



Personal Branding and Self-Promotion as a tool for career elevation for women of colour in the creative industry

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the research report on Personal Branding and Self-Promotion as a tool for career elevation for women of colour in the creative industry submitted for the BCOM Marketing Honours to The Independent Institute of Education (The IIE) is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for a postgraduate qualification.

Signature: E.P Date 28th November 2022

Abstract

This research study was conducted to understand the relationship between personal branding and elevating the careers of women of colour in the creative industry of South Africa. It was conducted in order to understand whether having a strong personal brand could have an effect on - by elevating or alleviating - the extent to which women of colour experience gender and racial biases in the workplace. The main argument was that if women of colour take the time to build strong personal brands and use self-promotion to advertise their skills, this would help them in building strong career trajectories and lessen inequality from a perspective of gender and race in the workplace. The research investigated the relationship between personal branding and elevating the careers of women of colour in senior-level executive positions. A qualitative data collection method was chosen in order to gather human truths about whether personal branding can be used as a tool. The research highlights that, although personal branding and self-promotion can be used as a tool to elevate one's career, it does not solve the problem of inequality in the workplace. Because women of colour need to put in more effort to advance in their professions, personal branding is a justified tool in this regard. It is apparent that both racism and sexism influence the career path of professional women of colour, particularly those in leadership positions. Ongoing sexual harassment in the workplace, and inherent doubts in some sectors of society about the skills and abilities of women of colour, need more attention.

Introduction

This research aims to determine the relationship between personal branding and elevating the careers of women of colour (Black, Asian, Coloured, Indian) in reaching executive and/or senior positions in the creative industry in South Africa. The creative industry for the purpose of this study is comprised of marketers, strategists, graphic designers and photographers. There are a large number of women that comprise the lower ranks of the South African creative industry. However, there appears to be a bottleneck preventing a similar demographic composition in senior and executive positions in the industry, where women are underrepresented (SheSays, 2020). This suggests that there are barriers preventing them from attaining these positions. It is vital for the phenomenon of personal branding and self-promotion to be defined as it will help understand the content of this proposal; personal branding. Tom Peters (2017) states that personal branding is the method by which individuals can differentiate themselves, allowing them to stand out from the general crowd, while savvy self-promotion is said to be the delicate art and science of bragging (John, 2021). This document looks at the population and sampling methods used to conduct the research which was specific to the data being collected. The data collection and analysis methods will be looked at in line with the research design. The findings of the study which has been conducted will be presented and interpreted - the findings have been critically analysed in line with the research problem. The research question and objective will be addressed with regards to the implications of the study, based on the findings which have been discussed below - highlighting how the research problem has been answered. Lastly, insights will be provided to conclude the discussion.

It is important to note that this study addresses the experiences of women of colour. The researcher acknowledges that this includes all people who identify as women, while understanding that experiences of gender-queer people (e.g., trans women) will face compounded discrimination in this regard.

Contextualisation

In today's business landscape, women of colour encounter gender bias in the workplace (Mpemba, 2020). Gender equality and women empowerment are prime focuses in the South African landscape, however, the gender gap remains prevalent, and despite comprising 51% of the population, women remain underrepresented in positions of authority and power (Get Smart, 2020). Research conducted by Stats SA (2021) further indicates that although women make up 43.4% of the total employment force only 33.1% of managerial positions are held by women. The study conducted by SheSays Cape Town indicated that women represent the majority of the workforce but as 'worker bees' (i.e., in the lower ranks) in the creative industry (SheSays, 2020). Women are represented in many disciplines but rarely as directors or part of the C-suite (a term used to describe high-ranking executive titles in an organisation); the lack of female perspective in leadership is deadly for creative agencies in South Africa (SheSays, 2020). Mpemba (2020) researched the barriers aspiring professional women of colour faced in their journey to advance their careers in South Africa, and concluded that they encounter a "glass ceiling". The glass ceiling phenomenon is described as an invisible obstacle that prevents women of colour from reaching C-suite status. Due to the debilitating effects of the glass ceiling, women but more predominantly women of colour face systematic disadvantages in their career advancements in terms of vertical mobility, lower status positions, authority and low income due to their gender and race (Mpemba, 2020). There are numerous obstacles that women of colour encounter when overcoming these discrepancies, including racism, sexism, gender discrimination and the oppression of women of colour (Jackson & Sanyal, 2020). In addition to these discrepancies, there are more difficulties when distinguishing oneself as a woman of colour, as one faces a landscape of systematic and institutionalised racism (Jackson & Sanyal, 2020). There are very few women of colour in the creative industry in South Africa that have reached executive and/or senior positions (SheSays, 2020). However, Suhana Gordhan was recently appointed as a chief creative officer of the Duke Group, which definitely does assist in giving other women of colour hope that there is a space at the top for them too (Duke, 2022).

Rationale

The SheSays study indicated that women represent the majority of the workforce, but as ‘worker bees’, and not executives, in the creative industry (SheSays, 2020). This indicates that there are barriers that prevent the promotion of women. Mpemba (2020) attributed these barriers to the existence of a ‘glass ceiling’, while Khosroshahi (2021) suggests that it is more like a concrete ceiling, due to the double discrimination that women of colour face in organisations’ cultures, practices, and politics. The perception of a glass ceiling indicates that you are, at the very least, aware of the senior positions you are unable to attain (by metaphorically looking through the glass). The concept of a concrete ceiling, however, indicates the extreme extent of additional barriers to women of colour. The history of South Africa, strongly rooted in the oppression of women of colour, compounds trends of global gender inequality, which themselves are rooted in a patriarchal system (Khuzwayo, 2018). This strongly influences all aspects of society, and has resulted in a lack of women of colour executives. It is important to understand what barriers women of colour experience when trying to climb the corporate ladder.

Personal branding is a tool that amplifies self-definition through the creation of strong and authentic brands. It has been shown to accelerate career growth (Gorbatov, Khapova & Lysova, 2019). It may therefore be a useful platform for women of colour, through self-promotion in a world that underestimates their worth, and professional capabilities. Personal branding specifically uses platforms such as social media to amplify the voices, capabilities and visions of an aspiring business person, therefore not relying on mainstream media and effectively taking control of their professional perception (Gorbatov *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, this research aims to explore whether personal branding can help to overcome the barriers preventing women from achieving executive positions in the South African creative industry. The researcher chose this topic in an attempt to understand the barriers women of colour face in the creative industry, in an attempt to contribute to helping women of colour achieve executive and/or C-suite positions.

Problem Statement

The research was set out to determine the relationship between personal branding and elevating the careers of women of colour in reaching senior-level executive positions in the creative industry in South Africa, by identifying the problems they face and investigating whether personal branding can help navigate these barriers.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was firstly to identify what barriers women of colour face in the South African creative industry that prevent them from moving up the corporate ladder, and secondly, whether personal branding can be used as a tool to combat these barriers and improve recruitment to executive and senior roles.

Research Question

Main Question: Can personal branding improve the recruitment of women of colour into executive positions in South Africa's creative industry?

Sub-question: Can personal branding play a role in navigating the barriers of sexism and racism in the workplace?

Research Objective

The objective of this study was to determine what barriers women of colour face in achieving executive positions in the South African creative industry, and whether personal branding can be used as a tool to overcome these barriers.

What barriers prevent women of colour from attaining executive positions in the South African creative industry.

Literature Review

The literature review looked at previous literature conducted on the topic of personal branding, self promotion and the barriers which women of colour face in the workplace, this was done to create a foundation of knowledge on the topic before conducting research.

Theoretical Foundation

Tom Peters (2017) states that personal branding is the method or way in which individuals can differentiate themselves, allowing them to stand out from the general crowd. Using personal branding theory allows individuals to communicate their unique values, and achieve an enhanced identity in comparison to others around them (Peters, 2017). Peters (2017) highlights that one is the CEO of one's own company: i.e., the CEO of one's own brand. For example, Peters (2017) says that the real action is amongst others, and personal branding can be used to establish one's own micro equivalent of the Nike swoosh. Using personal branding can allow individuals to reach out towards opportunities, make a notable contribution to the team, and importantly, put one's self in a great bargaining position for the next season.

Scheidt, Gelhard, and Henseler (2020) researched and analysed previous literature to find a more specific definition of the concept of personal branding, and suggest a conceptual approach based on three pillars: firstly, what the branded individual brings to the table. This looks into skills, competencies and experience. Secondly, it focuses on the audience or target group and the perceptions they have of the branded people and their relevant associations (Scheidt *et al.*, 2020). This aspect ranges from a few specific definitions, such as the employee trying to impress their boss, to a very abstract circumstance like who a person is to the world around them. The third pillar, differentiation - the end product - looks at how the process of personal branding aims to produce a distinction from peers by leveraging one's points of difference and definitions, resulting in an individual and unique selling marketing proposition. Aside from this conceptual triangle, a strong focus on career, employment, and the commercialisation of

the branded individuals can be identified by Scheidt *et al.* (2020). Scheidt *et al.* (2020) also highlighted that the definition of personal branding was to be updated as personal branding is the process of developing an individual human brand rather than the entire phenomenon of the branding of individuals. It is important to understand the difference between personal branding, the process, and the subject, the human brand.

This understanding was necessary in the current research study, which investigates the potential of personal branding as a tool to enhance the careers of women of colour in the creative industry. Due to personal branding still being in its infancy with regard to academic literature, it was important to analyse the gaps in the literature, to get a firm understanding of what is known and whether there is a strong tie between career progression and the process of personal branding. The theory related directly to the study as it was about personal branding and the investigation was into whether personal branding can help navigate these barriers which women face.

Literature Review

Personal branding and career outcomes; career outcomes have been conceptualised as career success so therefore, career success is defined as the accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes (Gorbatov, Khapova & Lysova, 2019). Gorbatov *et al.* (2019) state that career outcome criteria other than objective career success have become more important in the ever-changing work landscape for contemporary workers. Therefore, career satisfaction is an important subjective career outcome and it has shown to be a result of managing one's career. It was shown in a study that those who employed self-promotion behaviours showed greater career satisfaction and since personal branding is self-promotion behaviour it would yield a similar result (Gorbatov *et al.*, 2019). Gorbatov *et al.* (2019) also look at the perceived employability, research done on employability in line with an individual positive assessment of marketability on the job markets, it is seen that using personal branding can lead to higher perceived employability. One of the central processes of personal branding is the professional

image and there is evidence that clarity of professional self has significant positive impact on employability (Gorbatov *et al.*, 2019).

Lillian Barnard, the current CEO & GM at Microsoft South Africa, was interviewed along with 56 other female CEOs in order to research how more women can get to the top (Stevenson & Orr, 2017). Lillian Barnard herself has been a strong online presence using LinkedIn as her preferred social media platform. When looking at the results, it is evident that women have to work harder and longer to get to the same place as their male counterparts (Barnard being four years older when compared to other CEOs), before becoming CEO (Stevenson & Orr, 2017). Research states that women are more driven by achieving business results and making a positive impact, the interviews strongly suggest that status, power and reward were not enough to attract women to the role of being a CEO. It also highlights that these ambitious women are hesitant to self-promote as they are driven more by a sense of purpose (Stevenson & Orr, 2017). It was also highlighted that the CEOs needed to build themselves using specific traits like courage, risk-taking, resilience and managing ambiguity, all of which would contribute to a strong personal brand. Interestingly, the in-depth interviews with these CEOs indicate a consistent lack of self-promotion, when comparing these results to the predominantly male CEO benchmark, the women scored lower on confidence due to the lack of control of outcomes they perceive they have. It was evident that women benefited from early mentorship in their careers however, disparities were still evident. With the goal in mind of having 100 female CEOs lead the Fortune 500 by 2025, it is evident that personal branding could play an imperative role as it is said to improve one's self-worth, and increase confidence while self-promoting (Gorbatov *et al.*, 2019).

The Duke Group recently appointed Suhana Gordhan as their chief creative officer (CCO) after she joined Duke Advertising as their executive creative director (ECD) in 2020 (Duke, 2022). As a woman of colour herself, working in the creative industry in South Africa, she has been focused on creating access to the industry for young women and creatives of colour. Gordhan states that she views this promotion as deeply

personal as she gets to take up the ranks amongst a tiny handful of women CCOs, let alone women CCOs of colour (Duke, 2022). She also mentions that she wants to make sure that other young women coming up in the industry know that there is a place for them at the top. Gordhan also serves on key industry boards in South Africa - The Loeries and the Creative Circle Exco which both play a significant role in the creative industry in South Africa. When considering the interview above with Barnard, it would be extremely interesting to investigate how personal branding could possibly be used as a tool to advance the careers of women like Gordhan who had not yet been appointed into a C-Suite position. It was evident while interviewing the CEO's, there was a consistent lack of self-promotion when comparing them to their male counterparts CEOs (Gorbatov *et al.*, 2019).

The South African labour market is heavily racialised and gender-biased and the largest contributor to overall income inequality came from the labour market at 74.2% (Stats SA, 2020). Female workers are seen to earn approximately 30% less than males, who have better-paying jobs when compared to females (Stats SA, 2020). Research conducted by PWC (2021) states how improving female participation in the labour market will significantly impact the economy when women are allowed to be active in productive, well-paying jobs. South Africa has various pieces of legislation aimed at preventing gender discrimination in the workplace, however, the country has a stagnant median gender pay of between 23% and 35%; this indicates how gender equality in the workplace has not been achieved yet (Bosch & Barit, 2020).

Research shows that women accounted for 43.4% of the total employment in the second quarter of 2021, of which managerial positions 33.1% were women while 66.9% were men (Stats SA, 2021). Women dominate the domestic work at 95.5%, while most of the jobs are filled by men. Only 11.9% of craft and related trade jobs were occupied by women (Stats SA, 2021). The statistics continue to show the lack of female representation in the C-suite across industries, on the JSE only 13% of CEOs and CFOs are women which amounts to just 81 women (Buthelezi, 2021). The SheSays study indicated that women represent the majority of the workforce, but as 'worker bees', and not executives, in the creative industry (SheSays, 2020). This indicates that

there are barriers that prevent the promotion of women. Mpemba (2020) attributed these barriers to the existence of a 'glass ceiling', while Khosroshahi (2021) suggests that this is more like a concrete ceiling, due to the double discrimination that women of colour face in organisations' cultures, practices and politics.

SheSays conducted a gender representation survey on the South African creative industry, this study revealed that women represent the majority of the workforce but as 'worker bees' (SheSays, 2020). Women are represented in many disciplines but rarely as directors or part of the C-suite, the lack of female perspective in leadership can be deadly to the industry, having women leaders is said to be the 'secret sauce' for positive economic impact as well as an increase in GDP (SheSays, 2020). The survey focused specifically on the marketing and advertising industry where 72 agencies in South Africa were researched, the industries are dominated by women 61% while men 39% of the industry. When taking a closer look at the statistics one seems that in the creative sector, 61% of the Chief Creative Officers, and Executive Creative Directors are men while in the digital sector of the industry, 73% of digital Design Directors are male (SheSays, 2020). In the technology sector, 100% of Chief Technology officers and directors are male. The industry is not progressive, nor is it purposeful, the industry is not in order (SheSays, 2020). In addition, only a fifth of directors of listed companies on the JSE are women and many boards of directors of local companies still have no women, while those that diversify themselves usually only have one female board member at a time. It was reported that there is no doubt that there have been positive changes in the workspace with regards to women empowerment, however, the aforementioned statistics show that it is moving too slowly (Hammer, 2020). Interestingly, it was reported by Business Tech (2022) that South Africans stay about 2 years and 10 months in a job before moving on to their next position. Seeing that the duration of employees tenure is not long, there is seen to be a significant barrier as to why women of colour are moving horizontally to new companies rather than vertically into executive and senior positions (Business Tech, 2022).

Personal branding can be used for career success. Chritton (2020) is a Master Personal Brand Strategist and states that personal branding is not a trend; it is a survival strategy.

In the past, employees relied heavily on others to manage their careers, with the belief that if they worked hard, they would be duly recognised. This may happen, but if an employee chooses this route, one is handing over a huge component of one's career trajectory to hope. Exercising one's personal branding career strategy means one has control over their own career, which may be especially important for black women. Goldsmith (2020) states that people are known by their company, which is why allies are a huge part of building a personal brand, therefore making connections but do not solely rely on them for career success.

There is a glass ceiling above women of colour in the industry. Sepand (2015) researched the discrimination that women of colour face as well as the tools they have utilized to combat it and advance their careers. Sepand (2015) argues that women of colour benefit from having mentors to help them navigate race and gender discrimination, and that mentorship plays a huge role in personal branding. An important benefit of formal mentorship programs may be to affect how actively individuals seek out and cultivate multiple development relationships (Sepand, 2015). The multiple development relationship highlights the two functions which mentors serve: career development and psychosocial. Sepand (2015) highlights that career development aids with career advancement while psychosocial attempts to boost confidence, the mentoring programs allow for women of colour to access senior-level executives which in turn allows for the executives to see the potential in lower-level employees. Women of colour face a concrete ceiling in business when trying to climb the corporate ladder. This is due to the dual effects of gender discrimination, a result of bias and societal expectations of women, as well as cultural bias and racism in white-owned capital (Khosroshahi, 2021).

Gender discrimination in the workplace is stated to not only be a moral imperative but also an economic one as the discrimination can lead to both financial losses as well as decreased innovation which can stifle the growth potential and competitiveness of firms and countries (Triana *et al.*, 2018). The consequences of perceived gender discrimination at work include stress, job dissatisfaction as well as physical symptoms.

Jackson and Sanyal (2020) look into the struggles and strategies of women of colour business owners. It is imperative to draw attention to the unique challenges that women of colour face as the nuances of race and gender are often lost, when included in more general studies on gender discrimination (Jackson & Sanyal, 2020). There are many stereotypes which are seen as a challenge for women of colour that are fought against when self-promoting. Stereotypes such as justifying the marginalisation, controlling images, and oppression of women of colour, and being seen as incompetent or less intelligent than white counterparts in a predominantly white workplace are evident. Women of colour adopt survival strategies to navigate racism and sexism in the workplace, and Jackson and Sanyal (2020) state that professional women of colour attempt to adhere to the western culture norms of corporate spaces which upholds the standards of whiteness. How women of colour have responded to these harsh stereotypes is by using them as a motivation for their success as well as an opportunity to inspire other women of colour; the use of personal branding would be used in this process whether it be conscious or subconscious.

Historical racial and gender bias prevent women of colour from attaining executive positions. Patriarchal and stereotypical attitudes toward women are rooted in the 20th Century when black African women were mainly caregivers (Matotoka & Odeku, 2021). During apartheid black women were not appointed to leadership roles, subjected to exclusion in terms of gender, race, and class. It can be deduced that the lack of job opportunities for women of colour during apartheid has significantly contributed to their underrepresentation in managerial positions, because historically, they were not considered decision-makers, but rather provided with jobs that were extensions of traditional roles (Matotoka & Odeku, 2021). Despite the Employment Equity Act (EEA), enacted to ensure that the South African Labour force reflects the demographics in South Africa, women of colour are still underrepresented in managerial positions, especially in the private sector (Matotoka & Odeku, 2021). Their exclusion in key positions is based on a lingering legacy of race, gender, and class discrimination (Matotoka & Odeku, 2021).

Genat (2019) investigates gender bias against women in the workplace from the two types of bias; evaluation bias and backlash. Evaluation biases are cases when women are evaluated less favourably than their male counterparts due to their gender while the backlash comes in when women who behave in counter-stereotypical ways are evaluated less favourably in terms of likeability and hireability (Genat, 2019). Genat (2019) states that gender imbalance in the workplace continues to be an ongoing issue, globally women make up 50% of the working-age population however, they only generate 37% of the gross domestic product (GDP), only holding 25% of managerial positions. The reason for inequality in the workplace is studied when looking at the differences in men and women in their abilities which is seemingly small, to a large extent stereotypes and bias in the workplace affect women in many ways, it ranges from women not being hired to getting average recommendation letters in contrast to their male counterparts.

In Deloitte's Women @ Work study which was done to try and understand how women experience the workplace and how it impacts their engagement and career progression (Deloitte, 2022). The findings were quite striking, the majority of women (59%) have experienced harassment and/or microaggressions (such as being interpreted, talked over, or being patronized) over the last year which has been an increase from 52% in 2021. Half of the women said that they experienced microaggressions, and 14% had experienced harassment (Deloitte, 2022). Of these being reported, only 23% of microaggressions in comparison to 66% of harassment behaviours. 93% of women believe reporting non-inclusive behaviour will negatively impact their careers while also feeling like their employees won't take them seriously (Deloitte, 2022). It was also found that non-inclusive behaviour impacted the majority of the respondents however, women in ethnic minority groups and LGBT+ women were more likely to have experienced microaggressions (Deloitte, 2022). Women in ethnic-minority groups were significantly more likely to be excluded from informal interactions, feeling patronized or belittled by comments about their race or ethnicity.

Conceptualisation

It has been very clear when analysing previous literature that there seems to be a lack of self-promotion when looking at women in comparison to their male counterparts. Therefore, the new personal branding strategy is highly important to have analysed in order to understand whether it could help women of colour advance their careers (Stevenson & Orr, 2017). However, there are many different aspects which women of colour are faced with when wanting to promote themselves due to race discrimination, gender roles, gender pay gap, sexism, socio-cultural beliefs and the social backlash of self-promoting (Matotoka & Odeku, 2021). Personal branding, savvy self-promotion and the human brand have been defined, to give a more clear understanding of the difference between the product and the progress.

Racism at work: Kandola (2021) states that racism is often understood solely in terms of blatant, overtly hostile attributes and behaviour like physical intimidation or verbal abuse. However, the defining characteristic of so-called 'modern racism' is that it is subtle and may be seemingly innocuous, consist of microaggressive language, and be largely covert (Kandola, 2021). Women of colour face racism at work on a daily basis as it is one of the many challenges which they face when trying to climb the corporate ladder.

Gender bias in the workplace: Gender bias is the tendency to give preference to one gender over another (Reiners, 2022). Gender bias is one of the main challenges that women of colour face in the workplace, and indeed there is seen to be gender bias specifically in the senior executive hierarchy in South Africa. Personal branding as a tool will be investigated on whether it could be used to reduce this bias.

Occupational sexism: Occupational sexism, known as sexism in the workplace or employment sexism, is a form of discrimination against someone because of their gender, in their place of work. There are two theories that are identified as to why occupational sexism exists; social roles and stereotypes (University of the People, 2022).

Glass ceiling: The glass ceiling refers to artificial or invisible barriers based on an attitudinal or organisational bias that prevents qualified women and previously marginalised groups (e.g., women of colour, people who identify as LGBTQ+) from advancing into senior-level management positions (Seale, 2021). Personal branding will be researched as to how it might help black women shatter the systemic glass ceiling to help them succeed in the workplace.

Gender Pay Gap: The gender pay gap is defined as the difference in earnings between women and men. Bosch and Barit (2020) state that the gender pay gap or the difference in wages between men and women for the same type of work or work of equal value is a stumbling block in achieving gender equality in South Africa. The gender pay gap is not limited to the phenomenon of men being paid more for equal work than women, but also identifies that due to the barriers (borne of a patriarchal system) preventing women from attaining the same high-level executive positions as men, they are as a group paid less. The research aims to discover whether personal branding could be used to advance women's careers and therefore slowly close the gender pay gap.

Personal branding: Personal branding is the entire progress of establishing, maintaining and developing an individual human brand (Scheidt *et al.*, 2020).

Savvy self-promotion: Savvy self-promotion, described by John (2021), is the delicate art and science of bragging. Success at work depends on being seen as both competent and likeable, however, drawing attention to one's accomplishments can have a backlash attached to it. This may be especially prevalent for women, due to societal perceptions that women should be largely humble, and not braggadocious. As personal branding is used to self-promote oneself, understanding self-promotion gives insight into personal branding.

Human brand: The human brand serves as a general term for the brand that results from a personal branding process, independent of class. A human brand *is an intangible asset linked to a person, which generates economic and social value through its visibility as a result of a personal branding process* (Scheidt *et al.*, 2020).

Details of the issue/problem being investigated

The issue being investigated has two main facets. Firstly, the perceived bias and discrimination women of colour face in the South African creative industry, which prevents the promotion of a large number of women in lower sectors of the industry in the senior and executive levels. The second issue under investigation is personal branding as a concept, how it has been used in the past, and importantly, whether there is a place for it to help (highly qualified and competent) women of colour overcome career-advancement barriers in this industry.

Research Design & Methodology

Research paradigm

The selected paradigm for this research study is interpretivism. The main idea on which the paradigm rests is that people are fundamentally different, and that these differences are important in answering sociological questions, and therefore the analyses associated includes space for individual-level responses and opinions / experiences (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014). The research aimed to study and describe meaningful social actions by understanding human behaviour, which allowed the researcher to understand the effect of personal branding on women of colour's careers in the creative industry in South Africa. The reason interpretivism was chosen was due to the researcher intending to gain an in-depth and empathetic understanding of the challenges that women of colour face and what it is like to live the life of a woman of colour in the workplace (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). Theories played a crucial role in this study as they were used as a tool to sensitise others to the observable, subjective difficulties and experiences of the women. This enabled the study to lead to understanding how personal branding can be used by women of colour as it does not predict nor is it based on predictions (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). The interpretivism paradigm was used in this study to show the qualities and characteristics of the effect of personal branding on women of colour's career advancements (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). The three positions associated with interpretivism are briefly stated: the ontological position of interpretivism highlights that interpretivists do not believe in an objective or external reality, therefore, the social world is what people perceive it to be. The metatheoretical position of interpretivism tells a story: the research is extremely rich with detailed descriptions, including direct quotes from the participants in the study (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability when evaluating data were criteria used by the researcher. An inductive approach was used where the researcher collects information and analyses it before creating a theory to base it on. Lastly, the methodological position of interpretivism: the researcher empathises with and shares in the social values of the women that are being studied. In

this study, the researcher became the primary research instrument and the participants taught the researcher about their lives (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014).

Research approach and design

This study aims to investigate meaningful social actions by understanding human behaviour, which will allow the researcher to understand the effect of personal branding on women of colour's careers in the creative industry in South Africa. The interpretivism research paradigm will be used to gain an in-depth and empathetic understanding of the challenges that women of colour face and what it is like to live the life of a woman of colour in the workspace (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). This paradigm uses qualitative research to show qualities and characteristics (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). The researcher will be using exploratory research. The researcher will approach a sample of women of colour in the creative industry for one-on-one interviews, using discussion points aimed at identifying whether they experience barriers in the industry, what the barriers are, and whether they believe personal branding could help alleviate these problems and navigate the barriers. If they have already built personal brands, they will be asked whether it has helped, and in what ways. The study will be cross-sectional, to create an overall picture of a phenomenon at one point in time – i.e., the participants will be interviewed only once (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). This study will be using an inductive approach to data collection and analysis due to its qualitative nature.

In this study, the population consists of all women of colour in the South African creative industry. The sample chosen for the purpose of this study consists of a sample size (n) of four. To this end, the data was collected when the seven women were interviewed one-on-one, for approximately 40 minutes - 1 hour, depending on the level of detail they felt comfortable to go into. The unit of analysis was thus the transcript made of the recording of each interview. Each interview broadly followed a similar structure, with the same overarching questions. Due to the different experiences of the women, however, the answers to the different sections had different lengths. Overall, the variety of women

interviewed (different cultures and religious backgrounds) offered an in-depth understanding of the barriers women of colour face in the creative industry.

Population

The population is defined as ‘the total group of people or entities from whom information is required’ (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). In this study, the population refers to women of colour that work in the creative industry in Cape Town, South Africa, particularly millennials and generation X women from the ages of 25-55. In this study, the interviewees include marketers, strategists, graphic designers and photographers who are currently working on different levels in the creative industry. This age group was chosen because they regularly use social media, which is a tool that is often used to build personal brands (Gorbatov *et al.*, 2019). The target population are people who fall in the population parameter, whereas the accessible population is defined as the section of the population that the researcher has been able to include: the individuals that were reachable and available for interviews (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, the unit of analysis was individuals.

Sampling

Non-probability sampling was used because the researcher used qualitative research which means that it would have been difficult to gain access to the entire population, therefore a clear sample had to be selected from the accessible population (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). The sample was selected using the researcher’s judgement, not randomly selected participants from a list, meeting the population parameters (i.e., women of colour with an employment history in the creative industry of South Africa) (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). Using non-probability sampling meant that the elements (participants) in the population did not have an equal opportunity to form part of the sample, as they were selected to comply with the demographic that was being

studied. In qualitative research, such as this study directly investigating specific experiences related to a specific demographic group, representativeness is not important (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). The respondents were selected based on the researcher's professional network and knowledge of the industry.

When looking at qualitative sampling it was important to make sure that the experiences and detailed knowledge of the participants were collected as good quality data, and that the participants had the ability to convey this verbally (Maree, 2019). The researcher used purposive sampling to conduct the research; a sampling method where the researcher purposefully chose the elements (participants) to include in the sample, based on a set list of characteristics which were specific to the population which was highlighted above. The researcher looked at the population of women of colour in the creative industry in South Africa and determined which characteristics were important for the study (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). A sample of seven women of colour was chosen from the women who represented the identified characteristics. The researcher used an email and message recruitment method, to ensure that sufficient information was provided prior to participating in the study. This recruitment method also helped establish whether there was interest from the sample chosen as well as their willingness to serve as research participants (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014).

There are very few women of colour in the creative industry in South Africa that have reached executive and/or senior positions, therefore, the researcher investigated whether personal branding could be used to advance the careers of women of colour using an interpretivism research paradigm (SheSays, 2020). This approach was used to gain an in-depth and empathetic understanding of the challenges that women of colour face in the workplace; wherein the qualitative approach enabled the study to identify and understand personal, lived experiences of the interviewees (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). Understanding the research design was fundamental to choosing the sample, therefore the sample was specifically chosen in line with the research design and contextualised from the accessible target population. Respondents from different professions were selected, while also considering the levels and stages of their careers, to give a range of parameters relevant to the study. This helped to understand the

barriers which women of colour face and whether personal branding in their opinion could help them advance their careers.

Data Collection

This study used a case study approach, where a detailed description of a social phenomenon that exists within a real-world context was identified through interviews. This method allowed the researcher to thoroughly understand the particular lived experience of the participants in the study (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). The research tool was in-depth interviews, a qualitative data collection method which allowed the researcher to pose questions to the participants with the aim of learning more about their views, opinions and beliefs about a specific phenomenon. This method helped the researcher learn more about the participants, and interpret and understand their opinions, views, and beliefs about racial and gender discrimination in the creative industry that prevents career elevation, personal branding, and whether personal branding can help navigate the barriers (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). This method was suitable for this study as the researcher was in a position to ask more in-depth questions about the aspects that relate to the study, which allowed for flexibility in the research process (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). The standardised, open-ended interview was used which focused on asking the same set of open-ended questions to all the seven women of colour participating in the study. The information obtained was analysed more easily and the format allowed the researcher to compare notes on the views and opinions of the participants in a more organised manner (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). The researcher prepared research discussion points for the in-depth interviews. In addition, a data template was used to facilitate later analysis. The researcher did not rely exclusively on pre-planned questions but allowed the interview to progress and flow in a natural, conversational manner. Five of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, and the remaining two were conducted over Google Meets online calls. All of the interviews were recorded through the researchers laptop and transcribed so that the data could be analysed. The interviews were scheduled in advance in order for the respondents to have enough time to be focused on the task at hand. The information used for this study was based on what the participants meant and not what the

researcher felt they meant. Therefore, it was important for the researcher to use effective listening as an important aspect of the interviewing process (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). The researcher took the women's feelings into consideration when asking them about anything personal, as the researcher had to respect any boundaries that became evident. The researcher deliberately included questions about each respondent's experiences of barriers that they had faced in the workplace, as well as personal branding. There was time for the participants to explain and elaborate on their answers, allowing the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the findings of the study. To ensure that the evidence gathered was trustworthy and valid, the researcher spent as much time as necessary for each participant to respond to the open-ended questions. The researcher also allowed participants to add information about their experience in the creative industry where they thought it might be necessary to elaborate or bring in their different opinions about their lived experience.

Annexure A: Research Instrument

Data Analysis Techniques

Qualitative data analysis was used to explore and identify overt and covert themes and patterns embedded in the transcribed text gathered from the interviews (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). The interviews were subjective, and the data was analysed using the line-by-line coding data analysis method. A form of microanalysis, wherein the transcripts were read line by line, and certain words and phrases that were relevant to the study were marked. This allowed the researcher to develop categories within which to group the data. This data analysis method was used to build a conceptual framework which was then applied to all the data until no new codes or concepts emerged, indicating that the researcher had reached the data saturation point (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). An interpretive approach to data analysis and interpretation rested on the foundation that there can be no absolute right or wrong answer to human behaviour. Therefore, the researcher regards and describes human behaviour in the context of the

person who experiences a situation or phenomenon subjectively. The research used an inductive approach where the data collected was used to develop a general theory, as there were not many credible theories to base the analysis on when looking at personal branding for the specific characteristics of the sample (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). This process used inductive reasoning by which themes and categories emerged from the data which was collected by the researcher when carefully examined. As a result of inductive reasoning, the researcher was able to form patterns in the qualitative research to create statistically sound research data.

Findings

An in-depth analysis of the interview transcripts was done using line-by-line coding which is in line with the research design and research problem. The seven respondents were all women of colour. They ranged in position from fairly junior-level in their careers in the creative industry to senior executives in C-Suite positions, with an average of 10 years in the creative industry (range 5 to 19 years).

Barriers faced by women of colour in the South African creative industry:

The analysis revealed that all respondents had experienced both racial and gender-based discrimination in the workplace and that these were often combined, i.e., they were discriminated against as women and as people of colour. It was also evident that the researcher could see similar themes relating to the biases experienced as a whole. All the respondents described the racial discrimination they experienced as covert, while some (n=2) mentioned that some of the racial discrimination they had experienced was definitely institutionalised. Most gender-based discrimination was also covert, however, there were also accounts of sexual harassment (n=1) which could be interpreted as overt gender bias. These biases were experienced by the respondents

however, it was also experienced by their co-workers at a similar executive level to the respondents and from leadership and management roles.

All of the respondents had experienced racial bias at some stage during their careers. Most of their experiences involved obvious favouritism towards white peers in the same age group, with the same training and the same amount of time in the industry. One respondent described the situation where prejudice against her seemed to reduce after her colleagues heard her speak: "I feel under-estimated when in a meeting with new colleagues, until I speak with my very good English." This indicates that her language skills somehow compensated for her colour.

It became evident - particularly for the millennial women who had been in the industry for longer - that they were at a disadvantage working as a minority, and that discrimination was both against women, and people of colour. For example, in spaces with white leaders and bosses (i.e., all or most workspaces), opportunities were given to the white interns. Relevant quotes reflecting the experiences of respondents included: "Patronising attitude when talking to black women, using a different voice and accent". "The young white guy got all the praise. I complained and was told that I should learn from the experience." "We are often excluded from drinks after work...". "White women are given more responsibilities more quickly." Furthermore, it was apparent to the interviewees that white colleagues were provided with bigger budgets, opportunities, and they experienced fast-tracked career growth.

All of the racial bias experienced was covert, with no obvious, overt instances to the respondents recollection. One spoke particularly about the impact working as a minority racial group had on shaping the respondents career trajectory, with less opportunity for mentorship or aligning culturally with the people in leadership positions, and the need to outperform colleagues at every level available just to keep up with her (white) colleagues. Another respondent highlighted the discomfort that came with being a 'BEE' (Black Economic Empowerment) employee - an empowerment scheme that is meant to foster representation and encourage diversity in the workspace but results in being

regarded as a position given to those who do not deserve it (a false perception), and the workplace 'othering' people employed underneath it.

All respondents confirmed that the creative industry was male-dominated, and that they had experienced gender bias during their careers. They also confirmed that the male domination in the industry was not limited to senior positions, as it was prevalent in starting positions and particularly rife when presenting male interns with funded opportunities or resources to secure higher-paying jobs. For example, less-experienced male counterparts were given preference for opportunities, received bonuses earlier, and were given the preferred portfolios and clients. Most male colleagues did not work as part of a team but rather for individual gain. One respondent felt the need to go as far as wearing baggy clothing in an attempt to blend in with her male counterparts, as she worked in the creative photography industry which she mentioned was heavily male dominated. The respondent highlighted that being on set with feminine clothing often led to her male colleagues making verbal (unsolicited) advancements at her, which were inappropriate for the workplace. Another respondent also indicated that she had experienced sexual harassment from a male colleague. The creative industry can often involve casual social gatherings which are necessary for networking and sourcing opportunities, and these events often found unwelcomed, unsolicited advances from male colleagues. This became an additional barrier to overcome for a woman in the industry, particularly as a woman of colour already in a minority position. The respondent indicated that she began to dislike such events, and found them emotionally draining to attend, despite the fact that they would have helped advance her career, and act as alternative platforms for networking. Therefore, due to being sexualised and having to deal with men making advancements towards her, she had to make the decision to lose the potential benefits these networking opportunities offered and find (or indeed, create) alternative platforms to ensure career advancement.

It was interesting to note that one of the respondents experienced religious bias. Being a Muslim, this respondent was sidelined even more than the other women of colour that were interviewed. For example, being a Muslim meant that she could not work on alcohol brands, so she could not work on top-earning brands concerning alcohol, one of

the highest-paying sectors in the industry. This might have been doubly disadvantageous to her, since her stance might have been viewed as not wanting to be a team player, thus adding to the negative attitude from her peers.

One of the respondents reported age bias, saying that “being young makes it more difficult to show your bosses that you know what you are doing”. This was a common thread throughout that there respondents that said that they doubted themselves or felt like their managers and leaders did due to age. Since this is a factor that is common to everyone, it cannot be a form of discrimination that is experienced more or less by any one group. Nevertheless, age discrimination might exacerbate other kinds of prejudice, such as gender or racial bias.

Despite these barriers, most respondents (n=5) still felt that their competence and skills had been recognised and helped positively influence their career trajectories. However, none of the respondents felt that their gender or race had positively influenced their career growth. For example, there were accounts of needing to work far harder than colleagues (white and/or male) to stay in a similar position as them, or even still be overtaken by them. For example: “I was paid much less than my white counterparts; when this was raised as a complaint, the response was ‘we are empowering you while you are growing’.” All respondents had experienced white female colleagues and male colleagues progressing at a much faster rate than them, with similar or even lower work drives; or white colleagues who were promoted despite being less competent. For example: “A white male counterpart did very little, and didn’t succeed after the promotion, but got an award, was moved sideways and got more opportunities.” Many of the respondents mentioned that they compensated for their colour and race by overworking themselves in order to prove themselves to their employees which lead to exhaustion. Even though the respondents worked extremely hard and according to them, harder than their colleagues (white and or male), some of them did not believe that hard work equates to promotion or their work paying off with regards to acknowledgements from leadership.

It is therefore clear that the lack of women of colour in executive positions in the creative industry is due to intrinsic bias within the industry, and not a lack of competent, driven women of colour entering the industry. Although, one response clarified this, saying “Recently there is a shift with more top jobs going to black males and black females. It’s almost equalising. It is following an international trend, filtering down to us. But women definitely have to work harder to get a position.”

Most respondents identified that the intrinsic bias was covert: concealed and subtle. This is not surprising, since it is illegal to discriminate on race and gender. Even so, some respondents described the bias as institutional discrimination, which refers to actions or policies by companies or law that have differential impacts on minorities and women. Although there was no legislative or lawful discrimination, a system where career promotion depends largely on networks being led by white men, who primarily promote white co-workers and have direct cultural links only with white employees, can still be identified as institutional. For example, one respondent described the low payment to black employees (herself and some black colleagues) as institutionalised, where there were rumours that her white female colleagues were given far higher bonuses than she was. The respondent noted that the trauma of being underpaid in her early years in the industry still affects her business relationships today, as she never fully trusts employers to pay her to her full potential, despite her leading role in the industry, and explained “I think I worked too hard and got paid too little and had opportunities taken away from me, and I want those things for myself - I want opportunities for myself. But if you ask me if I’m proud of myself; heck yeah”. Many of the respondents showed little to no belief in their employees ability to treat them and women that look like them fairly. There were no women that mentioned that they look to their leadership to navigate the nuances of the concrete ceiling which they encounter on a day to day basis in the workplace. Many of the microaggressions experienced by the respondents were described as covert, such as being talked over or being ignored in meetings, not being allowed to control photoshoots, being diminished by male colleagues and not being given the same platform for promoting ideas to executive leaders. One of the respondents (n=1) who held an executive C-Suite position in the

industry, even though she reached the the top position, raised the concern that she was still not heard or listened to. Another respondent who held an executive C-Suite position mentioned that many Marketing Director positions in the industry are being filled by black women however, the rest of the C-Suite were predominantly white males so it seemed to her that it was more to tick of the BBEE box rather than really wanting the guidance of a qualified black executive marketer.

Personal branding and self-promotion:

Personal branding is the method by which individuals can differentiate themselves, allowing them to stand out from the general crowd (Peters, 2017). All of the respondents stated that they had used personal branding at some point in their careers. Some respondents had more experience with personal branding, but all had used it to some extent and were well acquainted with the concept. The types of personal branding tactics used to promote their personal brand included network events (n=1), social media such as Instagram (n=7), LinkedIn (three respondents), websites (n=1), and Behance (n=1). All of the respondents felt that they had used the type of personal branding they were most familiar with throughout their careers, and used it to help craft their own story for career advancement. For instance, one respondent describes its usefulness in being a 'strategy mindmap', and how taking control of the personal brand she wanted to create helped visualise where she wanted to be in her career. Most of the respondents believed that personal branding had enhanced their career growth, however, mentioned that they had not used the tool to its full potential. Only two of the respondents really practised personal branding intentionally whereas most of the respondents were more fascinated by the idea of enhancing their personal brand and taking the time to build their own. When the researcher discussed the term with the respondents many of them first said that they had not used it but when giving examples of what personal branding was, all the respondents had used the tools of personal branding in some shape or form, it seemed to be less intentional.

Furthermore, most respondents indicated that they had used self-promotion tactics. Self-promotion has been defined as the delicate art and science of bragging (John,

2021), and goes hand-in-hand with personal branding. The phenomenon of self-promotion was even less well-known than personal branding, and came with more negative connotations. The respondents had used self-promotion in the forms of podcasts (n=1), business cards (n=1), social media (n=2), receiving mentorship (n=1), knocking on doors (n=1), sending portfolios out (one respondent), word of mouth (n=1), and the majority of them when seeking jobs by going to interviews for example. This response indicated that there was less of a general understanding of what exactly self-promotion is, although once described, all respondents indicated they had used it. Self-promotion was perceived as more egotistical than personal branding, and the respondents described feeling insecure and vulnerable when using it. For instance, one respondent spoke of sending out portfolios but receiving no response, and another described feeling 'shy' to self-promote, despite understanding that being assertive can help her career trajectory. Another respondent mentioned that she felt "cringe" when self-promoting herself, however, she worked on packaging her messages more around the work that she did or achieved, rather than the self which she said got incredible responses. Indeed, five of the seven respondents, once questioned about self-promotion, realised that it was not a tool they were using enough. All agreed that it would benefit their careers.

Personal branding as a tool to navigate racial and gender discrimination:

The aim of this study was to identify whether personal branding, and therewith self-promotion, can help women of colour navigate the barriers they face in trying to succeed in the creative industry of South Africa. All respondents in this study had experienced racial bias, and all respondents had experienced sexism in the workplace. Furthermore, all respondents had used personal branding and some form of self-promotion. However, there was only partial agreement with the statement 'Personal branding is a tool that can help women of colour overcome gender and racial bias in the creative industry, by taking active control over their career trajectory and the curation of their worth in the industry'. Most of the respondents agreed because after doing the interview, they all agreed and realised that personal branding and self promotion as or could help them in building a strong career trajectory. However, respondents, in

particular one, mentioned that it could not be the catalyst of overcoming racial and gender bias that is so systematic and engrained in the minds of many colleagues in the industry. On the positive side, respondents mentioned that personal branding allows them to rely on themselves for their career trajectory, and not the white men in the industry. Given the evidence of racial and sexist bias towards women of colour presented above, relying on white male/female C-Suite executives to help elevate young women of colour talent does not occur in the industry, and therefore being able to take control of a personal brand may help navigate this. It did however become evident that personal branding is not the 'silver sword' that will help women of colour overcome all barriers in the creative industry but rather act as a tool to possibly help on a small scale.

On the one hand, all the respondents were successful in the industry, having managed to overcome some of the barriers they faced at the beginning of their careers without losing sight in themselves and their vision. One of the final comments from an interview was 'you can make it as yourself by being who you are', indicating that moving forward in the industry does not necessitate personal change. This is an important conclusion: it is important for personal branding to be authentic. Respondents also indicated that personal branding had helped them visualise their careers, and put their achievements and goals into perspective.

However, the strong negative connotations that can be associated with personal branding were also clear from the respondents. Respondents were particularly wary of using personal branding and self-promotion in a way that appeared too 'egoistic', and they did not want to be perceived as being a bragger. This was highlighted as a perception of women and self-promoting, wherein women are often raised to not be proud, or loud about their achievements. Indeed, five of the respondents expressed feelings of self-doubt and difficulty with pushing themselves forwards, particularly in white, male dominated work environments which is what the creative industry and many others is comprised of.

Findings

This study aimed to investigate whether personal branding can help women of colour navigate racial and sexist barriers they face in the creative industry of South Africa. It is well-known that women of colour face many barriers when rising to executive roles, these being categorized as largely racial discrimination and gender-based discrimination (Mpemba, 2020). The intersection of being both a woman and a person of colour in the industry has been shown to have compounding effects of the barriers – for instance, the glass-ceiling is a well-known phenomenon, described as an invisible obstacle preventing women from reaching top positions in the industry. However, women of colour have been described as being stuck under a concrete ceiling (Khosroshahi, 2021), due to the double discrimination that women of colour face: being black, and being a women.

All four respondents had experienced both racial and gender-based discrimination in the workplace in the industry. This bias was described as mostly covert, and some respondents described it as institutional. This resonated with other evidence, as Deloitte's Women @ Work study found that the majority of women (59 %) had experienced harassment and microaggressions (Deloitte, 2022). The respondents identified that it was a common experience to watch other colleagues, mostly white men and women, move ahead in the industry at a faster rate, be afforded better positions, and even be paid more than their black colleagues. This aligns with the literature, where it has been shown that despite making up a large proportion of the lower sectors of the creative industry, where very few women of colour in top executive positions (SheSays, 2020). Indeed, women make up only 33.1 % of managerial positions across South Africa (Sats SA, 2021). Given the accounts presented above, where all respondents had experienced favouritism in their white colleagues favour and having to work far harder than any white colleagues only to stay in the same (or even lower) position, the stats produced by SheSays (2020) come as no surprise. The evidence for intrinsic bias in the creative industry suggests that the discrimination is largely institutional and covert: a setting where white men and women support white men and women. There were no accounts of overt racism, but no doubt of covert racism.

One of the respondents particularly addressed a payment issue in the industry, where although payrolls are confidential, it became known that she and other black colleagues were receiving less pay, and particularly lower bonuses than their white colleagues, particularly white women. This aligns with the literature, where it is known that the South African labour market is heavily racialized and gender-biased, and overall the largest contributor (74.2 %) to income inequality (Stats SA, 2020). Women are paid on average 30% less than men, due largely to men holding better-paying jobs (Stats SA, 2020). Furthermore, the respondent highlighted how being underpaid for similar work has caused her to distrust employment to this day, and the negative psychological impact it has had on her life; not to mention the monetary impact being paid less than she deserved caused.

Personal branding is known as a method that individuals can use to differentiate themselves, communicate unique values, and achieve enhanced identity in comparison to others around them (Peters, 2017). Its use has been shown to help accelerate career growth, as a tool that amplifies self-definition through the creation of strong and authentic brands (Gorbatov *et al.*, 2019; Chritton, 2020). All respondents indicated that they had used personal branding, and most respondents saw it to help amplify their platform as women of colour in the creative industry. There is some evidence that shows that personal branding has helped certain women reach top positions in various industries. For example, Lillian Barnard (current CEO & GM at Microsoft South Africa), has a strong social media presence, using LinkedIn as her preferred social media platform (Stevenson & Orr, 2017). CEOs such as herself have had to build themselves – to a much stronger extent than male counterparts – and require specific traits such as courage, risk-taking, and resilience, all of which contribute to a strong personal brand. This study shows that women of colour in the creative industry use personal branding, particularly using social media as a platform for personal branding and self-promotion. Respondents agree that the use of the brand can help navigate the barriers women of colour face in the creative industry. Creating a personal brand helps generate a unique brand that you are in charge of and accountable for, and therefore, can generate a new perspective on career advancements (Chritton, 2020): as one respondent noted, it takes the control away from the white men in power. Gorbatov *et al.*, (2019) note that clarity of

a professional self has strong positive impacts on employment, and there is evidence for this increasing employability: this aligns strongly with the process of personal branding and self-promotion. Sepand (2015) has shown that women of colour benefit from career advancement tools that attempt to boost psychosocial confidence. Indeed, this resonates with the experience from the respondents, where personal branding and self-promotion can be of use personally, to strategize and implement career goals and – as so aptly put – take the control out of the white mans’ hands.

However, it became clear that personal branding will not solve the low recruitment rate of women of colour into executive roles in the industry, for two main reasons. First of all, the perception that women should not self-promote because of socialised gender norms, wherein women are expected to be humble, quiet, and any form of self-promotion is interpreted as bragging, egotistical, and looked down on. The history of South Africa is strongly rooted in the oppression of women of colour, and this compounds with trends of global inequality which themselves are rooted in societal gender norms (Khuzwayo, 2018; Matotoka & Odeka, 2021). There was evidence from the interviews that the respondents felt cautious of self-promotion, not wanting to be seen as “aggressive”, and although all recognized they could self-promote more and that it would indeed help their careers, they were wary. One respondent described being indoctrinated both culturally and religiously that women should not be loud or proud. Genat (2019) has shown that women experience two types of bias in the workplace: evaluation bias and backlash. ‘Backlash’ is the phenomenon that the respondents seemed wary of in this study, wherein were they to act in counter-stereotypical ways, such as self-promote confidently, they would be evaluated less favourably in terms of likeability and hireability (Genat, 2019).

Second of all, and a point made best by the respondent with the most experience in the industry (19 years), was that the problems are too large and diverse for personal branding to solve. This relates to the institutionalised discrimination in the industry, and the experience related by all respondents that white colleagues are afforded more and better opportunities than they are. The respondent highlighted that while personal branding can help women navigate these barriers, it is only one component of a bigger

picture. This can be related to the history of South Africa, where women of colour are one of the most oppressed groups given historical racial and patriarchal oppression. As Khuzwayo (2018) explains, the history of women of colour in the country compounds on trends of global inequality. It further links to the notion of the concrete, as opposed to glass, ceiling that is present for women of colour attempting to make a career in industries such as these (Khosroshahi, 2021). The extent of discrimination, its covertness and the micro-aggressions that all respondents experienced, and importantly, the common experience of watching white colleagues being promoted over them by white superiors for similar or even lower levels of work, give evidence for this.

Research Question, Problem, Objectives Addressed:

The implications of the above findings are that most women of colour in the creative industry, especially those in the early stages of their careers, are unsure or reluctant to promote themselves. Even though some of the participants did not feel comfortable talking about their self promotion behaviours as it was many a times more of a subconscious action they all agreed that self-promotion tools would significantly accelerate their career trajectory. This was a clear sign of the need for self promoting ones personal brand as a way to reach the respondents career goals. In addition, although all respondents used personal branding, it is clear that better strategies, knowledge about what personal branding is and professional advice and guidance, would make them more focused and directed to assist in overcoming the barriers evident in this demographic. The findings also highlighted that the barriers which women of colour face in the creative industry in South Africa are racism and sexism which was made evident in the literature alike. This affirms the concrete ceiling which Khosroshahi (2021) spoke about in the literature. The research question; determining whether there is racial and gender bias against women of colour in the creative industry in South Africa, was clearly answered with confirmation from all respondents. It was extremely clear that women of colour face bias of both gender and race in the workplace as the respondents all answered with multiple examples of their lived

experience in the creative industry in South Africa. Similarly, the question as to whether a more focused approach to personal branding and self-promotion could assist women of colour in their career trajectory was answered unanimously in the affirmative. Even though it was clear that three out of four of the respondents did not have as much of a clear understanding of the phenomenon, they all used the tools whether it being more subconsciously or consciously.

Conclusion

Validity, reliability or trustworthiness

As this research study is qualitative, and therefore there are no numbers as evidence; different criteria was used to determine the trustworthiness or credibility of the research findings (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). One should also keep in mind that the aim of qualitative research is to promote understanding of a particular phenomenon within a specific context rather than generalise results to a broader population. Bezuidenhout *et al.* (2014) mention that it is easier to measure reliability and validity in qualitative research however, it is not that easy when it comes to qualitative research as participants' answers are not objectively measurable as they are unique to each individual's experience. Even though many researchers still use the terms reliability and validity for qualitative studies there is a move toward different terminology to indicate it for qualitative studies are trustworthy (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). Trustworthiness is further divided into credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility refers to the accuracy with which the researcher interprets the data that was provided by the participants (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). A way in which the researcher made sure that the data was credible was to spend a longer period with the participants in order to understand them better and gain insight into their lives. Transferability is the ability of the findings to be applied to a similar situation and deliver similar results (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014). This allowed for the researcher to make generalisations within an approach that does not lend itself to generalised findings. This allows the results of this study to be applied beyond the specific research study. Dependability refers to the quality of the process of integration that takes place between the data collection, the data analysis and the theory generated from the data. This was important for the researcher to take note of when the research was conducted. Lastly, confirmability refers to how well the data collected supports the findings and interpretation of the researcher. This indicated to the researcher how well the findings flow from the data. For this to take place, the researcher had to describe the research process fully in order to assist others in scrutinising the research design. The aim was

that others who look at the data should come to similar conclusions as the researcher themselves (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2014).

Anticipated Contribution

The anticipated contribution relates deeply to the relevance of the research study, to explore how personal branding can be used as a tool to advance the careers of women of colour in South Africa and the implications thereof. After the study has been conducted the researcher hoped that there was a deeper understanding of how personal branding can be used as a tool to advance the careers of women of colour in the creative industry in South Africa. The contribution was adding to the body of knowledge which aligns with the interpretivism paradigm. With this information, women of colour could possibly make changes to their actions and possibly use personal branding to advance their careers to promote an intersectional, gender-discrimination-free workplace, from the research that has been done. The purpose of this research study is to explore and thus gain a better understanding of the perspectives of South African women of colour, with this knowledge the anticipated contribution will be to advance the careers of women of colour in an extremely gender biased workplace.

Ethical Limitations

The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the participants before the interviews were conducted, by way of a consent form. The participant's identity remained confidential throughout the study, and all the participants partook in the study on a volunteer basis (Bezuidenhout *et al.* 2014). It was important to pay attention to informed consent, collect data from participants, avoid harm, and deception, and deal with confidentiality versus anonymity with sensitive information (Bezuidenhout *et al.* 2014). The interviewer did not sway the participants towards any desired response, and data analysis was conducted objectively to ensure that there was no falsifying of information

or misinterpretation of the data. Ensuring that the researcher remained ethical, a personal code of ethics was used as a reminder of how one should act and respond. This is based on the principles of learning from other researchers, ethical mistakes and continuous education and learning of topics, forming partnerships, and helping one another to ensure good ethics (Bezuidenhout et al. 2014).

Please find the attached annexures for ethical clearance

Annexure E (b) - Research Consent Form

Annexure J - Consent form for respondents and participants

Annexure K - Consent form for Audio or Video Recording

Internal Annexure X 2022 Template RESE8419

Annexure Z - 2021 Ethics Letter approval

Limitations

Delimitations result from the very specific and definite choices the researcher made when deciding on the scope of the study. A delimitation that could be evident in this that the research study was delimitationed from the sample size as it was limited to only interviewing 7 women of colour, to understand their experience of personal branding. Limited access to data when looking at secondary data specific to women of colour in South Africa was a limitation. Time constraints, due to the submission deadline being the 5th of December 2022 meant that the researcher had limited time to complete the research report.

Conclusion

The document had looked at the population and sampling for the study, which was limited to 7 women of colour which work in the creative industry in South Africa. The data collection method was analysed with a focus on keeping it in line with the research design and the data analysis method being qualitative data analysis was used. The research findings were presented and interpreted in the context of the research problem, while relating the findings and interpretations to the literature. Lastly, the research question, problem and objective were addressed looking at the implications of the research based on the findings which were found in the study.

In conclusion, personal branding can be used as a tool to navigate racist and sexist barriers by women of colour in the creative industry of South Africa. In particular, it is useful for women to help take control of their career trajectory, use the brand as a strategy board, present achievements and self-promote. However, this study presented evidence that the biases are institutional, and therefore personal branding will not be able to entirely remove these barriers. In order for women of colour to be treated truly equal in the creative industry, the industry needs to fundamentally change and re-evaluate the intrinsic biases held in top positions that control it.

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