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DESIGN RESEARCH MASTERY JOURNAL

Introduction to place branding,
research methods, and differentiation.





This November we studied Design Research. This course covered a wide verity of topics and we began a place branding assignment that will continue in future months.

During the preliminary steps of this assignment, we focused on finding a place that was in our city that is distinctive, authentic, memorable, co-created, and had a clear sense of place.

For my place I decided to brand an art district in Salisbury, NC. This district is located on the south east side of downtown near the railroad tracks.

This area is distinctive because of the high concentration of art galleries, theaters, and museums in the area. It is also perfectly paired with restaurants and breweries for the



perfect cultured evening out. All within a reasonable walking distance.

This area is authentic because it hasn't been artificially created in any way. Artists have picked locations on this side of town to stay close to each other while picking economically affordable retail locations.

This area has created a lot of great memories for many locals. Maybe they met their girlfriend at a brewery, they took a class at waterworks art center, or their friend had an opening at one of the many galleries.

The area is co-created because it is designed by those who are rooted in the community. The art in the galleries are fully hung with art made by natives to Rowan county. The community isn't elite artists, it's a community effort to make the area a more beautiful place.

Lastly, the area has a clear sense of place, it's easy to know you're in the district because the buildings have interesting art, sculptures litter the streets, and the sound of music and laughing inside and outside the businesses fills the air.

Turning this personality into an identity requires connecting, synthesizing, and transforming. Marty

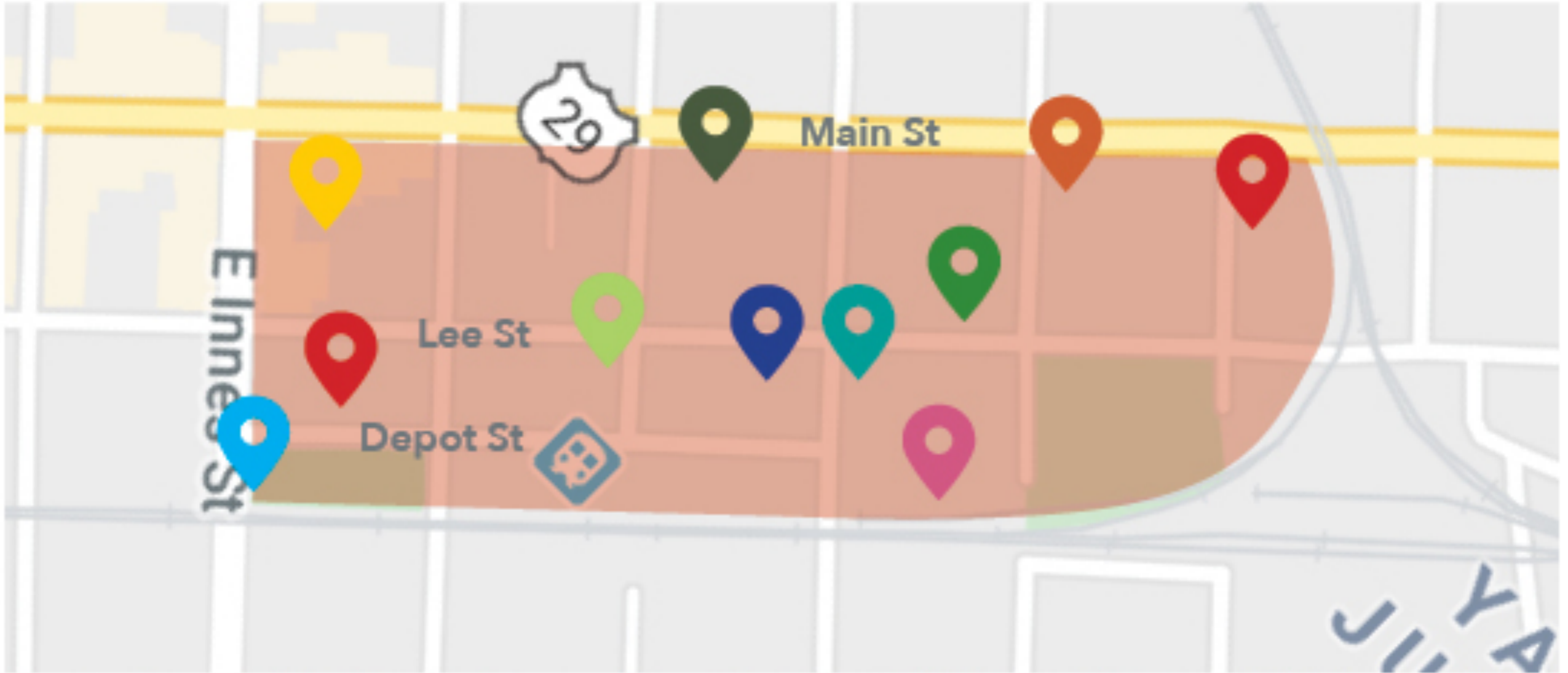


Neumeier (2005) writes that "A brand is no longer what you say it is, it's what they say it is," so the brand of a place would come from what the locals say about a place. By defining some unique features and benefits to a location, by giving it a visual and written voice, it guides them on what to say.

Secondary research is research that has already been compiled (Charles Doyle, 2011). This could be online, in books, magazines, or trade journals. **Primary research** is when you do the interviews, surveys, questionnaires, or focus groups. The benefit of primary is it's accurate and exactly what you are looking for. The downside is it is more expensive or more difficult. The benefit of secondary is it's easier and it's free or low cost. The downside is that it is often broad and not always directly related to your topic.

Example: If you are looking for the demographics for tourists of Salisbury, NC secondary research would be a google search. You may find the demographics for those who visit North Carolina. You may even find those who visit Winston Salem, a near by city. But likely won't find the small down. You will find who lives in Salisbury. From this information you may be able to roughly find a





demographic of those who visit, but it's not as accurate as option 2.

Primary research would be going downtown, asking visitors about their demographics, or another way of doing a survey. Where are they from? How old are they? Etc. This would be the most accurate way, though it would take many trips downtown to get an accurate pool of people. Gigi Default (The Balance, 2010) recommends starting with secondary research. Once you know what you are missing, you can do low cost surveys to confirm your hypothesis.

Week three we focused on differentiation. The lesson defines differentiation as "the identification and promotion of superior and/or unique aspects of your brand that allow it to stand apart from the competition." In order to truly differentiate yourself from the competition, you study them as in-depth as you study your own business/district.

While discovering the competitors in North Carolina, I found an art district in Asheville, Charlotte, and Winston-Salem. They each had characteristics that made them different from each other, and this highlighted what makes Salisbury Art District different.



CRAFT JUNCTION

First the difference included being on active railroad tracks with an Amtrak station. Second difference was the types of art that are represented. Some art districts focus on professional trained artists with high price points, other had more abstract fine art forms. Salisbury's art comes in many forms, including more craft type forms such as furniture. I decided to embrace both of these.

With research, I found the connection between the locals needs downtown and the authentic personality of the district. Most of the art districts in North Carolina focus on fine arts. Paint on Canvas. Clay formed into a bowl. They encourage performing arts, such as theater or music. Even pairing these activities with craft beer, they are a great place to explore when looking for art for your wall or even when looking to feel more cultured.

For Salisbury's **Craft Junction**, I believe what makes it unique is instead of an arts district, a craft district, focusing on the handcrafted elements of the small local district.



ACQUIRING COMPETENCIES

This month I really learned a lot about differentiation, and the level of understanding your competitors that is necessary to go above and beyond. I always understood not to copy them, but my previous level of understanding thought that we understood the competitors to create something that fit into this crowd. But now I understand that is a undergraduate level of thinking, and if I hope to create branding for higher level work, I need to study the competition with the intent of finding their weakness, or figuring out what is unique about my business that none of them are doing.

The topics I studied included place branding, co-creation, long term focus, secondary research, primary research, evaluative research, differentiation, and me too branding.

In short, during place branding I discovered that you must find a place that has clear borders with an authentic sense of place.

While studying co-creation I discovered the practice of using your target audience to help create your brand. For

Every location has a craft, Spanky's has handcrafted ice cream, New Serum has handcrafted beer. Classic Cycling builds custom bikes. That is their craft, next door is a shop that handcrafts furniture. Hand Crafted pizza. Handcrafted sandwiches. Craft Junction is the junction between all the crafts in one small area, where you can get off the Amtrack train, get ice cream, walk around the art museum, visit the theater, and grab a pizza and beer, then take the train home. It's the place to find somebody with a specialized craft when you are looking for custom furniture, specialty yarn, a unique record, or a specialty bike.

This district better compares to a craft district located in Duluth, MN, a city over a thousand miles north. They have branded the district Lincoln Park Craft District.

Thomashouse (n.d.) writes "Lincoln Park is now Duluth's leading destination for handcrafted items, as well as the visual and culinary arts." Tumwater, WA also has a branded Craft District, this time almost 3,000 miles west. The district describes themselves as "An experience oriented place where friends and families can engage with craft producers, educators, retailer's, and service providers."

Combining the concept of an experience oriented craft district who is located on the railroad tracks, I believe that **Craft Junction** is the perfect name for this district.



example, lego has children submit design ideas, this allows lego to get straight from the audience what they are looking for.

During long term focus grew my understanding of continuously appealing to your target audience as they change. Howtobuildabrand.org recommended avoiding trendy choices in branding, which may be in part by minimalism is hot in recent years. Simple will be withstand the test of time.

Before I began this unit I had a basic understanding that secondary research was when you found research that had already been compiled such as an article, and primary was compiling the research yourself from sources such as interviews and surveys. What learned this week was the benefits and downsides of each. Primary can be extremely costly on a large scale, but has very accurate and pertinent information collected. Secondary is often free or low cost, but may not include exactly what you are looking for.

Evaluative Research is often called user testing. This version of research would include having a user test your product and let them think out loud while they use it.



Me too branding isn't a new feminist movement, but instead it's when a brand makes a copycat of another brand. For a moment I thought I made this up, but with some research I found many examples. Brown (2019) compares Apple iPod and Microsoft Zune. Zune came out after iPod as a reaction to make something similar. It didn't fully evaluate how it could be different or better, but did the same exact thing, play mp3 files.

Differentiation has been discussed many times already in this paper, but is the identification and promotion of superior and/or unique aspects of your brand that allow it to stand apart from the competition.

Overall, I learned a lot this month. I always understood my job as a graphic designer as a more technical career, but I now understand why the research and design planning are so important.



Design Research

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