, the amount of active IoT devices will grow to 24.1 billion by 2030, from 7.6 billion in 2019. This digitalization has likely only been accelerated since the covid-19 pandemic. The way people interact with brands also reflects a change in consumer needs and behaviours. Consumers interact with brands to associate themselves with the respective brand image (Brand Management, 2014). People derive value from the brand they consume and actively use them to shape their image. People buy Apple products because they want to associate themselves with the creative brand image. In the same way, people use brands to distinguish themselves from others or to acquire status. Eckhard et

al. (2015) described this rising phenomenon as inconspicuous consumption. Here social status is acquired through the consumption of the right brands, signalling inside status or connoisseurship. This inconspicuous consumption shows a changing need for brand consumption; in this case, the need for authentic brand experiences. In turn, this changing need could influence how consumers engage in brand relationships.

One crucial factor changing this relationship is the rise of the platform economy. Within a platform economy, value is not merely created by the product or services created by the brand, but the network of participants creates it on the platform (Parker, Van Alstyne, Choudary, Platform Revolution, 2016). In a traditional product and service economy, the value chain is a linear process going from the company to the consumer. In a platform, this value is created outside of the platform company itself. (see figure 1). As value is created differently, this also changes the dynamic between the platform brand and the consumer. Figure 2 shows an example of different kinds of digital platforms.
Thinking about a brand strategy regarding platforms is almost inevitable. In a 2019 report by McKinsey, it was discovered that in an industry with multiple platforms one prevails 75% of the time, showing the importance for companies to think about their brand strategy regarding platforms. The brand either becomes a platform or becomes part of someone else's platform— either way, how brands build relationships with their customer changes from the traditional product or service business models. However, current research lacks an understanding of the field of building meaningful brand relationships within a platform economy.

1.3 VALUE FOR PWC

The company PriceWaterHouseCooper Netherlands (PwC) expressed interest in this exploration. At their Experience Center, they help companies create new product and service offerings for their clients with the focus on creating a great customer experience. The exploration of this topic will help them to be better equipped for upcoming client needs regarding the development of new products and services within a platform delivering on the brand promise.

How can the use of new insights and knowledge contribute to the creation of meaningful customer brand relationships within a future platform economy in the Dutch market?

1.4 STAKEHOLDERS

A design project is seldom done in a vacuum and stakeholders need to be addressed to know what needs are to be addressed in the project. In this project, 3 direct stakeholders and 1 indirect stakeholder are identified.

In this project, the direct stakeholder consists of the client PwC, the educational institution TU Delft and lastly me as a designer. Close collaboration with the company mentor Koert Bakker ensures that the results are in line with the strategy of PwC. The educational stakeholder is represented by the project chair, Jeroen van Erp, and the project mentor, Sijia Bakker-Wu. They will provide guidance and assistance during the project. Other students might benefit from the knowledge gained during this project.

An indirect stakeholder that is important to include are the PwC clients. As PwC as a professional service provider, their value proposition is based on how good they can address the needs of their clients.
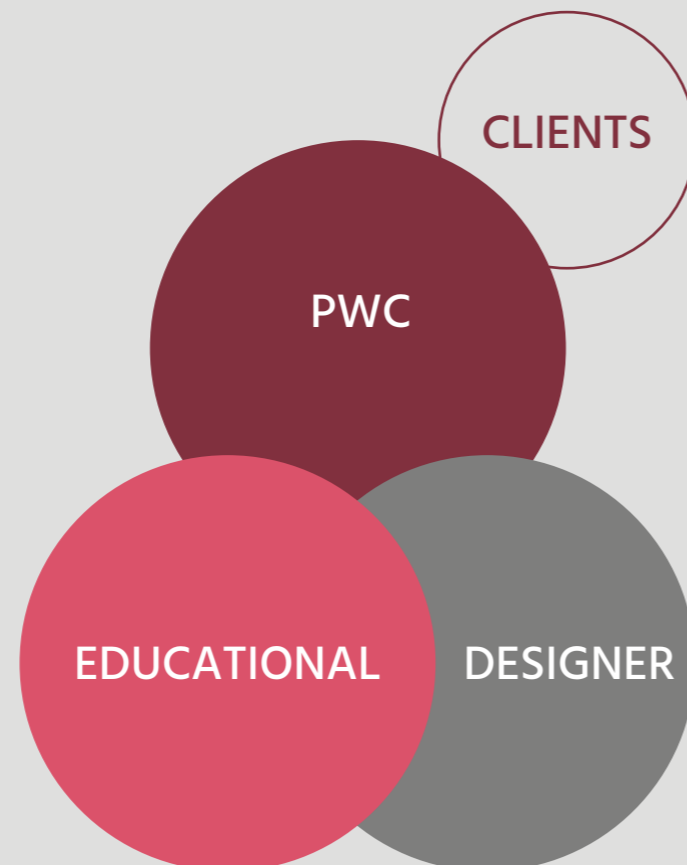
1.5 PROBLEM DEFINITION

Many companies will face disruption in their industry by digital platforms, potentially changing their brand-consumer relationship. Digital platforms such as Uber and Airbnb showed this disruption in the mobility and hotel industry. Without a future vision on their customer's needs in this platform economy, they stand the chance of losing ground with their customers regarding significant brand-consumer relationship building.

To help companies stand out and present themselves effectively towards their customers in this platform economy, new ways of building brand-customer relationships within the Dutch market needs to be researched. The main research question for this project will be:

How can the use of new insights and knowledge contribute to the creation of meaningful customer brand relationships within a future platform economy in the Dutch market?

The future in this project is tied to the year 2025, as rapid digitalization accelerated by the covid-19 virus makes it less possible to design for a more extended time.

The project aims to answer the following questions:

How do consumers form relationships with brands?

What are platforms and how do they influence brand relationships?
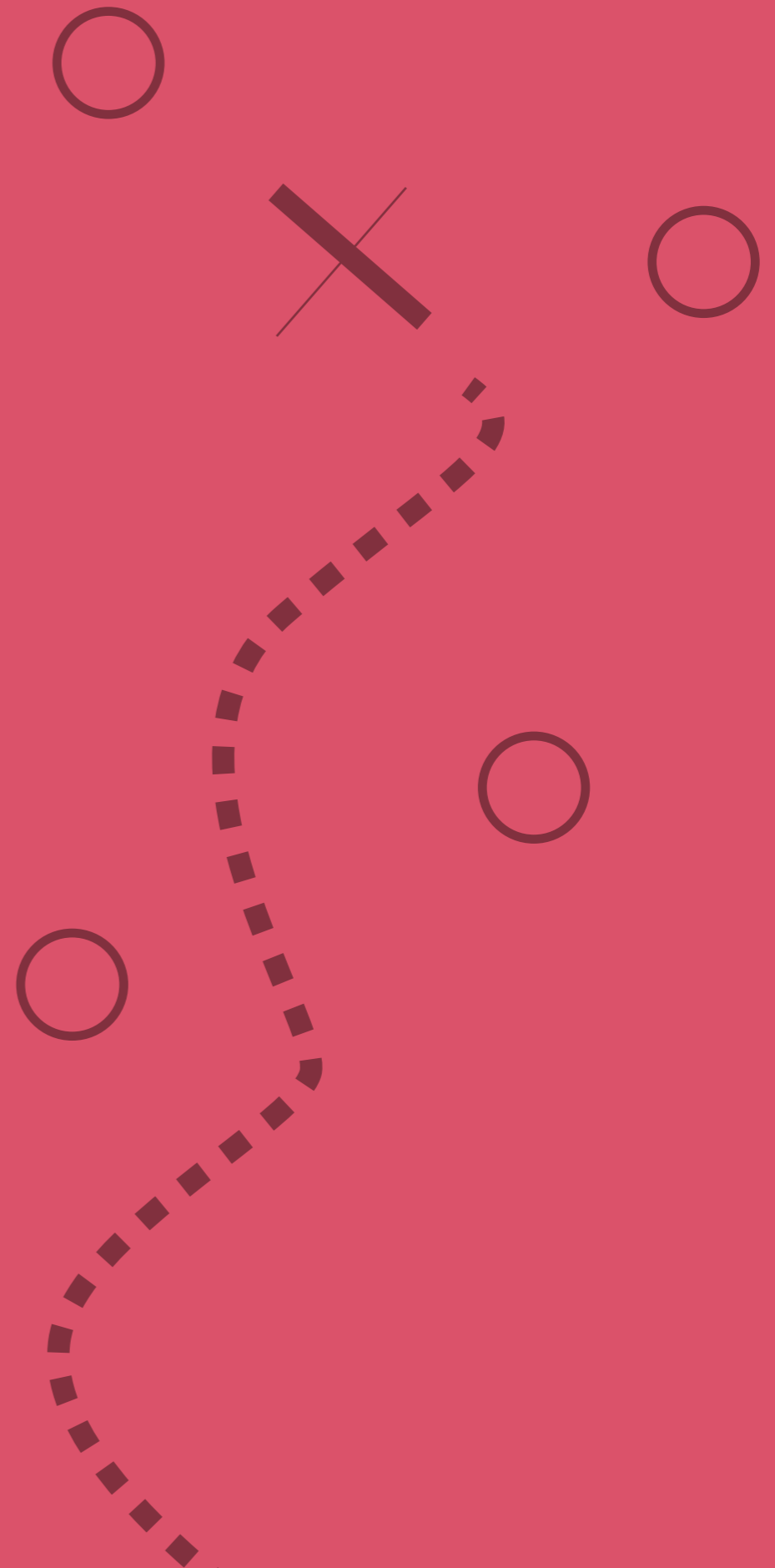
What will the future state of brand relationship building look like in a platform economy?

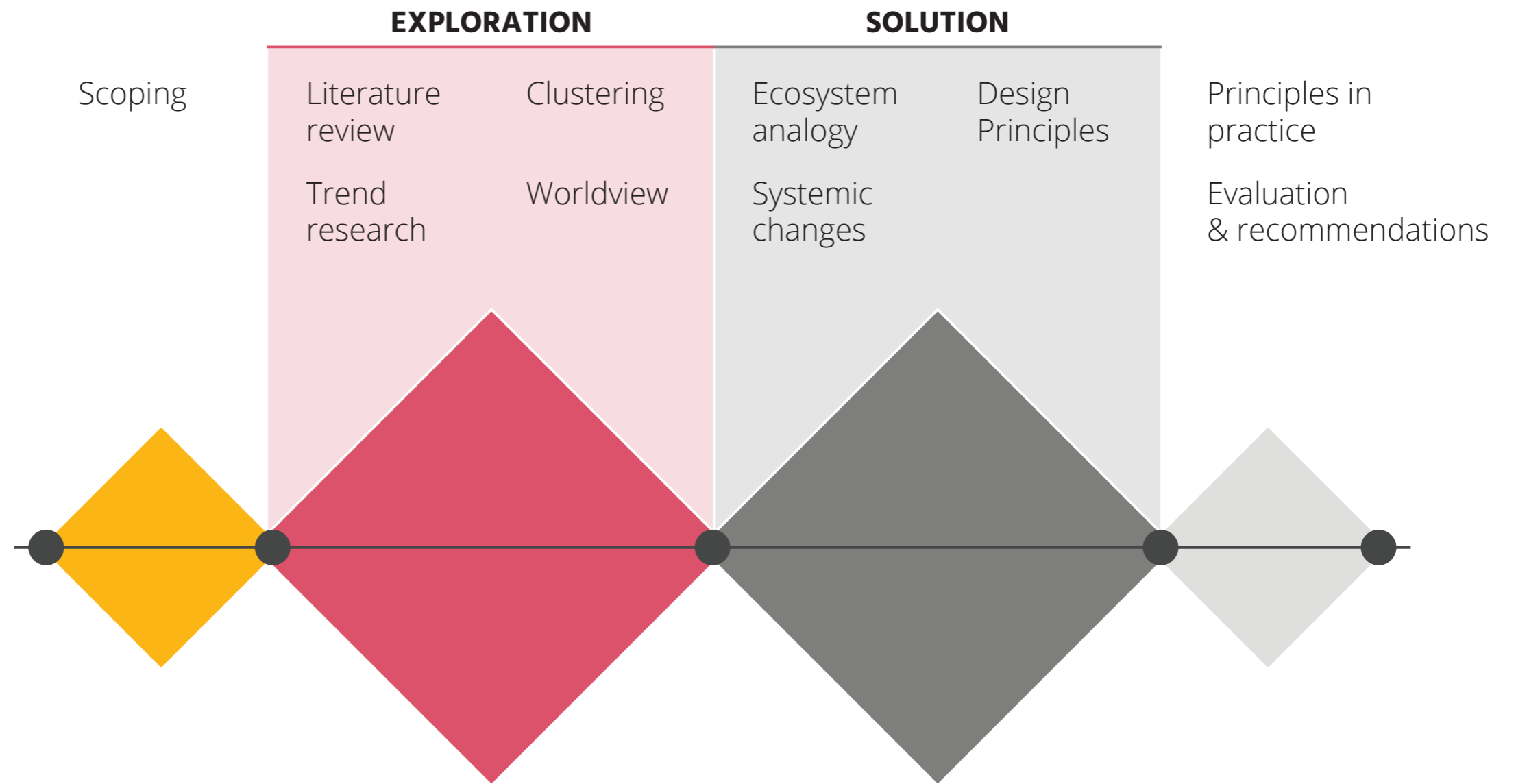How does a brand strategy embody a meaningful form of brand relationship building?

SECTION 2.0

APPROACH

This section explains which approach is used to address the research question. It lso includes a deep dive into the main methodology.

APPROACH

	EXPLORATION	SOLUTION	

Scoping

Literature review

Clustering

Ecosystem analogy

Design Principles

Principles in practice

Trend research

Worldview

Systemic changes

Evaluation & recommendations

2.1 METHODOLOGIES

To answer the main research question an approach was drafted with a span of 20 weeks. The project consists of two main phases, the first being explorative of nature and the second diving deeper into the solution space. This approach is inspired by the classic double diamond design approach (Zijlstra et al, 2020). In the double diamond method, each diamond consists of a diverging phase and a converging phase. In the diverging phase, the designers use methods that help them create many different ideas, whereas the converging methods help to structure the findings and come back to a central idea or concept.

During the first phase extensive desk research in collaboration with expert interviews was used to dive into the problem and gain extensive knowledge within the domain of the project. With the use of the ViP methodology this data was then used to identify areas for the solution space, forming the basis of the ideation phase.

During the second phase, this solution space was further explored to create a concept that would provide the solution to the main research question of building meaningful relationships between consumers and brands.

2.2 VIP

For this project, the Vision in Product (ViP) design approach was used to navigate this highly abstract domain. ViP assists the designer in navigating this future world and design in this space.

Given the high abstract nature of the domain, the Vision in Product methodology was used as it assists the designer in navigating this complex world of the future. ViP is also described as an interaction-centred design method (Hekkert & Van Dijk 2011), which closely ties into the domain of brand-consumer relationships. The method revolves around the understanding of the world of tomorrow, by first diving deeper into the world of today. By understanding the deeper forces of interaction today, a better view can be given on where the future of this interaction is going given the new trends and developments.

The ViP approach is divided into 2 phases; the deconstruction phase and the designing phase. Within the deconstruction phase, current products or services are analysed to understand the reasoning behind them. By doing this, the designer becomes aware of the interactions with the product and why they are designed the way they are. This results in a domain where the design solution will reside. Within this project, the domain was chosen during the project brief and was the start of the design phase.

The design phase starts by understanding a future context. By looking at what is happing within the chosen domain, a future world can be conceptualized based on these findings. The building of this future worldview is used within the context of this project to understand how different future interactions between consumers and brands might look like.
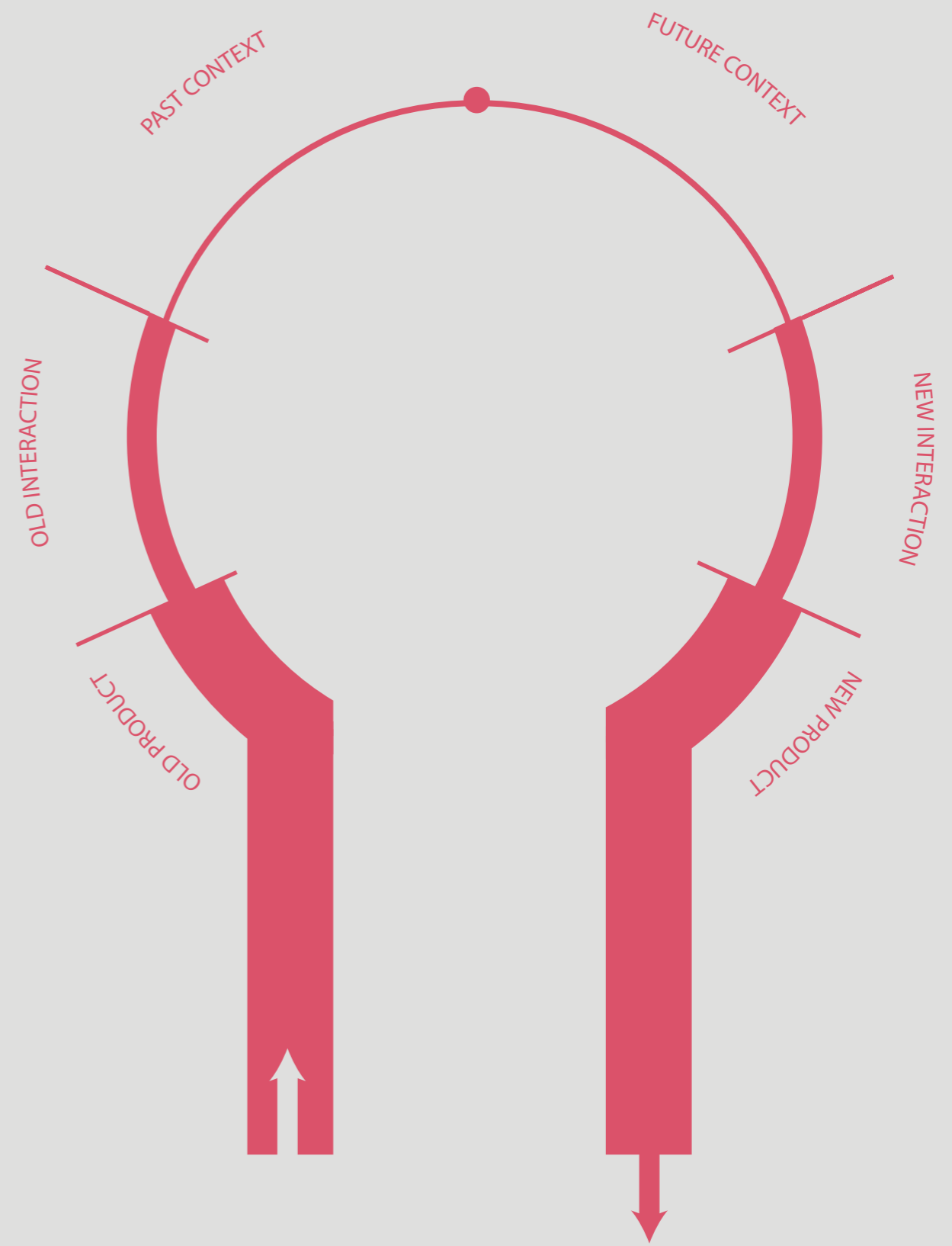
SECTION 3.0

REVIEW

To answer the research question of the project, insights are needed within the domain of brand-consumer relationships and the field of digital platform design. These insights serve to understand how these domains currently entail and help to give structure to the future context. This section tries to answer the first two research questions.
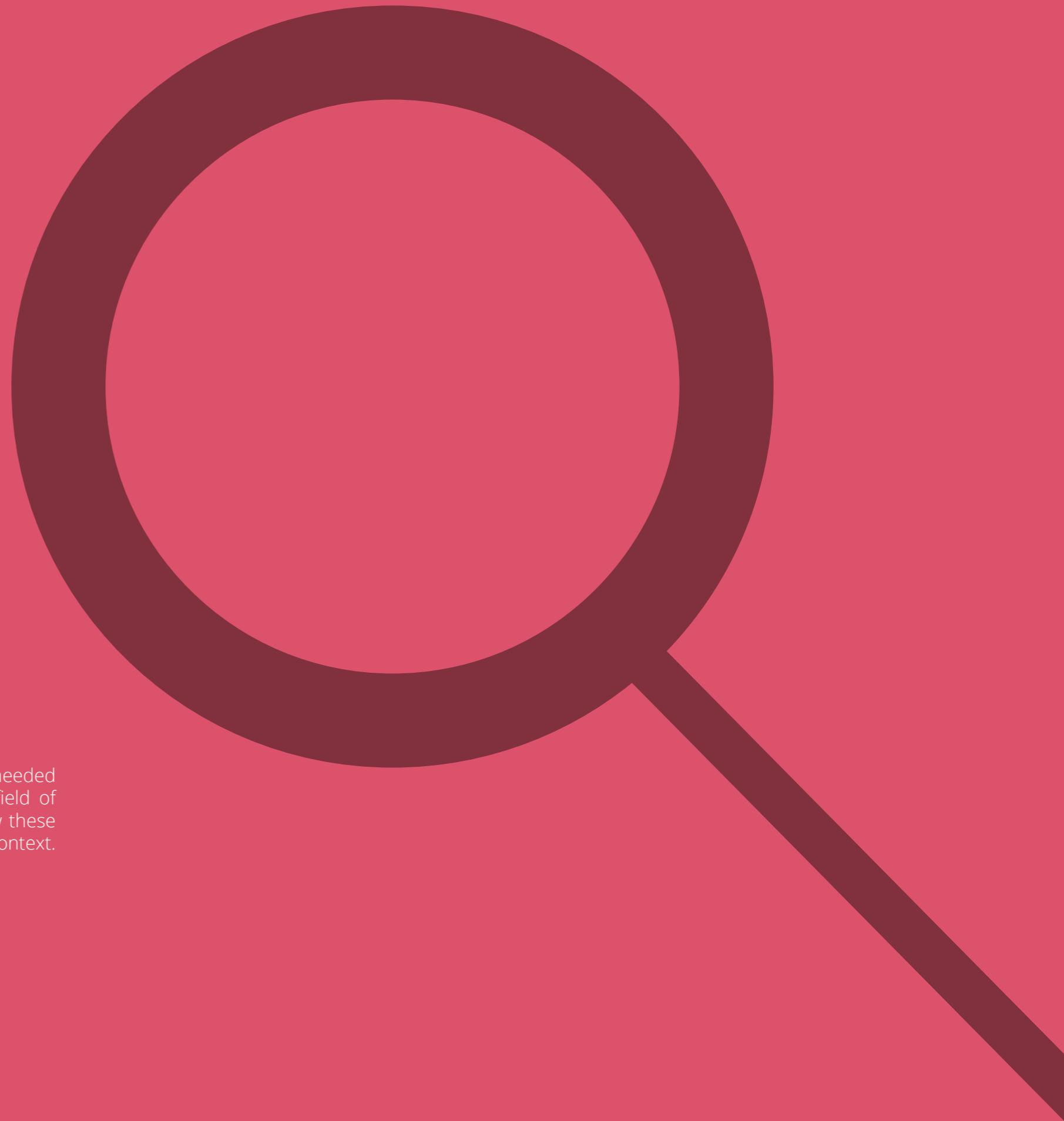
BRAND RELATIONSHIPS

On your average day, you are unconsciously surrounded by numerous brands. Just a simple walk to the fridge exposes you to multiple different brands. Some of these brands you actively take into account, while some you barely notice. This chapter will try to answer how consumers build relationships with brands.

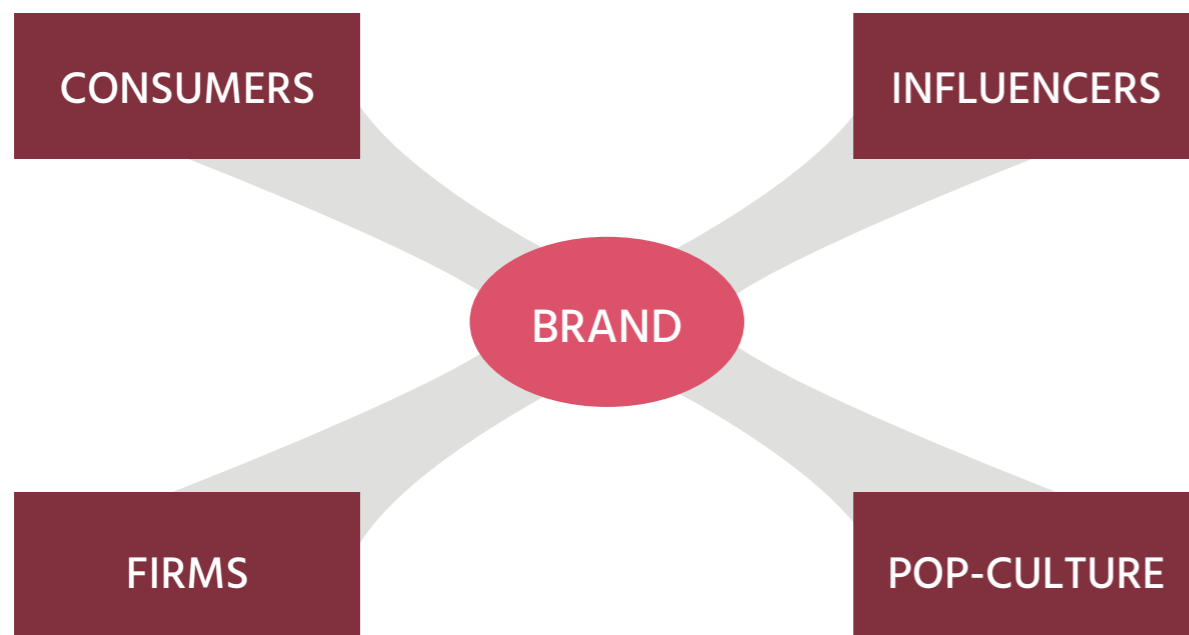## 3.1.1 BRAND MEANING

To understand how users can form relationships with brands, it is first essential to know how a brand creates meaning inside the consumer's mind. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. The same can be said about brands. In his book Brand Management, Micheal Beverland (201 explains the belief that brands only really exist in the minds of customers in terms of what they know about the brand. They only convey meaning in the mind of the person interacting with the brand.

The cultural brand model created by Douglas Holt tries to explain how this meaning is formed. In this model, he explains that the meaning of a brand is not just created by the company itself, but is actually co-created among different "brand authors".

In today's world, the meaning of the brand is not only shaped by the company building the products but also shaped by the context in which the brands are positioned. The cultural brand model created by Douglas Holt states that brand meaning is co-created by four "authors"; firms, users, influencer's, and popular culture. This model shows that even though a company might portray one meaning, it can have a different meaning in the mind of others.

One example of this is the clothing manufacturing company Dickies. Dickies created pants for working-class people. Lately, they were adopted in popular culture and seen as fashionable.

The brand had a different meaning depending on the person asked. Brands have also been described as potential resources for consumers to achieve identity goals (Merz, et al. 2009). Brands can thus be described as the symbolic value they offer. Holt (2003) describes the symbolic value within 3 categories:

IDENTITY VALUE

Here the act of consumption produces the emotional benefits associated with that brand. This experience can sometimes defy logic, as the perceived truth can often differ from the actual truth. Consumers who purchase an Apple computer might feel more creative as the brand is associated as such. For this very reason, brands use sponsorship deals to try to associate themselves deeper into this emotional benefit.

SOCIAL DISTINCTION

Buying brands says a lot about who we are. In this sense, the symbolic value lies in what the brand represents. It is a way for consumers to show who they are, who desire to be and who they are not. The consumption of a specific brand says something about an individual status in a community. This is best portrayed by the term inconspicuous consumption (Eckhardt, et al. 2015). Here status is defined through subtle signals and the choice of rare, older, heritage brands and the use of ritualised language that displays inside states.

COMMUNAL AFFILIATION

Here the act of purchasing certain brands portrays our solidarity with others and provides the basis for communities of consumption. Here the idea comes that the purchase of a certain brand makes you feel part of a group.

Brand symbolic values

Identity Value

Through the act of purchasing a brand you want to associate yourself with the qualities of the brand

Social distinction

Through the act of purchasing a brand you want to distinct yourself from others

Communal Affiliation

Through the act of purchasing a brand you want to associate yourself with the brand community

3.1.2 BRAND RESONANCE

Kevin Lane Keller introduced the concept of brand resonance in 2001 in his published article in the Journal of Marketing Management (2001). Here he introduced the famous brand equity pyramid, stating that brand resonance is the peak of the pyramid which can be achieved by satisfying the lower parts of the pyramid. Starting from brand identity, brand meaning, brand response to brand resonance.

The literature describes brand resonance also like the relationship between the consumer and the brand (Keller, 2018) (Bourbab & Boukill, 2008) (Stratfold, 2012) (Rindfleisch et al., 2005). Brand resonance, however, is a process that takes time and cannot be built in an instance (Kumar, 2006). Just like a real relationship, it takes time to form a deeper connection. Interestingly enough, consumers who have a deep resonance with the brand will also develop a community (Raut & Bitro, 2014). Users of a brand form a community, establishing emotional links and a sense of belonging to each other. In the same paper, they argue that as this community grows, it also becomes a reason for new consumers to join, hoping to identify themselves with this group. Here the use of the product is the "bridge" for their connection.

When applying this to platforms, you see that the use of a platform dependents on the interaction with other participants on the platform. This could mean that for platforms to create brand resonance, more emphasis has to be put on the creation of a community on their platform. For producers on the platform, this can either be an opportunity and a threat. It can be a way to associate themselves with the community on the platform, raising brand equity within that group. At the same time, it can also be a threat as members on the platform view themselves as part of the platform community and therefore won't form a deeper relationship with the other brand.
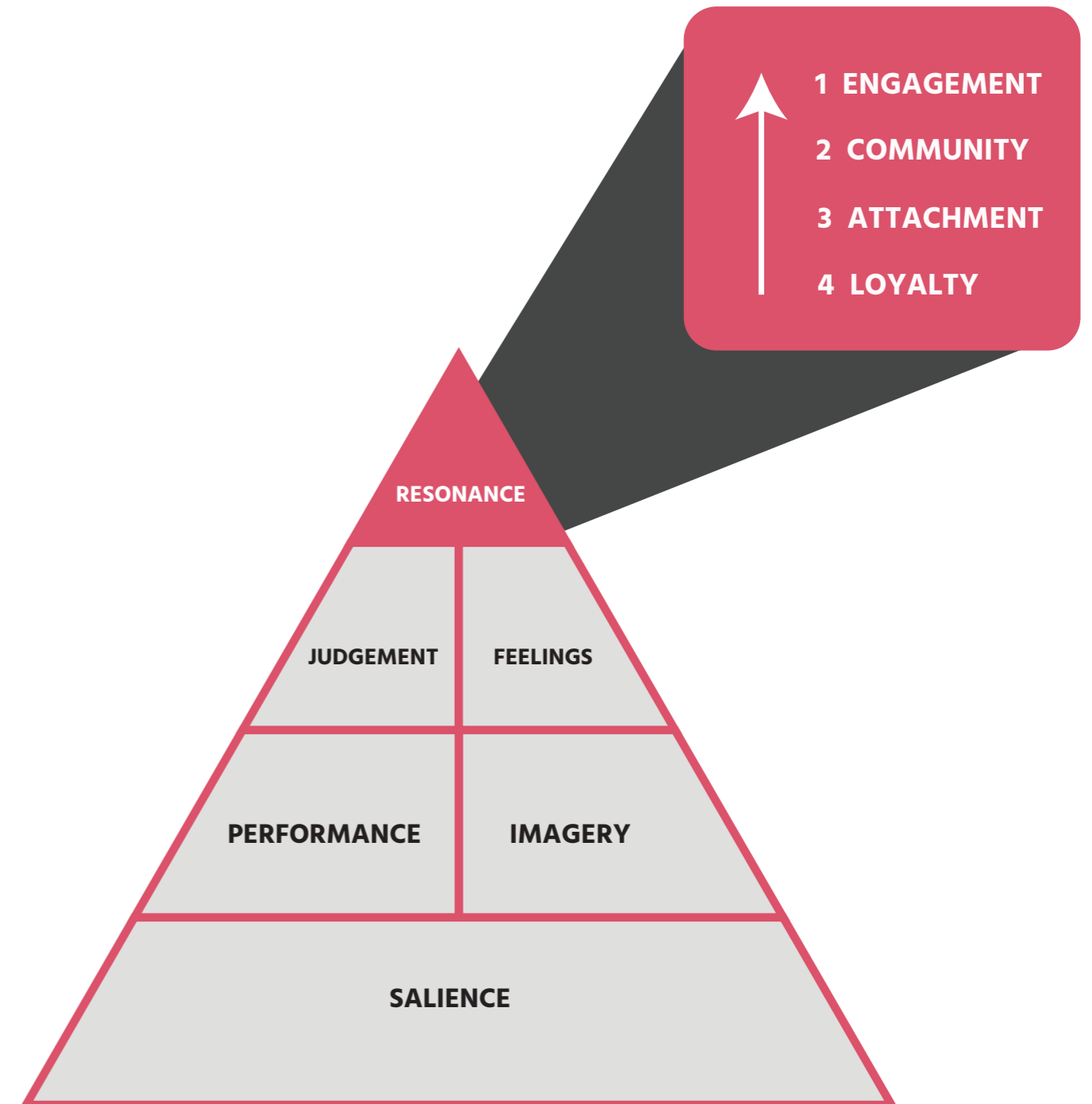
When talking about brand resonance, Raut and Bitro describe four levels of brand resonance in their paper; loyalty, attachment, community and engagement. Here each level indicates a higher form of brand resonance.

Loyalty is described as the lowest form of brand resonance where consumers are loyal to the brand but don't search for any kind of further interaction.

Attachment is described as the phenomenon when you feel emotionally attached to the brand. Consumers buy the product not simply because it provides them with the functional benefits the products offer, but the brand further emotionally resonates with them.

In the following level, community, the consumer already takes a more active role in the brand. They seek out other people that have the same kind of affinity with that brand and form a community.

Lastly, there is engagement. In this highest form of brand resonance, consumers actively search for engagement with the brand. They actively seek out interaction with that particular brand.

1 **ENGAGEMENT**

2 **COMMUNITY**

3 **ATTACHMENT**

4 **LOYALTY**

RESONANCE

JUDGEMENT | FEELINGS

PERFORMANCE | IMAGERY

SALIENCE

3.1.3 RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Relationship building between brands and consumers goes one step further than just articulating human characteristics to brands. Therefore the brand needs to behave as an active, contributing member of the relationship between the consumer and brand (Fournier, 1998). For brands building meaningful relationships with customers generally has multiple positive effects, as identified in her paper.

For once, they can leverage greater sales, as customers are willing to buy more from your brand. A better relationship will enhance customer loyalty making sure that they will choose your brand over your competitors. It has also been shown that a good relationship will generate resilience to negative brand information. A great example of this can be seen in the way Apple consumers sometimes defend negative brand information. Lastly, a better relationship reduces the price susceptibility of the customer. All factors explain why building meaningful brand-consumer relationships are highly beneficial for successful brands.

Why do people actively (or passively) partake in the development of relationships? All-day, we form relationships with others, be it with other humans or animals or even objects. These relationships also differ from each other. The relationship you have with your parents is very different from the relationship you have with the mailman that delivers your much-anticipated packages. In her paper, Fournier (1998) identifies three psychological goals for partaking in relationship forming, drawing from relationship theory.

First, they help to resolve life issues. These can be seen as existential issues, like who we are and what is our purpose. Second, they can deliver important life projects or tasks. Here life projects can be seen as projects involving construction, maintenance or dissolution of once core self. These can be things like your hobby's. Lastly, they can help an individual complete daily task. They are rooted in current concerns and help you complete your daily tasks better.

Though these are the three reasons identified for building, maintaining or dissolving relationships, the relationships can still change over time. In the same paper, she addresses five factors that influence the strength, relationship drivers, types of relationships, styles of interaction and the ease of relationship building or termination. These sociocultural factors are; age/cohort, life cycle, gender, family / social network and culture. Based on this theory, these changes in people's social-cultural environment can drastically change the relationship they seek around them.

This could mean that due to an unforeseen event in someone's life or when somebody moves to another country, their relationships will change. For brands, this could mean that the consumer may choose to dissolve the relationship with the brand for no fault of their own. Therefore brands that can assist in these changes have a higher chance of building a long and meaningful relationship with their customers.

3.1.4 RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

Brand Relationship Quality (BRQ) is a term used in literature to describe the strength of the consumer-brand relationship and is used as a higher construct of the relationship quality (Fournier, 1998; Palmateir et al., 2006). Both the branding field and marketing research field have developed conceptual models to explain this relationship quality. The marketing field has developed a topology consisting of trust, commitment and satisfaction to describe the RQ (de Wulff et al., 2001; Roberts et al., 2003), whereas the branding field uses the six facets model proposed by Fournier (1998), consisting of love, self-connection, commitment, interdependence, intimacy and partner quality. In the research done by Papista and Dimitridias (2012) they compare both models. Through qualitative research, trust, commitment, satisfaction, love, and intimacy are factors best used for describing brand relationship quality.

3.1.5 INSIGHTS & REFLECTIONS

Even though brands are abstract constructs, they can still play an essential role in perceiving the world. In the various models by Holt and Keller, they explain how meaning is attributed to the brand. Based on the theory by Holt it is important to tod the context of where the band is playing in order to understand how meaning is given to the brand and what kind of relationship they form. Keller introduces the term brand resonance, in his brand equity pyramid, stating that brand relationships can only be formed when brand salience, imagery, performance, feelings and judgement have all been satisfied. Lastly, Fournier identifies that the relationship between brands and consumers can be explained like a human to human-like relationship and understanding this relationship holds the key to forming meaningful relationships. From marketing and branding literature theory the construct Brand Relationship Quality is used to define the strength of the relationship, consisting of; commitment, love, intimacy, trust, satisfaction.

The field of brand relationship building however has not been very explored within the literature. The article Fournier wrote in 1998 is still considered to be most influential. This has some limitations on this project. For example the aspect of time. Relationships are built on previous interactions. This hints that relationships change over time and may become stronger or less intense based on previous experiences.

DIGITAL PLATFORMS

This section deep dives into the theme of digital platforms. Through literature review, a better understanding is given about the origin of platforms and the characteristics of a platform.
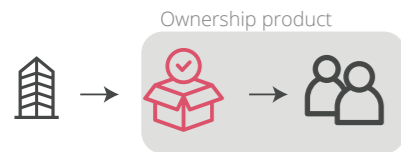
Producteconomy **Service-economy** **Platformeconomy**

3.2.1 RISE OF THE PLATFORMS

Through the rapid digitalisation of our world, everything becomes more and more connected. A few decades ago, it would have taken us weeks to receive news of events that were happening across the globe. Now, this only takes us seconds. The internet has allowed us to connect to humans across the globe and allowed for new ways to connect with one another. The internet has become a new source for a seemingly endless stream of information. An endless stream of information that can be accessed from anywhere through the power of a high-speed wireless internet connection. All these factors gave way for a new business model that is reshaping how many industries operate today. In their 2016 book Platform Revolution, Parker, Van Alstyne and Choudary provide the following definition for a platform:

A business based on enabling value-creating interactions between external producers and consumers with an overarching purpose: to consummate matches among users and facilitate the exchange of goods, services, or social currency, thereby enabling value creation for all participants.

This conforms with the view of technology-focused researchers who view a platform as a technological infrastructure designed for the facilitation of value creation (Gawer, 2014). The concept of a platform is actually nothing new and has been around for centuries. If we view the platform as an infrastructure that facilitates value-creation, a market in ancient Rome can also be described as a platform for its citizens. Within the field of industrial innovation management, platforms are described as a stable core variable periphery.

3.2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF A PLATFORM

Platforms are different from traditional business models. This is because the value is generated differently within a platform. Traditionally companies would have a linear pipeline process. Within the product economy value was created very simply by the company. Often differentiating by craft and expertise they manufactured products that had inherent value and were bought by the consumers. (Parker, Van Alstyne, Choudary, 2016). Within the service economy, this value changed from the product to the interaction between the company and the brand. This can be seen in the mobility service Felyx. The actual physical product, in this case, the scooter, does not provide the main value of the company. Here the value is created by the service of mobility, regardless of the actual physical scooter you are sitting on. Up until now, the value was created by the company itself. This changes within the platform economy. Here the value of the platform is created outside the company itself. The value is created by the participants interacting with each other. Take for example YouTube. The platform doesn't create value by the video's they put on the platform, rather the millions of users who upload content to the platform. The same goes for Facebook or Uber. Value creation is turned inside-out.

Based on the platform innovation kit, a tool created to design new platforms by Matthias Walter and Sabrina Guzman shows that successful platforms are multi-sided and generally have four various participants: consumers, producers, the platform owner (the brand), and partners.

The consumers are described as the ones utilising the core value and the producers the ones providing the core value. The lines between both can be blurry as consumers can also become producers, as is evident on the video platform YouTube.

The producers are the ones that deliver the main product for the consumers. They deliver the main value for the consumers. Just like the consumer side, the lines can get very blurry between these sides when consumers can also act as producers.

The brand is the owner of the platform's vision and is responsible for enhancing all stakeholders' ecosystem experience.

Finally, you have partners. They provide additional services broadening market access. Examples of partners are WordPress theme developers.

The addition of partners depended on the openness of the platform. Through an open API policy, additional services can easily be provided. Apple, however, has always chosen for a more closed platform, choosing to remain in tight control over the whole platform experience.

3.2.3 TYPES OF PLATFORM

Knowing how to generally describes a platform's characteristics, a detailed look describes various types of platform. In research done by Rangwasmy et al. (2020), they identified nine different types of platforms.

Even though some of these platforms sound very distinctive, brands can have multiple platforms under their business. The best example here is Apple. with the App Store, they own a two-sided technology platform, but with ApplePay, they also have their own payment platform.

It is important to note that in their paper, Rangwasmy et al. (2020), mention three criteria for their definition of a digital business platform. (1) Their core is focused on matchmaking between users (2) the platform promotes direct communication and transactions between users (3) users are independent parties that maintain residual rights.

The last criterium is essential as, under this definition, Netflix and online grocery stores are not considered the digital business platform. In simple words, it means that a platform can not have "inventory".

For this project, the three criteria are used to define a digital business platform. The project's scope is also further narrowed down to transactional and service platforms as they hold greater relevance for PwC clients and therefore have the most significant chance for impact.

Platforms

Transactional

Amazon, AliExpress, Booking
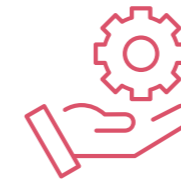
Service

Uber, AirBnB

Two sided Technology

App Store, Wordpress

Search

Google, Bing

Content

Youtube, Spotify

Social

Facebook, TikTok

Crowdsourcing

Matchmaking

Payment

3.2.4 NETWORK EFFECTS

One of the critical success factors of a platform is the participants. Facebook would not create as much value as it does now without users who interact on the platform. One important principle underlying a platform is the appearance of network effects. The principle of network effects states that the value of a product or service for consumers increases when more people adopt a compatible product or service (Farrel and Saloner, 1985).

For platforms, this means that a platform's value increases when more people or companies use it. The best example of the network effect can be seen, when looking at the earliest telephone. If two people have one there is only 1 connection possible for both users. When 3 people have a telephone there is a total of 3 connections and when 5 people have a telephone there is a total of 20 connections. You see that the number of connections possible increases non-linear.

When talking about network effects Parker, Van Alstyne, and Choudary (2016) define four types of network effect; positive same-side network effects, negative same-side effects, positive cross-side network effects, and negative same-side effects.

Positive same-side network effects occur when the increase in one side of the platform makes the platform more attractive to that same group. An example is the PlayStation Network. If more of your friends have a PlayStation, it will become more attractive for you to join this network.

With negative same-side network effects, the opposite occurs. When more producers or consumers join the platform, the platform will become less attractive for that same side. This effect can be seen on the Dutch platform Werkspot. When too many plumbers are on the platform, competition becomes fierce, making it less attractive for new plumbers to join the platform.

Positive cross-sided network effects occur when an increase in one side makes the platform more attractive to join for the other side. When there are more Uber riders, it will become more attractive for new Uber drivers to join the platform.

Lastly, there is the negative cross-sided network effect. Usually, an increase on one side of the platform is positive, but it can also lead to growing complexity. When content is not curated well enough to the other side, the complexity will make it less attractive for new people to join the platform.

The key takeaway from these network effects is that a platform needs to manage growth carefully. At the same time, it is also essential for brands to understand how they contribute to this platform's development.
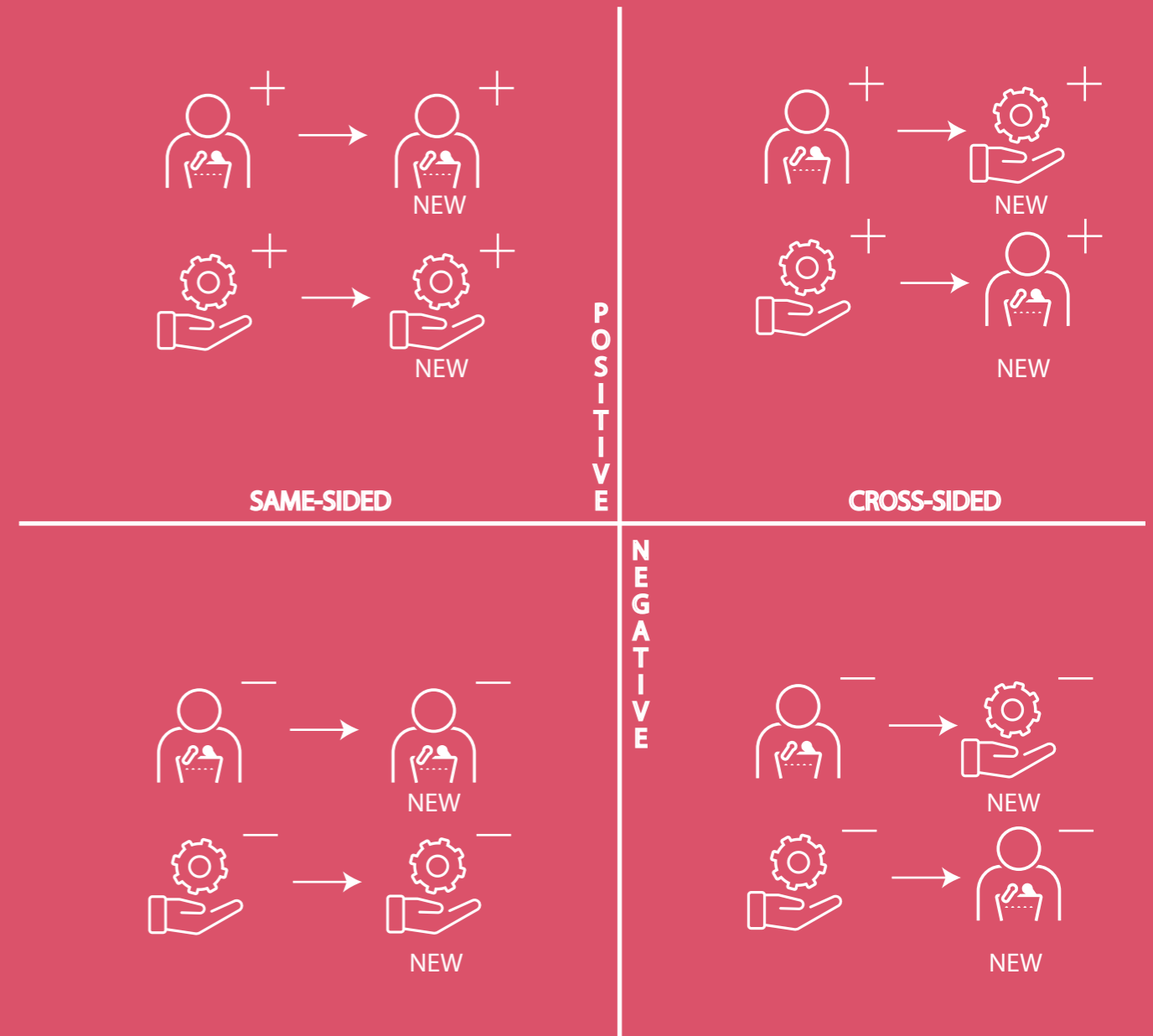
3.2.5 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

+ AGILITY

As the participants create the core value of platforms, owning a physical product is often not needed. Uber does not own any vehicle, nor does it employ any taxi drivers. Though the government is criticising this approach, the lack of owning these operational costs makes it easy for many people to start a platform. Often no specialised expertise has to be owned to start. Compare this to a Nike that has to invest a lot of money to create a shoe. Platforms can thus very easily change their services based on the new needs and changing user context..

+ SCALABILITY

This lack of owned assets also makes a platform very easily scalable. Supply and demand can be matched almost instantly and when new needs arise, they can be implemented within the platform. However, this growth must be carefully managed to make sure that supply and demand can always be matched.

+ DATA

Through the extensive use of the platform, a lot of data is gathered about the people interacting on the platform and as more features or services get added to the platform, more data is gathered about the consumer. This leads to the platform knowing things about you before you know them. It does so by analysing your behaviour on the platform and can make assumptions based on that data. The more users are on the platform, the better a platform can make the assumptions. Data has long been called the new gold by many different industry experts. As all interactions flow through the platform, the platform gathers this data. This can lead to the platform knowing more
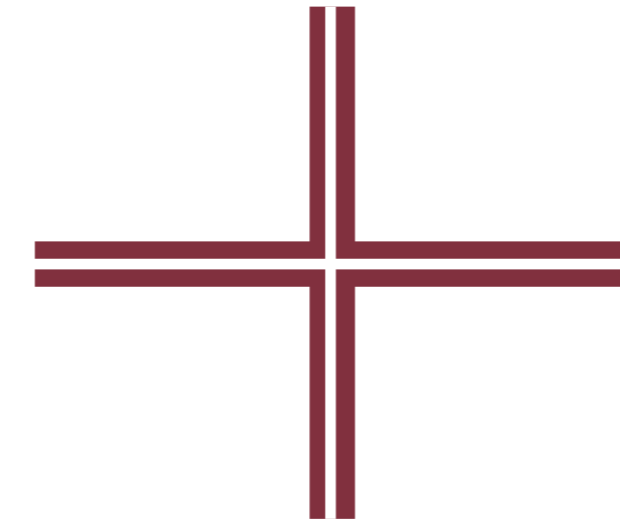
about the customers than the brands that operate on the platform. Though user data is a sensitive subject lately, shown by the Cambridge Analytics scandal. Policy on data gathering is still lacking with the EU making an effort to protect consumer data in their GDPR law. Though user data is a sensitive subject lately, shown by the Cambridge Analytics scandal. Policy on data gathering is still lacking with the EU making an effort to protect the consumer.

- PROFITABILITY

Platforms have been subject to competition and many platform formulas have not yet been able to make a profit ("The ever-growing sharing economy: Pros and cons", 2019). For instance, Uber and Lyft are currently in a price war that stakeholders on both sides hope to win as this could lead to either one making a profit, for the first time since their existence. Even the well-known platforms Amazon and Netflix have relatively small profit margins and are struggling to find business models that suit their strategy.

- LACK OF CUSTOMER LOYALTY

It has been proven repeatedly that customers lack loyalty concerning platforms ("7 Major Disadvantages of the Sharing Economic", 2018). Customers easily switch between Lyft and Uber, depending on which offers the lowest car ride price at any given time. In the Netherlands, bol.com is facing tough competition ever since Amazon entered the Dutch market. Relating this to food platforms, customers switch back and forth between Ubereats, Thuisbezorgd and Deliveroo depending on their food and price preferences.

- STAGE GATE

Large digital platforms are increasingly behaving like a digital gatekeeper of our interactions. Companies like Google determine what we see on the internet and, therefore, largely determine how we make decisions. Companies must comply with the rules of these platforms to keep interacting with their customers.
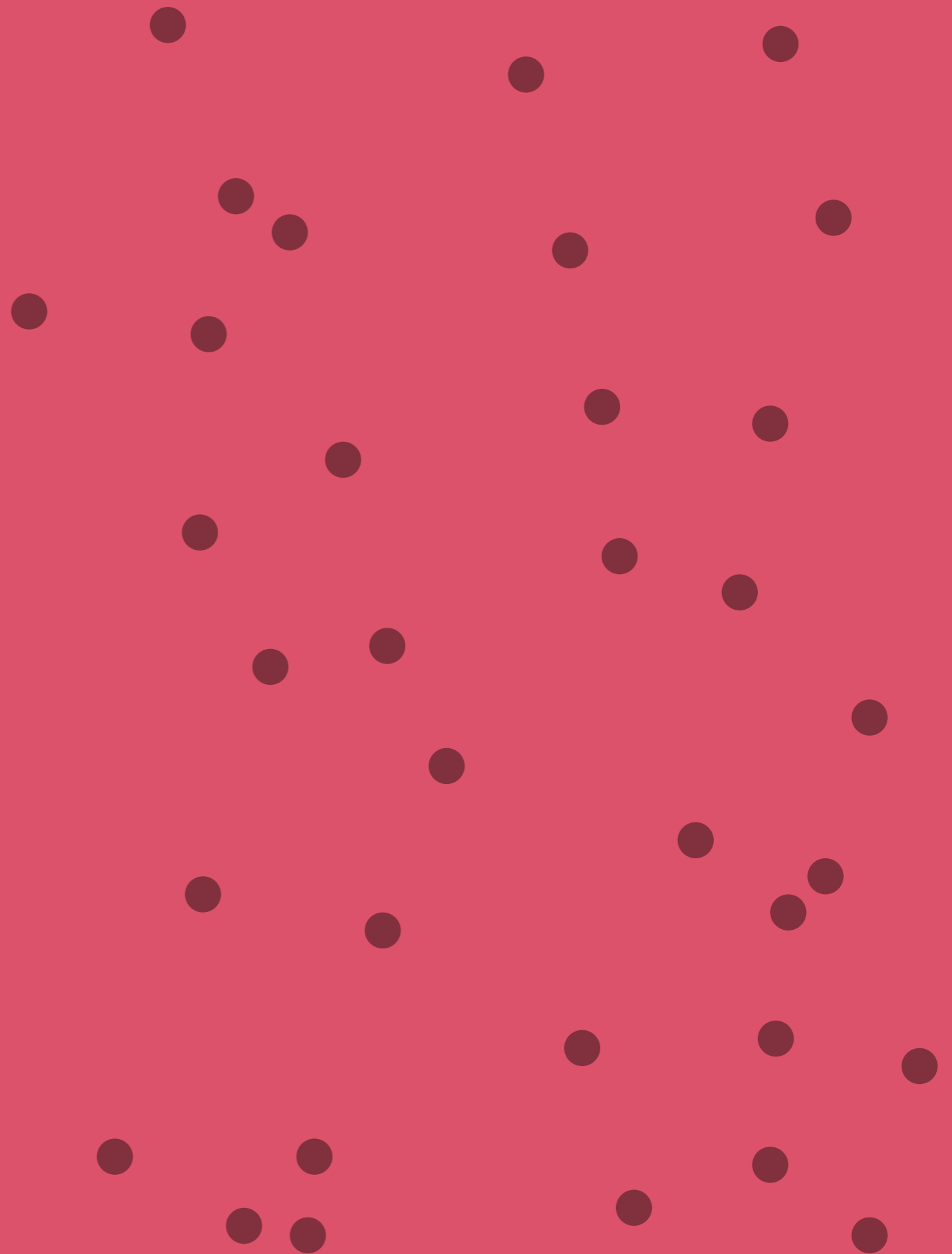
3.2.6 INSIGHTS & REFLECTIONS

Even though platforms have not been around very long, humans can already see their impact on society. The most explicit definition of a platform is the facilitation of transaction between supply and demand. Within a platform, there are 4 stakeholders: producers, consumers, the business and partners. Each provides a different element of value to the platform. The reason platforms can grow as fast as they do due to their network effects. With limited physical resources, they can increase as long as supply and demand are in balance. The downside of platforms on business is that when they grow larger, they increasingly act like a stage-gate, ironic considering how platforms disrupt traditional linear value chains. As these platforms determine which digital interactions consumers can largely influence buying behaviour and change the context of a brand, change the relationship people have with their brands for better or for worse, depending on how good you play the system.

When analysing this new digital platform economy, I realised that digital visibility is one of the most considerable platforms' constraints and their biggest strength. Compared to physical experiences, digital is all about efficiency. As there is limited space on your screen, platforms need to curate their content carefully. A filter is still a filter, so brands have to make more effort in their emotional bond with the customer.

SECTION 4.0

TREND RESEARCH

To build a view on the world of tomorrow, evidence has to be gathered to portray forces of change or trends. This sections will explain the definition used for these building blocks of the future and how they were collected.

TREND RESEARCH

4.1 CONTEXT FACTORS

Context factors are used in the ViP method as the building blocks for future world views. These context factors are value-free descriptions of the world's word phenomena around you (Hekkert & Van Dijk, 2011). These context factors are divided into four categories.

Here trends and developments describe phenomena that are changing or about the change. States and principles explain more stable phenomena and will not so easily change over time or will be valid for a long time.

The ViP method highly values originality, as the worldview is only as interesting as the building blocks on which it is made. Therefore when searching for context factors, extra emphasis was made on the originality and or novelty. Sometimes the developments at the edge of the domain create a more exciting worldview.

The searching of context factors was done in the domain of Brand Consumer Relationships. To ensure homogeneity within the domain, the DEPEST structure was used when gathering the context factors.

4.2 DATA GATHERING

The qualitative data gathering was done by desk research in conjunction with interviews with subject matter experts.
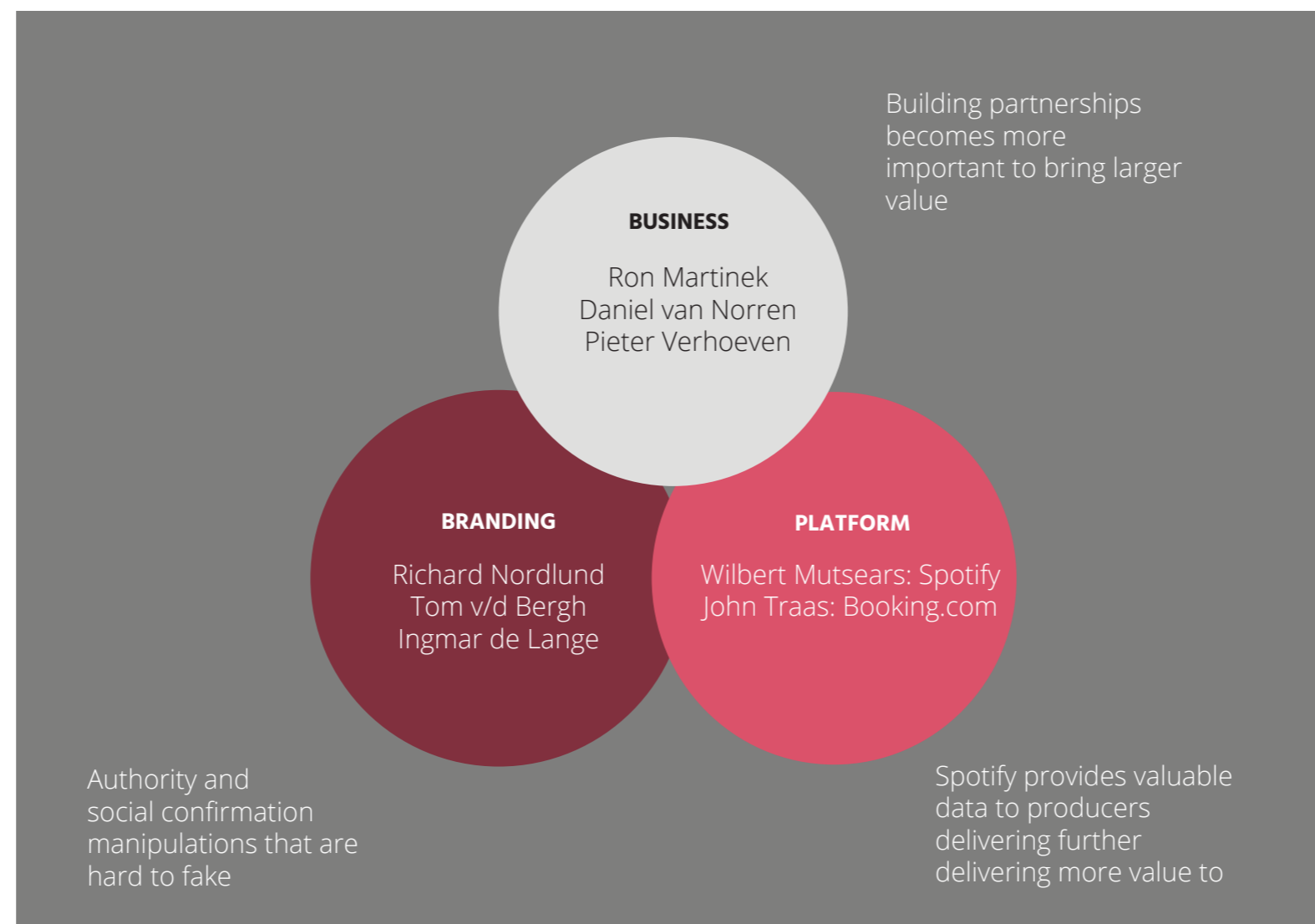
4.2.1 DESK RESEARCH

Part of the qualitative data was gathered using desk research. This desk research was done by analysing trend reports from notable companies such as Ericcson and Fjord. Besides these trend reports, news articles and scientific papers were used as sources. This desk research led to a total of 90 context factors.

4.2.2 INTERVIEWS

Simultaneously expert interviews were conducted to obtain insights from industry experts. These industry experts have a background in business development, branding, and digital platforms. In total, eight interviews were conducted, three within the field of branding, three within the business development area, and two operating within a digital platform.

The interviews were done using semi-structured interviews. The goal of the expert interviews was to gather interesting trends and development from subject matter experts. The interviews were done using Google Hangout as was necessary due to the covid-19 restrictions. After the interview, the insights were translated into context factors. In total, 77 insights were gathered from the interviews.

Building partnerships becomes more important to bring larger value

BUSINESS

Ron Martinek
Daniel van Norren
Pieter Verhoeven

BRANDING

Richard Nordlund
Tom v/d Bergh
Ingmar de Lange

PLATFORM

Wilbert Mutsears: Spotify
John Traas: Booking.com

Authority and social confirmation manipulations that are hard to fake

Spotify provides valuable data to producers delivering further delivering more value to

4.3 INSIGHTS & REFLECTIONS

The interviews with various experts gave many interesting insights, but most importantly, different perspectives on the subject. Through conversation with Brand Strategist Ingmar de Lange, I came to the understanding that the practice of branding becomes very difficult when dealing with digital platforms, as human behaviour is easily manipulated. People have intricate wired choosing mechanisms (Kahneman, 2012) that are easily manipulated. Authority and social proof, however, are constructs that take time and are harder to fake and are therefore essential focus points for future differentiation.

For the research, it was insightful to get the perspective of Wilbert Mutsears (Spotify) and John Traas (Booking.com). As they had a more insightful perspective on the role of digital platforms, context factors were otherwise hard to distil. Due to strategic reasons, they could not go in-depth about their platforms' future strategy about their platforms' future strategy but could share their perspectives on the matter.

CHANGE MAKERS

This section aims to translate qualitative data into different clusters. This supports the process by painting a more detailed picture of the future world. The clusters are written down as narratives to spark the imagination of the designer.
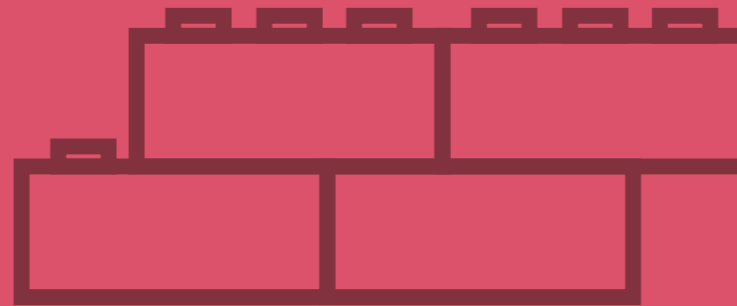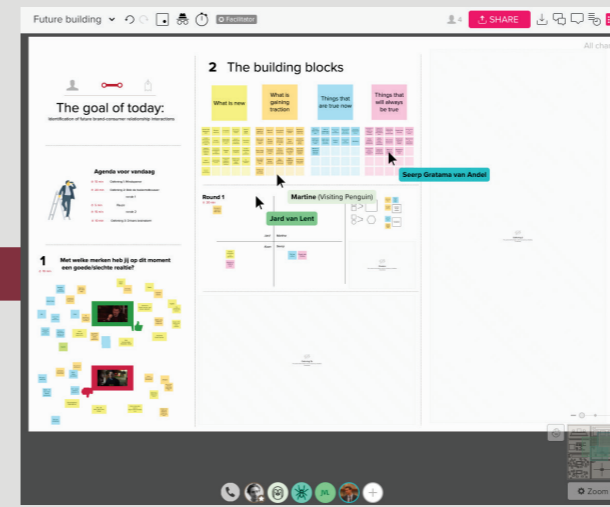
CLUSTERING

5.1 APPROACH

The qualitative data, the context factors, serve as building blocks to identify clusters. In line with the ViP methodology, these clusters are created by looking at the found context factors and identifying a common narrative.
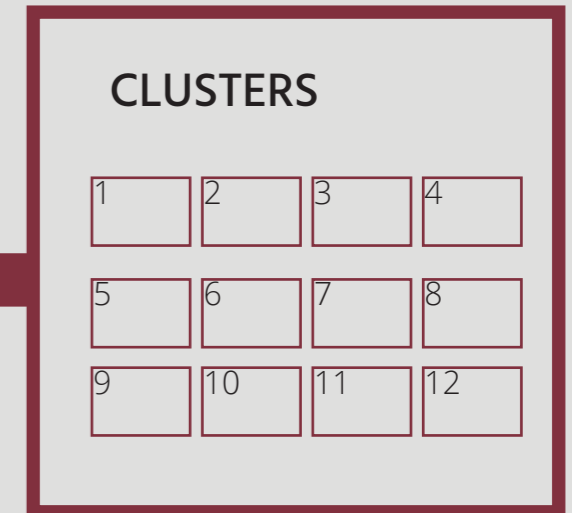
To get to the final clusters, three rounds of clustering were done.

Sticky notes were used to compare context factors in search for emerging clusters. Here one of the first iterations can be seen.

Due to corona restrictions the digital collaboration tool Mural was used as the digital collaboration tool during the generative session.

CLUSTERS

1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12

The first and second round are used to refine the clsuters, which finally resulted in 12 clusters from the 176 gathered insights.

5.2.1 DRAFTING CLUSTERS

In the first round of clustering, all factors were written down on a sticky note and put on a pile. Then one by one each factor was put on the table and clusters were formulated. Two strategies were used to come to a cluster. Either the context factors had a common quality. This is a cluster where all factors point in a similar direction and together form a 'meta-factor" (Hekkert & Van Dijk, 2011). The other strategy was looking for an emergent-quality cluster. Here the combined factors point into a new direction, one that cannot be distilled from a simple one factor.

Based on this method, 8 clusters were identified. Factors that were not placed in a cluster were saved for later as they still contribute to a future worldview even though not as part of a bigger cluster.

5.2.2 GENERATIVE SESSIONS

A generative clustering exercise was done in collaboration with fellow students. This session served one side to find new clusters. As the design students had limited prior knowledge within, they would have a fresh perspective. At the same time, the session helped to validate the findings of the first round.

Four students participated in the generative session, 3 of which had a background in Strategic Product Design and thus were experienced in dealing with these kinds of future thinking processes. In the process of the generative session, the students were

presented with the factors gathered in the research phase. After a brief introduction about the domain and goal of the session, the students were asked to formulate clusters and label them.

After a brief discussion about the clusters, the clusters from the 1st round were presented. In the second round of clustering, the students were asked to iterate further on their fellow student's clusters adding factors or changing the cluster based on the discussions that followed.

5.2.3 REFINING

Based on the information gathered from the generative session, new clusters were added, and some clusters were refined. This resulted in 12 clusters in total.

5.3 FORCES OF CHANGE

Based on the earlier clustering exercises, the following clusters were identified and explained through a narrative scenario. The numbers represent the specific context factors used to form this scenario.

MOBILE AS THE DOMINANT TOUCH POINT

[16, 18, 23, 25, 57, 61]

It is the first thing they see when they wake up and the last thing they see before they fall asleep. Almost everybody in the Netherlands owns a smartphone and carries it around them the entire day. It allows them to be connected with everybody and everything at all times. It also allows us to interact with the digital world directly. The phone feels like a digital version of ourselves as it is loaded with personal information and memories. With the digital world increasingly finding its way into the physical world, the smartphone is the direct link with ourselves.

IN SEARCH FOR AUTHENTIC INTERACTIONS

[1, 7, 8, 14, 49, 67, 85, 133]

With technology becoming increasingly more human-like, the debate continues on what it is to be human. It will be even more challenging to tell if the person on the other side of the interaction is a human being interacting through a digital machine or if it is an algorithm designed to look like a human. Up until now, bots are easy to spot on digital platforms, but as AI advances, it will draw the line between human and machine interaction will get blurry. New verification methods will arise to assure you that you are talking to a human.
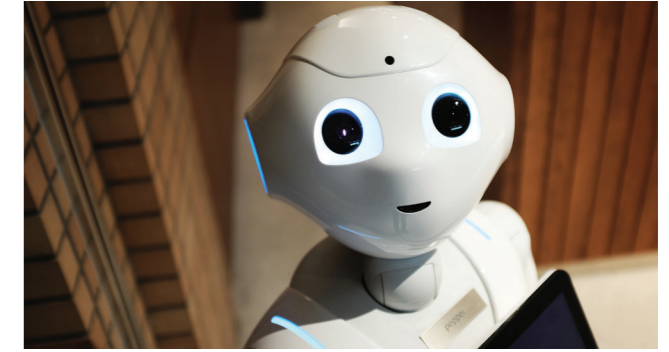
AUTOMATION TAKES OVER HUMANS

[45, 64, 130, 137, 153, 149, 163]

New technologies have allowed for faster gratification of our needs. Waiting is something that is from the past, and our expectations for companies delivering on these needs have grown. Big companies like Amazon have raised the bar in terms of operational performance. To be able to catch up on these high demands tasks need to be automated or regulated by machines. These machines are able to work under the extreme pressure of our own demands and deliver the value speed we now expect all companies to have.

REDUCE DIGITAL OVERLOAD

[6, 29, 42, 47, 48, 80, 89, 113, 114, 115, 117, 120]

In general, people don't like to think hard. The brain has limited thinking capacity, and generally, people don't want to waste it all on the most straightforward decisions. That would also be very time-consuming. Digital services and products are there to relieve the thinking pain. People outsource their thinking capacity so that they don't have to do it themselves. One of the ways technology will assist us is the consumption of products. People will look for services and companies that can do their shopping for them. A few consumers' criteria and the algorithm will determine the product that best fits their need based on their information. The success of this shopping depends on how good the service knows the user.

RIGHT FOR ANONYMITY

[12, 13, 20, 27, 30, 77, 85]

People are driven by their social status. This also refrains them from showing specific behaviour or saying certain things. The internet allows them to be anonymous and makes sure that somethings they say or do can not be traced back to them. People are selective about what personal information they want to share. To step out of anonymity, there needs to be an apparent reason or benefit for them to do so.

SEARCH QUALITY OF LIVING IN HOUSE

[3, 4, 6, 32, 34, 39, 58, 63]

A huge part of our basic needs can be done from the comfort and safety of our own home. As the location of living will be less dependent on the location of work people will move to the outer region of the city where wellbeing and quality of life in their home will improve.

SEEKING BROADER VALUE

[80, 92, 130]

Companies are seeking to create more value for their consumers than before. They step outside of their current portfolio to deliver value within their single point solution and try to create lifetime value, expanding the brand to different parts of the customers' lives.

RAISED BY THE INTERNET

[22, 41, 56]

Children are exposed to internet culture at a younger age. What is trending in America can now be instantly trending among teens in the Netherlands. More teens are growing up with the internet and rely on their services for their basic needs. Everything you want to do or learn is just one YouTube video click away and online careers are seen as regular job careers. When parents don't raise their kids, the internet will. This puts a lot of strain on the role of parents in this relationship between kids and the internet.

DEMAND FOR SOCIETAL IMPACT

[40, 75, 79, 81, 102, 112, 127]

Companies are no longer passive participants in relation to their customers. As environmental and social issues are becoming a more significant concern for customers, people look for companies that they perceive deliver the values they believe in. They expect a better relationship with the context the company is operating in and call-out those companies that are not operating under their beliefs. Their primary weapon is their money.

HUMAN SENSORIAL NEEDS

[17, 69, 116, 159]

The digital world can easily be altered and manipulated. The software has the capability to recreate realistic imagery that can't be distinguished from the real thing. New software tools make it incredibly easy to make fake claims feel believable. The physical world is not so easily altered. As the real world can not be easily changed by everyone it will become the way to enforce credibility. People go back to the physical world where they can test their credibility. They can use their own senses to test, as it is impossible to test physical experiences such as touch or smell.

MOVE TO SMALLER ONLINE COMMUNITIES

[21, 24, 44, 62]

Everybody is 24/7 online, and when you are not online, you might be afraid of losing out. The driving force behind this principle is the rise of ephemeral content, content that can only be seen for a limited time. The fact that it is ending creates a necessity to continually follow this person or object as there is a chance you might miss crucial information.

ONLY TRUST LOCAL CIRCLE

[2, 5, 19, 31, 70, 73, 132, 139, 152, 160]

People are desensitised to claims made by companies. Often they may have been led down by false promises, or the product didn't live up to their expectations. As it is easier to trust an individual than a large company, people look to their local community to search for opinions.

5.4   INSIGHTS   & REFLECTIONS

The clustering process led to a total of 12 clusters, each one written in the form of a narrative scenario. The three clustering rounds helped to get a satisfactory result. The covid-19 restrictions gave some hindrance as there was limited physical space to explore the context factors, and the generative session needed to be done digitally. The online generative session allowed developing the skill of creative sessions, further hosting as online interaction requires a different attitude towards the session. This skill can be beneficial in the future as likely more work will be done entirely online even after the covid-19 restrictions are lifted.

FUTURE WORLDVIEW

In this section, the clusters defined in the earlier section are used to form a worldview framework. Narrative scenarios are then used to explore these scenarios further. One scenario is then chosen to further explore in this project.
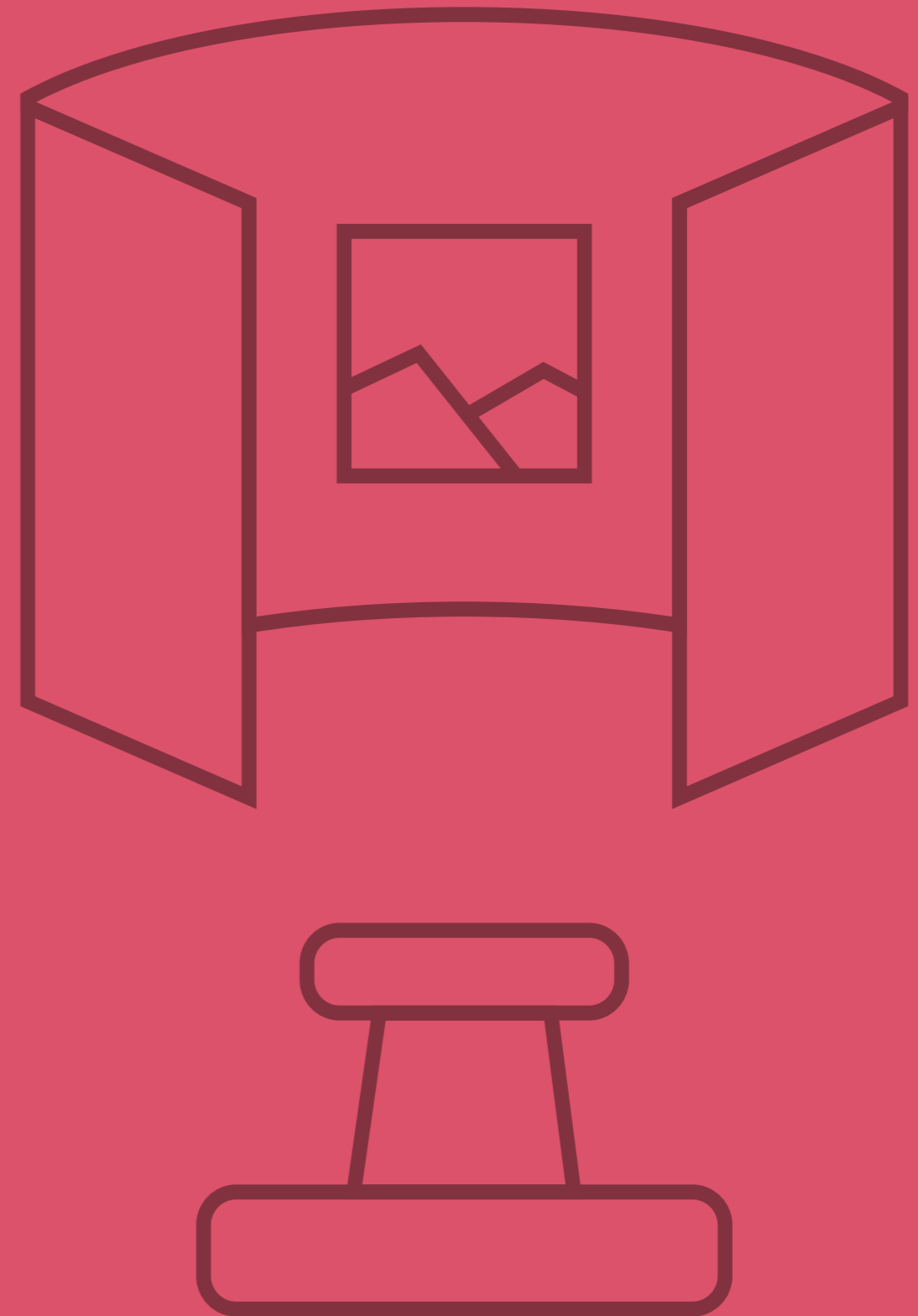
WORLDVIEW

6.1 DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK

After the clusters were finalised the ViP methodology was further used to construct a worldview consisting of different future scenarios. To get to this worldview relations were sought between different clusters. These relations helped to shape different narratives of where a future world might be heading towards.
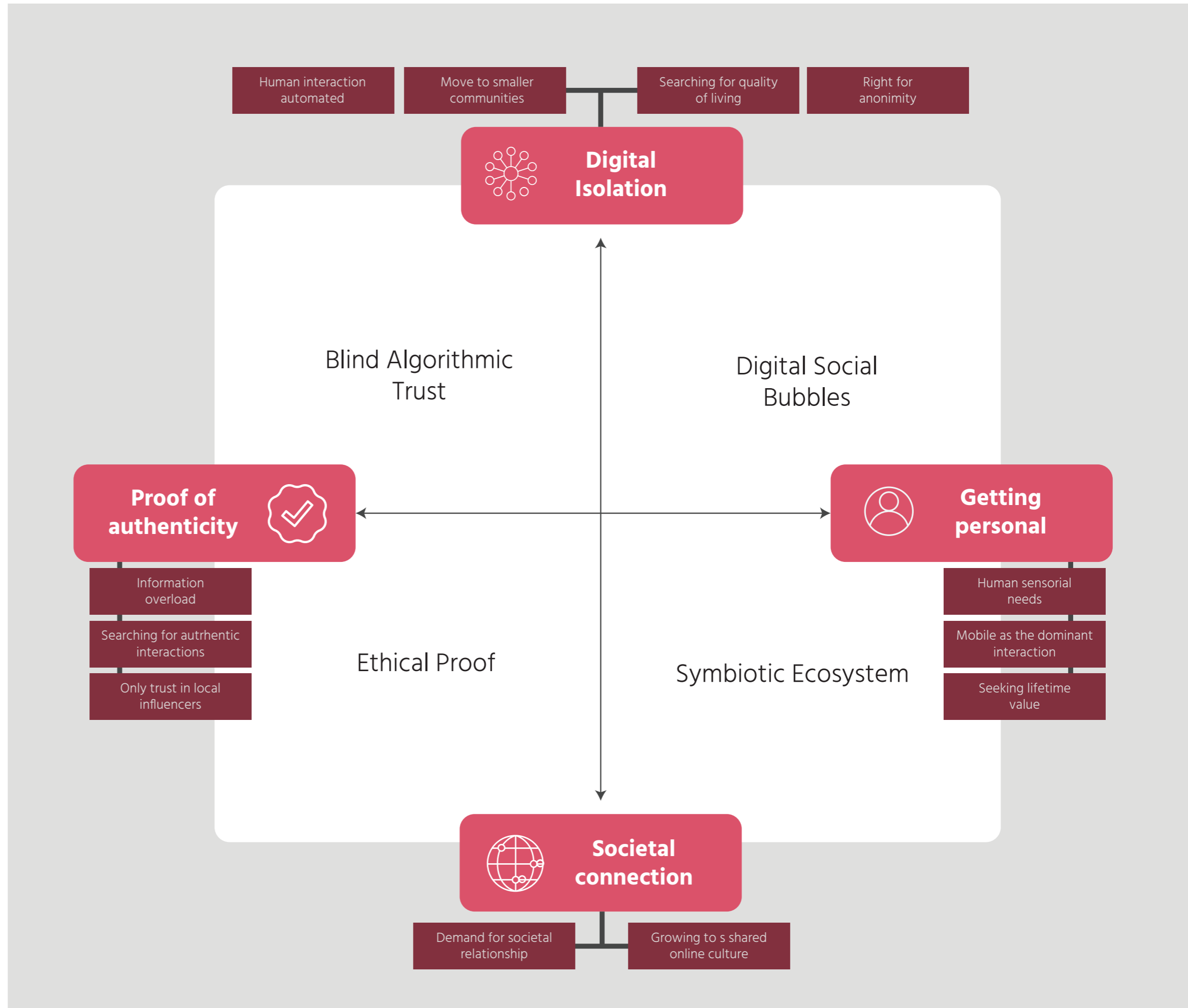
Multiple rounds of iterations were done to get to a satisfactory worldview. Here feedback from the client and the supervisory team was used as input for the iterations.

The final iteration led to a framework consisting of 2 axes. One axis looks at the attitude of the consumer towards a relationship where the themes "Proof of authenticity" and "getting personal" emerged. The other axis explains the type of digital interaction where the themes "Digital isolation" and "societal connection" emerged.

6.2 NARRATIVE SCENARIO'S

On the cross-section of the 2 axes appear 4 future scenarios. Narrative scenarios were chosen as a method to further explore these worlds as it helps the designer within this context to bring out deeper knowledge. The narrative scenario's serve as a tool to help describe how a future might unfold. Each scenario, therefore, explains a specific direction that could happen in the next 5 years.

The main perspectives of this project; consumer, brand, and platform were used to guide the narrative. The relationship between the 3 is also described.

Human interaction automated | Move to smaller communities | Searching for quality of living | Right for anonimity

Digital Isolation

Blind Algorithmic Trust

Digital Social Bubbles

Proof of authenticity

Getting personal

Information overload

Searching for autrhentic interactions

Only trust in local influencers

Human sensorial needs

Mobile as the dominant interaction

Seeking lifetime value

Ethical Proof

Symbiotic Ecosystem

Societal connection

Demand for societal relationship | Growing to s shared online culture

6.3.2 RELATIONSHIP BUBBLES

Everything around us becomes digitized and as more aspects of our physical lives are measured, more data becomes available about consumer behaviour. Products and services are now able to be personalized more than ever. The ones that know the most about us are able to form better relationships with us. Since digital platforms are facilitating our interactions they will more than ever know what consumers desire. It is a race for closeness and a handful of players are able to deliver lifetime value to the consumer. The platforms have the potential to deliver broader lifetime value as they are the ones that have the most data about you. The more they understand you the closer they get to you.

In this scenario, the relationship between the 4 players becomes more difficult. Platforms have by far the most data about the user, but themselves does not have the power to play an important part in the customer lifetime.

For this, it is depended on the brands on the platform that actually create meaning for the consumer. Still, the platform can swap out these brands or even whole categories based on the data. So brands are still depending on the platforms.
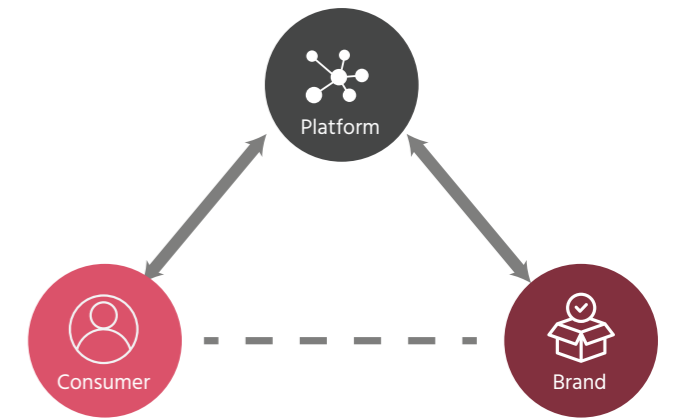
6.3.1 BLIND ALGORITHMIC TRUST

The digital world is increasingly becoming the driving engine behind the physical world. With this increase in digital activity, people are exposed to more "noise" than ever before. Where you used to be limited by your geographical location, now any goods or services can be bought from virtually any place. This abundance of choice makes it hard for normal consumers to choose from. For the simplest solution, there are an infinite amount of solutions. And as people get digitally isolated from each other they rely more and more on a system that helps them navigate this infinite world of zero's and one's. Digital platforms will play a dominant role in this scenario as they become the gatekeepers of our digital interaction. In their search for authentic interactions, people will turn to digital platforms that help them make the right choice, sometimes even outsourcing consumption to digital systems.
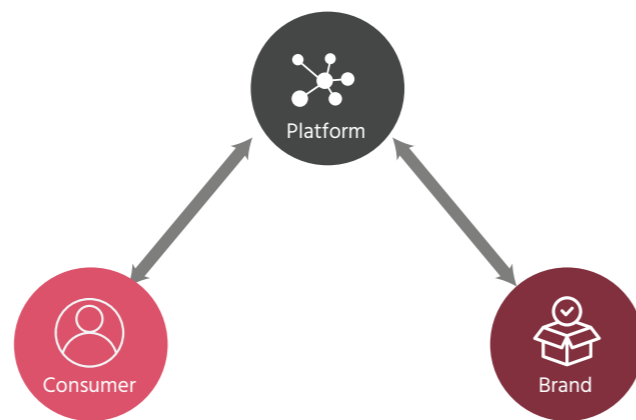
The relationship between consumers, brands and platforms is very one dimensional. In this scenario, platforms act as gatekeepers in the interactions between consumer and brands in some instances making the brand invisible to the consumer. In this scenario brands have large leverage over brands as not playing along with their rules might, in turn, mean that brands will have limited access to consumers. Brands that are optimized for this platform gain success, but they will also become dependent on the platform.

6.3.4 ETHICAL PROOF

In this scenario, the noise of the digital age is becoming greater and greater. People are moved to do the right thing as worldwide societal problems have increasingly become more important to them. Still, it is hard for them to decide how to act as now more then ever digital players are all around them. People are searching for mnemonics that help them make the right choice on the most authentic interaction while still abiding by societal problems. Consumers don't want to think too much about how they should be able to do good. They only want proof that their choice is contributing to a better world. Brands and digital platforms need to constantly convince the consumer that they are contributing to a better society and thus become a mnemonic in their head for this interaction. This scenario asks for a more ethical/societal centred brand.
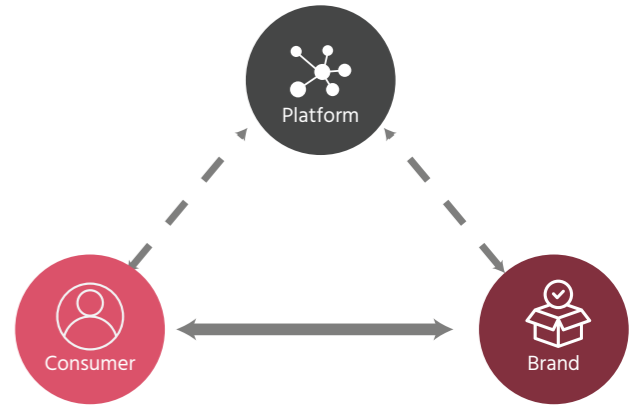
In this scenario the relationship dynamic changes completely. In their search for authenticity and credibility brands playing on the platform are more successful. They are the ones that are best able in the real world to portray authenticity in the interactions. As platforms are only there to help search for the right brand. In this scenario, the platforms are becoming more of a sales channel.

6.3.3 SYMBIOTIC SYSTEM

Physical borders have become a thing of the past. The world is increasingly becoming more connected and needs to be treated as such. A situation on one side of the planet can be felt almost immediately on the other side of the world (as has become evident during the covid-19 pandemic). The same is going on the internet where a shared online culture is driving a more societal relationship. Instead of closed bubbles, the digital landscapes will feel more like an ecosystem where multiple entities are codependent on each other and evolve organically. This societal connection goes in pair with the need for closeness or closer interaction. However, this race for closeness is now open for everyone as more digital data is being shared.
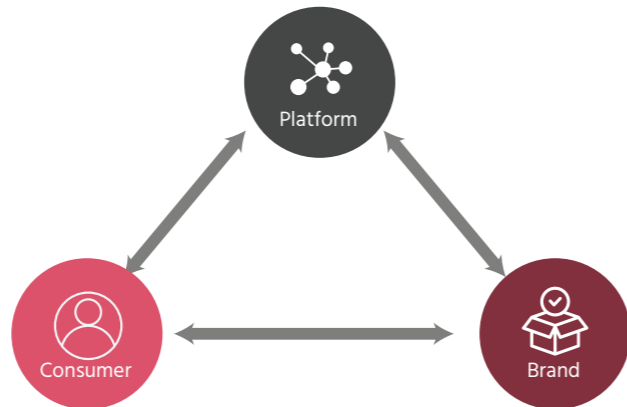
In this scenario, there is a more balanced relationship dynamic visible between the 3 players. Due to intervention there comes an end to the digital monopoly. This means that there is healthy competition between platforms and brands. This drives platforms to facilitate better interactions between consumers and brands rather than optimise for platform use.

6.4 FUTURE DIRECTION

For this project, one direction was chosen as the starting point for defining the design principles. This does not mean that there is only one possible future outcome. Multiple scenarios can coexist at the same time to some degree. However, due to time constraints only one scenario will be used for further exploration.
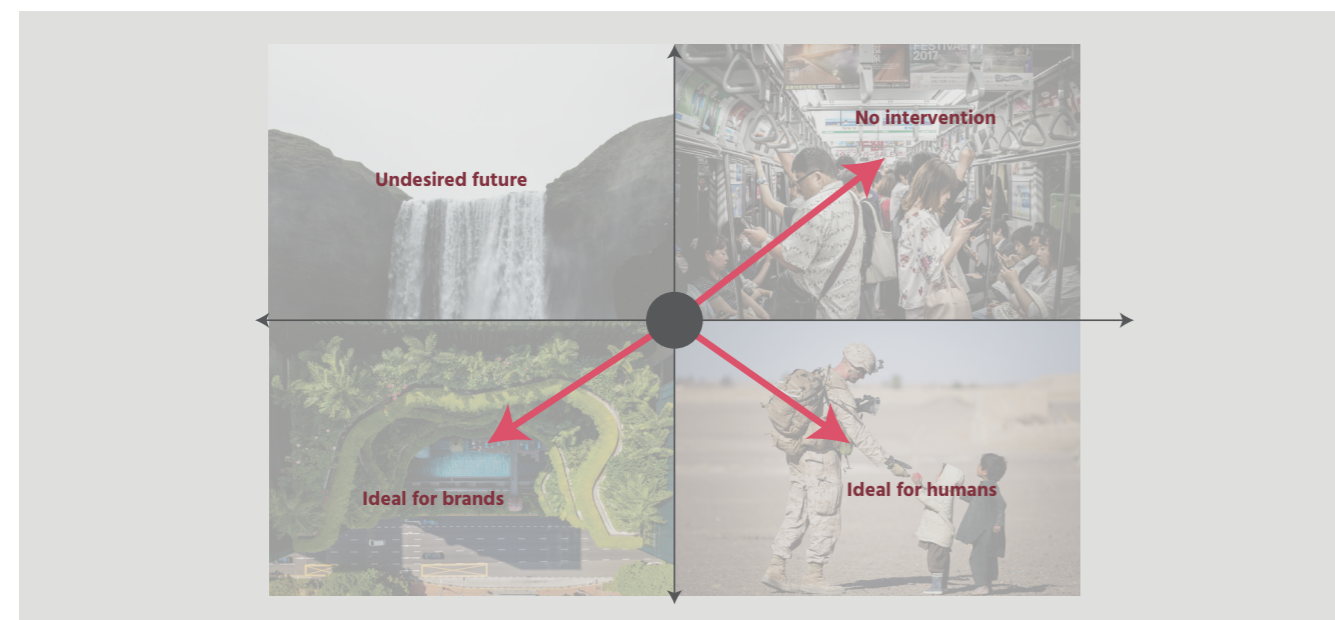
6.4.1 POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

To select the direction for further exploration a small analysis was done to explore how the potential outcome of the scenario would look like in terms of the triadic relationship between consumers, brand, and platform.

If no intervention takes place on current digital platforms there is a tendency for the world to move to the upper two quadrants. With no check on their growth, they will grow out to be the digital monopolies of our digital interaction. Due to the vast amount of data collection, they also have a huge lead in their personal connection with you.

For brands, the bottom left scenario is the ideal scenario. Here they can leverage their

The selection of a future direction was made on the basis of 3 short analyses. The different scenarios were analyzed based on their expected outcome for each of the stakeholders. Next PwC's strategy and values were used to see which direction would fit best with their strategy. Lastly, present-day indicators analyzed to see which scenario was most plausible due to current indicators.

brand authenticity and have more control over the platforms they sell-through. In this open-world, the success of a relationship is driven by ethical proof. Which in turn leads to the more powerful relationship between consumers and brands, with platforms only operating as sales channels

For consumers, each quadrant represents a different pain point to be relieved by brands or platforms. The upper quadrants are more focused on the individual while the lower quadrants are focused more on the group. When looking through the lens of society the lower quadrants are therefore more suitable as they allow for a more human-centred approach.


6.4.2 STRATEGY ALIGNMENT

In their purpose PwC states the following:

"PwC strives to build trust in society and solve important problems"

In their purpose, they state they have the motivation to solve for society. From a designers point of view, this means that PwC tries to not only solve the problems of individuals or their clients but want to be an active contributor to a better society.

Based on the analysis of the potential outcomes of the future scenarios, in conjunction with PwC, the choice was made to focus on the 3 scenarios in this project. This scenario aligned best with the ambition and purpose of PwC, serving the needs of the people.

PwC Values
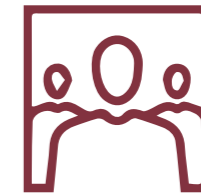
Act with integrity

Speak up for what is right, especially when it feels difficult

Expect and deliver the highest quality outcomes

Make decisions and act as if our personal reputations were at stake

Make a Difference

Stay informed and ask questions about the future of the world we live in

Create impact with our colleagues, our clients and society through our actions

Respond with agility to the ever changing environment in which we operate

Care

Make the effort to understand every individual and what matters to them

Recognise the value that each person contributes

Support others to grow and work in the way that brings out their best
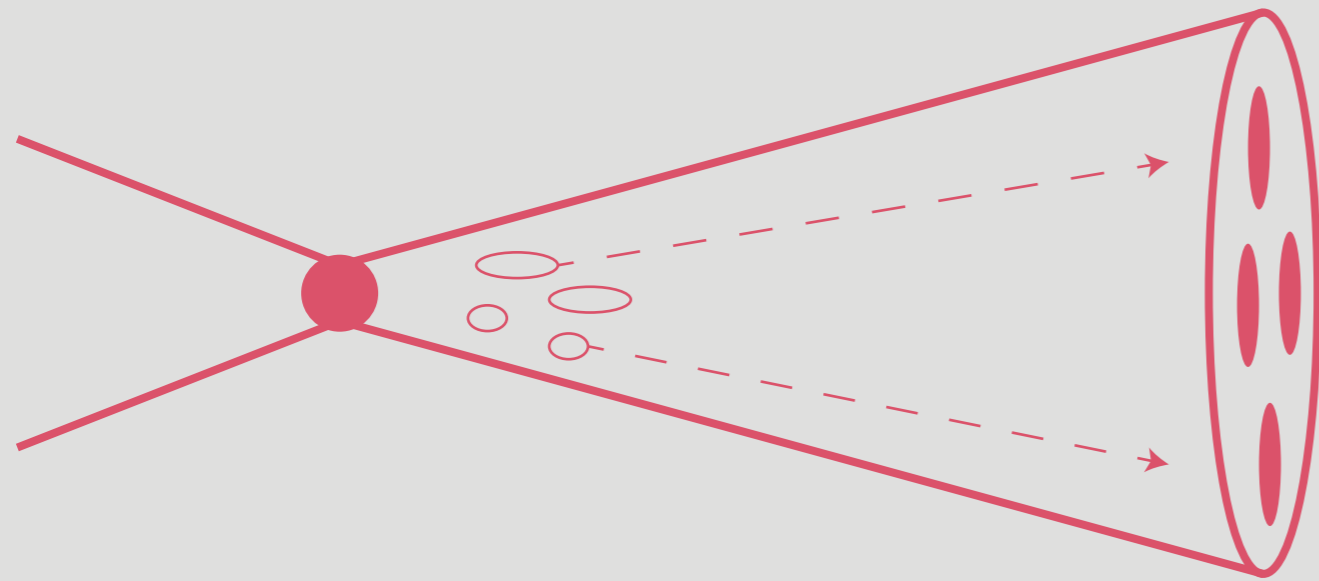
Reimagine the possible

Dare to challenge the status quo and try new things

Innovate, test and learn from failure

Have an open mind to the possibilities in every idea

Work together

Collaborate and share relationships, ideas and knowledge beyond boundaries

Seek and integrate a diverse range of perspectives, people and ideas

Give and ask for feedback to improve ourselves and others

6.4.4 SELECTION

The results of the three analysis support the third scenario as the most optimal to solve for. This scenario poses an equal outcome for all three stakeholders, aligns best with PwC strategy and its values, and is deemed most likely to occur looking at present legislation by the European Union. Therefore the outcome of a symbiotic system will be used as a starting point to define which interventions need to take place. These interventions can then be used to formulate design principles.

6.4.3 PRESENT INDICATORS

To indicate if a selected scenario is plausible, a designer can look for present-day indicators that point in that direction. An insight from the interview with Ron Martinek (Partner at PwC) suggested looking into changing legislation as an indicator, as it foreshadows what the rules are going to be for the next few years. In doing so a search was done for European legislation regarding the operation surrounding digital platform business models. This resulted in the findings of the European legislation the Digital Service Act and the Digital market act.

Digital Service/Market Act

With this new piece of legislation, the European Union is trying to counter the power digital services/intermediaries have at the moment. In these draft, there are a few important improvements they want to enforce (European Commission, 2020)

First, they want to create more transparency surrounding the content moderation, recommendation and advertisement. Consumers will have to get more insights into the algorithm that is recommending content to them, but also why certain ads are targeted to them.

Second, the legislation is hoping to create a digital market that is fair to everybody. This means that a digital platform is not allowed to rank its own services higher than competitors. Users will also have the ability for easier interoperability. Meaning that the cost of switching to another platform will be lower.

Lastly, liability. Liability has been the backbone of the growth of the internet. Platforms are not liable for the misconduct that is done by their users on their platform. However, the new legislation enforces that large platforms (at least 10% of 450 million European citizens) are under tighter restrictions to enforce illegal activity on their platform.

6.5   INSIGHTS   &   REFLECTIONS

Based on the earlier clustering a worldview was concluded. This framework helped to structure the different clusters and find a direction where a design intervention can be placed. The use of future narrative scenarios as a method helped to make these scenarios more realistic and served to inspire the designer. Upon further exploration of the outcome, the relationships between the different stakeholders differed. Based on this information together with PwC's strategy and present-day indicators form European legislation the choice for the scenario about a symbiotic ecosystem was chosen.

The new European legislation was introduced right in the middle of doing my research and was therefore not possible to be incorporated earlier in the analysis. It did however have a huge influence on the outcome of the research and was therefore valuable to incorporate. It will be very interesting to watch how the legislation will turn ou tin reality. It will have a major influence on large intermediaries. At the same time, the legislation can also inspire other countries to reiterate their policy around the subject.

FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES

This section aims to translate future vision into actionable systemic changes. These are changes necessary to get to the desired future world. These changes can then be translated into design principles.
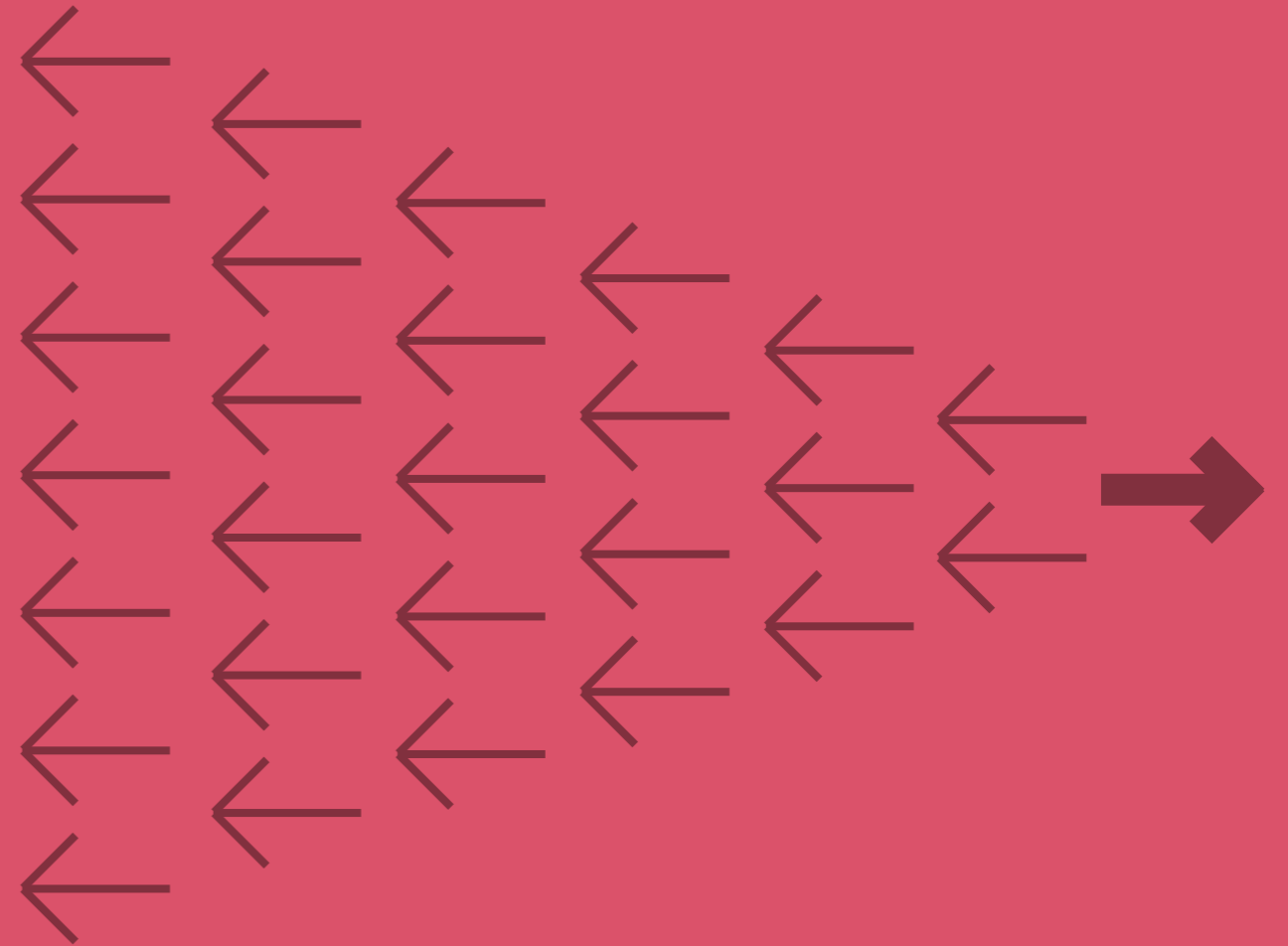
FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES

7.1 PURPOSE IN ECOSYSTEM

In the future vision, the healthy ecosystem is described as a natural symbiotic relationship between different individuals. To understand the changes that need to happen, the ecosystem is first decomposed into the players and their purpose in the system. The various players identified in this ecosystem are consumers, platforms, brands and politics.

7.1.1 PLATFORMS

The platform should balance the needs and desires of brands and consumers. They help the customer by navigating the endless stream of information by creating useful filters relevant to their needs. In contrast, time creates transparency about the products and services provides. On the other hand, platforms should help brands create better insights into the needs and desires of their customers. Platforms have the ability to uncover behavioural insights and should use this to help the community become better.

7.1.2 BRANDS

The purpose of the brand is to help the consumer in performing their life tasks. Companies can make physical changes in consumers' lives and should help them become better consumers. It is vital for brands to better understand the world's context and culture to better serve consumers' needs with a networked ecosystem.

7.1.3 CONSUMERS

The role of the consumer is to be critical of the way platforms and brands operate. Their spending money determines the growth of the ecosystem. They have critical voting power by pending their money or time on a certain service or product. If the consumer does not buy a certain brand or use the service of a platform it will eventually die out under ideal circumstances (B2B excluded).

7.1.4 POLITICS

Politics serve to protect the consumer against bad practices against people, but also the planet. They make sure that all instances in the ecosystem are in check and not trespassing. The laws should not interfere with the ecosystem but need to make sure that everyone serves their purpose well and does not behave maleficent.

7.2 INDIVIDUAL CHANGES

For each individual role in the ecosystem, different changes were written down that would contribute to their purpose in the ecosystem. These changes were then clustered and, based on previous insights, brought back to one key change that was deemed most critical. This resulted in the following changes.

7.2.1 QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

Through network effects, platforms have grown to sizes that transcend borders. Their focus on growth at all costs neglects the quality of interaction for its user group. As the platforms become larger and larger, their networks are more vulnerable to exploitation. Platforms should refocus their strategy and ensure high quality among the people using their services. This can be done through more rigorous verification procedures.

7.2.2 EDUCATION ON DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

In order to make better decisions and keep the ecosystem healthy, consumers need to be better educated about the costs of digital infrastructure. The internet is considered free and should remain that way to ensure equal access to information. However, people need to understand the hidden infrastructure that is required in order to support their digital behaviour. This can be done by better education on topics regarding what consumers are paying for.
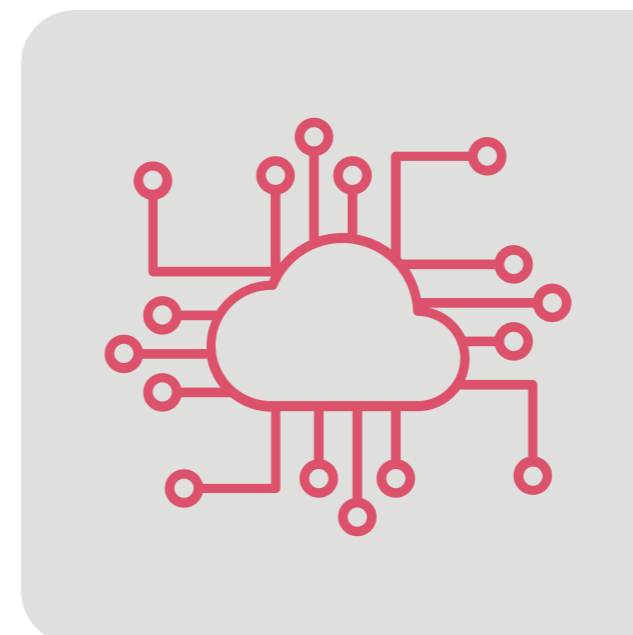
7.2.3 DIVERSIFY REVENUE STREAMS

The way a company earns more in large amounts determines how the company will grow. This can be especially problematic for publicly traded companies, as shareholders prefer short term profits over long term investments. A large part of digital platforms operates on a free business model. This free business model allows it to grow fast, relying heavily on advertisements. Platforms such as Amazon and Facebook essentially are advertising platforms. This also means that when a platform wants to earn more money, it needs to sell to a business. This creates an effect where platforms might favour the needs of other party's over that of the consumer. In the case of Facebook, even though they say the platform is for humans, the platform is now actually for advertisers. To mitigate this effect, new legislation might be necessary to limit the influence of outside parties on the growth of a platform.

7.2.4 RELATIONSHIPS AT THE HEART OF THE BRAND EXPERIENCE

In the platform economy, consumers have the ability to choose from more options than ever before. It is, therefore, necessary for brands to rethink how their brand is experienced by the consumer in relation to its context. This is a change of mindset from the brand as a sender of information to a brand that is co-created by its relationships. In order to form a meaningful relationship with the customer, brands need to deepen their relationship with the client at the heart of the strategy. When defined correctly, the brand is better able to position itself in a networked economy.

7.3 OPPORTUNITY

This project is aimed to support the building of meaningful relationships between consumers and brands in a networked economy. Even though the earlier mentioned system changes contribute at large to better relationships within the ecosystem, design principles that focus on the relation between the consumer and brand will be taken into account.

The design principles will open help the Experience Center open the discussion with their clients and support them in the creation of new business opportunities.

There is still value in the design principles related to the other areas. Better education on digital business models will help consumers understand how they contribute to value creation but also their role in shaping business. However, the skills of the Experience Center lie in the creation of new services and experiences. Framing design principles to support the creation of better experiences is, therefore, more desirable for PwC.

7.4 INSIGHTS & REFLECTIONS

Framing the relationship between consumer, brand and platforms as an ecological system gives way to the formulation of each actor as having an active purpose and role in the ecosystem. Here the purpose and role of a brand are defined as the actor helping consumers performing their life tasks and supporting in their identity goals.

Through this analogy, I came to the insight that although consumers need to be protected from bad practices, they also have their duty to make more cosiness decisions. Their spending power is what ultimately decides where the future lies of the ecosystem. However, this needs to be supported by options to choose from. The leader of China is still democratically chosen, but one might argue that the people in China don't really have any other choice. The right policy needs to be put into place to make sure that there are actually options to choose from.

Reflecting back on the changes I believe I have merely scraped the surface of things that should change to get to the desired future. If more time was at hand, a deep analysis could be done on every individual stakeholder and the important changes that need to take place. In the end, it was necessary to focus on the relationship between the consumer and brand, as there was more opportunity for PwC's Experience Center to create value. However, in the future, more clients from PwC might be interested to design a platform themselves.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

This section will explain how the design principles are formed in relation to brand experience design. The design principles will be detailed, and it will be explained how they help form meaningful relationships between the brand and consumers.
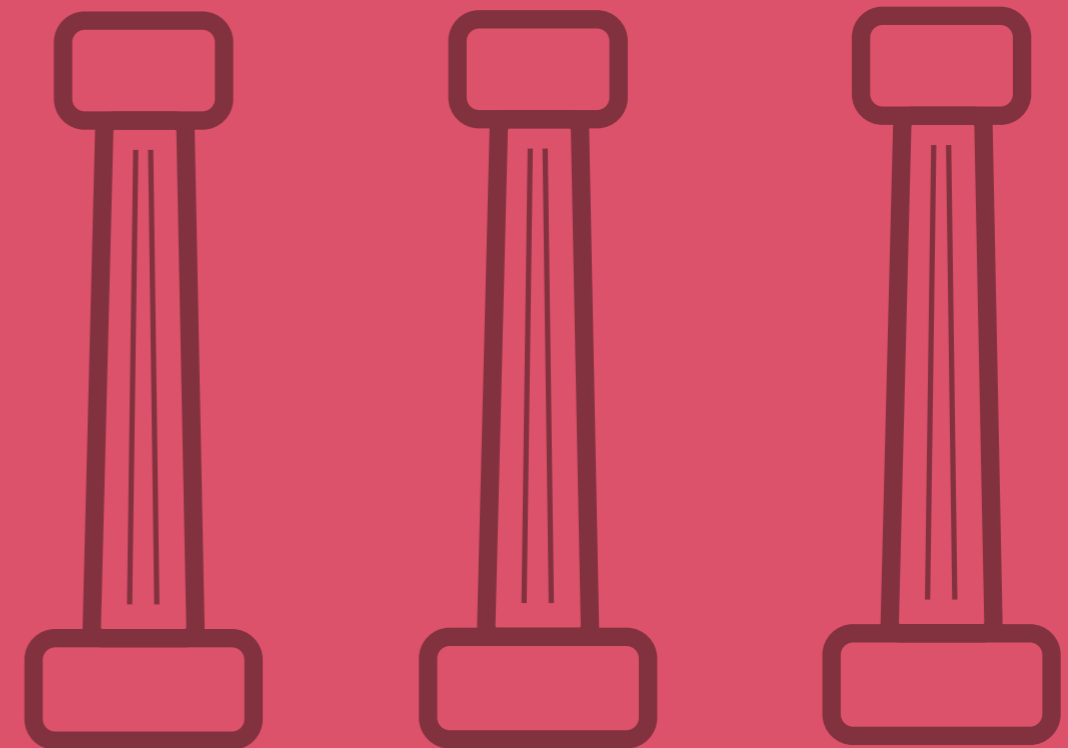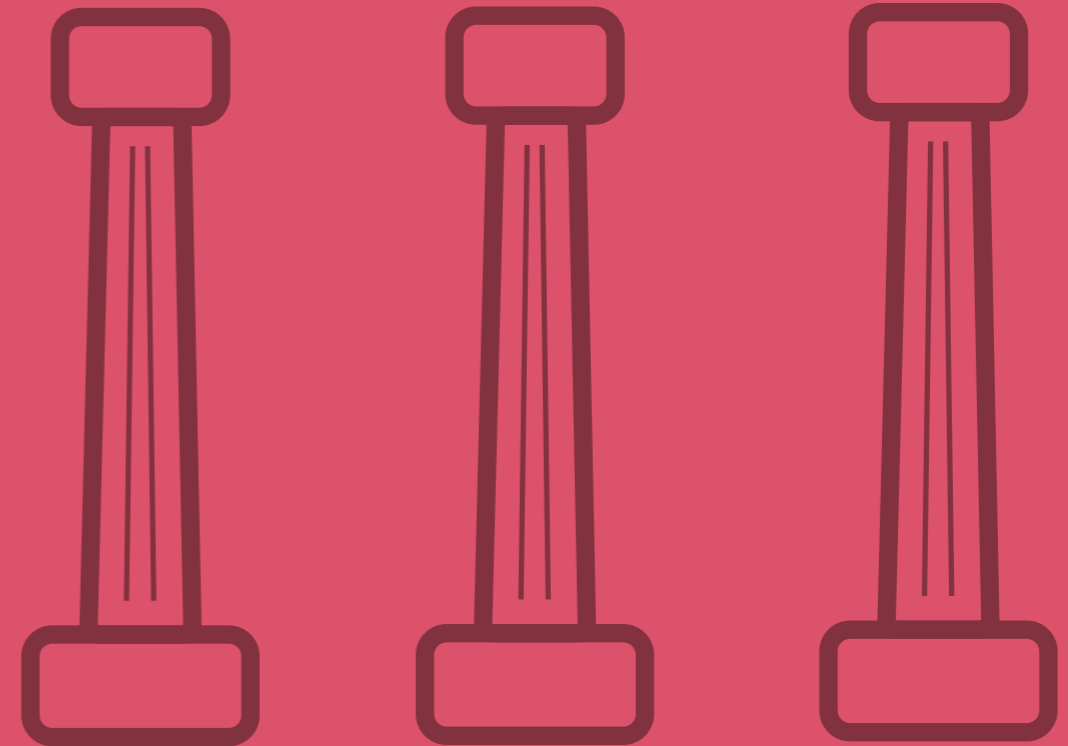
DESIGN PRINCIPLES

8.1 BRAND EXPERIENNCE CYCLE

As explained by the cultural brand model by Douglass Holt, the meaning of a brand is created in the mind of the consumer and written by the context it plays. The brand experience can therefore be described as the result of the interaction between the consumer and various touchpoints with the brand. To help give structure to the design principles and to help the creation of better experiences leading to a meaningful relationship between the consumer and the brand in a platform economy, brand experience design is used to define the design principles.

The brand experience design can be defined in 3 stages; strategy, interactions and feedback.

The strategy is defined as the classic brand strategy. The company defines the brand characteristics of the brand, which it wants to target and how it wants to be perceived. The strategy helps a brand not only in defining what it wants to do but also what it is not going to do.

The strategy gives form to the interaction.

Various touchpoints are designed and are used to perform.

The last part is about listening. Based on the feedback of your customers, the strategy can be optimised to make sure the touchpoints are in line with the expectations of the customer. Also by carefully listening and understanding the context of the consumer, can the brand understand where new value can be added.

Based on the desired future vision and the brand experience cycle, the following design principles arise.
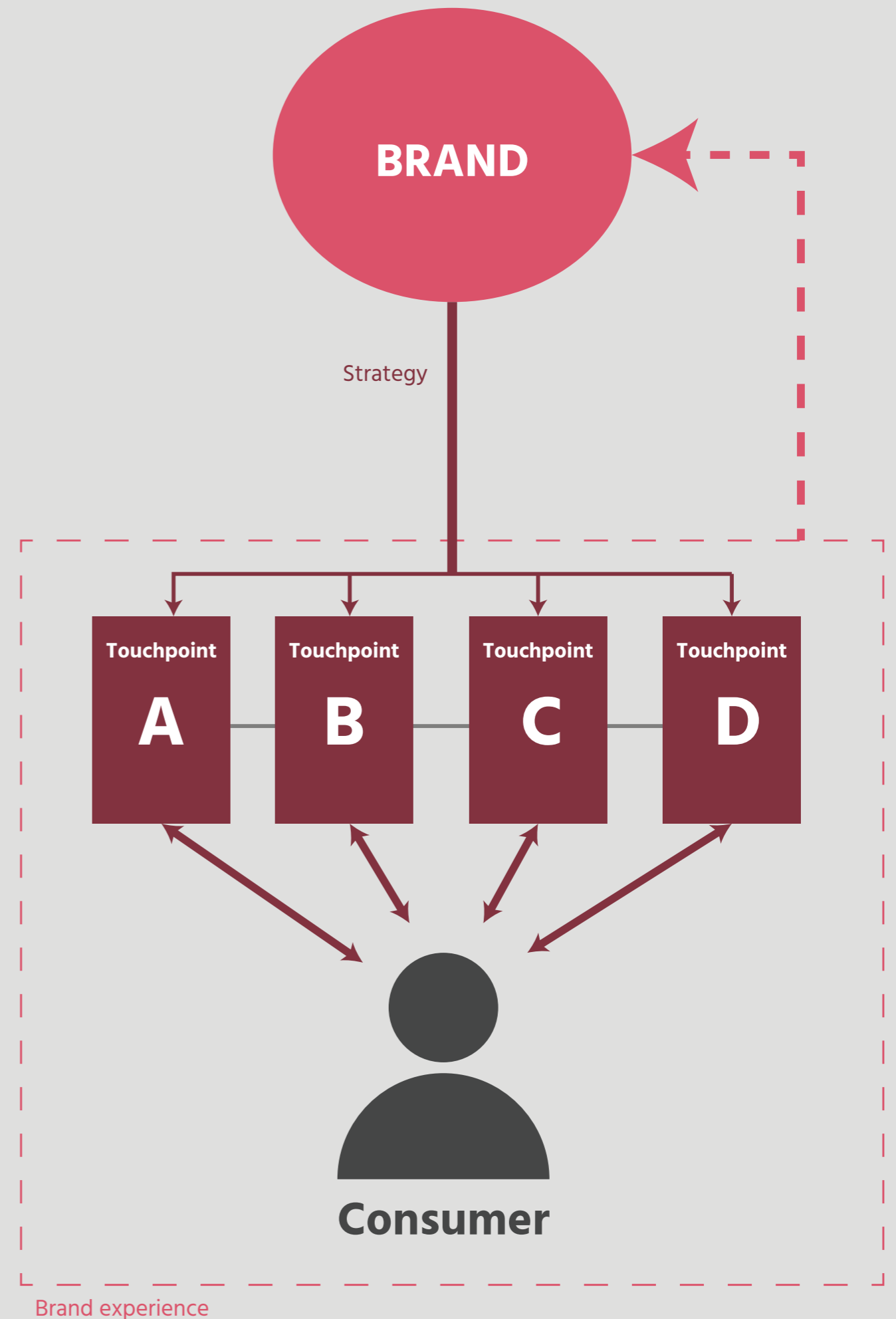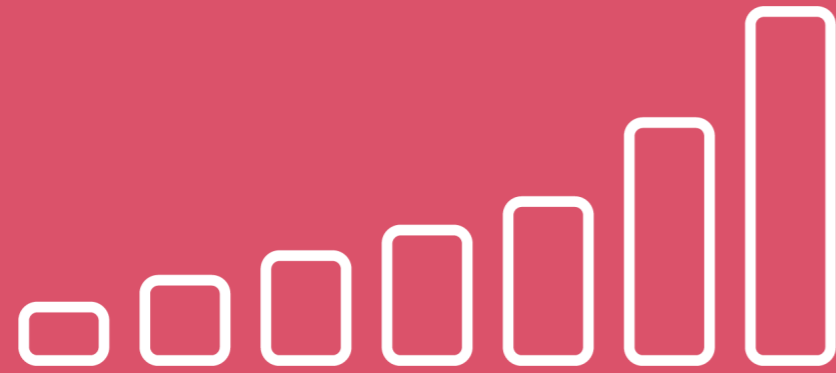
7.2.1 RELATIONSHIPS AREN'T BUILD OVERNIGHT

If you think about one of the most robust relationships you have with a friend or even enemy, you know that getting to this point took quite some effort. This is quite the same for building a relationship between brands and your customers; it takes time and, most of all effort. Brands need to prioritise these long term relationship building activities over short term financial gains.

Digital transactional platforms make it very easy to prioritise quick financial gains over long term effects. You pay extra money to be on top of the search results or to be seen when the consumer types in a keyword. However, this is not a sustainable practice as you will equally fast disappear from the minds of the consumer once you stop. It is a race to the bottom where you compete with other brands for the same digital space driving up customer acquisition costs (CAC the total costs for a brand to acquire one customer).

The design principle has the following consequences:

A brand needs to think about rewarding long time consumers.

Start collecting your own data about your customer.
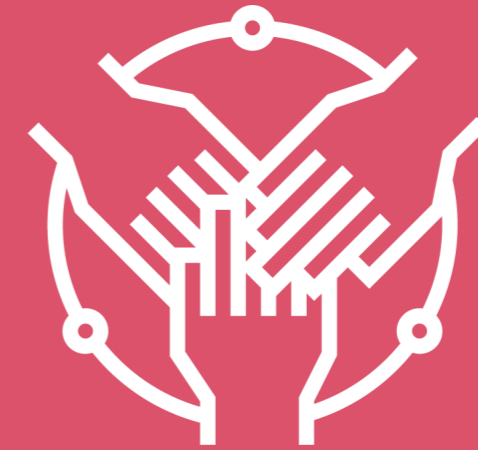
7.2.2 COLLABORATE OR DIE

Collaboration is now more then ever key to building menaingful realtionship with your The second design principle focuses on brand strategy.

To increase the strength of the relationships, you need to add value to the relationships continuously. This collaboration can take many forms, from the collaboration between various industry brands to cooperation with customers. Either way collaborating with the people around you allows the brand to add value to the relationships continuously. The combined value is larger than the sum of its parts. Brands should therefore look outside the realm of their own reach and see how they can partner up with others to bring more value to the customer. The collective experience of multiple brands can deliver a greater lifetime value for the customer. At the same time, the collaboration with the customer in the form of user-generated content (UGC) can greatly enhance the relationships as it enforces a sense of community among its customers.

One thing digital platforms have shown is that everything in the world is connected or will be connected. Keeping your ecosystem closed harms the potential of others, even your customers, to expand on the value of the brand.
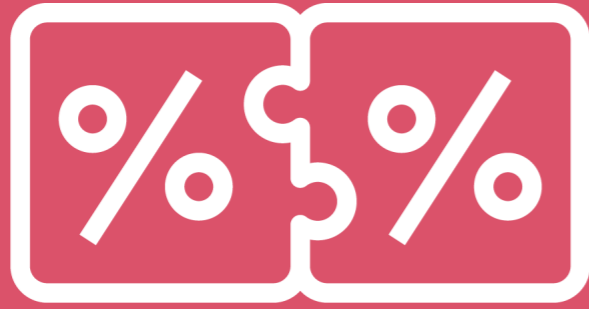
The design principle has the following consequences:

Look for brands that have a similar mission and operate in the same value ecosystem.

Partner up with brands operating in the same ecosystem.

Involve the customer in the creation of the brand.

Create a sense of community among your customers of a brand strategy.

7.2.3 NO SUCH THING AS A VIRTUAL HUG

Digital interactions have the benefit of being faster and more efficient. Processes can be optimised and tasks can be automated. However, these digital interactions also have their limits. They're digital. It is hard to feel the warmth of a comforting hug from a machine, just as it is hard to feel the energetic tap on the shoulder from a computer. The practise of branding is highly

Digital platforms largely take over the interaction with your customers. It is therefore now more important than ever to have a direct sales channel with your customer. Brands need to think about how they can combine elements of both the digital world and the physical world to bring one complete integrated phygital (combination of digital and physical) experience.

The design principle has the following consequences:

Carefully design your physical brand touchpoints. Make sure they add to the digital experience. Bringing something that can't be done digitally

Have a direct (physical) channel to interact with your customer.

7.2.4 BRANDING IS 99% EMOTION

Digital platforms allow consumers to navigate endless streams of information, but to do this the platforms rely on rational information. A brand is reduced to mere product features, ratings and prices. There is little to no room to articulate any form of emotion, even though branding is all about eliciting the right set of emotions. Platforms create an equal playing field for all different brands to allow consumers to compare them quickly. Brands, therefore, have to put extra effort into building these emotional associations with the customer to set them apart from the competition. It is therefore more necessary than ever to enforce the creation of emotional feelings when interacting with your consumers. The important part is that brands should behave

authentically to their beliefs. Like a character from a movie, the emotional responses have to be in line with your character for the customer to experience them as authentic.

To succeed in a platform economy, therefore, becomes more important to communicate an emotional experience before they enter the rational world of the digital platform. Digital platforms thus can be seen as the branding equivalent of the tv show Temptation Island. On the tv show, relationships are put to the test when two partners are separated and are seduced by others in order to test their relationship. Digital platforms are the same; they test the relationships by giving the consumer limitless possibilities.

The design principle has the following consequences:

Brand communication should focus on conveying emotions.

Put effort into building the emotional narrative of a brand.

Behave like a human, be authentic in your emotions

7.2.5 DOING GOOD FOR SOCIETY IS DOING GOOD FOR BRANDING

If you think about the relationships you have with your friends, which one do you think is more desirable. The one that just gives you what you want and nothing more or the one that actively helps in creating a better world around you. I think everybody would say the last one. This is precisely the mindset brands should take into account in the world of digital platforms.

Brands should rethink how they deliver value, not only trying to create value by selling products but also be prioritising, giving back to the community or planet. Often brands have lavish purposes of building a better world. In a digital platform, economy brands will not only be judged by the products they sell but on the value, they bring to the ecosystem as a whole.

The design principle has the following consequences:

Define a clear purpose and mission and put money aside to achieve that purpose.

Doing good for society is doing good for your company.

Prioritise earned marketing overpaid marketing.

7.2.6 ACTUALLY START TO LISTEN

As any good relationship therapist will say, listening is vital for a good relationship. So is the case for brands. Being able to really listen to your customer allows the brand to understand the context in which the consumer operates, but also in which the brand operates. Understanding this context allows the brand to better empathise with their customers and really connect on a deeper level. Even though data is considered a key resource for optimising your business, it doesn't give real qualitative insight into the struggles of your customer. Although digital platforms can help uncover behavioural patterns, you still need to actively listen to your customer and the changing context in which the brand operates.

For better or for worse digital platforms have vastly accelerated the pace at which information flows and our conversations have increasingly shifted towards this digital space. The context in which a brand operates, therefore, changes faster than before. It will be crucial for brands to listen to these connected online subcultures to understand the context in which the brand adds value.

The design principle has the following consequences:

Incorporate social media channels in your customer research, such as social listening tools.

Hire anthropologists within the branding team

Always combine quantitative data with qualitative interviews.

Brand personas should be updated more often.

Don't be silent on the topics your customer thinks is important.

8.4   INSIGHTS   &
REFLECTIONS

Framing the realtion betwween consumer, brand and platforms as a ecological system gve way to the formulation of each actor as hving an active purpose and role in the ecosystem. Here the purpose and role of a brand is defined as the actor helping consumers performing their life tasks and supporting in their identity goals.

To achieve this, a fundamental change in mindset needs to happen. Brands need to

DESIGN PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE

This section highlights how these different design principles come to life. The section highlights some good practices as well as some bad practices and how these can be turned around.
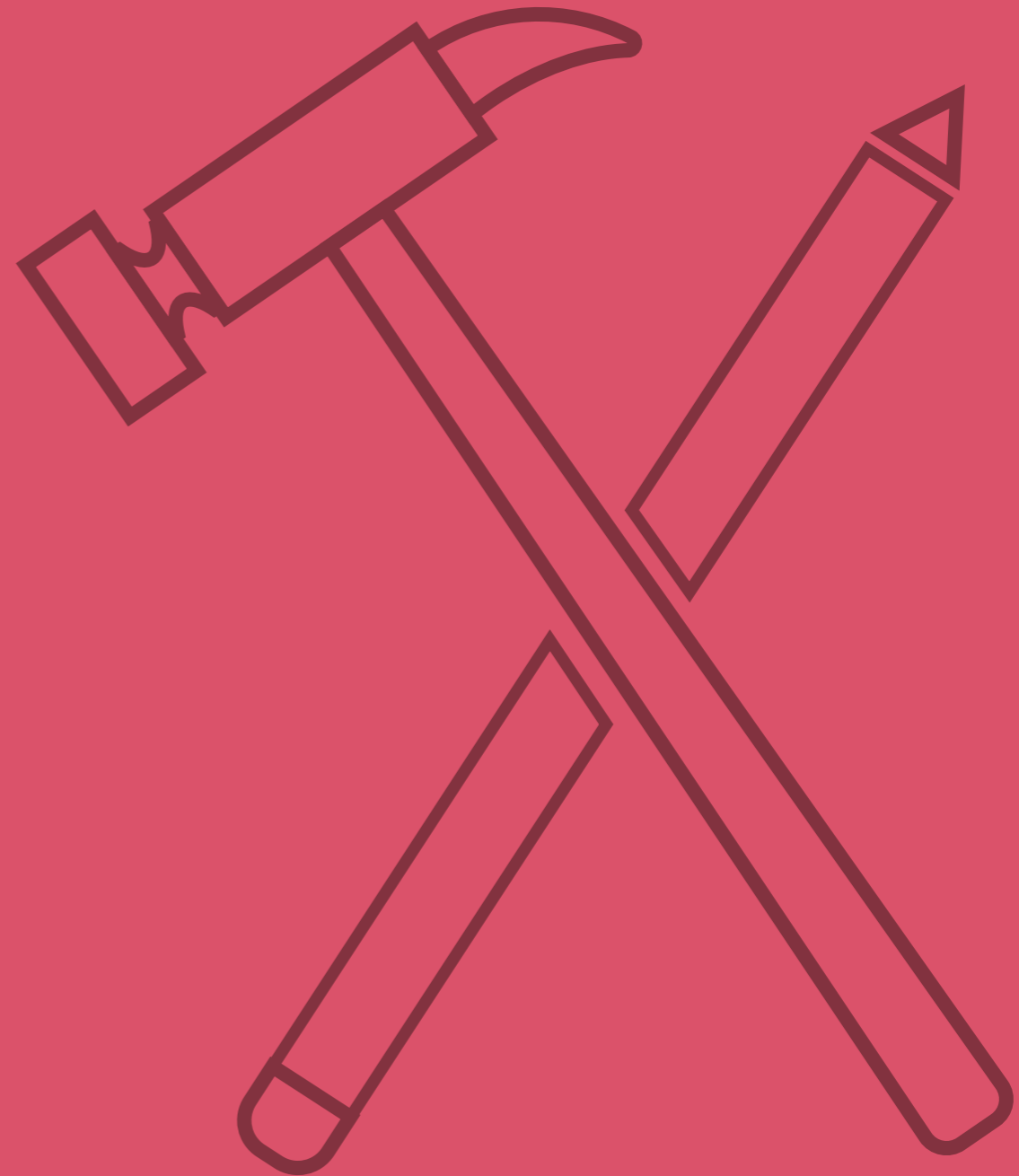
IN PRACTICE

9.1 BRANDS TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

First, it is important to define which brands are taken into account. There are many different types of brands and the design principles are not relevant for every single type of brand. Large brands like Nike and Apple were excluded to be used as examples. These brands do portray great examples for all design principles but from an analysis point of view are not interesting as the power of their brand equity overshadows that of platforms. Therefore the following criteria are used for looking at examples.

The brand operates in the Dutch market

The brand has a clear B2C focus

The brand sells consumer products that are easily replicable, not protected by patents

The brand is sold through a direct to consumer channel and is not dependent on platforms for its sales

The following segments highlight some of the forms these design principles take shape and how they help deepen the relationship with the customer.
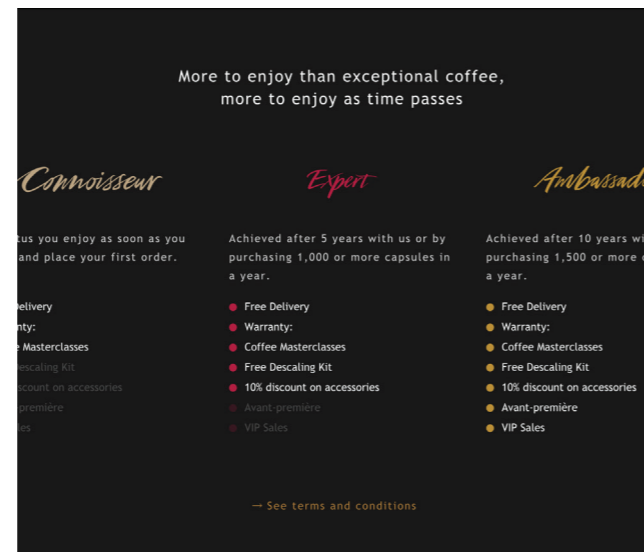
9.2.1 NESPRESSO (1)

Nespresso is a great example of a brand that values the relationship with the customer and uses a system that carefully establishes the consumer-brand relationship over time. They divide their customers into 3 phases; connoisseur, expert and expert. The way the customer advances to the next stage is either through consuming more coffee or being a customer for a longer period of time. However, when advancing to these next phases the customer will get more rewards from Nespresso. The value the brand delivers to its customers therefore increases the more loyal a customer becomes. This is also beneficial for Nespresso as the brand gives the consumer a reason to share more information with them.

When looking at a rivalry brand like Douwe Egberts, you see that they also form loyalty branding by awarding the customer with points with each product they can use to earn products. However contrary to Nespresso, this form of loyalty ends once the customer acquires their reward. The reward itself does not celebrate the relationship with the customer nor does it reinforce the nature of their relationship.

9.2.2 DAILY PAPER X VAN GOGH MUSEUM

Collaboration helps strengthen the relationship with the customer by combining the effort of two brands to bring extra value to the current relationships. Fashion brands are known for their collaboration with different artist. The Amsterdam fashion brand Daily Paper portrayed an excellent example of brand relationship. They collaborated with the Dutch Van Gogh museum to bring a collection inspired by the painting of the famous Dutch painter. On the first appearance, the clothing brand and the museum might not have that much in common. However, in collaboration with each other, they bring extra value to their won customers. Customers of the Daily Paper brand value aesthetics an art. Daily Paper is tied to Amsterdam fashion culture and therefore the collaboration with the Amsterdam based museum makes sense. The Daily Paper customer benefits from this collaboration as it strengthens the relationships with the customer as being an Amsterdam high art brand. At the same time, the customers (or visitors) of the museum brand benefit as the fashion brand allows them to wear a piece of apparel inspired by their favourite artists.

Through the collaboration, they bring extra value to the customer, but also differentiate themselves from competitors.

9.2.3 NESPRESSO (2)

For these design principles, Nespresso is once again a good practice. A consequence of applying this design principle is that the brand has control over a direct physical channel to interact with their consumer. However, what Nespresso does great with its physical stores is the creation of a unique experience that can not be rivalled by digital platforms. Their stores are particularly designed to let the customer experience new coffee in a way that pleases their senses. The physical stores add to the complete brand experience by giving the customer services that can not be experienced digitally. In doing so the brand is able to connect with the customer more deeply and strengthen the relationship with the customer.

Protect your playground.

9.2.4 PATAGONIA

A brand that perfectly captures the emotional side of branding is the apparel brand Patagonia. Their brand messaging usually does not involve the products themselves at all. Instead, they focus on their mission and the important values they uphold. This strong emotional side creates a sense of community among the consumers buying the brand. The benefit of highlighting this emotional aspect of your brand is that it also reinforces the relationship for loyal customers. This way when the customer sees the brand it will associate it with a specific emotion. This not only helps the Patagonia brand to set itself apart from the competition but also helps them deepen the relationships they have with their customer. for Patagonia their emotional message makes sense as it the message is part of their core business and is thus earned. It would be very hard for a brand to immediately claim the same emotional relationship with the customer when there is no proof that what they are saying is also what they are standing for. Having a well-defined purpose and mission is therefore key to building an authentic emotional connection and just like a well-written character in a movie, give it time to develop.

9.2.4 CORONA BEER

Brands nowadays have very lavish purposes and missions, but seldomly act on them. A great example of a brand that actually gives back to its community is the beer brand Corona. The now infamous brand name is known for its summer style beer. Beaches are an important part of their brand imagery, even being part of their slogan: find your beach. Their mission to create and preserve the perfect beach has motivated them to do a lot of volunteering work to clean up beaches. This is best summarized in their campaign slogan: plastic doesn't belong in paradise. In their effort to create a better world through volunteering work the brand becomes more than just a regular beer brand. In the relationship with the customer, it enforces their role is doing something good for the consumer. In this case, doing good for society is doing good for business.

9.2.4 IKEA

A great example of a brand that shows they understand the context of the customers is Ikea. In Canada, the first of July is known as the day many people move before leases expire. Especially young people are moving in and out of their houses in the run-up to that specific date. These young people make up an important part of Ikea's target audience. Ikea clearly understood the cultural context of their target audience surrounding that day. In a promotional campaign, Ikea drove around the city of Montreal handing out free moving boxes to everyone that needed them. This act perfectly showed how the brand was aware of a specific context of their customers and without the asking of the customer showed an empathic gesture. They portrayed to their customers that they understood their struggles and were there to help them. This act of listening deepens the strength of the relationship with the customer as it builds trust and shows commitment to their customers.

The example shows the importance of understanding macro and micro-cultures. the same promotional stunt might not have worked so well in another city or perhaps another country as a culture might differ slightly or value different things. digital culture is the same, the way people interact on Facebook is very different from the way they interact with Instagram.

9.3   INSIGHTS   & REFLECTIONS

An important insight I got when researching an example of the design principles, is the fact that usually, a company acting well on one design principle also did well in another category. This can be explained due to the fact that some of these principles are very close to each other. For example, the application of the design principle about better listening to your customer can result in your brand being perceived as more emotional by your customer. In general, I believe that listening to your customers is the most important thing a brand can do but is often neglected. just like in real life people often think they know better at forget to listen to the people they are in a relationship with. Platforms in that sense are important as they force the brand to start listening to their customer. If you don't listen clearly to the context of your customer you will take a risk of losing them to a brand that does listen.

SECTION 10.0

FINAL THOUGHTS

This section shows the main conclusions of the project and reflects on the outcomes discussing potential limitations and recommendations for future exploration.

FINAL THOUGHTS

10.1 CONCLUSION

Digital platforms will increasingly become a more important part of how a business operates. It is merely a question of time before a new platform will arise and reshuffle the cards in a particular industry, just like Booking, Amazon and Uber have done. This graduation project set out to answer the question of how brands prepare themselves best for this reshuffle and maintain aa meaningful relationship with their customer.

How can the use of new insights and knowledge contribute to the creation of meaningful customer brand relationships within a future platform economy in the Dutch market?

In this project, I have defined 6 principles that contribute to a high strategic level for brands to create meaningful relationships with their customers.

I conclude that digital platforms are not the enemy. They help the consumers make sense of the competitive landscape and give the consumers more options to choose from. Through their platforms, they create an equal playing field for different brands, small and big. In doing so they force the brands to make more effort in articulating their brand message to the customer and listen better to their customers. Because if they don't their customer can now more then every easily switch and choose a brand that fits better to their context or helps them achieve the right identity goals.

Brands have to choose if they are a utilitarian brand or an experienced brand, the latter requires brand managers to step up their game and make more effort in explaining why their brand is superior to others. In the age of digital platforms brands that actually want to build relationships have to put more effort into their brand activities as it becomes more important to articulate their brand imagery to the customers.

10.2 FUTURE VALUE PWC

Digital platforms disrupt the way traditional businesses operate. Airbnb and Uber show that linear business models are prone to change the way they deliver value to their clients. In the future more platforms like Amazon or Booking.com will rise and change the way brands will interact with their customers.

This project aimed to explore a new scenario that tries to explain how meaningful relationships between brand and consumer can be formed. The design principles that came out of his project serve as reference points for PwC to engage with their clients on how they can prepare themselves for this future. Each of these design principles is the starting point for study on its own but helps PwC by starting the right conversations with their clients. Ultimately the Experience Consulting team want to help their clients in creating experiences that deliver on the brand promise. The design principles can assist the Experience Consulting team in the exploration of new ways of delivering these experiences that ultimately help the clients form meaningful relationships with their customer, which in turn will lead to a more competitive brand.

10.3 LIMITATIONS

Besides the result, it is also important to realize the limitations of the research.

Starting on this endeavour I found that there is still very little known about brand relationships. The paper written by Susan Fournier is still considered key literature but is written almost 20 years ago. Still much has changed in the last tears, mainly the rise of the internet.

Validating the design principles was done by testing the principles on a specific brand. This case served to solidify how the end results of these design principles could potentially look like. However, this also shows the limitations as only one case study was done. Ideally, a full empirical study is needed with a larger sample to completely validate the design principles.

10.4 FUTURE RESEARCH

With this project, I dipped my toe in what feels like an ocean of possibilities. There is still a lot to be uncovered in the domain of brand relationships design and digital platform business models.

H2H BUSINESS MODELS

A large advantage of digital platforms business models is that it allows ordinary people to connect with each and offer services to each other. This human 2 human business model can be seen on platforms like Airbnb and Uber. Due to time constraints, these H2H platforms were largely ignored. However, the disruptive nature of these platforms has shown that they disrupt the relationship between brand and consumer. More research should be done on the effect of these H2H platforms to understand their effect on the relationship between consumers and brands.

The future world is built largely on the context factors gathered through my research. However, the quality of the outcome is determined by the amount of data gathered. More time for this phase would have probably resulted in even more insights which in turn might influence the result of the future scenarios. At the same time, the clustering of the data is done by the researcher. A different design student might have perhaps had different world views as he or she would have analyzed the qualitative data in a different way. I tried to mitigate the effect of my own opinions in the process by hosting a generative session with fellow design students.

The design principles are built upon a chosen future scenario. However, this future will likely not exist on its own and multiple scenarios can play out at the same time producing different results. The result of this project thus serves as an exploration of this potential scenario but does not give any

CURATION ETHICS

This project largely focuses on brands having to adapt in order to be resilient against platforms. In addition, these digital platforms could potentially also increase the relationships between the consumer and brand by employing a more ethical curation process. Curation is an important part of the process as it is the only way for consumers to make sense of the vast amount of data, but they also largely determine what consumers see online. More research should be done on the creation of fair curation ethics that ensures consumers are protected against bad practices.

10.5 PERSONAL REFLETION

The graduation project is now finally at an end, which leaves some room to reflect on the whole process. Even though 100 days is a long period to work on a single project, in hindsight it went by faster then I could have thought. In the end, I'm proud of the result I have delivered and grateful for the learning journey it has brought me.

The project was a challenging endeavour to start with. The graduation project is already a very isolated project compared to the rest of the master, but due to lockdown restrictions, this lonely journey sometimes felt a bit more lonely. The situation pushed me harder to get feedback from my peers, but also ask for help when I'm stuck.

Like any project, there are some good experiences, some bad experiences and some key takeaways.

The good experiences came from the insightful discussion with the subject matter experts and my supervisory team. This sometimes led to very philosophical discussions, which I enjoyed a lot. They also helped make sense of the big questions this project raised and it helped me deal with the complexity of the project.

The lesser experiences were of course the moments I felt stuck. Especially in these times of lockdown, it is hard to reach out to somebody and talk about your project. In these moments I miss the open atmosphere of the IDE faculty where a coffee with fellow students was always a minute away and they could point you in a direction that you may not have thought of before.

One of the key takeaways I take from this project is the following quote from my supervisory team:

Don't strive for perfection, strive for originality!

I think this line perfectly captures what it is to be a designer. You don't need to know 100% of everything in order to come up with ideas that create value. It also captures to me what it means to be a strategic designer. You need to know a little bit about everything, but not everything about a little bit.

THE SUPERVISORY TEAM
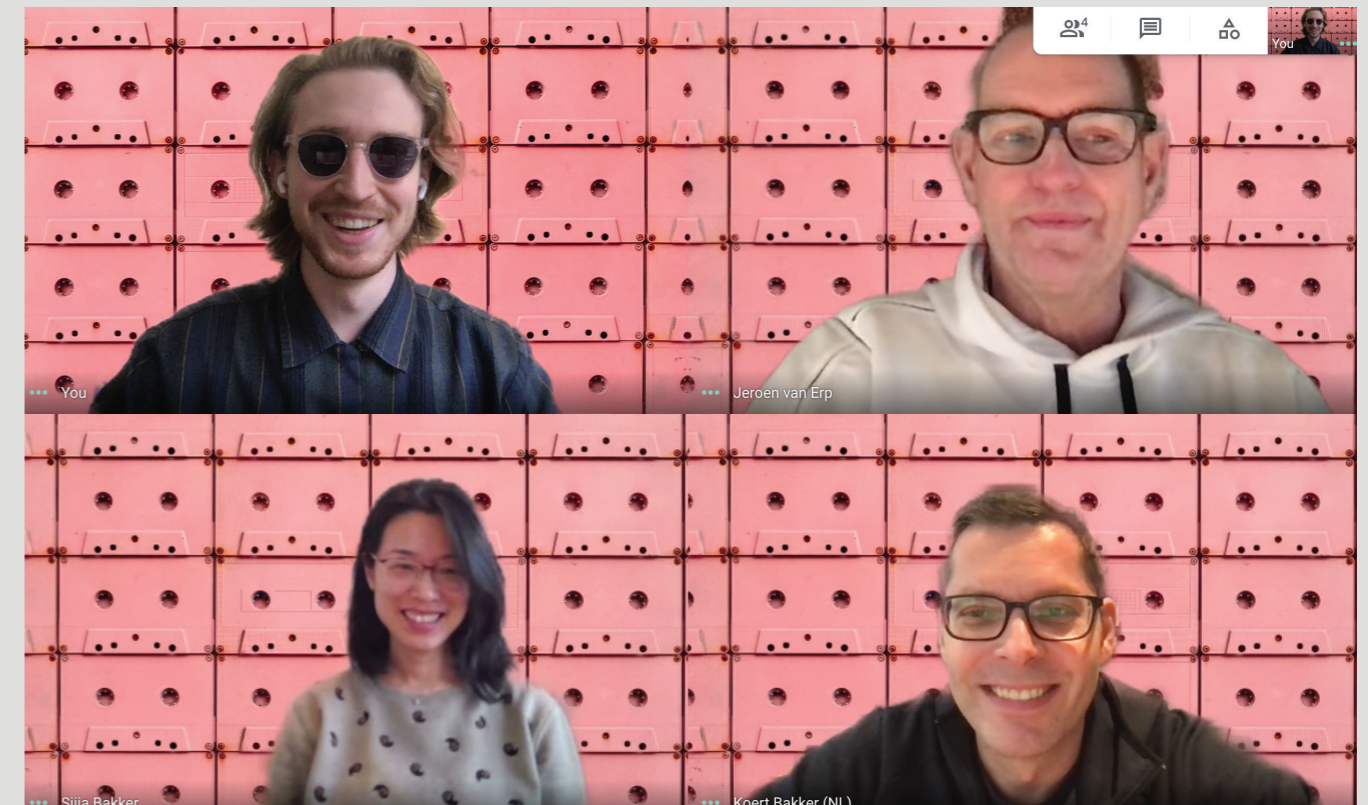
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SECTION 12.0

APPENDIX

The appendix can be found in a seperate file

CONTENT

1. Project Brief
2. Complete list of context factors