

**Exploring the transitioning trajectories
of independent contractors to business
owners in South Africa's media services
industry**

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the dynamic and evolving landscape of South Africa's media services industry, with a particular focus on the transitioning trajectories of independent contractors towards becoming business owners in the media industry. The media services sector is experiencing significant transformation, driven by technological advancements and changing consumer preferences. Against this backdrop, understanding how individuals navigate their career paths within this industry is of paramount importance. Through a comprehensive analysis of qualitative data, this research sheds light on the factors, challenges, and opportunities that shape the journey from independent contracting to business ownership. By examining the unique South African context, the study not only contributes to the academic understanding of entrepreneurship but also offers practical insights for policymakers and industry stakeholders seeking to foster sustainable growth in the media services sector.

The findings of this research illuminate the multifaceted nature of this career transition, highlighting the role of socio-economic factors, skills development, and entrepreneurial support systems in South Africa. Additionally, it underscores the importance of individual agency and adaptability in successfully traversing this path. As the media services industry continues to evolve, this study provides a valuable resource for aspiring entrepreneurs, educators, and policymakers, helping them to facilitate smoother and more informed transitions within the sector. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of entrepreneurship in a rapidly changing industry context and supports efforts to foster innovation and economic development in South Africa.

Keywords:

Independent Contractors, Business Owners, Entrepreneurship, Media Sector, Transitioning, South Africa.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the media service industry in South Africa

The media services industry in South Africa has undergone significant transformations in recent years, boosted by technological advancements, increased access to equipment, the rise of social media, and growing demand for visual content (Johnson, 2023). As a result, many independent contractors in the industry are considering transitioning from their current freelance roles to becoming small business owners (ILO, 2022). This shift offers new opportunities for growth and control over their ventures, but also comes with various challenges and uncertainties (ILO, 2022). To assess the viability of this transition, a strategic analysis of decision-making factors and the identification of critical success factors are necessary. The analysis aims to provide valuable insights into the considerations and actions necessary for a successful transition and sustained growth in this competitive market.

The media services industry encompasses a diverse range of professionals, including photographers, videographers, graphic designers, editors, and other creatives who offer their expertise on a freelance basis (Indeed, 2023). Independent contractors often enjoy flexibility, creative freedom, and the ability to choose their projects and clients. However, this independent status also exposes them to challenges like irregular income, limited scalability, and the burden of administrative tasks (Woodard, 2022).

Transitioning from being an independent contractor to a small business owner in the media sector involves a strategic decision that can significantly impact an individual's career trajectory. Several critical factors require careful consideration, including financial considerations, marketing and branding strategies, and operational factors like resource allocation, project management, and the ability to adapt to changing market trends (Chang *et al.*, 2011: 2130, 2132).

This strategic analysis aims to explore the decision-making factors that drive independent contractors to transition becoming small business ownership. By examining the motivations, risks, and potential benefits, the viability of this transition can be grasped. Furthermore, identifying the critical success factors in the media services industry can

provide aspiring small business owners with valuable insights into the strategies, skills, and capabilities required to thrive in this dynamic and competitive landscape.

Looking at the research question for this study: 'exploring the transitioning trajectories of independent contractors to business owners in South Africa's media services industry' this research seeks to delve into the decision-making factors and identify the key success factors that contribute to a smooth and successful transition. By shedding light on these crucial aspects, this study aims to provide aspiring small business owners in the industry with a strategic roadmap to navigate the challenges and maximise their opportunities for growth and success.

1.2 Significance of this study

This study explores the transitioning trajectories of independent contractors to business owners by illuminating the challenges and opportunities these individuals face; it also explores these individuals' navigation through this transition by providing an understanding of the factors that might influence their decisions. By uncovering the specific hurdles and success factors within the South African context, the research can contribute to developing tailored strategies and support mechanisms for those seeking to establish small businesses in the media services sector.

1.3 Problem statement

The media services industry is witnessing a notable shift as independent contractors contemplate the transition to small business ownership (Johnson, 2023). However, more comprehensive research is needed to investigate and analyse this transition process. A thorough understanding of the factors, challenges, and opportunities involved is necessary to develop effective strategies and support mechanisms tailored to the unique dynamics of the media services sector in South Africa (Indeed, 2023). This study aims to address this gap by investigating and analysing the process of independent contractors transitioning to small business owners. It also seeks to provide critical insights and guidance for independent contractors who are considering this shift by contributing to informed decision-making and entrepreneurial success.

1.4 Research objectives

1.4.1 General objectives

The general objective of this study is to comprehensively investigate and analyse the transition process of independent contractors in the media services industry to small business ownership within the same field of expertise. The study aims to gain a thorough understanding of the factors, challenges, and opportunities involved in this transition, with a specific focus on the photography services sector. By achieving this general objective, the research aims to provide valuable insights and guidance for independent contractors who are considering the shift to small business ownership within the media services industry.

1.4.2 Secondary objectives

The secondary objectives for this study are:

- to explore the key decision-making factors that independent contractors in the media services industry consider when deciding to transition into small business ownership,
- to identify critical success factors for small business owners,
- to identify the challenges and opportunities faced by independent contractors transitioning to small business ownership in the media services industry,
- to develop a conceptual framework that independent contractors can use to evaluate their readiness to transition to small business ownership in the media services industry.

1.5 Research questions

The research questions for the study are:

1. What are the key decision-making factors that independent contractors in the media service industry consider when deciding to transition to small business ownership?
2. What are the critical success factors for small business owners?
3. What challenges and opportunities do independent contractors face when transitioning to small business ownership in the media service industry?

4. How can independent contractors in the media services industry assess their readiness to transition to small business ownership through the development of a conceptual framework?

1.6 Research design and methodology

1.6.1 Qualitative approach

A qualitative research approach will be used for this study. A qualitative research approach will be used because a qualitative research approach is apt for this study to deeply explore and understand the nuanced experiences, motivations, and challenges of independent contractors transitioning to business ownership in South Africa's media services industry, providing rich insights beyond numerical data. The qualitative approach for this study involves an in-depth exploration and understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and perspectives of independent contractors transitioning to small business ownership in the photography services sector within the South African media services industry. This approach uses interviews, focus groups, and content analysis to capture the context-specific aspects of the transition process (Mahmud *et al.*, 2022:125). By allowing participants to share their stories and insights, the study seeks to identify recurring themes, patterns, and unique challenges individuals face during this transition. Qualitative data analysis methods, such as thematic analysis, will derive meaningful interpretations and generate a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the transition from independent contracting to small business ownership. A qualitative approach is instrumental in providing a holistic view of the phenomena under investigation, allowing for exploring subjective experiences and contributing to developing a nuanced conceptual framework that can guide and inform others contemplating a similar entrepreneurial journey (Mahmud *et al.*, 2022:125).

1.6.1.1. Selection of participants

In selecting participants for this study on exploring the transitioning trajectories of independent contractors to business ownership in South Africa's media services industry, a stratified sampling approach was employed to ensure a comprehensive representation of diverse perspectives within the target population (Hayes, 2023). The population of interest comprised individuals who already transitioned from independent contracting to business ownership in the media services sector and were stratified based on relevant

criteria such as industry experience, types of media services offered, and geographic location. This stratification created distinct subgroups, ensuring that participants were purposefully selected from each stratum to capture a range of experiences and variations in the transition process. By employing stratified sampling, the study aimed to enhance the depth and richness of insights, acknowledging the heterogeneity within the population and providing a more nuanced understanding of the transitioning trajectories in the South African context.

1.6.1.2 Data collection methods

The data collection procedure for this study involved a systematic outreach process where emails were sent to prospective participants who met the predefined criteria for inclusion in the research. The criteria included, independent contractors in the media service industry, who are based in South Africa. The participants should have at least two years of experience. It should be individuals who have transitioned into a small business ownership, or that are considering to transition. Following the identification of potential participants through the stratified sampling approach, personalised and informative emails were written, explaining the purpose of the study, emphasising the voluntary nature of participation, and providing details on the interview or focus group process (Saldaña, 2021). The emails also included a clear call to action, inviting individuals to express their interest in participating. In the interest of ethical considerations, the emails underscored the confidentiality of responses and assured participants that their identities would be protected as it is required by the POPI ACT. A follow-up mechanism was implemented to address inquiries, obtain informed consent, and schedule interview sessions at the convenience of the participants. This email-based approach facilitated efficient communication and allowed for a respectful and transparent engagement with potential participants, fostering a collaborative environment conducive to the open sharing of experiences and insights.

1.6.1.3 Data analysis techniques

The data analysis for this study employed ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software, to systematically analyse and interpret the rich dataset collected from interviews. Following the principles of thematic analysis, the data underwent a multistage process within ATLAS.ti. Initially, the software was utilised for data coding, where meaningful data

segments were systematically labelled with descriptive codes. Through an iterative process, these codes were then organised into broader themes and patterns, allowing for the identification of recurring concepts and insights. The software's advanced features to link codes and visualise relationships facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the complexities inherent in the transitioning trajectories of independent contractors to business ownership in South Africa's media services industry. ATLAS.ti proved instrumental in managing the large volume of qualitative data, enhancing the rigour and reliability of the analysis, and ultimately contributing to generating subtle findings that capture the diverse experiences and perspectives of this study's participants.

1.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations for this study are paramount and revolve around ensuring the participants' well-being, confidentiality, and informed consent. Firstly, the study upholds the principles of voluntary participation, clearly articulating to potential participants that their involvement is optional and they may withdraw at any stage without consequence. Informed consent was obtained, outlining participation's purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits. Confidentiality measures were rigorously implemented to safeguard participants' identities, ensuring that personal information shared during interviews or focus group discussions remains confidential and is not disclosed in any reporting according to the Protection of Personal Information ACT 4 of 2013. Additionally, the research will strive to minimise potential harm or discomfort to participants, particularly given the sensitive nature of discussing professional transitions. Throughout the study, the researcher-maintained transparency in communication, fostering an open and respectful dialogue with participants. The study underwent ethical review and approval from relevant institutional review boards to ensure alignment with established ethical guidelines and standards in social research. Collectively, these ethical considerations aim to prioritise the dignity, autonomy, and well-being of the individuals participating in the study, adhering to the highest ethical standards in qualitative research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction to the literature review

The work landscape in the contemporary media services industry is witnessing a transformative shift, particularly as independent contractors contemplate the significant leap into small business ownership (Johnson, 2023). This transition, marked by nuanced trajectories, challenges, and opportunities, is a dynamic process that demands thorough exploration and understanding. The literature review for this study delves into existing scholarly works to unravel the multifaceted dimensions of transitioning from independent contracting to small business ownership within the broader context of the media services industry. By examining key concepts such as entrepreneurship, independent contracting, and small business development, this review aims to build a theoretical foundation to explore the unique challenges and opportunities faced by individuals in the South African media services sector, specifically focusing on the photography services industry. Through a synthesis of relevant literature, this review seeks to identify the gaps in knowledge, theoretical frameworks, and practical insights that will guide the subsequent investigation into the transitioning trajectories of individuals navigating this intricate and pivotal phase of their professional journey.

2.2 Theoretical framework on career transition

Transitioning trajectories refer to the paths or routes individuals follow as they move from one state, condition, or role to another, often with distinct stages, experiences, and outcomes along the way (Matthyssen *et al.*, 2010:695). These trajectories map the journey of people undergoing a significant transition, such as a change in career, lifestyle, or social status. The term is frequently used in social sciences, particularly sociology and psychology, to study and understand individuals' processes and patterns during significant life transitions (Stroud *et al.*, 2015:127).

Transitioning trajectories can encompass a wide range of experiences, from personal and professional development to changes in socio-economic status or identity (Ecclestone, 2009:30). For instance, in the context of this study's title 'Transitioning Trajectories of Independent Contractors to Business Owners in South Africa's Media Services Industry', the term signifies the pathways independent contractors follow and their experiences as

they transition from working as freelancers or subcontractors to establishing their own media businesses. These trajectories encompass various aspects, including motivations, challenges, opportunities, and outcomes, and can be shaped by individual choices, external factors, and the broader context in which the transition occurs. Studying transitioning trajectories provides valuable insights into the dynamics of change, helping researchers and policymakers better understand the factors influencing these transitions and their consequences for individuals and society (Loorbach *et al.*, 2017:605).

2.3 Overview of the media services industry

Media services encompass a wide range of activities and functions related to the creation, distribution, and management of various forms of media content (Shahbaznezhad *et al.*, 2021:55). These services are integral to the media and entertainment industry and crucial in delivering information, entertainment, and communication to audiences across different platforms. Media services produce content across various formats, including television, radio, print, and digital media. This includes scriptwriting, filming, editing, graphic design, and sound production (Carol *et al.*, 2023). Professionals in this domain work to develop compelling and engaging content that can inform, entertain, or persuade audiences.

Media services also include distributing and broadcasting content to a target audience. This may involve television and radio broadcasting, streaming services, print publications, online news websites, and social media platforms (Donders *et al.*, 2019:1015). The aim is to disseminate content through the most appropriate channels to reach the intended viewers or readers. Another critical aspect of media services is managing and marketing media content and businesses (Ye *et al.*, 2021:165). This involves advertising, public relations, media planning, media buying, and managing media companies, studios, or agencies. Professionals in this field work to ensure that media content is effectively promoted and monetised while also overseeing the strategic direction of media organisations (Ye *et al.*, 2021:165).

Media services encompass the entire spectrum of activities that make media content possible, from its creation to its distribution, management, and marketing. In a rapidly evolving digital landscape, media services continue to adapt to new technologies and consumer preferences, ensuring that content is both accessible and impactful in an ever-changing media environment.

The media services industry in South Africa is a dynamic and multifaceted sector that reflects the country's diverse media landscape (Reporters Without Borders, 2022). This industry encompasses various activities, from traditional print and broadcast media to digital and emerging technologies. South Africa has a robust and competitive media ecosystem, with a mix of established media houses, independent production companies, and a growing number of digital content creators and streaming platforms (Reporters Without Borders, 2022). The country is home to various newspapers, magazines, radio stations, and television channels, providing diverse content to cater to different interests and demographics. South Africa's media services industry has also witnessed a significant shift towards digital media, with an increasing focus on online news portals, social media, and digital advertising (IAB South Africa, 2021).

The media services sector in South Africa is a source of news and entertainment and a platform for cultural expression, public discourse, and advertising. The industry is crucial in disseminating information, shaping public opinion, and promoting South African culture and heritage (ILO, 2022). South African media professionals and content creators are known for their innovation and creative storytelling, making the country's media landscape vibrant and engaging. However, like media industries worldwide, South Africa's media services sector faces challenges related to sustainability, regulatory compliance, and the ever-evolving digital landscape (Khumalo, 2022). As it continues to adapt to changing technologies and consumer preferences, the media services industry in South Africa remains a vital and influential part of the nation's communication and cultural landscape (Khumalo, 2022).

2.4 Transition from independent contractor to business owner

An independent contractor is a self-employed individual or entity who provides goods or services to individuals or businesses, also considered a client, under a contract or agreement. Independent contractors are not considered employees of the clients or businesses they work for, and they maintain a higher degree of independence and control over their work (Maloke *et al.*, 2019:60). They have the freedom to set their own work hours, choose their work locations, and decide how to perform the tasks specified in their contracts. They are not subject to the same level of direct supervision and control as employees. Independent contractors are responsible for filing their own income tax returns, including self-employment taxes, and typically do not have taxes withheld by

clients (Diab-Bahman *et al.*, 2020:913). Independent contractors often work with multiple clients simultaneously or over time, and they are not exclusive to a single employer. This diversity of clients can provide more financial stability and flexibility. Independent contractors may have limited legal protections and benefits compared to employees. They are not covered by labour laws governing minimum wage, overtime, and workplace safety in the same way employees are (Diab-Bahman *et al.*, 2020:913). Independent contractors are commonly found in various industries, including freelance writing, consulting, graphic design, photography, videography, and many others.

Independent contractors in South Africa represent a diverse group of professionals across various industries, including the media services sector. Typically, these individuals operate autonomously, offering their specialised skills and services to clients on a contractual basis (Maloke *et al.*, 2019:60). In the media services industry specifically, independent contractors may include freelance journalists, graphic designers, photographers, and audiovisual professionals who provide their expertise to media outlets, marketing agencies, or individual clients. Due to the dynamic nature of the gig economy, many independent contractors in South Africa leverage digital platforms to market their services and connect with potential clients (Anwar *et al.*, 2021:245). These contractors often value the flexibility and autonomy afforded by freelancing, allowing them to choose projects that align with their skills and interests. However, they may also face challenges such as inconsistent income streams, the need for self-promotion, and the responsibility of managing their own business affairs. The appearance of independent contractors in South Africa's media services industry reflects a modern and evolving landscape, shaped by the intersection of technology, entrepreneurship, and the desire for professional independence (Anwar *et al.*, 2021:245).

A small business owner is an individual who owns, operates, and assumes responsibility for a small-scale enterprise or business entity. Small businesses typically have characteristics such as limited organisational size, a relatively small number of employees, and a modest scope of operations compared to larger corporations (ASQ, 2023). Small business owners are typically the driving forces behind their businesses, often initiating the business concept, securing the necessary resources, making strategic decisions, and overseeing day-to-day operations.

The role of a small business owner encompasses a wide array of responsibilities, which may include, but are not limited to, business planning, financial management, marketing and sales, human resource management, customer service, product or service development, regulatory compliance, and overall strategic direction (Kurpayanidi *et al.*, 2021:2). Small business owners are often deeply involved in all aspects of their businesses, wearing multiple hats and taking on a hands-on approach to ensure the success and sustainability of their enterprises.

Small business owners are known for their entrepreneurial spirit, as they are driven by a vision to create, develop, or expand a business venture that aligns with their passion, expertise, and goals. They are essential contributors to the local and national economy, generating employment opportunities, fostering innovation, and serving as pillars of their communities (Santoso *et al.*, 2021). Small business ownership is characterised by a degree of independence and autonomy, allowing owners to shape the direction of their enterprises and directly influence their business's performance and growth (Kurpayanidi *et al.*, 2021:2).

Small businesses in South Africa present a vibrant and diverse landscape, reflecting the country's entrepreneurial spirit and economic dynamics (Small Business Development, 2016). These enterprises span various industries, including retail, services, manufacturing, and technology. In urban centres and townships alike, small businesses can be observed in the form of local shops, family-run restaurants, tech startups, and specialised service providers. Many small businesses in South Africa are characterised by their close ties to the community, often serving as key contributors to local economies. The appearance of small businesses is often marked by a mix of traditional brick-and-mortar establishments and digitally driven enterprises, with an increasing number leveraging online platforms for marketing and sales (Santoso *et al.*, 2021). While some operate independently, others may form part of cooperative networks or business associations, fostering collaboration and mutual support. The visual landscape of small businesses in South Africa is dynamic, with a constant interplay between innovation, resilience, and the pursuit of economic sustainability. These businesses play a crucial role in job creation, skills development, and contributing to the overall economic resilience of the nation (Small Business Development, 2016).

2.5 Challenges and success factors in transitioning

Transitioning from being an independent contractor to becoming a business owner in South Africa's media services industry can be challenging (Johnson, 2023). Several issues need to be considered. One of the primary challenges is understanding the complex regulatory environment and bureaucratic procedures involved in starting and managing a small business. Entrepreneurs often need help with licensing, taxation, and compliance hurdles, which can be particularly difficult in the dynamic and evolving nature of the media sector (Small Business Development, 2016). Financial constraints also pose a significant obstacle, as transitioning individuals may need help securing capital for business startup costs, marketing, and operational expenses. Moreover, the shift from a freelance mindset to assuming the responsibilities of a business owner requires acquiring new skills, including managerial tasks, client acquisition, and strategic planning. Understanding these challenges is crucial to developing targeted support programmes to make the transition smoother for independent contractors who want to become successful business owners in South Africa's media services industry (ASQ, 2023).

Identifying and leveraging success factors is essential for steering individuals to sustainable entrepreneurial ventures. Building a robust professional network is a critical success factor, as it provides opportunities for mentorship, collaboration, and access to valuable resources. Entrepreneurial education and training programmes equip individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the complexities of business ownership, enhancing their likelihood of success. A proactive and adaptable mindset is also pivotal, allowing entrepreneurs to pivot in response to market changes and capitalise on emerging opportunities. Establishing a solid brand identity, effective marketing strategies, and cultivating a strong customer base contribute to the long-term viability of the small business. Additionally, fostering a supportive ecosystem that includes access to financing options, government incentives, and industry networks plays a crucial role in facilitating the success of independent contractors transitioning to business owners in the unique context of South Africa's media services industry. Understanding and emphasising these success factors will help to formulate targeted recommendations and interventions to empower entrepreneurs in pursuing small business ownership (Maloke *et al.*, 2019:60).

2.6 Comparative analysis with other industries

Transitioning from being an independent contractor to a small business owner shares common themes across various industries, and nuances and unique challenges emerge within specific sectors. A comparative analysis for this study revealed distinctive technology-, consulting-, and industry characteristics.

Technology industry:

In the technology sector, independent contractors often transition to small business ownership driven by opportunities to scale their services or develop proprietary products. Challenges may include staying abreast of rapidly evolving technologies, obtaining necessary certifications, and navigating the competitive landscape. Success factors often involve strategic partnerships, continuous skills development, and effective utilisation of digital platforms for marketing and client engagement (ASQ, 2023).

Consulting services:

The transition to small business ownership in consulting is marked by a shift from providing individual expertise to managing a consultancy. Challenges encompass client acquisition, establishing a solid reputation, and adapting to diverse client needs. Success factors often revolve around niche specialisation, building a robust client portfolio, and fostering long-term client relationships through effective project management and delivery (Small Business Development, 2016).

Common themes across industries:

Despite these industry-specific variations, common challenges persist, such as financial constraints during the startup phase, adapting to new administrative roles, and building a reliable client base. Success factors often involve networking, continuous skill development, strategic marketing, and adapting to market trends (Maloke *et al.*, 2019:60).

In essence, while the overarching process of transitioning from an independent contractor to a small business owner shares fundamental aspects, industry-specific challenges and success factors necessitate a nuanced approach. Understanding these variations is crucial for tailoring support mechanisms, educational programmes, and policy interventions to the unique needs of entrepreneurs in diverse industries.

2.7 Summary

Chapter 2 delves into the literature review, offering a comprehensive exploration of the transitioning trajectories from independent contractors to business owners in South Africa's media services industry. The evolving landscape of the media services sector is examined, considering the intricate dynamics individuals face as they contemplate and navigate this significant career shift. The literature review constructs a theoretical framework, emphasizing the concept of transitioning trajectories, which encompasses the multifaceted paths individuals follow during career transitions. The study focuses on the South African context within the media services industry, particularly in the photography services sector, aiming to identify gaps in existing knowledge and theoretical frameworks while laying the groundwork for the subsequent investigation.

Additionally, the literature review elucidates key concepts such as entrepreneurship, independent contracting, and small business development, providing a theoretical foundation for understanding the challenges and opportunities inherent in the transition process. It navigates through the complexities of the media services industry, highlighting the diverse activities within this sector, from content creation and distribution to marketing and management. By synthesizing relevant literature, the review sets the stage for a nuanced examination of the motivations, decision-making factors, challenges, and opportunities faced by independent contractors making the leap to small business ownership in the South African media services context.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

The research design for this study employs a qualitative approach, which is the most appropriate methodology for capturing the nuanced and multifaceted nature of the transition process from independent contracting to small business ownership in the media services sector. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration of the subjective experiences, motivations, and decision-making factors that influence individuals in this specific industry (Mahmud *et al.*, 2022:125). It also provides the flexibility to adapt and refine the research as the study progresses, ensuring that the research captures the

diversity of perspectives and unique circumstances within the media services industry. Qualitative research, therefore, serves as the ideal research design to address the multifaceted nature of the study's objectives, offering a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by individuals making the transition from independent contracting to small business ownership in the media services sector (Mahmud *et al.*, 2022:125).

3.1.1 Participants

The target population for this study consisted of independent contractors and small business owners. All of the participants were based in North West, Northern Free State and parts of Gauteng. The inclusion criteria for the participants of this study includes:

- The individual should be an independent contractor in the media service industry or should run a small business in the media industry.
- Based in South Africa
- The participants should have at least two years of experience.
- It should be individuals who have transitioned into a small business ownership, or that are considering to transition.

The stratified sampling method was used to select the participants. Stratified sampling is a method that divides the target population into homogeneous subgroups or strata and then selecting participants from each stratum in proportion to their representation in the population (Hayes, 2023). All participants were a photographer or a videographer or graphic designers who work as independent contractors; wo worked in the media industry for a company and individuals who had their own media companies that specialised in sound, lighting, stage effects, audio visual, and films. Of the ten participants who participated in the study, six were male and four were female.

3.1.2 Data collection procedure

Data collection occurred during September and October 2023. First, the researcher sent emails to prospective participants who qualified for this study to ask whether they would be interested in participating in this study. Out of the 20 prospective candidates, 15 agreed to participate in the study. The researcher sent out the qualitative questionnaire before conducting interviews with the participants. This was done to ensure the accuracy

of the study. Out of the 15 candidates who agreed, only 10 participated in the interview process. The participants had one week to prepare answers to the questions before the researcher conducted interviews with them. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 45–60 minutes per participant. The interviews took place between 16 and 27 October 2023. The researcher decided not to use focus groups due to the sensitive nature of the individual career transition, the individuals may be hesitant to share their personal experiences in a group setting. Interviews provided more of an in-depth exploration of each participants understanding of transitioning from independent contracting to small business ownership. The questions that the participants had to answer can be found in Annexure A.

3.3.3 Research procedure

The Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the North-West University provided ethics approval for this study (NWU-01823-23-A4). This study complied with the ethical guidelines, such as voluntary participation, confidentiality, and informed consent. The researcher first sent out emails to the 20 prospective participants, wherein they were invited to participate in this study, briefly received an explanation of the purpose of the study and were also told that participation is voluntary. After seven days, the researcher sent a follow-up email. The prospective participants could contact the researcher if they had any questions about the study. The researcher would then reply personally and explain the benefits and the risks of participating in the study, what would happen to the findings, and how feedback would be given to them. Before the candidates participated, they were asked to fill in a consent form, which can be found in Annexure B. For this study, a total of ten people were interviewed, where four were female and six were male. Three of the participants are event photographers and videographers, two are only videographers, two are event officers, one owns a production company, one is a social media manager, and one is a graphic designer. Each person received a participation ID. The participation ID numbers started at 001 and ended at 010. The participation ID's were given to them in the order the interviews were conducted. The first person got 001 and the last person got 010.

3.1.4 Data analysis

The responses were analysed for qualitative content. Deductive coding and inductive coding were used for this study.

Deductive coding is a qualitative research technique that involves the application of predefined categories or concepts to the analysis of textual or visual data (Silverman, 2020). In contrast to inductive coding, where categories and themes emerge from the data itself, deductive coding starts with a predetermined coding

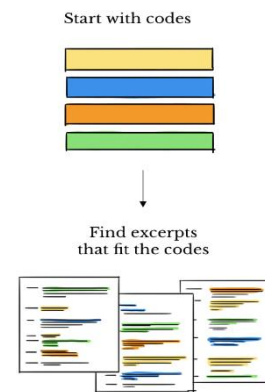


Figure 1: Deductive coding

framework or set of concepts based on the existing research questions. Researchers use deductive coding to systematically assess how well the data aligns with these predetermined categories and concepts.

Inductive coding is a qualitative research technique used in the analysis of textual or visual data, such as interview transcripts, written documents, or images (Saldaña, 2021). It is a method of

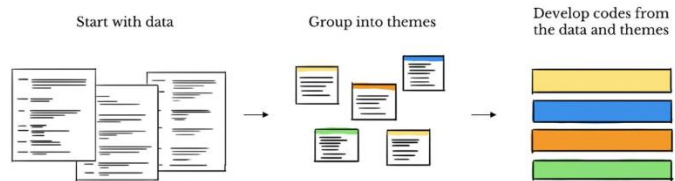


Figure 2: Inductive coding

coding that allows patterns, themes, and categories to emerge from the data itself, rather than being determined in advance based on preconceived ideas or existing theories. Inductive coding is particularly useful when researchers want to explore and understand a subject in an open-ended, exploratory manner (Saldaña, 2021).

The process involved data reduction, coding, and decoding to analyse each interview form. Each interview question was analysed deductively by doing structural coding per interview answer. Thereafter, a second coding cycle was applied inductively. This was done to identify themes and sub-themes; this is to look beyond the interview question and to get a broader understanding of this study. ATLAS.ti was used to do the data analysis, especially in obtaining the codes, themes, and sub-themes. A list of 270 codes were created and this was then reduced to 25 codes and 5 theme groups. Direct quotes were used to illustrate examples of each analytic insight.

3..1.5 Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the study on exploring the transitioning trajectories of independent contractors to business owners in South Africa's media services industry is fortified by a meticulous and comprehensive research framework. A qualitative research approach has been chosen, allowing for an exploration of individual experiences and ensuring the study's findings align closely with the participants' perspectives. The research design is methodologically robust, emphasizing transparency and ethical considerations throughout data collection and analysis.

To ensure the study's credibility, a rigorous sampling strategy is implemented, ensuring that participants represent diverse facets of the media services industry in South Africa. Ethical considerations, such as obtaining informed consent from participants, are given utmost priority, safeguarding the rights and privacy of those involved. Data analysis employs validated methods, enhancing the reliability of the study's outcomes. The transparent reporting of results, coupled with an acknowledgment of any limitations, contributes to the overall trustworthiness of the study.

The commitment to peer review and potential replication further enhances the study's credibility, as it allows other researchers to scrutinize the methodology and findings. Additionally, the study's dedication to sharing data and materials promotes transparency and open access, enabling others to verify and build upon the research. Through these principles and best practices, the study strives to provide a trustworthy and valuable contribution to the understanding of the transition from independent contracting to entrepreneurship in the South African media services industry.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Obtaining ethical clearance is a crucial step in ensuring that research involving human participants is conducted in a responsible and ethical manner. It involves seeking approval from an ethical review board or committee to ensure that the study adheres to ethical principles and protects the rights, well-being, and privacy of the individuals involved. In the case of exploring the transitioning trajectories of independent contractors to business owners in South Africa's media services industry, ethical clearance is particularly important. Participants must provide informed consent to participate voluntarily in the study, and their anonymity must be protected. Any potential risks or

discomfort associated with the research should be minimised. Ethical clearance also reinforces the commitment to maintaining the highest standards of integrity and transparency throughout the research process. This, in turn, reinforces the credibility and trustworthiness of the study's findings. Ultimately, ethical clearance is crucial for upholding the dignity of participants and contributing to the responsible advancement of knowledge within academic and professional domains.

Ethical clearance was obtained, approved, and granted by the Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the North-West University. The ethics approval number for this study is: (NWU-01823-23-A4).

The POPI Act was also taken into consideration. This is very important as the POPI Act protects those participating in this study. This means that the names, surnames, or ID of the participants are not allowed to be shared in the study. Therefore, a unique participation ID was created for each participant. Overall, the POPI Act in South Africa aims to balance the need for organisations to collect and use personal information for legitimate purposes with the protection of individuals' privacy rights. It places an emphasis on transparency, consent, and accountability in the handling of personal data, aligning South Africa with international data protection standards.

3.5 Summary

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology employed to explore the transitioning trajectories of independent contractors to business owners in South Africa's media services industry. The chosen research design is qualitative, aligning with the nuanced and multifaceted nature of the transition process. Qualitative research enables an in-depth exploration of subjective experiences and motivations, offering flexibility to adapt to the evolving study context. The participants, drawn from North West, Northern Free State, and parts of Gauteng, include independent contractors and small business owners in the media services sector. A stratified sampling method is employed to ensure representation from diverse segments within the industry, and ethical considerations, including informed consent, are prioritized. Data collection involves a combination of qualitative questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, conducted between September and October 2023. The decision to use individual interviews instead of focus

groups is based on the sensitivity of the career transition topic, ensuring participants feel comfortable sharing personal experiences.

Furthermore, the chapter details the research procedure, highlighting ethical considerations and the adherence to established ethical guidelines. Ethical clearance from the Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the North-West University is obtained, emphasizing voluntary participation, confidentiality, and informed consent. The Protection of Personal Information (POPI) Act in South Africa is also taken into account to protect participants' privacy rights. Data analysis involves deductive and inductive coding, using ATLAS.ti for a thorough exploration of themes and sub-themes. The chapter underscores the trustworthiness of the study, emphasizing methodological rigor, transparency, and a commitment to sharing data and materials. Ethical clearance and adherence to ethical principles contribute to the study's credibility and reliability, ensuring the responsible exploration of transitioning trajectories in the South African media services industry.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction to results

For this study, a total of ten people were interviewed, where four were female and six were male. Out of the 15 who agreed to participate, only 10 participated agreed to do the interviews. Three of the participants are event photographers and videographers, two are videographers, two are event officers, one owns a production company, one is a social media manager, and one is a graphic designer. Each person got a participation ID. The participation ID numbers started at 001 and ended at 010. For the results, the researcher created themes that were found in the interviews. Each theme has sub-themes that would relate to one or more of the overall themes. Quotes from the interviews are included from the empirical data, which is used to make arguments and also to get insight from the interviewers' point of view. As mentioned in the data analysis, a list of 270 codes were created, and this was then reduced to 25 codes. One hundred forty-six quotes were created from the interview data. This implies that a thorough examination of the data was conducted. The themes were created by grouping the codes into categories, and then allocating a theme accordingly. Table 1 below provides the themes and sub-themes.

Table 1: Summary of Themes and Sub-Themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Motivations for transition	Stability, Creativity, Expansion, Independence, Capacity management.
Decision-making factors	Financial stability, Assessment: demand for services, Business expenses, Readiness scale, Market research.
Challenges Faced	Finding capital, HR challenges, Work–life balance, Competition, Client acquisition: client base.
Opportunities and success factors	Dedication, Marketing, Persistence, Business development, Quality work.

Readiness assessment framework	Readiness scale, Financial Stability, Compliance: legal and regulatory factors, Client Acquisition: client base, Business expansion.
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4.2 Presentation and analysis of findings

4.2.1 Motivations for transition

Motivations for transition, in the context of individuals moving from one state or situation to another, can encompass a wide range of personal, professional, and situational factors that drive the decision to make a significant change (Truominen *et al.*, 2020). These motivations can vary from one person to another and are influenced by individual goals, needs, and circumstances. In this study, it is to transition from being an independent contractor to a small business owner. Out of the ten people who were interviewed, six people made the transition, and their motivations ranged from wanting to work independently, gain creativity freedom, and expand their business, and because they reached capacity and couldn't do the work on their own anymore.

'Stability was the biggest reason for me. I wanted to have a routine and the ability to spend more time building relationships with people' [Participant 001, Event Photographer]

'To grow your business you need to have a team who can help you do that, so that you don't have to do everything alone in your business, but that you can start delegating tasks. So growth motivated me' [Participant 004, Production company owner.]

'My clients have grown significantly since I've started in 2020, and I started my own media business to appoint some people to help me.' [Participant 006, Videographer and Photographer.]

'The workload has become overwhelming, and I wanted a team to manage multiple client accounts effectively.' [Participant 008, Social Media Manager.]

'The workload has increased in my third year of being an independent contractor, and I need a team to handle larger projects efficiently and maintain work-life balance; that is why I transitioned.' [Participant 009, Graphic Designer]

'As event demand grew, I want to offer a full-service experience and I expanded because I reached my capacity.' [Participant 010, Event Photographer.]

Three of the participants reported that they were considering transitioning in the near future. The reason for this is that they believe it will give them more opportunities and creative freedom, and also the ability to work independently.

'The motivation to transition would depend on factors like a desire for more creative control, the potential for increased income, or the need to expand services beyond the university.' [Participant 002, Videographer]

'More opportunities: being exposed to more opportunities and also more sport types where more marketing can be done. Not limited to one place or one company.' [Participant 005, Events Officer]

'My motivation to transition would be to have control over my work and also to get more income.' [Participant 007, Videographer]

One participant reported that they had not made the transition yet because of financial uncertainty. They unsure that the business would be sustainable in the long run. Expenses is one of the biggest factors that they consider, and they are uncertain whether all the costs of the company would be covered when they transition.

'Expenses. That's the main one for me. As a one-man show, it's easy to generate the income yourself and to also take a salary from that income. Where you become a small business owner, sometimes you need to have an office. You have to switch the lights on, use water. There might be a levy. You might employ staff, which might all be tax deductible, but it is also an expense that you have to cover. I think if you can see the income and you know that you're not necessarily going to generate more by creating a business out of it and making a fully-fledged company, then you might carry on. But if you need more staff to generate more income, that might be a good move.' [Participant 003, Events Officer]

4.2.1 Decision-making factors

Decision-making factors are the considerations, criteria, and elements that individuals or organisations weigh when making choices or decisions. These factors influence the decision-making process and can be essential in determining the best course of action (Fischhoff *et al.*, 2022:340). The specific decision-making factors can vary depending on the nature of the decision and the context in which it is made.

In this study, the most common themes for decision-making factors were:

- Financial stability,
- Assessment: demand for services,
- Business expenses,
- Readiness scale,
- Market Research.

'Financial stability and determining your own workload or rules.' [Participant 001, Event Photographer]

'Key decision-making factors may involve assessing the demand for services, financial stability, a desire for independence, and the ability to handle increased administrative responsibilities.' [Participant 002, Videographer]

'Financial stability. If an independent contractor can be able to diarise enough income for at least three years, it's not always; that's a dream scenario. If you know that you are busy enough in whatever you do, let's say you're in the events industry, photography industry, you create ads, videos, whatever you do, you must be able to be self-sustainable. When you become a small business owner, not only an independent contractor, it's not only for yourself anymore, but it's for your staff as well, and to cover your overheads and expenses. You must know that you are fully booked in such a sense that more people can be employed, do multiple things at one stage, and create multiple channels of income. But the company must be self-sustainable. There's no need to invest more money to make more money if more jobs is not coming in.'
[Participant 003]

<i>'Scale: are you ready to work on a bigger scale with more people.'</i> [Participant 004, Production Company Owner]
<i>'Financial stability, market research: get to know the market, and if there is a gap in the market, to fill that with what you are doing. Make sure work comes in consistently before starting your own business.'</i> [Participant 005, Event Officer]
<i>'Key-decision making factor for me is financial stability and also if my monthly projects will cover the cost of all my expenses.'</i> [Participant 006, Photographer and Videographer]
<i>'Key decision-making factors for me is financial stability, would I be able to stand on my own feet and also to consider my expenses once I have my own business'</i> [Participant 007, Videographer]
<i>'Key factors include workload, client growth, and the need for specialised expertise'</i> [Participant 008, Social Media Manager]
<i>'Decision factors include the need for more resources, consistent work, and expanding the client base.'</i> [Participant 009, Graphic Designer]
<i>'Key decision-making factors for me include increasing demand, the need for a studio space, and the desire to offer a one-stop event photography service.'</i> [Participant 010, Event Photographer]

4.2.3 Challenges faced

Challenges faced refers to the difficulties, obstacles, or problems that individuals, organisations, or entities encounter in the course of pursuing their goals, objectives, or endeavours. These challenges can arise from various sources, including external factors, internal issues, or complex circumstances, and they can impede progress, create complications, or require active problem-solving (Boenigk *et al.*, 2021:550). For this study, the researcher asked the participants what the challenges were when they were independent contractors, or when they made the transition from being an independent contractor to a small business owner; the participants' comments are presented below:

'I think finding capital to buy your own equipment, finding work and client management skills.' [Participant 001, Event Photographer]

'Common challenges during the transition can include securing financing, hiring employees, managing business operations, and establishing a diverse client base.' [Participant 002, Videographer]

'I think they sometimes don't realise what it costs to be a small business owner. All of a sudden, you work for yourself, you have to generate your own income on a full-time basis, which means you can't... For instance, where I'm working now, I can take leave whenever I want to, and the money will still come in for the university in whichever sense. But when you're a small business owner, if you are away, then the company might stand still.' [Participant 003, Events Officer]

'Choosing a suitable name for your company ... In South Africa your B-BBEE score plays an important role in the type of business you can get.' [Participant 004, Production Company owner]

'Managing people: I think this is the most challenging part of any business. People are difficult to manage and to keep everyone happy all the time is impossible. So, choose your team wisely, and you need good people management skills or appoint someone to handle HR for you.' [Participant 004, production Company Owner]

'Competition in the media industry is huge. Make sure your work is top quality and make sure to be available so people can come to you and make use of your services.' [Participant 005, Events Officer]

'For starters, to build up a strong client base that you know will use you for events and also buying equipment that will be efficient enough to be used for events like weddings and other events.' [Participant 006, Photographer & Videographer]

'To have the finances, also to make the decision if I should hire employees and establishing a good client base.' [Participant 007, Videographer]

'Transition challenges include finding skilled social media professionals, financing, and complying with legal requirements.' [Participant 008, Social Media Manager]

'Challenges for me included securing financing for the studio I've built, finding skilled graphic designers to help me with projects, and navigating legalities.' [Participant 009, Graphic Designer]

4.2.4 Opportunities and the measure of success factors

Opportunities and the measure success factors are concepts often used in business and organisational contexts to assess and evaluate various aspects that can impact the achievement of objectives and desired outcomes (Indeed, 2023). Below are quotes from the participants on what they think opportunities and success factors are to transition from an independent contractor to a small business owner:

'Hard work, networking, and dedication. I feel a lot of people underestimate the amount of work it takes to create a successful business. Never get complacent either. Constant growth in your craft is crucial.' [Participant 001, Event Photographer]

'Key success factors may include effective branding, marketing strategies, and strong customer service. Transitioning contractors should focus on building a solid reputation.' [Participant 002, Videographer]

'Hard work, patience, a clear vision for your business, a good mission, and the correct team players as employees.' [Participant 004, Production Company Owner]

'To get long term clients in place before making the decision to start you own company. Clients determine your future and to have long term clients which you know will use your services will be a key success factor' [Participant 005, Events Officer]

'Hard work, dedication, and also building relationships with clients' [Participant 006, Photographer & Videographer]

'Branding, marketing, and have a good relationship with clients I believe are key success factors.' [Participant 007, Videographer]

'Success factors: team building, client satisfaction, and staying updated with industry trends are critical.' [Participant 008, Social Media Manager]

'Planning, marketing, and financial management are vital for a smooth transition'
[Participant 009, Graphic Designer]

'Success depends on maintaining the quality of event photography, building a cohesive team, effective marketing, and sound financial management.' [Participant 010, Event Photographer]

4.2.5 Readiness assessment framework

A readiness assessment framework is a structured tool or methodology used to evaluate the preparedness and capacity of individuals, organisations, or entities to undertake a specific change, project, or transition (Balasubramanian *et al.*, 2021). It is designed to assess whether the relevant stakeholders have the necessary resources, skills, knowledge, and conditions in place to successfully initiate, manage, and sustain the proposed initiative. Developing a conceptual framework that independent contractors can use to evaluate their readiness for small business ownership, potentially including factors like financial stability, business planning, and industry knowledge.

The five sub themes for the readiness assessment framework are:

- Readiness scale,
- Financial stability,
- Compliance: legal and regulatory factors,
- Client acquisition: client base,
- Business expansion.

Readiness assessment framework: transition from independent contractor to small business owner

1. Readiness scale

Objective: assess the overall readiness of the independent contractor to transition into small business ownership. This includes evaluating their mindset, commitment, and preparedness for the change especially if they are ready to scale up.

Criteria:

- self-assessment of readiness (e.g. on a scale from one to five),
- willingness to adapt to new roles and responsibilities,
- understanding of the challenges and demands of small business ownership.

2. Financial stability

Objective: evaluate the financial health and stability of the independent contractor. Financial stability is crucial for sustaining a new business venture.

Criteria:

- personal savings and assets,
- existing debts and financial obligations,
- access to initial capital for business startup,
- understanding budgeting and financial planning.

3. Compliance: legal and regulatory factors

Objective: assess the contractor's understanding and ability to navigate legal and regulatory requirements associated with small business ownership.

Criteria:

- awareness of local, state, and federal business registration and licensing requirements,
- knowledge of tax obligations and compliance,
- familiarity with industry-specific regulations,
- plan for legal structure (e.g. sole proprietorship, LLC, corporation).

4. Client acquisition: client base

Objective: determine the readiness to transition by assessing the strength and portability of the independent contractor's existing client base.

Criteria:

- size and diversity of the client portfolio,
- contractual agreements and client loyalty,

- transition plan for maintaining and expanding client relationships as a small business.

5. Business expansion

Objective: evaluate the potential for business growth and expansion as a small business owner.

Criteria:

- business growth strategy and goals,
- availability of resources for expansion (e.g. hiring staff, investing in marketing),
- market analysis and identification of growth opportunities.

Scoring system:

- Each criterion can be scored on a scale, such as from one to five, with one indicating low readiness and five indicating high readiness.
- The scores for all criteria can be aggregated to calculate an overall readiness score.
- An overall readiness score above a predefined threshold may indicate a higher likelihood of a successful transition.

Action Plan:

- Identify areas where readiness scores are low and require improvement.
- Develop an action plan to address the identified gaps, which may include acquiring necessary financial resources, seeking legal advice, and implementing a client transition strategy.
- This readiness assessment framework provides a structured approach to evaluating the readiness of an independent contractor for transitioning into a small business owner role. It helps in identifying areas that require attention and allows for targeted planning and preparation.

The following table is what a Readiness Assessment Framework can look like:

Table 2: Readiness Assessment Plan

Category	Objective	Self-assessment	Action plan
Readiness	<p>Assess the overall readiness of the independent contractor to transition into small business ownership. This includes evaluating their mindset, commitment, and preparedness for the change, especially if they are ready to scale up.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not ready: significant gaps and challenges in all readiness factors. 2. Somewhat ready: limited readiness and substantial areas for improvement. 3. Moderately ready: some readiness, but with important gaps to address. 4. Mostly ready: good readiness, but areas for improvement remain. 5. Fully ready: well-prepared and ready to transition to small business ownership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify weak areas: review the results of your self-assessment and identify areas where your readiness is rated lower. • Set clear objectives: establish clear and specific objectives for each factor. Determine what level of readiness you aim to achieve in each area. • Create a timeline: develop a timeline that outlines when you plan to work on each readiness factor. Ensure that the timeline is realistic and achievable. • Monitor and measure progress: continuously monitor and measure your progress in enhancing readiness. Use the overall readiness scale to assess your progress.
Financial Stability	<p>Evaluate the financial health and stability of the independent contractor. Financial stability is crucial for sustaining a new business venture.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not financially stable and lack necessary resources. 2. Somewhat financially stable but with limitations. 3. Moderately financially stable with some resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess current financial situation: review your current financial status, including savings, income, and expenses. Understand your financial strengths and weaknesses.

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Financially stable with adequate resources. 5. Fully financially stable and well-resourced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a financial plan: develop a financial plan that outlines how you will secure the necessary capital for your business. Consider options like savings, loans, or investors. • Build an emergency fund: establish an emergency fund to cover unexpected expenses or temporary income fluctuations during the transition. • Budget management: practice effective budgeting to control costs and ensure efficient financial management. • Diversify income streams: explore opportunities to diversify your income sources to enhance financial stability.
<p>Compliance: Legal and Regulatory Factors</p>	<p>Assess the contractor's understanding and ability to navigate legal and regulatory requirements associated with small business ownership.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack awareness of legal and regulatory requirements. 2. Partial awareness but not compliant. 3. Moderate awareness and partial compliance. 4. Good awareness and mostly compliant. 5. Full awareness and complete compliance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research legal requirements: thoroughly research the legal and regulatory requirements specific to your industry and location. Seek legal counsel if necessary. • Create a compliance checklist: develop a checklist of all legal and regulatory obligations, licenses, and permits that your business must comply with.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a compliance calendar: create a calendar to track compliance deadlines and renewal dates for licenses and permits. • Engage legal assistance: if needed, engage legal professionals or consultants who specialise in your industry to ensure full compliance. • Regular compliance audits: schedule regular compliance audits to ensure ongoing adherence to all legal and regulatory obligations.
<p>Client Acquisition: Client Base</p>	<p>Determine the readiness to transition by assessing the strength and portability of the independent contractor's existing client base.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No existing client base. 2. Limited client base with few clients. 3. Moderate client base with some regular clients. 4. Good client base with regular clients. 5. Extensive client base with a steady flow of clients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client relationship building: focus on building strong, long-lasting relationships with existing clients to encourage repeat business. • Referrals and networking: actively seek referrals and engage in networking events to expand your client base. • Marketing strategy: develop and implement a robust marketing strategy to attract new clients. • Market research: continuously conduct market research to identify opportunities and stay informed about client preferences and needs.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client retention: implement client retention strategies to ensure client loyalty and repeated engagement.
Business Expansion	Evaluate the potential for business growth and expansion as a small business owner.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No intention or ability to expand. 2. Minimal intent or limited resources for expansion. 3. Moderate intent and resources for limited expansion. 4. Strong intent and resources for moderate expansion. 5. Full intent and ample resources for significant expansion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth strategy: develop a clear growth strategy that outlines your vision for expanding the business. • Resource planning: evaluate the resources, including finances and personnel, required to support expansion. • Market expansion: research new markets or niches that align with your business and industry. • Scaling operations: prepare to scale your operations efficiently by considering hiring, technology, and infrastructure. • Risk management: develop contingency plans to address potential risks and challenges that may arise during expansion.

The assessment scale used for evaluating the readiness to transition from independent contractor to small business owner involves a numerical rating system ranging from 1 to 5. Each numerical rating corresponds to a specific level of readiness, with higher numbers indicating a higher degree of preparedness. The criteria for each level of readiness are clearly defined for each objective, including factors such as overall readiness, financial

stability, compliance with legal and regulatory requirements, strength of the client base, and potential for business expansion.

To perform the scale assessment, the individual would reflect on their current status and capabilities within each objective area and assign a numerical rating based on the provided criteria. For example, when assessing overall readiness, if the individual identifies significant gaps and challenges in various readiness factors, they might assign a rating of 1. Conversely, if they feel well-prepared and ready to transition, they might assign a rating of 5.

The self-assessment is a subjective process, requiring honest reflection and a realistic evaluation of one's current situation. After completing the assessments for each objective, the individual can then proceed with the action plan, addressing identified weaknesses, setting clear objectives, creating a realistic timeline, and monitoring progress over time. This structured approach allows for a systematic and strategic preparation for the transition from independent contracting to small business ownership.

4.3 Discussion and Interpretation of results

A readiness assessment plan for an independent contractor who aspires to transition to small business ownership is of paramount importance for several key reasons. First and foremost, such a plan serves as a structured and systematic framework for individuals to evaluate their preparedness and potential success in this significant career shift (Balasubramanian *et al.*, 2021). It enables a comprehensive self-assessment, helping individuals identify their strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in critical areas, such as financial stability, legal compliance, client acquisition, and business expansion. Moreover, the readiness assessment plan acts as a strategic roadmap, guiding individuals through the essential steps and actions required to address identified areas of improvement. It empowers them to set clear objectives, allocate resources, and create a timeline for enhancing their readiness. This structured approach increases the likelihood of a successful transition by ensuring that critical factors are thoroughly considered and addressed. The plan also acts as a risk mitigation tool. By conducting a thorough readiness assessment, individuals can proactively identify potential challenges and risks associated with the transition. This early awareness allows them to devise contingency plans and seek professional advice or mentorship in areas where they may lack expertise.

Furthermore, a readiness assessment plan provides a basis for informed decision-making. It helps individuals make realistic and well-informed choices about whether, when, and how to transition to small business ownership. It prevents hasty decisions that could lead to financial instability or compliance issues down the line (Balasubramanian *et al.*, 2021). In summary, a readiness assessment plan is a vital tool that empowers individuals to make informed, strategic, and well-prepared decisions regarding their transition from independent contracting to small business ownership. It not only enhances the chances of a successful transition but also minimises potential pitfalls and risks along the way.

4.4 Comparative analysis with theoretical framework

In the context of this study, a suitable theoretical framework could be drawn from entrepreneurship theories, such as the Stages of Small Business Growth Model proposed by Neil C. Churchill and Virginia L. Lewis. This model outlines distinct stages of growth that small businesses typically undergo, from existence through survival, success, and finally, take off (Uddenberg *et al.*, 2015)

The framework also considers critical factors such as financial management, strategic planning, and market orientation, providing a lens through which to analyse the transitioning trajectories of independent contractors (Uddenberg *et al.*, 2015)

Entrepreneurial motivations:

- Theoretical framework: entrepreneurship theories posit that individuals are motivated by autonomy, opportunity recognition, and a desire for growth (Uddenberg *et al.*, 2015)
- Study findings: the study aligns with these theories, as motivations for transition include a desire for independence, creative freedom, and business expansion.

Decision-making factors:

- Theoretical framework: the Stages of Small Business Growth Model emphasises financial stability, strategic planning, and market research as crucial for decision-making (Uddenberg *et al.*, 2015)

- Study findings: the study's objectives mirror these factors, focusing on financial stability, sector-specific environments, and challenges faced by contractors during the transition.

Challenges and Opportunities:

- Theoretical framework: entrepreneurial theories acknowledge that challenges, such as financial constraints and market competition, are inherent to business ownership. Opportunities arise from effective strategic planning and innovation (Uddenberg et al., 2015).
- Study findings: participants in the study echo these sentiments, citing challenges like financial uncertainty and competition while identifying opportunities in creative control and market exposure.

Readiness assessment framework:

- Theoretical framework: while not explicitly covered in traditional entrepreneurial theories, readiness assessment aligns with the broader concept of strategic planning and preparedness for business growth (Uddenberg et al., 2015)
- Study findings: the readiness assessment framework in the study aligns with the need for individuals to evaluate their readiness in critical areas before transitioning, drawing parallels with strategic planning theories.

Qualitative research design:

- Theoretical framework: qualitative research is often rooted in phenomenology or grounded theory, aiming to understand and interpret the lived experiences of individuals (Uddenberg et al., 2015)
- Study findings: the study's qualitative design is congruent with these theoretical underpinnings, capturing the nuanced experiences and perceptions of independent contractors transitioning to business ownership.

In summary, the study's focus on the transitioning trajectories of independent contractors aligns with entrepreneurship theories, particularly those emphasising the stages of small business growth. Although not explicitly theoretical, the readiness assessment framework draws from strategic planning concepts, enhancing the study's alignment with established

entrepreneurial principles. This comparative analysis demonstrates the coherence between theoretical frameworks in entrepreneurship and the study's empirical findings.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction to conclusions

The motivations for transitioning from independent contracting to small business ownership can be a complex interplay of personal and professional factors (Snider *et al.*, 2015). In this study, insights from interviews with ten individuals shed light on the diverse motivations driving this significant change. Notably, six out of the ten participants successfully made the transition, each driven by unique motivations. These motivations included a desire for greater independence, creative freedom, business expansion, and managing increasing workloads. Hereafter follows a discussion on these motivations.

5.2 Synthesis of key findings

Independence and stability: for some, like Participant 001, transitioning offered the prospect of stability and the ability to establish a daily routine. It allowed them to allocate more time to nurture relationships with clients and partners. This motivation reflects a desire for a sense of security and predictability, which can be particularly attractive to those who have experienced the fluctuations inherent in independent contracting (Alqahtani *et al.*, 2020).

Business growth and delegation: others, such as Participant 004 and Participant 006, were primarily motivated by the potential for business growth. The transition represented an opportunity to build a team and delegate tasks, which is often essential for expanding business operations. As workload and client demands increase, the need for additional hands and expertise becomes evident. This motivation reflects a proactive approach to scaling the business and maximising its potential.

Efficiency and work–life balance: a substantial workload, as expressed by Participant 008, can become overwhelming for independent contractors. In such cases, the transition allows for effective management of multiple client accounts, which contributes to maintaining a healthy work–life balance. This motivation is rooted in the pursuit of efficiency and the desire to ensure sustainable productivity without sacrificing personal life quality (Snider *et al.*, 2015).

Creative control and opportunities: among the three participants considering the transition in the future, creative control and expanded opportunities were common motivators. Participant 002 highlighted the desire for greater creative freedom, while Participant 005 saw transitioning as a means to access more diverse opportunities and marketing prospects. This motivation underscores the potential for personal and professional growth that small business ownership can offer (Uddenberg et al., 2015).

Financial uncertainty as a hurdle: despite these motivating factors, one participant, Participant 003, expressed hesitancy to transition due to financial uncertainty. This individual raised valid concerns about expenses associated with small business ownership, such as office costs, staff salaries, and additional overhead. The uncertainty about the ability to cover these costs and generate a sustainable income served as a significant hurdle to the transition.

The decision-making factors discussed in the study shed light on the multifaceted considerations that individuals face when contemplating the transition from independent contracting to small business ownership. These factors are pivotal in determining the feasibility and viability of such a transition.

Financial stability: as highlighted by several participants, financial stability emerges as a central decision-making factor. Participant 001 and Participant 006 underscore the importance of ensuring a stable income stream. In the context of small business ownership, financial stability transcends personal earnings and extends to the ability to cover overhead costs, staff salaries, and other business expenses. This factor is not only about the individual's financial well-being but also about the business's capacity to sustain itself and potentially grow (Alqahtani *et al.*, 2020).

Assessment: demand for services: Participant 002 and Participant 005 emphasise the need to assess the demand for services as a key decision-making factor. Understanding the market's demand for the services offered is fundamental in gauging whether there is a viable business opportunity. It involves conducting market research, identifying gaps in the market, and ensuring a consistent influx of work before making the transition. This factor aligns with the concept of ensuring there is a sustainable client base to support the business (Zhou *et al.*, 2020).

Readiness scale: Participant 004 alludes to the importance of readiness to handle a larger scale of operations, particularly if the transition involves expanding the business and working with a larger team. This factor pertains to the ability to manage the increased workload, administrative responsibilities, and the complexities that may arise when a business grows. It underscores the need for preparation and the capacity to adapt to a changing business landscape (Uddenberg et al., 2015).

Business expenses: as echoed by Participant 005 and Participant 007, the consideration of business expenses is a critical decision-making factor. Small business owners must account for various costs, such as office space, utilities, staff salaries, and equipment. Evaluating whether the income from monthly projects can comfortably cover these expenses is paramount. Balancing the revenue with the costs is vital for sustainable business operations.

Market research: understanding the market and identifying gaps, as emphasised by Participant 005, is intertwined with the assessment of demand for services. Market research is a vital component of decision-making, enabling individuals to align their business offerings with the needs of potential clients. It also involves recognising opportunities in the market landscape.

Scaling and growth: Participant 008, Participant 009, and Participant 010 highlight the decision-making factors related to scaling and growth. Factors such as workload, client growth, the need for specialised expertise, and the desire to offer comprehensive services play a significant role in decision-making. Scaling a business often entails taking on more work, expanding the client base, and providing a broader range of services.

In summary, the decision-making factors discussed in this study reflect the comprehensive and intricate considerations that individuals weigh when contemplating a transition from independent contracting to small business ownership. These factors encompass financial stability, demand assessment, readiness to scale, business expenses, and market research. Each factor serves as a valuable guidepost for individuals as they assess their preparedness, evaluate the market landscape, and make informed decisions about embarking on the journey of small business ownership. By considering these factors in a structured and systematic manner, prospective small

business owners can enhance their prospects of success and mitigate risks associated with the transition.

The challenges faced in the pursuit of transitioning from being an independent contractor to a small business owner are multifaceted and reflect the intricate landscape of entrepreneurship. The insights gathered from the study's participants shed light on the diverse obstacles and hurdles encountered during this significant change. Let's have a discussion of these challenges and their implications.

Capital and equipment acquisition: Participant 001 aptly identifies the challenge of securing capital to purchase essential equipment. This is a common hurdle for many individuals making the transition. Equipment costs can be substantial, and without adequate capital, it becomes difficult to set up the necessary infrastructure to operate as a small business. It's a financial obstacle that demands resourcefulness and creative financing solutions.

Financial challenges and income generation: Participant 003 provides valuable insights into the financial challenges faced during the transition. The shift from independent contracting to small business ownership means the responsibility to generate a consistent income falls squarely on the individual. This change can be daunting, especially if individuals were accustomed to the security of a regular income in their previous roles. It underscores the need for careful financial planning and the ability to maintain business operations even during slow periods (Zhou *et al.*, 2020).

Business operations and management: Participant 002 rightly highlights the challenges related to business operations and management. Managing the complexities of a small business, including hiring employees, overseeing daily operations, and building a diverse client base, can be overwhelming. It calls for a diverse skill set, including leadership and organisational abilities, which may not have been as critical in the role of an independent contractor.

Brand and compliance: Participant 004 brings attention to challenges such as choosing a suitable business name and addressing compliance requirements. These issues reflect the need for effective branding and adherence to legal and regulatory standards. Choosing a business name that resonates with clients and satisfies legal requirements is a nuanced challenge that can impact the business's image and credibility.

People management and competition: as noted by Participant 004 and Participant 005, people management and competition are significant challenges in the transition to small business ownership. Managing a team, fostering a positive work environment, and handling HR-related matters can be intricate tasks that require expertise in interpersonal dynamics. Additionally, the competitive landscape in the media and events industry demands consistently high-quality work and availability to meet client demands.

Client base and equipment efficiency: Participant 006 highlights the challenge of building a strong and reliable client base. This challenge underlines the importance of client acquisition strategies and marketing efforts to ensure a consistent flow of business. Moreover, the efficient use of equipment for events is crucial for providing high-quality services and maintaining client satisfaction.

Financial decisions and compliance: Participant 007 emphasises the financial challenges, including the decision to hire employees and the establishment of a good client base. These financial decisions are significant milestones in the transition process, and they require careful consideration. Furthermore, complying with legal and regulatory requirements is an ongoing challenge that demands a commitment to staying informed and adhering to industry-specific standards.

Skilled professionals and legalities: Participant 008 and Participant 009 point out challenges related to finding skilled professionals and navigating legalities. In industries such as social media management and graphic design, sourcing and retaining skilled talent can be a persistent challenge. Additionally, legal requirements and compliance, including issues related to studio construction, can present hurdles that need to be addressed methodically.

In conclusion, the challenges faced by individuals transitioning from independent contracting to small business ownership represent a dynamic landscape of financial, operational, legal, and HR-related obstacles. These challenges highlight the need for comprehensive planning, financial prudence, effective management, and a clear understanding of the competitive landscape. Successful navigation of these challenges can lead to a rewarding and sustainable small business venture. The insights provided by the study's participants underscore the importance of preparedness and strategic thinking when making this significant career shift (Snider *et al.*, 2015).

The perspectives shared by the study's participants provide valuable insights into the concepts of opportunities and success factors when transitioning from an independent contractor to a small business owner. These insights underscore the multifaceted nature of opportunities and the critical elements that contribute to success in this entrepreneurial journey (Zhou *et al.*, 2020). Let's delve into a discussion of these opportunities and success factors and their implications.

Hard work and dedication: Participant 001 emphasises the importance of hard work, networking, and dedication. These are foundational elements in building a successful small business. The commitment to continuous effort and self-improvement, combined with networking to establish valuable connections, are key opportunities for aspiring small business owners. This underscores the need for an unwavering work ethic and the understanding that success often requires sustained effort (Snider *et al.*, 2015).

Effective branding and marketing: Participant 002 highlights the significance of effective branding and marketing strategies. This suggests that opportunities lie in the ability to craft a strong brand identity and promote the business effectively. Successful branding can help distinguish the business in a competitive market, while effective marketing strategies can create visibility and attract clients. Building a solid reputation is a key success factor that can lead to sustained business growth (Zhou *et al.*, 2020).

Vision, mission, and team: Participant 004 identifies the importance of having a clear vision and mission for the business, along with assembling the right team. These elements represent opportunities for setting a strategic direction and leveraging the strengths of a dedicated team. A well-defined vision and mission can guide the business, while selecting the right team members who share the same values and goals can be a key success factor in achieving those objectives (Uddenberg *et al.*, 2015).

Client relationships and long-term clients: Participant 005 highlights the opportunity of securing long-term clients as a key success factor. Building and nurturing client relationships is fundamental to long-term business success. Having a pool of loyal, long-term clients who regularly use the business's services can provide stability and a foundation for growth.

Branding, marketing, and client relationships: Participants 006 and 007 echo the importance of branding, marketing, and maintaining good client relationships as key

success factors. These elements collectively contribute to the business's reputation and its ability to attract and retain clients. Opportunities for growth and success can be harnessed through effective branding, marketing efforts, and the cultivation of strong client connections.

Team building and industry trends: Participant 008 emphasises the importance of team building, client satisfaction, and staying updated with industry trends. These factors represent both opportunities and success factors. Building a competent and cohesive team can enhance the business's capacity to meet client needs, while staying attuned to industry trends ensures the business remains competitive and adaptable in a dynamic marketplace.

Planning, marketing, and financial management: Participant 009 underscores the value of planning, marketing, and financial management. These elements represent opportunities for informed decision-making and strategic thinking. Effective planning and financial management are critical to achieving a smooth transition, while marketing strategies can create opportunities for business growth (Zhou *et al.*, 2020).

Quality, team, marketing, and financial management: Participant 010 emphasises maintaining the quality of event photography, building a cohesive team, effective marketing, and sound financial management as success factors. This highlights the importance of maintaining excellence in service delivery, fostering a collaborative work environment, and managing the business's financial health as key contributors to success.

In conclusion, the insights provided by the study's participants underscore that opportunities and success factors are intertwined in the journey from independent contracting to small business ownership (Snider *et al.*, 2015). These opportunities often present themselves in the form of hard work, effective branding, marketing strategies, client relationships, and visionary leadership (Snider *et al.*, 2015). Success factors include maintaining quality, building a competent team, and sound financial management. Recognising these opportunities and success factors and strategically leveraging them can significantly enhance the prospects of small business owners in a competitive and dynamic business environment.

5.3 Implications and recommendations for the industry

The practical implications of this study on 'Transitioning Trajectories of Independent Contractors to Business Owners in South Africa's Media Services Industry' can have a significant impact on various stakeholders, including independent contractors, small business owners, policymakers, and industry professionals. Below are some practical implications:

1. Guidance for independent contractors

Independent contractors looking to transition to small business ownership can benefit from the insights provided in this study. They gain a deeper understanding of the motivations, decision-making factors, challenges, and opportunities associated with the transition. This knowledge can inform their decision-making process and help them prepare effectively for the change.

2. Readiness assessment tools

the study highlights the importance of readiness assessment in determining an individual's preparedness for small business ownership. This can lead to the development of practical readiness assessment tools or resources that aspiring entrepreneurs can use to evaluate their own situations and make informed decisions.

3. Financial planning and support

The study emphasises the significance of financial stability and capital acquisition in the transition process. This can lead to the development of financial planning resources and support mechanisms for individuals making the shift. Financial institutions and government agencies may offer tailored services or funding opportunities to facilitate the transition.

Entrepreneurs in South Africa can gain access to financial planning and support by engaging with a variety of resources offered by financial institutions, government agencies, and business support organizations. The study's emphasis on the significance of financial stability and capital acquisition underscores the need for tailored services to assist individuals in their transition from independent contracting to small business ownership in the media services industry.

Financial institutions, including banks and lending organizations, may develop specialized programs or products designed to meet the unique needs of entrepreneurs in the media sector. These offerings could include business loans, lines of credit, or financial planning services aimed at supporting entrepreneurs through the challenges of transitioning. Entrepreneurs are encouraged to proactively reach out to financial institutions to explore available options, discuss their business plans, and assess the feasibility of financial support.

Government agencies, such as those dedicated to small business development, may play a crucial role in providing financial assistance and guidance. Entrepreneurs can access information on grants, subsidies, or incentive programs designed to facilitate business ownership transitions. Government-sponsored workshops or advisory services may offer insights into financial planning and help entrepreneurs navigate the regulatory landscape.

Business support organizations, industry associations, and entrepreneurial networks can serve as valuable sources of information and assistance. These entities may collaborate with financial institutions and government agencies to provide workshops, mentorship programs, or networking events that specifically address financial planning and support for individuals making the shift.

Moreover, digital platforms and online resources may offer entrepreneurs convenient access to financial planning tools, educational materials, and information on funding opportunities. Staying informed about industry trends and participating in relevant forums can also provide entrepreneurs with insights into best practices for financial management during the transition.

In summary, entrepreneurs in South Africa can access financial planning and support by actively engaging with financial institutions, government agencies, and business support organizations. By leveraging available resources and staying proactive in seeking guidance, entrepreneurs can enhance their financial stability and increase their chances of a successful transition to small business ownership.

4. Education and training

The findings can inform educational institutions and training programmes about the specific needs of individuals transitioning to small business ownership in the media

services industry. Tailored courses and workshops can be developed to equip entrepreneurs with the necessary skills and knowledge.

Entrepreneurs seeking education and training opportunities in South Africa can benefit from the study's findings by actively engaging with existing educational institutions and training programs. As the research highlights the specific needs of individuals transitioning to small business ownership in the media services industry, entrepreneurs can anticipate the development of tailored courses and workshops that address these identified needs. By keeping abreast of offerings from reputable institutions and training providers, aspiring business owners can access programs designed to equip them with essential skills and knowledge required for a successful transition.

These entrepreneurs can explore collaborations with established institutions, industry associations, and business development organizations that are likely to leverage the study's insights to enhance their educational offerings. Networking with professionals in the media services sector and participating in industry events can serve as avenues for discovering and accessing relevant training opportunities. Online platforms and digital resources may also play a crucial role in providing accessible and flexible learning options, accommodating the dynamic needs of entrepreneurs managing their businesses while undergoing the transition.

In essence, entrepreneurs in South Africa can access education and training by proactively seeking out programs that align with the study's recommendations. By staying informed about the evolving landscape of educational resources, entrepreneurs can enhance their capabilities and readiness for the challenges and opportunities associated with transitioning from independent contracting to small business ownership in the media services industry.

5. Policy considerations

Policymakers may use the study's insights to consider policies that support small business development in the media services sector. This can include simplifying registration processes, providing tax incentives, and offering resources for compliance with industry-specific regulations.

6. Mentorship and networking

The study underscores the value of networking, mentorship, and relationship-building. Associations and industry groups can facilitate mentorship programmes and networking events to connect established small business owners with newcomers, fostering knowledge exchange and support.

7. Market research and innovation

The emphasis on market research as a key success factor can encourage small business owners to continually assess market trends and innovation opportunities. Industry associations and business support organisations may offer resources and guidance on market research and innovation strategies.

8. Client relationship management

Recognising the importance of client relationships as a success factor can lead to the development of client management resources and best practices. Businesses can invest in client relationship management tools and training to enhance customer satisfaction and retention.

9. Quality and efficiency:

The focus on maintaining high-quality services and operational efficiency can drive small business owners to invest in equipment, technology, and staff training to meet and exceed client expectations.

10. Networking and collaboration:

Industry professionals can leverage the study's findings to encourage collaboration and partnership opportunities among businesses in the media services sector. Collaborative efforts can expand market reach and provide more comprehensive services to clients.

In summary, the practical implications of this study extend to various facets of the media services industry and entrepreneurship in South Africa. The insights obtained from the research offer valuable guidance and support for those considering the transition from independent contracting to small business ownership. They can inform strategies, policies, and resources that facilitate a smoother and more successful transition process.

Entrepreneurs in South Africa can access the practical implications outlined in this study through a multi-faceted approach that involves leveraging available resources, engaging with industry networks, and staying informed about educational opportunities. Firstly, entrepreneurs can seek guidance from business development organizations, industry associations, and government agencies that focus on supporting small businesses. These entities are likely to offer workshops, seminars, and educational materials tailored to the specific needs identified in the study, such as financial planning, readiness assessment, and client relationship management.

Furthermore, entrepreneurs can tap into existing mentorship programs and networking events facilitated by industry associations. Establishing connections with experienced small business owners can provide valuable insights and firsthand advice on navigating the challenges and seizing opportunities in the media services sector. Online platforms, industry forums, and social media groups may serve as additional channels for networking and knowledge exchange.

To stay informed about policy considerations, entrepreneurs should regularly check updates from relevant government departments and industry regulatory bodies. Understanding potential changes in registration processes, tax incentives, and compliance regulations can help entrepreneurs align their business strategies with evolving policies. Educational institutions and training programs may also incorporate the study's findings into their curricula, offering aspiring entrepreneurs targeted courses and workshops.

Overall, the practical implications highlighted in the study can be accessed through a proactive and collaborative approach. Entrepreneurs should actively engage with the resources and opportunities available in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, leveraging the insights provided to enhance their preparedness and success in transitioning from independent contracting to small business ownership in the dynamic landscape of South Africa's media services industry.

5.4 Final conclusions

In conclusion, this study has provided a comprehensive exploration of the transitioning trajectories of independent contractors to small business owners in South Africa's dynamic media services industry. The research journey unveiled a nuanced landscape of

motivations, decision-making factors, challenges, and opportunities that individuals encounter when making this significant career shift.

Motivations for transition were found to be diverse, ranging from a desire for independence, creative freedom, business expansion, to the need to manage increasing workloads and maintain work–life balance. These motivations reflect the personal and professional aspirations of individuals in the pursuit of entrepreneurial ventures. Decision-making factors played a pivotal role in the transition process, with financial stability, demand assessment, readiness to scale, business expenses, and market research emerging as critical considerations. These factors informed individuals' choices and guided their preparedness for the challenges and opportunities ahead. Challenges, as reported by the participants, underscored the multifaceted nature of small business ownership. Overcoming obstacles related to capital acquisition, financial stability, business operations, and legal compliance demanded resilience and strategic planning. These challenges illuminated the need for informed decision-making and effective problem-solving. Conversely, opportunities and success factors pointed to the promise of hard work, effective branding, marketing strategies, client relationships, and visionary leadership. These elements provide a roadmap for aspiring small business owners to build a solid reputation and sustain business growth.

As South Africa's media services industry continues to evolve, the findings of this study offer valuable insights to independent contractors considering the transition to small business ownership. By recognising the motivating factors, addressing the decision-making criteria, preparing for challenges, and capitalising on opportunities, individuals can navigate this transition with greater confidence and preparedness. The study underscores the importance of conducting a readiness assessment, as it empowers individuals to evaluate their personal and professional readiness for the journey ahead. Additionally, it emphasises the value of comprehensive planning, financial prudence, effective marketing, and team building as core elements of success in this entrepreneurial landscape.

The transitioning trajectory from independent contracting to small business ownership in South Africa's media services industry is a multifaceted endeavour, marked by unique motivations, challenges, and opportunities. This study provides a valuable resource for

individuals seeking to embark on this transformation, offering insights that can inform their decision-making and enhance their prospects for a successful transition.

5.5 Limitations and suggestions

While this study provides valuable insights into the transitioning trajectories of independent contractors to business owners in South Africa's media services industry, it is crucial to acknowledge certain limitations that may impact the generalizability and depth of the findings. Firstly, the study's scope is geographically limited to the North West, Northern Free State, and parts of Gauteng regions, potentially limiting the representation of diverse perspectives from other parts of the country. The media services industry exhibits regional variations, and the experiences of individuals in different provinces may differ significantly. Therefore, caution should be exercised in extrapolating the findings to the entire South African context.

Secondly, the qualitative nature of the research, while well-suited for exploring individual experiences, may introduce subjectivity in data interpretation. The insights obtained are context-specific and may not be universally applicable. Additionally, the sample size of ten participants, though chosen strategically, may not capture the full spectrum of experiences within the diverse media services sector. A larger and more varied sample could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with transitioning.

To enhance the robustness of future research in this area, it is recommended to broaden the geographical scope, incorporating participants from different provinces and cultural backgrounds. This expansion would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges faced by independent contractors across diverse regional contexts. Furthermore, employing a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative insights with quantitative data, could provide a more holistic view of the factors influencing the transition to small business ownership. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking individuals through their transition process and beyond could offer valuable insights into the long-term impacts of the decisions made during this critical career phase. Finally, considering the dynamic nature of the media services industry, regular updates and follow-up studies would ensure that the findings remain relevant and reflective of the evolving landscape.

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ANNEXURE A: DATA COLLECTION TOOL



NWU Business School
North-West University
Private Bag x6001
Potchefstroom, 2520
<http://commerce.nwu.ac.za/business-school>

The purpose of this interview guide is to provide a structured approach for conducting interviews with relevant stakeholders.

Interview Procedure:

1. Pre-Interview Communication

- a. Contact the selected participants, provide an overview of the study, and request their participation.
- b. Send a formal invitation with details of the interview, including date, time, location, and the expected duration.
- c. Share the consent form and any relevant background material with the participant in advance.

2. Interview Set-up

- a. Choose a suitable location for the interview, ensuring minimal interruptions and distractions.
- b. Set up recording equipment and test it before the interview.
- c. Have materials ready to take notes during the interview.

3. Beginning the Interview

- a. Begin the interview by expressing gratitude for the participant's time and willingness to contribute to the study.
- b. Introduce myself and provide a brief overview of the research project.
- c. Explain the interview process, including its duration, voluntary nature, confidentiality, and how the data will be used.
- d. Obtain informed consent from the participant.

4. Conducting the Interview

- a. Use the interview guide to ask structured questions and follow-up probes.
- b. Encourage the participant to share their thoughts, experiences, and opinions by using active listening skills and maintaining eye contact.
- c. Be flexible and responsive to the participant's answers, adapting the interview guide as necessary.
- d. Take notes during the interview, focusing on key points, quotes, and observations.

Demographic Questions

1. What is your current role or occupation in the photography and media services industry?
2. How many years of experience do you have as an independent contractor in this industry?
3. Could you briefly describe the type of media services you specialize in?
4. In which geographical location(s) do you primarily operate your business?
5. Have you ever considered transitioning from an independent contractor to a small business owner in this industry?
6. What motivated or influenced your decision to consider this transition?



7. Could you please provide some background information about your previous experience as an independent contractor and any challenges you have faced during that time?
8. How familiar are you with the process and requirements of becoming a small business owner in the photography and media services industry?
9. Do you currently have any plans or strategies in place for making this transition?
10. Can you describe the key decision-making factors that independent contractors in the photography and media services industry consider when transitioning to small business owners?
 - a. Probe: Are there any specific factors or criteria that heavily influence their decision?
11. What are the common challenges that independent contractors face when making the transition to small business owners in the media services industry?
 - a. Probe: Can you provide specific examples of challenges that you or others have encountered during this transition process?
12. How important is financial stability in the decision-making process for independent contractors transitioning to small business owners? What financial factors should they consider?
 - a. Probe: Are there any specific financial considerations or strategies that you believe are crucial for a successful transition?
13. What are the key success factors that independent contractors should focus on to ensure a smooth transition to small business ownership in the photography and media services industry?
 - a. Probe: Can you provide examples or insights into how these success factors have played a role in your own experience or in the experiences of others?
14. How crucial is market research and understanding the target audience when transitioning from an independent contractor to a small business owner in the photography and media services industry?
 - a. Probe: Could you share any effective market research techniques or approaches that you have used or witnessed others using during this transition?
15. What strategies can independent contractors employ to build a strong client base and establish a solid reputation as small business owners in the photography and media services industry?
 - a. Probe: Are there any specific marketing or networking strategies that you would recommend for successfully attracting clients and establishing a reputation?
16. Are there specific legal and regulatory factors that independent contractors should be aware of when transitioning to small business ownership in the photography and media services industry?



ANNEXURE B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM



NWU Business School
North-West University
Private Bag x6001
Potchefstroom, 2520
<http://commerce.nwu.ac.za/business-school>

25 June 2023

DEAR PARTICIPANT

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER TO INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

You are invited to take part in a research study that forms part of a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this study. Please ask the researcher or person explaining the research to you any questions about any part of this study that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research is about and how you might be involved. Also, your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to say no to participating. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part now.

This study has been approved by the NWU Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC) and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the North-West University and other international ethical guidelines applicable to this study.

Title of the project: Exploring the transitioning trajectories of independent contractors to business owners in South Africa's media services industry.

Institution: NWU Business School

Ethics Reference Number: NWU-01823-23-A4

Names and contact details of project staff

	Supervisor	Researcher
Title, name & surname	Prof Leenta Grobler	Mr Tian du Preez
Full Names	Magdalena Johanna Grobler	Tian du Preez
Function in Project	Principle Investigator	Researcher
Telephone	0828785894	0828811741

What is this research study all about?

This research seeks to delve into the decision-making factors and identify the key success to identify the key decision-making factors that independent contractors in the photography and media services industry consider when deciding to transition into small business ownership.

The primary objectives to this study:

- To explore the key decision-making factors that independent contractors in the media services industry consider when deciding to transition into small business ownership.
- To describe the sector-specific environment of the media services industry and identify critical success factors for small business owners.
- To identify the challenges and opportunities faced by independent contractors transitioning to small business ownership in the media services industry.



- To develop a conceptual framework that independent contractors can use to evaluate their readiness to transition to small business ownership in the media services industry.

Why have you been invited to participate?

You have been invited to participate in this research study because you fall into at least one of the following categories:

- Freelance/Self Employed Photographers or Videographers.
- Small Business Owners in the Media Industry.

What will be expected of you?

You will be expected to:

- Participate in a 45 – 60 min semi-structured interview with the researcher at a suitable time and private area without interruptions that is convenient for both parties via an online platform. This will be scheduled by the researcher once approved by the NWU ethics committee.
- Respond to the questions in an open and honest manner.
- Inform the supervisor should you feel or experience any form of discomfort or distress during the research process and inform the supervisor if you at times feel the need to terminate your involvement in the research process.

Will you gain anything from taking part in this research?

This research study intends to give you a voice to reveal, explain and reflect on the decisions-making factors and key success factors that you have used to grow your business. No monetary reward shall be made available for participation in the study. You will however be furnished with a two-page communique on the outcomes of the study that you can utilize to prepare for the interview.

Are there risks involved in your taking part in this research and what will be done to prevent them?

Participation in this study does not create any physical risk to you as the study does not involve any physical activities or experiments. We, however, have identified certain ethical principles that shall be always maintained to prevent any damage to you. The focus of these principles will be to protect your dignity and keep all records provided private and confidential.

How will we protect your confidentiality and who will see your findings?

You will be assigned a unique participant ID because of the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) of 2013, it is not allowed to use people's names and surnames in the study. Overall, the POPIA Act in South Africa aims to balance the need for organizations to collect and use personal information for legitimate purposes with the protection of individuals' privacy rights. It places an emphasis on transparency, consent, and accountability in the handling of personal data, aligning South Africa with international data protection standards. Our interview will be recorded and saved with reference to the ID, but data collected shall be regarded as confidential and will not be shared with any 3rd party that is not directly involved in the research process. Personal details of participants and their direct input to the research study shall not be made public. All records of the research shall be kept for a retention period and destroyed by an appropriate means. The findings of the study will be made public however will not contain any raw data that might incriminate certain individuals.

What will happen with the findings or samples?



The findings concluded in the study will be for academic purposes and will only be utilized to add to the current body of available knowledge.

How will you know about the results of this research?

Participants in the study, should they require, will be made aware of the results of the research, through a two-page communique, by means of electronic mail. The electronic final version of the dissertation will also be made available if requested.

Will you be paid to take part in this study and are there any costs for you?

Participation in this study will not yield monetary value to you. There is no cost envisaged to you except the time that you spend participating in this study. This study will be funded by the researcher himself.

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

You may contact the supervisor, Prof Leenta Grobler, on leenta.grobler@nwu.ac.za if you have any further questions or problems. You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your own purposes.

DECLARATION

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I _____ agree to take part in the research study titled: Exploring the transitioning trajectories of independent contractors to business owners in South Africa's media services industry.

I declare that:

I have read this information/it was explained to me by a trusted person in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable in. The research was clearly explained to me. I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person getting the consent from me, as well as the researcher and all my questions have been answered. I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and I have not been pressured to take part. I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be handled in a negative way if I do so. I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished if the researcher feels it is in the best interest, or if I do not follow the study plan, as agreed to.

Signed at: _____

On: _____

Signature of participant

Signature of witness



Declaration by researcher

I Tian du Preez declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to the participant
- I did/did not use an interpreter
- I encouraged them to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them or I was available should they want to ask any further questions.
- I am satisfied that they adequately understand all aspects of the research, as described above.
- I am satisfied that they had time to discuss it with others if they wished to do so.

Signed at: _____ On: _____

Signature of researcher

Signature of supervisor



ANNEXURE C: ETHICAL CLEARANCE DOCUMENTATION



Private Bag X1290, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 015 299-1111/2222
Fax: 015 299-4910
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Senate Committee for Research Ethics
Tel: 015 299-404
Fezile.Mseleni@nwu.ac.za

11 October 2023

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the **Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC)** on, 25/08/2023 the Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee hereby **approves** your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-REC) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title: Factors influencing independent contractors' transition to small business owners in the photography and media services industry																																	
Study Leader/Supervisor (Principal Investigator)/Researcher: Prof L Grobler																																	
Student: T du Preez (24098973)																																	
<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr> <td>N</td><td>W</td><td>U</td><td>-</td><td>0</td><td>1</td><td>8</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>-</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>-</td><td>A</td><td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3">Institution</td> <td colspan="5">Study Number</td> <td colspan="2">Year</td> <td colspan="5">Status</td> </tr> </table> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation</p>				N	W	U	-	0	1	8	2	3	-	2	3	-	A	4	Institution			Study Number					Year		Status				
N	W	U	-	0	1	8	2	3	-	2	3	-	A	4																			
Institution			Study Number					Year		Status																							
Application Type:																																	
Commencement date: 11/10/2023		Risk: Minimal																															
Expiry date: 11/10/2024																																	
Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.																																	

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):

•

<p>General conditions:</p> <p><i>While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The study leader/supervisor (principle investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the EMS-REC:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and</i> - <i>without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.</i> • <i>The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the EMS-REC, prior to implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.</i> • <i>Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit.</i> • <i>The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started.</i> <p><i>In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-SCRE and EMS-REC reserves the right to:</i></p>

1

- request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;
- to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process;
- withdraw or postpone approval if:
 - any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;
 - it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the EMS-REC or that information has been false or misrepresented;
 - submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or
 - new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.

The EMS-REC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your study. Please do not hesitate to contact the EMS-REC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely,

The logo for Mark Rathbone, featuring the name 'Mark' in a stylized font with a blue and yellow graphic element.

Rathbone

Digitally signed by Mark Rathbone
DN: cn=Mark Rathbone, o=North-
West University, ou=Business
management,
email=mark.rathbone@nwu.ac.za,
c=ZA
Date: 2023.10.13 10:32:30 +02'00'

Prof Mark Rathbone

Chairperson: NWU Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee

ANNEXURE D: ADDITIONAL SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Language Editing Certificate



Certificate of Proofreading

391 Walter Sisulu Street
Miederpark
Potchefstroom
2531
24/11/2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I, Mirrycke Krüger, hereby confirm that Krüger Language Practitioners have proofread the mini-dissertation of T du Preez (24098973), titled:

Exploring the transitioning trajectories of independent contractors to business owners in South Africa's media services industry

Submitted to the North-West University in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree: Master of Business Administration at the North-West University.

Mirrycke Krüger
SATI member number: 1000377
Qualified Language Practitioner: BPHIL Ethics, Philosophy, and Languages (with distinction/
GoldenKey)
kruger.langprac@gmail.com
061 211 7594

Disclaimer

During the proofreading process, the assigned language practitioner uses track changes and the comment tool to make corrections and suggestions. The student works through these track changes and rejects or accepts them. Thus, this document cannot be a direct representation of the language practitioner's work. Furthermore, Krüger Language Practitioners cannot guarantee that the student did not include new sections after receiving the proofread document.

Proofreading services exclude reference checking; it is exclusively concerned with the appearance of the references according to a specific style. Reference checking is a separate and costlier service. If major errors are found in the appearance of the references, such as using a mixture of APA and Harvard style references, consistently making the same mistakes, or incorrectly applying a reference style throughout the text, the client is instructed to revise them. The practice also cannot guarantee that the client understood or corrected these errors. Proofreading services excludes fixing references.

Furthermore, proofreading services are also distinct from editing services, which means that the content and overall composition of the text is solely addressed by the supervisor and the student (or a third party service provider other than Krüger Language Practitioners). Proofreading is primarily concerned with syntax, grammar, punctuation, minor formatting errors, inconsistencies, and the appearance of references.

Proofreading is synonymous with language editing.

If any doubt exists as to whether this certificate was indeed issued to the specific student named on this form, contact us to confirm whether he/she was our client.

Notice of submission



NWU Higher Degree Administration

NOTICE OF SUBMISSION - FORM

*Notice of intention to submit for examination must be given to Higher Degree Administration at least **three months** prior to submission for examination*

Student title, first names and surname:	Mr. Tian du Preez
Address (correspondence):	36 Rissik Street Potchefstroom 2530
Email:	tiandup@gmail.com
University number:	2 4 0 9 8 9 7 3
Cell no:	0 8 2 8 8 1 1 7 4 1
Promoter/Supervisor:	Prof. Leenta Grobler
Qualification currently registered for:	Masters in Business Administration (MBA)

Title:
(it should be exactly the same as registered/approved title)

Exploring the transitioning trajectories of independent contractors to business owners in South Africa's media services industry

This title must appear exactly as registered by the faculty. No deviation from the registered title will be accepted on the title page for examination copies and final copies titles in title case only (ALL CAPS), are not accepted as an NWU style for Title registrations

Intended submission date:	27 November 2023	ORCID:	0 0 0 9 - 0 0 0 8 - 3 9 2 4 - 9 1 4 6
Ethics number:	NWU-01823-23-A4		
Signature of student:			

I, **Prof Leenta Grobler** the promoter/supervisor of abovementioned student hereby confirm that:

I will not, in accordance with the General Academic Rules 4.11.2.10 (M) and 5.11.2.10 (PhD)

- Communicate with the examiners of this student during the examination period.

I also confirm that:

- The student will most likely be ready to submit by the above mentioned date;
- The title for the study has been registered on an approved committee;
- The registered title mentioned above is correct;
- And that the examiners have been appointed on an approved committee.

Promoter/Supervisor:	
Signature:	
	Digitally signed by Prof Leenta Grobler Date: 2023.11.20 19:24:33 +02'00'