



FINAL RESEARCH REPORT

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TITLE:

**TO ANALYSE HOW LOCAL FASHION BRANDS ARE BUILDING THEIR BRAND
IDENTITY AS A DIFFERENTIATOR IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN MARKET:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE MAXHOSA AFRICA BRAND**

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DECLARATION REGARDING PLAGIARISM

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Compulsory declaration:

I hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the BA Honours: Strategic Brand Communication degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes.

- I certify that I have received ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee at Vega to conduct this academic research study (letter attached).
- This final research report has been submitted to the SafeAssign similarity and originality-checking software.

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ABSTRACT

Competition within the South African fashion industry has intensified following the influx of global fashion brands in the market (Petzer & De Meyer, 2013, cited in Coetzee, 2018). It is therefore apparent that local fashion brands need to cut through the clutter of a saturated market by differentiating themselves against rival brands. The risk of lacking a distinctive brand identity as a clear differentiator leaves brands vulnerable to potential brand identity confusion amongst their competitors (Srivastava, 2011). There is therefore a need to develop a comprehensive understanding of how local fashion brands are building a distinctive brand identity to stand out in the market.

This paper explores how local fashion brands are building their brand identity as a differentiator in the South African market by analysing the Maxhosa Africa brand, against Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews to understand the perspective of their brand team.

The study found that Maxhosa Africa has developed a multifaceted brand identity, consisting of a core and extended identity as suggested by David A. Aaker, which visibly differentiates the brand for easy identification without confusion. This paper makes two main contributions. First, it adds to the current understanding of brand identity development which sits within the brand management literature. And second, it advocates for the importance of developing a distinctive brand identity as a clear differentiator for local fashion brands in the South African market.

Keywords: Brand Identity, Brand differentiation, Competition, South African fashion market

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1. Chapter 1: Introduction

This introductory chapter will firstly contextualise the study and provide a rationale. It will also outline the problem statement and why the problem warrants a research response. Further, the overarching research question, sub-questions and objectives of the research will be discussed. Then followed by the conceptualisation of key concepts and an overview of the research methodology. Finally, it will also outline the structure of this research paper.

1.1. Background and orientation (contextualization)

The competition within the South African fashion industry has intensified over time following the influx of global fashion brands in the market (Petzer & De Meyer, 2013, cited in Coetzee, 2018), it is therefore apparent that local fashion brands need to cut through the clutter of a saturated market by differentiating themselves against their competitors. Aaker (1996) recommends that brands need to develop a distinctive brand identity that can serve as a clear differentiator amongst competitors. As such, the aim of this research study was to add to the existing body of knowledge by exploring how local fashion brands are building their brand identity as a differentiator in the South African market by analysing the Maxhosa Africa brand, against Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model. It was important to conduct this research to develop a comprehensive understanding of brand identity development to enhance the competitiveness of local fashion brands.

1.2. Rationale

Following the influx of global fashion brands in South Africa, the clothing industry has become a fiercely competitive environment as local fashion brands face both local and global competition within the South African market (Petzer & De Meyer, 2013, cited in Coetzee, 2018). As such, this research sought to contribute to the current understanding of the importance of brand identity development as a clear differentiator in the South African market, not only for the purposes of brand identification and

differentiation but to also enhance the competitiveness of local fashion brands against their competitors.

1.3. Problem statement

The risk of lacking a distinctive brand identity to differentiate any brand within a saturated market, leaves brands vulnerable to potential brand identity confusion amongst competitors (Srivastava, 2011). Therefore, there was a need to develop a comprehensive understanding of how local fashion brands are building a distinctive brand identity to stand out in the South African market.

1.3.1. Why is the problem worth investigating?

Upon reviewing previous literature on the topic of brand identity development within the context of the South African fashion industry (discussed in Chapter 2), it is not clear how local fashion brands are building a distinctive brand identity to differentiate themselves in the market. The researcher believes this requires further enquiry and therefore warrants a research response to explore this phenomenon, which is situated within the broader brand management discourse, in order to contribute to the existing body of knowledge. It is problematic when a brand is not distinctively identifiable as it could result in brand confusion amongst competitors in the market (Srivastava, 2011).

1.3.2. Research questions

How are local fashion brands building their brand identity to differentiate themselves within the South African market?

To this core research question follows three sub-questions:

- What is the brand identity of Maxhosa Africa?
- How does the Maxhosa Africa brand differentiate their brand identity amongst their competitors in the clothing market?
- How does Maxhosa Africa's brand identity elements measure against Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model?

1.3.3. Research objectives

- To investigate what the brand identity of Maxhosa Africa is.
- To explore how the Maxhosa Africa brand differentiates their brand identity among competitors in the market.
- To explore the application of Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model on Maxhosa Africa's brand identity.

1.4. Purpose statement

The purpose of this study is to explore how local fashion brands are building their brand identity as a differentiator in the South African market by analysing Maxhosa Africa's brand identity, against Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model. It is intended to serve as a guide for aspiring new entrants into the market and existing fashion brands that wish to refresh their brand identity.

1.5. Conceptualization (of key concepts)

There are four key concepts that have been identified as being applicable to this study, they are Brand Identity, Fashion Brand Development, Brand Differentiation, and Competitors. These concepts will be reviewed to determine their relevance to this research.

Applicable to this study is the concept of brand identity which is defined as a unique set of brand associations that a brand manager aspires to create or maintain. As such, the identity of a brand is about how a brand custodian wants the brand to be perceived (Aaker, 1996). Further adding that it encapsulates what the brand is and what it stands for. Moreover, the visible elements such as the logo, colour palette, design, and name are part of the brand identity as a form of branding to both identify and distinguish the brand amongst competitors (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). Likewise, Keller (2012) concurs with the fact that brand identity is useful for consumers to differentiate between competing brands. Similarly, Kapferer (2008) & Aaker (1996) both insist that

brand identity is the foundation of a brand strategy. Thus, the formulation of a clear brand identity creates a lens through which customers view brands (Zwakala & Steenkamp, 2021).

Without contradiction, the seminal authors mentioned in this section seem to agree on the definition of what brand identity is because they maintain the same essence which is the fact that brand identity is a means to identify a brand in a distinctive manner in comparison to other brands (Aaker, 1996; Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Keller, 2012 & Kapferer, 2008). Against this background, it can be concluded that developing a clear brand identity in the fashion industry is extremely important to build a brand that is differentiated from its competitors. This study will specifically adopt Aaker's (1996) definition of brand identity because it conveys the meaning of brand identity more clearly with rich details.

In terms of the development of fashion brands, the South African fashion industry has proven to be a significant contributor in the local economy, having contributed no less than R1 billion to the GDP in 2019 (Jadezwi, 2020). This was established in a study entitled: '*Assessing the Economic Value of the Designer Fashion Sector in South Africa*'. It was a collaboration between the Department of Trade Industry and Competition (DTIC) and the South African Cotton Cluster (SACC) just before the Covid-19 outbreak in South Africa last year (Jadezwi, 2020). This proves the viability of the local fashion industry and therefore justifies the development of fashion brands to further grow the local economy (GQ South Africa, 2020).

Further, when developing a fashion brand Vogue (2020) argues that a universally recognisable brand identity in the fashion world is far more important than the next collection by a brand. Therefore, branding in the form of a differentiated identity is even more valuable due to the globalisation of markets where a fashion brand can compete across countries. This is to be considered in the development of a fashion brand to have a competitive advantage in a saturated fashion market.

Amid the global pandemic, when developing fashion brands, designers will have to adapt to the changes in consumer buying behaviour due to Covid-19. Currently, there is a move toward loungewear and athleisure, where people dress for comfort and not

style because by large, they work remotely. The ability to adapt will help fashion brands to remain relevant to the needs of the South African market (Business Insider SA, 2020). Also, Dr Precious Moloi-Motsepe, founder of the African Fashion International (AFI), asserts that being innovative will ensure the financial sustainability of fashion brands during the pandemic (Moloi-Motsepe, 2020).

In terms of brand differentiation, it has become apparent that establishing a differentiated presence in the South African fashion market through a clear brand identity is crucial to enable local fashion brands to stand out among many rival brands. Zwakala & Steenkamp (2021) call it identity-based brand differentiation. Furthermore, in a time where consumers are inundated with multiple brand choices, brand differentiation is increasingly becoming important (Kapferer, 2008). Also, the influx of global fashion brands in South Africa has intensified the ever-increasing competition in the local clothing industry (Petzer & De Meyer, 2013, cited in Coetzee, 2018). This makes differentiation and therefore brand identity, that much more important as a distinguishing factor.

In addition, Keller (2012) writes on the points of difference (PODs) for brands, stating that a brand that differs from a competitor is likely to gain a competitive edge. This is particularly true in the fashion industry where the market is saturated with the availability of multiple brands. Also, Fensy (2017) conducted a study on the *'Effects of differentiation strategies on the growth of fashion businesses in Kenya'*. Three differentiation strategies were examined, that is product, service, and channel differentiation, respectively. It was found that differentiation strategies have greatly contributed to the growth of fashion brands. Among others, this has translated to the distinguishing of a company's products from its competition (Fensy, 2017).

Finally, the concept of competitors is also relevant to the study considering the increasing competition from global brands and the volatility of the South African fashion market (Petzer & De Meyer, 2013, cited in Coetzee, 2018), hence local brands attempt to stand out against the competition. To this end, the inclusion of this key concept in the study was not to conduct a competitor analysis for the Maxhosa Africa brand, however, to broadly define what constitutes a competitor for this brand.

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary (2021), a competitor is defined as a business that competes with others in a rivalry manner for customers. Thus, within the context of this study competitors refers to both local and international fashion brands that are present and sold in South Africa.

In brief, the key concepts of brand identity, fashion brand development, brand differentiation, and competitors were discussed to prove their relevance in this study.

1.6. Overview of Research Methodology

The research used an exploratory research design, and was conducted through field research. Qualitative data was collected using semi-structured interviews. And the data was analysed using Braun & Clarke (2006) Thematic Analysis method. A detailed discussion on the research methodology is outlined in Chapter 3.

1.7. Structure of the paper

The structure of this research paper is three-fold, firstly; it explored the current brand identity of Maxhosa Africa, secondly; it explored what differentiates the brand against competitors, and thirdly; it measured Maxhosa Africa's brand identity elements against Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model.

2. Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter will provide a critical review of the existing literature relevant to this study. Therefore, this alludes to previous research on the topic of brand identity development within the context of the fashion industry, to build on it and avoid duplication in the academic body of knowledge. As such, this chapter will firstly outline the paradigm through which the study was approached. Followed by a discussion on the theoretical foundation as a method of measurement. And then the current literature relative to the research topic will be critically assessed. Finally, for contextual purposes it will also provide a brief background on the specific brand upon which this study is based.

Research Paradigm

The term paradigm was introduced by the historical philosopher, Thomas Kuhn in 1962 (Davis, 2014). Paradigms serve as a lens through which reality is interpreted thus it informs worldviews upon which a qualitative study is anchored (Creswell, 2019). Therefore, by following a paradigm, researchers subsequently ascribe to a specific manner of studying a relevant phenomenon as it influences how the research should be conducted and how the results should be interpreted. In the main, there are three dominant research paradigms, namely positivism, interpretivism and critical realism (Davis, 2014). By means of a brief description of what each paradigm entails; the positivism paradigm is about how positivists want to discover and explain causal relationships in effort to predict and control nature, the behaviour of humans and animals alike. While interpretivists only want to understand human behaviour through the lens of the people being studied. And finally, critical realists believe in empowering people through knowledge and therefore involves dramatic action such as activism work to advocate for transformation (Davis, 2014).

However, the researcher has adopted the interpretivism paradigm for her study. This is because the interpretivism approach aims to gain in-depth understanding of several realities through the study of meaningful social action and human behaviour, through the eyes of the research respondents hence its relevance to this study (Davis, 2014). Further, the interpretivism paradigm was reactively developed following the shortcomings of the preceding tradition (positivism) in its application to the social

sciences. It is argued that people are different to objects hence they cannot be studied the same way. This is because unlike objects, people are constantly changing, and they are influenced by their environment in defining what counts as reality to them (Davis, 2014).

The researcher believes that interpretivism is suitable to this study as the purpose of inquiry was to understand the social construct in terms of how the Maxhosa Africa brand is building its brand identity from the perspective of the members of their brand team.

Further, Davis (2014) asserts that the interpretivism paradigm has five positions: namely the epistemological, ontological, metatheoretical, methodological and axiological position. However, this study only took the ontological position because it holds that reality is fluid, subjective and created by human interaction (Davis, 2014). In addition, Creswell (2019) and Davis (2014) agree that reality is subject to the meanings that people attach to their own experiences and interactions with others. Davis (2014) calls reality a 'social construction' as the social world is what people perceive it to be. It is subject to change based on the changes in people's perceptions, making it fluid and fragile. Thus, depending on factors such as experiences and circumstances, people may or may not experience reality the same way (Davis, 2014). Interpretivism does not generalise research results. It maintains that the results are only applicable to the specific sample that was studied. To this end, the outcome of this study only applies to the brand identity of Maxhosa Africa. The researcher will refrain from generalising the results to all the local fashion brands in South Africa.

In reviewing the available paradigms, the researcher mentioned the main three research paradigms or traditions. A selection of the relevant paradigm and its position was then made. To this end, the ontological position of interpretivism guided how the researcher approached the study in her quest to understand how local fashion brands are building their brand identity to differentiate themselves within the South African market, through an analysis of the Maxhosa Africa brand. The researcher believes the selected paradigm suffices as it provides a unique perspective for generating new knowledge to add to the current literature.

Theoretical foundation:

Although other brand identity frameworks such as Kapferer's (2008) Brand Identity Prism, and Marty Neumeier's (2016) Brand Commitment Matrix, are among those available but the researcher believes that Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model is most suitable for this study as a theoretical foundation considering its enduring relevance in the market almost three decades later after it was first introduced by the globally renowned professor of Marketing, David A. Aaker in his book called *Building Strong Brands*.

This research study was measured against Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model. It consists of three components; the first layer is the *Strategic Brand Analysis* of customers, competitors, and self (the brand). It is followed by the *Brand Identity System* (the core and extended brand identity). The core identity is about the central and timeless essence of the brand while the extended brand identity provides complex details that distinguishes the brand in a manner that would be apparent if competitors attempt to replicate them. It considers 12 element categories under four perspectives: namely Brand as a Product; Brand as a Person; Brand as an Organisation and Brand as a Symbol. It also includes the value proposition (customer benefits), and the brand-customer relationship (Aaker, 1996).

Lastly, the *Brand Identity Implementation System* which exclusively focuses on the implementation of brand building programs and to track brand growth (Aaker, 1996). For the purposes of this study, only the second component of the model (brand identity system) is relevant as a method of measurement.

The only criticism against developments around Aaker's model is that four years later since 1996, David A. Aaker partnered with Erich Joachimsthaler in 2000 to adapt the model to include the *brand essence* in addition to the core and extended brand identity (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). The researcher finds this addition to be unnecessary and a duplication as the *core* and the *essence* are oddly similar in that the core identity is about the most important elements of a brand's identity to create a focus while similarly, the brand essence is about creating 'more' focus on the same identity elements. The authors themselves (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000) have cautioned

that it is not 'feasible' for some brands to develop a brand essence. Thus, if brands already have a compelling core brand identity, they should consider the additional element of *brand essence* to their identity as optional to avoid confusion in the whole brand identity system. Also, the slightly adapted model was renamed as the 'Brand Vision Model' even though it refers to the same model first introduced in 1996. Of course, this could potentially be mistaken for a new model.

Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model

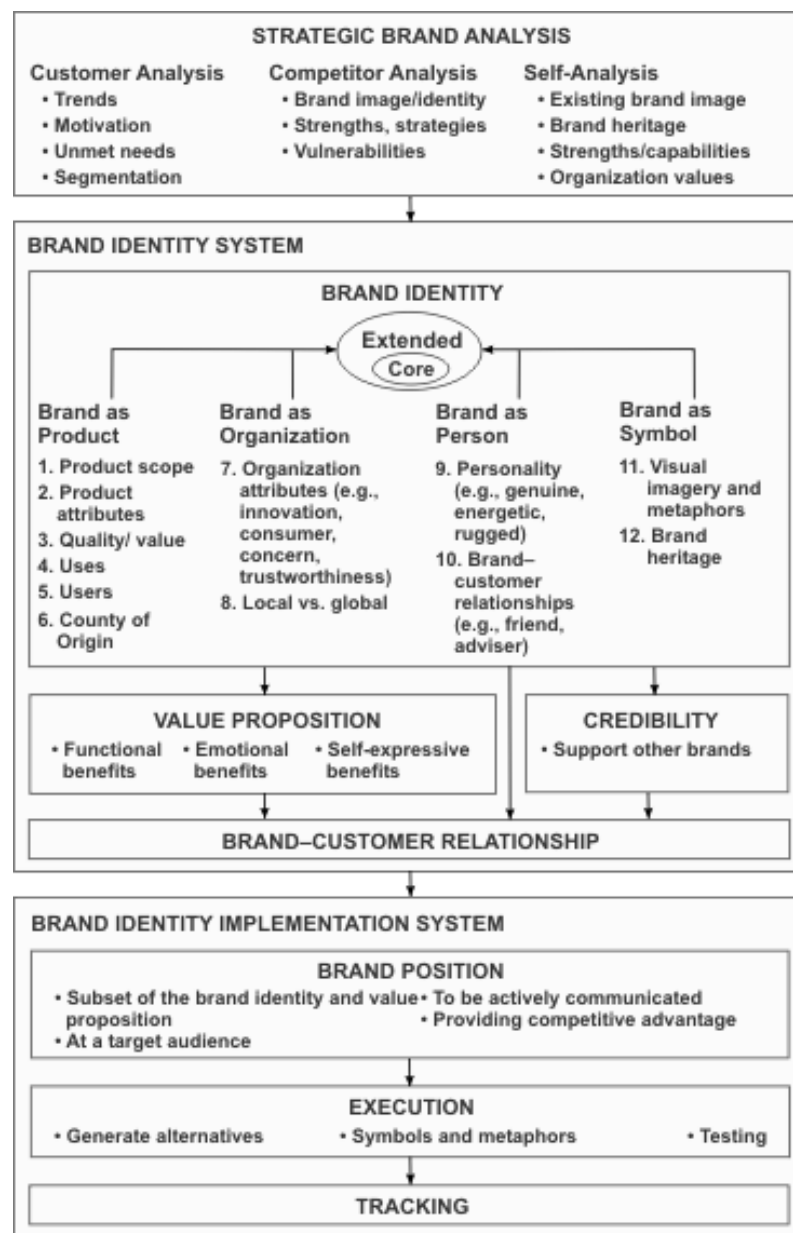


Figure 1: Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model.

Review of previous literature:

In this section, the current literature on brand identity development for fashion brands will be reviewed.

From an international perspective, the researcher noted a study by Hashim, Mohd.Tajuddin and Zainol (2015). They conducted a case study on *Creating Resilient SMEs Through Brand Identity*, focusing on SMEs that operate fashion businesses in Malaysia (Bumiputera). This followed a discovery by the Malaysian government that there was a lack of experience and exposure among SMEs as it relates to branding. The study found that brand identity is critical for these fashion entrepreneurs to be competitive and resilient both locally and internationally. It also confirmed the strategic role of brand identity to create resilient fashion SMEs and to enhance business performance.

In addition, a paper called: *Managing founder-based brand identity during succession*, by Casprini, Melanthiou, Pucci & Zanni (2020), links brand management literature and family firms. It explores a case study of an Italian family firm that operates in the jewellery sector to investigate how family firms manage a founder-based brand identity during succession. Brand identity is considered as a resource that should be managed across generations. The findings indicate that a joint effort between the first and second generations and non-family members is needed to manage the founder-based brand identity over time.

While a paper by Stoimenova (2017) submits that competition in the 21st century is among brands. Currently, the main tools for effective brand management are brand identity and brand positioning. More specifically, the paper delves deep into the technicalities of designing a brand identity from scratch. It explored the various elements of a visual brand identity design such as a logo, typography, symbols, imagery, etcetera. The analysis resulted in a framework for planning the design of visual identity programs to encode and convey certain meanings and to strengthen brand image and perceptions. This is an interesting study for creative designers.

Whereas in South Africa, Carnie (2018) conducted research to understand the views of South African women toward the Victoria Secret brand and determine whether their brand perceptions align with the brand's identity. This came after the controversy of whether Victoria Secret is a brand that embodies a culture of inclusivity and diversity or not, and how that impacts on the brand's identity, to the extent of affecting consumer buying behaviour. It was found that most South African female consumers have a negative image of the brand due to the imagery of the models being seen as sexually objectifying, which promotes unrealistic goals for young women. Also, it was found that Victoria's Secret brand identity was not aligned with the consumer perceptions of the brand's image, thus most of the participants were not persuaded to buy from the brand. There is therefore a need for diversity and authenticity through the brand's communication initiatives to consumers.

With all the studies above considered, it is still not clear how local fashion brands are building their brand identity to specifically differentiate themselves within the South African market. Thus this study was conducted in attempt to cover this gap in research.

Maxhosa Africa's Brand Story

As it relates to this study, the brand identity of the Maxhosa Africa brand was explored. It is therefore necessary for the researcher to share some background on the brand itself for contextual purposes.

Maxhosa Africa is a South African luxury knitwear brand founded in 2012 by Laduma Ngxokolo. He wanted to 'explore knitwear design solutions that would be suitable for amakrwala (Xhosa initiates)'. Laduma having gone through the same traditional rite of passage of circumcision as a young man, wanted to cater to this male market through designing a modern Xhosa-inspired knitwear collection that reflects his heritage. The brand has evolved over time to also cater to women (skirts, dresses, shawls etc). It also sells accessories, home décor and unisex items. The brand has flagship stores in Johannesburg (Mall of Africa) and Cape Town (V&A Waterfront shopping mall), and an e-commerce website (Maxhosa Africa, 2021).

Even more interesting, Maxhosa Africa is family run as Laduma works with his three siblings in the business: a fashion designer, general manager, and finance officer, respectively while he takes the lead as the creative director (Career magazine, 2020).

In addition, the brand has attracted the attention of international fashion media outlets (British Vogue, 2020 & The New York Times, 2021). The brand is also known to showcase at prominent fashion runways around the world, including the New York Fashion Week, catapulting Laduma to global acclaim as an African designer (Singer, 2020 & BBC, 2021). Better than a product placement in a Hollywood film, the Maxhosa Africa brand was recently commissioned by the renowned Costume Designer, Ruth E Carter to create costumes for the cast of the *Coming to America* movie, starring Eddie Murphy. The international film premiered on Amazon Prime on 04 March 2021. The cast looked breath-taking in their Maxhosa Africa designs which depicted African royalty (Mazibuko, 2021).

It is against this background that the researcher has specifically selected the Maxhosa Africa brand for the study to explore how they are building their identity as a local fashion brand.

3. Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Considering that the success of a research project is based on the strength of its methodologies to answer its research questions, makes this chapter critical to the end that the trustworthiness of this study is achieved. As such, herewith below a detailed discussion of how the research study was conducted.

3.1. Research paradigm

As discussed in Chapter 2, the interpretivism paradigm and its ontological position were relevant to this study. This is because the interpretivism approach seeks to gain in-depth understanding of some realities through the eyes of the research respondents (Davis, 2014).

3.2. Research approach

This is a qualitative study because it attempts to get an in-depth understanding of the participants on the concept of brand identity development (Davis, 2014).

3.3. Research design

It is a qualitative research study, which is phenomenological to understand how a phenomenon is being experienced by the brand team of Maxhosa Africa. It is also cross-sectional and exploratory in its research design (Creswell, 2019) because reality is fluid, thus the researcher acknowledges that the development of brand identity in the fashion world is subjective (Davis, 2014). Also, the research was deductive in its approach, moving from a broad view and narrowed down to a specific brand or situation (Godwill, 2015). Further, the study was approached from the ontological position of the interpretivism paradigm (Davis, 2014). While the conceptual framework of the study was Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model as a method of measurement.

3.4. Population and sampling

The study population was all local fashion brands in South Africa that have a brand identity (Davis, 2014). The researcher was not able to ascertain the number of available local fashion brands in South Africa based on scientific research. They could be many, however, the target population for this study was the Maxhosa Africa brand whose brand identity was explored. The researcher arrived at her target population following talkability around the brand early this year, owing to extensive media coverage about the latest achievement of Maxhosa Africa. The brand was recently commissioned by the renowned Costume Designer, Ruth E Carter to create costumes for the cast of the *Coming to America* movie, starring Eddie Murphy. The international film premiered on Amazon Prime on 4 March 2021. The cast looked breath-taking in their Maxhosa Africa designs which depicted African royalty. This was reported on both local and international media outlets like the Mail & Guardian, IOL, TimesLive, BBC and, British Vogue among others (Sassen, 2021; Mazibuko, 2021; Smith, 2021; BBC, 2021 & British Vogue, 2021).

Further, the brand is also known to showcase at prominent fashion runways around the world, including the New York Fashion Week, catapulting the founder, Laduma Ngxokolo to global acclaim as an African designer (Singer, 2020 & BBC, 2021). The Maxhosa Africa brand has also emerged as one of South Africa's fast-growing fashion exports. The knitwear specialty brand is present in Paris, Japan, Switzerland, Nigeria, and has enjoyed great success in America and Netherlands (Rangongo, 2018).

It is against this background that the researcher has selected the Maxhosa Africa brand for the study to explore how they are building their identity as a local fashion brand.

While the accessible population, which is the brand team of Maxhosa Africa, was informed by the fact that those involved in some aspect of brand management should be able to articulate the brand identity (Aaker & Joachimisthaler, 2000). Thus, the researcher interviewed them to understand their different perspectives on how they are building their brand identity as a clear differentiator in the market.

Sampling:

With all the available sampling methods considered, however, purposive sampling which is a form of a non-probability sampling method was the most applicable to the research study because it allowed for the formulation of a selection criteria to sample the population relevant to the study (Creswell, 2019). As such, the representative sample was selected using purposive sampling. The participants consisted of several members of the brand team from Maxhosa Africa as the purpose of inquiry requires those who are involved in some aspect of brand management because they should be able to articulate the brand identity (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). To this end, the study sought to explore different perspectives of individual members of the brand team as they are experts that work at Maxhosa Africa within various job functions of brand management such as communication, marketing, sales, PR, and social media in South Africa. This negates all the other employees that work within various divisions at Maxhosa Africa other than the aforementioned job functions. Thus, they were irrelevant to the study and were therefore not considered in the sample.

The sample size for this study was five participants. After approaching the Maxhosa Africa brand to request for their participation in the research, their Digital Marketing Manager confirmed interest in the study (see Annexure B). He offered himself and four other members of their brand team to also participate in the research. To this end, the final sample consisted of two family members and three non-family members of the family firm.

3.5. Data collection

The researcher used a field research method to gather primary data (Creswell, 2019). This means new knowledge about the discourse of brand identity development was collected from the participants in the study. This was done through semi-structured interviews which were conducted online. This method proved beneficial to the study because not only did it allow for the interview scripts to be kept as a record for reference, but it also allowed the researcher to reflect on the interviews to determine whether it was necessary to possibly prompt the participants for clarification (Creswell,

2019). The interview questions included elements of Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model as a basis and followed the same sequence for consistency.

Application of data collection method:

Pre-testing:

Firstly, for testing purposes, the researcher conducted a pre-test interview to test the data collection tool and the quality of the interview questions to avoid what Godwill (2015) terms 'errors of instrumentation'. To this end, convenient sampling was utilised. The researcher requested the marketing executive that manages the brand that the researcher works for, to do the pre-test interview. The request was approved and the pre-test participant firstly signed a consent form and proceeded to do the pre-test interview by email. The interview schedule for the pre-test was adapted to refer to the relevant brand for testing purposes (see annexure C). The pre-test participant was given a few days to answer the questions. The interview script was then sent to the researcher for review to see if the data collected does in fact answer the research questions. Although the pre-test interview was transcribed (see Annexure C), but it will not be analysed with the final sample as it was merely for testing purposes.

Following a process of reviewing the data received through the pre-test interview, the researcher found that there is a need to add one more interview question to improve their quality ahead of the actual data collection phase (Godwill, 2015). As such, the interview schedule was updated to include the following question:

- What point(s) of difference is exclusive to the Maxhosa Africa brand in the clothing market, based on its brand identity? (*'Identity-based brand differentiation'*)

This question further helped to answer what differentiates the brand against competitors in the local marketplace based on their brand identity. As such, the interview schedule was updated (see Annexure C). Overall, the researcher believes the pre-test interview proved useful as it generated rich data that suffices to answer the research questions, which further confirmed that the semi-structured interviews were suitable to gather qualitative data for the study.

In terms of the actual data collection process, upon receiving ethical clearance from the Vega Ethics Committee, the researcher had permission to proceed with the research. Firstly, a consideration was given to the time pressures faced by the fashion industry hence the manner in which the interviews would be conducted was subject to the brand's availability. It is worth mentioning that the deadline given to the brand team by the researcher collided with Maxhosa Africa's first international showcase for this year, the SS2022 collection titled '*Lindelwa: We are the ones they have been waiting for*' at the Rakuten Fashion Week in Tokyo (Mazibuko, 2021). With these time pressures in mind, the interviews were subsequently conducted by email to collect data.

Prior to commencing with the semi-structured interviews, the researcher compiled an interview schedule, including an information sheet and questions to guide the participants to remain within the confinements of the research topic. The participants were required to sign a consent form beforehand. They were then given almost four weeks to respond to the questions (mostly open-ended) to understand their different perspectives on how they are building their brand identity as a differentiator in the South African market. This online method of conducting the interviews proved to be Covid-compliant in keeping with the safety measures that are in place under lockdown in South Africa (SA Coronavirus, 2021).

3.6. Data analysis method

It was important for the researcher to select a data analysis method that is applicable to this study. To this end, Braun & Clarke (2006) Thematic Analysis process seemed relevant (see figure 2). Thematic analysis is suitable for this study because it is a flexible analytical method to identify, analyse and report patterns or themes within a set of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Also adding that it helps to organise and describe the data set in rich detail. The approach to the thematic analysis was deductive, going from a broad to specific approach for the researcher to explore the understanding of Maxhosa Africa's brand team in their subjective social construction of brand identity development in the fashion world (Davis, 2014).

Braun & Clarke (2006) thematic analysis process:

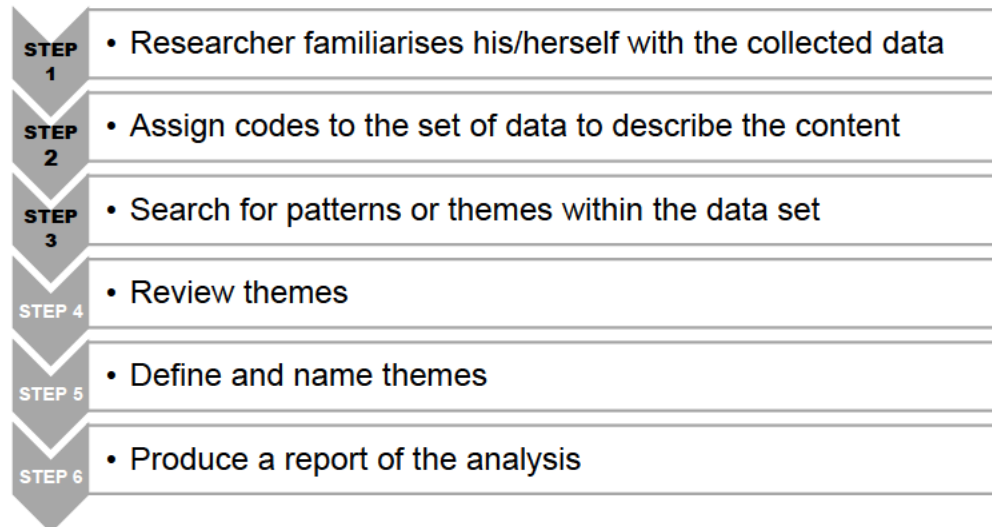


Figure 2: Braun & Clarke (2006) thematic analysis process

3.7. Limitations and delimitations

Limitations

Firstly, this is a student-led research project, under supervision with limited resources. Therefore, it is not feasible to conduct extended research in this regard (Godwill, 2015). Therefore, the scope of this study was limited to the exclusive analysis of Maxhosa Africa's brand identity. Further, the study used a limited representative sample due to issues of accessibility to participants. However, this is favourable in qualitative research as the intent is not to generalise results to a broader population (Creswell, 2019). Also, an unexpected challenge emerged during the research process. Initially the plan was to only interview employees within some aspect of brand management, but unfortunately due to reasons of a relatively small brand team, the researcher had to substitute with a finance officer who is justifiably the sibling of the founder of the family business, in order to meet the minimum sample size required which is five participants. With all these factors considered, the results are nonetheless valid for the purpose of answering the research questions of this study (Creswell, 2019).

Delimitations:

The delimitations of the study include the fact that although the Maxhosa Africa brand is present in other countries such as Switzerland, Paris, Japan, Nigeria, America and Netherlands (Rangongo, 2018), however for the purposes of this study only how the brand identity of Maxhosa Africa is built within the context of South African market was explored. Also, the research exclusively focused on analysing the brand identity of one brand which is Maxhosa Africa. Also, the sample consisted of a select number of the brand team who are involved in brand management as opposed to every employee that works at Maxhosa Africa. These delimitations served as a reminder of possible shortcomings or weaknesses of the study so that the researcher could monitor them while conducting the research (Creswell, 2019).

4. Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents findings from the data collection described herein below in Chapter 4. The data was analysed using Braun & Clarke (2006) Thematic Analysis method, and the findings are discussed below.

4.1. Presentation of collected data and analysis

The following themes emerged from the data as indicated below in Table 1:

The interview data allowed for new insights and rich details into the topic at hand. It explored the current brand identity of Maxhosa Africa, what differentiates the brand against competitors and finally, it explored Maxhosa Africa's brand identity elements based on Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model.

Table 1: CODING OF QUALITATIVE DATA

TITLE: To analyse how local fashion brands are building their brand identity as a differentiator in the South African market:
An analysis of the Maxhosa Africa brand

Interview Questions	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	Themes	Frequency	Verbatim Quotes
RQ 1: What is the brand identity of Maxhosa Africa?								
Interviewer: What do you think brand identity means for a brand?	I would say, an attribute that is easily picked up from seeing what mark (impact) the brand makes. This is what usually separates the brand from other brands, or provides a point of parity.	Identity, shows what makes a brand have an attribute that people can attach to it.	It's who we identify ourselves as, whether through products or services.	Attributes that identify the brand and speaks to the stance of the brand in the market.	My understanding is that brand identity refers to the identifiers of the brand.	Brand attributes	3	P1: "An attribute that is easily picked up from seeing what mark (impact) the brand makes". P2: "Identity, shows what makes a brand have an attribute that people can attach to it". P4: "Attributes that identify the brand" P3: "It's who we identify ourselves as, whether through products or services". P5: "brand identity refers to the identifiers of the brand"
						Identifiers	2	

Interviewer: As an employee of Maxhosa Africa within some aspect of brand management, what would you say is the core identity of the brand? (timeless essence)	At the brand's core are values that are key, which is technology, people and sustainability. The brand prides itself on being a brand for the people, meaning we are people-centric in our approach, even though we are a luxury brand.	Heritage, Culture , Art, Technology are all identifiers of the brand and also attached to the core values we add.	We are a culture luxury brand, so culture.	I would say culture is the central focus of the brand.	Culture is at the core of the brand.	Values Culture	2 4	P1: "At the brand's core are values... which is technology, people and sustainability". P2: "Heritage, Culture, Art, Technology are all identifiers of the brand and also attached to the core values". P3: "We are a culture luxury brand, so culture" P4: "Culture is the central focus of the brand." P5: "Culture is at the core of the brand"
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Interviewer: Has Maxhosa Africa's brand identity evolved over the years? (Any adaptations, brand refresh or a complete rebrand), If so, please explain.	We started as a premium brand, and moved to a luxury brand, also our other evolution is in the brand perception. The naming of the brand, was one of the key pivotal moments, it was called: MAXHOSA by Laduma, we then moved to MAXHOSA AFRICA , as we are inspired by the continent . This also helped separate and differentiate between brand Laduma and brand MAXHOSA.	Yes it has, we try to shift the paradigm annually , by always trying to rebrand one aspect of the brand , or come up with a new form or way to repurpose our core position. The brand has adapted the continent as its core inspiration , which is a huge shift for the brand.	Yes, from MAXHOSA by Laduma to MAXHOSA AFRICA	Yes, previously the brand was called MAXHOSA by Laduma but over time it was changed to MAXHOSA AFRICA .	Yes, there was a rebrand from MAXHOSA by Laduma to MAXHOSA AFRICA .	Brand evolution	5	P1: "The naming of the brand was one of the key pivotal moments, it was called: MAXHOSA by Laduma, we then moved to MAXHOSA AFRICA, as we are inspired by the continent". P2: "We try to shift the paradigm annually, by always trying to rebrand one aspect of the brand," P3: "Yes, from MAXHOSA by Laduma to MAXHOSA AFRICA... The brand has adapted the continent as its core inspiration" P4: "The brand was called Maxhosa by Laduma but over time it was changed to Maxhosa Africa". P5: "Yes, there was a rebrand from Maxhosa by Laduma to Maxhosa Africa".
						Brand inspiration (Continent of Africa)	2	

Interviewer: As an ongoing effort, how is the Maxhosa Africa brand building its brand identity?	We are slowly etching into the luxury industry within the continent, we firstly looked at brand growth from a profit-based view, then we saw that value is our unique offering . We now move towards creating value and increase job creation, these are what makes us build on the brand.	By identifying what our core offering is, also we have built our identity through how the clients engage with the brand. We are allowing the brand to be multifaceted.	It is being built daily, as we are educating our clients as we grow.	I would say through various brand building initiatives like campaigns.	We continue to build the identity of the brand through campaigns that are executed in alignment to its identity .	Creating value	2	P1: "We firstly looked at brand growth from a profit-based view, then we saw that value is our unique offering". P2: "By identifying what our core offering is" P4: "Brand building initiatives like campaigns" P5: "...through campaigns that are executed in alignment to its identity"
						Brand building initiatives	2	

RQ 2: How does the Maxhosa Africa brand differentiate their brand identity amongst their competitors in the clothing market?

Interview Question	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	Themes	Frequency	Verbatim Quotes
Interviewer: According to you, how does the Maxhosa Africa brand differentiate its brand identity among their competitors in the South African clothing market?	"I think our viewpoint, and our biggest competitor is perception, we are fighting perception of what is the best when it comes to local output. Our key differentiator is that we are synonymous with culture as well as luxury, it is clearly seen that our brand of luxury is not Eurocentric. Our ideation is also in paying homage to art, anthropology and technical execution".	What sets us apart is that we have ties to culture , and are honouring culture as a phenomena, in how we build and design".	We start our process by designing from studying anthropology .	By standing for culture . People follow brands that stand for something.	The key differentiator of the brand is being synonymous with culture .	Culture Anthropology	4 2	P1: "Our key differentiator is that we are synonymous with culture" P2: "What sets us apart is that we have ties to culture, and are honouring culture as a phenomena, in how we build and design" P3: We start our process by designing from studying anthropology. P4: "By standing for culture" P5: "The key differentiator of the brand is being synonymous with culture"

Interviewer: Without doing a competitor analysis, briefly, what do you think constitutes a competitor for the Maxhosa Africa brand in the South African fashion world?	How we have termed competition is within the word perception, which means that even if we are working as a global brand, if the perception is that we are local and whatever attachments to local are attached to us. Even in fashion, as we make our designs and patterns, we fight the perception that the patterns are bought or brought from overseas.	Our competitors would be other luxury brands, however, we also are our toughest critics, so our competition would be the people that are currently studying the field, coming up with innovative ways to bring about new ideas	Our competitors are other luxury brand within the continent, global and local.	I think other luxury brands in the market.	Other luxury brands and new fashion brands that emerge in the market from time to time.	Luxury brands	4	P2: "Our competitors would be other luxury brands" P3: "...other luxury brand[s] within the continent, global and local" P4: "I think other luxury brands in the market" P5: "Other luxury brands"
Interviewer: What point(s) of difference is exclusive to the Maxhosa Africa brand in the clothing market, based on its brand identity? ("Identity-based brand differentiation")	Culture, art, anthropology and education, we are a brand that is able to be tracked to culture, as in how we use our design and language, you can see inspiration from Ancient Xhosa beadworks, or you can identify a certain culture in the process of final product.	Our identity is entrenched within the Xhosa culture, also we are different because we are showcasing the continent's beauty and culture through clothes.	We identified ourselves as a heritage, culture and luxury brand, that implies that we are able to have facet of culture on our identity.	The Xhosa culture is exclusive to our brand. We are the only fashion brand named after it.	Our association to the Xhosa culture and language is exclusive to the brand in fashion.	Xhosa culture Design Language	5 2 2	P1: "We are a brand that is able to be tracked to culture, as in how we use our design and language" P2: "Our identity is entrenched within the Xhosa culture, also we are ...showcasing the continent's beauty and culture through clothes" P3: "...facet of culture on our identity'. P4: "The Xhosa culture is exclusive to our brand. We are the only fashion brand named after it. P5: "Our association to the Xhosa culture and language is exclusive to the brand in fashion"

Interviewer: Do you think that brand identity plays a role in differentiating Maxhosa Africa as a fashion brand and why?	Yes it does, because our brand identity is our biggest selling point, what we have seen is that people buy MAXHOSA because it is MAXHOSA. So it allows us to risk more in terms of design, as well as patterns.	Yes it does have a role, because when brand identity is solidified, the brand can exist in any market.	Yes, because we are able to [be] easily seen as a luxury brand, also from being in the continent.	Yes, because it sets the brand apart. Brand identity makes Maxhosa Africa memorable in the minds of people.	Yes, because it enables our target audience to identify the brand in the market.	Brand identity as a selling point in the market Brand identity as a differentiator	4	P1: "Our brand identity is what is our biggest selling point, what we have seen is that people buy MAXHOSA because it is MAXHOSA" P2: "When brand identity is solidified, the brand can exist in any market" P4: "Brand identity makes Maxhosa Africa memorable in the minds of people" P5: "it enables our target audience to identify the brand in the market"
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RQ 3: How does Maxhosa Africa's brand identity elements measure against Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model?

We will now look at the brand through four perspectives: namely Brand as a Product; Brand as a Person; Brand as an Organisation and Brand as a Symbol (extended identity). There are 12 element categories under these four perspectives to be unpacked. And lastly, the value proposition and the brand-customer relationship as a differentiator will be explored.

Interview Questions	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	Themes	Frequency	Verbatim Quotes
The Maxhosa Africa brand as a product:								
1. Product scope – What is the product scope of Maxhosa Africa's offering?	Ready to wear, accessories, men and women's looks, golfers, skirts, dresses, pants, and dresses.	Lifestyle clothes, luxury items.	Textiles, Clothes, Homeware.	Fashionable clothes, accessories, and textiles.	A range of ready to wear clothes for men and women, accessories, and textiles.	Clothes	5	P1: "Ready to wear, accessories, men and women's looks, golfers, skirts, dresses, pants, and dresses". P2: Lifestyle clothes, luxury item. P3: "Textiles, Clothes, Homeware"
2. Product attributes – What are the attributes of the products that the brand offers its target market?	We provide cultural artefacts made of 100% raw material.	Culture, Luxury, sustainable fashion	We make from 100% raw materials.	Luxury and sustainable fashion, using 100% raw material.	African luxury, and sustainable fashion, using 100% raw material.	Luxury Sustainable fashion	3 5	P1: "We provide cultural artefacts made of 100% raw material". P2: "...Luxury, sustainable fashion" P3: "We make from 100% raw materials" P4: "Luxury and sustainable fashion, using 100% raw material" P5: "African luxury, and sustainable fashion, using 100% raw material"

3. Quality/ value – What quality or value does the brand offer its consumers?	Quality is in our items made from raw materials, as well as craftsmanship.	To have top notch quality, with raw materials sourced locally.	Quality, sustainability.	We offer high quality items.	We provide exceptional quality and craftsmanship.	Quality	5	P1: "Quality is in our items made from raw materials" P2: "...top notch quality, with raw materials sourced locally". P3: Quality, sustainability. P4: We offer high quality items. P5: We provide exceptional quality and craftsmanship.
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4. Uses – What are the main product use occasions?	We are in the business of selling beauty, the clients use our items to stand out.	To date, the clothes are used to be worn.	Ready to wear.	Customers use our products to dress up for everyday life (ready to wear).	Mainly customers wear our products to various occasions like social events, and work.	Adornment	5	P1: "We are in the business of selling beauty, the clients use our items to stand out" P2: "the clothes are used to be worn" P3: "Ready to wear" P4: "Customers use our products to dress up for everyday life (ready to wear)" P5: "Mainly customers wear our products to various occasions like social events, and work"
5. Users – who uses or consumes the Maxhosa Africa products?	Clients who appreciate luxury and quality items. These are varied clientele, mostly from South Africa.	Luxury consumer , middle class and high-end clientele.	Client and fashion enthusiasts.	Luxury consumers.	Luxury consumers that appreciate exceptional quality.	Luxury consumers	4	P1: "Clients who appreciate luxury and quality items". P3: "Luxury consumer" P4: "Luxury consumers that appreciate exceptional quality" P5: "Luxury consumers that appreciate exceptional quality"

6. Country of origin – South Africa								
The Maxhosa Africa brand as an organisation:								
7. Organisation attributes – What are the organisational attributes of Maxhosa Africa as a business? (e.g., leaderships etc).	Innovation , we work on developing new ideas and new techniques with each collection . Sustainability , we are a zero-waste brand, as we also use 100% raw materials that can be threaded to remake another one.	We are an innovation and design brand.	Sustainability, Innovation.	Innovation and sustainability.	Innovation and sustainability.	Innovation designs	5	P1: "Innovation, we work on developing new ideas and new techniques with each collection" P2: "We are an innovation and design brand" P3: "Sustainability, innovation" P4: "Innovation and sustainability" P5: "Innovation and sustainability"
						Sustainability	4	
8. Local vs global: In your perspective, is Maxhosa Africa perceived differently as an organisation locally and globally where the brand has market presence? (such as South Africa, Paris, Japan, Switzerland, Nigeria, America and Netherland). If so, in what sense?	<i>Not answered.</i>	would say we are perceived differently , but we are a global brand, so at times, people feel that we are doing greater overseas than we do locally.	We believe we are on track to have the same reception at home as well as abroad.	There is a mistaken perception that the brand is doing better in global markets than locally.	In South Africa, there is a perception that the brand is more successful overseas than here.	Customer brand perception	3	P2: "we are perceived differently, but we are a global brand, so at times, people feel that we are doing greater overseas than we do locally". P4: "There is a mistaken perception that the brand is doing better in global markets than locally" P5: " In South Africa, there is a perception that the brand is more successful overseas than here.

The Maxhosa Africa brand as a person:								
9. Brand personality – if the Maxhosa Africa brand was a person, how would you describe its personality and the thinking behind it?	The brand personifies humility.... In the output, it is a brand that is bold , but does not shout. This is because the brand is shaped around the values of its founder, Laduma.	Bold , and the thinking is innovative.	Not answered.	Our brand is bold but not in your face (does not shout).	If the brand was a person, they would be bold . This is evident in our designs.	Bold brand personality	4	P1: "The brand personifies humility.... In the output, it is a brand that is bold, but does not shout" P2: "Bold, and the thinking is innovative" P4: "Our brand is bold but not in your face (does not shout)" P5: "If the brand was a person, they would be bold. This is evident in our designs"
10. Brand-customer relationships – what kind of relationship does the brand have with its consumers and why? (e.g., a friend, confidant, etc)	The brand has a friendly connection with its customers, as they are always voting for the products with their money. Also it is a brand that embodies family values as it is a family business .	We are seen as family by our clientele	Family values.	We are a family to our customers.	We have built an authentic family relationship with our customers.	Family	5	P1: "It is a brand that embodies family values as it is a family business". P2: "We are seen as family by our clientele" P3: "Family values" P4: We are a family to our customers. P5: "We have built an authentic family relationship with our customers"

The Maxhosa Africa brand as a symbol:								
11. Visual imagery and metaphors – when you think of Maxhosa Africa, what would you say is the meaning behind the visual representations of the brand (logo, imagery, colours, and symbols)? Also refer to the brand's CI manual or brand book and explain all the brand identity elements, including meanings attached to it.	The name MAXHOSA was based on the aspirations of the Xhosa people, who are a bold and vibrant subtribe. It then evolved to being the brand inspired by culture in the continent. The brand is a home to archiving historical artefacts by reimagining them. Also the colours are bold and vibrant, representing the many cultures in the continent, as each colour has a select meaning, as the red, would be based on the red one that women would adorn themselves with or men within a rite of passage.	Logo: it was designed to perceive the beginning of art, through a free from element of brand. Our imagery is an archive of history, with our colours being 10 core Maxhosa colours to create from.	Our clothes represent culture.	Things like our logo and brand colours represents the brand visually.	The Xhosa culture and its people are the greatest inspiration of the visual representations of the brand. The logo and bold patterns are symbolic to the culture.	Archiving of History	2	P1: "The brand is a home to archiving historical artefacts by reimagining them. <u>Also</u> the colours are bold and vibrant, representing the many cultures in the continent" P2: "Our imagery is an archive of history, with our colours being 10 core Maxhosa colours to create from" P3: "Our clothes represent culture" P4: "Things like our logo and brand colours represents the brand visually". P5: "The Xhosa culture and its people are the greatest inspiration of the visual representations of the brand"
						Brand colours	3	
						Representation of Xhosa culture	3	

12. Brand heritage – what would you say is the unique history and heritage of the Maxhosa Africa brand that differentiates the brand against competitors in the local fashion market?	We are a heritage brand, as we are named after one of the biggest subtribes in Southern Africa, the inspiration, is the language, the use of rites of passage, beadworks, and clothes. The unique history is that the brand started as a thesis project, as it is deeply entrenched in anthropology. Hence it can be seen as a highly technical, yet spiritual design process. It is meant to invoke imagination. For instance, the last collection as a way to illustrate happiness in a pandemic.	Our history is in how we create a product celebrating culture, also how we branded ourselves is that the brand values is now seen as justifiable.	<i>Not answered.</i>	The history of the brand is around the Xhosa culture, the same applies to its heritage.	Our unique history and heritage are captured in the name of the brand (MAXHOSA). Our link to the Xhosa culture makes us a heritage brand.	Brand History	4	P1: "The unique history is that the brand started as a thesis project, as it is deeply entrenched in anthropology. P2: "Our history is in how we create a product celebrating culture". P4: "The history of the brand is around the Xhosa culture, the same applies to its heritage" P5: "Our unique history and heritage are captured in the name of the brand (MAXHOSA)"
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Interviewer: In terms of customer benefits, please explain which benefits the brand offers to its customers to create a compelling value proposition and thereby differentiate itself: Functional benefits:	Being able to adorn yourself in clothes and accessories.	Wearing our clothes .	Client getting clothes .	Ready to wear clothes .	Ready to wear luxury clothing .	Clothes	5	P1: "Being able to adorn yourself in clothes and accessories". P2: "Wearing our clothes" P3: "Client getting clothes" P4: "Ready to wear clothes" P5: "Ready to wear luxury clothing"
Emotional benefits	Feeling of belonging , beauty, and culturally modernised.	Looking good, and being complemented as wearing great product.	Clients aspire to own items, and feeling of happiness.	The brand delivers on the emotional benefit of customers feeling like they belong to a family of like-minded people (fashion enthusiasts that love culture).	A sense of belonging to a brand community that is affluent but very proud of their cultural heritage.	Feeling a sense of belonging	3	P1: "Feeling of belonging, beauty, and culturally modernised" P4: "...customers feeling like they belong to a family of like-minded people (fashion enthusiasts that love culture)" P5: "A sense of belonging to a brand community that is affluent but very proud of their cultural heritage"

Self-expressive benefits	Managing to afford luxury , or thanking one's self for working hard. Standing out.	Clients who grew with the brand, we are an aspirational brand, so we can say aspiration.	Clients feeling they have achieved something by purchasing our items.	Customers purchase our items as a way of making a statement that they are successful due to their ability to afford luxury.	Our brand is commonly used as a status symbol to prove the socio-economic standing of our consumers (ability to afford luxury).	Pride in ability to afford luxury	4	P1: "Managing to afford luxury..." P3: "Clients feeling they have achieved something by purchasing our Items" P4: "Customers purchase our items as a way of making a statement that they are successful due to their ability to afford luxury" P5: "Our brand is commonly used as a status symbol to prove the socio-economic standing of our consumers"
Interviewer: As we wrap up this discussion, do you have any final thoughts on the importance of developing a clear brand identity as a differentiator in the South Africa fashion industry?	It is key for brands to make themselves standout in the industry, with key research all brands can have a unique factor . What MAXHOSA took, was what was in front of everyone and is part of everyday life, culture, and made it modern, beautiful, and Luxury.	It takes years to develop brand identity, and it is something that everyone can agree with that it ties the brand together with one viewpoint.	<i>Not answered.</i>	Brands without a clear identity will not survive in fashion , they will be forgotten or confused for something else.	I think of brand identity as the anchor of any brand. It helps people to identity a brand with certainty in the presence of similar brands in the market.	Identity as a differentiating factor	4	P1: "It is key for brands to make themselves standout in the industry, with key research all brands can have a unique factor". P2: "it ties the brand together with one viewpoint". P4: "Brands without a clear identity will not survive in fashion, they will be forgotten or confused for something else" P5: "It helps people to identity a brand with certainty in the presence of similar brands in the market"

Application of data analysis method

The 6-step thematic analysis method by Braun & Clarke (2006) was followed to analyse the set of data from the qualitative interviews:

STEP 1: Get to know the data

The researcher familiarised herself with the set of data by reading through the five interview transcripts of the participants. In engaging the data, the researcher read the data multiple times in effort to get to know the data better before attempting to analyse it (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

STEP 2: Initial coding

The initial coding of the transcripts to explore the qualitative data and generate the initial codes then followed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved labelling the text, making note of similarities and repetitions across the text in a bid to describe the content (see Beginners Guide to Coding Qualitative Data – Quirkos, 2019).

STEP 3: Search for themes within the data set

Then the researcher began to search for themes within the data, in order to organise the data into themes that appears frequently in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To this end, the researcher used an excel spreadsheet (see Annexure D) as an approach to line-by-line colour coding to identify themes in each line or sentence in the text.

STEP 4: Revise themes

The researcher further refined the themes, reducing them to a manageable number and expanding them to encompass more ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The existing data was compared to the emerging data to see if everything is accommodated within the set of identified themes. Over time, the researcher narrowed the themes to a select few as discovered in the set of primary data gathered.

STEP 5: Define and name the categories

It was important to define and name the final categories and apply to all (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

STEP 6: Produce a report of the analysis

Finally, the researcher concluded by describing the categories, and the reoccurring themes under them without interpreting the results as yet. This step involved linking the discussion back to the literature review relevant to this study.

Herewith a discussion on the categories under which the themes have emerged:

With BRAND IDENTITY as the central organising theme, the researcher settled on three categories, namely core identity; brand differentiation; and extended identity, in that particular order of category importance.

CATEGORY 1: Core Identity

Aaker (1996) define core identity as the central and timeless essence of the brand. Under this category, the data set reveals various themes, namely brand attributes, culture, values, brand evolution, and being inspired by the continent of Africa. To explain the themes, brand attributes are considered the meaning attached to the brand identity of Maxhosa Africa. While at the core of the brand is culture and values like technology, people, and sustainability. Further, the data revealed that the brand is intentional about its brand evolution 'by trying to rebrand one of the aspect[s] of the brand' annually. This means consistently adapting elements of their brand. As mentioned in the data, an example of this is the renaming of the brand. Initially it was called MAXHOSA by Laduma, to now MAXHOSA AFRICA. The name change was 'inspired by the continent'. Further adding that the name change 'also helped separate and differentiate between brand Laduma and brand MAXHOSA'. The data also shows that over time, the brand has evolved from a 'premium brand and moved to a luxury brand' which has elevated the 'perception' of the brand. As an ongoing effort, Maxhosa Africa is building its brand identity through leveraging value creation and executing brand campaigns in alignment to the identity of the brand.

Previous literature shows that brand identity also alludes to the aspirational associations of the brand (Aaker, 1996). As it relates to Maxhosa Africa, the data set shows that the brand was aspiring to tap into the luxury market, which they are now progressing toward: 'We are slowly etching into the luxury industry within the continent',

CATEGORY 2: Brand differentiation

A review of the previous literature revealed a study by Zwakala & Steenkamp (2021), which is around 'Identity-based brand differentiation'. To this end, within the collected data appears what Keller (2012) calls points of difference (PODs) that distinguish the brand from their competitors. The broad theme around brand differentiation is dominantly culture as the brand's identity is 'entrenched within the Xhosa culture'. The modern Xhosa-inspired knitwear designs are informed by anthropology and reflects the heritage of the founder, Laduma Ngxokolo. This can be seen in the bold patterns and the ancient Xhosa beadwork. This rationale aligns with the existing literature which found that brand identity is about what the brand stands for, which is culture in the case of the Maxhosa Africa brand (Aaker, 1996).

Further, the brand considers their association with the Xhosa culture and use of the Xhosa language are points of difference that are 'exclusive' to the brand. In terms of the role of brand identity for differentiation purposes in the fashion industry, the brand considers their brand identity as their 'biggest selling point' in the market. As such, brand identity as a selling point and differentiator marks the second theme emerging from the data. To this end, previous literature has argued that in the development of a fashion brand, a universally recognisable brand identity is more important than the next collection by a fashion brand (Vogue, 2020). From the collected data it appears that Maxhosa Africa is conscious of building a differentiated identity to stand out in a competitive fashion market. Lastly, in terms of what constitutes a competitor for the brand, what came out of the data is other luxury brands and new entrants into the market. Although slightly different, but the dominant theme is other luxury brands.

CATEGORY 3: Extended identity

Based on the brand identity system component of Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model, against which this study is measured, the data shows four dominant themes including, Brand as product, Brand as organisation, Brand as Person, and Brand as symbol which encapsulates the extended identity of the brand.

The collected data around Brand as product speaks to the totality of Maxhosa Africa's product offering in the market, product attributes, exceptional quality, uses, users, and country of brand origin. Thus sub-themes are ready to wear clothes, quality,

sustainable fashion, and luxury. The market of the brand are 'Luxury consumer[s], middle-class and high-end clientele'. While data around Brand as an organisation shows that the brand takes ownership of innovation in its designs as an organisational attribute. Another innovative move by the brand is identifying as 'a zero-waste brand', using '100% raw materials that can be threaded to remake another one'. Also, the organisation is perceived differently locally and abroad. The perception is that the brand is performing better overseas than it is locally.

Under Brand as person, the brand has a 'bold personality but does not shout' as it also 'personifies humility'. 'This is because the brand is shaped around the values of its founder, Laduma'. In addition, a sub-theme of family has also emerged from the data. Family from two perspectives, firstly that Maxhosa Africa is seen as a family by its customers (brand community). And then the fact that it is a family business. This is supported by existing literature which made mention that Maxhosa Africa is family run as Laduma works with his three siblings in the business: a fashion designer, general manager, and finance officer, respectively while he takes the lead as the creative director (Career magazine, 2020). 'It is a brand that embodies family values', as revealed in the data.

While under brand as symbol frequently appears a sub-theme of history. The brand's commitment to preserve the historical heritage of the Xhosa culture through fashion designs. As stated in the data: 'The brand is a home to archiving historical artefacts by reimaging them'. And the brand's representation of culture: 'Our clothes represents culture'. Lastly, as part of the extended identity, there is the value proposition of the brand, which capture customer benefits like functional (luxury items of superior quality and craftsmanship), emotional (a sense of belonging to a culture-conscious brand community), and self-expressive benefits (displaying their ability to afford luxury).

Briefly, what stood out in the interviews was that all the participants seem to have a good general understanding of Maxhosa Africa's brand identity. However, the depth of their brand knowledge is not at the same level. There are some that have more in-depth knowledge while others have slightly inferior knowledge in comparison. This is not a surprise as the participants hold different positions, in a hierarchical order. Also, there are instances where the articulation of the brand's identity is different, but the

essence is more or less the same. Overall, the data shows that the participants have clarity on what they understand Maxhosa Africa's identity to be currently.

Note: The final analytical report will translate into the interpretation of the research findings. It will be discussed in Chapter 4 and 5.

4.2. Findings

Herewith the findings based on the responses provided by the participants in relation to the following overarching research question: 'How are local fashion brands building their brand identity as a differentiator in the South African market?'

The researcher arrived at these findings following a process of collecting and analysing data (as discussed in Chapter 3). The data reflects the knowledge and understanding of the participants about the concept of brand identity development. The structure of the study is three-fold, firstly, it explored the current brand identity of Maxhosa Africa, secondly, it explored what differentiates the brand against competitors, and thirdly, it measured Maxhosa Africa's brand identity elements against Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model. Herewith a detailed discussion below.

- **Exploring the current brand identity of Maxhosa Africa:**

The objective of this section seeks to explore what the current brand identity of Maxhosa Africa is based on the understanding of the participants.

When asked about the concept of brand identity, of the five participants that were interviewed, all the participants showed a good general understanding of what brand identity means: Participant 4 stated: 'Attributes that identify the brand and speaks to the stance of the brand in the market'. Likewise, participant 3 stated: 'It's who we identify ourselves as, whether through products or services'. And participant 5 said: 'Brand identity refers to the identifiers of the brand'. Similarly participant 1 and 2 mentioned brand attributes to explain the meaning of brand identity.

Regarding the knowledge of the participants about what the core brand identity of Maxhosa Africa is; all five participants provided a relevant answer, which allude to brand attributes as the identifiers of the brand. They all agree that culture is the core identity of the brand. Participant 2 stated: 'Heritage, Culture, Art, Technology are all identifiers of the brand and also attached to the core values'. Likewise, participant 3 stated: 'We are [a] culture luxury brand, so culture.' Therefore, the participants' understanding of the timeless essence of the brand is aligned.

Concerning the evolution of the Maxhosa Africa brand, all the participants were aware of recent changes, mentioning the adaptation of the brand name, Participant 1 stated, 'It was called: MAXHOSA by Laduma, we then moved to MAXHOSA AFRICA, as we are inspired by the continent. This also helped separate and differentiate between brand Laduma and brand MAXHOSA.' However, the study found that the lines are still blurred between the two brands as Laduma remains the face of Maxhosa Africa in its promotional material (see figure, 1 & 3). This makes it hard to tell them apart.

The participant further added that: 'We started as a premium brand and moved to a luxury brand'. The brand is intentional about adapting elements of their brand identity to enhance it, participant 2 stated: 'We try to shift the paradigm annually, by always trying to rebrand one aspect of the brand'. This view aligns to that of Casprini, Melanthiou, Pucci & Zanni (2020) who assert that brand identity is not a static concept. Although the essence of the brand should be maintained, but the brand identity should be adapted over time for relevance in the market (Aaker, 1996).

When asked about how, as an ongoing effort, is the Maxhosa Africa brand building its brand identity, participants 1 and 2 shared the same sentiment that value creation through their product offering is how they continue to build their identity. Participant 1 stated that 'We firstly looked at brand growth from a profit-based view, then we saw that value is our unique offering'. Further, participant 1 said: 'We are slowly etching into the luxury industry within the continent'. And participant 2 said: 'We are allowing the brand to be multifaceted'. While participant 3 has scattered ideas of their continual brand building efforts. This could mean that there is no consensus across the brand team on the brand building initiatives that are executed by the brand.

- **Exploring what differentiates the brand against competitors:**

The objective of this section is to explore how the Maxhosa Africa brand differentiates their brand identity among competitors in the market.

All five participants are of the same view that Maxhosa Africa differentiate its brand identity among competitors through culture. Participant 1 stated: 'Our key differentiator is that we are synonymous with culture as well as luxury'. And participant 2 supports: 'What sets us apart is that we have ties to culture, and are honouring culture as a phenomenon, in how we build and design'. In responding to what the participants think constitutes a competitor for the brand in the South African fashion world, the leading response was other luxury brands.

In terms of differentiation through brand identity, all the participants tended to believe that their association to the Xhosa culture and language are points of difference that are exclusive to Maxhosa Africa in the clothing market. And therefore, it would be obvious if a competitor attempt to replicate it (Aaker, 1996). Participant 4 stated: 'Our identity is entrenched within the Xhosa culture' and similarly participant 3 stated: '[A] facet of culture on our identity'. Also, participant 1 stated: '...We are a brand that is able to be tracked to culture, as in how we use our design and language'.

Although participant 1 mentioned the distinct language use, but it was not explained in detail. But through secondary data (Maxhosa Africa, 2021), the researcher found that some of the enduring elements of Maxhosa Africa's brand identity is the usage of the Xhosa language in its brand communication. For instance, as can be seen on their website, the landing page has a welcome banner written in Xhosa and English subtitles (see figure 3). Although a global brand, but the brand insists on the consistent but subtle use of a local language which is also captured in their brand name. The Xhosa language is also used in the e-mail signatures of their employees (see figure 4), as well as in naming their collections, i.e., SiziiKumnkani NeeKumnkanikazi / WE ARE KINGS AND QUEENS (see figure 6).

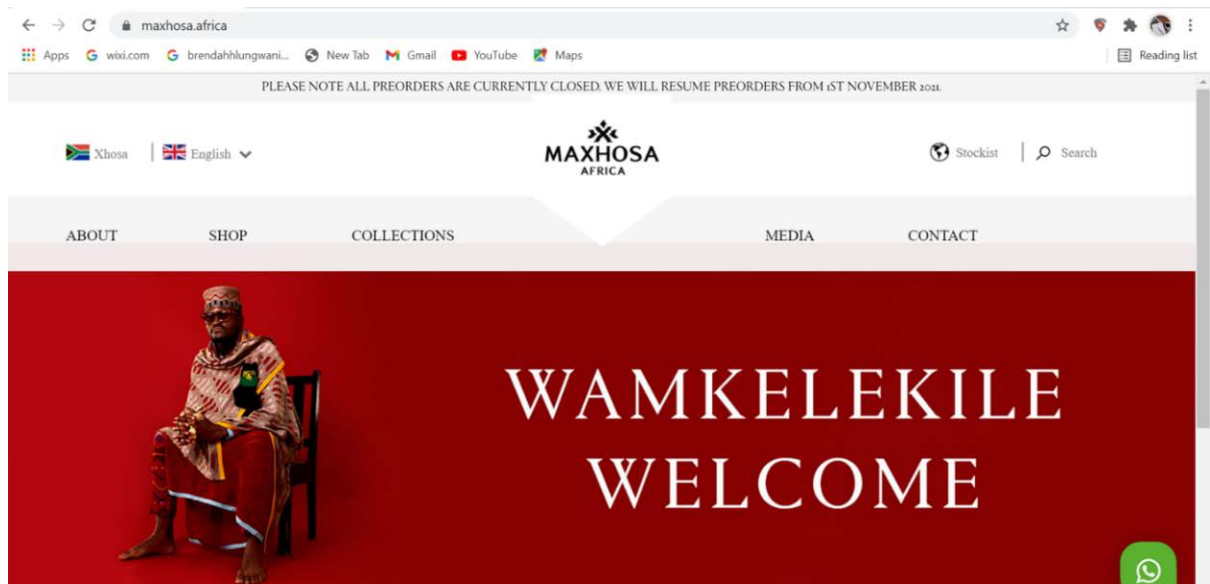


Figure 3: Landing page on the Maxhosa Africa website (featuring Laduma)

Enkosi (Thank you)

Ntsika Tyatya

Digital Marketing Manager

MAXHOSA

Shop.maxhosa.africa

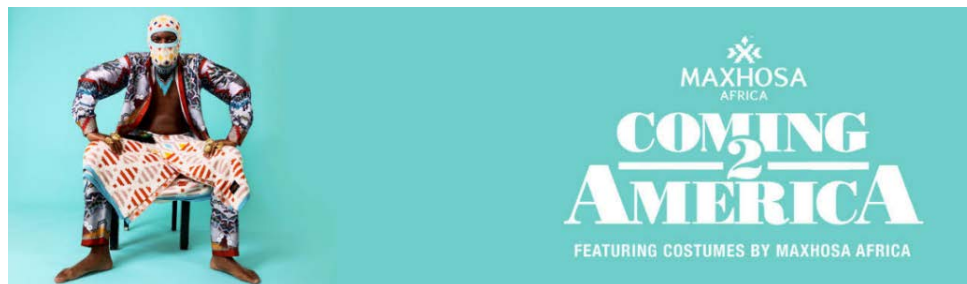


Figure 4: E-mail signature for staff at Maxhosa Africa

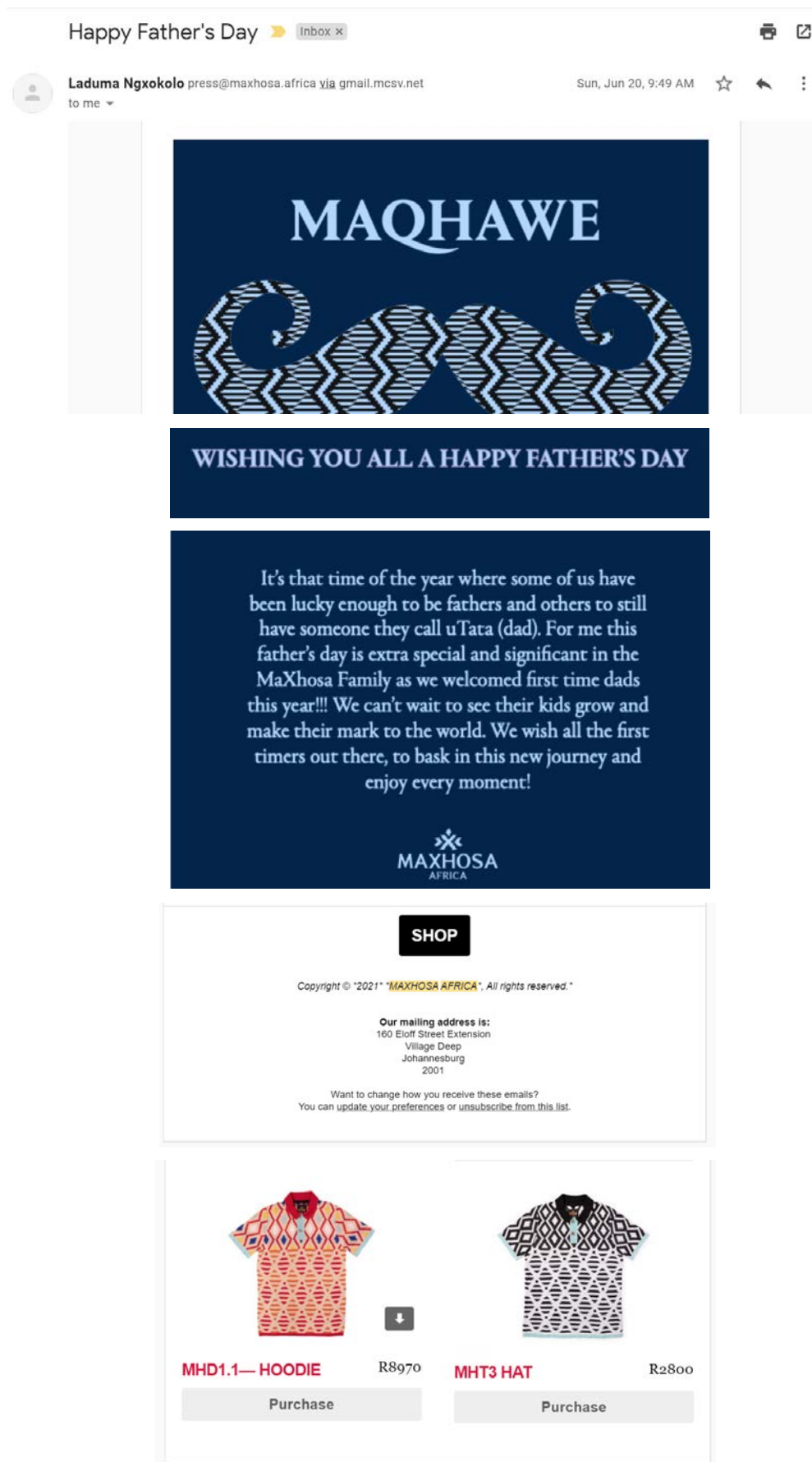


Figure 5: e-newsletter by Maxhosa Africa (personally sent to subscribers by Laduma)

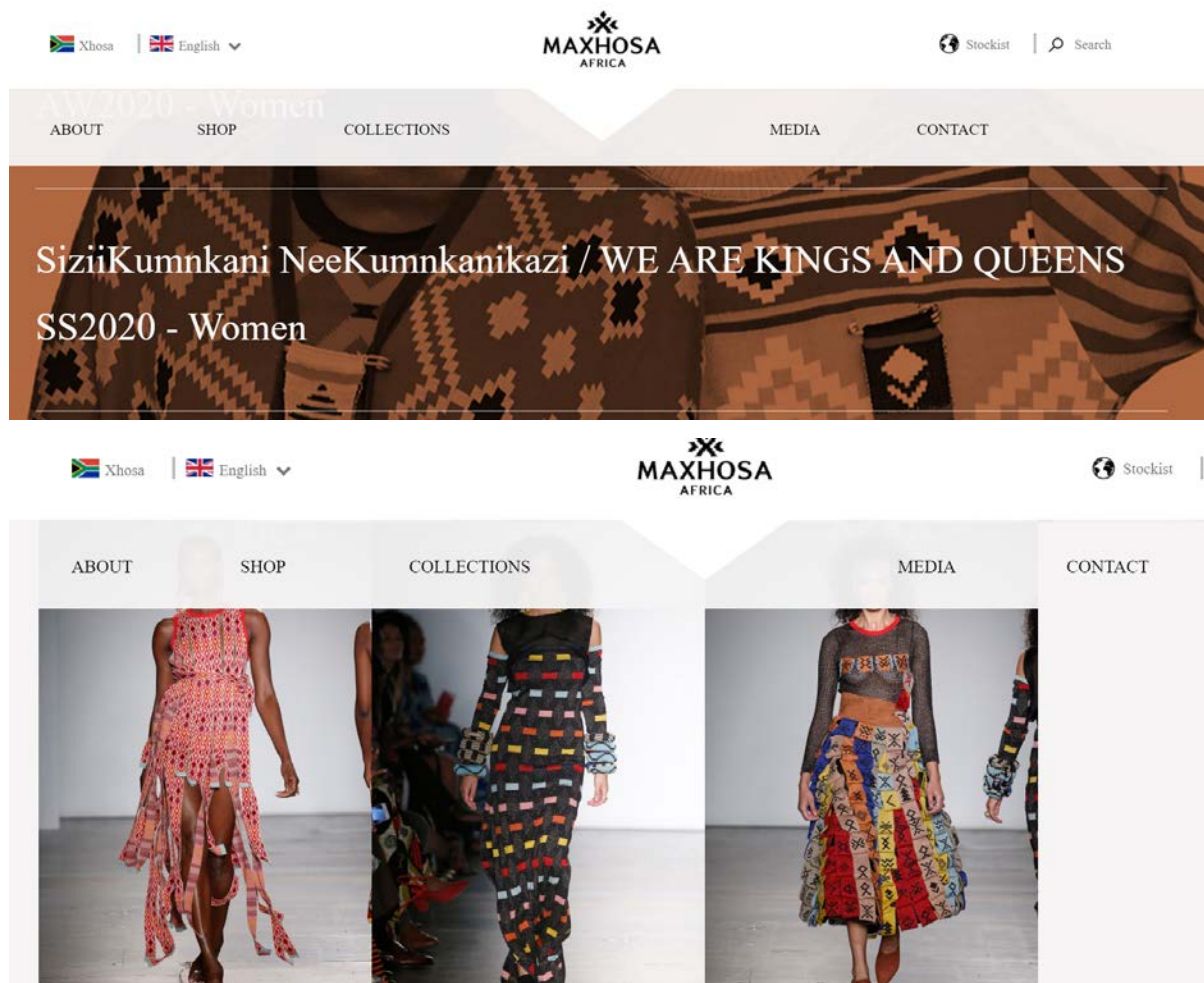


Figure 6: Summer Collection by Maxhosa Africa named in Xhosa

When asked about their thoughts on the role of brand identity in differentiating Maxhosa Africa as a fashion brand, all the participants felt that the role of brand identity is important. Participant 3 stated: 'Our brand identity is our biggest selling point, what we have seen is that people buy MAXHOSA because it is MAXHOSA. So it allows us to risk more in terms of design, as well as patterns'.

- **Exploring Maxhosa Africa's brand identity elements based on Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model:**

The objective of this section is to explore the application of Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model on Maxhosa Africa's brand identity elements. For the purposes of this study, only the second component of the model (brand identity system) is relevant as a method of measurement.

This section looked at the brand through four perspectives: namely Brand as a Product; Brand as a Person; Brand as an Organisation and Brand as a Symbol (extended identity).

There are 12 element categories under these four perspectives which were unpacked. And lastly, the value proposition and the brand-customer relationship as a differentiator were explored.

o The Maxhosa Africa brand as product:

When asked about Maxhosa Africa as a product, all five participants mentioned the totality of the product offering, inclusive of luxury items like ready to wear clothes, homeware, and textiles targeted at luxury consumers. In terms of the product attributes, all the participants spoke to sustainable fashion, using 100% raw material. This is consistent with the view of ethical fashion (Harris, Roby & Dibb, 2016). Further, the brand prides itself in providing exceptional quality and craftsmanship. Participant 1 stated that the products on offer are used by 'Clients who appreciate luxury and quality items. These are varied clientele, mostly from South Africa'.

o The Maxhosa Africa brand as organisation:

All five participants indicated a good understanding of the organisational attributes of Maxhosa Africa as a business, namely innovation and sustainability. Participant 1 stated: 'Innovation, we work on developing new ideas and new techniques with each collection. Sustainability, we are a zero-waste brand, as we also use 100% raw materials that can be threaded to remake another one'. Moreover, all the participants felt that Maxhosa Africa is perceived differently as an organisation locally and globally in countries like Paris, Japan, Switzerland, Nigeria, America, and Netherland where the brand has market presence. Participant 2 stated: 'I would say we are perceived differently, but we are a global brand, so at times, people feel that we are doing greater overseas than we do locally'. However, the study has found this to be untrue as participant 1 has pointed out that the brand boasts a 'varied clientele, mostly from South Africa'. But there is hope that this perception will cease to exist, as stated by participant 3: 'We believe we are on track to have the same reception at home as well

as abroad'. It is advisable for Maxhosa Africa to change this brand perception as it could be potentially damaging.

o The Maxhosa Africa brand as person:

According to four participants, Maxhosa Africa has a bold personality. Participant 1 stated: 'The brand personifies humility. In the output, it is a brand that is bold, but does not shout. This is because the brand is shaped around the values of its founder, Laduma'. While participant 3 did not provide an answer which might imply a lack of knowledge about their brand personality. It was good to find that the brand has defined its personality, Aaker (1996) asserts that creating a brand personality helps to build a strong emotional relationship with target audiences.

Then in response to the brand-customer relationship, the participants repeatedly mentioned the word family. Participant 1 felt that the brand has 'A friendly connection with its customers... Also, it is a brand that embodies family values as it is a family business'. And similarly, participant 3 said: 'We are seen as family by our clientele'. This suggests that the family business has managed to create a strong emotional connection with its customers by making them feel like family (Aaker, 1996).

o The Maxhosa Africa brand as symbol:

In response to the brand as a symbol, the participants were asked to also refer to their brand manual to explain all the brand identity elements, including meanings attached to it. Participant 1 stated: 'The name MAXHOSA was based on the aspirations of the Xhosa people, who are a bold and vibrant subtribe. It then evolved to being the brand inspired by culture in the continent. The brand is a home to archiving historical artefacts by reimagining them. Also, the colours are bold and vibrant, representing the many cultures in the continent...'. Participant 2 stated: '[The] logo: it was designed to perceive the beginning of art, through a free from element of brand'. While participant 3 stated: 'Our clothes represent culture'.

In response to the question about brand heritage and history, the participants provided similar responses, but articulated differently. This suggests that the participants have a common understanding about the history of the brand. Participant 1 said: 'The

unique history is that the brand started as a thesis project, as it is deeply entrenched in anthropology. Hence it can be seen as a highly technical, yet spiritual design process. It is meant to invoke imagination'. While participant 2 said: 'Our history is in how we create a product celebrating culture...'. Participant 4 & 5 were also aligned, believing the brand history to be a link to the Xhosa culture which makes it a heritage brand. But participant 3 did not provide an answer which implies uncertainty.

Previous literature (as discussed in literature review) revealed that Maxhosa Africa is run as a family firm as Laduma works with his siblings in the business: a fashion designer, general manager, and finance officer, respectively while he takes the lead as the creative director (Career magazine, 2020). Considering that it is a family business, what the study found lacking is the emphasis on family history. The interview questions asked about brand history, this was a great opportunity for the participants to speak on the family history in relation to the fashion brand development and involvement of family members in the business. Also, it appears that the brand identity of Maxhosa Africa is subtly linked to the owning family and rather focused on the founder (Casprini, Melanthiou, Pucci & Zanni, 2020).

Finally, as a differentiating factor, the participants agree that the brand offers the following customer benefits in the market: (i) functionals benefits: ready to wear luxury items that are of exceptional quality and craftsmanship; (ii) emotional benefits: a sense of belonging to a culture-conscious brand community; and (iii) self-expressive benefits: displaying their ability to afford luxury.

In summary, to the research question: 'How are local fashion brands building a clear brand identity as a differentiator in the South African market?' the findings suggests that Maxhosa Africa has achieved a clear identity by building a multifaceted brand identity, consisting of a core and extended identity. The core identity represents the central and timeless essence of the brand, and the extended identity refers to complex details that makes it harder for competitors to copy (Aaker, 1996). To this end, the core identity of Maxhosa Africa is predominantly the Xhosa culture upon which the brand is entrenched, having a 'founder-based' brand identity and, being a facet of culture within the African continent. Also, the Xhosa culture, language and consulting

anthropology to inspire their designs are dominant differentiators of the brand against competitors in the world of fashion. While the extended identity is tied to their extensive product offering (Brand as Product), their local and global market presence and the subsequent brand perceptions (Brand as Organisation), having a bold yet humble brand personality (Brand as Person) and visual representations of the brand (Brand as Symbol).

Ultimately, both the core and extended identity of Maxhosa Africa culminate into distinctive identifiers of the brand for differentiation purposes. And aids recognisability and recall for customers amongst an array of competitors in the market (Aaker, 1996).

Finally, when measured against Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model, the brand identity elements of Maxhosa Africa were all applicable to the model without fail. This means that the Maxhosa Africa brand is not vulnerable to potential brand confusion amongst competitors in the saturated fashion market in which it operates (Srivastava, 2011). It also suggests continual investment by the brand in building a clear brand identity as reflected in its collections that represents culture.

4.3. Validity and Trustworthiness of the study

Considering that validity is difficult to establish in qualitative research, trustworthiness is used instead and it is further divided into credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Davis, 2014). Herewith below a discussion to determine the trustworthiness of the research findings of this study:

Credibility: it refers to the accuracy with which the researcher interpreted the data that was provided by the participants (Davis, 2014). To this end, this study is credible because it applied relevant research methods to collect and analyse data. Namely, to avoid what Godwill (2015) terms 'errors of instrumentation', the research tool was validated by testing the quality of the interview questions through a pre-test interview (convenient sampling) to possibly amend ahead of the actual data collection stage. Furthermore, the qualitative data set was analysed in a systemic manner based on Braun & Clarkes (2006) Thematic Analysis method. It was also measured against a

seminal theoretical framework which is Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model. And the study was approached from a suitable paradigm (the ontological position of interpretivism). Moreover, the data that answered the research questions was collected from the relevant selected sample which is the brand team of Maxhosa Africa.

Transferability: it refers to the ability of the findings to be applied to a similar situation and producing similar results (Davis, 2014). Whilst it remains true that data from a qualitative study is not intended to be generalised to broader populations, but the researcher believes this study is fairly transferable and may allow for generalisation of the findings across local fashion brands in South Africa. This is only in general terms.

Dependability: it refers to the quality of the process of integration between the data collection method, data analysis and the theory generated from the data (Davis, 2014). Since the research design and process was explained extensively, the researcher is confident in the dependability of this study. If future researchers were to follow the methodology of this study, they would arrive at similar findings and conclusions.

Confirmability: It refers to how well the data collected support the findings and interpretation of the researcher (Davis, 2014). The researcher can ascertain that due diligence was applied in describing the research process fully to the extent that others can confirm the findings to ensure that it is an accurate reflection of the understanding of the participants. As such, the researcher believes this study is confirmable.

All these diligent efforts sought to instil greater confidence in the findings of the research study.

5. Chapter 5: Conclusion

Finally, in this discussion chapter the researcher will discuss the key findings and subsequently indicate how they answer the research questions of this study.

5.1. Concluding answers to the research questions

- **What is the brand identity of Maxhosa Africa?**

The study found that Maxhosa Africa is a founder-led brand that has a 'founder-based' brand identity as its core identity (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). This means that the brand identity of Maxhosa Africa is anchored on its founder, Laduma Ngxokolo, who is also the head designer (Ndlangisa, 2016). The brand reflects his cultural heritage and embedded values. Also, the brand stands as a representation of culture. This timeless essence of the brand is likely to remain constant as the brand travels to new markets and products (Aaker, 1996).

Therefore, in answering what is the brand identity of Maxhosa Africa, it was found that it is a 'founder-based' brand identity and it is a brand that stands for culture at its core.

Perhaps as a caution, the study found that although having a 'founder-based' identity is beneficial to clearly identify the brand as the founder is the ultimate symbol, however it is to be noted that it comes with potential problems. In a paper called: *Managing founder-based brand identity during succession*, Casprini, Melanthiou, Pucci & Zanni (2020) argue that during succession, whether by retirement or death, brand decisions on managing a founder-based identity over time can be challenging, especially where the founder is also the designer, as it is the case with Maxhosa Africa. There is a possibility that the brand identity of a family business may change after succession from a former generation to the next as they might adopt different branding strategies. Since Maxhosa Africa's identity is linked to the founder, this poses a risk on the management of the brand identity should a new generation takeover the reigns of the family business. To mitigate this risk, it is advised that the effective management of a founder-based brand identity during succession requires a joint effort between the first and second generations as well as non-family members.

- **How does the Maxhosa Africa brand differentiate their brand identity amongst their competitors in the clothing market?**

Maxhosa Africa's key differentiator is predominantly culture, particularly the Xhosa culture and language which the brand considers as their exclusive points of difference in the market (Keller, 2012). This means it is believed that no other brand boasts the same and therefore it would be obvious if replicated by a competitor (Aaker, 1996). This is called 'Identity-based brand differentiation' (Zwakala & Steenkamp, 2019).

As such, in answering how does the brand differentiate their brand identity against competitors, it was found that Maxhosa Africa has achieved differentiation through a unique association to the Xhosa culture and language. This means the brand has a facet of culture on their identity. Also, the brand consults anthropology to inspire their designs. Their difference is communicated clearly in the execution of the brand in how they design and subtly use the Xhosa language in their brand communication. These brand differentiators are unique in the local fashion market and thus differentiates Maxhosa Africa's brand identity against their competitors.

- **How does Maxhosa Africa's brand identity elements measure against Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model?**

Looking at the brand through four perspectives: Brand as Product; Brand as Person; Brand as Organisation and Brand as Symbol (extended identity), the findings were as follows. It was found that the brand offers an extensive product scope with product-related attributes (Brand as Product); that Maxhosa Africa's organisational attributes are innovation and sustainability. And that the brand has local and global market presence, with a subsequent negative brand perception that it is performing better globally compared to locally (Brand as Organisation); the brand has a bold yet humble personality as it is shaped around the values of its founder (Brand as Person); and in addition to the visual representations that encapsulate the identity of the brand (colours, logo, etc), the ultimate Maxhosa Africa symbol is the founder, Laduma Ngxokolo. He represents much of what the brand stands for (Brand as Symbol).

To this end, when measured against Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model, Maxhosa Africa's brand identity elements are applicable to the model without fail. This means that the Maxhosa Africa brand is not vulnerable to potential brand identity confusion amongst competitors in the saturated fashion market in which it operates. This outcome also suggests dedicated efforts by the brand in building their brand identity as a differentiator in the South African fashion market.

The study hereby concludes that developing a clear brand identity in the fashion industry is extremely important to build a brand that is differentiated from its competitors. The study has therefore answered its overarching research question that says: 'How are local fashion brands building a clear brand identity as a differentiator in the South African market?' The results indicate that Maxhosa Africa has achieved a clear identity by building a multifaceted brand identity, consisting of a core and extended identity, as suggested by David A. Aaker in his book called Building Strong Brands. Their identity captures both the central and timeless essence of the brand as well as nuanced details that are unique to the brand as differentiators (Aaker, 1996). While the dominant differentiators of the brand against competitors are the Xhosa culture, language and consulting anthropology to inspire their designs.

5.2. Implications of findings for future practices

The study has contributed new knowledge about the discourse of brand identity development as generated from the perspective of the participants (Davis, 2014). Therefore, the study makes two main contributions. First, it adds to the current understanding of brand identity development which sits within the brand management literature. And second, it advocates for the importance of developing a distinctive brand identity as a clear differentiator for local fashion brands within the South African market, to enable them to cut through the clutter of a saturated market that is flooded with both local and global brands. A distinctive brand identity is not only beneficial for brand identification and differentiation but also to enhance the competitiveness of brands against their competitors.

5.3. Conclusions (critical evaluation of this study and findings)

This study revealed the importance of brand identity development as a clear differentiator within the context of the fashion industry. Thus, this study makes a recommendation to aspiring new entrants into the market and existing fashion brands that wish to refresh their brand identity, to be intentional about building a distinctive brand identity as a differentiator in the market to stand out and avoid brand confusion amongst competitors. Also, it is advisable for brands to periodically conduct a brand refresher internally to enhance the understanding of those involved in brand management. This is important as brand identity is the basis of a brand strategy which informs the execution of the brand (Aaker, 1996). Finally, to further develop a comprehensive understanding of the discourse of brand identity development, there is a need for additional exploration of this topic through the analysis of other local fashion brands in the market. Also, future studies could be measured against other theoretical frameworks for varied results.

5.4. Ethical considerations

The researcher acted with integrity in adhering to the ethical considerations of this research study (Creswell, 2019), firstly the academic study did not commence without obtaining an ethical clearance letter from the Campus Ethics Committee at Vega (see Annexure A). Also, the employer of the researcher was informed of the study as the researcher studies through their bursary (see confirmation email attached). However, it is to be noted that the company did not commission this research, they are merely funding her studies which in partial fulfilment of the degree require academic research to be conducted.

Moreover, the researcher also communicated the purpose of the study and obtained signed consent forms from participants. The participation was voluntary and matters of confidentiality were discussed (Davis, 2014). Additionally, participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point of the interview should they wish to do so (Creswell, 2019). The researcher collected the data ethically and applied due diligence to engage objectively with the data under investigation. Following the introduction of a data protection law in South Africa, in the form of the Protection of

Personal Information (POPIA) Act which came to effect on 1 July 2021, it was imperative for the researcher to protect the information of the participants collected through field research. No reputational harm was caused to the Maxhosa Africa brand as this research is strictly for academic purposes.

CONCLUSION

This study found that Maxhosa Africa has achieved a clear identity by building a multifaceted brand identity, consisting of a core and extended identity as suggested by David A. Aaker. The core identity represents the timeless essence of the brand and the extended identity refers to complex details that are hard to replicate (Aaker, 1996). To this end, the core identity of Maxhosa Africa is predominantly the Xhosa culture upon which the brand is entrenched, having a 'founder-based' brand identity and, being a facet of culture within the African continent. Also, the Xhosa culture, language and consulting anthropology to inspire their designs are dominant differentiators of the brand against competitors in the world of fashion. While the extended identity which looks at the brand through four perspectives is tied to their extensive product offering (Brand as Product), their local and global market presence and the subsequent brand perceptions (Brand as Organisation), having a bold yet humble brand personality (Brand as Person) and visual representations of the brand, with the founder as the ultimate symbol of the brand (Brand as Symbol).

Ultimately, both the core and extended identity of Maxhosa Africa culminate into distinctive identifiers of the brand for differentiation purposes. And aids recognisability and recall for customers amongst an array of competitors in the market (Aaker, 1996). When measured against Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model, the brand identity elements of Maxhosa Africa were all applicable to the model without fail. This means that the Maxhosa Africa brand is not vulnerable to potential brand confusion amongst competitors in the saturated fashion market in which it operates in South Africa (Srivastava, 2011). It also suggests continual investment by the brand in building a clear brand identity as reflected in its collections that represents culture (Maxhosa Africa, 2021).

The purpose of this study was to explore how local fashion brands are building a clear brand identity as a differentiator in the South African market by analysing the Maxhosa Africa brand, against Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model.

This study managed to provide relevant answers to the research questions. And the research problem was solved because comprehensive understanding of how a local fashion brand is building a distinctive brand identity to stand out and avoid brand confusion among competitors in the South African market was developed in effort to add to the existing body of knowledge on the discourse of brand management.

Table 2: Final Research Report Summary Document

TITLE: To analyse how local fashion brands are building their brand identity as a differentiator in the South African market: An analysis of the Maxhosa Africa brand

Research Purpose/Objective	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors/Sources	Literature Review – Concept	Paradigm	Approach	Data Collection Method(s)	Ethics	Key Findings	Recommendations
To explore how local fashion brands are building their brand identity as a differentiator in the South African market by analysing Maxhosa Africa's brand identity, against Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model.	How are local fashion brands building their brand identity to differentiate themselves within the South African market?	To contribute to the current understanding of the importance of brand identity development as a clear differentiator in the South African market, to enhance the competitiveness of fashion brands.	<i>David A. Aaker (1996)</i>	Theme 1: Brand Identity	The study followed an Interpretivism paradigm as it sought to gain in-depth understanding of the development of brand identity in the fashion world which is subjective. This study used an ontological position of interpretivism.	Qualitative study.	Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data. Secondary data consisted of textual data such as the brand's website and previous literature.	Participant: Confidentiality and anonymity in disclosing the information of participants. Researcher: Authors had to be acknowledged in this paper. Brand: The integrity of Maxhosa Africa was Maintained.	The findings indicate that Maxhosa Africa is building its brand identity as a differentiator by allowing it to become a multifaceted brand with distinct elements consisting of the core and extended identity.	This study recommends that aspiring new entrants into the market and existing fashion brands that wish to refresh their brand identity, should be intentional about building a distinctive brand identity as a differentiator in the market to stand out and avoid brand confusion amongst their competitors.
			<i>David A. Aaker & Erich Joachimsthaler (2000)</i>	Theme 2: Branding		Population				
			<i>Jean-Noël Kapferer (2008)</i>	Theme 3: Brand differentiation		Target population: Maxhosa Africa brand.				
			<i>Jan Nieuwenhuis (2016)</i>	Theme 4: Local fashion market		Accessible population: Maxhosa Africa's brand team within comms and marketing.				
Research Problem	Secondary Questions/Objectives	Key Concepts	Key Theories	Theme 5: Competitiveness		Sampling	Data Analysis Method(s)	Limitations	Key contribution	
A fashion brand without a clear brand identity as a differentiator among competitors in a saturated market risks brand identity confusion. Thus, there is a need to develop an understanding of how to stand out in the market.	What is the brand identity of Maxhosa Africa? How does Maxhosa Africa's brand identity elements measure against Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model? How does the Maxhosa Africa brand differentiate their brand identity amongst competitors in the market?	Brand identity	Aaker's (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model.	Theme 6: Brand management		Probability or Non-probability sampling Non-probability sampling	Unit of Analysis. Members of the brand team that manages the Maxhosa Africa brand.	It is a student-led research project, under supervision with limited resources. The results cannot be generalised to broader populations.	To contribute to a greater understanding of how Maxhosa Africa is building a clear brand identity to differentiate themselves amongst their competitors, which has not been done in-depth before.	Also, it is advisable for brands to periodically conduct a brand refresher internally to enhance the understanding of those involved in brand management.
		Fashion brand Development		Theme 7: Distinctiveness		Sampling method Purposive Sampling				
		Brand differentiation				Size 5 respondents.	Data Analysis Method(s) Thematic Analysis was applied.	Delimitations: *Sample size *Data collection method		

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Appendices:

A: Ethical Clearance Letter

B: Informed Consent Forms

C: Interview Schedule

D: Pre-test interview

E: Excel spreadsheet (line-by-line coding of qualitative data)

F: Example of a transcript