

# **Master's Thesis**

## **Fashion Designers: Building a Fashion Business**

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## Preface

Writing a thesis is one of the requisites to complete a Master's Degree in Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Radboud University Nijmegen. This thesis will address a research question, *“How designers with limited resources can build a successful fashion business by balancing creative vision, capitals, and marketing capabilities?”*

The question arises from my own personal interest in fashion entrepreneurship. Prior to coming to the Netherlands, I got the opportunity to learn fashion at ESMOD Jakarta and worked as an assistant designer. Therefore, I was very excited when I figured Dr. Nanne Migchels came up with a creative industry topic and was beyond thrilled to learn that I got to work with him on this topic.

With this opportunity I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Nanne Migchels for the advice, kind gestures, and endless support, not only during the period when we worked together for the thesis but over the course of my study at Radboud University. As an international student I greatly appreciate it. Also to Dr. Sibel Ozasir Kacar for the constructive feedback that allows me to step up to the plate and reach my potential.

Additionally, to the designers who have been very generous with their time and knowledge. I am very grateful for the opportunity. Also my friends in the Netherlands, US, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia who have been very supportive with my study and thesis. Lastly, my parents who have been my number one support system for me through and through. Terima kasih banyak

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## Abstract

One-third of designer-entrepreneurs would go out of business after three years in the fashion industry (Malem, 2008). Moreover, not all aspiring designer-entrepreneurs are endowed with abundant resources to start their own label. While previous studies probe into designer's survival strategies and coping mechanisms, this research focuses on variables that are deemed imperative by experienced designer-entrepreneurs to start and strive in the industry according to Bourdieu (1993)'s cultural field theory, Bourdieu (1986)'s capital theory, and Weerawardena (2003)'s marketing capability theory. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how designers with limited resources can build a successful fashion business by balancing creative vision, capitals, and marketing strategies.

In order to address the question, nine semi-structured interviews were conducted. Participants are designer-entrepreneurs from Indonesia, Malaysia, and The Netherlands. With thematic analysis, transcripts from the interviews were analyzed. The result suggests that it is pivotal for designers to have the ability to create value that can be appreciated and is appealing to the field. Moreover, economic capital should not be a hindrance for fashion designers to start their own label. Social capital is deemed to be vital in providing designers with access to myriad resources.

Additionally, this also leads to a conclusion that whether the audience is vast or restricted, one must be able to figure the right balance between their creative aspirations and the field's demand to keep the business going. Hence, by shifting to the experiential marketing approach, designers can deliver long-term value for the customers and to shift from merely performing marketing functions to building a stronger customer base and competitive advantage.

*Keywords: fashion entrepreneurship, creative vision, capitals, and marketing capabilities, designer entrepreneur*

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1. 1. Introduction

Miuccia Prada (n.d.) once said that, “what you wear is how you present yourself to the world, especially today, when human contacts are so quick. Fashion is instant language.” Hence, fashion has been recognized as one of the forms of self-expression and also frequently associated with one’s character, mood, and personality. Moreover, fashion has also become an acclaimed subject within the postmodern art world as a result of broadened conceptions of fashion and art (Kim, 1998). Therefore, it requires a great understanding of the market and unique strategies to create a fashion business as art is in the eye of the beholder (Kim et. al., 2020). In addition to that, a designer needs to understand the value of his or her own creativity (Malem, 2008). Being filled with creative minds, it is imperative to have the capability to manage creative vision in order to get accepted by the actors in the field (Ngara, 2010).

Nevertheless, being creative and talented is deemed to be insufficient to create a successful fashion enterprise. Designers also need to understand the importance of selecting the right business approach. It can be a struggle to find the right balance between business and creative aspirations as it is considered to be the key to success in the industry (Malem, 2008; Mills, 2011; Aako & Niinimäki 2018). Moreover, not all designers are endowed with abundant resources and business knowledge to start their company. Hence, in the beginning a lot of them are less likely to be included in the industry network unlike those established designers (Mills, 2011). Notwithstanding the challenges, many designers dream to set their foot in the industry but many find starting a business in the industry intimidating and challenging. Moreover, designers are prone to make costly mistakes and get lost in this highly competitive and face-paced industry. In fact, one-third of designers in the fashion industry would go out of business within three years of start-up (Malem, 2008).

Despite the high inclination of designers to start their own label, through which they can unreservedly express their conceptual and aesthetic ideas, there is only a few research that concentrates on designer’s creative and entrepreneurial approach. Most studies related to fashion business center its study around retail and global branding which applications are more appropriate for the later stage of business expansion. Moreover, studies about fashion business usually have larger scale brands and retailers as the samples. In addition to that, the participants

of the two related studies about designer's creative and entrepreneurial approach by Malem (2008) and Aako & Niinimäki (2018) only include designers from one specific area. Hence, the two previous research have an exploratory nature. Meanwhile, this research tries to assess the topic with Bourdieu (1993)'s theory about field of cultural production and Bourdieu (1986)'s theory about capital as the underlying theories to approach the research question. This way researcher can expand the two previous studies' perspective on certain topics which will be discussed further in the discussion.

Furthermore, a research question is then developed to be addressed in the study, *“How designers with limited resources can build a successful fashion business by balancing creative vision, capitals, and marketing capabilities?”* This research will be an extension to the two previous studies about fashion designers' creative and entrepreneurial approach by Malem (2008) and Aako & Niinimäki (2018). The research by Malem (2008) focuses on designers' business approach and survival strategies that will allow them to sustain in the market while the study by Aako & Niinimäki (2018) centers the research on the challenges that designer-entrepreneurs encounter while running their business and its coping mechanisms. Therefore, this study should be able to fill in the gap by providing insights through qualitative research. The study aims to investigate the contributions of creative vision, capitals, and marketing capabilities to the success of designers in the fashion industry. Moreover, one of the objectives of the research is to look into the importance and influence of field in designer's creative and business decisions. Additionally, the study will also investigate the importance of having the economic, social, and cultural capital for the business. Also, to figure the marketing strategies and tools designers find working for their business.

In the research, Creative Vision, Capitals, Strong Brand, and Marketing Strategy are selected as variables that are deemed to be the key contributors to the success of fashion designer-entrepreneurs in the fashion industry. Creative vision is picked as one of the main variables because Malem (2008) stressed the importance of understanding one's creativity perceived by the agents in the marketplace as the underlying basis to the business approach in the fashion industry. This statement then leads to a bigger theory about the field in cultural production by Bourdieu (1993). In addition to that, Bourdieu (1986) also suggests that possession of the capitals will determine the person's power position in a specific field. Moreover, he also argued that capitals are not restricted to economic capital only. Bourdieu (1986) proposed that capitals comprise three typologies namely economic capital, social capital and cultural capital. Lastly, Weerawardena (2003)'s marketing capabilities theory supposedly extends the Malem (2008)'s view on how designer can communicate effectively with the

chosen markets. Piercy (1997) emphasizes the importance of shifting from merely performing marketing functions such as sales and promotion to delivering long-term customer and shareholder value to gain competitive advantage in a highly competitive market.

Additionally, the prominence of the research is to adequately appraise the shared knowledge and experiences of designers who are already in business, to the current and aspiring designer-entrepreneurs. Moreover, the outcome of the study should allow novice designer-entrepreneurs who are interested in starting a business to quickly comprehend the aspects required to set up a fashion business and develop strategies that are unique to the environment they are operating in. Hence, the outcome of the study contributes to the existing knowledge and the body of knowledge. More of the theoretical and practical implications of the research will be explicate in the final chapter of this paper.

In the following chapters, a literature review will be presented followed by methodology and results. Finally, a discussion is offered and a conclusion will be drawn.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

### 2. 1. Creative Vision

Many who aspire to become a fashion designer also dream of having their own label, through which they can unreservedly express their conceptual and aesthetic ideas (Aakko & Niinimäki, 2018). These conceptual and aesthetic ideas are also identified as creative vision. Creative vision is defined as imaginative idea, insight, mental image, fantasy, or visualization prior to its actualization into substantive reality (Marshall, 2007). It is the firm's specific asset which underpins the firm's innovative capability (Earl & Poots, 2016). Furthermore, a creative vision can be generated through a conscious intent to master and transcend prevailing artistic expressions in the domain (Ngara, 2010). By this definition, a creative vision should be conveyed by the artist and accepted by agents in the field. Hence, it all started with an idea and creativity. Malem (2008) suggests that when creating a business, a designer needs to understand the value of his or her own creativity.

In literature, there are a few names that have studied about creativity. One of the earliest theories argues that creativity is the emergence of a novel relation product whose uniqueness is beyond its materials, events, people, or circumstances (Rogers, 1954). However, most theorists simply define creativity as novelty that is useful (Stein, 1974). While most researchers believe that creativity occurs at the individual level, Amabile (1988) and Csikszentmihalyi (1988) claim that creativity also emerges in different places. Creativity is also identified as a production of novel and useful ideas by an individual or small group of individuals working together (Amabile, 1988). Besides, Csikszentmihalyi (1988) offers a compelling notion to measure creativity related to the parameters cultural symbol system (domain) in which creative activity takes place and the social roles or norms (field) that regulate that given creative activity.

#### 2. 1. 1. Field

Malem (2008) stressed the importance of understanding the value perceived by the agents in the marketplace as the underlying basis to the business approach in the fashion industry. Likewise, Bourdieu (1993) emphasizes the influence of the field itself in determining



one's success in the field. He further argues that works of art are the manifestation of the field as a whole and all the determinisms inherent in its structure and functioning are concentrated. Additionally, the positions of agents in a field are typically arranged depending on the amount and type of economic and cultural capital they possess which become the axes of the field. Within the cultural fields, the axes correspond to two subfields namely a field of restricted production which has a restricted audience, and the field of large-scale production whose orientation is to accumulate economic capital and to produce for a broader audience (Bourdieu, 1993). It is pivotal for a designer-entrepreneur to decide the market orientation and field he or she would serve. A designer who would consider starting their own line must reckon the field's value, especially during the creative process, as it holds power to determine one's success in the field.

### 2. 1. 2. Nomos

A designer-entrepreneur's decision on whether he or she will follow the nomos or deviate from the norms, will be pivotal for their venture's trajectory. Bourdieu (1993) explains that nomos refers to the specific norms that are prevalent in the field and regulate the actions of agents in the field as they are typically unspoken but universally comprehended by all agents in a field. He believes that nomos is grounded in principles of vision and division that date back in the 19th century. He claims that nomos encompasses principles of vision in that it proposes a particular vision as the legitimate vision which leads to division. He suggests that the world is based on dividing groups of individuals, objects, or practices of which categories have hierarchical relations. He also gave an example of the contemporary painters that were classified into groups according to their extent of adherence to the nomos of the field. He classified the group of painters according to their virtue whether they are naive, ignorant, rebellious, or misguided (Bourdieu, 1993). There is nothing against the avant-garde but customers should perceive the idea as valuable. Nevertheless, designers must understand the market thoroughly in order to make the products well-tailored to the market. (Malem, 2008)

## 2. 2. Capital

Capital is deemed to be vital to develop a viable business. Bourdieu (1986) defines capital as accumulated labor which enables people to appropriate energy in the form of reified or living labor. He criticized the popular belief of capital as a mere monetary exchange. He further classified them into three main typologies such as economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital. These capitals are assumed to be the determinants of peoples' social position in society. He also emphasizes the possibility of the interplay between each capital which can be converted into one another. The acquisition of other capital might depend on other capital. Possession of the capitals will determine the person's power position in a specific field (Bourdieu, 1986).

### 2. 2. 1. Economic Capital

It seems impossible to run a business without economic capital. Economic capital refers to material assets which hold monetary value and can immediately and directly be converted into money or institutionalized in the form of property rights (Bourdieu, 1986). Economic capital encompasses all kinds of material resources such as financial resources, land or property ownership, and assets that could be used to start a business. While economic capital is deemed vital for start-up however it is not solely the main contributor to one's dominance in the field. The circulating misconception is that people's accumulation of capital is primarily based on their existing possession of capital, primarily the economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Moreover, nowadays, there are myriad different means to gain economic capital. Carter and van Auken (2005) suggests that to fund and bootstrap a start-up, an entrepreneur can use funds from non-formal sources such as personal loans which applied to the venture, credit card debt, delaying payments, minimizing accounts receivable and sharing resources other than personal funds as options.

### 2. 2. 2. Social Capital

Social capital is often overshadowed by economic capital despite being one of the prominent means to gain resources vital for a business. Bourdieu (1986) identified social

capital as the social network of an agent. It is the resources made available to the agent in the network by virtue of the social network in the informal, professional or familial relational forms. Moreover, resources are accessible through group membership, relationships, networks of influence and support (Pinxten & Lievens, 2014). Social capital is accruing from relationships, making the person richly endowed with capital not only with social capital, but can also have cultural and economic capital. A person can gain maximum benefit of social capital by transforming all circumstantial relationships into lasting connections, when it is exerted it is highly productive (Bourdieu, 1986).

### *Networking*

It is believed that networking can enhance organizational and business performance. Networking encompasses social processes over and above the normal economic trading relationship (Chell & Baines, 2000). In the beginning of the stage, ‘strong tie’ networks are imperative for the entrepreneur. People who are linked by strong ties tend to trust each other and are more likely to exchange information and other resources. However, Chell and Baines (2000) argued that dependency on strong ties militates against the generation of new information. It also becomes a hindrance for owner-managers in gaining new perspectives and creating business opportunities for growth and development. Therefore, entrepreneurs and perhaps managers should consider expanding their network and creating weak ties. Weak ties will enable the individuals to actively and purposefully reach outside their immediate close social circle (Granovetter, 1973). By taking advantage of their networking system, businesses can gain complementary expertise or assets that allow gaps to be bridged (Dennis, 2000). Networks also provide links to new product ideas and new sales opportunities (Ashton, 2006). Therefore, it is pivotal for fashion entrepreneurs to reach out to the right people to open the door of contacts, insightful information, inspiration, opportunities, sales and myriad resources that will be beneficial to the development of the business.

### **2. 2. 3. Cultural Capital**

As a designer-entrepreneur, cultural capital is arguably the key to success in the field. It is hard to fake and it enables the person to generate reputation by virtue of the social

distinctions the knowledge communicates. According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital refers to the cultural knowledge an agent has accumulated throughout his or her life. It can be acquired to a varying extent depending on the period, society, and social class, in the absence of any deliberate calculation. Cultural capital may include knowledge, skill, education, or any similar advantages a person has that can potentially allow her or him to earn a higher status in society (Pinxten & Lievens, 2014). However cultural capital may diminish or die as the person gets older or die because it is closely tied with a person's biological capacity and memory (Bourdieu, 1986).

### *Symbolic Domination*

Symbolic distinction will allow businesses to gain domination in a certain market segment which enables enterprises to sustain and thrive. Bourdieu (1986) argues that aesthetic distinction and dispositions are connected to class. He further emphasizes importance of the role aesthetic and cultural discrimination in the establishment and maintenance of class division. Symbolic distinction can secure material and symbolic profit with the cultural competence that drives scarcity value for the agent. He also claimed that personal style is never more than a deviation in relation to a style of a period or class. The production of symbolic domination arises because deviations rarely attempt to overthrow the hierarchy of style but simply trying to find a place to fit within. Eventually, it will reinforce the legitimacy of that hierarchy on which its symbolic domination is based.

### **2. 3. Building a Strong Brand**

For centuries, brand has been used as a means to distinguish products from one producer to another. Arguably, it has been the key driver of economic values for fashion brands. Aaker (1996) claims that product's superiority is no longer the sole driver of business performance. A strong brand can transform a generic product into a valuable product that leads to customer preference, loyalty, and commitment. Additionally, with a strong brand firms can charge premium prices that will enhance its profitability (Weerawardena, 2003; Kotabe, 2002). Moreover, it allows firms to be immune to parity spirals that can suck companies into ruinous

pricing wars. Aaker (1992) also argued that an effective branding should have the four dimensions; awareness, associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty.

In contemporary culture, a brand is a symbol of the company's vision. Furthermore, it comprises names, slogans, logos, product design, packaging, advertising and marketing that make a brand recognizable (Hung & Li, 2007). Kapferer (2008) argued that brand and business are intertwined with each other therefore when building both brand and business, entrepreneurs must be aware that production, staffing, distribution, pricing and advertising that are considered as brand touchpoints because they matter to firm's overall brand perceived by consumers. Additionally, consumers would typically associate brands with attributes such as feature, usage situation, product spokesperson, or logo (Anderson, 1983). This association network forms a brand's image which defines brand uniqueness and value to customers that can be leveraged in the marketplace (Aaker 1996).

It also involves a cerebral dimension in which persona is embedded in the minds of the consumers. Brands that have the ability to trigger an emotional response in the consumer's mind given the environment they encounter are deemed to be the successful ones. (Hung & Li, 2007; Williams, 2000). Likewise, Keller (2003) believes that the power of the brand lies in the mind of the customer based on what they have experienced and learned about the brand. Aaker (1996) suggests that in order to build a strong brand a firm should consider the five elements that are deemed to be helpful; have a clear identity, a corporate brand, integrated and consistent communications, customer relationships, and symbols and slogans.

### 2. 3. 1. Brand Identity

Fundamentally, consumers are more likely to find involvement in brands which they perceive brand identity congruent with their personal or social identity (i.e. brand identity similarity) (He et al., 2016; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Meanwhile, often people confuse brand identity with brand image. Kapferer, (2008) argues that brand image is on the receiver's side while brand identity is on the sender's side. He further explains that brand image focuses on how a product is perceived by the customers while brand identity is an element that a firm is sending in the midst of a variety of products, actions, and communications. In the early literature, brand identity is identified as the internal construct which represents the notion of what the brand should be (Aaker, 1996; de Chernatony, 1999). The deliberate identity of a

brand demonstrates the defining directions for all of the firm's marketing activities (Ianenکو, 2020).

However, managers frequently experience myopia where they perceive brand image more positively than that perceived by consumers. Therefore, entrepreneurs need to ensure the compatibility between the projected brand identity and how it is perceived by the consumers as it is deemed as pivotal (Ross & Harradine, 2010). Likewise, Aaker (1992) also emphasizes the importance of being aware of the customers' thoughts of their brand and the consistency with the firm's brand image before making any decision. This way companies can develop a strong brand with a clear and strong identity (Aaker, 1992). Moreover, it is considered as the first step in creating brand equity is to develop a brand identity (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2003).

### 2. 3. 2. Brand Equity

Aaker (1996) argues that when starting a company, not only that the management needs to build their tangible asset but also their intangible assets which he identified as brand equity. Likewise, Kapferer (2008) defines the term of brand equity as an asset which is built over a period of time. The concept of brand equity emphasizes the importance of the role of brand particularly in the marketing strategies (Keller, 2003). Consumer knowledge can drive diversity in manifestation of brand equity which is deemed to have an important managerial implication. He also believes that brand equity provides brands a focus and guidance with a means to interpret their marketing performance and help them design their marketing activities. Furthermore, Aaker (1996) and Keller (2003) argued that brand equity can be achieved through awareness of the brand's strong, favorable and unique set of associations that a firm aspires to create or maintain. Therefore, implementing a brand equity management system is vital in managing one of firm's most valuable assets which allows the organization to position its brand more accurately and enable the brand to progress towards goals (Keller 2008).

### 2. 3. 3. Brand Positioning

The aim of positioning is to identify a strong purchasing rationale that gives the company real or perceived advantage over the competition (Kapferer, 2008). It can be stated that acknowledging how a customer perceives a brand is imperative for a company. The dogma

is that brand positioning revolves around planning with successful launch (Doyle, 1975). Furthermore, it has emerged as the strategic resolution for companies in generating competitive advantage in the marketplace (Ameyibor, 2021; Aaker 2004). Therefore, companies should mindfully outline the image in the context of competition with other brands in the same category as it is significantly associated with the general impression of positioning.

Firm's ability to deliver their unique selling point will allow companies to formulate effective marketing strategies and help customers to grasp the brand's essence. Hence, brand positioning plays a key role in the overall brand management and marketing performance as it is arguably the primary basis for marketing activities and product strategies (Ameyibor et al., 2021, Larsen 2018). In addition to that, how strong the position that remains in the minds of consumers should be constantly evaluated (Iorgulescu & Marcu, 2019). Firms can regularly adjust their brand position to accommodate the constantly changing consumer preferences and adapt to new markets. (Gaustad et al., 2018). Moreover, companies should be agile in responding to change and highly capable in exploiting opportunities which may arise (Cavender & Kincade, 2014).

## 2. 4. Marketing Strategy

Marketing capability provides companies with a sustainable competitive advantage. It is defined as firm's collective knowledge, skills, and resources that the business to add value to its goods and services and meet competitive demands (Weerawardena, 2003; Day, 1994). Hence, product needs to be brought to the attention and made available to be appealing to the market (Weerawardena, 2003). In cultural production, Petrides & Fernandes (2020) suggest that brand creation begins with artistic production however it requires participation from the gatekeepers and the general public. Public has the word of mouth power simply by visiting, following and commenting on social media which can contribute to brand consolidation and magnification of artistic reputation. Therefore, a solid marketing strategy is deemed to be fundamental.

One of the means to develop a marketing strategy is to use a marketing mix framework. Londhe (2014) argues that marketing mix is not necessarily a scientific theory, but merely a conceptual framework that assists entrepreneurs and managers in configuring offerings to suit consumers' needs and make principal decisions. In the early discussions, marketing mix is

defined as a means of integrating each phase of a product which contributes to its ultimate salability. This comprises price, packaging, label, quality, shape, size and color, method of distribution and sales. In addition to that it also includes advertising, sales promotion, publicity and public relations programs. The integration of all these factors is embodied in the marketing mix. (Stein, 1961) One of the earliest theories that was prevalent and adopted by many entrepreneurs and organizations is the McCarthy's (1964) 4Ps. The framework proposed factors like product, price, promotion and place in the mix. According to Rafiq and Ahmed (1995), there were various alterations to the 4Ps framework that have been proposed. However, the theory receives numerous criticisms from the service industry. To counter the critiques, Booms and Bitner's (1981) extended the marketing mix framework and developed 7Ps framework can be applied to a broader marketing context in myriad industries. The 7Ps model demonstrates superiorities over the 4Ps framework. Booms and Bitner's (1981) expansion of the 4Ps model to involve process, physical evidence and participants. The model seems to receive positive response and has gained widespread acceptance particularly in the services marketing literature since (Rafiq & Ahmed, 1995).

However, the adoption of the marketing mix in the fashion industry is assumed to shift from the traditional approach of marketing mix, the 7Ps framework. Batat (2019) suggests that ventures should consider the implementation of experiential marketing and communication to create and share value with their customers. The theory proposes a 7Es framework for the experiential marketing mix whose components encompass Experience, Exchange, Extension, Emphasis, Empathy capital, Emotional touchpoints, and Emic/etic process (Batat, 2019). The 7Es framework integrates decision-making attributes related to strategic or marketing decisions in the company. In addition to that, the new framework is reckoned to assist entrepreneurs to meet organizational and strategic objectives with a robust and sustainable competitive advantage generated from the value creation and sharing process (Batat, 2019).

Although the approach is different the underlying theory is rather comparable. In principle, coordination of marketing-mix activities should enable organizations to gain advantage of the complementarity and to minimize incompatibility between marketing-mix variables (Gatignon, 1993). Often, companies face challenges due to constraints with the marketing budget as well as the marketing-mix instruments themselves. In principle, marketing mix is claimed to be a conceptual framework that helps entrepreneurs to define the principals in a decision-making process which allow them to configure their offerings that suit consumers' needs rather than a mere scientific theory (Paul, 2014).



## 2. 5. Competitive Advantage

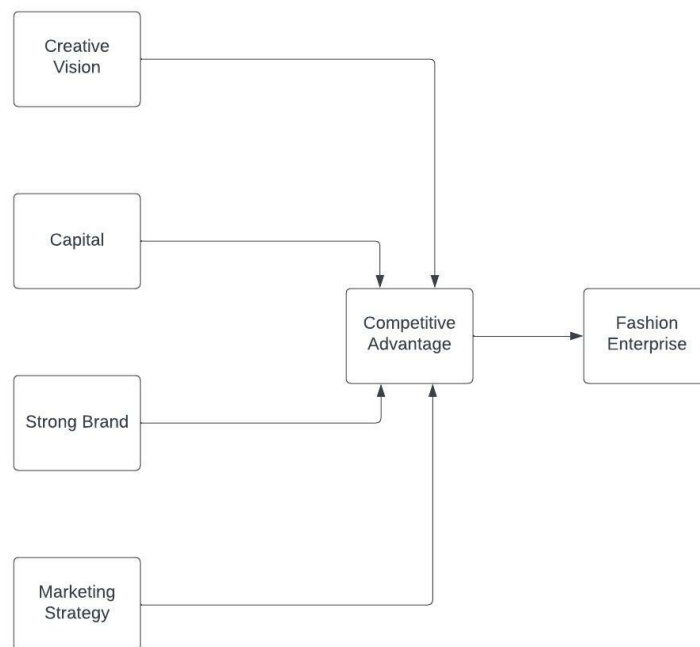
For designers turning entrepreneurs, it could be challenging to figure out the right strategy for his or her business especially in the early stage of building a business. Apparently, this is an issue for many organizations as well. Simkin (2002) claims that there are many factors that become a hindrance for organizations. However, he suggests that entrepreneurs should ensure that they are capable of facilitating the implementation of the basic marketing activities such as analysis, core marketing strategy, and the elements of the marketing mix. The importance of continuous improvement and update on subjects such as target market priorities, product range, and marketing offer is stressed (Simkin, 2002).

Furthermore, Piercy (1997) discusses the marketing implications and strategy execution process in an organization. He is adamant that marketing strategy formulation and implementation are linked. He believes that strategic initiatives can be appealing to the market while being in tune with the organization's execution capabilities. Meaning that fashion entrepreneurs can still be market oriented while at the same time being realistic. Consistency between the dimensions of a process is key to the implementation capabilities. He further emphasizes the importance of shifting from merely performing marketing functions such as sales and promotion to delivering long-term customer and shareholder value.

Likewise, Weerawardena (2003) challenged the previous studies by stating that marketing plays a role in contributing to a company's competitive advantage. He claims that the role of marketing in the strategy discussions often gets overlooked by the marketing related disciplines. Organizational creativity is arguably the primary source of sustainable competitive advantage (Parkman et. al., 2012). However, a unique and superior product is deemed to be imperative but often insufficient. Product needs to be brought to the attention made available to target customers of which inadequate marketing support will lead to failure (Weerawardena, 2003). Cooper and Kleinschmidt (1987) suggests that marketing synergy as a significant factor of success. Therefore, it can be stated that marketing capability can provide companies with a sustainable competitive advantage (Weerawardena, 2003). Therefore, it requires a balance of creativity and entrepreneurial orientations to be successful in the creative industry (Parkman et. al., 2012).

## 2. 6. The Conceptual Model

The main question of the study is “How designers with limited resources can build a successful fashion business by balancing creative vision, capitals, and marketing capabilities?” The research question is developed by combining three fundamental theories namely, Bourdieu (1993)’s field of cultural production theory, Bourdieu (1986)’s capital theory, and Weerawardena (2003)’s marketing capability theory. The conceptual model below outlines the variables that are deemed to be essential in establishing a fashion enterprise based on the theories mentioned.



## Chapter 3. Methodology

### 3. 1. Chosen Research Method

#### 3. 1. 1. Qualitative Research

According to Gummesson (2000), qualitative methodology can provide powerful tools for management and business studies. Moreover, qualitative study is immensely diverse, complex and nuanced (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Holloway & Todres, 2003). Qualitative studies allow researcher to gain an in depth understanding that may not be possible to do with a closed question survey. Moreover, participants are given more space and freedom to disclose their experiences, views and feelings without restraints. Therefore, this method is considered to be the most appropriate with the goal of the study which is to gain insights from designers' views and experiences related to establishing a fashion business.

### 3. 2. Data Sources

#### 3. 2. 1. Interview

The core methods of data collection in qualitative research include interviews, focus group, participatory visual methods, participant observation, and ethnography (Cassell & Symon, 2012). Interviews are considered as an exciting means and opportunities to potentially learn something important from the participant experiences and views on the subject. During the interview, researcher tries to find out as much information as possible about what it is considered as important to build a business from each participant. Valge (2014) suggests that it is recommended to leave some questions open and it is unnecessary to ask the same questions in the same way. Additionally, an in depth semi-structured interview is designed to allow researchers to have a number of interview questions prepared in advance and sufficiently open for subsequent questions (Wengraf, 2001).

Therefore, for this research, semi structured interview is picked to address the research question. Hence, follow up and improved questions was constructed in a careful manner in

order to gain maximum insight from the informants. During the interview, some participants' responses were different than anticipated thus some improvisations were necessary. This approach is assumed to be the most effective way to gain insight because the participants are given an opportunity to share their personal experiences and ideas regarding what they think are the best practices to succeed in the industry. The one-on-one session with the entrepreneur allows the researcher to focus on the respondent and the topic thus more insight can be generated.

### 3. 3. Data Collection

#### 3. 3. 1. Data Sample

For this research, nine designers were selected to participate in the interview. This number is deemed to be sufficient by referring to previous research by Malem (2008) which was conducted by interviewing nine designers. The duration of the interviews was ranging between 45 minutes to 1 hour. The participants were all fashion designers who run a fashion enterprise from small to medium scale business. Four of the participants are designers from Indonesia while three others are from the Netherlands and two from Malaysia. The objective was to create a variation in the sample in terms of demographic, business stage, and business scale. The fashion entrepreneurs were reached out through researcher's own contact. Three participants are direct connections of the researcher, four designers are from researcher's second-tier connection and two designers are from researcher's networking efforts. The researcher first reaches out the participants via instant messaging application, WhatsApp and email. After getting consent to interview, researcher then schedule an interview session.

#### 3. 3. 2. The interview procedures

Due to COVID and distance, most of the interviews were conducted via zoom call. All interviews were recorded using the record feature on zoom or a smartphone. The interview took around 45 minutes to 1 hour. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian or English depending on the preference of the participants. Since the interview is rather long, participants

were able to share their experience and perspective on the subject of building business as a fashion. Several measures were taken to ensure the interview quality.

Firstly, the interview was scheduled according to interviewees' availability. Hence, it was highly encouraged for them to ensure that they will only do the interview when they are free and not in the middle of something important that can potentially make them get distracted and hasty. Secondly, no notes were taken during the session thus the interviewer could focus and fully engaged in the exchange especially when a follow up question was reckoned necessary.

### 3. 4. Data Analysis Procedures

#### 3. 4. 1. Interview Transcription

Nine lengthy interviews were transcribed for this research. Four Interviews were done in Indonesian thus after getting transcribed in Indonesian, documents were carefully translated into English. Meanwhile, interviews that were conducted in English were transcribed with an online software Trint before minor inaccuracies were manually corrected by researcher. Relevant texts and interesting insights were highlighted and transferred into tables. In order to prevent misinterpretation, researcher labeled the findings from the literal quotation of the text relative to the context. Interesting findings were labeled into categories and transformed into codes.

#### 3. 4. 2. Coding Process

Coding is an iterative process of a constant moving back and forth between codes and data (Langley & Abdallah, 2011). Moreover, Saldaña (2009) explains that coding is a heuristic method of making meaning of individual pieces of data. It is a means of patterning, classifying, and later reorganizing each datum into different categories. The data used for this research is generated from the transcription of the recordings.

Since the chosen method is thematic analysis, Braun and Clark (2006)'s approach on coding is applied. Firstly, the words of participants were sorted through an open coding. From

there researcher was able to generate the initial codes. Afterwards, the initial codes were collated and reviewed. It is easy to get lost during the interpretation process if researcher fails to understand context. Therefore, it was important for researcher to keep going back to the original transcript and listen to the recording to validate. After themes were reviewed through constant comparison, researcher was able to generate the aggregate dimensions or core categories. Those categories serve as the summary of the elements from the recurring themes. Lastly, themes were defined and named.

### 3. 4. 3. Analysis Process

As mentioned briefly, the analysis method selected for this research is thematic analysis, specifically reflective thematic analysis. Braun and Clark (2006) argued that thematic analysis is a method which allows researchers to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning or themes within qualitative data. Moreover, it provides accessible and systematic procedures for generating codes and themes from qualitative data. Furthermore, they believe that the hallmark of using this method is its flexibility. Not only do researches are given a theoretical flexibility, but also flexibility with research question, sample size and constitution, data collection method, and approaches to meaning generation. (Braun & Clark, 2017) In regard to reflective thematic analysis, it is typical of inductive coding. It does not mean that theory is optional but rather researcher has flexibility to select theories that fits within that selected philosophical approach (Campbell et al., 2021).

To analyze the data, researcher followed the Braun and Clark (2006)'s phases of thematic analysis. The process starts with data familiarization that includes transcribing interview and thorough reading. Notes were also highlighted when necessary. Then, researcher generates the initial codes which are deemed relevant. Afterwards, collating codes into potential themes before generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis which followed by defining and naming themes with clear definitions and names for each theme. Lastly, producing comprehensive report which address the research question and literature.

#### 3. 4. 4. Analysis Presentation

In the following chapter, the analysis from the interviews will be elaborated. According to Langley and Abdallah (2011), the most salient and prevailing rhetorical pattern lies in the presentation of the findings. The analysis starts with a short definition of concept. Then, main findings are going to be presented in the form of a brief summary of interviewees' discourse. This will be done to provide an upfront embodiment of the paper's core message. Going further, researcher will elaborate themes in a narrative form using various references from participants' quotes in order to provide a compressive support to the statement (Langley & Abdallah, 2011). Following that, researcher's own interpretation of the statements will be provided to consolidate the findings. Lastly, after the presentation of the findings, researcher will elaborate the contribution of the study in the discussion section.

#### 3. 5. Research Quality

##### 3. 5. 1. Reliability and Validity

Patton (1990) argued that validity and reliability are two factors which any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study. He suggests using the measures to analyze results and judge the quality of the study. Furthermore, Seale (1999) states that "trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability."

To ensure the reliability of the study, researcher has used several methods. Firstly, a pilot interview was commenced prior to the actual interview. Interview was done with an acquaintance with no background in fashion designing and entrepreneurship to ensure that the questions are proper. Secondly, researcher repeated some of the highlights from the interviewees' answers for confirmation to minimize misinterpretation.

Furthermore, one important point is that despite the nature of qualitative research that can disclose interesting patterns useful for impending research and practical implications, the results of this research is not generalizable. This is due to lack of statistical-probabilistic generalizability (Myers, 2013).

### 3. 6. Ethics

In conducting this study, researcher is aware of the ethical concerns entailed. Traditionally, protecting the research participants is one of the most important aspects of the ethical responsibilities. During the interview, researcher did try to carry the research in compliance with professional codes of conducts. As Miller et. al. (2012) suggests, researcher began the interview by asking for the informants' consent, will to participate and be recorded. It is highly important that the interviewees' participation is conducted voluntarily. Once they agreed, it was then followed by announcing confidentiality and anonymity. Additionally, for this interview researcher had made sure that participants are aware and agree with the objective of the research in order to give valid answers.



## Chapter 4. Result

### 4.1. Creative Vision

Creative vision is regarded as one of the main variables in this study because Earl & Poots (2016) believe that it is the firm's specific asset which underpins the firm's innovative capability. Moreover, the previous research by Malem (2008) is certain that it is imperative for a designer to understand the value of his or her own creativity relative to the market. When designers were asked on the topic of creative vision, almost all of the designers but one appear to share a similar view on the topic by considering it as an important aspect in running a fashion business. Designer K claimed that ideas and visions are assets that are inimitable which allows designers to stand out therefore there are many designs that have a patent. Likewise, three designers claimed that creative vision is key to creating a brand that will stand out amongst the fierce competition. Meanwhile, three other designers claim that creative vision allows them to have a sense of direction of how they will do their business and create their collection.

“Yeah, definitely. Definitely. Because I think especially for like smaller designers, because there's such a huge difference between my brand versus H&M or Zara, for example, It's so important to have that great aspect because if it's just going to be the same as everything else, you can't really compete in the industry.” (Designer N)

“At the end of the day, you need to know who you are selling to, who you are, who, who your clients are and who you're selling to. [...] You know, these are the things that I have to think about because I can't be doing doing one thing and then suddenly pivot to like suddenly I do Avant-garde kind of design. So it will confuse my my customers.” (Designer F)

Majority of designers hinted that creative vision is pivotal in providing the business with a sense of direction, identity, and something to stand out in the competition especially against the mass produced and Chinese products. However, one designer expressed his opposition to the idea that creative vision is a crucial variable in creating a fashion business. He argues that having certain creative vision will restrict him as a designer who likes to do experiments.

“That is subjective to me because, during the time your creativity changes. For me I do not want to have a signature or anything for my brand, I would rather have a comedian kind of brand. Having a signature kind of restricts you long term. I want a non binary brand.”

(Designer M)

These statements by designers can be interpreted by coming to a claim that creative vision is vital for a fashion business. Ultimately, it helps designers to shape an identity to stand out among the fierce competition. Additionally, it provides a sense of direction to navigate the business and how the brand should be perceived by the customers. An extreme pivot to the vision can potentially confound the customers. However, at the end of the day, it will depend on one’s vision whether he or she wants to be perceived a certain way. Designers who are inclined to do experiments may not want to restrict their creativity by sticking to one vision.

#### 4. 1. 1. Field

Malem (2008) stressed the importance of understanding the value perceived by the agents in the marketplace as the basic principle of business approach in the fashion industry. Her claim about the significant role of agents in the field leads to the bigger theory about the field in cultural production by Bourdieu (1993). Aligns with Malem’s notion, all of the designers consent with the impression that understanding the value perceived by the agents in the marketplace is pivotal for their business. Especially for a designer-entrepreneur who is serving a larger-scale market like Designer S and Designer M with their ready to wear brands.

“It is really important to understand the market. As much as I like to experiment, there will be some pieces or looks that are meant for the market because business still has to run. [...] You do those trend research and so on, there is some influence from there as input to get sales.”

(Designer M)

Additionally, designer F also argued that it could be challenging to find the balance between the creative aspirations and business aspirations which aligned with the previous studies by Malem (2008) and Aakko & Niinimäki (2018).

“Because you cannot succumb too much to the business until you lose your vision and you lose your direction. But then you cannot be too artistic that you forget about the business aspect of it. You need to sell because you still need to make money for rent.” (Designer F)

Meanwhile, Designer E suggests that it will depend on the designer’s goal orientation. If the goal is to maximize economic gain then pleasing a wide audience will be key. Her argument supports Bordieu’s theory about two subfields which are categorized by the size of the audience and economic goal orientation (Bourdieu, 1993). However, being a designer for a restricted audience does not necessarily mean that he or she should not care about the field at all. At the end of the day, they still need to earn profit to keep the business going. Designer D and Designer B agreed with the notion.

“But like I said, because I designed it more for me than for all the other people. If someone doesn't like a piece, then I will probably not sell it, which is fine. Mm hmm. Um, but if I would have that constantly, then I wouldn't have a business. But I would have a hobby.”

(Designer D)

“Usually you have a certain style in mind, but in reality, the client's wish is more important, because I do custom, the clients want different things. [...] Even though in the end I will still give my touch to the design but you just have to be flexible if you do custom order like this.”

(Designer B)

Thus, despite having a restricted audience, a designer should be able to create value that appeals to that particular segment of audience and to remain relevant. However, when it comes to trends designers have different opinions on whether they have to jump on the bandwagon.

“Following trends can be good and bad because a trend, you know, trends are constantly changing. Especially with fashion, it changes very quickly.” (Designer S)

“If you want to be that designer, then yes. But for example, I never look at trends because I think it narrows down how you design.” (Designer D)

“But I think trends are important because that sort of, masses go with trends. And within this mass of people, there's some people that are my target audience. So they, they are also like in on the trends. And for that I need to like lure them over to my business. Right. So I have to use the trends also.” (Designer N)

These designers' statements can be inferred that in order to create a successful business, designers must be able to create a value that can be appreciated and is appealing to the field. Whether the audience is vast or restricted, one must be able to figure the right balance between their creative aspirations and the field's demand to keep the business going. If designers weigh in too much on their creative aspirations but the field cannot appreciate it then they would end up with just a hobby. Additionally, trends can be short lived but it may help to gain a few customers and boost sales. It is up to the designers whether to jump on the bandwagon or not.

#### 4. 1. 2. Nomos

Bourdieu (1993) suggests that nomos is prevalent in the field and regulate the actions of agents in the field. Moreover, they are typically unspoken but universally comprehended by all agents in a field. While it is unclear whether hierarchical relations within categories of the dividing groups of individuals in the fashion industry exist, but designers are aware that there are some grounded principles of vision that lead to divisions. Therefore, when they are asked about their approach to their design, they can identify themselves without any problem. Six out of the nine designers would identify themselves as a classic and conventional designer while the other three have a rebellious and avant-garde approach. For a traditional bridal designer, Designer K feels the need to understand the cultural background of her client by doing research to make sure her design is appropriate.

“Because I'm still trying to maintain the classic look, therefore I would do research on what is appropriate for the culture, use the original look of the Kebaya as it is but also give it a modern twist.” (Designer K)

Meanwhile, a ready to wear designer raised her doubt about taking the avant-garde route. Although there is nothing against the avant-garde, customers should perceive the idea as valuable.

“We are more conventional. If it's too avant-garde, it might be hard to enter the market.”

(Designer S)

However, some of the more eccentric designers are confident with their approach. They also have customers that appreciate and value their aesthetic due to their unique design approach.

“I wouldn't say complete avant-garde, but eccentric. [...] What has always been really important for me is for people to express themselves and feel good about what to wear so they can sort of be the reflection of themselves in the society.” (Designer N)

The statements by the designers indicate that designers are aware of some grounded principles of vision that lead to divisions. However, despite the divergence in the design approach, the variance doesn't seem to discriminate. To say the least, segregation helps designers to focus on a certain type of audience that they can associate with and create value for them.

## 4. 2. Capital

### 4. 2. 1. Economic Capital

Apparently, Bourdieu (1986)'s notion about the accumulation of capital not being primarily based on one's existing possession gets support from the designer participants. While economic capital is deemed to be vital to start a company, it is not solely the main contributor to one's dominance in the field. As far as economic capital is concerned, all designers hinted to concur that it has never been the main hindrance for them to start their fashion venture. All of the designers admitted to starting their business with very minimal capital to nothing at all. Designer D had to work three jobs after graduation to enable her to pursue her dreams to start her fashion business, however she said it was not a large amount of money. Meanwhile

Designer K, a bridal designer, claimed that she barely needed capital to start her business. She asked her client to pay a down payment which covers the production instead. However, she admitted that although practically she did not need any capital to start her business but she needed some funding for her education. She needed the money to go to fashion school to learn the basic skills. Lastly, Designer R suggests that it is almost impossible to start a business without economic capital at all. Some capital is still required to start a fashion venture.

“As for capital, it's not possible to run a business without any capital even if just a little. We need education to learn how to sew and apply beading. Then, it's impossible for us to start a fashion business without having ‘the weapons’ like the sewing machines and overlays. It requires capital to buy them. No matter how small it still requires capital.” (Designer R)

These claims indicated that economic capital is essential to start a business. Economic capital is needed to acquire cultural capital such as a degree or skills that are deemed to be fundamental to start a business. In addition to that, economic capital is deemed to be vital to cover the costs that incurred in the initial stage such as buying the sewing machines or paying the rent. However, it has never been regarded as the main contributor to one’s dominance in the field nor it is restricted to one’s existing possession. Moreover, it is believed that there are myriad different means to acquire capital which will be discussed in the following subtopic.

#### 4. 2. 2. Social Capital

Although the topic of social capital is often overshadowed by economic capital but it apparently plays a major role in contributing to the business of many designers, especially in the beginning. Bourdieu (1986) suggests that social capital is the resources made available to the agent in the network by virtue of the social network in the informal, professional or familial relational forms. Five of the nine designers learned sewing and garment making for the first time from their family members. Moreover, some of the designers also admit to getting financial support from their family to start their business. Designer K mentioned that her parents paid for her fashion school tuition. Designer F got her first sewing machine from her ex-husband, while Designer D had her brother as her first investor. As proposed by Bourdieu (1986), when social capital is exerted it is highly productive.

## *Networking*

In regard to networking, Aakko and Niinimäki (2018) persist that it is essential in creating a stable business. Likewise, all participants have appeared to give a synonymous response towards this particular topic. They all agree that networking is essential in starting and running a fashion business. Most of the designers interviewed claimed that their fashion ventures were started with very limited resources. Therefore, they are able to express the significance of networking contributions to their businesses by opening up doors of resources and opportunities for them. One participant who joined a group of fashion entrepreneurs, Designer F, ends up with a partnership that allows her to have her own studio. Moreover, she gained mentorship and assistance from the community she joined which helps her to navigate her business.

“So I operate in studio called Dream Makers Club. [...] It is owned by my, my studio partner. He is Designer JL. [...] I am so thankful that I have somebody to, you know, escort out my grievances because every month you have to think about cost. You think about, okay. that's additional costs or okay, what do I have to do?” (Designer F)

Meanwhile, Designer M started his business through a collaboration with another designer whom he was able to connect with through his acquaintances. He used people in his network to connect him with other designers.

“Once you are in the right social group, it's easier for you to get exposure to the public. You also need to socialize with the magazines, editors, and everything in order for you to get in the list of designers to be in the magazines. That is the important part of getting yourself into events so that your name is not forgotten.” (Designer M)

Another designer, Designer N, claimed that networking is even more important than social media especially in the early stage. She mentioned that joining the startup community allows her to meet people that can help her navigate and expand her business.

“For me, it's very important and I think it's way more important than social media. Because first of all, networking for guidance because and you're starting I mean there's so much to learn [...] I have like that event, social media going on and then somebody who's professional sort of helps to market my brands to that event, which is a really big thing.” (Designer N)

On the other hand, Designer S stated that she started her business with zero network. Despite having no network in the early stage of the business but she admitted to meeting her current business partner from school and she also conceded that she has grown her network overtime especially with the influencers. Additionally, she also added that maintaining a network is very important. Therefore, it can be argued that growing a network and maintaining it are keys.

“We started with 0 networks. It's important if there is one. [...] The important thing is to just keep in touch with the influencers. Don't just pay once for an endorsement and gone and grow the network from there.” (Designer S)

Another participant, participant E, gets to sell her collections at some high end boutiques abroad and has been invited to hold a fashion show in several countries from expanding her network.

“Networking is very important. Important because I've seen the past few years, I've been traveling a lot and my network has grown. Yeah. Yesterday I received an invitation from Kazakhstan to come.” (Designer E)

Their emphasis on the importance of leveraging social contacts indicates the significance of networking in the advancement of their business. They implied that networking allows them to gain resources such as clients, collaborations, community, exposure, mentorship, and access to more affordable resources. Additionally, it allows access to people in the fashion industry which lead to bigger opportunities.

#### 4. 2. 3. Cultural Capital



Bourdieu (1986) suggests that cultural capital enables a person to generate reputation by virtue of the social distinctions the knowledge communicates and it is hard to fake. Arguably, this makes cultural capital the key to success in the field. Two third of the participants went to fashion school to learn garment making. However, only four of them have a full degree while the rest have only been taking some short courses and learned various techniques of garment making from the internet or from their respective relatives. Nevertheless, every single one of them agree that a fashion degree is not necessarily a prerequisite to become a fashion designer nor to have a successful fashion business and experience is the best teacher.

“For fashion design, I would say it's a bonus. Not compulsory. Because with fashion design, experience comes more. When you learn for experience rather than from college.” (Designer M)

Similarly, Designer S and Designer F also believe that a fashion degree is not that necessary especially with the internet. Nowadays, the internet has allowed people to gain access to unlimited sources of information and knowledge. Online classes have also become very common and the skills are more important than anything.

“no matter if you learn from a lady who is sewing all her life, you know? Yeah, no matter who you learn from, as long as your skills are strong, you don't really need fashion school. Because at the end you the idea is within you, you can put it to life with the right skills.”

(Designer F)

On a similar note Designer K also suggests that unless the person is doing *couture*, of which requires high technical skills, a fashion degree will not be considered as necessary.

“Nowadays you can just pass your rough sketches to the manufacturer or sometimes even a picture of your inspiration and tell them what materials you want and it's enough. If that's the case, you don't really need a degree. Especially with the daily wear, you don't really need a degree.” (Designer K)

Despite the growing popularity of the alternatives to traditional school, some of the designers who have a full fashion degree still put some emphasis on the benefits they gain from going to the fashion school.

“If I say it's necessary, I'm breaking the hopes of people who learn to sew and design on their own. However, now you can learn from anywhere, from YouTube or courses. Nonetheless, better to study at the university or course center like I did.” (Designer R)

Furthermore, she also raised some concerns related to technical issues that many designers who did not go to the fashion school could be facing. She argued that many designers know how to design but lack of basic technical skills such as pattern drafting and sewing which could potentially lead to some communication issues during production. Additionally, at her school where she studied, they teach their students about garment production and business which allow students to learn how to price their products and understand the breakdown of production cost. She suggests that it is very crucial for a fashion designer who wants to run his or her own business to avoid markup by vendors that could eventually lead to a financial loss.

Likewise, Designer D also believes that fashion school prepares their students to set foot in the industry. Although she doubted the idea that people nowadays are that old fashioned to think that a person can only gain respect from the field because he or she has a formal degree.

“It prepares you for a world that you think probably is different than how it's going to be. [...] I mean, 80% of what I'm doing right now, I never imagined that it was part of having your own company, for example, or having being your own independent designer. So our school kind of works for that.” (Designer D)

On the other hand, some designers even suggest a business degree to people who are considering starting her or his own business. Unless the person wishes to become a *couture* designer, which involves intricate works and advanced skills, a business degree is implied to be more pivotal. In fact, both designers have a full fashion degree yet they recommend designer-entrepreneur to pursue a business degree instead.

“But after doing this business, what really matters is actually the business aspect. Where are you going after this? Moreover, there should be a vision. So yes, fashion school is necessary to know the basics, but you don't need a full degree. Because with courses you can do it too.”

(Designer S)

“For being like a fashion artist or, you know, like an independent designer who goes and sells lingerie for example, then the fashion degree is very relevant, you know, making patterns and all of that. But as a designer who starts up her own business, business degrees is way more relevant.” (Designer N)

Nonetheless, all designers concur that having a full fashion degree is not the only means to generating cultural capital. This indicates skills and knowledge can be acquired from various places. Designers named short courses, online courses, and family members as the alternative sources to learn some basic skills. The dispute among designers on whether a business degree or fashion degree is more important to start a fashion venture construed as an autonomous decision for the aspiring designer-entrepreneur to contemplate. Additionally, artistic aspiration and economic orientation might influence the decision.

### *Symbolic Domination*

Despite Bourdieu (1986)'s belief that aesthetic distinctions and dispositions are connected to class, not all of the designers seem to agree with the notion. His emphasis on the role of aesthetic and cultural discrimination in the establishment and maintenance of class cannot be justified by some of the designers.

“But from the designer's point of view, we have to be able to cater to every kind of person regardless of the class.” (Designer S)

“Like because class also socially puts us into a bubble [...] unless you grew out of it, you know? [...] I think what, what I've seen with like designers who really come from like lower

class, like Alexander McQueen, for example, is that they become very inventive because of the scarcity of the means that materials like everything. (Designer N)

Additionally, Designer N and Designer M also mentioned that one's exposure to different kinds of aesthetic that is not necessarily associated with a certain class can bring influences on his or her aesthetic. Therefore, she believes there are many designers that deviate from what is supposed to be his or her aesthetic. Furthermore, Bourdieu's second claim about the production of symbolic domination that arises from the deviations without overthrowing the hierarchy of style but instead trying to find place to fit within seems to have some truth. While four designers agree that a designer's class brings influences on their aesthetic and privileges that allow them to dominate a certain market. However, the rest of the designers argue that it is not necessarily the primary factor of success.

“I think it depends. I think everyone can be successful in any class segment. Again it depends on how you define success. Like Renzi is successful, but he's in a different class with Sapto. It depends. Yes, I wish everyone could be like Sebastian Gunawan, but for Renzi's class, for some people he is already very successful.” (Designer B)

Therefore, it can be interpreted that personal style is not necessarily deviated by the influence of period or class only. Although class and cultural competence might provide some privileges and put people in a bubble, exposure can help people grow out of it. Moreover, it is almost certain that symbolic dominance can be achieved by finding a place without overthrowing hierarchy to fit within.

#### 4. 3. A Strong Brand

Aaker (1996) claims that product's superiority is no longer the sole driver of business performance and a strong brand can lead to customer preference, loyalty, and commitment. Apparently, some designers seem to agree with the notion. According to Designer S, a good and strong branding makes the whole entity looks professional of which makes the brand more inviting to customers. Moreover, a brand can be used as a means to interact with customers and

set a position in public. Designer M argues that, if the branding doesn't work, people tend to forget. He believes that branding is key and the people who are associated with brand are also keys. Ambassador and influencers are as important as the brand. Additionally, branding is also used as a means to express one's aspirations yet doesn't necessarily planned. Moreover, branding is a trial and error for some designers thus for some it is a work in progress. However, for the majority of the designers, branding seems to be an afterthought or something that they figure out as they go.

“Eventually it is. Yes. I don't think you can base a whole brand on branding because that's what a lot of people do or what I see that they. And that's also maybe why. It feels like it took me a long time to be where I am, but that's mainly because, yeah, I didn't really care about things like that. So I my branding, as it may look is just because I do it as I want to do it.”

(Designer D)

“So it's like a step by step for me. I did not figure it all out, all in one go. You know, it's literally a very, very long process. But it's like as I go, as I do my business, I'm also figuring out, okay, actually, this is a good branding, this is a good logo and oh, okay, this is my type of women that I want to sell to. So it's all I figure it out.” (Designer F)

Although the majority of the designers implied to give their branding a lower priority. Nonetheless, designers are aware that branding is still essential for their business. However, more than half of the designers bluntly admitted to have struggled managing their brand.

“To be honest, when I started my brand, it was like spontaneous. Nothing was planned at all. I just jumped with my gut and did it. I did my planning while doing the work. For the first year it was very messy.” (Designer M)

All in all, designers do consider a strong brand as important because it enables them to express and communicate their aspirations about the brand. Moreover, it allows them to interact with a public which later assist them to set a position in the market. A professional branding also claimed to be more inviting for the customers. However, despite the claim about strong brand superiority, it is rather an afterthought for the majority of them. This can be interpreted

that lack of business experience and knowledge makes building a strong brand process takes longer especially when they do not include it in the priority list. Hence, daily hustles as a designer-entrepreneur can get in a way that deviates their focus on building a stronger brand and expanding the business.

#### 4. 3. 1. Brand identity

Aaker (1992) highlights the importance of being aware of the customers' thoughts on the brand and the consistency with the firm's brand image before making any decision. He believes that it is one of the prominent means to develop a strong brand with a clear and strong identity (Aaker, 1992). Out of all the topics related to branding, brand identity seems to be the area of focus to many designers and implied to be the top of mind for some of them. It can be stated that brand identity's significance for the designers can be classified into two directional orientations; internal and external. Firstly, brand identity provides directions for a designer-entrepreneur to navigate his or her own business. Secondly, brand identity is used by designers to give customers a clue of who they are as a designer and brand thus customers can look out for themselves what suits their preferences. Half of the designers suggest that brand identity allows their customers to understand their aspiration as designer and how they would like to be perceived. Three other designers believe that brand identity provides a natural filtering system which attracts customers who find associations with the brand.

“Well because of identity. Um, it sorts of invite in people to my brand who really like it. So it's like identity is also a natural filtering system. You know, people who wear only black [...] these are not the client I want. So it helps to pinpoint the target audience.” (Designer N)

Meanwhile, Designer S, uses brand identity as a navigating compass for her business while most designers focus on the notion of how customers should perceive it.

“It's really important because we can get lost in the middle if we don't have one. Actually, my partner and I used to argue about where do we want to take this brand. Due to a brand identity crisis. After that, we slowly fixed it and really think about the brand identity until we found it. After that, we found the market. So brand identity is very important.” (Designer S)

Even though all of the designers agree that brand identity is vital for a fashion business but Designer D is particularly concerned about authenticity and freedom of the customers. She believes that brand identity should be genuine and should not be restricted for the customers to interpret.

“But I also think that it should be genuine, so it should be something that really fits with you. [...] There is sort of an identity, but it's not something that dictates you. Mm hmm. So it is clean, but it's still free and may be open for interpretation.” (Designer D)

The designers' claims about brand identity can be interpreted that the customer's perception about the brand can be used as a natural filtering system. Therefore, a brand must be able to convey their identity accurately, who they are as a brand and designer, to appeal to the right customers of which find associations with the brand. Moreover, it provides a sense of direction to navigate the business that will also impact any strategic decision especially related to branding. However, it is strongly encouraged for brands to be genuine and open for the customers to interpret, especially for the artistic designers.

#### 4. 3. 2. Brand Equity

Keller (2008) is adamant that brand equity is firm's most valuable asset which allows the organization to position its brand more accurately and enable the brand to progress towards the goals. He argued that brand equity can be achieved through awareness of the brand's strong, favorable and unique set of associations that a firm aspires to create or maintain (Keller, 2003). He also believes that brand equity provides brands a focus and guidance with a means to interpret their marketing performance and help them design their marketing activities (Keller, 2003). Apparently, it is implied to be aligned with some of the designers' approaches when it comes to designing their marketing activities. More than half of the designers have been actively using their social media platforms to display their products which help them to project their visions as designers-entrepreneurs to their potential customers.

“First, we have to have an identity. So people can find something in common with us. Then branding, our branding. Tiktok, Instagram really helps us.” (Designer R)

Meanwhile Designer S, chooses to involve social media influencers that share the same style and audience profile to help them put their product out in the market. Their strategy is to give those potential customers a strong and unique set of associations through endorsement with influencers and social media marketing activities.

“We use marketing. Actually, it's more the influencer's job. Can't live without influencers. [...] From there, people can become more aware ‘Oh Brand L is like that’. Certainly also on our account, we emphasize again what we offer. We make videos like ‘How to wear this dress’. Thus it's both, from social media and influencers too.” (Designer S)

While the majority of the designers are putting emphasis on their vision through marketing efforts, three other designers are more into letting their products speak for themselves.

“It sounds a little bit arrogant if they don't know me in a way I can do anything. Whatever you like I can do anything. We can work it out. We can brainstorm everything. The easiest way is that I'm a comedian designer. If I tell you I'm a comedian designer, you'll be like "Eugh?" so I will just tell that I'm an all rounder kind of designer.” (Designer M)

“You know what people sometimes stand. At the front. They are afraid to approach. And when I go to them and ask them. Why aren't you coming in? I see that. You like it. Yeah. And then you know what the answer is? "It looks so stylish and so expensive. I don't. Even want to touch it. I'm afraid to touch it because it's so artistic. It's so it looks so expensive’.”

(Designer E)

However, what Designer M and Designer E are doing is only possible once they have a reputation. Petrides and Fernandes (2020) suggest that artistic reputation is a result of social



processes and through consensus building. It does not only apply for artists but also artworks, genres, schools and media.

Designers' statements about brand equity indicate offering a set of favorable or unique associations to the customers is key in shaping customer's perception towards the brand. Once a designer earns a brand equity they will gain a reputation that even its product can speak for itself.

#### 4. 3. 3. Brand Positioning

Kapferer (2008) argues that the aim of having a brand positioning is to identify a strong purchasing rationale that gives the company real or perceived advantage over the competition. According to the interviews, all of the designers are positioning their brand for the middle to upper class. They mainly center their brand positioning around pricing. Designer S argues that their pricing will have an impact on their strategic decisions such as product quality, profit margin, and competitor. She finds brand positioning really vital in navigating her business.

“It is important! Our brand is targeting the middle class. The pricing will have an impact on the materials used, quality, and all kinds of things.” (Designer S)

Beside price, the customer's demographic, especially the target age group is also important for them. The target age group seems to help designers to sense their customers purchasing power and lifestyle which later allow them to develop strategic resolution in generating competitive advantage in the market.

“Yeah, a lot of them like working in corporate and most of them are married. Definitely with a bit of purchasing power because you know especially to do made to order as well like I position my my price to be in the higher end because you know I'm the only one who's doing the sewing.” (Designer F)

While the majority of the designers are aware of their brand position in the market, one particular designer persists that he is not positioning his brand in a particular way. This could

be due to his decision to become a ‘comedian designer’ that does not belong to a certain genre nor segment.

“I don't really position my brand. Not really important for me. It is important in terms of business but I just chose not to. I am not sure if it's going to pay off but I chose not to position myself in a certain way.” (Designer M)

However, when he was asked about his competitors, he was able to point out who are his competitors. This implies that he is actually aware of his brand position and the players in the market that could be his potential competitors due to similar concepts and target market.

“My primary competitors. I have local brands. Their aesthetics are maybe different but the concepts are similar. First thing is the aesthetic secondly is the target market is the same. The location is also the same. We are all in Kuala Lumpur.” (Designer M)

While Designer M and the rest of designers are aware of their competitors but Designer B and Designer E chose not to focus on their competitors. They believe in their own strengths as designers.

“Well, there is no particular competitor because each has its own characteristics.” (Designer B)

“No, I don't. Just for I am my own competitor. You know, I. I always try to be better. I try to develop myself my skills to be better. Yeah. That improve, you know. That's me. Yeah. I don't have any competitive.” (Designer E)

Furthermore, Designer N has a unique approach in how she maps her brand position by defining her customers based on their profiles. She then was able to identify two different types of customers which she named Adelinas and Cocos. Adelinas are quirky middle aged women who sometimes have Cocos as their children. While Cocos are young and carefree young ladies in their mid twenties. By mapping her brand position, she was able to identify her customers

and the right marketing strategies that will appeal to them. She figures that word of mouth is more effective with Adelinas whilst social media works better for Cocos

“With social media, because with networking, especially now in our region I meet a lot of Adelinas and very little Cocos.” (Designer N)

From the statements, it can be learned that positioning a brand is fundamental in this industry. It provides a base for designers to map their competitors, identify their customers’ profile, and define product quality. Additionally, most designers center their brand positioning strategies around pricing, customer’s demographic, and aesthetic preferences to help them navigate their business. As suggested by Ameyibor et. al. (2021) and Larsen (2018), at the end of the day brand positioning should enable brands and entrepreneurs to formulate effective marketing strategies by becoming the primary basis to locate their position in the market

#### 4. 4. Marketing Strategy

Weerawardena (2003) and Day (1994) suggest that marketing capability is the collective knowledge, skills, and resources that allow the business to add value to its goods and services and meet competitive demands. In addition to that, Paul (2014) affirmed that marketing mix can be used as a tool to form a conceptual framework that helps entrepreneurs identify the principals in a decision-making process which allow them to configure their value offerings. One commonality shared among all participants is their strong concentration on products out of the 7 Ps of the marketing mix. They believe that their design approach is what sells. Designer D would only design what she will wear herself because she believes that there are also people who dress up like her. Designer K would design something traditional with a little bit of modern twist. Meanwhile, some designers seem to be more adventurous and willing to take risks in their designs. Regardless of their style, each designer has a certain aesthetic that attracts a certain group of customers and they place their product in high regard.

Regarding marketing efforts, more than half of the participants would only rely on word of mouth and use their social media platform such as Instagram, primarily as a portfolio to let people know their products. This aligns with Weerawardena (2003)’s conviction that product needs to be brought to the attention and made available to be appealing to the market. Designer

R experienced it herself where her customers raised questions regarding her rare update on her Instagram which signaled doubts in her ability as a designer and brand.

“So I wasn't the type of person who frequently updates my Instagram. [...] If we haven't posted for a long time, even though we've done a lot of sewing, there's no proof. [...] If I don't post anything many would say, "They say that you have a lot of portfolios, but how come only a few have been uploaded?" (Designer R)

“I think my network is really important. So like my customers will bring other customers, for example. Like from know also Instagram, obviously. Yeah. Um, I wish we didn't need it, but it's like a great tool.” (Designer D)

However, when some designers were asked about their marketing efforts, two designers declared their reluctance of doing heavy promotion as they are not too keen about the idea of growing too big. Designer B expressed her concerns about scaling up her business. She is against the idea of growing too large too fast due to her lack of management skills. At the moment, she is only capable of taking 20 - 30 orders per month of which actually is considered pretty hefty for a small medium scale business in custom wedding attire. Likewise, Designer E also opposed the idea of putting too much effort into marketing. She is content with the current size of her business. She argued that if she was younger she might have a different approach towards her business expansion but currently she is treating her business as a means to do her passion.

“It depends, because I don't want to go big. You know, I want to keep it this size, you know, because when I was, if I was more younger, maybe I had a I would have another strategy to build, to grow, to expand. But at this point, it's it's more like a hobby for. It's my passion and I'm living my passion.” (Designer E)

“It's really important. But if I'm honest, my management is still a mess. Because I can't take too many orders. That's the issue. 20-30 orders is the maximum. [...] I still can't handle stress.” (Designer B)

These statements by designers can be interpreted that it can be a struggle to keep up with the demand while having to manage the business especially marketing without losing the joy as a designer. However, it may depend on one's goal on whether he or she wants to go big with his or her brand which will have an impact on its long term marketing strategy. In order to keep up with the business, designers need to find the right balance between their business aspirations and creative aspirations. In terms of marketing tools, they find word of mouth and social media to be the most effective marketing tools. Other designers also use partnerships with influencers and agents in the industry like wedding organizers to promote the business.

#### 4. 5. Competitive Advantage

In a buyer-driven market, like fashion, sales are highly influenced by how their product and company is perceived. Hence the fierce competition with the fast fashion and Chinese brands. Weerawardena (2003) has been adamant that marketing plays a role in contributing to a company's competitive advantage. Additionally, Piercy (1997) also encourages entrepreneurs to deliver long-term value for the customers and to shift from merely performing marketing functions such as sales and promotion. Apparently, that has been the focus for many designers already. Despite the strong emphasis on product, more than half of the designers have gone above and beyond product selling. Designers are deemed to be moving away from traditional marketing framework to experiential marketing instead. Centering their strategies towards how they are perceived by the customers. Designers seem to have been putting more effort into service (intangible) offerings.

From the interview it can be learned that bridal designers appear to be very generous with their clients by pouring out all kinds of services.

“I also provide service for the groom's attire, adding beads to match (the bride) and there is also a package for the couple. Caps, beskap (men's traditional suit) and bottoms.” (Designer

B)

“I would say the services I provide for my customers. [...] For my custom made customers, I would be there for them from the beginning until they walk down the aisle. So I provide those kind of services.” (Designer M)

Moreover, designers are also aware of the power of a satisfied customer in bringing other customers thus it goes beyond a mere promotion. Batat (2019) suggests brands to focus on creating brand content by using a holistic approach based on a brand culture which puts emphasis on humanizing the brand. It can be done by bringing a brand's personality to life thus companies can establish a strong relationship with its customers and set the brand apart from the competitors. Designer R and Designer E have been building a strong customer base by letting their customers to part take in promoting their business which encourages the sense of belonging with the brand. Supposedly, it should offer companies with more sustainable value and resources in the long-term (Batat, 2019).

“So the CEO of Rotterdam Festivals, she also is one of my customers. And then she came and it was for the Eurovision Song Contest. So I made a dress for her. Normally it was like 700 (Euro). I gave it for 500 (Euro), and then she posted on LinkedIn and she got like. Maybe 50,000 views. And because of views, I get a new range of customers.” (Designer E)

Thus it can be interpreted that designers' statements prove the point of Parkman et. al., (2012) who suggested that to be successful in the creative industry, it requires a balance of creativity, marketing and various organizational management efforts. In addition to that, marketing capability can provide companies with a sustainable competitive advantage (Weerawardena, 2003). Therefore, many designers have been shifting from the traditional marketing framework to the experiential marketing framework. Designers are very much aware of the power of a satisfied customer in bringing other customers thus their marketing strategy goes beyond a mere promotion. This allows designers to establish a strong relationship with their customers and set their brand apart from the competitors.

## Chapter 5. Discussion

In this section, the key findings related to the objectives of the study will be highlighted based on the researcher's interpretation of the interviews. Following the findings, the practical and theoretical implications of the study will be deliberated. Furthermore, study limitations and recommendations for future research will also be discussed in this section. Finally, a conclusion that covers the main highlights of the finding will be presented.

### 5. 1. Key Finding and Interpretation

The thesis is developed on three underlying theories namely, Bourdieu (1993)'s the field of cultural production theory, Bourdieu (1986)'s capital theory, and Weerawardena (2003)'s marketing capability theory. With those theories researcher was able to develop a research question which has been mentioned previously in the introduction section, "How designers with limited resources can build a successful fashion business by balancing creative vision, capitals, and marketing capabilities?" One of the key findings is that despite coming from different backgrounds and serving different geographic markets, designers are able to agree on many topics discussed in this research. In general discourse, it is very possible for any aspiring designer to start a fashion business despite having limited resources. Almost all of the participants admitted to embark on their entrepreneurial journey with very little economic capital. Although a lump sum of capital may not be necessary, some funds are still required to cover the initial sunk costs.

Aside from economic capital, there is another capital that designers imply to be fundamental that is cultural capital. Although a full degree is not a prerequisite, garment making skills and knowledge are deemed to be vital to start a fashion business. Designers stated that nowadays people can take short courses and online courses to gain some basic knowledge then develop their skills through practice and experiments. The other capital, social capital, is also asserted to be one of the keys of success by the designers. Designer hinted that strong ties support has been imperative as many got their first sewing lessons from family and also get funding to learn fashion from their family. Moreover, designers also emphasized the significance of networking contributions to their businesses. They affirm that networking has

allowed them to gain resources such as clients, collaborations, community, exposure, mentorship, and access to more affordable resources.

Another key to highlight is the role of creative vision in the success of their business. All but one designer concur on the importance of having a creative vision. Designers claim that creative vision provides the business with a sense of direction, identity, and unique selling points to stand out in the competition especially against the mass produced and Chinese products. While the rest of the designers agree with the significance of having creative vision, one particular designer opposed the notion. He argued that it would restrict him as an experimental designer. Regarding the influence of the field on their success. They do agree that it has some influence however it depends on one's goal orientation. If the goal is to maximize economic gain, then pleasing a wide market will be key.

Furthermore, what turned to be a surprise was designers' lack of attention to their branding. Despite their claim of it being important, branding is more of an afterthought for the majority of them. However, out of all the topics related to branding, brand identity seems to be the area of focus to many designers and implied to be the top of mind for some of them. They implied that brand identity can provide them a sense of direction on where they want to go with their business while at the same time it allows designers to give their customers a clue of who they are as a designer and brand thus customers can look out for themselves what suits their preferences. Hence, it provides a natural filtering system that attracts customers who find associations with the brand. However, one designer expressed her concerns. She believes that brand identity should be genuine and open for interpretation.

In regard to marketing strategy, it may depend on one's goal on whether he or she wants to go big with his or her brand. However, one's decisions will have an impact on the firm's long term marketing strategy. Apparently, it is not an easy job as many of them are complaining about the struggle to keep up with the demand while having to manage the business especially marketing without losing the joy as a designer. In order to keep up with the business, designers need to find the right balance between their business aspirations and creative aspirations which aligns with Malem (2008), Aakko & Niinimäki (2018) and Mills (2011)'s notion. Moreover, currently word of mouth and social media are claimed to be the most effective marketing tools by most designers. This aligns with Petrides & Fernandes (2020)'s claim that brand creation begins with artistic production however it requires participation from the gatekeepers and the general public. Public has the word of mouth power



simply by visiting, following and commenting on social media which can contribute to brand consolidation and magnification of artistic reputation. Hence, the emphasis of using experiential marketing framework. Most designers seem to have moved away from traditional marketing framework to experiential marketing framework by putting more effort into their services (intangible). They are aware of the power of a satisfied customer in bringing other customers thus it goes beyond a mere promotion that can allow them to establish a strong relationship with their customers and set their brand apart from the competitors.

## 5. 2. Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study is an extension to the two previous studies about fashion designers' creative and entrepreneurial approach by Malem (2008) and Aakko & Niinimäki (2018). The research by Malem (2008) focuses on designers' business approach and survival strategies that will allow them to sustain in the market. The study by Aakko & Niinimäki (2018) centers the research on the challenges that designer-entrepreneurs encounter while running their business and its coping mechanisms. Meanwhile, this study particularly highlights the variables that are deemed to be imperative for a designer-turning-entrepreneur to have in order to set their foot firmly in the industry. To gain insight from the designer-entrepreneurs, researcher use the cultural production theory by Bourdieu (1993), capital theory by Bourdieu (1986), and marketing capability theory by Weerawardena (2003) to develop the research question.

By assessing Bourdieu (1986)'s theories about capital, it enables the research to extend the view by Aakko and Niinimäki (2018) about capital. In the paper, Aakko and Niinimäki (2018) regard financial capital as one of the main challenges that could be a hindrance for designers to sustain the business. However, in this study it was discovered that funds and investments are not particularly regarded as the sole capital that contributes to the business success. For the designers, cultural capital such as skills and knowledge are implied to be more fundamental. Additionally, Aakko and Niinimäki (2018) also explored the topic of social network and networking but the concerns were mainly about finding a retail partnership, skilled employees, and quality production sites. However, from the interview it was discovered how crucial networking is for many designers. It allows designers to gain resources such as clients, collaborations, community, exposure, mentorship, and access to more affordable resources. Besides, it opening up doors of resources and opportunities for them.

On the other hand, Malem (2008) assumes that designers need to scale up to survive. Hence, the strong emphasis on the retail and wholesale business model as the way to sustain. However, from the interviews it was discovered that designers may come from different backgrounds and situations that lead to different goal orientations. This study was also able to cover different business models which allow them to gain perspective on how they can run the business. From ready to wear, custom measure, to total made to order. Moreover, Weerawardena (2003)'s marketing capability theory allows the study to extend the Malem (2008)'s view on how designers can communicate effectively with their chosen markets. One of the ways is by incorporating the Batat (2019)'s experiential marketing mix framework to establish marketing strategy to amplify their competitive advantage. Fundamentally, it urges entrepreneurs to deliver long-term value for the customers and to shift from merely performing marketing functions such as sales and promotion which is also encouraged by Piercy (1997).

Furthermore, the study provides a deeper understanding to Malem (2008)'s view on a creative person in the cultural industry by using Bourdieu (1993)'s cultural field theory to approach the subject. By reckoning the field in the picture, Buordieu (1993) suggests that his theory allows people to map the relationship between agents and the field. In addition to that, the label of "artisan designer" and "business designer" that are used by Malem (2008), can be explained more in depth with the theory. Bourdieu uses axes to distinguish the production orientations; restricted production and large scale production. This explains why Malem (2008)'s study found no indication that the "artisan" type of designer was less business minded. Artisan designers can be as business driven as business designers however their audience is just more restricted. It then produces a notion that despite targeting a more restricted audience it does not necessarily mean that he or she should not care about the field at all. At the end of the day, they still need to earn profit to keep the business going or it will only end up as a hobby.

In addition to that, this research also offers some practical implications particularly to the aspiring fashion entrepreneurs. Apparently, there are not that many studies about building a fashion business especially for designers who predominantly have little to no knowledge about entrepreneurship.

Firstly, the study confirms that designers do not need a large amount of economic capital to start a fashion venture. This should encourage designers who are wishing to have their own business to realize their dream. The accumulation of capital is not primarily based

on one's existing possession (Bourdieu, 1986). Moreover, it is not solely the main contributor to one's dominance in the field. Designers can use other methods to gain resources. The study hinted that designers can leverage social contacts to contribute to the advancement of the business. Networking enables designers to gain resources such as collaborations, community, exposure, mentorship, and access to more affordable resources. Additionally, it allows access to people in the fashion industry which can lead to bigger opportunities.

Secondly, nowadays cultural capital can be generated from many sources other than the traditional formal institutions. Aspiring designers would no longer need to pay for a costly degree to learn garment making. There are shortcuts and cheaper alternatives that are available for them to choose. This way, designers can allocate their time and money to starting their business. Thirdly, the emphasis on moving away from the traditional marketing mix framework to gain competitive advantage. Designers are encouraged to deliver long-term value for the customers and to shift from merely performing marketing functions such as sales and promotion. By using experiential marketing framework, designers can create brand content using a holistic approach that puts emphasis on humanizing the brand which will bring the brand's personality to life. This way brands can establish a strong relationship with its customers and set the brand apart from the competitors as suggested by Batat (2019).

### 5. 3. Limitations

One of the major limitations for this particular research is that most participants were interviewed online. This is mainly due to the COVID situations and geographical location of the participants that reside in the other part of the world. Moreover, this online interview has some drawbacks as seldomly words in the recordings are inaudible and there is a substantial decrease in nonverbal communication. Furthermore, there is a time constraint due to the short deadline thus the sample size is rather small with nine designers. The study also only included designer-entrepreneurs from Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Netherlands. The interviews with the Malaysian and Dutch designers were conducted in predominantly English which is not the native language of the participants even though they are very fluent. Additionally, although the transcripts are carefully translated into English however a few inaccuracies can be expected as some words cannot be expressed in English. Despite the limitations, this research managed to

produce quality output that contributes to the existing knowledge and the body of knowledge related to designers' creative-business approach.

#### 5. 4. Recommendations for future research

The research generates insightful theoretical and practical implications that should be taken into account in the future research. Moreover, the study limitations offer room for the impending research to fill in by assessing variables and theories related to designers' creative-business approach.

Firstly, future research can include a larger sample size and expand the geographical area of the sample. Apparently, designers in different countries have different business approaches and business models. Moreover, there is a discrepancy in the university's curriculum in Asia and Europe as fashion major in Asian universities also include business courses. Therefore, with a vast and diverse sample, the study could potentially offer different results. Additionally, researcher can use a triangulation approach to enhance validity through the convergence of information from various sources. One of the means is to involve more researcher(s) to collect and analyze data. Investigator triangulation can reduce bias and promote pluralistic orientations to research (Archibald, 2016). Lastly, future research can consider to assess other sectors in the creative industries such as film, performance art, or music by using Bourdieu (1993)'s field of cultural production theory, Bourdieu (1986)'s capital theory, and Weerawardena (2003)'s marketing capability theory to figure which elements are claimed to be pivotal in the industry.

#### 5. 5. Conclusion

Ultimately, the aim of the study is to address the research question "How designers with limited resources can build a successful fashion business by balancing creative vision, capitals, and marketing capabilities?"

A key highlight is that despite serving different geographic markets, designers are able agree on with many topics discussed in this study. Thematic analysis allows researcher to organize and interpret underlying themes of the topic within the data. From the analysis, it can

be learned why certain variables are claimed to be imperative for designers' success in the industry.

In conclusion, it was confirmed that having a limited economic capital should not be a hindrance for designers to realize their dream to own a fashion label. In fact, all participants started their business with very minimal capital. Designers can use their social capital and network to provide them access to myriad resources through collaborations, exposure, mentorship, and access to more affordable resources. Hence, cultural capital such as technical skills and knowledge in fashion and business is more valued. Moreover, what is implied to be pivotal is the designer's ability to create a value that can be appreciated and is appealing to the field. Whether the audience is vast or restricted, one must be able to figure the right balance between their creative aspirations and business aspirations by taking account the field's demand to keep the business going. Additionally, by shifting to the experiential marketing approach, designers can deliver long-term value for the customers and to shift from merely performing marketing functions to building a stronger customer base. Eventually, it will bring the brand's personality to life thus brands can establish a strong relationship with its customers and gain competitive advantage.

Lastly, the outcome of this research should become a great addition to the existing knowledge and provides additional information to the aspiring designer-entrepreneurs regarding creativity-business approach. As mentioned, the study highlights the factors that are deemed to be critical by designers to build a fashion business by deep diving on topics such as creative vision, capitals, and marketing strategies.

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# Appendix

## Attachment 1

### Interview Questions

Hi xxxx

Let me introduce myself. My name is Syaravina Ardhani Setyawan. You can call me Syara. I am a Master's student from Radboud University, the Netherlands, majoring in Innovation and Entrepreneurship. I am now working on my Master's thesis and I would like to ask you a favor.

I am currently doing a research on how designers build their fashion business by balancing creative vision, capitals, and marketing capabilities. Therefore, I would like to know your view on the topic and hear about your experience as a fashion entrepreneur. Shortly we will start the interview. I would like to ask your consent to record our conversation. Your name will be kept anonymous and our interview session will only be used for the purposed of the study only.

Will you give permission for me to record it? Yes/No

\*Record\*

Thank you for letting me record this session and thank you for your time. I have previously introduced myself and announce to you the purpose of the study. Now I would like to hear your story.

Introduction:

- Do you get any influence from other people on your aesthetic?

Name:

- When you design your collection, did you have certain vision of what your collection should be and how the customers perceive it?

Age:

From:

Name of the business:

*Field*

- Do you think what people in the field think about your aesthetic matters for your business?

*General*

- What made you aspire to become a fashion designer?

- Do you get influence from other people or trends?

- How long has it been since you first started your business?

*Nomos*

- What made you want to start this business?

- If you have to describe your designs, do you think it's conventional or eccentric and deviant?

*Creative Vision*

- Do you think your creation is a piece of art?

- Why do you choose that style?

- Why do you think people like your aesthetic?

*Symbolic dominant*

- Do you think class has something to do with aesthetics?

- Does class have anything to do with taste?
- Do you think class drives success in the industry

### *Capital*

#### *Economic*

- How did you finance your business in the beginning?
- Do you think economic capital is important?

#### *Social*

- Did you remember who your first client ever was?
- How did they find you?
- Do you think networking is important?
- What have you gained from your network especially, the beginning of the business?
- Did you get any support from your close ties (family, friends) for money, resources, contacts, or orders?

#### *Cultural*

- Do you have a fashion degree?
- Do you think a fashion degree is important to succeed in the industry?
- What do you think is the main capital for a designer-entrepreneur?

#### *Branding*

- When you created the brand, what did your first think of? (e. g. name, image, logo)

### *Identity*

- Do you think brand identity is important? Why?
- How does that influence customers?
- Do you think you have a certain image or element that people associate with?

### *Equity*

- How do you project that in the consumer minds? Do you try to create any association?

### *Position*

- How do you position your brand?
- Do you have a competitor? Who are your competitors? What makes them your competitor?

### *Marketing Strategy*

- Can you please tell me your marketing strategy?
- What kind of marketing strategy works for your business?
- What were the barriers?
- Did you hire or have anyone to help you with the marketing strategy and execution?

### *Competitive Advantage*

What sets you apart from other designers? Especially, besides your portfolio.

Does your marketing have something to do with it?

*Thank you so much for the insightful session*

## Attachment 2

### Themes

<b>THEMES:</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Creative Vision</b>	
Provide Direction	Creative vision provides designers with a sense of direction of how they will do their business and create their collection.
Something to stand out	Creative vision allows designer to create unique values to stand out amongst the fierce competition.
Asset	Ideas and visions are assets which cannot be imitated by others. That is why some designs have patents.
Identity	Creative vision provides an identity for the whole collection and brand.
Signature Restricts Designer	Sticking to one vision can restrict experimental designers.
<b>Field</b>	<b>Description</b>
Product-market fit	Designers try to adjust their designs to suit the target market preference.
Source of inspiration	Designers are using certain market as reference.
Creative-business balance	Finding the right balance between creative aspirations and business aspects.
Authenticity	Designers weigh in more on authenticity than pleasing the large market.
<b>Nomos</b>	<b>Description</b>
Conventional	Designers opted for classic and convectional designs.
Mix style	Designers mix several styles such as avant-garde casual or business eccentric.
Eccentric	Designers totally drifting away from conventional designs.
<b>Economic Capital</b>	<b>Description</b>
Started Small	Designer only required small amount of economic capital to start his or her business.
Smooth Business	Economic capital allows designer to have something to fall back on to and run business smoothly.
Education	Economic capital allows designers to acquire the skills and education necessary.
Resources	Economic capital allows designers to acquire machines, labors, and materials.
Potential	Without economic capital, it is hard to achieve potentials.
<b>Social capital</b>	
Close ties support	Family and friends contributions (i.e. paying for education, WOM, recommending clients, investments etc.).
Spousal support	Partner contributions (i.e. financial aid, buying the machines, and emotional support during hard times).
<b>Networking</b>	<b>Description</b>
Access to resources	Networking allows designers to gain access to capital (investment), information, and other resources (i.e. cheaper rent and materials).
Marketing, promotion, and exposure	Networking allows designers to get exposures (i.e. getting invited to events, featured in a magazines etc.) and free promotion from word of mouth to social media posts by people in their network.
Partnership	Networking allows entrepreneur to gain partnership with other designers, celebrities and magazines.
Mentorship and Community	Networking allows gain access to community and mentorship.
Client and Projects	Networking allows designer to get projects and clients.
<b>Cultural Capital</b>	<b>Description</b>
Experience	With fashion design, experience comes more (accumulated skills and knowledge).

Practice and Experiment	More experiment, more knowledge gained.
Technical and Business Aspect	Fashion schools allow student to learn the technical and business aspect of garment making.
Preparing designers	The information obtained from the fashion school prepares designers to set a foot in the industry.
Outsourcing some functions	Some functions ( i.e. pattern drafting and tailoring ) can be outsourced thus a full degree may not be necessary.
<b>Branding</b>	<b>Description</b>
Professionalism	It is believed that professionalism in branding can boost attractiveness.
Interaction	Branding is used as a means to interact with customers and set a position in public.
Communicating team identity	Branding is used as a means to communicate the identity of the entire team to the customers and collaborators.
Self expression	Branding is used as a means to express one's aspirations. It doesn't necessarily have to be planned. It can be spontaneous.
Set a position	Branding can be used to secure a position in the market as well.
Still figuring out	Branding is a trial and error for some designers thus for some it is a work in progress.
<b>Brand Identity</b>	<b>Description</b>
Provide Direction	Brand identity provides direction not only for the internal firm but also their to target the market of who they are as brand and designer.
Something to stand out	Brand Identity provides designers with something to stand out against the competition and it shapes customer's perception towards the brand.
Gain people understanding	Brand identity is one of the means for designers to communicate their aspirations related to their brand to public in hope people understand who they are as a brand and designer.
Natural Filter	Brand identity allows customers to decide on their own whether the brand suits their preferences.
Genuineness and Free Interpretation	It is believed that brand identity should be authentic and non-restrictive for public to interpret.
<b>Brand Equity</b>	<b>Description</b>
Social Media	Brand equity can be gained from actively using social media platforms such as Instagram and Tiktok.
Promotional Content	Brand equity can be gained from promotional contents such as imagery, campaign visual, and taglines.
Influencers	Brand equity can be gained from social media influencers that designers partner up with by sharing similar aesthetic and audience profile.
Design and Character	Brand equity can be gained from inimitable design and signature look.
<b>Brand Positioning</b>	<b>Description</b>
Income	Positioning the brand based on a certain income segment.
Age Cluster	Positioning the brand based on a certain age category.
Location	Positioning the brand for certain areas and compete with players in those areas.
Bridal	Positioning the brand specifically for weddings.
Aesthetic Preference	Positioning the brand according to certain aesthetic preferences.
<b>Marketing Strategy (Tools)</b>	<b>Description</b>
WOM	Word of mouth can start from close ties or satisfied customers.
Social Media	Social media like Instagram sometimes is used as promotion tool and portfolio to display designers' pieces.
Endorsement	Endorsement is used to reach potential customers that share similar audience profile with the influencers.
Partnership	A bridal designer has partnerships with wedding organizers to bring in clients with commissions in return.
Discount	Discounts are offered to boost sales or discount to customers who promote his or her brand.

<b>Competitive Advantage</b>	<b>Description</b>
Service	Services include free alteration, custom measurement, and designer's assistance through out the process.
Freebies and bundles	Complimentary items offered to match the clothes such as shoes, mask, even groom's attire
Giveaway and pricing strategy	Designer would do some giveaway and special price promotion for some customers