



**EXPLORING THE IMPORTANCE OF CROSS-CULTURAL
COMMUNICATION TRAINING PROGRAMMES:
AN INTERNATIONAL BRAND PERSPECTIVE**



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degree **Master of International Business** at The Independent
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DECLARATION

I, Miriam Gitonga, declare that this Research Report entitled “Exploring the importance of cross-cultural communication training programmes: An international brand perspective” submitted for the Master of International Business degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own, unaided work and has not been previously submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes. Any assistance that I have received has been duly acknowledged in the report.

Except where reference is made in the text, this report contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or part from a thesis or report presented by me for another qualification. No other person’s work has been used without due acknowledgement in the

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ABSTRACT

Language, in either verbal or non-verbal communication, continues to be a challenging factor in international business. With the increase of globalisation and digitisation, different nations interact with one another, resulting in an increased need for effective cross-cultural communication. Therefore, it is important for global businesses to understand how both verbal and non-verbal communication can be interpreted differently across cultures to avoid cross-cultural miscommunication.

This study explored whether the lack of cross-cultural communication training programmes could lead to unsuccessful digital advertising campaigns for global brands. This research is grounded in an interpretivist epistemological stance, focusing on how knowledge about cross-cultural communication barriers is constructed and understood from participants' perspectives. A deductive approach by focusing on the communication accommodation theory and Hofstede's six cultural dimensions. A non-probability purposive sampling was applied, with the clear inclusion criteria that participants should be brand managers working at a global brand specialising in oral care products. Furthermore, snowball sampling was used, as interviewed brand managers recruited other brand managers working at the same global brand to participate in the study. The researcher applied interpretivism by interviewing eight brand managers and analysing the cross-cultural communication barriers they faced while digitally advertising the brand's oral care products. Through mono-method qualitative research, primary data was collected through online one-on-one semi-structured interviews. All the interviews were recorded, after participants granted consent.

Thematic analysis and interpretation of the data from the interviews resulted in three themes and eight sub-themes which provide evidence that verbal and non-verbal communication barriers are present in international business and that cross-cultural communication barriers in different cultures further affect the success of digital advertising campaigns. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on cross-cultural communication, the barriers faced in digital advertising and the importance of cross-cultural communication training for designing advertising materials that capture cultural nuances.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a brief introduction and the relevant background to the study that identifies the gap, hence the rationale of the study and problem statement. The key research questions and subsequently the research aims and objectives are then highlighted. This chapter also provides a preliminary literature review on cross-cultural communication and barriers faced in international businesses, the models used for the theoretical framework and how cross-cultural communication can be managed in international business. The chapter concludes with the research design and methodology and the ethical considerations for data collection and analysis.

Human communication is a crucial part of our daily life. Through social interaction, there is an exchange of opinions, ideas, information, attitudes and feelings between the sender and the receiver (Abu-Arqoub and Alserhan, 2019). Language, the most common communication tool, continues to be a challenging factor in international business (AbuArqoub and Alserhan, 2019) owing to globalisation, demographic shifts and technological changes (Gokhale and Sharma, 2021). Language consists of both verbal and non-verbal communication. Verbal communication is expressed through spoken and written words but makes up only 10% of communication, while non-verbal communication, which consists of cues such as sign language, body language and visuals, comprises the other 90% of communication; this becomes even more apparent when two cultures communicate with one another (Abu-Arqoub and Alserhan, 2019). Cultures around the world have their own set of communication patterns, which create their own unique identity, and globalisation has forced individuals from different cultures to interact to a greater extent than ever before (AbuArqoub and Alserhan, 2019; Benčíková, et al., 2021). Cultural factors such as language, societal norms and customs, values and beliefs should be considered by global brands when they design effective and influential marketing campaigns for global target markets (Yusuf, 2023).

The concepts of marketing and advertising are often used interchangeably, as they share the same goal of creating awareness of an available product or service among potential customers (Kongkaew, et al., 2023). Yet, these two terms are not the same. Marketing is a holistic strategy encompassing various components such as market research to identify customers' needs, product development, branding, distribution channels and customer

behaviour, likes and dislikes (Kongkaew, et al., 2023). In digital marketing a brand tries to reach its target market by promoting its products through promotional sites and posters on social media platforms (Chole and Dharmik, 2018). Advertising, in contrast, is the process of creating brand awareness through paid messages that promote products or services by using multiple channels such as digital ads, television commercials, radio and printed media (Kongkaew, et al., 2023). Unlike marketing's broad strategy, advertising aims to influence consumer behaviour and attitudes, as it can lead to persuasive techniques that evoke a positive emotional response towards a brand and purchasing intentions (Soti, 2022). Therefore, advertising aims to motivate a brand's target market by encouraging them to consider their brand, while marketing its products or services to several diverse cultures simultaneously (Retnowati, 2016; Shavitt and Barnes, 2020).

Target markets are defined as large groups of people with similar demographics, geographical area, personality and behavioural attitudes that a brand aims to reach with its products and services (Grayson, 2023). In addition to languages, the choice of colour, symbols and visual elements can have different meanings across cultures (Yusuf, 2023). For example, black and white cannot be used for packaging in Japan, as these colours are used for mourning, while in Hispanic countries, packages with the colour purple were banned as it is associated with death (Montagna, 2023). For a company to differentiate its products and services from its competitors, it needs to implement a branding strategy with a distinctive name, logo, slogan and packaging that makes it easier for its audience to recognise the brand (Okereafor, 2023). This can be achieved by using digital advertising, by which its target audience is informed of its products and services to effectively satisfy their requirements (Nalbant and Aydın, 2023; Xian, 2023). Social factors, such as the socioeconomic status of different societies, influence customer buying behaviour, which can aid marketers in understanding customer habits, while psychological aspects enable the understanding of people's perceptions, motivations, beliefs and attitudes towards products and services (Diamantopoulos, 2020).

The target audience is a certain group of people identified to whom brands narrow and tailor their messages about the benefits of their products and services (Harjanto, et al., 2019). For example, a brand selling baby-milk products would identify its target market as babies under one year old who would consume this product, while identifying its target audience as caregivers who act as decision makers and buyers of the product (Harjanto, et al., 2019). Another example is that of an oral care brand in New Zealand that caters for the whole

family's oral health. The company produces a Kids Corner line products that care for children's mouths and encourage oral hygiene practices, making their target market the children who will benefit from using these items. However, the brand identifies the target audience as the parents (Chen, 2024). Because the target market and target audience are not necessarily the same, brands aim to communicate about their products and services with messages tailored differently to target markets and target audiences (Harjanto, et al., 2019).

Marketing, as a form of communicating information about products or services to a brand's target market, may be delivered through various forms of media to successfully achieve a company's objectives (Kushwaha, et al., 2020). Marketers have also adopted face-to-face communication and included non-verbal audio and visual elements such as images and emojis that usually replace spoken or written language (Kushwaha, et al., 2020). Therefore, it is important to understand how non-verbal communication in advertising may be interpreted differently across cultures (Montagna, 2023). Those responsible for creating content for global audiences are required to commit to culturally sensitive practices, as they need to be mindful of cultural differences in non-verbal communication and understand that what may be considered appropriate in one culture may not be perceived the same way in another (Wajahat, 2024; Karimova, 2025). Hence, there is a need to conduct in-depth audience research and incorporate cultural sensitivity training, which are both essential for designing effective cross-cultural digital marketing campaigns (Karimova, 2025). Failure to acknowledge cultural differences such as communication styles, social norms and the use of humour and symbols may influence the effectiveness of messaging of digital marketing campaigns, resulting in either offense or confusion (Karimova, 2025).

As the world is more interconnected than ever before, communication on digital platforms such as social media has enabled people to connect with one another, enhancing global communication and cultural exchange (Modak and Nath, 2024). However, the establishment and maintenance of social relationships have become more challenging. This calls for a need to understand how effective cross-cultural communication is achieved in international business; therefore, the need for self-awareness with respect to prejudice, assumptions and stereotypes become crucial (Usadolo and Oparinde, 2022). Various strategies exist for overcoming these cross-cultural communication challenges and barriers, such as practising cultural competence, cultural awareness and cultural intelligence (Abu-Arqoub and Alserhan, 2019). In addition, cross-cultural understanding is important for individuals when different cultures and languages are present, as this helps one to recognise and correctly

interpret different cultures (Ratnasari, 2018). It is with cross-cultural understanding that one may develop successful localised advertising as an effective advertising strategy that reflects the cultural values and norms of its target audience (Retnowati, 2016). Cross-cultural adaptation and communication factors are determined based on individuals' environmental components and ethnic backgrounds, despite their different values, beliefs and norms (Usadolo and Oparinde, 2022). One of the most noteworthy barriers to effective cross-cultural communication is language; therefore, designing a campaign for a single language audience can hinder its ability to raise awareness as it may not resonate with those who are not familiar with that language (Karimova, 2025). Although digital tools have enabled content translation into multiple languages, it is still critical to consider cultural nuances, as such nuances may be difficult to translate across languages (Karimova, 2025). Therefore, it is through localisation that content may be adapted to cultural norms and linguistic preferences tailored to specific and diverse audiences (Karimova, 2025). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which lack of cross-cultural communication training programmes contributes to unsuccessful digital advertising campaigns, with a focus on global oral care brands. Oral care products are considered basic health necessities used by nearly everyone, and culturally, oral care is strongly tied to moral judgment about hygiene and social acceptability (Foláyan, et al., 2025). The research was conducted at a global oral care brand within the African market due the presence of diverse cultures. Indeed, oral care in Africa, may be influenced by multiple factors such as cultural beliefs, economic constraints and structural barriers (Foláyan, et al., 2025).

1.2 Background and Rationale

Communication is vital for global brands, as it allows them to effectively market and explain how their products and services differ from those of their competitors (Padhi, 2016). Marketing is the process of communicating a company's products or services by relaying its information to its target market to convince them to buy its products through brand awareness (Kushwaha, et al., 2020). Several models of communication have been studied over the years to aid in understanding the processes of communication. Some of these include the Lasswell communication model (verbal communication), the Shannon and Weaver Model (oral and written forms of communication) and the two-way communication process in Charles Osgood's model (Kapur, 2020). The communication process consists of the sender, the message, the media and the receiver (Kapur, 2020). The sender should communicate a message simply by using language, both verbal and non-verbal, that the receiver understands, through a suitable communication channel (Aririguzoh, 2022). It is within the

communication channel that the culture of the sender may shape the media of communication (Aririguzoh, 2022). Lastly, the receiver should acknowledge the message relayed and give proper feedback (Aririguzoh, 2022).

Digital advertising allows global brands to achieve marketing success through omnichannel marketing either online through a mobile device, or physically from a brick-and-mortar shop to reach their target market (Gani and Faroque, 2021). Therefore, global brands are using different forms of media to reach their audiences, which has led to the rise of integrated marketing communication (IMC) (Kushwaha, et al., 2020; Ihzaturrahma and Kusumawati, 2021). The effective use of IMC allows global brands to coordinate, evaluate and execute methods of engaging with stakeholders to attain marketing objectives. Furthermore, it aims to improve brand equity, market share and audiences' attitudes and increase sales volume (Kushwaha, et al., 2020; Ihzaturrahma and Kusumawati, 2021).

With ongoing globalisation, technology continues to advance, further enabling global brands to adjust their competitive advantage through the integration of social media advertising while incorporating their IMC objectives (Kushwaha, et al., 2020; Ihzaturrahma and Kusumawati, 2021). IMC, through advanced technology, has moved away from traditional advertising via one-way communication to interactive two-way communication through digital advertising on social media platforms (Kushwaha, et al., 2020). In addition, various print and electronic media channels may be used to circulate advertising information to the public. Its success is usually measured through brand awareness (Kushwaha, et al., 2020).

As a result of technological advancement, individuals around the globe have increasingly become an online community establishing cross-border relationships on digital platforms (Gani and Faroque, 2021). Therefore, amid today's cultural dynamics, representation has become important, especially when advertising products and services, as the target market wants to see themselves represented in brands' advertisements (Langlois, 2019). Global brands are taking the initiative to accommodate these calls by representing different races, people with disabilities, models of all body shapes and members of the LGBTQ community, to name a few aspects of identity (Langlois, 2019). An example of this representation is Coca-Cola's 2019 Super Bowl commercial, in which the company reminded its target market that its products tasted the same for everyone regardless of their background through an animated visual (Langlois, 2019).

Failed cross-cultural advertising may result in global brands' damaging their reputation, which results in their having to spend millions to try and fix the damage (Allan, 2022). Yusuf (2023) reported that 31.9% of the respondents to a research survey highlighted the importance of cultural sensitivity in advertising, with one respondent stating that he felt uncomfortable with an advertisement depicting a different race promoting hair products for people of his racial background. This made this advertisement feel inauthentic to the respondent (Yusuf, 2023). If marketing campaigns fail to align with local cultures, the target market becomes less engaged with the brand (Yusuf, 2023). Some brands have been involved in misrepresentations of culture and race. One example is the GIF that Dove posted on their Facebook page in 2017, showing a Black woman taking off a brown shirt to reveal a White woman in a lighter shirt underneath (Langlois, 2019; Makanjuola, 2020). The second example happened in 2015, when US supermarket chain Tesco marketed smokybacon-flavoured Pringles during the Islamic holiday of Ramadhan, seemingly forgetting that Muslims are prohibited from consuming any pork products (Allan, 2022). The third example is that of 2018's H&M advertisement on its global website which showed a young Black boy model wearing their sweatshirt with the slogan "Coolest monkey in the jungle" (Langlois, 2019; Makanjuola, 2020).

The negative feedback from the target market resulted in both Dove's and H&M's taking down their advertisements and apologising to the public (Langlois, 2019). It is therefore crucial for a global brand to include aspects of regional cultural norms, appropriate colour correlation and appropriate tone when relaying a message for the cross-cultural branding in their campaigns to be successful (Allan, 2022). To combat negative cross-cultural advertising, introducing cross-cultural training helps individuals to be more culturally sensitive and culturally aware by analysing the cultural differences between those of others and their home country (Enatto, 2024). Furthermore, developing a cultural sensitivity training programme for internal public relations and brand managers and communication teams can be beneficial, as it results in a more positive engagement with a culturally diverse audience when engaging in their advertising campaigns (Joseph, 2023).

1.3 Problem Statement

Effective cross-cultural communication can have a positive impact on global brands by allowing them to engage with diverse target audiences and tailoring their advertising campaigns to specific cultures (Montagna, 2023). Yet several global brands have failed to incorporate cross-cultural communication training programmes to incorporate cultural

sensitivity in their advertising campaigns (Retnowati, 2016), which may lead to cross-cultural misunderstanding. Cross-cultural misunderstanding can in turn affect a global brand's target market purchasing power and the demand for its products and services (Liu, et al., 2023). The aim of this study therefore was to explore the extent to which the lack of cross-cultural communication training programmes contributes to unsuccessful digital advertising campaigns, with a focus on a global brand specialising in oral care products due to their impact on basic oral hygiene. In socio-cultural perspectives, not maintaining oral hygiene can lead to social and spiritual exclusion (Foláyan, et al., 2025). The research focused on the African market due the presence of diverse cultures within and between countries.

1.4 Research Questions

1.4.1 Primary Research Question

The primary research question of this study was:

To what extent does the lack of cross-cultural communication training programmes contribute to unsuccessful digital advertising campaigns?

1.4.2 Secondary Research Questions

To successfully answer the primary research question, the following secondary research questions (SRQs) were posed:

1. What are some of the verbal and non-verbal cross-cultural communication barriers global brands face in digital advertising campaigns?
2. How do cross-cultural communication barriers in different cultures affect the digital advertising campaigns of global brands?
3. Do global brands provide cross-cultural communication training programmes to effectively communicate the brand in international business contexts?

1.5 Aims and Objectives

1.5.1 Primary Research Objective

The aim of the proposed study was to explore whether the lack of cross-cultural communication training programmes can lead to unsuccessful digital advertising campaigns of global brands.

1.5.2 Secondary Research Objectives

In order to attain the primary objective, the secondary objectives were:

1. Identify the verbal and non-verbal cross-cultural communication barriers faced by global brands in digital advertising campaigns.
2. Identify how cross-cultural communication barriers in different cultures affect the digital advertising campaigns of global brands.
3. Determine whether global brands provide cross-cultural communication training programmes to communicate the brand in international business effectively.

1.6 Preliminary Literature Review

The increase of digital and technological tools has increased the awareness of digital competence in organisations, as cross-cultural communication tends to be more frequent across global locations (Lifintsev and Wellbrock, 2019). During the digital transformation process in a global company, digital marketing is a fundamental aspect. It introduces new marketing techniques that are centred on communication technologies that can improve customer relationship management and increase the overall customer satisfaction rate (Veleva and Tsvetanova, 2020). Furthermore, the application of digital marketing by global brands allows them to be more flexible and adaptable to global trends and become more responsive to their customers' needs by increasing and building an effective relationship (Veleva and Tsvetanova, 2020). For example, social media analytics (SMA), data collected to better understand societal trends, can create new opportunities for the organisation (Zachlod, et al., 2022).

For most global companies, digital marketing communication continues to be a significant part of marketing communication; it may be conducted through digital advertising campaigns and social networks such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter (Nadanyiova, Majerova and Gajanova, 2020). In addition, digital marketing communication continues to provide effective and prompt communication as a useful tool used to measure how efficient customer relationship management is (Nadanyiova, et al., 2020). However, if a brand carries it out unprofessionally or does not target it correctly, its customers may perceive it as unserious, leading to negative feedback due to a lack of trust (Veleva and Tsvetanova, 2020). Social media, an important marketing communication tool, has transformed the interaction of global brands with their target audiences and enhanced consumer engagement (Jafni, et

al., 2021). Customers may comment, like and share what brands have posted on their social media pages (Jafni, et al., 2021). With more than half of the world's population using social media, cultural exchanges increase as communication across cultures becomes more frequent (Yuna, et al., 2022). Furthermore, because of increased digitalisation, new local and international cultural relationships are formed, requiring new theories that explain the consequences and concerns of cross-cultural communications in the digital era (Yuna, et al., 2022). This section introduces some key terminologies, expands on cross-cultural communication in marketing, explains the theoretical framework of communication accommodation theory (CAT), highlights cross-cultural communication barriers and briefly describes how to manage and train people in the field of cross-cultural communication.

1.6.1 Cross-Cultural Communication in Marketing

Cross-cultural marketing is defined as “marketing activity involving two or more cultural environments enabling a global brand to effectively manage their cultural marketing strategies” (Sun, 2020, p.539). Several studies (Dikčius, et al., 2023; Yusuf, 2023) have indicated that cultural factors have an impact on consumer behaviour and customer loyalty, as they shape customers' perspective on a global brand. Therefore, there is a need to increase cultural diversity and conduct cultural sensitivity audits and research among consumers. This further enables a global brand to remain competitive by adjusting its marketing decisions to engage with global customers of different cultural values (Dikčius, et al., 2023; Yusuf, 2023). Cross-cultural marketing is also described as “ethnic marketing”, focusing on implementing and developing marketing strategies suitable to all cultures (Sahem, 2023). Incorporating ethnic marketing as a strategy shows both respect and sensitivity for the target audience's cultures and the importance of understanding their cultural differences (Montagna, 2023). The choice of the language a global brand uses in digital advertising plays a significant role in shaping consumers' perceptions, memory, attitude and behaviour (Deng, et al., 2021). Target audiences from different cultural backgrounds tend to react differently to messages conveyed in advertising and marketing campaigns (Montagna, 2023). This is because brand-consumer communications on social media platforms are different from the offline delivery of both verbal and non-verbal communication (Deng, et al., 2021).

To conduct successful cross-cultural marketing, a brand must have a thorough understanding of cultural dimensions and cultural rights and demonstrate cultural sensitivity in a global market (Sahem, 2023). These build credibility and trust by respecting their target culture and eliminating language barriers (Montagna, 2023). It is important to develop a trusting target

audience by maintaining a good brand image through crafting effective messages and culturally sensitive campaigns, while ensuring that the company's intentions are effectively communicated and perceived (Montagna, 2023). Therefore, for a global brand to effectively implement a multicultural marketing strategy, it must recognise that its target market in each diverse region has diverse needs shaped by the norms and cultural environments of each (Sahem, 2023).

1.6.2 Models Used for the Theoretical Framework

1.6.2.1 Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Framework in Marketing

Advertisements can be seen as a reflection of a society, as they convey messages about the attitudes, norms and behaviour of a national culture, hence the importance of understanding the unpredictable impact that cultural differences have on the effect of cross-cultural advertising communication (Valaei, et al., 2016; Xian, 2023). Religious beliefs may shape digital marketing campaigns. For example, a brand cannot advertise pork or alcohol in Muslim countries, as these products are prohibited under Islamic law (termed haram), or beef in India, as cows are sacred animals in Hinduism (Rukmani, 2022). Another study found that having a standardised digital advertising strategy in two Muslim countries, namely, Malaysia and Pakistan, failed because the assumption that both countries had similar cultures proved to be false (Raza and Zaman, 2021). Therefore, brands need to focus more on culture, as consumers are more attracted to advertisements that align with their cultural values, customs, norms and traditions; this affects their product decisions and buying behaviour (Rukmani, 2022). Hofstede's cultural dimensions are important in helping brands adapt their products to different cultures, as they illustrate crucial cross-cultural value differences in customer behaviour (Meng, 2022).

Geert Hofstede's (1984) framework consists of six cultural dimensions, namely, (1) power distance, (2) individualism versus collectivism, (3) masculinity versus femininity, (4) uncertainty avoidance, (5) long-term orientation versus short-term orientation and (6) indulgence versus restraint.

The first dimension, *power distance*, refers to the extent that the less powerful members of a society (for example, a particular family member) accept that power is distributed unequally (Lifintsev, Fleseriu and Wellbrock, 2022; Nickerson, 2023). A study conducted on two digital advertisements showed how Hofstede's cultural dimensions illustrated crosscultural differences in consumer behaviour (Meng, 2022). The study cited differences in power

distance between two cultures: the Chinese culture was more prone to accepting and giving authority while the US culture was more concentrated on equality (Meng, 2022).

The second dimension is *individualism versus collectivism*, which distinguishes personal goals and achievements from group accomplishments (Lifintsev, Fleseriu and Wellbrock, 2022; Nickerson, 2023). The same study conducted by Meng (2022) found a significant gap between the individualist US culture and the collectivist Chinese culture.

Masculinity versus femininity is the third dimension. It expresses the domination of the traditional “male” or “female” assertiveness and nurturing values in different societies (Lifintsev, Fleseriu and Wellbrock, 2022; Nickerson, 2023). The study conducted by Meng (2022) reported a similar score for the masculinity versus femininity dimension: both US and Chinese cultures are focused on achieving success rather than quality of life or caring for others.

The fourth dimension, *uncertainty avoidance*, describes the attitude of society’s members to risk-taking and ambiguity (Lifintsev, Fleseriu and Wellbrock, 2022; Nickerson, 2023). When analysing uncertainty avoidance dimension, Meng (2022) reported that the US culture is more likely to be uncomfortable with ambiguity and chaos than the Chinese culture.

The fifth dimension; *long-term orientation versus short-term orientation*, expresses how practical and persistent a society is in achieving a goal (Lifintsev, Fleseriu and Wellbrock, 2022; Nickerson, 2023). The study conducted by Meng (2022) concluded that the Chinese culture is more long-term oriented, as they invest in the future, as opposed to Americans, who are short-term oriented and focus more on the present.

Lastly, *indulgence versus restraint* describes the role of the rules and standards in people’s everyday lives and how they suppress or control gratification of needs through social norms (Lifintsev, Fleseriu and Wellbrock, 2022; Nickerson, 2023). Meng’s (2022) study concluded that the Chinese viewed indulgence as wrongful, as opposed to Americans, who are more willing to enjoy their life desires.

Some cultures are of high-context, meaning they rely more on non-verbal cues, while those of low-context focus on having more detailed communication in words (Seeger and Gustafsson, 2021). Further, high-context cultures use simple messages with deep meaning to flow freely, while in low-context cultures, communication is less dependent on non-verbal cues (Hall, 1976). For example, these two digital advertisements demonstrated that, in the

high-context communication culture of China, people are likely to use non-verbal communication to show their expression indirectly, while in the low-context US culture, people use verbal communication to show their expression directly (Meng, 2022).

Based on these examples, the importance of understanding a nation's culture further contributes to an effective digital advertising strategy (Raza and Zaman, 2021). Therefore, Hofstede's model is still the most applicable tool in global advertising that helps to distinguish and understand basic cultural differences (Ruanguattanun, 2023).

1.6.2.2 Communication Accommodation Theory

CAT is one of the theories applied in understanding and predicting when, how and why people adapt their communicative behaviours when interacting socially in cultural contexts and languages (Jafni, et al., 2021; Giles, Edwards and Walther, 2023). The three main adjustment strategies derived from CAT theory are (1) *convergence* (communicators try to decrease social distance through similar communicative behaviour by adjusting their verbal and non-verbal characteristics), (2) *divergence* (communicators try to increase the differences in their communicative behaviours) and (3) *maintenance* (maintaining one's level of communication without adjusting to others) (Elhami, 2020; Jafni, et al., 2021). The convergence adjustment becomes difficult in effective communication on social media platforms; hence, there has been a need to develop strategic groups of advertisers who have similar opinions, attitudes, behaviours and views when relaying an intended message on social media platforms (Knox, 2020). There has been an increase of interpersonal communication on social media platforms by which there is greater opportunity for and occurrence of two or more people of diverse backgrounds communicating with one another two or more people communicate with each other based on either social differences and similarities in communication characteristics, such as culture, gestures, attitudes, opinions, words, age, gender and social status. For this reason, studies of the CAT theoretical framework have been conducted in online communities, virtual teams, instant messaging and emailing (Knox, 2020; Jafni, et al., 2021).

1.6.3 Cross-Cultural Communication Management

International businesses focus on two categories in cross-cultural communication, namely, (1) language, non-verbal and business etiquette when engaging in international trade and (2) intercultural communication issues due to cultural differences (Feng, 2023). Cultural differences may lead to miscommunication and conflict but may be viewed as a competitive

advantage for global companies, as there has been a rise in the strategic understanding of sensitivity to diversity and cross-cultural communication competence. Cross-cultural communication aims to improve and facilitate the interaction between brands and customers from different cultures (Lifintsev and Wellbrock, 2019). Functioning successfully across different cultures, either domestically or internationally, can be challenging for brand managers, thus the importance of cultural competence, training employees and promoting cultural adaptation (Padhi, 2016; Lifintsev and Wellbrock, 2019). Cross-cultural training (CCT) allows individuals to adjust to new cultural environments and become more sensitised to issues happening around them by learning more about themselves and their world views (Sahadevan and Sumangala, 2021). A study conducted among organisational expatriates who relocated to foreign countries showed how CCT had been implemented and assisted in improving interactions between people of different cultural backgrounds, while crosscultural adjustment helped in understanding how individuals adapt to foreign cultures (Noman, et al., 2023). Another benefit of CCT is giving a global brand representative an advantage over their competitors by removing certain restraints delaying cross-cultural communication (Padhi, 2016). Therefore, cross-cultural and intercultural competence enables a company to achieve its objectives while also overcoming cross-cultural communication barriers by respecting the values, norms and beliefs of the people affected by its operations (Padhi, 2016).

1.7 Research Design and Methodology

This section explains the research methodology and design used in the study. The study applied Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill's (2007) six-layer "research onion" model of (1) research philosophy, (2) approaches to research, (3) research strategy, (4) methodological choice, (5) time horizons and (6) techniques and procedures.

1.7.1 Research Philosophy, Approach and Strategy

The first layer of the research onion focuses on research philosophy, comprising ontology and epistemology. Ontology focuses on the nature of reality, and epistemology focuses on the theory of knowledge, facts and information (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007; Melnikovas, 2018). This study focused on the theory of knowledge and facts on crosscultural communication barriers and the theory underlying these concepts. In addition, the research applied an interpretivist paradigm by studying and interviewing brand managers' experiences of cross-cultural communication barriers while communicating with a global oral care brand. This is because interpretivism emphasises subjective opinions rather than

objective knowledge, as used in positivism, by studying how people interpret what they have experienced (Kumatongo and Muzata, 2021).

With respect to research approach (the second layer), the research applied the deductive approach by focusing on the CAT theory and the cross-cultural communication barriers faced while digitally advertising a global brand that specialises in oral care products. This is because a deductive approach is recommended in the case that a theory has already been developed, versus the inductive approach, which contributes to the emergence of new theories, or the abductive approach, which helps the researcher explain specific incomplete observations (Mimansha and Nitin, 2019).

There are various strategies to research (the third layer of the research onion). The researcher used phenomenology to better understand how a lack of cross-cultural communication training might lead to unsuccessful digital advertising for a global brand specialising in oral care products. This is because phenomenology helps the researcher to better understand a situation on a subjective level of reality through the method of inquiry, either through interviews, focus group meetings, discussion or observations (Qutoshi, 2018).

1.7.2 Methodological Choice and Time Horizons

The fourth layer of the research onion focuses on methodological choice. This allows the researcher to explore and investigate the value and processes behind observed results of events and situations by answering questions of how and when to expand current and existing literature and outline events (Aldaihani and Islam, 2022). In this study, the monomethod of qualitative research was used. A qualitative methodology explores phenomena to understand concepts, experiences and social interactions, as opposed to quantitative research, which measures variables and tests hypotheses to find relationships through numerical procedures (Kandel, 2020). Lastly, it helps understand the context in which the respondents will answer questions related to research objectives, leading to finding solutions to them (Aldaihani and Islam, 2022). For this study, online interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. Each participant was sent a joining link to the online session a week beforehand, which is also stated a time estimate of how long the interview may take.

The fifth layer is that of time horizons, which can be either cross-sectional or longitudinal (Melnikovas, 2018). Cross-sectional research involves the collection of data at a specific point in time, while longitudinal research collects data repeatedly over a long time period to

compare data (Melnikovas, 2018). This study applied a cross-sectional time horizon, as data was collected over February and March 2025.

1.7.3 Techniques and Procedures

The sixth and last layer of the research onion is the techniques and procedures. The two techniques of sampling are probability sampling and non-probability sampling (Etikan and Babatope, 2019). In probability sampling, the subject in the sample has an equal chance of being selected, while in non-probability sampling, the subject does not have an equal chance of being selected (Etikan and Babatope, 2019). For this research, non-probability purposive sampling was applied owing to the clear inclusion criteria of brand managers working at a particular global brand specialising in oral care products. Furthermore, snowball sampling was used, as the first-interviewed brand managers recruited other brand managers working at the same global brand to participate in the study. A total of eight participants were interviewed, each brand manager being from a different region.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria allow a researcher to set the platform for who may participate in the research study, according to whether they meet the requirements that align with the study's aims and objectives (Hornberger and Rangu, 2020). Inclusion criteria are key features of the target population such as demographic and geographical traits, that allow the researcher to answer their study questions (Patino and Ferreira, 2018). Exclusion criteria, in contrast, consider potential study participants who meet the inclusion criteria but have additional traits that could interfere with the success of the study or result in an unfavourable outcome (Patino and Ferreira, 2018). For this research study, the inclusion criteria for the sample were that participants had to be brand managers working at a particular global brand that specialises in oral care products; all other managers and employees working at this particular global brand and other global brands that specialise in oral care products were excluded.

1.7.4 Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data collection is the process of gathering and measuring information through a systematic manner, which allows the researcher to answer research questions, test hypotheses and evaluate outcomes (Kabir, 2016). The two types of data are *primary data*, which is objective and collected from first-hand experience through observation, interviews and questionnaires, and *secondary data*, which is collected from sources that have already been published (Kabir, 2016). Data collection methods for qualitative methodology include interviews and focus

group discussions, as these lead to understanding rather than predicting a phenomenon, through interpretation and the identification of different themes and patterns (Aldaihani and Islam, 2022). For this study, primary data was collected through online one-on-one interviews using a semi-structured interview schedule. The advantage that one-on-one interviews may have over focus groups is eliminating bias and manipulation (for example, through outspoken participants) and minimising the hurdles of separating an individual view from a group view (Gundumogula, 2020). Seven open-ended questions were asked (see Annexure A), with each interview lasting about twenty to thirty minutes. All the interviews were recorded with the participants' consent.

Data analysis helps further relate the data collected to the research problem (Pandey, 2015). The data from the interviews conducted were coded to identify emerging themes. Incorporating saturation in qualitative research is crucial, as it assists in making the data collected valid (Hennink and Kaiser, 2022). Data saturation is determined when there is enough information to replicate the study, that is, few to no new codes emerge in the data collection. For this study, data saturation was expected at between eight and twelve interviews. Data from each thematic section was analysed separately to answer the research questions. Thematic analysis is suitable for understanding a set of behaviours, ideas and experiences and is quite applicable when searching for a common meaning in the data collected (Aldaihani and Islam, 2022). An important consideration when analysing qualitative data is the trustworthiness of this data. With this in mind, the study applied Guba's model of trustworthiness, which recommends that studies uphold four criteria: (1) credibility, (2) transferability, (3) dependability, and (4) confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Stahl and King, 2020).

1.8 Ethical Considerations

The researcher was required to follow ethical guidelines provided by the Independent Institute of Education (IIE MSA) in its Research and Postgraduate Studies Policy. Once ethical clearance was granted, as seen in Annexure D, the researcher conducted a one-on-one interview assigned to eight brand managers working at a particular global brand that specialises in oral care products. Before conducting interviews, the researcher provided the participants with consent forms and sought permission from their employer (see Annexures B and C). The consent forms informed the participants of their right to autonomy and respect and that their participation was voluntary, before they were asked to consent to the interview, as this is a fundamental aspect of the research process (Gill and Baillie, 2018). In addition,

the participants were given the opportunity to read an information sheet that outlined the research study, ask questions, understand how their data would be stored and used, and informed of their free will to withdraw at any point without reprisal (Gill and Baillie, 2018), outlined in Annexures B and C. Before conducting the interview, the researcher was required to send copies of the consent forms (Annexure B) signed by both the researcher and the supervisor to the participants, regardless of whether the interview was conducted through a digital mode of communication (Gill and Baillie, 2018). As per Annexure B, the participants were asked to give written consent to both audio and video recording for transcribing purposes, informing them of their confidentiality and how the recordings would be stored. No major ethical risks were identified, as the researcher did not interview vulnerable groups or cover sensitive topics while conducting the interviews.

Further details on ethical considerations have been covered in Section 3.8.

1.9 Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: Background to the study

This chapter provided a brief background to the study and an introduction to the research problem of cross-cultural communication barriers faced in international businesses. The chapter also outlined key terminologies and gave an overview of the research design, methodology used and the ethical considerations that were adhered to.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This section entails a review of literature that is pertinent to this research study. Relevant theories, barriers and solutions to cross-cultural communication barriers are discussed.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter focuses on the research design and methodology of the study, following the research onion model of Saunders, et al. (2019). The methods and design used to obtain results for the research questions and objectives are also outlined in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter provides an overview of the data analysis methods and the results from interviewing brand managers working at a particular global brand that specialises in oral care products. The findings are discussed and compared to previous studies.

Chapter 5: Findings, recommendations, and conclusions

The final chapter provides an overview of the findings and makes recommendations. The study is concluded and the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research are discussed.

1.10 Conclusion

When cultures interact, different variations arise in the values, thoughts, lifestyles, body languages, habits, beliefs, customs, eating and dressing styles, among many other aspects. Therefore, it is important to study cross-cultural communication barriers and their effects on marketing, advertising and communication management in a global brand. This chapter introduced the topic and research problem, explained the research objectives, and highlighted the research design and methodology that were used to obtain the results of the study. Importantly, it also highlighted ethical considerations that were upheld throughout the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a detailed introduction and background to the study and outlined the key concepts, research problem and objectives, and the significance of the study. In addition, the chapter further provided a brief overview of the research design and methodology and the required ethical considerations provided by the institution. Chapter 2 provides an in-depth discussion in a literature review of cross-cultural communication, its barriers and how to manage it through cross-cultural training. This section furthermore introduces models used for the theoretical framework, such as Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions and the CAT theory.

Advertising, which is a significant approach to marketing, greatly contributes to international business (Gao, et al., 2022). In the advertising process, cultural differences tend to have a major influence on the brand, as different countries have different linguistic symbols, customs, traditions, values, religions and laws that, if ignored, could lead to failed advertising (Gao, et al., 2022). As the world shifts to a digital market, customer demands and business strategies are affected (Weng, 2023), as digital advertising allows businesses to overcome constraints such as space and time when sending messages to their global audience. This enables them to expand both their target market and market share (Diamantopoulos, 2020). The increase of new technology has also changed customer demands and how they interact with markets and products (Weng, 2023). Digital marketing communication is a significant part of marketing communication, and businesses conduct digital marketing through digital advertising campaigns and social networking (Diamantopoulos, 2020). Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, allow digital advertising to use different formats such as texts, images, audio and videos, hence, the choice of verbal and non-verbal communication in brand-customer interaction plays a significant role in shaping customers' perception, memory, attitude and behaviour (Diamantopoulos, 2020; Deng, et al., 2021). However, crafting advertising in the 21st century digital era has become difficult because consumers' attention spans have grown increasingly shorter, as they are exposed extensively to advertisements, which makes them more exhausted with the overload of choices from the flood of content (Ruanguttamanun, 2023).

Nonetheless, if brands execute their digital advertising incorrectly or unprofessionally, by failing to align with different cultures, this can result in negative feedback from their target

audience, harming the brand’s reputation and causing revenue loss from managing the damage (Veleva and Tsvetanova, 2020; Allan, 2022). Yet, several global brands have failed to incorporate cross-cultural communication training programmes in order to incorporate cultural sensitivity in their advertising campaigns (Retnowati, 2016). With this in mind, therefore, the researcher aimed to explore to what extent the lack of cross-cultural communication training programmes contributes to unsuccessful digital advertising campaigns by focusing on a global brand specialising in oral care products. Table 2.1 introduces the key terminologies used in this study.

Table 2.1: Key terminologies

Key Term	Definition
Cross-cultural understanding	“Ability to recognise the (cultural) differences, make correct interpretations and react properly to people or situations in the communication with these communities” (Ratnasari, 2018, p.127).
Cross-cultural marketing	“Marketing activity carried out in two or more cultural environments, mainly emphasises the management of cultural differences implemented by the two parties (companies and customers, clients, distributors, suppliers, etc.) who have reached a transaction, which mainly includes cultural marketing strategy management, related market research work, brand management and marketing work content” (Sun, 2020, p.539).
Cross-cultural training	“Programme designed to enhance the understanding and skills of individuals when working or interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds” (Enatto, 2024, p.30).
Cross-cultural advertising	“Marketing products or services to several diverse cultures simultaneously” (Retnowati, 2016, p.345).

2.2 Cross-Cultural Communication

For a business to be successful in today’s increasingly competitive international market, it must master the important functions of communication. Communication is a foundational need for all individuals; without communication, social relationships could not exist (Bowen, 2021). In this new age of digital transformation, cross-cultural communication and social media dynamics have intertwined on account of cultural differences, socioeconomic factors, and other technological advancements (Huang, 2024). It is because of these factors that social media platforms act as central spaces where individuals can express their cultural differences and share information, which shapes and reflects societal norms. Social media platforms are also used by businesses to showcase and advertise their products and services, influencing consumer perceptions, purchasing decisions and brand personality while developing consumer-brand relationships (Huang, 2024; Jack, Akpan, Fcicn and Ap, 2024).

The emergence of the new digital era of social media platforms has displaced the use of traditional one-way communication between the brand and its consumers and replaced it with two-way communication (Heywood and Yaméogo, 2022). An example of one-way communication is radio, where communication flows from the sender to the recipient with no feedback from the latter, while in two-way communication, such as Facebook, recipients can provide feedback to the sender (Heywood and Yaméogo, 2022).

The communication process is highly complex, as human language involves verbal and nonverbal communication (Bowen, 2021). Both verbal and non-verbal communication play a key role in transmitting and interpreting messages relayed between individuals (Sadiki, 2020). Non-verbal communication, as a “silent language”, encompasses unwritten and unspoken messages (e.g. through facial expressions, gestures, physical appearance, eye contact, touch, space and time), and it varies from individual to individual (Sadiki, 2020). An example of non-verbal miscommunication may be seen in the way that nodding one’s head may differ in meaning from culture to culture: in Moroccan culture, it means yes, while in Turkey or Greece, it is interpreted as no (Sadiki, 2020). Some of the characteristics of verbal communication include verbal fillers such as “ah”, “um”, and “uh”, tone of voice, speaking rate, volume and pitch (Sadiki, 2020). An example of the different meanings that these features of speech may carry can be seen in the Arab culture, where a soft voice may seem devious while a loud voice seems more sincere when communicating (Sadiki, 2020), versus the Chinese culture, in which being soft-spoken is seen as etiquette, and the Thai culture, in which loud voices are seen as rude (Sadiki, 2020).

Language barriers, differences in values and behaviour, lack of experience, trust and knowledge about other cultures or stereotypical thinking are among the most widespread challenges in cross-cultural communication (Lifintsev and Wellbrock, 2019). Some recorded failed cross-cultural communication incidents include the case of Bata sandals in Bangladesh, which resulted in fifty individuals’ being wounded (Herbig, 2013). This was due to a logo on the sandal, which, although it was intended to be stylish, resembled Allah, causing riots in the community (Herbig, 2013). As a result, the government banned the sale of the sandals. Another failed cross-cultural interaction is the case of Federal Express: when the company entered the European market with ethnocentric tendencies, all of its promotional material and company brochures were in US English, neglecting other European languages (Herbig, 2013). Lastly, Ford introduced its “Feira” model car in Latin

American countries, only to realise that the name translated to “ugly old woman” in Spanish (Herbig, 2013).

Other cross-cultural communication barriers include stereotyping and ethnocentrism (Sahadevan and Sumangala, 2021). Stereotyping usually happens when individuals use their “cultural lens” to view others and form certain views about specific types of individuals (Sahadevan and Sumangala, 2021). Ethnocentrism, in contrast, happens when individuals view their own cultural background to be superior to other individuals (Zhu, 2020). To avoid cross-cultural miscommunication, it is important to understand how both verbal and nonverbal communication can be interpreted differently across cultures.

2.3 Barriers in Cross-Cultural Communication

The advancement of globalisation has seen nations interact with one another, which has resulted in an increase in the need for effective cross-cultural communication (Zhu, 2020). Verbal and non-verbal barriers in cross-cultural communication are greatly embedded in the attitudes and values of people when engaging in an intercultural environment (Zhu, 2020). Some of these barriers include ethnocentrism, language, stereotyping, prejudice and nonverbal elements (Zhu, 2020), which are discussed below.

2.3.1 Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism has been defined as the belief that one’s own cultural background, rules and behaviours are superior to those of others, which are considered inappropriate and wrong (Zhu, 2020). This happens when a group of individuals categorise themselves as an in-group and view those with different cultures as an out-group (Kapur, 2020). Ethnocentrism, therefore, is a process of dividing cultures, as those in the in-group will give preference to the in-group culture, form negative feelings about and communicate inappropriately with the out-group (Kapur, 2020). This encourages aggression and hostility (Kapur, 2020). In multicultural organisations, an example of ethnocentrism can be seen in how some companies prefer to hire home-country nationals for key positions in international operations (Tripathy, 2019).

2.3.2 Language

Language barriers may be noted in both different and similar cultures, given the context of different vocabulary, slang, jargon, euphemisms and dialects (Seeger and Gustafsson, 2021; Montagna, 2023). Slang may be used to identify a specific group and is usually short-lived,

for example, when brands use the slang “24/7” or “bottom line” (Montagna, 2023). Furthermore, words in the same language often have more than one meaning, or where words have the same spelling or same pronunciation but different meaning, making language complicated (Seeger and Gustafsson, 2021). When an individual who is not well equipped in a language attempt to communicate with others, this may lead to misunderstanding. This can be seen when individuals from rural areas migrate for job opportunities to urban cities, where slang terms are prevalent. To improve their language skills for working in an organisation or during travel for work assignments to different regions, workers usually enrol in short-term or long-term language training courses (Kapur, 2020). In addition, language differences, such as in cases where the use of slang was misunderstood or there was an incorrect usage of dialects, have caused many problems in marketing and advertising (Montagna, 2023). To ensure that the meaning of the brand’s intended message is not lost in translation, marketers will hire translators and interpreters who are familiar with these language differences (Montagna, 2023).

2.3.3 Stereotyping

Stereotyping, as another barrier, usually happens when individuals use their “cultural lens” to view others and form certain views about specific types of individuals (Sahadevan and Sumangala, 2021). It is the overgeneralised, lazy and limited beliefs and perceptions of individuals who are grouped to fixed patterns based on their previous behaviours (Zhu, 2020). These fixed patterns and groups are stereotyped by race, gender, age, social class and even physical appearance (Zhu, 2020). The five dimensions of stereotypes are (1) *direction* (positive or negative perceptions), (2) *intensity* (how rooted the perceptions are in people’s minds), (3) *specificity* (a vague or concrete perception), (4) *consensus* (how widespread the perception is within a population) and (5) *accuracy* (how accurate the perception is about individuals) (Zhu, 2020). When a group of individuals are discriminated against and not offered similar opportunities to others, this leads to communication barriers (Kapur, 2020). In business communication, when employees meet one another for the first time, their minds connect the employee’s image with their cultural background, rather than their personalities, which may result in little to no communication (Tripathy, 2019). In advertising, stereotypical portrayals of young female endorsers depict a more attractive and successful picture than those of older minority endorsers, as this minority group may not resonate with societal expectations. Therefore, marketers often face a dilemma, as introducing diverse and inclusive portrayals may lead to either a negative advertising effect or a positive social effect by raising or reducing stereotypes and prejudices (Eisend, Muldrow and Rosengren, 2023).

2.3.4 Prejudice

Prejudice and racism barriers are the result of an irrational hatred of individuals of different races and religions through discrimination, verbal abuse and physical avoidance and contact (Zhu, 2020). Individuals who practise prejudice and racism often isolate themselves, deny equal opportunities, make impolite name-labelling jokes, and have biased and negative attitudes to other individuals (Zhu, 2020). As identified by Eisend, Muldrow and Rosengren (2023), promotional material in the advertising industry is dominated by young white males who may unconsciously or consciously select other advertising agents with whom they can identify, thus contributing to less inclusivity and diversity in advertising.

2.3.5 Non-Verbal Barriers

One crucial role in interpersonal communication is the use of non-verbal cues, which convey emotions, attitudes and intentions more effectively than verbal language alone (Wajahat, 2024). Non-verbal barriers happen when facial expressions, body language, signs and symbols, time management, relationships and formalities are misunderstood or ignored (Seeger and Gustafsson, 2021). Non-verbal and visual advertising tends to be understood globally, breaking verbal language barriers. However, body language and motions can be interpreted differently, leading to misunderstanding because of cultural discrepancies (Montagna, 2023). One of the challenges viewers with hearing impairments may face while watching videos is non-verbal communication, therefore, creators implement techniques such as captions, as a way to enhance accessibility for all audiences (Wajahat, 2024). In addition, the reliance on text-based digital communication may hinder the development of empathetic skills; therefore, communication via video-based platforms tries to bridge this gap by allowing the use of facial expressions and body gestures (Wajahat, 2024).

2.4 Cross-Cultural Advertising

Cross-cultural advertising allows brands to simultaneously market their products or services to several diverse cultures while engaging with their specific target audience through digital advertising displayed on social media platforms (Retnowati, 2016). The creative designing of advertisements must not only pay attention to product categories but also consider cultural dimensions suitable for the target audience's culture (Retnowati, 2016). Cross-cultural marketing is defined as "marketing activity involving two or more cultural environments enabling a global brand to manage their cultural marketing strategies effectively" (Sun, 2020, p.539). In addition, cross-cultural marketing requires marketers to understand various

cultural dimensions and show sensitivity and respect towards customers' cultural rights (Vaddadi and Thandava, 2019). Cross-cultural marketers must also look at the cultural expectations of consumers when designing the marketing mix; this may include cross cultural product advertising for each targeted culture, cultural preferences on price adaptation, appropriate distribution channel as a place adaptation, and promotion adaptation that an advertisement engages well with the local target market (Vaddadi and Thandava, 2019). Significantly, cross-cultural communication skills and knowledge have become profoundly important in cross-cultural marketing for better understanding the impact of cultural differences on cross-cultural advertising (Xian, 2023).

Understanding cross-cultural communication helps multinational companies achieve brand integration communication in the global market, by analysing how culture affects the different elements of an advertising campaign and then adjusting them to best speak to the brand's target audience (Retnowati, 2016; Xian, 2023). Some effective strategies for cross cultural advertising include conducting in-depth research on a country that helps a brand understand cultural differences (Xian, 2023), and establishing the correct communication concepts that respect the local language habits, for example, the use of different verbal and non-verbal communication styles, for some cultures, pictures contain more information than words, while for others, the only way to convey meaning is verbal (Retnowati, 2016; Xian, 2023). Therefore, effective cross-cultural advertising may help reduce the stereotyping of audience-to-audience environments and within the target region (Retnowati, 2016; Xian, 2023).

Failed cross-cultural advertising can occur when those responsible for advertisements take their own culture as the benchmark and then incorporate the recipient's culture, which often leads to the cultural and psychological rejection of the consumer's country (Xian, 2023). An example of this is when a French male perfume, Opium, was introduced to the Chinese market, but the local residents argued that the advertisement related to the Opium War, which was a painful memory for many Chinese people (Gao, et al., 2022). This ignorance of the cultural connotations later caused the company huge losses, highlighting the importance of combining the perspective of consumers' emotions with brand's advertising and marketing to obtain consumers' empathy (Gao, et al., 2022). Therefore, global brands have started shifting their focus by developing strategies that include consumer desires and cultural needs that align with the norms, financial and moral values, convictions, attitudes and habits of a given group of consumers (Diamantopoulos, 2020). Understanding the purchasing and

consumer behaviour in different cultures can help brands adapt their digital advertisements to suit their consumers' cultural identity, behaviours and norms (Diamantopoulos, 2020). Therefore, the importance of a successful cross-cultural advertising strategy requires crosscultural communicators who fully understand the local consumers' culture and psychological characteristics (Gao, et al., 2022).

2.5 Cross-Cultural Communication Management

There is a relationship between culture and communication, as individuals convey their identities through communication (Aririguzoh, 2022). It is therefore important to create and maintain effective communication that binds and sustains a community, as this eradicates cross-cultural miscommunications (Aririguzoh, 2022). Cross-cultural sensitisation continues to be extremely important, thus the need for intercultural adaptability and communication competence (Gokhale and Sharma, 2021). To combat cross-cultural communication barriers, one can practise cultural literacy by frequently communicating with people of different cultural backgrounds, as this reduces ethnocentric perceptions (Aririguzoh, 2022). Other ways of reducing misperceptions and misinterpretations are through (1) *practising the assumption of differences* until it is proven that similarities exist between cultures, (2) *emphasising explanation* rather than judging one's cultural background, and (3) *empathy*, by putting oneself in the position of the one receiving the message (Mogea, 2023). Cross-cultural understanding is another communicative approach with different stages (Ratnasari 2018). The first stage is *cross-cultural knowledge*, whereby individuals ought to be familiar with different cultural characteristics, values and beliefs; second, *cross-cultural awareness* allows individuals to change their attitudes, understanding and appreciation towards different cultures; the third is *cross-cultural sensitivity*, in which individuals react appropriately when engaging with people from different cultures; and lastly, *cross-cultural competence* allows the individuals to work and collaborate effectively with other individuals from different cultures. (Ratnasari 2018).

Cultural awareness and intercultural competence are terms that are currently and frequently used in media and businesses (Gokhale and Sharma, 2021). There are five competencies essential in developing intercultural communicative competence, according to Byram's intercultural communicative competence model, which help individuals effectively communicate across cultures by minimising conflicts in multicultural settings (Jhaiyanuntana and Nomnian, 2020). The first aspect is *attitudes, curiosity, openness and readiness* to regard others' cultures and beliefs, thus determining how appropriately one

interacts with others. Second is the *unconscious and conscious intercultural knowledge* of social groups. The third aspect focuses on *skills of discovery and interaction* through acquiring new knowledge of other cultures and employing them in communication and interaction. The fourth focuses on the *skills of interpreting* information in different cultures and relating them to one's own. The fifth competency is *critical cultural awareness* – assessing the perspectives, practices and products in both one's *own* culture and others (Jhaiyanuntana and Nomniam, 2020). Other strategies in intercultural communication include *cognitive intelligence*, which focuses on acculturation and openness; *emotional intelligence*, which focuses on empathy, sensitivity and mindfulness; and lastly, *behavioural skills*, which focus on adaptiveness to change and language proficiency (Jhaiyanuntana and Nomniam, 2020).

Cross-cultural training programmes are intended to improve people's understanding and skills when interacting or dealing with cross-cultural situations in both national and international contexts (Enatto, 2024). In addition, these programmes aim to aid in building a positive outlook towards appreciating cultural differences and fostering acceptable behaviour in intercultural communication (Enatto, 2024). Some forms of cross-cultural training include language training and cultural sensitivity training (Enatto, 2024). Global brands succeed internationally by providing cross-cultural training to employees to manage cultural conflicts and improve cultural sensitivity, which further helps them adapt to and understand cultures in their target market (Liu, et al., 2023). This was accomplished successfully by a multinational consumer goods company when it extended its brand into India and trained its employees on the Indian culture in order to better understand the needs and expectations of Indian audiences (Liu, et al., 2023). Another study, by Lifintsev and Wellbrock (2019), on Generation Z who spoke first languages other than English, highlighted the importance of cross-cultural communication skills in reducing language barriers in digital interactions compared to offline (face-to-face) communication.

Therefore, the success or failure of cross-cultural management determines how effective and efficient intercultural communication competence is in a culturally diverse institution, thus making it vital to have a comprehensive cross-cultural management that works harmoniously in aiding intercultural adaptation (Benčíková, et al., 2021). The significance and results of this study contribute to developing effective cross-cultural communication training programmes for global brands to successfully communicate the brand in international business. The literature review on barriers of cross-cultural communication in digital

advertising and the results of the study are expected to help in minimising failed global digital advertising.

2.6 Models Used for the Theoretical Framework

People are continuously exposed to various cultures and sub-cultures owing to globalisation and exposure to new technologies, and it is these cultural values that contribute to crosscultural differences (Sahadevan and Sumangala, 2021). In addition, different cultures respond differently to advertisements, which shows how important it is to thoroughly understand cultural nuances. Hofstede's theoretical framework is an important tool that may be used for this purpose, to study consumer behaviours and design effective local advertisements (Ruanguttamanun, 2023).

2.6.1 Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Framework

Geert Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimensions framework consists of six dimensions, namely, (1) power distance, (2) individualism, (3) masculinity versus femininity, (4) uncertainty avoidance, (5) long-term orientation versus short-term orientation and (6) indulgence versus restraint. Hofstede's cultural dimensions are important in helping companies adapt their products and market to different cultures for creating customer satisfaction and brand loyalty (Dikčius, et al., 2023; Nickerson, 2023). An example of *power distance* in consumer behaviour is the effect of price sensitivity of consumers in their willingness to pay for products or services after price adjustments (Sağlam and Abdullah, 2021). An example of the second dimension of *individualism versus collectivism*, is seen when collectivist individuals feel more comfortable achieving goals and working in groups, as opposed to individualists, who prefer working alone and focus on the needs of oneself (Lifintsev, Fleseriu and Wellbrock, 2022; Nickerson, 2023). A study of online shopping patterns revealed that participants with a high individualism score are less influenced by others, as they are more inclined to believe in themselves while purchasing and repurchasing; therefore, they show greater brand loyalty (Dikčius, et al., 2023). This is different for those in collectivist cultures, as they are more likely to socialise and interact with others (Dikčius, et al., 2023).

On the aspect of the third dimension of *masculinity versus femininity*, a country's culture has a significant influence on how gender roles are portrayed, with cultures in which gender stereotypes still exist rating higher in Hofstede's masculinity index (Sharma and Bumb, 2021). Many studies show the effect of nontraditional gender roles in the way products are

being advertised, for example, female endorsers portrayed as being empowered, and portraying men as caregivers or interested in traditionally female-oriented products (Eisend, Muldrow and Rosengren, 2023). However, the opposite is also true, for example, television commercials that depict women as housewives or endorsing products related to cosmetics, rather than involved in professional activities or alongside products associated with cars (Sharma and Bumb, 2021).

Fourth, *uncertainty avoidance*, was seen in a study conducted in e-commerce which showed that high uncertainty avoidance was positively related to customer loyalty to a specific product or service, as these cultures tend to buy products or services from the same retail channel or cross-buy from their trusted retailer on account of reluctance to accept new knowledge and innovations (Dikčius, et al., 2023).

The fifth dimension, *long-term orientation versus short-term orientation*, expresses how customers of long-term orientation cultures prefer to purchase products or services from known and trusted companies, as this will result in customer satisfaction and long-term customer loyalty (Dikčius, et al., 2023). Those of short-term orientation are not particular about a specific brand and are likely to switch brands (Dikčius, et al., 2023).

Lastly, *indulgence* societies prioritise rewards that pertain to fun and entertainment, as opposed to *restraint* groups, who constrain gratification and admire utilitarian rewards; those from indulgence tend to show greater customer loyalty (Dikčius, et al., 2023).

Trompenaars's model has seven cultural dimension three of which are similar to Hofstede: *individualism* versus *communitarianism* (*collectivism* in Hofstede) and *universalism* versus *particularism* (*uncertainty avoidance* in Hofstede) and *achievement* versus *ascription* (power distance in Hofstede). The other four include *affective* versus *neutral* cultures which relate to expression of emotions and feelings, *specific* versus *diffused* cultures where *specific* concentrate and analyse small details and put them together as a whole while *diffused* analyse the whole and then the specific elements that link to each other. In *time perception*, people with a past oriented culture tend to respect older people while those of future oriented culture tend to focus on future achievements. Lastly *relation to nature* relate to peoples' attitudes towards their environment where some cultures believe that they control the environment while others think they are controlled by it (Trompenaars, 1993).

This study applied the Hofstede's model of six cultural dimensions as this model tries to define, understand, analyse and compare the inter-cultural differences of people in the world

which would help individuals and companies manage and enhance international business. This is in contrast to Trompenaars's model which mainly helps companies to develop their own inter-cultural management (Áqua, et al., 2023).

2.6.2 Communication Accommodation Theory

Communication not only serves to exchange information but also conveys people's social identities, by virtue of how they control and accommodate their verbal and non-verbal interpersonal communications, depending on whom they are talking to and what they are talking about (Jeong and Kim, 2023). In the cross-cultural communication field, one of the key factors of communication, as identified by several authors, is the influence of culture (Zhang and Giles, 2018). The communication accommodation theory (CAT) studies how, when and why individuals adjust their communicative attitudes when interacting socially and the effects from such adjustments (Giles, Edwards and Walther, 2023). This theory provides a theoretical framework that explains the ways in which individuals adapt their communication behaviours, such as accents, the rate of the speech and choice of topic, to manage social relationships through communication (Soliz, Giles and Gasiorek, 2021). Furthermore, adaptation can be either symmetrical or asymmetrical. Symmetrical adaptation is when both parties adjust to similar degrees, resulting in more positive and improved interpersonal relations. Asymmetrical adaptation, in contrast, is when both parties adjust to different degrees, resulting in a hostile interpersonal relation (Soliz, Giles and Gasiorek, 2021).

Over the years, CAT has been studied across several human social groups, cultural contexts and languages, by studying both face-to-face communication and new communication technologies (Giles, Edwards and Walther, 2023). It has become one of the top theories of interpersonal communication in the past two decades through its evolution as a sensitising framework that addresses adaptation across various verbal and non-verbal behaviours in contexts such as healthcare, family relations and social media interactions (Soliz, Giles and Gasiorek, 2021). Other studies of this framework have been conducted in online communities, virtual teams, instant messaging and email contexts (Jafni, et al., 2021).

CAT focuses on three main types of adjustment: (1) *convergence* (communicators try to decrease the differences on a linguistic and psychological level), (2) *divergence* (communicators try to increase the differences) and (3) *maintenance* (maintaining one's level of communication without adjusting to others) (Elhami, 2020). Notably, through the CAT lens, consumers may appreciate the effort of brands in converging their social media

communications to the way consumers interact with each other (Giles, et al., 1991), and consequently, this experience may strengthen a sense of community between brands and consumers. In marketing communication, language can influence the outcome of brand–customer communication, as it may have an impact on a customer’s trust in the brand (Jafni, et al., 2021). This has, however, been challenging to marketers, as they must be strategic in their linguistic communication styles, and they need to research and expand their knowledge of ways to deliver value on social media platforms (Jafni, et al., 2021). This is vital, as these customer engagements, through successful sales, act as a key indicator of a brand’s growth and sustainability (Jafni, et al., 2021).

Effective cross-cultural communication aims to transform how messages are written, code, and sent to individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Aririguzoh, 2022). One may use a conversational language style that incorporates emotion and informality to have a positive impact on consumer engagement on social media platforms (Jafni, et al., 2021). A study conducted on marketing communication revealed that emotionality and emotional linguistic features, when used in advertising, can influence communication positively, as the emotions embedded in brand-related content encourage audiences to share the content and engage with the brand (Jafni, et al., 2021). Complexity is the effort required to comprehend and relay communication (Jafni, et al., 2021). It is therefore important to understand how the length, choice of words and hashtags used in the content posted on social media can enhance or reduce an advert’s influence, as the target audience usually prefers simple brand communication (Jafni, et al., 2021). Lastly, the informal communicative style is usually used to strengthen relationships and minimise social distance by using emoji and only common and easily understood punctuation, which increases consumers’ interactivity and brand perspectives (Jafni, et al., 2021).

By investigating brand accommodation to informal communications on social media, Jeong and Kim (2023) recommended that brands use the CAT strategies in their communications. These include adopting convergence strategies of informal communication to integrate casual dialogues with consumers, as these strategies reflect the brand’s effort to create interpersonal understanding and communication competence with consumers. This study is grounded on this theory, as it focuses on how people from different groups interact and understand each other based on non-verbal attitudes and language barriers.

2.7 Conclusion

Chapter 2 provided a detailed review of literature on cross-cultural communication and explained in detail some cross-cultural communication barriers in international business. In addition, the key concepts of cross-cultural marketing and cross-cultural advertising were explained. This chapter also provided ways of managing cross-cultural communication to improve and maintain effective communication in different cultures. The models of Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework and CAT, which form the framework for this study, were presented and analysed with regard to the ways in which individuals of different cultures respond to different products and when and why individuals adjust their communicative attitudes. The chapter concluded with an analysis of similar studies to highlight the study's research gap and the research objectives and questions that align to the purpose of the study, as introduced in Chapter 1 (see Section 1.4).

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology used in this study. Research methodology is a fundamental aspect of research, as it helps the researcher use specific procedures that assist in selecting, identifying and analysing information and systematically solving the research problem at hand (Dissanayake, 2023). To structure the research methodology and design, the research onion model has been expounded in this chapter. This model is a systematic approach to decision-making that helped design the research methodology appropriate to this study (Dissanayake, 2023). According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007), the six layers of the research onion model are (1) research philosophy, (2) approaches to research, (3) research strategy, (4) methodological choice, (5) time horizons and (6) techniques and procedures, as shown in Figure 3.1. These layers or phases are discussed in the section below.

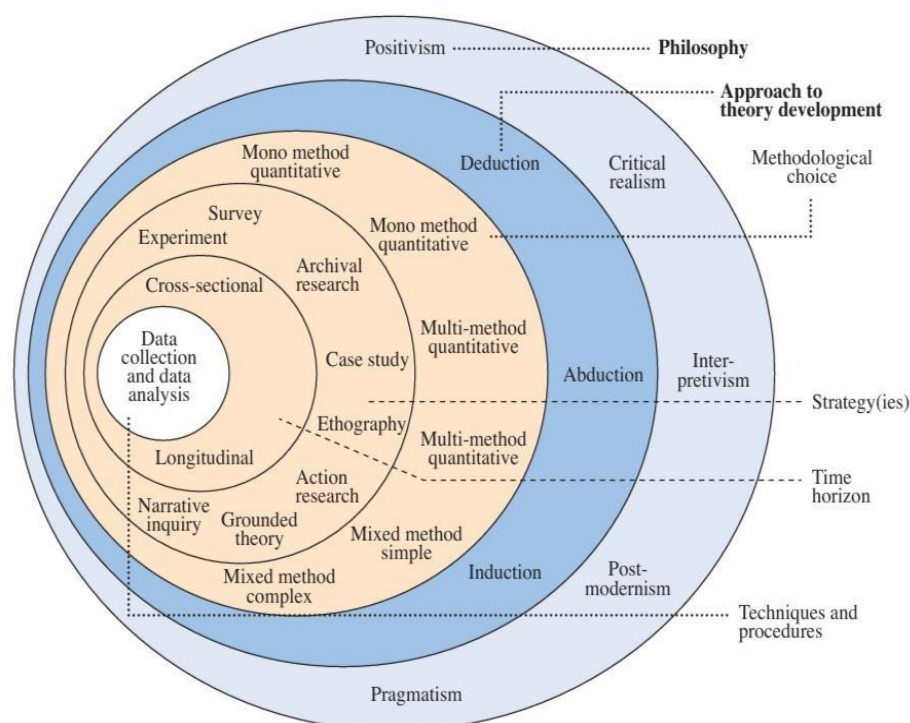


Figure 3.1: The six layers of the research onion model

Source: Melnikovas (2018, p.33)

3.2 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy is the foundation of any research study, as it describes the set of beliefs upon which the research is built. Research philosophy can be described from ontological or

epistemological points of view (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007; Melnikovas, 2018). Ontology focuses on the nature of reality, while epistemology refers to “assumptions about knowledge, what constitutes acceptable, valid and legitimate knowledge, and how we can communicate knowledge to others” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007; Melnikovas, 2018). Ontology is the study of being or reality and helps answer the main questions about reality and how we know what is real (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Therefore, ontology is concerned with what knowledge exists in the world in which humans can acquire whilst epistemology is concerned with the development of knowledge while looking at all aspects of the validity; methods of acquiring such knowledge and how the transferability of such knowledge can be assessed (Junjie and Yingxin, 2022). Considering this, the study applied an epistemological stance by focusing on how knowledge about cross-cultural communication barriers is constructed and understood from participants’ perspectives.

Within the ontological and epistemological assumptions, four types of research paradigms exist, namely, (1) positivism, (2) interpretivism, (3) constructivism and (4) pragmatism. Research paradigms are methods, models and patterns applied when conducting research (Kumatongo and Muzata, 2021). *Positivism* prefers quantitative methods such as social surveys and questionnaires on account of their reliability and representativeness. It further adheres to the objective view that only factual knowledge is gained and therefore numerical data is generally collected for analysis (Taherdoost, 2022).

Interpretivism focuses on subjective opinions rather than objective knowledge by studying how people interpret what they have experienced (Kumatongo and Muzata, 2021). In addition, interpretivism argues that researchers can never be separated from their personal values and beliefs, so these will inevitably inform how they collect, interpret and analyse data (Ryan, 2018). There are four main approaches to interpretivist research: (1) *hermeneutics*, interpreting and understanding texts and documents and the deeper meaning in them; (2) *Verstehen*, the exploration of understanding from the points of view of research participants to understand why a phenomenon exists or why the participants behave the way they do; (3) *symbolic interactionism*, which dwells on the fact that people’s behaviour is based on their own meanings, which are generated from social interactions, and hence, people may adapt meanings based on their perceptions of situations; and (4) *phenomenology*, which focuses on the interpretation and description of people’s experiences, and this is deeply informed by philosophical assumptions (Ryan, 2018).

Constructivism rejects objective knowledge; researchers rely on their participants' views and interpret them through the way they engage with the world (Kumatongo and Muzata, 2021).

Pragmatism uses the philosophical and methodological approaches that work best for researchers in investigating a particular research problem; it goes hand in hand with mixed research methodology owing to the complexity of the research (Kumatongo and Muzata, 2021).

For this study, the researcher applied interpretivism by studying and interviewing brand managers to explore whether the lack of cross-cultural communication training programmes can lead to unsuccessful digital advertising campaigns of global brands.

3.3 Research Approach

A research approach may be deductive, inductive or abductive (Mimansha and Nitin, 2019). The *deductive* approach is used when the researcher starts with a social theory that they find compelling and then tests its implications with data, with the aim of accepting that the observation is indeed steered and in line with the theory (Malhotra, 2017; Alturki, 2021). Therefore, deductive research tests the validity of theories already presented (Mimansha and Nitin, 2019). An *inductive* approach, in contrast, contributes to the emergence of new theories. This approach should be used when the researcher develops a theory and hypotheses and designs a research strategy to test those hypotheses (Malhotra, 2017; Alturki, 2021). Hence, should a researcher have a theory that they wish to reject or accept, they would use a deductive approach. In the absence of a theory, the researcher would use an inductive approach to answer the research questions and objectives (Mimansha and Nitin, 2019). Conversely, the *abductive* approach helps the researcher explain specific incomplete observations (Mimansha and Nitin, 2019). Furthermore, it may be used to discover new concepts and ideas by finding new data or events not presented in pre-existing knowledge (Kennedy and Thornberg, 2018).

In short, the inductive approach aims to answer “what” questions in research, the deductive answers “why” questions, and the abductive aims to answer both “what” and “why” questions (Malhotra, 2017; Alturki, 2021). Furthermore, as inductive research aims to prove limited generalisations about observed patterns and characteristics of people in social events (Malhotra, 2017), this research applied the deductive approach by focusing on CAT and the cross-cultural communication barriers faced while digitally advertising a global brand that specialises in oral care products.

3.4 Research Strategies

Various strategies for research exist, such as experimental, survey, case study, action research, grounded theory, ethnography, narrative inquiry and phenomenology (Melnikovas, 2018). The *experimental* research strategy aims to determine how or whether a specific behaviour influences an outcome (Kumatongo and Muzata, 2021). In addition, it can be divided into laboratory, natural and field experiments (Alturki, 2021). A *survey* design seeks to measure the qualities of a specific target population by studying an individual's viewpoints, opinions and beliefs (Taherdoost, 2022). By using this strategy, the researcher may develop a numeric description of the target population's trends, attitudes or opinions (Kumatongo and Muzata, 2021). *Case studies* focus on gaining an in-depth exploration of events and individuals in which data can be explanatory, exploratory or descriptive (Kumatongo and Muzata, 2021; Taherdoost, 2022). Data may be collected through on-site direct observations or archival documentation (Taherdoost, 2022). *Action research* focuses on addressing real-life problems, in which a solution is found within a social unit (Chege and Otieno, 2020; Mahesh, 2020). The aim of the *grounded theory* strategy is to collect and analyse data to develop new theories stemming from the researcher's viewpoint after interacting, observing or interviewing the participants (Kumatongo and Muzata, 2021; Taherdoost, 2022). In addition, in grounded theory, the data is collected in a social setting to better understand human behaviour; through its analysis, the researcher may create new thoughts and patterns of argumentation around the topic (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014).

Ethnography is a prolonged observation (for roughly six months) adopted to explore cultures and societies through direct interaction and involvement with their participants (Mahesh, 2020; Kumatongo and Muzata, 2021; Taherdoost, 2022). It focuses on a collective or group, rather than single individuals, to study shared common experiences (Kumatongo and Muzata, 2021; Taherdoost, 2022). Ethnography allows the researcher to gain a better understanding of the way of life of a particular cultural group in an audience, institution or street (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Using a focus group allows the researcher short periods to obtain insiders' views or media in the context of everyday life (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Street ethnography focuses on a particular group of people who spend most of their time on the streets and have developed a unique culture that differs from mainstream culture (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). If conducted in an institution, the researcher gains a better understanding of how a workplace shapes people's subjective experiences by studying the personal experiences of the individuals (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Ethnography can be done through anthropological, autoethnographic and virtual lenses. *Anthropology* allows the

researcher to spend lengthy periods immersed in unknown cultures to obtain insiders' views on cultural interactions of group members. *Autoethnography* focuses on researching the cultural connection between the researcher, the participants and others, while *virtual* focuses on studying people's cyberspace behaviours (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014).

The *narrative inquiry* approach may be applied by researchers who study the participants' experiences told in the form of stories through social interactions (Azzahrawi, 2021). Lastly, *phenomenology* provides researchers with a theoretical guideline to better understand a situation on a subjective level of reality; to do so, the researcher collects data through interviews, focus group meetings, discussion and/or observations (Qutoshi, 2018). This is discussed further in the Data Collection section. For this study, the researcher used phenomenology to better understand how a lack of cross-cultural communication training might lead to unsuccessful digital advertising for a global brand specialising in oral care products.

3.5 Methodological Choice

Methodological choice refers to the selection between either mono-method or mixed methods research. Mono-method refers to conducting only qualitative or only quantitative research (Vizcarguenaga-Aguirre and López-Robles, 2020). Qualitative methods are generally used to investigate societal and practical issues that cannot be explained through numbers (Taherdoost, 2022). It may be explorative in nature, as after collecting primary data, the researcher may discover new ideas and generate new theories (Taherdoost, 2022). Qualitative methods may also be investigative, as they explore the researcher's understanding of social issues subjectively by contrasting, comparing and assessing opinions, behaviour, attitudes and social interactions (Kumatongo and Muzata, 2021). A researcher using qualitative methodology research may decide to apply an interactive or noninteractive approach, which means that they may choose to be in contact with their participants or not (Kumatongo and Muzata, 2021).

Unlike the qualitative, the quantitative method is objective, whereby the researcher tries to prove knowledge by testing theories and determining facts and not by opinions or personal interpretations (Kumatongo and Muzata, 2021). Quantitative studies allow the researcher to collect quantifiable data (information with a numerical focus, which includes statistics) to develop mathematical models, theories and hypotheses (Kandel, 2020). The quantitative method aims to research specific rational questions through the collection of numerical data that answers predictions (Taherdoost, 2022). Mixed methods research combines quantitative

and qualitative research techniques (Vivek and Nanthagopan, 2021). For this study, a monomethod was implemented through only qualitative research.

There are six steps in qualitative research studies: (1) attending, (2) telling, (3) transcribing, (4) analysing, (5) reading and (6) validating (Cropley, 2023). The first two steps focus on the participant's life experience and developing a subjective understanding of those experiences through their narratives (Cropley, 2023). Transcribing, analysing and reading focus on the researcher by recording what the participants narrate, developing an understanding of participants' statements and communicating their findings on their research report (Cropley, 2023). Lastly, validation is about readers' adopting the findings in the research report (Cropley, 2023). Qualitative research is deductive and applies experimental methods and surveys (Chege and Otieno, 2020; Taherdoost, 2022). The qualitative research approach entails the collection and interpretation of data by observing what people say and do through individual in-depth interviews. For this study, a qualitative methodology was applied, as it allowed the researcher to explore and investigate the current cross-cultural communication barriers that brand managers face in digitally advertising a global brand.

3.6 Time Horizons

Data may be collected over one of two-time horizons: cross-sectional or longitudinal (Melnikovas, 2018). A cross-sectional time horizon involves the collection of data at a specific point in time, while longitudinal data is collected repeatedly over a long period of time so that the data from different periods may be compared (Melnikovas, 2018). A cross-sectional time horizon assists the researcher in capturing direct links between the causes and effects of the study, while the longitudinal time horizon will assist the researcher in capturing the changes in data and testing the consistency of any inferences over a period (Alturki, 2021). This research applied a cross-sectional time horizon, as data collection was conducted at a particular point in time, that is, between February and March 2025.

3.7 Techniques and Procedures

3.7.1 Data Collection

Data collection is the process of gathering and measuring information in a systematic manner that allows the researcher to answer research questions, test hypotheses and evaluate outcomes (Kabir, 2016). There are two types of data: *primary data*, through observation, interviews and questionnaires, and *secondary data* from books, newspapers and published articles (Mimansha and Nitin, 2019). Primary data is objective and reliable, is collected from

first-hand experience and has not been altered by individuals, while secondary data is collected from sources that have already been published (Kabir, 2016). A researcher can conduct interviews in one-on-one sessions, focus group discussions, and via telephone or digital methods (Gill and Baillie, 2018; Mimansha and Nitin, 2019). Interviews entail two or more people discussing a detailed human or social issue (Alamri, 2019). Interviews may be *structured*, by using the exact same questions with all participants, *semi-structured*, by having several key questions but also altering pre-planned questions, or *unstructured*, which requires no pre-planning when asking questions (Alamri, 2019).

Structured interviews are used when the researcher requires clarification on a topic, while unstructured interviews allow the researcher to ask opening questions that lead to a discussion of topics which little or less is known, and semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to ask prearranged questions while ensuring that their participants discuss issues they feel are important (Gill and Baillie, 2018). The advantage that one-on-one interviews may have over focus groups is the elimination of bias and manipulation through outspoken participants and minimising the hurdles of separating an individual view from a group view (Gundumogula, 2020). For this study, online semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect primary data. The desired approach was one-on-one interviews that were audio recorded, as per the participant's consent, in a twenty- to thirty-minute session. The interview questions were focused on exploring the importance of cross-cultural communication training programmes needed by brand managers while digitally advertising oral care products globally in different cultures. The data recording procedure sought both verbal and written consent from the participants (the latter given on forms provided by the researcher). The participants were assured of confidentiality and of their privacy by not revealing their names or that of their employer in any study reports.

Data saturation identifies redundancy in data through the similarities and contrasts in the emerging theory (Saunders, et al., 2018). In interviews, when the researcher identifies increasingly repetitive comments, this means that data saturation has been reached (Saunders, et al., 2018). Thereafter, the researcher proceeds to start analysing what has already been collected (Saunders, et al., 2018). For this study, the collected data was coded to identify emerging themes and monitor data saturation. Data saturation was reached after interviewing eight brand managers.

3.7.2 Population and Sampling

A population is an entire group from which a researcher intends to study and draw conclusions, whereas the sample is the specific group of individuals from whom data is collected (McCombes, 2019). The population for the study usually comprises two groups: the *target*, which is everyone within parameters that the researcher aims to understand, and the *accessible*, which focuses on the top selection of the population needed in the study and that can be measured (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). The sample size is a specific number of participants from a chosen population based on the timeframe, cost-effectiveness and geographical aspects (Etikan and Babatope, 2019). When selecting a sample size for qualitative research, several factors are considered, such as the type of research design, research question and data quality (Bekele and Ago, 2022). Some scholars recommend that a phenomenological study should conduct between five and twenty-five interviews (Bekele and Ago, 2022). A previous study on cross-cultural communication found that fewer than sixteen interviews were needed to reach data saturation (Guest, Namey and Chen, 2020). In comparison, another inductive thematic analysis of sixty in-depth interviews found themes in the first twelve interviews (Guest, Namey and Chen, 2020). Therefore, the sample size of this research study, which applied the phenomenology approach, consisted of eight to twelve brand managers working at a global brand that specialises in oral care products.

In selecting the subset of the population for data collection, the researcher may use either of two sampling techniques: probability or non-probability (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014; Etikan and Babatope, 2019). In probability sampling, the subject in the population has an equal chance of being selected to be part of the sample, while in non-probability sampling, the subjects do not have an equal chance of being selected owing to difficulty in gaining access to an entire population (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014; Etikan and Babatope, 2019; Stratton, 2023). Probability sampling is often used in quantitative research, as it removes bias through random and systematic methods, while non-probability sampling is usually applied in qualitative research (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014; Stratton, 2023). In quantitative research, a sampling plan determines how study participants are selected and the number to be included, while in qualitative research, the sampling decision is based on the information and theoretical needs (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Sampling in quantitative research aims to remove subjectivity and any bias; therefore, the research becomes repeatable, and the sample is representative of the whole population (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Sampling in qualitative research includes subjectivity by focusing on individual experiences, contexts, themes and

saturation through purposive selection (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014, Stratton, 2023). Figure 3.2 outlines the different sampling methods, which are then further explained.

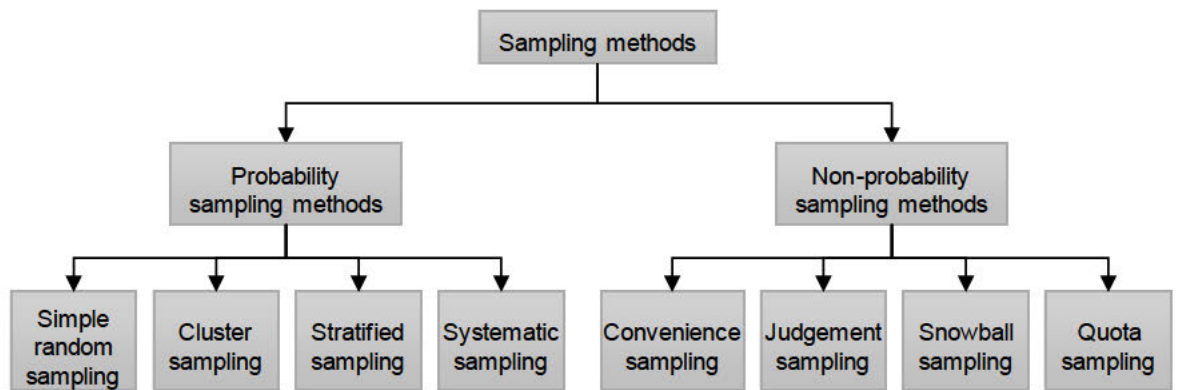


Figure 3.2: Sampling methods

Source: Wiid and Diggins (2009: 199).

There are four probability sampling methods: (1) simple random, (2) cluster, (3) stratified and (4) systematic sampling (McCombes, 2019). In simple random sampling or systematic sampling, every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected (McCombes, 2019). Under *simple random sampling*, each member of the population is assigned a number either through an automated software or randomly selected from a hat (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014; Pace, 2021). In *systematic sampling*, each element in the population must be numbered on a sampling frame list from which the element is randomly chosen and used in a sampling interval (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). In addition, the sample is retrieved following a precise procedure to reduce bias. Cluster sampling is used when the population for a study is widespread or it might be costly to reach all sample elements (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). *Cluster sampling* is further divided into subunits depending on large and dispersed populations; however, each of these subgroups should have characteristics similar to those of the whole sample (McCombes, 2019; Pace, 2021). Like cluster sampling, *stratified sampling* allows the researcher to seek precise conclusions by dividing the population into subpopulations that may differ in significant ways, thus allowing every subgroup to be represented in the sample (McCombes, 2019).

There are also four sampling methods under non-probability sampling: (1) convenience, (2) snowball, (3) quota and (4) purposive sampling (McCombes, 2019). *Convenience sampling* entails selecting participants who are most accessible to the researcher (McCombes, 2019). The benefits are that it is a quick and cost-effective way of collecting data. However, it can

also result in selection bias (McCombes, 2019). Should the researcher find it difficult to access the population, *snowball sampling* may be used to increase the sample size by recruiting participants through referrals from existing participants (McCombes, 2019). This further helps the researcher reach specific members of the population who meet the inclusion criteria (Pace, 2021). Like convenience sampling, however, it may lead to sampling bias (McCombes, 2019). *Quota sampling* is a non-random selection of a predetermined number of units called a quota, which aims to control what or who makes up the research sample (McCombes, 2019). In *judgement sampling*, also known as *purposive sampling*, the researcher selects participants based on clear inclusion or exclusion criteria to come up with a sample that is most useful for the study, either to gain detailed knowledge or when a certain sample size is very small and specific (McCombes, 2019). The researcher purposively selects the elements they wish to include in their sample by further determining what characteristics are important to the research (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). It is best used when studying specific characteristics. However, the researcher may be biased, which would influence which participants are selected (Pace, 2021).

For this research, non-probability through purposive sampling was applied due to the clear inclusion criteria of brand managers working at a particular global brand specialising in oral care products. In addition, snowball sampling was employed, by which the initially interviewed brand managers helped in recruiting other brand managers working at the same global brand to participate in the study.

3.7.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria allow the researcher to set the conditions for who may and may not participate in a research study, according to the requirements that align with their study's aims and objectives (Hornberger and Rangu, 2020). The criteria can either be broad, specific or narrow and consider language and demographic facets (Hornberger and Rangu, 2020). Inclusion criteria are key features of the target population, including demographic and geographical traits, that allow the researcher to answer the study questions (Patino and Ferreira, 2018). For this research study, the inclusion criteria limited the sample to brand managers working at a particular global brand that specialises in oral care products. Exclusion criteria, in contrast, consider potential study participants who meet the inclusion criteria but have additional traits that could interfere with the success of the study or result in an unfavourable outcome (Patino and Ferreira, 2018). The exclusion criteria for this study

included all other managers and employees working in this particular organisation and other global brands that specialise in oral care products.

3.7.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis is a crucial part of research, as it allows the researcher to summarise the collected data by interpreting it to determine patterns or trends using logical or analytical reasoning (Taherdoost, 2022). In quantitative research, the analysis is conducted by describing and exploring the data through graphs and charts (Taherdoost, 2022). The data collected needs to be prepared before being used in the data analysis process; data coding, data entry, missing values and data transformation are performed (Joshi and Patel, 2021; Taherdoost, 2022). The first step, data coding, entails converting data into numerical values; data entry, as the second step, requires the numerical values to be input into spreadsheets; third, missing values are removed, such as questions not answered by participants; and lastly, data transformation happens where the structure of the data may be converted to make it more useful before comparing or combining it (Joshi and Patel, 2021; Taherdoost, 2022).

In qualitative research, thematic analysis is used to identify, analyse, organise, describe and report themes existing in a data set (Nowell, et al., 2017). A rigorous thematic analysis can produce trustworthy and insightful findings (Nowell, *et al.*, 2017). Some of the advantages of thematic analysis is its highly flexible approach that provides a rich, detailed and complex account of data, as it summarises key features of a large data set (Nowell, et al., 2017). The present study used thematic analysis according to the six steps outlined by Dawadi (2020) to analyse and draw conclusions about the data:

- **Step 1:** Familiarisation with data by reading and rereading transcripts. This first stage helps the researcher in identifying possible emergence of themes from the interview questions.
- **Step 2:** Generating initial codes through highlighting sections of the data.
- **Step 3:** Searching for themes that capture the broad topics, patterns and relationships in the data.
- **Step 4:** Reviewing themes by ensuring that they accurately represent the data; comparing themes.
- **Step 5:** Defining and naming themes, which helps in understanding the data analysis.
- **Step 6:** Writing a report.

An important consideration when analysing qualitative data is the trustworthiness of the data (Stahl and King, 2020). For this study, Guba's model of trustworthiness was applied, which specifies (1) credibility, (2) transferability, (3) dependability and (4) confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Stahl and King, 2020). Guba's model defines *credibility* as a measure that assesses the relationship between the respondents' views and the researcher's representation of them by using techniques such as prolonged observation or data collection (Nowell, et al., 2017). This criterion states that the researcher should present results that are true and believable, assisted by data collection techniques such as interview notes after engaging with participants (Forero, et al., 2018). *Transferability* in qualitative research refers to the generalisability of the inquiry (Nowell, et al., 2017). The researcher may identify patterns (of cross-cultural communication relationships, in the case of this study) and then put them into context (Forero, et al., 2018). To achieve *dependability*, the researcher ensures that the research process is logical, traceable and clearly documented (Nowell, et al., 2017). To do so, the researcher presents the data results to be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers (Forero, et al., 2018). Lastly, *confirmability* is concerned with ensuring that the researcher's findings are clearly derived from the data by demonstrating how and why decisions were made, conclusions reached, and interpretations presented (Nowell, et al., 2017). It is with this in mind that the present researcher developed a detailed track record of the data collection process and measured the research coding accurately (Forero, et al., 2018).

3.8 Ethical Clearance

The researcher was required to follow ethical guidelines provided by the IIE MSA in its Research and Postgraduate Studies Policy. Once ethical clearance was granted (as seen in Annexure D, Ethical Clearance Letter), the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with eight brand managers working at a global brand that specialises in oral care products. Before conducting interviews, a researcher should inform the participants that they will be afforded autonomy and respect and that their participation is voluntary, as this is a fundamental aspect of the research process (Gill and Baillie, 2018). Before conducting any interview, the researcher should obtain written consent from the participant, and both should sign copies of the consent form (whether the interview is face-to-face or through a digital mode of communication) (Gill and Baillie, 2018). As per IIE MSA ethical guidelines, the researcher provided the participants with a consent form (as seen in Annexure B), informing the participants of their rights previously mentioned, and explaining that they were allowed to withdraw or refrain from participating at any time without providing any explanation.

Participants should be allowed to read an information sheet that outlines the research study, ask questions, understand how their data will be stored and used, and know of their freedom to withdraw at any point without reprisal (Gill and Baillie, 2018), which the informed consent form (Annexure B) outlined to them. Furthermore, Annexure B provided participants with both the researcher's and the supervisor's contact details, should they have wished to ask any questions about the study.

Lastly, for transcribing purposes, prior to the interviews, participants were asked for written consent for both audio and video recording for the virtual interviews (Annexure B). Furthermore, the form informed them of their confidentiality and detailed that the recordings would be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer, and only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who would sign a confidentiality agreement) would have access to these recordings.

A gatekeeper's letter (see Annexure C) was shared with the global brand to ask for permission for the researcher to interview potential participants, in this case, eight to twelve brand managers. The gatekeeper's letter allows the company to choose either anonymity or to be mentioned in the research report. Lastly, there were no major ethical risks identified, as the researcher neither interviewed vulnerable groups nor covered sensitive topics while conducting the interviews. The results of this study have been shared with those interested with the research, and as stated in Annexure B, participants may ask the researcher to send them a summary of the research if they are interested in the outcome of the study, or they may access the research report made available in IIE Libraries and on the IIE Repository.

3.9 Reflexivity Statement

Reflexivity is the act of examining one's own assumptions, beliefs, and judgement systems, and thinking carefully and critically about how these influence the qualitative research process which centres on participants' personal and unique lived experience (Jamieson, et al., 2023). Hence, qualitative researchers are encouraged to continuously and collaboratively engage in multifaceted practices that self-consciously critique, appraise, and evaluate how their subjectivity and context influence the research processes thus forming an important part of training within this paradigm (Jamieson, et al., 2023; Olmos-Vega, et al., 2023)

As the primary researcher, I acknowledge that my personal background, values, and experiences may have shaped the way I approached this study. As a social scientist who has lived and studied in different cultures, including some of the ones the participants came from,

and now studying inter-cultural communication, I strongly believe in effective inter-cultural communication. While this perspective could have influenced my choice of research topic and my interpretation of participants' responses, this similarity in cultures only helped to build trust, while remaining transparent throughout the research process. In addition, I revisited transcripts multiple times to ensure that my interpretations remained grounded in participants' own words rather than my own preconceptions.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter explains that the research is grounded in an interpretivist epistemological stance, focusing on how knowledge about cross-cultural communication barriers is constructed and understood from participants' perspectives. With respect to research approach (the second layer), the research applied the deductive approach by focusing on the CAT theory and the cross-cultural communication barriers faced while digitally advertising a global brand that specialises in oral care products. This is because a deductive approach is recommended in the case that a theory has already been developed, versus the inductive approach, which contributes to the emergence of new theories, or the abductive approach, which helps the researcher explain specific incomplete observations. Regarding the methodological choice, only qualitative method was used in gathering data for the research. The cross-sectional mode of data collection was implemented as interviews were conducted at one point in time (over February and March 2025). The rich and in-depth data collected was subjected to thematic analysis, through which various themes were identified to relate to the research questions and objectives.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the research onion, which was used to structure this study's research design and methodology, and a detailed description of the six layers was given. This chapter presents the interpreted findings of the data collected from the semi-structured interviews. The main purpose of this study was to explore whether a lack of cross-cultural communication training programmes could lead to unsuccessful digital advertising campaigns for global brands. To fulfil this objective, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted among a sample of brand managers recruited using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling, with data collection concluding at the saturation point. This section gives a brief overview of the demographics of the eight interview participants. After that, the thematic analysis is discussed by detailing themes and sub-themes generated from the interviews.

4.2 Demographics

The demographics of the eight participants for this study are presented in Table 4.1 below. The table lists their job titles, responsibilities and regions for which they are responsible. As seen in the table, most of the participants have exposure to working with people from different African countries with diverse cultures and languages when designing various digital content for the brand's consumers. The following sections will look in detail at how the participants in different managerial positions, with different organisational tasks and assigned different African markets, engage with their consumers with regard to crosscultural communication barriers.

Table 4.1: Demographics of eight brand managers interviewed for the study

Participant	Title	Region	Responsibilities
Participant 1	Brand manager	Sub-Saharan Africa	All brand-building activities such as bringing new products to the market and relaunching existing products
Participant 2	Junior programme manager	Eastern Africa	Designing and coordinating educational materials on oral health
Participant 3	Assistant brand manager	Central Africa	Working on brands established by the company; reinventing products in different markets
Participant 4	Junior brand manager	East and West Africa	Ensuring that the product gets from one point to another, where it is manufactured into the different markets for which it is destined
Participant 5	Junior brand manager	East and West Africa	Brand strategy for the brand, planning for any activations and new launches
Participant 6	Assistant brand manager	East and West Africa	Managing the digital part of the brand
Participant 7	Brand manager	East and West Africa	Developing media strategies to grow the brands by driving brand equity and understanding people's needs and how the band can cater to those needs through its products
Participant 8	Junior brand manager	East and West Africa	Managing a few brands with regard to what the brand would look like from a consumer's point of view

Source: Researcher's own construction

4.3 Thematic Analysis

This section gives a detailed discussion of the findings from the data analysis, based on the identified themes and sub-themes, which are linked to the theoretical background detailed in Chapter 2 and the research questions introduced in Chapter 1 (see section 1.4). The figure below shows the themes and sub-themes that were identified through the thematic analysis of the interview data and how they relate to the research questions, which also briefly lists the relevant evidence for each sub-theme.

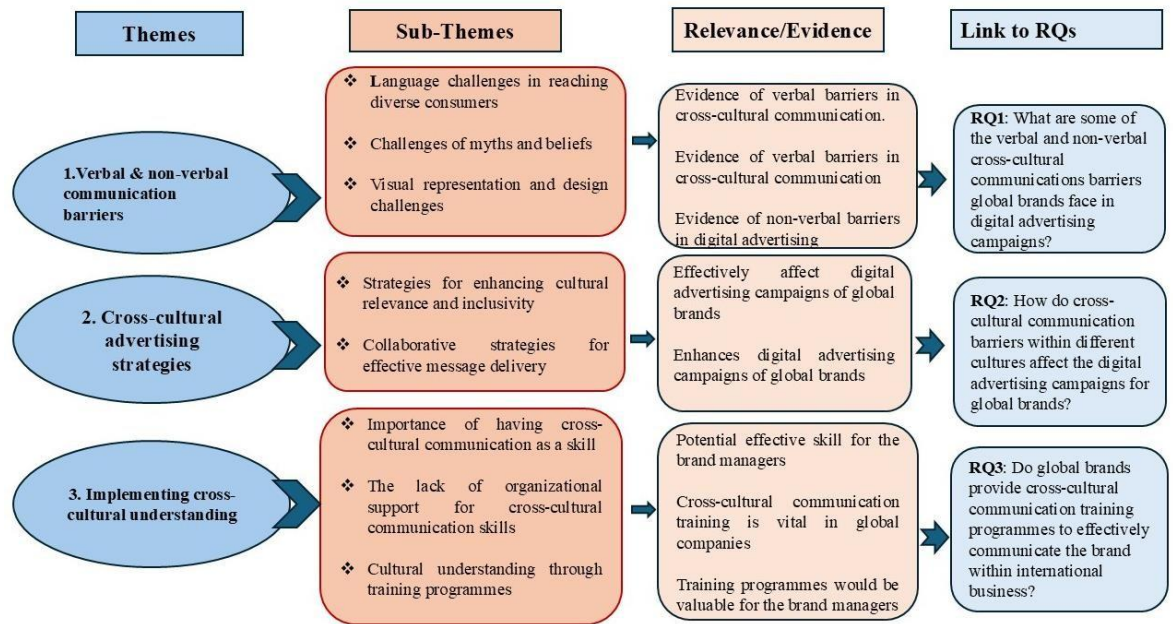


Figure 4.1: Identified themes and sub-themes and their relevance

Source: Researcher's own construction

4.3.1 Theme 1: Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication Barriers

The first theme that emerged was verbal and non-verbal communication barriers. It answers SRQ1: *What are some of the verbal and non-verbal cross-cultural communication barriers global brands face in digital advertising campaigns?* The three sub-themes identified under this theme are discussed below.

4.3.1.1 Sub-Theme 1: Language Challenges in Reaching Diverse Consumers

The first sub-theme was language challenges in reaching diverse consumers. All the participants identified language as a verbal cross-cultural communication barrier in the African market, including the difference in spelling of written texts and pronunciation of certain words despite regions with similar languages.

Participant 3 stated:

“So, I think the main, the obvious one comes down to language barrier ... To really understand what one another's saying, so I'd probably say that language barrier and more from an understanding of the language than anything else.”

Participant 1 explained that the company has operations in roughly forty countries across the African continent, and across these countries, there are multiple languages and cultures. In addition, even in a single country, there are different ethnicities and religions, and the people speak up to twenty languages. Participant 1 stated:

“It’s incredibly diverse, and trying to find messaging and communication approach that reaches as many people as possible in a language and in a way of speaking that is relevant to as many people as possible can be quite challenging ... So we are not on the ground often times to understand the local nuances about how people speak, what are people’s perceptions about certain issues or topics, or saying things in a certain way ... so it’s very important to try and understand those nuances before you put advertising material out into the public.”

Participant 1 furthermore stated:

“Yeah, I mean, you know, it’s a similar thing to even just video advertising or it’s making sure we’re getting for example our message translated to a local language. Google can translate for you technically, but it never catches those nuances. It’s not how people speak when they speak to each other, day-to-day. Can you use slang or colloquial language? And if you do, you need to make sure you’re using it in the right way. Otherwise, you know you risk—you run the risk of being irrelevant and you know, alienating your brand from potential consumers. And seeming like you’re trying too hard and being—and then it ends up coming across as insincere but, but you always want the message whether text or print to be genuine, so it resonates with people”.

This was similar to Participant 7’s view on having different languages between Southern Africa and Eastern Africa, stating that:

“I think one of the key challenges ... because obviously with the type of product or the type of work that I do right, which is in marketing, you need to be able to connect people in their language that they understand, so that create that bond, right? And for someone who is based in South Africa and, for example, working with the Kenyan market, yes, you might get the Swahili translation, right? But those nuances, local nuances that, as if I was a brand manager in Kenya, I would have done certain things differently, right? So I

think that is one of the areas that I find to try get. That local nuances as you work on creatives and how to communicate with people.”

In addition, both Participant 2 and Participant 8 explained how a French-speaking or Portuguese-speaking African consumer in West Africa and Mozambique may differ from European French- and Portuguese-speaking consumers, on account of the difference in spelling of written texts and pronunciation of certain words. Participant 2 furthermore stated how difficult it would be to standardise advertising, given that the choice of language would be difficult, hence the need to have something that can be easily understood by everyone and also translated in most of the languages. They stated:

“Maybe it’s another point ... language that would also be a barrier because East and West Africa, there’s Swahili-speaking people, French, Portuguese, and that might not be like ... the European, French, Portuguese. [Each] country obviously has their own dialects, for lack of a better word, that they speak in, so we would need was a local translator for that.”

Participant 8 stated:

“Verbal ... I think that’s a big one language I think because it’s such a global company there are different languages ... I will take Portuguese, for example. Portuguese is different in different places, like Brazilian Portuguese versus Mozambique Portuguese. So there’s a few things that maybe on the product packaging or even on some of the stuff that comes from our division team, we then have to go and double-check that all of the languages are 100% correct, but it could clash because we share it with so many different countries ... But yeah, I think the language is definitely a big one.”

In addition to this, Participant 6 mentioned business language as a barrier when communicating and engaging with consumers through promotional campaigns or advertisements, as there is a challenge of conveying the message:

“I think sometimes it’s a bit, like, hard for people to understand the message that we are trying to put across, right. I think in terms of, like, business language, it makes sense what we’re saying. But when it comes to consumers, they aren’t really, like, sure as to, like, what the message is that we are communicating. And, I think another challenge ... is that message—

something that's important to people that actually, like, take note of, right? For example, let's say you are speaking of a certain kind of benefit that the toothpaste has, and then you kind of, you know, you communicate to certain kind of message, and you think it's a big idea and everything and it would work. But then when it's kind of, like, a total fail because it's not something that people are actually like looking for, it's not something that you are interested in. So I think it's kind of, like, one of like the challenges because strategy wise in the business, it makes sense for us to push out that kind of message."

From the above quotes, language emerged as one of the main cross-cultural communication barriers when advertising digitally to diverse consumers. Participants identified the difference of dialects in languages such as Portuguese and French spoken in different regional markets and the importance of including cultural nuances when translating materials.

4.3.1.2 Sub-Theme 2: Challenges of Myths and Beliefs

The second sub-theme highlighted was the challenges of myths and beliefs. Participant 2, who designs educational materials around oral health, stated that designing these materials in some African markets can be challenging because of myths and beliefs around fluoride, which is essential in preventing cavities. The participant furthermore stated that consumers in this region engaged with the brand on social media platforms, relaying their concerns of using fluoride for children's toothpastes. Participant 2 stated:

"I think some of the barriers would be just, I guess, education around oral health care. You know, there is a lot of, especially in our African countries, ... surrounding our health. I think one of the main ones would be around fluoride, right. We see a lot of people, especially on our social media pages, messaging us, telling us that, you know, fluoride is dangerous especially to kids ... so, I think the main barrier would be just busting these myths".

In addition, Participant 2 added that another myth or superstition was that of "plastic teeth", which they believe them to be bad luck but in oral health relates to unhealthy gums. Instead of using the brand's oral care products, some of the local residents resort to traditional practices. However, these traditional practices lead to more harm. Therefore, Participant 2 creates educational materials offering knowledge about the brand's oral health products.

“Some of the other things would be: I recently travelled to Tanzania and something called plastic teeth. And it’s basically, like in infants especially, there’ll just be, like, these white spots on their gums, but it’s just really like a blister ... [They] believe that it’s kind of like a superstition, that if your kid has that, that’s bad luck for your family or future. So, they take them to witch doctor. And they take a small piece of charcoal ... and they rub it on the gums of infants, which damage their gums. So, you know, we try to step in to say like, these are just myths. These are not medical facts.”

Participant 3 also gave an example of a toothbrush advertisement in Kazakhstan that compared an old toothbrush to mouldy bread. The advert failed because bread is viewed as a holy meal to the local citizens. The participant stated:

“I mean, I think of some way, like Kazakhstan for example. So, we were trying to do a, like, a change-of-toothbrush-every-three-months kind of project and what the idea was on the communication in store was to use, like, a mouldy piece of bread, to be like, ‘you wouldn’t eat this, so why would you brush your teeth with,’ like, ‘a really bad toothbrush?’ kind of thing, but culturally, in Kazakhstan, bread is very, like, kind of like a holy product to them. So, to use something like that was semi-offensive to the people not understanding like small cultural cues like that, understanding what’s important to different cultures. You know, sometimes it can hamper some of your plan.”

From the above quotes, it is evident that traditional beliefs, myths and superstitions in different cultures can affect how well consumers engage with brand advertisements, which demonstrates the importance of thoroughly understanding diverse consumers.

4.3.1.3 Sub-Theme 3: Visual Representation and Design Challenges

The third sub-theme that was highlighted was visual representation and design challenges. Three participants mentioned the challenge of finding the right skin tone that represents African consumers. In addition to skin tone, participants also mentioned the challenge of finding the right physical appearance, such as perfect teeth, for digital advertising of oral health and the brand’s oral care products, or the right facial features to fit the right market. Participant 7 stated:

“But I think also the type of talent that you choose, right, because sometimes people would then feel like you leaning more towards a specific, I don’t know, skin tone or tribe or anything like that so ... from our perspective, because we do with oral care and has to do with teeth and we know that, you know, we don’t always have perfect teeth, right? So how can you bring those different things to the forefront to say when you speak around healthy mouth, healthy teeth? When necessarily been fairly wide and all straight teeth ... So those are some of the things that in my journey that I’ve learned that you need to incorporate that to make people feel like they can resonate with the brand and that it also speaks to them in their differences.”

Participant 8 agreed, claiming that:

“We’re in South Africa, but we’re working with over how many African countries, and each one is different, right? So, you can already see facial features are different from a Kenyan person to potentially Ethiopian to West Africa ... so it’s just that representation and how do you strategise?”

This aligns with the views of Participant 2, who stated:

“Maybe just in terms of, like, skin colour, right? We would obviously get global guidelines, but we would want to localise that like our global guidelines. I mean we are very inclusive as a company. Most of the standardised stuff you’d see, it would be like a white skin tone, right? Whereas in Africa we know majority of the people are not white, we’re black, and there’s also talent. But I think it’s a barrier that we’ve overcome as a well because we do have like some freedom to localise our adverts.”

Another visual blunder that was identified by Participant 5 is the misrepresentation in a video advertisement from this particular oral care brand that portrayed a lady in a rural area fetching water from a river, which the locals found to be offensive, as the global brand insinuated that not everyone has access to clean water. Participant 5 stated:

“There was a video where we had spoken about the water in one of the countries, I think [it] was Kenya. So, we were we were talking about, you know, because it’s not clean all over and some people use, especially in the rural areas, river water. So, I think we were just showing a lady using that

and they were talking about, you know, that not everyone has access to clean water. And I think they found it very offensive. Yeah. So, they were like, 'No, what do you mean? We do have.' And yeah, so, you know, some things can just get misinterpreted."

This echoed Participant 1's statement of the importance of mindfulness when it comes to video advertising by understanding social contexts of different societies and religions:

"So, it's very important to be mindful of that again to understand the social context of certain subjects, certain topics and how you phrase things. This comes up, you know, a lot if you are talking about women or you talk about children, or something related to religion. Different societies have different positions on that, and we try to be very mindful of that."

The challenge of design was identified when two other participants also stated the use of colour on packaging as a challenge experienced in this global brand. An example given was the misinterpretation of the colours used on the brand's product. Participant 4 stated:

"But one of the things we could have never predicted was this product had different colours on it. The colours simplified the different benefits in a way without necessarily calling it out ... But in our Eastern African markets, it was interpreted as us promoting LGBTQI. ... We're asked to pull this product off shelf because we as a company were representing or ... – what's this? – promot[ing] LGBTQ. So, I think that was a big miscommunication, nonverbal."

Participant 5 stated:

"It's like very colourful on the packaging ... But people in the different countries were thinking different things. Some of the things is a bit taboo, like so when they see all those colours then they were like we celebrating – what do you call this? – pride, and they didn't ... so you know, just assuring them that it's just, the colours stand for basically what they stood for was the different benefits ... maybe freshen your breath or brighten your teeth. There's a lot of things, so it's just, that's why there were all the colours."

Participant 1 and Participant 6 noted that, given the overwhelming amount of advertising consumers encounter daily, a brand must differentiate itself through the way it communicates with its audience and the duration a campaign remains active before launching the next one.

Participant 1 stated:

“Because I think, for a big part, consumers are flooded with advertising material and advertising and that sort of content. Everywhere you look there’s an advert. Someone trying to scream for your attention ... How do we break through that, and how do we—? How does our message stick in the minds of consumers? How are we remembered? And so it’s this big, lofty question of ‘How do I stand out in a sea of advertising and how is my brand remembered in your mind?’”

Participant 6 stated:

“I think people have become like very, like, picky. They kind of know, like, the kind of things that they are looking for. I think as much as strategy wise, it makes sense to send out the same message, like, for a particular period of time. ‘OK. Yeah, we heard what she said. Like what’s next? Can you please move on?’ So it’s a bit of a challenge when it comes to that ... Like, how long does it take for people to get tired of a certain kind of message or promotional campaign?”

The above quotes show the importance of having the right representation, where consumers see themselves portrayed in advertisements. In addition, the section noted how symbols and colours on the packaging of a brand’s product can be interpreted differently between cultures.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Cross-Cultural Advertising Strategies

The second theme identified was cross-cultural advertising strategies, which answers RQ2: *How do cross-cultural communication barriers in different cultures affect the digital advertising campaigns of global brands?* The two sub-themes under this theme are explained below.

4.3.2.1 Sub-Theme 1: Strategies for Enhancing Cultural Relevance and Inclusivity

The first sub-theme identified was strategies for enhancing cultural relevance and inclusivity. Participant 8 stated that localising the company’s advertisements has brought in more

representation, which has resulted in consumers' engaging more with the brand, as they see themselves represented. Participant 8 claimed:

“So positively, it's actually been really good. The more that we started localising, the more that we brought in representation. And I think a big one coming out now is using people darker of colour ... They [the target audience] are actually feeling closer to the brand, and you know, like, ‘Oh, that's me’ or they can see themselves in the brand. Yeah. I think since we've really started localising everything, people have been loving the brand more and they really want to see themselves in it more. They are not scared to tell you, ‘We don't like it’, and they are not scared to say, ‘That's not,’ you know, ‘our people’ kind of thing.”

Participant 2 added:

“We want something that can be easily understood by everyone and also translated in most of the languages as well. So I think maybe the translator is just the main thing.”

This was further supported by Participant 5, who stated that localising the company's advertisements has fostered an environment in which the brand has become more sensitive by including people of different countries, with the accents of any speakers or voiceovers based on where the advertisement is displayed, thus encouraging inclusivity and representation. Participant 5 stated:

“I think, going forward, we became more, like, sensitive to what we would say ... You can't be using someone that looks like a South African for Kenyan ... or someone that looks like an American. You have to use talent that looks like the people of the different countries. So we also do that. We choose talent based on where the ad is going.”

From the above quotes, it is clear that working and collaborating with local teams encourages inclusivity and sensitivity in the advertisements a brand puts out to diverse consumers. This further eliminates misrepresentation of or misinformation about what the brand intends to put out.

4.3.2.2 Sub-Theme 2: Collaborative Strategies for Effective Message Delivery

The second sub-theme identified was the collaborative strategies for effective message delivery. To avoid the identified cross-cultural communication barriers cited by the participants, the majority of the participants stated the importance of partnering with local agencies as a strategy to ensure that consumers in different markets understand the designed digital advertisements.

Participant 8 stated:

“So you have to obviously have a close relationship with the agency. So, agency really needs to understand our, what, our localisation and what we’re trying to do, and they need to understand the countries we’re going into. Obviously we can’t always win. I mean, if it’s something very generic, then it’s fine. But if it’s—I think we’re trying to start be—being a little bit more specific for region because also, language, like also speaking that way.”

Participant 1 stated:

“I think it’s really about partnering with the right people. And getting that support where you have a knowledge gap. And we try to work with agencies who have representation across these countries where we then advertise in, and these local agencies help us with insights into just how locals and how society is in those countries, and then that’s—that speaks into the translations and how we rework our messaging to make sure that it’s relevant and it’s not offensive to anyone ... So they can translate that knowledge, that internal brand knowledge and company knowledge and translate it into how an advert comes to life. So, it’s important to have the local team with us on the ground or in the recording sessions ... And most importantly, that it resonates, and it actually means something to people. They mustn’t just understand the message, they must feel something when they receive the message.”

From the above quotes, it is evident how important it is for brands to collaborate and partner with local agencies in translating advertising material effectively for consumers from diverse groups.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Implementing Cross-Cultural Understanding

The third theme identified was implementing cross-cultural understanding, which answers SRQ3: *Do global brands provide cross-cultural communication training programmes to effectively communicate the brand in international business contexts?* The three sub-themes identified under this theme are discussed below.

4.3.3.1 Sub-Theme 1: Importance of Having Cross-Cultural Communication as a Skill

The importance of having cross-cultural communication as a skill was the first sub-theme that was identified. All of the participants indicated that cross-cultural communication is an essential skill in a globalised digital world by acknowledging how different and diverse the markets in which they advertise is. Participant 1 gave an example of how it would help a brand deliver relevant, meaningful and personalised content for consumers:

“Yes, yes, absolutely, absolutely. Gone are the days where we could shoot an advert in America, for example, and just put it on TV everywhere. Consumers now, and the way they consume media, really want to feel like a brand is speaking to them personally, and ‘it must be relevant for me. Otherwise, I can very easily tune out and block you out, so it needs to speak like I speak. A brand must speak the way I speak, the brand must know my story and know my needs. And be able to address those and speak to me in in that particular way’ ... Into the brands and actually begin to love the brand. So yeah, it’s in this day and age in 2025, there’s nothing more important than delivering relevant, meaningful, personalised experiences for consumers.”

Participant 2 stated:

“Definitely, I think. Like I said, no two countries are the same ... I think Africa, we very people-centric and also literal in the way that we understand things, the way we do things, so the same thing that works in America is not going to work here ... So I think it’s really important that we have the skill to recognise what are some of these cultural differences that we see across our markets.”

Participant 3 stated how impactful having such a skill is in understanding cultural nuances for different markets:

“I do think so. I think understanding cultures makes a massive difference when it comes to making an impact. I think, especially if you’re going to be doing it on a large scale, the bigger the scale, the more important it becomes, because if I’m just going to be targeting, for example, the people of Kenya, and I’m going to isolate my messaging to Nairobi, I probably don’t need to understand too much of the culture, besides those people in Nairobi, whereas if I’m going to be expanding that to the whole of East Africa, the whole of Africa, understanding the cultural nuances and kind of things to try and avoid I think is super important.”

Participant 5 also identified it as a successful skill to have when advertising either in a single market or different market, by stating:

“Yes, I do. I think it is an essential skill. To be successful, because if you don’t have it or you don’t learn it or adapt to it. You know, for example, if we didn’t learn from what happened in the past and we just carried on doing our the way we did, people wouldn’t like that, and [they] probably stopped using our products ... I think it’s important not only if you’re doing— like, if you’re working doing advertising for different countries, but even if we’re doing advertising within South Africa alone, I think it’s important because it’s made up of so many different people.”

Adding to this, Participant 6 stated:

“Definitely. I think so because you know, I think the way that people are, right now, right? They like being independent. They don’t ever want to be, like, categorised with other countries or whatever. Everyone is quite proud of, like, how they— the country is. Be proud of the things that they could do, so they want to be. They want things that are more, like, personalised. They want things, you know, that are directed to them because I think— ... For example, I’m South African. If you’re going to show me something from Kenya, I think the first thing is ‘OK, so what? Like, how does this resonate or relate to me?’ You know, so I think it’s very important to always, you know, consider those aspects.”

From the above quotes, it is clear how important cross-cultural communication is as a skill in digital advertising. It is with these skills that brands are able to successfully incorporate

cultural nuances and not have a standardised advertisement for culturally diverse consumers. This directly ties in with Hofstede's *individualism* cultural dimension in which case a certain culture wants to be treated individually other than grouped with other cultures.

4.3.3.2 Sub-Theme 2: The Lack of Organisational Support for Cross-Cultural Communication Skills

The second sub-theme identified was the lack of organisational support for cross-cultural communication skills. Most participants stated that the organisation conducts workshops on diversity, equity and inclusion. Unfortunately, it does not necessarily have formal training specifically on cross-cultural communication skills for brand managers.

Participant 2 stated:

"I don't want to say yes, but I also don't want to say no because there's no formal training, but we do have, like, diversity, equity and inclusion training right within the company. But that's more for kind of us within the company to recognise cultural differences between each other for ways of working. Yeah, I think, but I'm not too sure if this could be said for, like, our digital trainings or the way we execute our campaigns ... But when it comes to our consumers, not so much. Just because it's kind of, like, already ingrained in us."

Participant 3 agreed by stating:

"So, I wouldn't call it training. ... Something that we did about a year ago, we had these, like, they were called DE&I meeting. So diversity, equity inclusion, they were kind of like little coffee chats where we would have someone from different cultural backgrounds would be hosting and they would kind of give you a sense of what their culture's all about, the kind of foods they eat, the kind of people ... things that are, you know, really important to them as a culture ... So that was quite helpful, but it wasn't like a mandatory training. Not everyone had to attend. You kind of chose if you wanted to be there ... People research in the markets we operate in to really understand the needs of what the people are about. But again, that's more focused on understanding our consumer and what is it they want to buy and sometimes they can, but I wouldn't call it a training. I would call it more a research study that gets done, yeah."

Participant 1 stated:

“I don’t think we’ve received training in that way with that, with that sort of purpose, no”.

This agrees with that Participant 7 stated:

“So I wouldn’t say we specifically get trained from a marketing perspective to and then, looking at it, OK, how do you communicate to a Muslim community, how to communicate to a Christian community? ... I think it’s more holistic because in as much as you need to connect which with each and every one, you need to find a global or a universal thing that can connect almost everyone. So from our side it’s more what is that human truth that resonates with the brand but resonate with majority of the people?”

Participant 4 stated:

“We would meet up once a month with all the people within our markets and they would take us through their culture. What is the type of food? What are different languages? ... For me, that was a good thing because it helps us understand the market much better ... I mean they did it for like two to three months and then that was it.”

Participant 5 also noted employment equity training, but also mentioned training in grouping different consumers when marketing the company’s products:

“Because we’re marketing, the only training we get, for example, is like, you know, there’s a thing called segmentation marketing. So, you would put your different consumers into different groups based on similarities that they have, and then they obviously get different advertising based on their different groups because it’s tailored for them.”

From the above quotes, it is evident that although the eight brand managers did not receive cross-cultural communication training, there were different workshops that encouraged cross-cultural communication and understanding. This idea of grouping the consumers based on their similarities may achieve better marketing results as seen in Hofstede’s *collectivism* social dimension.

4.3.3.3 Sub-Theme 3: Cultural Understanding Through Training Programmes

The last interview question was a two-part question that asked participants whether a cross-cultural training programme would be valuable and what they would have wanted to be included in these training programmes should this particular oral care brand implement one for brand managers. All of the participants expressed that such a training would be valuable, and each gave suggestions for what should be included in the training programmes. For example, Participant 5 suggested having such training once a year and tailoring it to different market regions, while Participant 1 stated that such training should help in understanding elements of the culture of the markets to which the advertisement is tailored. Participant 4 and Participant 7 agreed by stating that such training should be tailored to helping brand managers to understand the cultures and languages of their different markets. Another view, brought up by Participant 2 and Participant 7, was that including the consumers' demographics in the training programme would help the brand understand their buying patterns. Although Participant 6 stated that having regular workshops and collaborating with local agencies have been helpful in understanding and sharing ideas and knowledge on how to strategise campaigns, this participant and Participant 8 also stated that training on how to engage with diverse consumers should also be provided at all levels of management.

Table 4.2 shows the responses from the participants on whether a formal cross-cultural training programme would be of value and the suggestions of what to be included. Since the responses were not explicit for both parts of the question, the part that answers whether the participants thought cross-cultural training programmes would be valuable is underlined within the response. The rest of the response answers the part of the question that asked for suggestions of what should be included in the training programmes.

Table 4.2: Participants' responses for need and composition of training programmes

SUB-THEME 3: CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING THROUGH TRAINING PROGRAMMES Question: Does your organisation provide cross-cultural communication training? Part two Sub-questions: If no, do you think such a training programme would be valuable? Please motivate your answer. In your opinion, what should be included in this training programme?	
Participant 1	“So I think you know it would need to be a programme that is relevant for, you know, some of the markets that I work on ... and some of those consumer groups that are important ... like East Africa has a large Indian population. So how do we think through that and understand the nuances of an African Indian who's been born and raised in India? They are not like a black African. But you know, because they carry a bit of both elements of that culture. So how do we speak to them? How do I understand them better? How do I communicate better to them? And understand their nuances. <u>Yeah. So I think it'll be very, very, very relevant. Very, very impactful.</u> I just think it would have to be tailored to the specific region or specific country.”
Participant 2	“<u>I think we should definitely take a look at the lack demographics of our consumers, right?</u> Like into your rural consumers and how [their] background [and their] upbringing and their habits could affect their buying patterns ... Think that would be one looking at demographics, looking at language barriers as well, and how certain things say would translate into another and how that can be received.”
Participant 3	“<u>I think understanding cultures makes a massive difference when it comes to making an impact. I think, especially if you're going to be doing it on a large scale ... understanding the cultural nuances and kind of things to try and avoid, I think is super important.</u> Understanding people on a global level, even more important, so I think because you know most brands operate in a way, OK, at least most big global brands will have people in different divisions of the world that will be tasked with doing those kinds of things ... I would say to the success of your brand, your campaign, et cetera.”
Participant 4	“<u>For me, it wouldn't be a one size fits all. Should say all brand managers should learn this course ... for us to understand the different cultures itself. Because once you understand the different cultures, you understand the different advertisements that you have, how you can make it relevant</u> ... But for me, that's where I'd look at it. If someone is handling South Africa, it's just sort of a training to understand the different cultures within South Africa, the different languages, you know, the different nuances across the different cultures and languages. For me, that probably would be training that would be relevant. That would help us to understand better or the things to consider as you're having an advertisement towards that audience.”

Participant 5	“I think. So maybe something I’d like to see is splitting up, so depending on where you the region you are. So, like, I don’t work for the South Africa division, but they can still get the training based on South Africa alone and then, you know, splitting it out into these other groups that you get. Like, we work with East and West Africa. So a little bit of southern and eastern, west, so, splitting it up. Saying, you know, for this group specifically, this is their stuff. This is their culture. This is how you would tailor your advertising to them ... <u>So, you wouldn’t just get that training when you join, but you’d maybe get it every once a year because things change constant.</u>”
Participant 6	“So I think maybe having, like, regular workshops where we can check with country teams ... updates on what’s trending <u>currently in the in the country</u> ... when we have to come up with strategies on how we are going to push out a campaign or adapt things based on how certain people in a certain country are, instead of just going with everything or one plan campaign for all the countries ... <u>It wouldn’t be a bad idea either to get, like, training because we are constantly changing</u> ... directors, new VPs, you know, Africa, and then it’s a whole, and it takes time for them to kind of like, understand the markets, the different countries and how the people are.”
Participant 7	“Yeah, I think for me again, just thinking about it from how the world approaches things right. We approach things based on globally what’s happened, right, because I think now the movement is more around understanding the LGBTQI community, what they’re about, how to be sensitive, how to embrace, et cetera. <u>But I think we’re starting to move away from understanding people from a cultural ... There are even deeper nuances that you can also go into that could help your brand resonate a bit more.</u> But again, I think it’s how do you find that balance of understanding everyone to their level but not being, not overloading people a lot with information. It becomes hard to then do your work ... <u>but I think for me, what I have missed or I’m starting to see is lacking now is we’re focusing a lot more from a global aspect that we’re starting to miss on the local nuances.</u>”
Participant 8	“<u>Maybe first phase is bringing it to people’s attention and also, like, ‘How do I— how do I convince or how do I tell the top trust us?’</u> Maybe it’s like a top-down, bottom-up kind of conversation to have. I don’t know what it looks like ... <u>I guess it’s also maybe a bit of a brand book or brand guidelines to be like,</u> ‘OK, cool when you’re in this country, especially as big as Africa, try find someone like this’ ...”

Source: Researcher’s own construction

From the above quotes, it may be concluded that all of the participants felt that implementing cross-cultural communication training programmes would be valuable for brand managers who work on strategising digital advertising for diverse consumers. These programmes would help them to be aware and sensitive to the nuances across different cultures and languages because, more often than not, global brands mainly focus on the global picture and slowly start to miss out on the local nuances. The participants felt that such training should not be a once-off training but probably given to employees when they join the brand and then once a year thereafter, while others felt that there should be regular workshops because things are constantly changing. It was also suggested that such training should also be provided at all levels of management, as each level engages with diverse consumers, and this can be implemented in a top-down or bottom-up approach and probably provided in a brand book or brand guidelines.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the demographic profile of the eight brand managers: two brand managers, two assistant brand managers and four junior brand managers, their job description and regional areas assigned to them. Chapter 4 further provided a detailed discussion of the themes and sub-themes that were generated from the raw interview data. The data and thematic analysis and interpretation from the semi-structured interviews resulted in three themes and eight sub-themes that answered the three research questions. Language emerged as a major cross-cultural barrier, not only with regard to understanding the different languages, dialects and slang, but also in interpreting or adapting the digital advertisements to capture local nuances. Through the CAT lens, by adjusting their communicative attitudes to the level of consumers, the consumers may appreciate the effort the brand is making in converging their digital advertising campaigns to the way consumers interact with each other, and consequently, this experience may strengthen a sense of community between brands and consumers. The issue of myths, cultural beliefs and superstitions and choice of colour challenged how different cultures viewed the different messages around this global brand's oral health products. By deeply engaging with and understanding the cultures the brand may succeed in enforcing Hofstede's *uncertainty avoidance* cultural dimension and build trust and customer loyalty further enforcing Hofstede's long-term orientation cultural dimensions.

The brand also need to understand how gender roles are portrayed within the different cultures, in line with Hofstede's *masculine* versus *feminine* cultural dimensions to develop appropriate digital advertising messages.

The participants stated that partnering with local teams helped them to identify knowledge gaps so that messages could be developed to resonate and actually mean something to the local people. They also reiterated that, owing to the existence of different cultures, digital advertisements developed in one country cannot be replicated across countries and continents. Therefore, having cross-cultural communication as a skill is important and essential in developing and delivering messages that are relevant, meaningful and personalised to consumers' experiences. With respect to understanding cross-cultural communication through training programmes, the participants reported that this global brand did not have formal cross-cultural training programmes, but they all felt that such programmes were important. They gave various suggestions for the composition of such training with regard to the approach, adaptation and even frequency of training, and more importantly, that such training should also be provided at all levels of management, as each level engages with diverse consumers.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the interview findings of the study are discussed. The chapter also provides recommendations for future studies and some conclusions based on the findings made. A total of eight interviews were conducted with two brand managers, four junior brand managers and two assistant brand managers. The researcher managed to reach saturation after eight interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to explore whether the lack of cross-cultural communication training programmes can lead to unsuccessful digital advertising campaigns of global brands. This was guided by answering the three secondary research questions introduced in Chapter 1. The below figure shows the research process and timeline for this study.

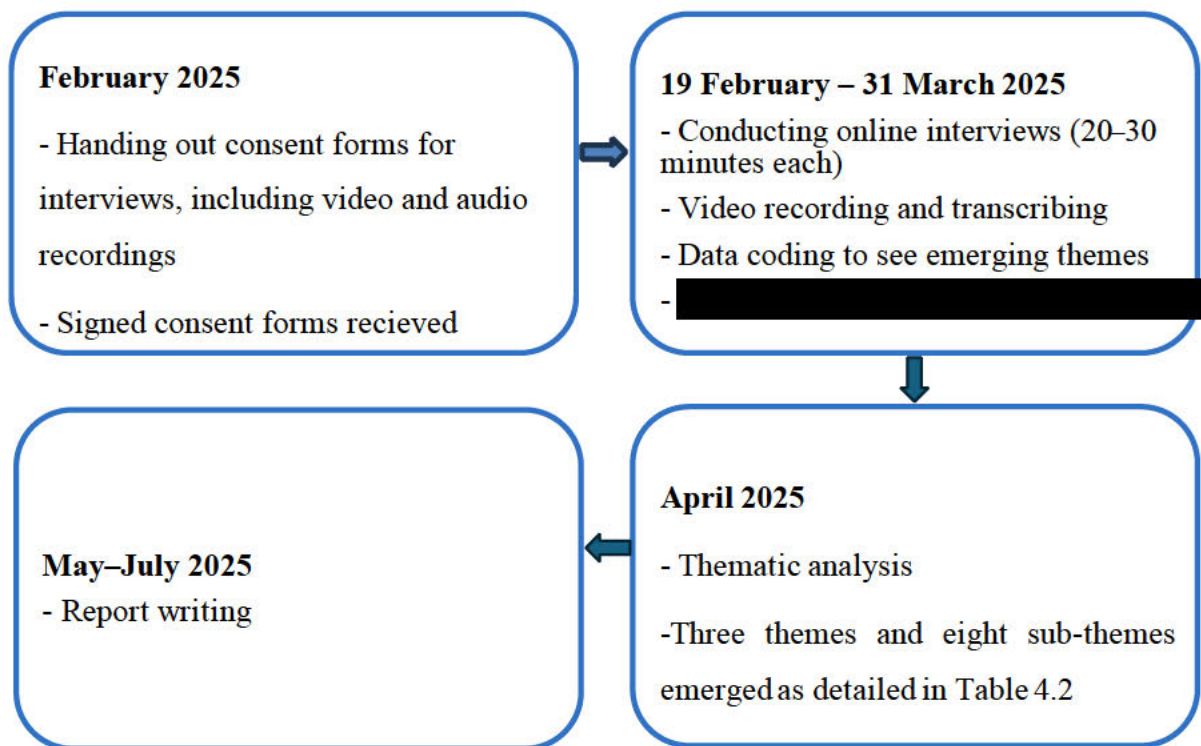


Figure 5.1: Research process

Source: Researcher's own construction

5.2 Findings

5.2.1 Theme 1: Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication Barriers

5.2.1.1 Sub-Theme 1: *Language Challenges in Reaching Diverse Consumers*

All eight of the participants cited language as a verbal cross-cultural communication barrier in their profession of digitally advertising the oral care products to diverse consumers on the African markets. This finding aligns with that of Abu-Arqoub and Alserhan (2019) regarding the way in which language, as the most common communication tool, continues to be a challenging factor in international business. Participants working with the East and West African markets identified the difference of using English and Swahili for East African consumers and French for West African consumers. Different participants gave the example of how a French- or Portuguese-speaking African consumer in West Africa and Mozambique, respectively, may differ to European French- and Portuguese-speaking consumers, because of the differences in spelling of written texts and pronunciation of certain words. This furthermore corresponds to Seeger and Gustafsson's (2021) statement that language barriers can be noted in both different and similar cultures, given the context of different vocabulary, slang and dialects. In addition, two participants stated the importance of being mindful when using slang and colloquial language in their advertisements or even using digital tools to translate language for different cultural groups, as they do not always capture cultural nuances. Furthermore, it echoes the findings of Karimova's (2025) study that, although digital tools have offered solutions that have enabled content translation into multiple languages, considering cultural nuances is still crucial, as such nuances may be difficult to translate across languages. Therefore, it is through localisation that allows content adaptation to cultural norms and linguistic preferences tailored to specific and diverse audiences.

Participant 6 also mentioned the use of business language in promotional campaigns as a communication barrier – the challenge of getting the message across. As argued by Aririguzoh (2022), in a two-way communication process, the sender should communicate a message by using a language that the receiver understands. This corresponds to Giles, et al.'s (1991) study, that from the CAT lens, consumers may appreciate the effort of brands in converging their social media communications to the way consumers interact with each other, and consequently, this experience may strengthen a sense of community

between brands and consumers. Jeong and Kim (2023) concluded their study by recommending that brands use CAT strategies in their communications, such as adopting convergence strategies of informal communication to integrate casual dialogues with consumers, as these strategies reflect brand's effort of creating interpersonal understanding and communication competence with consumers. Therefore, the choice of language a global brand uses in digital advertising plays a significant role in shaping consumers' perceptions, memory, attitude and behaviour (Deng, et al., 2021).

5.2.1.2 Sub-Theme 2: Challenges of Myths and Beliefs

Under the second sub-theme, Participant 2 cited myths and beliefs as a barrier on account of cultural beliefs and myths that a certain country holds about fluoride, which is used in most oral care products of the brand in this study. The consumers in this country engage with the brand on social media platforms, relaying their concerns about using fluoride in children's toothpastes. Another myth is that of "plastic teeth", which relates to unhealthy gums, which are superstitiously believed to be bad luck, and instead of using the brand's oral care products, they resort to traditional practices that lead to more harm. Therefore, Participant 2 engaged in creating educational materials offering knowledge on the company's oral health products. A similar study by Foláyan, et al., (2025) on the Yoruba culture of West Africa, found that they are deeply rooted in spirituality with beliefs that mouths are a "gateway" to expressing one's inner character as it is used for speech, prayers, and blessings. Additionally, some Yoruba traditional songs associate spiritual clarity and respectability with bright, clean teeth and a well-cared-for mouth. In this culture, it is also believed that dazzling white teeth symbolize good health while healthy teeth symbolize spiritual balance, which encourages them to engage in regular oral health rituals (Foláyan, et al., 2025)

Participant 3 also gave an example of how an advertisement failed in Kazakhstan, where the advertisement compared brushing teeth with an old toothbrush to eating mouldy bread. This did not receive positive feedback, as the local citizens view bread as a holy meal. This sub-theme agrees with Rukmani's (2022) assertion that religious beliefs can shape the digital marketing campaigns of brands and that brands should focus on culture more. This is because consumers are more attracted to advertisements that depict cultural values, customs, norms and traditions that align with their own, which affects their product decisions and buying behaviour. In addition, this corresponds with the results of

a study conducted by Yusuf (2023), which stated that cultural factors such as language, societal norms and customs, values and beliefs should be considered by global brands when they are designing effective and influential marketing campaigns for global target markets. Considering the socioeconomic status of different societies can aid in understanding customer habits, while an awareness of the psychological aspects enables an understanding of people's perceptions, motivations, beliefs and attitudes towards products and services (Diamantopoulos, 2020).

5.2.1.3 Sub-Theme 3: Visual Representation and Design Challenges

Three participants referred to the challenge of finding models of the right skin tone to represent African consumers, which supports Langlois' (2019) statement that in today's cultural dynamics, representation has become important, especially when advertising products and services, as the target market wants to see themselves represented in brands' advertisements. This further supports the research conducted by Yusuf (2023), in which one respondent stated how he felt uncomfortable seeing an advertisement featuring people of a different race promoting hair products intended for people of his racial background, making the advertisement feel unauthentic to the respondent. In addition to skin tone, participants also cited the challenge of finding people with the "right" physical appearance, such as perfect teeth or the right facial features to fit the right market, to use in digital advertising for the oral health and the brand's oral care products. This further supports Kushwaha, et al.'s (2020) study which revealed that marketers have adopted face-to-face communication and included non-verbal audio and visual elements such as images and emojis that usually replace verbal or written language. Two participants gave an example of a brand's product that was misinterpreted by East African consumers, because the colours used on the package were interpreted as LGTIBQ+ and not the intended meaning of various facets of oral health. The participant mentioned that the company has since changed the packaging of the product. As the choice of colour, symbols and visual elements can have different meanings across cultures (Yusuf, 2023), this was seen in this particular region where there is a stigma around LGTIBQ+ identities within Sub-Sahara Africa (Muwanguzi, et al., 2023).

Another misrepresentation, identified by Participant 5, was a video advertisement featuring a lady in rural Kenya using water from the river, causing offense among the brand's consumers, who felt that the advert suggested that there was a lack of clean water

in the country. One participant stated the importance of being mindful in understanding social context in different cultures, which aligns with Sharma and Bumb's (2021) study on the significant influence of a country's culture on how gender roles are portrayed, in line with Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Two participants mentioned that consumers are constantly overloaded by advertisements, hence the importance of finding the best way to communicate with consumers and stand out as a brand. This is in line with Ruanguttamanun's (2023) statement that crafting advertising in the 21st-century digital era has become difficult on account of consumers' attention spans, which have grown increasingly shorter as they are extensively exposed to advertisements, becoming more exhausted with the overload of choices from the flood of content. Nonetheless, as suggested by Padhi (2016), communication is vital for global brands, as it allows them to effectively market and explain how their products and services differ from those of their competitors. Therefore, as concluded by Montagna (2023), it is important to understand how non-verbal communication in advertising can be interpreted differently across cultures.

5.2.2 Theme 2: Cross-Cultural Advertising Strategies

5.2.2.1 Sub-Theme 1: Strategies for Enhancing Cultural Relevance and Inclusivity

Under this second theme, the first sub-theme that emerged was strategies for enhancing cultural relevance and inclusivity. One participant stated that localising the brand's advertisements has brought in more representation, which has resulted in consumers' engaging more with the brand, as they see themselves represented. This was further supported by another participant who stated that being more inclusive had fostered an environment for collaboration, which aligns with Langlois' (2019) study on how global brands are taking the initiative to adhere to consumer requests of representing different races, people with disabilities, so-called plus-size models and members of the LGBTQ community to name a few. Participant 5 mentioned that the company had become more sensitive by including people of different countries, with the countries' accents based on where the advertisement is displayed. The responses align with Gokhale and Sharma's (2021) statement that cross-cultural sensitisation is becoming more important, thus the need for intercultural adaptability and communication competence.

This sub-theme also agrees with how cultural factors have an impact on consumer behaviour and customer loyalty, as they shape customers' perspective on a global brand (Dikčius, et al., 2023; Yusuf, 2023). In addition, as stated by Sahem (2023), to conduct cross-cultural marketing successfully, the marketers must have a thorough understanding of cultural dimensions and cultural rights and demonstrate cultural sensitivity in a global market. Therefore, there is a need to increase cultural diversity, conduct cultural sensitivity audits, increase strategies for enhancing cultural relevance and inclusivity, and conduct cross-cultural research among consumers (Dikčius, et al., 2023; Yusuf, 2023). The participants' responses show that this particular oral care global brand has identified and implemented strategies that have helped in enhancing cultural relevance and inclusivity by becoming more sensitive to different cultures in the African market. It is with cross-cultural understanding that one can develop successful localised advertising as an effective advertising strategy that reflects the cultural values and norms of its targeted audience (Retnowati, 2016).

5.2.2.2 Sub-Theme 2: Collaborative Strategies for Effective Message Delivery.

The second sub-theme highlights the importance of having collaborative strategies for effective message delivery, as the majority of participants stated that they collaborated with local agencies and translators. This aligns with Montagna's (2023) statement that brands hire translators and interpreters to ensure that the meaning of the brand's intended message is not lost in translation. Participant 1 stated that local agencies helped the brand to rework its messaging to make sure that it is relevant and not offensive to anyone and, most importantly, that it resonates with and means something to the consumers. This corresponds to Montagna's (2023) study which showed that it is important to develop a trusting target audience by maintaining a good brand image through crafting effective messages and culturally sensitive campaigns while ensuring that the company's intentions are effectively communicated and perceived. In addition, as stated by Lifintsev and Wellbrock (2019), cross-cultural communication aims to improve and facilitate the interaction between managers and customers representing different cultures. As Ratnasari (2018) stated, cross-cultural competence allows individuals to work and collaborate effectively with other individuals from different cultures. Therefore, for a global brand to effectively implement a multicultural marketing strategy, it will need to recognise that its target markets in diverse regions have diverse needs shaped by their own norms and

cultural environments (Sahem, 2023). This particular oral care brand has included partnership and collaboration with local teams and agencies, which shows the application of convergence as an adjustment type in communication accommodation theory, by which communicators try to decrease the differences on a linguistic and psychological level (Elhami, 2020).

5.2.3 Theme 3: Implementing Cross-Cultural Understanding

5.2.3.1 Sub-Theme 1: Importance of Having Cross-Cultural Communication as a Skill

All eight participants agreed that cross-cultural communication is an essential skill to have in a globalised digital world. Participant 1 emphasised the importance of personalising content designed for the consumer, as this would help a brand to deliver relevant, meaningful and personalised content for consumers. This was supported by Participant 7, who stated that one needs to connect with people at their level and in their language, and for the brand to echo what the consumers and their communities stand for. This makes it easier for consumers to identify the brand. Another participant pointed out that, if something works in the United States, for example, it may not work in the African market. Therefore, for the company to gain consumer loyalty or brand loyalty, it must take these differences into consideration. Another participant supported this by stating that if one does not have this skill, does not learn or adapt it (i.e. if the brand has not learnt from its past mistakes), then the consumers would stop using its products.

Therefore, effective cross-cultural communication skills can have a positive impact on a global brand by allowing it to engage with diverse target audiences and tailoring its advertising campaigns to specific cultures. However, if marketing campaigns fail to align with local cultures, the target market becomes less engaged with the brand (Montagna, 2023; Yusuf, 2023). As stated by Gokhale and Sharma (2021), having cultural awareness and intercultural competence is essential as these skills are frequently required in media and businesses. Based on the work of Jhaiyanuntana and Nomnian (2020), other strategies for effective cross-cultural communication that minimises conflicts in multicultural settings include sensitivity and mindfulness; skills of interacting with culturally diverse people and acquiring new cultural knowledge; skills of interpreting information in different cultures and relating them to one's own; and behavioural skills, which focus on adaptiveness to change and language proficiency. Another effective strategy is

conducting in-depth research on a country, so that a brand may understand cultural differences to aid them in cross-cultural advertising (Xian, 2023), which this brand has done by partnering with local agencies. Functioning successfully within different cultures, either domestically or internationally, can be challenging for managers, hence the importance of cross-cultural competence and the need to train employees and promote cultural adaptation (Padhi, 2016; Lifintsev and Wellbrock, 2019).

5.2.3.2 Sub-Theme 2: The Lack of Organizational Support for Cross-Cultural Communication Skills

Although all of the participants stated that cross-cultural communication is an essential skill in a globalised digital world, all stated that the company did not have training focused on cross-cultural communication skills specifically for brand managers. This supports Retnowati's (2016) finding that several global brands have failed to incorporate crosscultural communication training programmes to incorporate cultural sensitivity in their advertising campaigns. Although there is a lack of organisational support for cross-cultural communication skills, other strategies such as workshops were offered. The participants mentioned that they had attended workshops on diversity and inclusion, in which employees of different cultures engaged with one another, learnt more about other cultures and, through this, were able to understand their market better. This aligns with Abu-Arqoub and Alserhan's (2019) statement that various strategies exist for overcoming crosscommunication challenges and barriers, such as practicing cultural competence, cultural awareness and cultural intelligence.

5.2.3.3 Sub-Theme 3: Cultural Understanding Through Training Programmes

Given that the participants worked in different countries in East and West Africa, crosscultural training programmes would help in improving their understanding of the cultures in these regions and equip them with the skills needed when interacting or dealing with cross-cultural situations in both national and international contexts. This would build a positive attitude among brand managers towards appreciating cultural differences and understanding successful and acceptable behaviour in intercultural communication for their target markets (Enatto, 2024). In addition, as Sahadevan and Sumangala (2021) stated, cross-cultural training allows individuals to adjust to new cultural environments and become more sensitised to issues happening around them by learning more about

themselves and their world views. Based on some of the past mistakes mentioned by some participants, it is evident that there is a need for better cross-cultural awareness. Liu, et al.'s (2023) study suggests that providing cross-cultural training to employees is essential, as it would help to manage cultural conflicts and improve cultural sensitivity, which further helps in adapting to and understanding cultures in their target market and avoiding any future cross-cultural misunderstandings in digital advertising. Participants mentioned that they would have liked to see the company implement cross-cultural training programmes that would help them to understand the cultural elements of the different markets to which they advertise. This aligns with Enatto's (2024) explanation that some forms of cross-cultural training include language training and cultural sensitivity training.

One participant stated that including the consumers' demographics in the training programme would help the brand understand their buying patterns, which supports Diamantopoulos' (2020) assertion that knowing about the socioeconomic status of different societies can aid in understanding customer habits, while being informed about psychological aspects enables the understanding of people's perceptions, motivations, beliefs and attitudes towards products and services. Therefore, global brands must consider cultural factors such as language, societal norms and customs, values and beliefs when designing effective and influential marketing campaigns for global target markets, as argued by Yusuf (2023). It is with these training programmes that brand managers may develop cross-cultural understanding as a communicative approach through the stages of crosscultural knowledge, cross-cultural awareness, cross-cultural sensitivity and crosscompetence, as Ratnasari (2018) concluded.

5.3 Recommendations and Limitations

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on cross-cultural communication, the barriers faced in digital advertising and the importance of cross-cultural communication training. The themes and sub-themes identified from data from this study have provided evidence that verbal and non-verbal communication barriers are present in the digital advertising campaigns of this global brand specialising in oral care products. Some of the most noted cross-cultural communication barriers affecting the digital advertising campaigns were language, myths and beliefs, and visual representation and design challenges.

It was noted that, despite the participants' stating the importance of having cross-cultural communication as a skill, this global brand does not provide formal cross-cultural training programmes for its brand managers. However, it has established partnerships and collaborative strategies with local teams and agencies for effective message delivery in its digital advertising campaigns. However, it is recommended that this global brand consider developing and implementing formal cross-cultural training programmes in order to impart skills such as cross-cultural knowledge, cross-cultural awareness, cross-cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural competence to brand managers and other employees engaging in digital advertising. This study has also demonstrated that cultural differences may influence how consumers interpret marketing messages, and these differences may affect the success of digital advertising campaigns.

Based on the literature review and interviews conducted, the lack of cross-cultural communication training can result in miscommunication from failed digital advertising campaigns, which in turn may lead to consumer–brand conflicts, reduced effectiveness in service delivery and negative public engagement. It would be valuable to incorporate and make cross-cultural training programmes mandatory for new employees and offer continuous refresher learning programmes for leadership development at all employment levels. Such programmes should be tailored in a way that it includes all region-specific cultural dynamics of where the brand intends to engage with its consumers, while ensuring that the campaigns are not just translated but culturally adapted to local cultural nuances of both verbal and non-verbal communication styles. Global brands may hire cross-cultural communication trainers who facilitate content making and design creative cross-communication training programmes for leaders, brand managers and strategy teams after engaging with consumer insights from post-campaign analytics of any cultural miscommunication.

This study has a number of limitations: (1) although the study focused on a global brand, the data was only gathered from South Africa and a number of African countries; (2) the study also focused only one division, that is oral products; and (3) data was collected through online interviews owing to time and cost involved in travelling locally and internationally, and therefore the researcher could not adequately capture non-verbal communication cues such as body language. Hence, since the researcher used an interpretivist approach (focusing on deep meanings) and a small group of experts from just

the oral care industry, the results cannot be applied to all industries or large populations. Thus, statistical generalisability cannot be achieved.

Although the data from Africa represented several cultures and indeed provided insightful outcomes, it cannot be generalised globally because the collectivist African culture may differ somewhat from American, European or Asian cultures, for example. It is therefore recommended that this study be expanded to other continents. Similarly, it is recommended that future similar studies expand to other divisions such as health care, cosmetics and clothing, using the insights from this study as a starting point. To capture non-verbal communication cues such as body language, researchers residing in the different countries may collaborate in collecting such data and collating it in a final research report.

5.4 Conclusion

The themes and sub-themes identified in this study have provided evidence that verbal and non-verbal communication barriers are present in international business and specifically in digital advertising campaigns. In addition, this study on an oral care company shows that brands have implemented collaborative strategies to enhance effective digital advertising campaigns by addressing cultural nuances for specific markets. Despite the participants' stating the importance of having cross-cultural communication as a skill, the brand does not provide any training programmes that would be valuable in designing digital advertising to diverse consumers. Therefore, there is a need to incorporate cross-cultural communication training that will develop cross-cultural understanding, cross-cultural knowledge, cross-cultural awareness, cross-cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural competence in the brand.

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ANNEXURE A: QUALITATIVE MEASURING INSTRUMENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions for Brand Managers:

1. What is your current job title within the organisation and what is your main responsibility?
2. Based on your experience, what are some of the verbal barriers faced when digitally advertising oral care products to culturally diverse consumers?
3. What are some of the non-verbal barriers faced when digitally advertising oral care products to culturally diverse consumers?
4. How have these cross-cultural communication barriers affected global digital advertising for this particular global brand?
5. Considering the verbal and non-verbal barriers that you have identified; how do you ensure that these cross-cultural communication barriers are avoided when designing digital advertisements?
6. Do you think cross cultural communication is an essential skill in a globalised digital world?
Please motivate your answer
7. Does your organisation provide cross-cultural communication training?
 - a. If yes, what are the main factors included in the training programme?
 - i. In your opinion, what should be added to this training programme?
 - b. If no, do you think such a training programme would be valuable? Please motivate your answer.
 - i. In your opinion, what should be included in this training programme?

ANNEXURE B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM



Annexure H – PARTICIPANT OR RESPONDENT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants

To whom it may concern,

My name is Miriam Gitonga, a student at IIE MSA and I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Chante Botha. The purpose of the study is to explore to what extent the lack of cross-cultural communication training programs contributes to unsuccessful digital advertising campaigns, by focusing on a global brand specializing in oral care products.

I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.

What will I be doing if I participate in your study?

I would like to invite you to participate in this research as your participation is expected to contribute to the developing of an effective cross-cultural communication training for global brands. If you decide to participate in this research, there will be a total of eight open-ended questions in this indepth interview.

You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.

Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?

Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your feelings, opinions and experiences relating to crosscultural communication barriers faced while advertising global oral care products to culturally diverse consumers. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.

Detail the potential risks and how it will be managed by the researcher. Indicate how the ethical considerations will be applied in the context of the study.

Do I have to participate in the study?

- Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary;
- If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so;
- Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.

Will my identity be protected?

I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at IIE MSA, will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.

What will happen to the information that participants provide?

Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my Master of International Business. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.

What happens if I have more questions about the study?

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate.

You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed.

My contact details are as follows:

Miriam Gitonga

[REDACTED]

The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:

Dr Chante Botha

[REDACTED]

Signature

Date

Participant or respondent Informed Consent – Audio and Visual Recordings.

I agree to participate in the research conducted by Miriam Gitonga about exploring to what extent the lack of cross-cultural communication training programs contributes to unsuccessful digital advertising campaigns, by focusing on a global brand specializing in oral care products.

This research has been explained to me, and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

- I agree to participate in this research and be recorded for the purpose of data collection.
- My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private and confidential.
- My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research.
- I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview.
- I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.

Signature

Date

ANNEXURE C: SAMPLE OF GATEKEEPER'S LETTER

Consent form to conduct research at company/organisation/association	
I, [INSERT FULL FIRST AND LAST NAMES OF REPRESENTATIVE], in my capacity as [INSERT FULL TITLE/DESIGNATION] of [INSERT COMPANY/ORGANISATION/ASSOCIATION NAME], grant permission to [INSERT FULL FIRST AND LAST NAMES OF RESEARCHER] to conduct research at the [INSERT SPECIFICATIONS SUCH AS WHERE AND ON WHICH GROUP(S)] pending the outcome of the ethics committee of the IIE on the envisaged research. The student may only engage with members of the organisation/ company/ association if they can produce the Ethics Letter from the IIE. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve for the people I represent. I also reserve the right to remind the people I represent that their participation in this study is completely voluntary and that this permission does not imply their participation. I reserve the right to withdraw this permission at any time. I also understand that research reports are made available in IIE Libraries as well as on the IIE Repository. The below conditions must be applied whilst writing up the research report:	
Conditions concerning the anonymity of the company/organisation/association:	
The company/organisation/association must be kept <u>anonymous</u> in the research report.	☐
The company/organisation/association may be <u>identified</u> in the research report.	☐
Conditions concerning the publication of the research report:	
The research report will be made available on the IIE Repository...	
<u>Immediately</u> after completion.	☐
<u>After</u> a specified number of months has elapsed.	☐
Number of months, if selected:	
Signature	Date

ANNEXURE D: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER



Our Ref: M. 491024
Enquiries: research@iie.ac.za

04 October 2024



Outcome of Ethics Clearance Application for Master of International Business

Student name: Miriam Wanjiru Gitonga
Student number: [REDACTED]
Brand and campus: IIE/MSA



Dear Miriam,



Thank you for submitting the ethics clearance application for the study: **Exploring the Importance of Cross-Cultural Communication Training Programs: An International Brand Perspective.**



We are pleased to inform you that your ethical clearance application has been approved. This means that you may proceed with data collection.

You are reminded to inform the IIE's Higher Degrees Committee of any changes made to the research methodology or title of the research prior to examination. Kindly ensure that all ethical considerations are duly applied whilst collecting, analysing and interpreting the data for the completion of your research. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact your programme team or supervisor directly.

All the best with your research.



Dr Reza Hosseini
Chair: Higher Degrees Committee



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ANNEXURE E: COMPLETE TABLE OF DATA COLLECTION

INTERVIEW QUESTION	RAW DATA	THEMES	SUB-THEMES	Link to secondary research question (SRQ) and secondary research objective (SRO)
2. What are some of the verbal barriers faced when digitally advertising oral care products to culturally diverse consumers	"I think a big one language I think because it's such a global company there are different languages. So for example I will take Portuguese. Portuguese is different in different places, like Brazilian Portuguese versus Mozambique. Portuguese." "...trying to find messaging and communication approach that reaches as many people as possible in a language and in a way of speaking that is relevant to. To as many people as possible can be quite challenging" "So, I think the main, the obvious one comes down to language barrier ... To really understand what one another's saying, so I'd probably say that language barrier and more from an understanding of the language than anything else." "I think some of the barriers would be. Just, I guess, education around oral health care. You know, there's a lot of, especially in our African countries, it's a lot of myths surrounding our health. I think one of the main ones would be around fluoride [...] We see a lot of people, especially on our social media pages, messaging us, telling us that, you know, fluoride is dangerous especially to kids" "Something called plastic teeth and it's basically like in infants especially, they'll just be like this white spots on their gums and it looks like, but it's just really like a blister or kind of like an ulcer. And they believe that it's kind of like a superstition that if your kid has that. That's bad luck for your family or future. So they take them to witch doctor ... So you know, we try to step in to say like, these are just myths. These are not medical facts."	1. Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Barriers	1. Language Challenges in Reaching Diverse Consumers 2. Challenges of Myths and Beliefs	SRQ 1: What are some of the verbal and non-verbal cross-cultural communication barriers global brands face in digital advertising campaigns? SRO 1: Identify the verbal and non-verbal cross-cultural communication barriers faced by global brands in digital advertising campaigns

	“Kind of project and what the idea was on the communication in store was to use like a mouldy piece of bread. To be like you wouldn't eat this, so why would you brush your teeth with, like, a really bad toothbrush kind of thing, but culturally, in Kazakhstan, Bread is very like kind of like a holy product to them. So to use something like that was semi offensive to the people not understanding like small cultural cues like that, understanding what's important to different cultures. You know, sometimes it can hamper some of your plan” “To try get. That local nuances as you work on creatives and how to communicate with people” “So the organization I work for, we sell oral health products among other products. To most of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa, so that region of the world is very, very diverse with Well, 54 countries across the continent, but I think we are we address about 40 countries and across that there's multiple languages and cultures. And ethnicities and religions, and even within one country, you can have a one country that, you know, people speak up to 12/15/20 languages across the country. So it's incredibly diverse and trying to find messaging. And and communication approach that reaches as many people as possible in a language and in a way of speaking that is relevant to. To as many people as possible can be quite challenging”			
3. What are some of the nonverbal barriers faced when digitally advertising oral care products to culturally diverse consumers	“So you can already see facial features are different from a Kenyan person to potentially Ethiopian to West Africa ... So it's just that representation and how do you strategize” “...colour is quite a big one. So for example [company product and packaging] has the rainbow on it, but the rainbow [...] But obviously if you're going into a stricter country, Tanzania. It's obviously seen as pride and you know they're very against that” “But I think also the type of talent that you choose, right, 'cause sometimes people would then feel like you leaning more towards a specific, I don't know, skin tone or tribe or anything like that so” “Just in terms of like skin color. We would obviously get global guidelines, but we would want to localize that like our global guidelines. I mean we are very inclusive as a company [...] Most of the standardized stuff you'd see it would be like a white skin tone, right? Whereas in Africa we know majority of the people are not white, we're black and there's also very talent”		3. Visual Representation and Design Challenges	

	“But one of the things we could have never predicted was this product had different colors on it. The colors simplified the different benefits in a way without necessarily calling it out. But in our E markets, it was interpreted as us promoting LGBTQI. We're asked to pull this product off shelf because we as a company were representing or calling out that people can. What's this promote LGBTQ?” “It was like I think it was a picture ... It's like very colorful on the packaging. But people in the countries in the different countries were thinking different things. Is a bit taboo ... just assuring them that it's just the colors stand for basically what they stood for was the different benefits like only maybe freshen your breath or it doesn't own. Brighten your teeth” “it's a similar thing to even just video advertising or it's it's making sure we're getting for example [...]So it's it's very important to be mindful of that again to understand the social context of, you know, of certain subjects, certain topics and how you phrase things” “...content of visuals that we send out and Wordings. Sometimes it comes off as if it's a bit too much for people to consume because it's like, where do I focus? Because they are reading, do they miss out on the whole other visual”			
4. How have this cross-cultural communication barriers affected global digital advertising for this particular global brand?	“Country obviously has their own dialects, for lack of a better word that they speak in, so we would need was a local translator for that” “We want something that can be easily understood by everyone and also translated in most of the languages as well.” “ So you know, just assuring them that it's just the colors stand for basically what they stood for was the different benefits because it's a it's the total brand.” “I think going forward we became more like sensitive to what we would say.”		1. Strategies for Enhancing Cultural Relevance and Inclusivity	SRQ 2: How do crosscultural communication barriers in different cultures affect the digital advertising campaigns of global brands?

	“...you can't be using someone that looks like a South African for Kenyan... or someone that looks like an American, you have to use talent that looks like the people of the different countries. So we also do that. We choose talent based on where the ad is going” “But I think it has impacted us in a way where we needed to ensure that we have diversity within the different teams and having that connect with the teams right to get different views. So that whatever you put out there is not biased.” “So positively, it's actually been really good. The more that we started localizing, the more that we brought in representation. And I think a big ones coming out now is using people darker of color... I think since we've really started localising everything, people have been loving the brand more and they really want to see themselves in it more.” “ [...] to make sure that the product is compliant 100%. But like I said, there's certain things that you can never really predict. You know there's times where we do all our checks actually in our different markets, but they come back with a different perspective to it that forces us to then go back and provide further substantiation”	2. Cross-Cultural Advertising Strategies		SRO 2: Identify how cross-cultural communication barriers in different cultures affect the digital advertising campaigns of global brands.
5. Considering the verbal and non-verbal barriers, how do you ensure that these cross-cultural communication barriers are avoided when designing digital advertisements?	“I think localization is very important... There's a big difference between your Americas, your Europe's, and Africa. I think in Africa, a lot of our consumers are very literal in the way we think. So we can't be using like funny metaphors. We really have to ensure that we get to the point and not.” “So you have to obviously have a close relationship with the agency... Our localization and what we're trying to do and they need to understand the countries we're going into, obviously we can't always win.” “I think on the translation, but it's still a bit challenging because we have to employ Another agency in a sense, and the people on the ground might not have the time to do things as quick as we would need them to do it.” “But it's more on that reactive conversation that we would need to try and work on... Digitally, you can respond and you can react a lot quicker, whereas for us, we can't react a lot quicker because somebody might		2. Collaborative Strategies for Effective Message Delivery	

	say it in Portuguese. Then we have to go and get it translated. Then we have to react. So I think the reaction time, so we really have to be close to the agency that can react quite quickly. 'cause, you don't want boring.” “I think it's really about partnering with the right people... We try to work with agencies who have representation across these countries where we then advertise in and these local agencies help us with insights into just how locals and how society is in those countries and then that's that speaks into the translations and how we rework our messaging to make sure that it's relevant and it's not offensive to anyone.” “How a word is written, how it's spelled, how it's pronounced? And and that's very important. And that really makes a difference. And I think that's it's a game changer in terms of the message being received well.” “When the local agencies are. Recording the voice overs in country. We make sure one of our team members joins that session to be able to help the production team, the director, even the voice actors, to make sure that they are pronouncing things correctly, that the script is correct and that they're speaking like how local people would speak and.” “So they can translate that knowledge, that internal brand knowledge and company knowledge and translate it into how an advert comes to life. So it's important to have the local team with us on the ground or in in the recording sessions, for example.”			
6. Do you think cross-cultural communication is an essential skill in a globalized digital world?	“Definitely, I think... Like I said, no two countries are the same.” “...think it's really important that we have the skill to recognize. What are some of these cultural differences that we see across our markets?” “Yes, I do. I think it is an essential skill To be successful, because if you don't have it or you don't learn it or adapt to it.”	3. Implementing Cross-Cultural Understanding	1. Importance of Having Cross-Cultural Communication as a Skill	

	“You know, for example, if we didn't learn from what happened in the past and we just carried on doing our the way we did, people wouldn't like that and it probably stopped using our products because it'd be like... we'll rather use a different brands product.” “I think it's important not only if you're doing. Like if you're working doing advertising for different countries, but even if we're doing advertising within South Africa alone, I think it's important because it's made up of so many different people.” “Definitely... And you know, catering to different markets instead of just trying to put out. Like a message for everyone, because if it does not resonate with the consumer, you are probably not to that consumer, you do not.” “Definitely it's very important. And in order to do that, you need to connect with people at their level, at their in their languages...” “Yes, I think obviously... You definitely need to understand the people... And even just how to speak to people...” “Yes, yes, absolutely, absolutely. Gone are the days where we could shoot an advert in America, for example, and just put it on TV everywhere. Consumers now and the way they consume media Really want to feel like a brand is speaking to them personally and it must be relevant for me. Otherwise, I can very easily tune out and block you out, so it needs to speak like I speak. A brand must speak the way I speak, the brand must.” “I think so definitely... For me, it's not necessarily just about taking one copy, whether it's a TV copy, radio copy, and just translating it... Get different copies for 15 different markets... think about the cultural relevance and the nuance of that particular market and see how it can make it relevant.”			SRQ 3: Do global brands provide cross-cultural communication training programmes to effectively communicate the brand in international business contexts? SRO 3: Determine whether global brands provide cross-cultural communication training programmes to communicate the brand in international business effectively.
7. Does your organisation provide cross-cultural communication training?	“I don't want to say yes, but I also don't want to say no... There's no formal training, but we do have like. Diversity, equity and inclusion training right within the company. But that's more for kind of us within the company to recognize cultural differences between each other for ways of working.”		2. The lack of Organizational Support for Cross-	

	“Yeah, I think, but I'm not too sure if this could be said for like our digital trainings or the way we execute our campaigns. But when it comes to our consumers, not so much. Just because it's kind of like a ready ingrained in us.” “They don't actually. the only training we get for example is like, you know, there's a thing called segmentation marketing. So you would put your different consumers into different groups based on similarities that they have, and then they obviously get different advertising based on their different groups because it's tailored for them” “Not necessarily. I don't think it's. I don't think we've received training in that way with that. With that sort of purpose, no.” “we not necessarily the focus on how to communicate cross culturally, et cetera. But they do have an element of it in ...” “Cause we have a DNI community that really comes with, you know, And we talk about different topics, right? We talk around. Culture and how to, you know, embrace and understand the different cultures, sexuality. Race, so there's a lot of things that they do to educate people around Diversity and inclusion and how then to understand the differences that we have but be able to work together to bring the best for the organization and also the people that we out here to serve as a brand” “So I wouldn't call it training. That's what we do is it was something that we did about a year ago. We had these like they were called DE and I meeting. So diversity, equity inclusion, they were kind of like little coffee chats where we would have someone from different cultural backgrounds would be hosting and they would kind of give you a sense of what their culture's all about, the kind of foods they eat, the kind of people.” “So it's more of like a collaborative like working environment instead of as you know getting the training.”		Cultural Communication Skills	
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a. If no, do you think such a training programme would be valuable? Please motivate your answer. i. In your opinion, what should be included in this training programme?	“The lack demographics of our consumers... rural consumers and how their backgrounds in the upbringing. And their habits could affect their buying patterns.” “...So splitting it up. Saying, you know, for this group specifically, this is their stuff. This is their culture. This is how you would tailor your advertising to them. This is this group, but I think also it probably evolves as time goes. So you wouldn't just get that training when you join, but you'd maybe get it every once a year because things change constant.” “I don't know if it would have to be like a training or maybe it could be like a workshop... So I think maybe having like regular workshops where we can check with, you know people. It could be like our in country teams or it could be from like the agencies where you know they give us like insights or updates on this is what's trending currently in the in the country. This this is what's working and this is what's not working I think.” “That's what could help, because it would help us, you know, when we have to come up with strategies on how we are going to push out a campaign or anything like that. But I don't know if it would be like a training... Because we think of a training. When will they be teaching us the local language?” “...Understanding everyone to their level but not being. Not overloading people a lot with information. It becomes hard to then do your work, but I think for me what I have missed or I'm starting to see is lacking. Now is we're focusing a lot more from a global aspect that we're starting to on the local nuances. “Elements of that culture. So how do we speak to them? How do I understand them better? How do I communicate better to them? And understand their nuances. Yeah. So I think it'll be very, very, very relevant. Very, very impactful. I just think it would have to be tailored. To the specific region or specific country”		3. Cultural Understanding through Training Programs	
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ANNEXURE F: CERTIFICATE OF EDITING



Kevin Walker

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1 October 2025

To whom it may concern

DECLARATION BY LANGUAGE EDITOR

Details of manuscript:

Author:	Miriam Gitonga (ST10161447)
Type:	Mini-dissertation
Degree:	Master of International Business
Institution:	Independent Institute of Education, IIE MSA
Title:	Exploring the importance of crosscultural communication training programmes: An international brand perspective
Approx. Length:	27,000 words (excluding front matter, references and appendices)

I hereby declare that I have edited the abovementioned manuscript for English language usage. In line with ethical practices for the editing of academic work for examination, this is limited to the following, as suggested by the Professional Editors' Guild (n.d.):¹

- the correction of mechanical errors such as spelling, punctuation and grammar;
- ensuring the correct use of logical connectors, or drawing the author's attention to issues of this nature;
- imposing consistency in the appearance of tables and figures and other basic formatting;
- flagging certain terminology and wording that was overly specific, insufficiently precise or ambiguous, for the author's revision; and
- checking for consistency the format of in-text citations.

All content, research, arguments and their structure/or der otherwise remain the original work of the author. My intervention did not include the checking for plagiarism, identifying AI-generated text, confirming the veracity of claims or verifying the legitimacy or existence of works cited.

The document was returned to the author with tracked changes and comments, and the onus is on the author to attend to the suggested changes and queries. The author accepts full responsibility for any further revisions to the manuscript that have not undergone editing.

Should you wish to contact me for any further information, my details may be found above.

Yours faithfully

Kevin S Walker

¹ <https://editorsorg.za/wp-content/uploads/Copy-Editing-Academic-Texts-Guidelines-For-Students-And-Authors.pdf>

EDITING CERTIFICATE

22 October 2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

DECLARATION: Reference Editing of Mini-dissertation

I hereby declare that the **references** in the Master of International Business mini-dissertation of **Miriam Gitonga** titled "**EXPLORING THE IMPORTANCE OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING PROGRAMMES: AN INTERNATIONAL BRAND PERSPECTIVE**" have been edited. The scope of the engagement was limited to editing of references and *excluded language editing and technical editing*. It is the responsibility of the student to address any comments from the editor or supervisor. The editor will not be responsible for any subsequent additions or deletions made by the student in their document. Additionally, it is the final responsibility of the student to make sure of the correctness of the mini-dissertation.



Khomotso Bopape (ATE)

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ANNEXURE G: SUPERVISOR'S PERMISSION TO SUBMIT



ANNEXURE F – CERTIFICATE OF RELEASE (IIE007)

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Degree:	MASTER OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS	
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