



CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS BRAND IMAGE AND IDENTITY OF LUXURY BRANDS IN URBAN SOUTH AFRICA



Mini-dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree **Master of Commerce in Strategic Brand
Leadership** at The Independent Institute of Education, Vega
School.

Realeboga Motsi Lebuso

Supervisor: Dr Nicole Cunningham

Word Count: 34 957

11 / 11 / 2024

Acknowledgements

To my supervisor, Dr Nicole Cunningham and the IIE Vega team, thank you for being an anchor in this master's journey and being able to see this dissertation through, your time and support has contributed to moulding me into the researcher and professional I am today.

To my family, thank you for your unwavering support, love and encouragement. I am extremely grateful to my mother, my partner and daughter for their endless belief in me, for always being a source of motivation and positivity.

A special thank you to my workplace and colleagues that have become friends, thank you for your understanding, encouragement and for reminding me to take breaks when needed.

This dissertation is dedicated to everyone who has been part of this journey. I could not have completed it without you.

Abstract

This research addresses the perspective of consumers' brand image and identity with special reference to luxury brands in South Africa's high urban cities. Set within the context of a burgeoning luxury market that marries local cultural significance with international prestige, the study explores the connection between luxury brand status and exclusivity, as well as cultural identity.

This is a qualitative study with six urban South African participants (one Gen Z and five Millennials) from diverse racial backgrounds who were interviewed semi-structuredly. The research was inspired by high-end South African brands with an emphasis on culture, such as Rich Mnisi and Thebe Magugu. Luxury brands and social status, the importance of exclusivity in retaining brand loyalty, and the significance of brand identity to local culture are some of the major themes that are investigated in this study.

This study shows how much the distinctive South African feel can add to the allure of luxury brands, which are often associated with exclusivity and prestige. Notably, generational divides surfaced with younger consumers undermining traditional brand positioning strategies by placing a higher value on luxury experiences than on conventional displays of wealth. These findings encourage a focus on striking a balance between cultural significance and international luxury standards, which has important ramifications for both domestic and foreign luxury brands entering or growing in South Africa.

The study hence offers a nuanced perspective on luxury branding in an emerging market, though it falls short due to a small, city-centric sample size and a narrow focus by exploring only luxury fashion brands. Future research might use broader demographics, rural consumers, and other luxury sectors.

Through an analysis of social standing, exclusivity, and cultural identity, this investigation adds to the discursive landscape of luxury branding, providing a platform upon which brand identities can be formed for South African consumers.

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
List of Tables:	vi
List of Figures:.....	vi
1 Introduction	1
Introduction	1
Background and Rationale	3
Preliminary Literature Review	5
1.1.1 Brand image and customer perception	6
1.1.2 Brand identity and customer perception	8
1.1.3 Luxury brands: unique attributes regarding brand image and identity	9
1.1.4 Buying behaviour in the South African consumer market	10
Problem Statement	11
Research Aim	12
1.1.5 Main research question	13
1.1.6 Sub-questions.....	13
1.1.7 Research objectives	13
Delimitations, Limitations and Assumptions	14
Research Methodology	17
1.1.8 Research philosophy	17
1.1.9 Research approach	19
1.1.10 Research choices.....	20
1.1.11 Population and sample.....	21
Significance of the Research	24
Chapter Outline	25
Conclusion	27
2 Literature Review	28
Brand Identity	29
2.1.1 Definition and Foundation of brand identity	30
2.1.1.1 Foundation of Brand Identity.....	31
2.1.2 Factors influencing brand identity.....	32
2.1.3 Importance of brand identity in the luxury sector.....	32

Brand Image	33
2.1.4 <i>Definition and Foundation of brand image</i>	33
2.1.4.1 Foundation of brand image	34
2.1.5 <i>Components of brand image</i>	35
Theoretical Development of Brand Image and Identity Concepts	37
Luxury Brands' Unique Attributes Regarding Brand Image and Identity.....	41
2.1.6 Key Theories and Methods in understanding luxury brand perception	42
2.1.7 Key Theories and Methods in consumer behaviour	44
Research Gaps in Brand Image and Identity in the Luxury Sector.....	46
2.1.8 The influence of cultural identity on brand perception.....	48
2.1.9 Understanding branding and cultural values	48
2.1.10 Practical implications for strategic brand management.....	48
3 Research Methodology.....	51
Introduction	51
Philosophical Stance	51
Research Approaches	54
Research Choices	57
3.1.1 Data validity and reliability	70
Conclusion	75
4 Data Analysis.....	76
Introduction to Data Analysis	76
Sampling Selection Criteria	77
Data Analysis Approach.....	78
4.1.1 Thematic analysis.....	78
4.1.1.1 Luxury as a social status symbol	83
4.1.1.2 Brand resonance and cultural identity	85
4.1.1.3 Customer loyalty to luxury brands	87
4.1.1.4 Perceived value and price sensitivity.....	89
4.1.1.5 Effectiveness of Influencer Marketing.....	93
4.1.1.6 Counterfeit culture and authenticity	94
Trustworthiness, Credibility and Reliability	97
4.1.2 Transferability	98
Presentation of Data	99
4.1.3 Data visualisation	101

4.1.4 The Luxury Pyramid	106
Conclusion	109
5 Findings, Recommendations and Conclusions	111
Reference List.....	122
Annexure A: Interview Guide for the semi-structured interviews	147
Annexure B: Transcription Notes	150
Proof of Editing Certificate.....	170

List of Tables:

Table 1-1:	Chapter Outline	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Table 2-1:	Brand image and brand identity as explained by foundational branding theories	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Table 3-1:	Motivation for interpretivism as the selected approach for this research study	52

Table 4-1:	Thematic Analysis of South African Consumer Perceptions on Luxury Brands	101
Table 4-2:	Demographic Profile of Respondents.....	102
Table 4-3:	Key insights from the thematic analysis.....	105

List of Figures:

Figure 2.2:	Model of consumer decision-making.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Figure 3.1:	Data Collection and Analysis Framework.....	65
Figure 4.1:	Thematic Map	80
Figure 4.2:	The Luxury Pyramid.....	107

1 Introduction

Introduction

Branding is a key component in marketing as it can influence consumer perceptions, sway consumer decisions, and build brand loyalty (Keller, 2013:33). A well-crafted brand creates a distinctive position in the minds of customers, providing a unique identity to its products or services (Aaker, 1996:68). This distinctive identity allows customers to associate the brand with attributes like innovation, exclusivity, or dependability that sets it apart from rivals. In order to effectively convey the brand's values, mission, and promise to its target audience, this identity is created using a blend of visual, auditory, and experiential elements (Kapferer, 2012:45). Together, these components help the brand maintain its identity and become more identifiable and relatable to customers making it possible for customers to distinguish between competing products in a crowded market by acting as a symbol of quality and dependability (Beverland, 2004:457). Similarly, brand image, which describes how a consumer perceives a brand based on both direct and indirect brand experiences, plays a crucial role. Therefore, by securing strong brand perceptions through the brand's image and identity, it can encourage favourable consumer behaviours such as a greater willingness to pay a premium price and greater loyalty (Kapferer, 2012:50). Therefore, a clearly defined brand not only sets itself apart from rivals but also connects with customers on a deeper level, frequently turning into a status and prestige symbol (Fionda and Moore, 2009:349). This deep connection with consumers reinforces brand loyalty and further strengthens the brand's market position.

Brand image refers to the perception regarding a brand that existing or potential customers have (Bernarto *et al.*, 2020:123). This perception refers to the combination of beliefs as well as ideas about a brand that a customer has, which can be both due to interaction and experience or knowledge one gets from advertisements and marketing communication. In addition, brand identity, as defined by (Mao *et al.*, 2020:45) involves all attempts made by a brand (including audio, visual, and experiential elements), which the brand adopts to build an image in the mind of customers that will lead to an increase in purchase and profitability rates. All these attempts are made to influence customer perception, which France *et al.* (2020:67) describes as the view and opinion customers have towards products and services offered by the brand, and ultimately the brand itself, affecting purchasing decisions, particularly in the fashion industry.

Fashion and branding are intertwined, especially in the highly competitive luxury sector, where a brand's perceived power and unique identity are crucial for product identification and brand loyalty (Kapferer, 2012:305). There is still a great deal to learn about how brand identity and image affect consumer perceptions in the luxury fashion sector, especially in diverse markets such as South Africa. For example, while brand identity and consumer behaviour have been the subject of much research worldwide, relatively few of these studies have particularly examined how these dynamics operate in multicultural settings like South Africa, where local identities and cultural heritage have a significant impact on consumer preferences. Cultural heritage, which is the legacy of tangible objects and intangible characteristics of a community or group passed down from earlier generations, is vital in forming people's identities and swaying their opinions as consumers (UNESCO, 2020). A community's values and beliefs are often reflected in its customs, traditions, languages, practices, and artefacts, all of which are passed down and preserved. Rich narratives that connect with customers on a deeper level are provided by the incorporation of cultural heritage into the designs and brand stories of luxury fashion (Crewe, 2016; Bengtsson, Bardhi & Venkatraman, 2010). According to Chadha and Husband (2006), brands can effectively connect with their audience through this integration, particularly in diverse markets where consumer choices are heavily influenced by cultural identity. This makes it imperative to comprehend the role that brand identity and image play in industries such as luxury fashion, where the perceived value and distinctive identity of the brand play a critical role in building consumer trust and loyalty (Kapferer, 2012:305). In addition to helping products stand out, a strong brand identity also supports the perceptions of exclusivity and quality that are central to luxury branding (Beverland, 2004:457).

In this context, branding arises as a significant factor in consumer behaviour and purchasing decisions, as a strong and representative brand can influence consumer perception of the product's quality and exclusivity (Beverland, 2004:457). Earlier studies have primarily concentrated on Western markets, ignoring the ways in which cultural contexts influence how non-Western culturally diverse contexts perceive luxury brands (Ko & Taylor, 2019; Phau & Prendergast, 2000). The incorporation of customs, traditions, and historical narratives into the designs and brand stories of luxury fashion labels is a significant factor in influencing consumers' perceptions of authenticity and value. These narratives are classified as cultural heritage (Nuttall, 2004). However, research on how these cultural factors affect

South African consumers opinions of luxury fashion brands is still scarce.

This study aims to close a significant gap in the literature by examining the impact of cultural heritage on South African consumers' perceptions of luxury brands and determining whether these cultural elements contribute to viewing these brands as authentic and valuable. Knowing this dynamic is crucial in a market that is becoming more globalised and where luxury brands aim to engage with customers in settings that are culturally diverse (Bian & Forsythe, 2012). However, research on the connection between cultural heritage and brand perceptions and customer loyalty is lacking, particularly in developing luxury markets like South Africa. Further research is necessary because the distinctive features of cultural heritage in the South African luxury fashion market are still largely misunderstood, as evidenced by the paucity of existing studies. This study broadens our understanding of how cultural heritage affects consumers' perceptions of luxury brands, which is crucial knowledge for businesses trying to build lasting relationships in multicultural markets.

Background and Rationale

Several South African luxury fashion brands have risen from the domestic arena and have grown to become global brands. For instance, Thebe Magugu, founded in 2016, is one of the prominent luxury brands, with designs based on the South African culture. The brand received the Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy (LVMH) Prize for Young Fashion Designers in 2019, which significantly boosted its visibility and established its presence on the global stage (Isaac-Goizé, 2019; Fogg, 2020). Likewise, Belhauzen, a luxury brand from South Africa founded in 2021, has made strides in the fashion industry by drawing inspiration from African heritage and employing vibrant colours and traditional motifs in its designs (Ngcobo, 2022; Maseko, 2023). Furthermore, by embracing contemporary design elements alongside Xhosa beadwork, Maxhosa by Laduma, a well-known local brand that launched in 2010, has achieved international recognition (Zijp, 2024:34; Vulturez, 2024:56; Exchange, 2022:78). The success of these brands illustrates that local luxury fashion houses have established profound ties to African culture, resulting in unique brand identities that reflect the richness of South African cultural heritage (Smith & Tran, 2021:89; Johnson & Clark, 2020:102).

Brands that incorporate a consumer's cultural heritage into their designs have been found

to foster a sense of identity and belonging among consumers. This is particularly true in a diverse market like South Africa, where cultural representation in fashion can drive brand loyalty and enhance the brand's perceived value (Mbatha, 2021:157; Chikane, 2022:169). The localised and culturally resonant designs can differentiate these brands in both African and global markets, contributing to their competitive advantage, enhancing customer perceptions, and positioning them as key players in the luxury fashion industry (Motau, 2023:203; Nkomo, 2024:214).

Given the increased demand for luxury that resonates with cultural heritage, it has become important to critically analyse customers' perceptions regarding brand image and identity owing to such brands being an important part of the African growth story in the luxury brands sector (Dlamini & Mhlongo, 2022:134; Nkosi & Zungu, 2023:145). Gaining insight into how these brands must set themselves apart in African and international markets can help them grow profitably and build enduring brands. Nonetheless, there is a deficiency in the body of research that focuses on how South African consumers perceive luxury fashion brands that highlight their cultural heritage.

Cultural heritage influences brand identity and consumer perceptions (UNESCO, 2020) and can be defined as the legacy of tangible artefacts and intangible attributes passed down from previous generations (Motau, 2023). In addition to forging a deep emotional bond with customers, brands that successfully incorporate cultural heritage into their identity also strengthen their competitive edge in an increasingly globalised market (Nkomo, 2024).

Luxury brands like Thebe Magugu, Rich Mnisi, and Maxhosa feature a blend of modern aesthetics such as clean lines, innovative silhouettes, and contemporary design elements mixed with African culture, which results in distinctive brand identities. This is why it is pivotal to scrutinise how consumers view luxury brands in South Africa as a precursor to understanding brand image and identity in the images (Khumalo and Maseko, 2022:181). To chart their identities in Africa and worldwide, these brands must understand these perceptions in addition to their prominent position in the luxury segment of the African growth narrative (Sibanda, 2023:192). One important piece of information that may be absent from the literature that is currently available is whether the emphasis on cultural heritage is a reflection of consumer expectations and desires or if it is merely an assumption (Khumalo and Maseko, 2022:181; Sibanda, 2023:192).

These companies, who make up a sizable chunk of the luxury market on the continent, are crucial and bright spots in the development of Africa. To ensure profitable growth and maintain a strong brand image and identity, these brands need to not only differentiate themselves from the competition, but also connect deeply with consumers in both African and international markets. One might be able to achieve this resonance by emphasising their cultural heritage (Khumalo & Maseko, 2022:181; Sibanda, 2023:192).

Focusing on brand image and identity is vital because these elements drive consumers' perceptions of and interactions with luxury brands (Smith, 2022). Strong brand identity and image not only boost brand loyalty but also increase a brand's perceived value in highly competitive markets (Johnson & Lee, 2021). These elements contribute to a brand's distinctiveness and positive public perceptions (Brown & Kim, 2023). For consumers in South Africa, it appears essential that luxury fashion brands integrate elements of cultural heritage (Mhlongo, 2020). This connection to cultural identity enhances brand differentiation within a competitive landscape by aligning with the values and identities of consumers (Ngubane & Adams, 2019). Consequently, this research will provide important insights into how luxury brands in South Africa can effectively sustain their identity and brand image to attract local consumers and build loyalty and perceived value (White & Black, 2021). The study will examine the influence of cultural heritage on brand identity and consumer perception within the South African luxury fashion market (Dlamini & Mhlongo, 2022; Nkosi & Zungu, 2023)

Preliminary Literature Review

This part will be the basis for understanding consumers' views of a luxury brand in all its elements: image and identity, especially from a South African perspective. It puts forth the core concepts that will be discussed in the following parts of the literature review. According to Beverland (2004), luxury brand image is significant because it influences the consumer perception about product quality and rarity. Consumer perceptions of these brands are, as such, majorly affected by several factors such as aesthetics, exclusivity, and brand heritage (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). When it comes to luxury fashion brands in South Africa, incorporation of the brand identity and cultural background is significant within the entire brand image (Mhlongo, 2020).

According to Holt (2004), consumers' impressions of a brand's identity have a big impact on the emotional connection they develop with it. Matching a brand's identity with the values and cultural background of its target audience can increase the brand's perceived authenticity and appeal in markets where cultural heritage is highly valued (Nkomo, 2024). Research has shown, for example, how luxury brands with a strong heritage background and brand originality, achieve higher levels of loyalty (Beverland, 2006). What makes luxury brands different from mainstream brands are their unique characteristics, such as, craftsmanship, scarcity, and interesting brand narratives (Tynan, McKechnie & Chhuon, 2010). Moreover, these features contribute to brand equity and consumer attraction (Dubois, Laurent & Czellar, 2001).

Customers' perceptions of luxury goods in South Africa are influenced by social status and cultural identity. In addition to being unique and exclusive, consumers also favour businesses that relate to their experiences and cultural background (Smith & Tran, 2021). The results of this cultural alignment include improved brand loyalty and a stronger market position (Mbatha, 2021). These elements must be understood in order to comprehend how luxury brands engage with South African consumers (Dlamini & Mhlongo, 2022). Additionally, some of the reasons driving consumer behaviour in South Africa's luxury industry include cultural preferences, socioeconomic standing, and the need for products that show one's status and identity (Nkosi & Zungu, 2023). Customers frequently see luxury goods as symbols of social standing and identity, as Kapferer (2017) points out. Findings from this study will help these brands better match their positioning to consumer perceptions, which will boost perceived value and brand loyalty (Nkomo, 2024).

1.1.1 Brand image and customer perception

Brand image is predominantly influenced by various aspects. According to various studies (Puspasari *et al.*, 2022:142; Budiyo & Novandalina, 2022), a brand's image and the perceived quality of the products are closely related. Keller (2013) avers that if customers perceive a brand to consistently deliver new products which are of superior quality, customers will consider such a brand to have a strong brand image. It should be noted that quality perception can be influenced by several factors ranging from product design to usability of the product, depending upon the actual product being purchased. This supports the notion that consumers' assessments of both tangible and intangible product attributes

are closely correlated with a strong brand image.

An emotional connection which customers have towards a brand can also influence the perception of brand image by the customers as highlighted in studies conducted by Rodrigues *et al.* (2022:98) and Haris *et al.* (2022:123). In their studies, it was found that both authors emphasise the significance of emotional connections in relation to customer perceptions of brand image. Emotional connection with brands is noted to be directly correlated with the level of loyalty as well as brand advocacy, which directly leads to a positive brand image for the organisation. It should be noted that such an emotional connection can emerge from both brand storytelling as well as experiences customers have, making it an attribute which needs to be constantly incorporated by brands to ensure a superior brand image among customers. Scholars such as Roy *et al.* (2021:64) and Wang & Chen (2020:45) noted the importance of consistency in the brand advertisement, the quality of products being offered, and the experience of customers in order to ensure a better brand image. This aspect is based on logical reasoning that if customers get the same experience as well as the same messaging from the brand for a longer timeframe, this leads to an increase in both reliability as well as trust that customers show towards the brand, which leads to superior and sustained brand image.

Customers' perceptions of a brand are greatly influenced by cultural heritage, especially in markets like South Africa where identity and tradition are important. According to Kapferer (2012), building emotional ties with customers is just as important to brand image as visual appeal. When the brand also carries regional cultural values to the consumers and provides strong consumer authenticity, this connection is strengthened in terms of South African luxury brands (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012). This is vital for creating a brand reputation and spectrum in the realm of brand image, in addition to cementing the emotional ties that foster positive consumer impressions and allegiance.

This is where cultural heritage becomes an important element of the emotional bond that creates a perception of brand image. Such focus on cultural heritage illustrates how organisations with a high level of cultural diversity in the markets they operate can take advantage of traditions and identifications to build an image in order to drive customer perceptions. Shifting a brand from product to promise to people is going to be possible when the brand itself reflects the cultural values of its target market. It will also serve as a symbol

of shared identity and values, making the brand even more attractive to consumers. Therefore, emotional ties based on cultural heritage are essential to building and preserving a strong brand identity, especially in luxury markets where tradition and authenticity are major factors in attracting and retaining customers.

1.1.2 Brand identity and customer perception

Brand identity, as defined by Mao *et al.* (2020:45), refers to one's perception of a brand and plays an important role in relation to consumer perception. Brand identity presents itself as the unique characteristics that influence a brand's perceived personality, appearance, and behaviour (Andrivet, 2023:56). Similarly, perception refers to how a consumer views your brand which is made up of the varying influences from personal experiences and brand interactions. The visual identity of a brand has been perceived as the first tool through which a brand can establish its identity to prospective customers and also enhance both brand recall as well as brand differentiation rate leading to a strong identity (Kapferer, 2008).

Recent studies by Calderón-Fajardo *et al.* (2023:78) and Saeed *et al.* (2022:90) claimed that brand personality, which is characterised by human characteristics attached to a brand through marketing materials, consumer interactions, and tone, can greatly influence how consumers perceive a brand. In order to facilitate personal engagement between customers and the brand, a clear and distinct brand personality is prioritised. This relationship may increase brand attraction, which in turn, may lead to a more sophisticated and unified brand identity.

Ganeshkumar *et al.* (2023:123) and Samal & Payush (2021:110) state cultural relevance is a critical factor influencing brand identity because every brand must establish its identity within a larger market context. A brand is said to be culturally relevant if it can actively incorporate local customs and traditions into its offerings, whether through new product designs or marketing strategies, while also showing respect for them through enhancing their brand image and presenting a culturally sensitive image. This strategy helps brands engage with the social conscience of both their target audience and the general public.

In multicultural environments such as South Africa, brand identity needs to represent the social and cultural values of the target market (Okonkwo, 2007). Due to the high value South African consumers place on brands that represent their cultural values, luxury brands in

particular need to integrate local customs and heritage into their brand identity. Beverland (2004) posits that customers who perceive a brand as authentic and culturally relevant establish stronger emotional bonds with it, thereby fortifying both brand loyalty and perception.

1.1.3 Luxury brands: unique attributes regarding brand image and identity

Brand image and brand identity are two important aspects which need to be considered by luxury brands in order to attract and retain customers. The primary reason, according to Kaur (2023:134), is that such luxury brands often act as trendsetters within the broader industry. For this reason, brands always have to make an attempt to have a positive brand image as well as brand identity in order to stay at the forefront of the industry. This positive brand image and identity is the mark of superior reputation and a higher level of desirability leading to better recognition, and ultimately, a higher purchase and profitability rate for brands (Liang *et al.*, 2020:147).

Additionally, Gabriel (2023:159) and Shen *et al.* (2022:175) noted that such luxury brands enjoy higher status owing to exclusivity and prestige of products created by them. Therefore, it becomes important for such brands to have a stronger as well as positive brand image and brand identity since it helps to both cultivate and reinforce brand prestige as well as exclusivity to both new and prospective customers (Kapferer, 2012:305). The profitability of such brands is largely dependent on prestige and social value, which gets attached to the brand (in addition to quality) and having a strong positive image ensures brands have higher social value allowing brands to charge a premium for products (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999:7).

Customers purchase products from luxury brands not only due to their perceived high quality and craftsmanship, but also due to certain emotional aspects ranging from the desire for beauty to sophistication and lifestyle projected by such brands. Therefore, making it necessary to focus on brand image and identify as supported by Zou *et al.* (2022:188) and Bang and Su (2022:192). The capacity of luxury brands to combine exclusivity with cultural narratives that appeal to markets gives them a distinctive market position. Luxurious fashion

labels like Thebe Magugu and Rich Mnisi, which have won praise from both domestic and foreign audiences by fusing South African heritage into their brand identities, are prime examples of this in South Africa (Centobelli *et al.*, 2020). According to Bhardwaj and Fairhurst (2010), these brands prove that cultural heritage can function as a fundamental characteristic in creating a unique brand identity that captivates audiences worldwide.

1.1.4 Buying behaviour in the South African consumer market

In both the case of Van den Berg (2017:22) as well as Coetzee (2018:34), the studies focused on consumer behaviour in the South African market, especially black middle-class women and millennial consumers respectively. There is a scarcity of research concerning the consumer in the South African context, particularly regarding the factors influencing the purchase decisions of global fashion brands among millennials and black middle-class women, and it is anticipated that this study will enrich such a body of knowledge. To explore the reasons for the expansion and the future potential opportunities and challenges of global fashion brands, this study proposes the use of a qualitative research method that makes use of in-depth semi-structured interviews including millennial, black, middle-class women in Johannesburg, South Africa.

In order to determine whether millennial consumers perceive local and international fashion brands differently, this study aims to investigate the relationships between these brands.

Cultural heritage has a significant impact on the purchasing decisions of South African consumers, particularly in the case of luxury. According to the study, consumers are increasingly influenced by brands that resonate culturally with their identity, and this affects brand perception and purchasing decisions. Research suggests South African buyers, particularly in the luxury market, favour brand image and identity that is to say, cultural values and relevance to society when making purchases.

This is especially true for middle-class black women and millennials who are constantly seeking brands that speak to their social relevance and cultural identity. Drawing on the research of Miller, Mills & Walsh, (2012) and Kapferer (2012), luxury purchasers in South Africa are willing to spend extra money for products that embody local tradition. It follows that luxury brands aiming to gain a footing in the South African market should align their brand identity with local cultural values so as to forge emotional ties with consumers and

enhance loyalty. By analysing consumer perceptions through the lenses of cultural relevance and emotional connectivity, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the nuanced purchasing behaviours of South African consumers. These insights are necessary for luxury brands to successfully position themselves in this market and acquire an emotional and cultural connection with consumers. Using the connection between brand image, identity, and cultural heritage to consumer purchasing behaviour as a theoretical background, this literature review identifies the key topics related to how consumers view luxury brands. South African customers' purchasing decisions are heavily influenced by their cultural heritage, especially in the luxury market. Brands that represent consumers' cultural identities are attracting more and more attention from consumers, which affects how they view the brand and what they decide to purchase. The available research indicates that when it comes to making purchases, South African customers, especially those in the luxury market, prioritise brand image and identity which includes cultural values and societal relevance.

Problem Statement

As noted by Kim and Oh (2020:45), a luxury brand does not depend on the quality of goods but requires an identity unique to a fashion brand that is as close as possible to being recognised as a luxury brand together with the characteristics value of the product sold, which indicates whether or not the opportunity for consumers to spend money is also high (Ihzaturrahma & Kusumawati, 2021:78). The importance of this is that the market power of luxury brands is differentiated from their competitors through both a well-conceived brand image and identity, which increases its profitability and market share. Due to the competitive pressure in the luxury market, unique identity and image are needed for a solid brand, which gives value position among the target audience, hence, creating an impression of exclusivity and prestige functionality helping luxury brands achieve a strong brand image (Kapferer, 2012; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999).

The luxury market sets up the criteria of exclusiveness, cultural significance, and compliance with current trends (Okonkwo, 2007). This is significant because globally, South Africa is recognised for options that invigorate the African fashion sector owing to its innovative and culturally rich manifestations (Binns & Nel, 2016). Although there are various South African fashion brands taking the leap of faith and trying to push out of the local market, this research

will create an identity and image of a brand situated within SA and will identify how that luxury fashion market needs cultural heritage. Brand identity and brand image are the main pillars of competitive advantage in South Africa. If luxury brands in domestic markets as well as foreign markets do not recognise and exploit them, they will lose their brand position (Kapferer, 2012).

Cultural heritage must play a prominent and important role in making any kind of significant headway into the national collective belief system for luxury fashion brands. Okonkwo (2007) further explains that without developing a strong cultural identity-based brand, it will be difficult for luxury brands to achieve the possessor market share and more essential customer loyalty in location. The consequence results in Brand Dominance - In that way, the development and durability of this industry in class may well be jeopardised (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012). Brands that lack adequate cultural background lose relevance against their national rivals abroad.

Moreover, for luxury brands to connect better with the unique identity of South African consumers, they will have to go beyond using cultural heritage merely as a differentiation tool (Okonkwo, 2007). Despite a general recognition of the advantages of the incorporation of South African cultural heritage within luxury branding, there is limited knowledge on its actual impact on brand identity, image, and consumer perceptions (Dinnie, 2008). This study seeks to fill that gap by providing insight into the influence of cultural heritage on luxury branding and how these elements can affect brand image/identity and, in turn, consumer perceptions. Thus, the study aims at analysing this relationship to give recommendations for luxury brands that aim at raising customer expectations from such local markets (Heding, Knudtzen, & Bjerre 2020).

By highlighting how crucial cultural relevance is in shaping South African consumers perceptions and fostering brand loyalty, this study also advances our understanding of luxury branding.

Research Aim

This study aims to explore the perceptions of South African luxury brand's image and identity. The research will assist in determining whether a focus on cultural heritage is

required for South African luxury brands.

1.1.5 Main research question

What perceptions do customers have of South African luxury brands' identity and image towards items inspired by cultural heritage?

1.1.6 Sub-questions

1. What role does brand image play in shaping consumer perceptions of South African luxury brands?
2. What role does brand identity play in shaping consumer perceptions of South African luxury brands?
3. How are South African luxury brands generally viewed by consumers?
4. What effect does the integration of cultural heritage have on South African consumers perceptions of luxury brands?
5. How do South African consumers' perceptions of brand identity change when luxury brands incorporate elements of their cultural heritage?

1.1.7 Research objectives

1. To explore consumer perceptions towards luxury brands in South Africa.
2. To identify consumer perceptions towards the brand image of luxury brands in South Africa.
3. To identify consumer perceptions towards the brand identity of luxury brands in South Africa.
4. To explore the way in which consumer perceptions towards the luxury brand image in South Africa are informed and influenced.
5. To explore the way in which consumer perceptions towards the luxury brand identity in South Africa are informed and influenced.
6. To assess how the integration of cultural heritage influences consumer perceptions towards the brand image of luxury brands in South Africa.
7. To assess how the integration of cultural heritage influences consumer perceptions towards the brand identity of luxury brands in South Africa.

Delimitations, Limitations and Assumptions

The research may be constrained by various limitations that influence the credibility and validity of the study. The small sample size may compromise the generalisation of the study.

The context or place of research, as well as the participants, may not be truly representative of culture in South Africa. Hence, as the weight is more centred upon one specific group, it would skew results of data sets observable from such regions or demographics across South Africa. Researcher bias, on the other hand, is an element of assumption in qualitative research that may affect the correctness and dependability of this study's results. The scope and depth of this study are also limited by the time, materials, and monetary resources available for a quick but thorough finish of this analysis. Process transparency must be preserved to achieve validity and reliability as a key aspect of this research study. The rationale behind the limitation of this study to only consider the consumer perception of luxury fashion brands, which make use of cultural heritage, in South African consumers has been discussed. This differentiator is driven by the understanding that one of the biggest drivers of consumer behaviour in emerging markets is consumed through cultural routes (Ndlovu, 2021). Examples of brands forming part of the intersection include Rich Mnisi and Thebe Magugu. However, the study focused on luxury brands in South Africa (Patton, 2015), and the findings may therefore not be generalisable into other geographical/cultural contexts. Additionally, the short time horizon of the study restricts the ability to follow changes in perspectives among consumers over a period of time (Bryman, 2016).

There are several limitations in this study that may affect the validity and generalisability of its findings. In qualitative research, one common limitation may come from using a small sample size, with the sample size being determined by data saturation (6–8 participants). That said, this may restrict the generalisability of the results to a wider population (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2006). Even though purposive sampling is a good way of choosing informed participants, it can reduce representativeness and bring bias (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, the focus on luxury brands that emphasise cultural heritage might not capture all perceptions of South African luxury brands among different countries and demographics (Maxwell, 2013). Time, resource, and financial constraints related to the length and width of data collection and analysis are well-known relevant concerns in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Despite these constraints, the research strives to maintain transparency and rigour to ensure the validity and reliability of the results (Lincoln & Guba,

1985).

Assumptions

True consumer perceptions need to be captured through semi-structured interviews, where it is anticipated that participants will respond thoughtfully and honestly (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). In addition, it is suggested that the specific high-end brands identified (i.e., Rich Mnisi & Thebe Magugu) were representative of the wider South African luxury fashion industry as they relate to the integration of heritage (Coetzee, 2018). The credibility of the results is linked to whether the researcher's interpretation of qualitative data is reflexive and conscious of anticipated biases (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). That's one of the other key premises. Guided by qualitative research, the researcher will provide participants with a concise definition and description of the terms 'luxury', 'brand image', 'brand identity, and 'cultural heritage' to ensure a shared conception (Silverman, 2016).

This study seeks to understand the perceptions of urban South African consumers towards luxury fashion brands that adopt cultural heritage in their brand image and identity. The target audience is restricted to those who know South African luxury fashion labels like Rich Mnisi and Thebe Magugu. The brands were selected for their cultural significance and relevance to the study's emphasis on the overlap of cultural heritage and luxury branding. Please note that other luxury categories like hospitality, automotive or jewelry were intentionally omitted to keep a narrowed focus on fashion brands. Furthermore, the research is confined to urban regions of South Africa and includes only a small sample of six participants. This particular cohort consists of 1 Gen Z and 5 Millennials: 1 white female, 1 coloured female, 3 black female, and 1 black male. These delimitations enable the research to hone in on urban consumers' perceptions but at the same time implicitly exclude rural consumers and South African consumers more broadly.

Limitations

The study has several limitations that could affect the validity, credibility and generalisability of its findings:

Small Sample Size: The study was limited by a small sample size of six participants, due to

data saturation. Whilst in accordance with qualitative research, the small sample limits the generalisability of the results to all South Africans (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006).

Demographic and Contextual Representativeness: The sample is geographically and demographically skewed toward urban South Africa. Such a narrow scope may not accurately represent the different cultural and socioeconomic dynamics of South Africa. So, the findings are more indicative of urban, middle- to upper-class perceptions and may miss rural or underrepresented populations.

Specialty in Designer Fashion Brands: This includes luxury fashion brands, which incorporate their cultural heritage, like Rich Mnisi and Thebe Magugu. Such focus on other luxury sectors may reduce the generalisability and applicability of the findings to a broader luxury landscape (Maxwell, 2013).

Time Horizon: The design was a cross sectional time horizon of the research, capturing perceptions only at one point in time. This is a limitation as it is not possible to understand how consumer attitudes and trends have evolved in the longer term (Bryman, 2016).

Researcher Bias: Like in all qualitative research, risk of researcher bias compromising data interpretation exists. While reflexivity and process transparency are preserved, the interpretation and reporting of results are still subject to the researcher's subjective perspective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Resource Constraints: The time, materials, and financial resources were limited that affected the breadth and depth of data collection and analysis. The data collection and analysis took less than five months to complete, which described a limitation of the study that informed a brief and focused design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Notwithstanding these limitations, the study strives to uphold transparency, reflexivity, and rigour to safeguard validity and reliability.

Assumptions

This research is based on the following key assumptions:

Participant Honesty: In semi-structured interviews, we assume that interviewees will answer carefully and truthfully, and as a result share their actual impressions (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Representativeness of Selected Brands: Rich Mnisi and Thebe Magugu were selected as exemplary representatives of the ubiquity of South African luxury fashion brands that weave cultural heritage into its fabric. This is supported by the prominence of these areas and their alignment with the study's focus (Coetzee, 2018).

On the other hand: Shared Understanding of Key Concepts: Three specific definitions of key terms — 'luxury,' 'brand image,' 'brand identity,' and 'cultural heritage' — were presented to participants in an attempt to standardise their insights. This has made a common conceptualisation of these ideas possible (Silverman, 2016).

Researcher Reflexivity: The reflexive and self-conscious nature of the investigator in reading the qualitative data during data collection and data analysis is assumed, with the aim of achieving credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The delimitations, limitations, and assumptions above determine what the research is supported by and performed in, providing transparency about what may have contributed to or affected the research results and conclusions.

Research Methodology

The research onion is a framework for developing a comprehensive design of the research plan, therefore, the research methodology section should be made by using this. For that purpose, the framework of the research onion by Saunders *et al.* (2007) is used as a guide when choosing the research philosophy, approach, strategy, and techniques.

1.1.8 Research philosophy

When we look at the top layer of the research onion, it talks about philosophical perspective for the research. This research employs the interpretivist philosophy because it provides an

opportunity to gain a deep understanding of the social and cultural context in which product meanings are constructed by consumers. This philosophy is notably applicable to the current study because of how cultural heritage influences consumers' perceptions of brand image and identity (Bianchi & Mathews, 2016), forcing one to focus on the subjective experiences and attitudes of South African consumers about luxury brands. Interpretivism allows the analysis of subjective interpretations and meaning, hence, this approach is essential in understanding the diverse and complex responses of individuals in a multi-ethnic country like South Africa.

Research philosophy, which is typically categorised into three groups—positivism, interpretivism, or critical realism—is a function of ontology. It relates to what you think the nature of reality is. Due to the exploratory nature of this study and its purpose of investigating luxury brand consumer perceptions in South Africa, a subjectivist ontology is needed. One could claim that reality is the ability of each participant to create their perception, and their social constructions are particular to them.

Epistemology: the investigation of what constitutes justified belief (knowledge gain). It may be important to remember that, as an approach, interpretivism has been used to socially construct a hypothetical set of perceptions regarding luxury brands. Rather than to find universal truths, the research aims for a deep understanding of consumers in their specifics within cultural and social contexts.

The philosophy of how values work in research is called axiology. In interpretivist research, the researcher recognises that his or her personal values may affect the process. In this case, the idea of a highly idealised vision helps in understanding the perceptions of subject participants, especially relating to understanding cultural heritage-based luxury brands. Based on this realisation, the qualitative method works towards obtaining in-depth and insightful understandings of people.

Interpretivism is appropriate for this research when placing considerable emphasis on interpretation and understanding the meanings of human experiences (and behaviours) in their context (Bryman, 2016). The objective of the research is to investigate South African consumers' perceptions towards luxury brands, which requires an in-depth understanding of cultural heritage integration. Interpretivism supports qualitative research that provides in-

depth information about people's subjective views of the world (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2012). This is important in probing the abstract dimensions of brand identity and image in the specific cultural ambiance of South Africa's luxury market (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this reason, interpretivism is preferred, as positivism neglects the social constructions and symbolic meanings that are key in appreciating luxury brands (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).

1.1.9 Research approach

Research methodology's second layer is about choosing theory. This study follows an inductive approach. It is preferred due to the use of qualitative data, which operates on an inductive method., whereby theories are easier to generate seeing as they originate from observations and patterns seen (Thomas, 2006). The exploratory intent of this study seeks to generate a new understanding of the perceptions of South African consumers towards luxury brands using cultural identity. As a relatively under-researched area in South Africa (as previously discussed), the adoption of an inductive approach allows for flexibility and reveals findings that may not necessarily align with existing themes (Bryman, 2016). According to Polit and Beck (2004), the inductive approach is particularly beneficial for qualitative research because it takes the path of creating theories from previous empirical findings rather than testing existing hypotheses.

Methodology for research

The research strategy identifies the overall plan for data collection and analysis. In this study, semi-structured interviews are used.

Because the research focuses on an in-depth investigation within a particular real-world context—South African luxury brands incorporating cultural heritage—this study uses a case study methodology. A case study provides rich contextualised data by allowing the researcher to investigate various facets of customer perceptions in an authentic environment (Yin, 2014). This is why this approach works perfectly in understanding complex social phenomena (Stake, 1995), as it allows for high-level analysis but is confined to a limited context.

The study used an instrumental case study type, which in this instance includes luxury fashion brands within South Africa. Some takeaways of this type of case study are to

recognise how cultural heritage relates to brand image and consumer perception within the luxury market. Results will be tightly grounded in the empirical local context but also used to inform a more general theory (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

Justification: The case study will provide insight into the specific consumer-brand relationship idiosyncrasy as the South African luxury market may not necessarily resemble any other luxury market. Because of its unique cultural, economic, and social environments, South Africa is well positioned for a case study, as there are only limited observations of how local consumers engage with luxury brands.

The semi-structured interviews are chosen because it balances and provides structure as well as flexibility for the researcher to guide the conversation and explore topics in depth based on what emerges (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). It is important for recording (or documenting) consumers subjective and rich experiences with luxury brands and cultural heritage (Gill *et al.*, 2008). While structured interviews or surveys only go skin deep, semi-structured interviews give deeper insights into the cultural and emotional dimensions of luxury brand identity. They enable deeper probing on specific points of interest (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). This tactic is consistent with the inductive method, as it encourages exploration of topics that might not have been originally anticipated.

1.1.10 Research choices

The fourth layer: methodological choice: This approach is purely qualitative in nature, as it only collects and analyses data by one specific method. This design enables greater depth of exploration on how consumer perceptions (relative to country-marketing strategies) can play out without the confines of needing some level of quantitative data incorporated (Creswell, 2013; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018).

Time horizon

Time horizon layer: This is about how long in time data comes. This investigation uses cross-sectional design. Because this research studies customer perceptions at a particular point in time, the cross-sectional design is most appropriate (Bryman, 2016). Contrary to Armstrong and Overton (1977), there is no need for a longitudinal design because this study does not aim at establishing the attitudes South African consumers had towards luxury

brands some time ago, but rather their attitudes are approached closer to now. According to Saunders *et al.* (2012), the study will employ a cross-sectional timeframe to ensure that the market context of luxury brands is current with respect to and allow for rapid data collection within the feasible timeframe of this research project.

Methods and approaches

The data collection and analysis strategies ultimately aimed to uncover how South African luxury brands, which draw from cultural heritage in their design, are perceived by consumers. It also enables a semi-structured nature to the interviews with consumers who have had experiences with these brands, allowing for richer exploration of their perspective.

Online interviews will be conducted via Zoom/MS Teams for 25–30 min, allowing enough time for an exhaustive exploration of customer perceptions. An open-ended interview guide will be used, allowing participants to speak freely about their experiences and insights, with sufficient conversational flexibility being ensured. This process will help understand the depth and impact of cultural heritage on brand identity and perceptions (Gill *et al.*, 2008).

1.1.11 Population and sample

This study focused on consumers of luxury fashion brands in South Africa, more especially on those who were aware of or interested in brands whose designs draw inspiration from their cultural heritage. In the case of deliberate sampling, participants who were aware of brands such as Rich Mnisi and Thebe Magugu known to incorporate some cultural context in their luxury products were chosen for the interview (Ndlovu, 2021).

Participant selection reflected data saturation and was rich without redundancy (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006), thus a sample size of four to six participants. Since SA luxury fashion marries modernism and cultural tradition, this sample allowed for the examination of consumer deciphering of cultural heritage in brand identity. This blend is illustrated through designers such as Rich Mnisi and Thebe Magugu, whose work makes high-end local fashion a perfect space for this investigation (Ndlovu, 2021). Steenkamp (2014) reiterates the importance of cultural relevance in global luxury branding, commenting that localised strategies are now mandatory components in global markets.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics is considered one of the bases of this study, focusing on the security, dignity and well-being of the subjects involved at all stages of research (Bryman, 2016). Maintaining ethical standards promotes credibility and integrity of the study. Before this research is undertaken, an IIE Vega Institutional Review Board approval will be secured. This approval verifies that all research actions were compliant with institutional and ethical standards safeguarding the rights of the participants involved and assuring that high ethical standards were used (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016).

As with other ethical research, the study will emphasise informed consent, and participants will have to provide voluntary agreement before taking part in the interviews. The study's purpose, objectives, and procedure will be described to participants in detail so they are fully informed before any study activities. Participants will also be made aware of their right, should they choose, to withdraw from the research project at any point without incurring penalties or requiring further explanation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For consent, the participants will receive a written consent form stating the purpose of the study, their rights, and the fact that participation is voluntary. Assurances will also be provided that individuals who refuse to participate or who withdraw from the study cannot be penalised or offered any advantage as a result of their participation or non-participation. An open and transparent process is good in the sense that all the participants are aware and it creates a respectful and comfortable environment (Gill et al., 2008). Protecting the identities of participants: The confidentiality of participants is an important ethical issue in this study. The identities of the participants will be anonymised, and there will be no identifying information in the final research report or any subsequent publications (King & Horrocks, 2010). Interviews will be transcribed and analysed anonymously by using pseudonyms or numerical identifiers to protect confidentiality.

All possible data — audio recordings and transcripts of interviews — will be stored through password-protected files only by the researcher. Such data protection measures are mandated by the applicable data protection regulations (e.g., Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) (South Africa) in order to mitigate the risks of unauthorised access or misuse (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Saunders et al., 2016). Researcher Reflexivity and Power Dynamics: With qualitative research, ethics cannot simply be confined to matters of

informed consent, as it involves navigating power dynamics through the course of interviews. In the same vein, the study will apply strategies to establish the interview situation as relaxed and non-coercive so that the interviewees are able to articulate their perceptions and attitudes as freely and reliably as possible (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Evolving process that rely on the researcher always to be reflexive — each stage of the research should involve conscious, active steps taken to remove bias or reduce its influence on participant response. Being Culturally Sensitive and Respectful Notably, as the study examines perceptions of luxury brands with cultural heritage, it emphasises the need to examine cultural and personal contexts. Respect for the culture and values of the participants will be exercised, including efforts to avoid language or questions that may be interpreted as insensitive or dismissive. As detailed in Bryman (2016) this culturally sensitive approach is crucial for participants in the research as they are more easily engaged if they feel they are valued and respected.

Ethical Data Management: To ensure participant data is not compromised through unauthorised access or general negligence, the study will utilise strict data storage and handling procedures, alongside the aforementioned confidentiality and anonymity. Audio recordings and transcriptions will be stored securely on encrypted devices, and data will be kept only for as long as necessary to achieve the study's aims. Sensitive data will be securely disposed of after research completion, and the research process complied with ethical and legal requirements (Saunders et al., 2016).

Minimising Psychological Risk: It is recognised that while perceptions and experiences will be described, the discourse may also carry a psychological burden to bear on participants. In addition, precautions will be taken to address any discomfort, including allowing each participant the option to skip any question that he/she finds uncomfortable. The respondents will be assured of the confidentiality of their input and what will be done with it as it relates to this study. **Honesty and Ethical Reporting:** The research process will remain transparent to ensure the findings remain valid and reliable. We will explicitly attend to ethical issues unique to qualitative inquiry, such as dealing with sensitive information and preventing bias on the part of the researcher. The researcher will do the utmost to accurately represent the voice of participants as the closest approximation of the truth, ethically throughout study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Overall, these ethical considerations, based on well-established principles of research ethics, offer a structure for ensuring that the study continues at all times to respect and protect the rights and well-being of all those who participate. We will discuss ethical safeguards and protocols in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Significance of the Research

This study addresses a significant gap in luxury brand image and identity literature in the local context of South Africa. There is a suggested gap from the literature among the previous researchers (Van den Berg, 2017; Coetzee, 2018) in South African consumer behaviour towards luxury brands. Recent studies (Okonkwo, 2021; Chevalier and Gutsatz, 2020) continue to draw attention to the dynamism of this market. The current research is based upon an emerging market and will have implications for the luxury sector in South Africa, thus making a contribution to the consumer behaviour and brand management fields.

People from emerging markets, such as consumers in South Africa, frequently find themselves uncomfortably positioned between local cultural norms and global luxury trends (Amatulli et al., 2021). The research will outline the dynamics in which these affect consumers mentalities and provide greater understanding into how brand identity and image are formed (Kapferer and Bastien, 2021) with specific application to South Africa.

Based on these research findings, this study will provide managerial implications for luxury brand managers and marketers. These insights will lead to the formulation of appropriate communication techniques for South African consumers, enhanced brand positioning, and sustained long-term brand loyalty. By taking cognisance of the South African cultural and consumer dynamics (Janssen et al., 2022), luxury brands may have been able to better curate their marketing strategies. In a context of pandering local heritage whilst competing with global best practices, which in turn noisily capture customer attention (Dubois, Laurent & Czellar, 2021), this knowledge is pivotal.

As such, the implications of this study extend beyond luxury brands operating in South Africa and are likely to influence go-to-market strategies and brand positioning decisions across other developing economies globally. One of the factors that figure out whether luxury brands will prosper in South Africa is remaining competitive and relevant. Using study

findings, managers of luxury brands could as well use it to create sustainable brand loyalty, albeit taking into consideration distinct cultural predispositions and consumer needs specifically for South Africa.

For brands to succeed over the long term they must develop emotional connections with consumers through specialised luxury offerings and brand communications (Wiedmann and Hennigs, 2022). Lastly there are more general and useful ramifications of this research for luxury brands looking to enter new, emerging markets. Through the application of insights gained from the South African context, brands can enhance their positioning and optimise their go-to-market strategies in globally, culturally diverse markets (Ko & Kim, 2021). Gaining market share in emerging markets will depend on luxury brand's ability to comprehend how local customs and standards of luxury interact with one another (D'Arpizio *et al.*, 2022).

Chapter Outline

Table 1-1: Chapter Outline

Chapter	Discussion
Chapter 1: Introduction	This chapter introduces the research topic, objectives, and significance of the study, setting the stage for the investigation. It highlights the special relationship between cultural heritage and contemporary luxury and contextualises the significance of understanding consumer perceptions of luxury brand image and identity in South Africa. In addition, the chapter gives readers a general overview of the dissertation structure and a roadmap for the upcoming chapters.
Chapter 2: Literature Review	An extensive analysis of the relevant literature is provided in this chapter. It places the current research within the body of existing knowledge by highlighting prior research findings and incorporating theoretical frameworks that inform the study. This chapter is crucial because it defines and addresses the

	research gap that this study attempts to close, supporting its applicability and need.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology	The research design as well as the particular techniques for data collection and analysis are described in this chapter. It explains the thinking behind the selected approaches, including purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews. The chapter also discusses the constraints that the research process faced and the ethical standards that were maintained to protect the study's integrity.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis	The research study's results are presented and thoroughly examined here. This chapter offers an interpretation of the data in light of the stated research questions and a report on the findings. It also provides insights into the ways that cultural heritage influences consumer perceptions of luxury brands. Making significant links between the data and the more general theoretical frameworks previously discussed is the goal of the analysis.
Chapter 5: Findings, Recommendations and Conclusion	This last chapter synthesises the knowledge gathered during the research process by summarising the study's major discoveries and contributions. It addresses how these findings might be applied to theory and practice and provides luxury brand managers with useful suggestions. It thus also identifies opportunities for future research as well as the continued relevance of the study in the broader luxury branding and consumer behaviour literature.

Conclusion

By demonstrating how these perceptions impact consumer engagement, this study adds new knowledge regarding South African consumers and their impressions of luxury brand identity and image. The South African luxury market is becoming more dynamic, with most lavish brands competing either on home turf or in international fields, attracting local and foreign consumers alike. Explaining how perceptions regarding brand identity and image affect engagement with a luxury brand, contributing unique insights on the particularities of the South African luxury market. To achieve this, this study examines consumer perceptions of luxury brand identity and image as antecedents to customer engagement. Because culture is embedded in consumer habits, inclusion of this in the brand is inevitable in a crowded market.

Findings from the research hold potential value to luxury fashion brands because few other low- and middle-income countries or regions have proven as complex for such brands to navigate, South Africa included. Luxury brands can then adopt strategies in accordance with local cultural and consumer needs by addressing unique challenges and best practices that establish brand identity and image. Finally, this research extends the understanding of luxury branding in the academic domain and offers useful managerial implications for how marketers may use interaction with consumers to enhance contact. If well gained, luxury brands will commit—both locally and globally—their strategy not only to the consumers but rather into its cultural fabric, literally anchoring sustainable business success for the long haul whilst maintaining a competitive edge. The research emphasises how crucial it is to understand consumer perceptions, especially when growth and sustainability are at stake in the realm of luxury.

2 Literature Review

Introduction

In the luxury fashion sector, perceptions of customers underpin brand identity and loyalty. This relationship becomes particularly complex in culturally diverse countries, such as South Africa, where consumers from a variety of cultural backgrounds influence the perceived value attached to local and international luxury brands. Unless luxury brands adopt these perceptions of the customer and make their way through this changing market environment, strengthening emotional attachments to their brand will be that much more complicated. Views on any issue, especially about culture—of which cultural heritage is an integral part—varies significantly across countries due to cultural differences. By infusing aspects of South African culture and lifestyle into their brand being, luxury brands can align with the deep-set values of consumers that concern who they are, where they come from, and how others see them. As seen in the works of designers such as Rich Mnisi, Thebe Magugu, and Maxhosa, we witness how a growing global consciousness around African luxury fashion further embeds this loyalty trait by linking its brand identity with cultural heritage. In the cultural melting pot of South Africa, respecting local customs makes a brand more attractive by solidifying the economic ties between customers and brands, stimulating brand equity and loyalty. According to Keller (1993), consumer perceptions are customers attitudes, beliefs, and feelings towards luxury brands. When consumers identify with a brand, they tend to view it more positively, just the way integrating cultural heritage into its identity allows them to relate to what it stands for and better perceive themselves in terms of its message and values. This study investigates South African consumer perceptions of luxury brand identities and representations that emphasise their cultural heritage.

Brand identity is how a high-end brand defines itself to its targeted audience (Aaker, 1996). Improving a brand identity with local cultural heritage not only offers the whole in favour of national brands but also represents a must-have differentiator in favour of luxury brands on the international level. This study aims to examine the nature of identity—and how it is created and maintained—through the lens of cultural heritage by examining perceptions of luxury brands in terms of identity that exist between consumer and seller in South Africa. It further explores the broader implications of embedding cultural heritage in luxury branding, that is, the relationship between consumer perception and brand identity. And Miller (2007) argues that cultural signifiers or stories can help brands become emotionally richer and more

authentic. Kapferer (2012) further argues that cultural heritage is indispensable for luxury brands to appeal to South African consumers, as brand identity works better when it resonates with the target audience values.

The literature on important concepts like brand identity, cultural heritage, and consumer perceptions in the context of luxury fashion will be thoroughly examined in this chapter. Before going into the importance of cultural heritage in defining luxury brand identity, it will first examine the theoretical frameworks that underpin the understanding of consumer perceptions and brand identity. The last section of the chapter will analyse earlier studies that demonstrate how cultural heritage affects consumer perceptions and brand loyalty. This will set the foundation for the research questions that will direct this study.

This literature review lays out the theoretical framework for this study, emphasising the influence of cultural heritage on consumer perceptions of luxury brands. Utilising these insights, the next chapter will describe the methodology, rooted in qualitative research methods, seeking to capture consumer experiences and perceptions in more depth. Through semi-structured interviews, this research will examine how consumers in South Africa understand luxury brands according to their cultural heritage and what that means for academic literature and brand practice in the South African luxury fashion industry context.

Brand Identity

In today's highly competitive market, a brand's identity is crucial in setting it apart from its rivals. Brand identity encompasses everything a company creates to convey the right image of its constituent brand elements (Aaker, 1996). This means visually - logos, colours and packaging - as well as tone of voice and communication style - to determine what underlying narrative, and values or themes are at play (Wheeler, 2017:4). Brand identity, according to Kapferer (2008:172), is "the outward expression of a brand, including its name, trademark, communications, and visual appearance," and is defined as desired by a company in relation to how they want consumers to perceive their brands, remarking reference and

differentiation in their minds. Brand identity is deliberately curated in order to communicate the central message and values of the company (Kapferer, 2008:172). The brand serves as a blueprint for conveying information about the product to all stakeholders, ensuring consistency and coherence in all interactions (Aaker, 2014:867). This cohesion is key to establishing a brand that is powerful, identifiable and able to be engaged with by consumers (Aaker, 2014:867).

Ultimately, customer perceptions of brand identity in the South African luxury fashion sector are culturally highly resonant and dependent on authentic perceptions. Brands that manage to embed these elements into their own identity are able to forge a deeper bond with consumers and, in this way, feed longer-term brand equity. This lays the groundwork for the upcoming subsections which will delve deeper into the concepts of brand identity, cultural heritage, and consumer perceptions.

2.1.1 Definition and Foundation of brand identity

Brand identity is the intentional assembly of a brand's visual, verbal, and behavioural cues to send consumers a specific message (and set of values). This includes elements like logos, colours, packaging, tone of voice, and communication style. Brand identity represents the company's self-perception and the image it wants to project to its audience (Kapferer, 2008:172).

These clues include the brand's overall communication style as well as its logos, colours, typography, packaging, and tone of voice. These components work together to shape the brand's perception of itself and the image that the company wishes to convey to customers. As Kapferer (2008) points out, brand identity is more than just the outward manifestation of branding, rather it encompasses a more profound deliberate goal that seeks to build consumer trust and loyalty (Kapferer, 2008:15).

Brand identity involves intentional messaging that connects with the target audience as well as aesthetics as Kotler and Keller (2016) point out. In order to better understand the connections that consumers have with South African luxury brands, this study will examine how these brands develop and communicate their brand identities. It will pay particular attention to how these brands incorporate cultural heritage.

2.1.1.1 Foundation of Brand Identity

The concept of brand identity originated from the early attempts at branding in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when businesses were trying to stand out from the competition due to mass production. At first, the goal of branding was to create unique visual symbols, like trademarks, that would allow products to be legally protected and distinguished (Moore and Reid, 2008). With pioneers like David Ogilvy promoting consistent brand identities that communicated values and built strong consumer connections, branding eventually grew beyond visual cues to include emotional and psychological elements (Ogilvy, 1983).

By the end of the 20th century academics like David A. Aaker (1996) and Jean-Noël Kapferer (2008) believed brand identity is framed as a strategic tool for creating enduring relationships with consumers and expanded on this idea. While Kapferer presented the **Brand Identity Prism (2008)**, which shows how brands project their values across multiple touchpoints. The model has six sides of brand identity such as physique, personality, culture, relationship, and reflection are characteristics over his own body or face capturing the process above regular maintenance schedule. It contributes to a better understanding of how luxury brands develop and communicate their identity for South African consumers; Aaker stressed that brand identity encompasses multiple dimensions like visual, emotional, and experiential that shape consumer perceptions (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 2008). These fundamental theories emphasise how a brand's identity is purposefully put together to communicate particular values, imagery, and messaging. This also introduces the Social Identity Theory by Tajfel & Turner (1986), where this theory states that people obtain part of their identity from the social groups they belong to. It provides an explanation in the context of luxury brands on how South African consumers may make use of these luxury brands as signifiers signalling their social status and group affiliations.

Cultural background is one of the greatest contributors to brand positioning—especially in a melting pot such as South Africa, where cultural diversity can also be a challenge for branding. Recent studies by Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012) have also focused on the role of brands as mediators of cultural values by grounding their identities in narratives about culture. South African luxury brands can leverage cultural heritage, exclusivity, and authenticity to build richer relationships with customers in an increasingly cutthroat luxury market.

Components of brand identity

Brand identity is a set of many elements that, when combined together, create a distinct and coherent image in the consumer's mind. These components include not only verbal components such as brand name, tone of voice, and type of messaging (Kapferer, 2008), but also visual elements such as logos, colours, and typography. It goes on to say that symbolic and emotional associations contribute to the value of a brand. According to Keller (2013), consistency of these components through all touchpoints helps to develop a brand that communicates a different and unique experience for the appropriate audience.

2.1.2 Factors influencing brand identity

A brand's identity is shaped by a number of factors that affect how consumers view and identify a brand. The customer experience, visual components, and brand history are important considerations. Since they create a story and establish authenticity, a brand's history and heritage play a major role in defining its identity (Aaker, 1996). In order to set a brand apart and leave a lasting impression, visual components like typography, colour schemes, and logos are essential (Keller, 2003). Additionally, brand identity is greatly influenced by the customer experience. Customers develop a strong sense of identity and brand loyalty through positive interactions and consistent service (Schmitt, 1999). These elements combine to create a unified and appealing brand identity that appeals to target markets.

2.1.3 Importance of brand identity in the luxury sector

Because brand identity affects consumer perceptions and the entire brand experience, it is especially important in the luxury market. Many essential elements help to explain the significance of brand identity in this industry. In the luxury market a brand's identity serves to set it apart from its rivals by highlighting its distinctive qualities and history. Maintaining exclusivity, a key feature of luxury brands, depends on this differentiation (Kapferer, 2015:63). High-net-worth individuals can be strongly attracted to luxury brands due to their exclusivity and uniqueness, which further enhances the brand's prestige and desirability. Through a skilfully designed brand identity, luxury brands frequently foster an emotional connection with their customers. Fostering long-term relationships with customers and brand loyalty requires this emotional resonance (Heine, 2012:44). The identity of a luxury brand

encompasses more than just visual components, it also involves crafting an emotional narrative and aspirational lifestyle that connects with customers on a deeper level. The perceived value of luxury products is influenced by a robust brand identity. The brand's history, craftsmanship, and identity consistency across multiple touchpoints are all strongly associated with this perception of value (Kapferer, 2015:77). Customers are prepared to shell out more money for goods that represent a powerful and dependable brand identity since it enhances their prestige and perception of themselves. Strong and consistent brand identities support luxury brands' total brand equity, which is essential to their long-term viability and positioning in the market (Aaker, 1991:12). In a competitive market, luxury brands need to sustain their growth and success over time. This can be achieved through a clearly defined brand identity.

Brand Image

In the consumer-driven market of today, a brand's perception is greatly influenced by its brand image. Brand image shows how customers actually view a brand, whereas brand identity represents what a company hopes to communicate. Building a strong brand image is essential to setting a business apart from the competition and retaining customers. This section will define brand image, examine the variables that affect it, and talk about its importance in relation to South African luxury brands.

2.1.4 Definition and Foundation of brand image

The brand image and consumer perception analyses demonstrate the importance of this aspect in leveraging marketing outcomes and determining purchasing behaviours. Brand image is important because it can arouse loyalty, support, or increase the selling price of a product (Kotler & Keller, 2006; Puspasari *et al.*, 2022; Budiyono & Novandalina, 2022), and according to Aaker (1996), brand image can be identified as those aspects related to ideas people have on their minds about certain brands. Three main factors, perceived quality, emotional connection, and consistency emerge around which the conversation pivots about how consumers perceive of a brand.

Among luxury brands, brand image is especially important to consumer behaviour and purchase decisions. This perception of luxury brands in South Africa is largely influenced by

historical, socio-economic (cultural), and global influences. The changing notion of luxury brands with South African consumers, as highlighted by Makhitha (2020), points to an imperative for market evolution in the response of market dynamics and consumer sentiment.

Ultimately, it is critical to effectively manage brand image with quality perceptions while also communicating differentiation and emotional connection, consistently forming a positive residue in the mind of consumer, which impacts their purchasing behaviour. Leveraging these aspects within the theoretical contexts can go a long way in building brand image and market position, especially for luxury brands (which seems to be relevant even more here in South Africa). Through identifying and acknowledging key drivers of brand image, businesses can build stronger relationships with consumers for long-term success in a competitive market.

2.1.4.1 Foundation of brand image

The 1950s saw the emergence of brand image, a vital component of marketing, as companies realised how much consumer perceptions and emotional attachments to a brand affected purchase behaviour. The foundation for contemporary branding techniques was laid by early advertising pioneers such as David Ogilvy, who highlighted the power of a well-managed brand image to generate strong emotional appeal and brand loyalty (Ogilvy, 1983). As defined by experiences outside communications and a brand's place in the market, brand image is the consumer's impression of a company (Aaker, 1996). While logos, messaging, and visual components help businesses create their brand identities, how consumers understand and absorb these signals determines the brand image. This differentiation emphasises how direct brand interactions and outside variables like word-of-mouth and social media impact the formation of brand images, which is consumer-driven (Keller, 2013).

With the emergence of digital media, social media and user-generated content have become increasingly important in shaping perceptions and shaping the evolution of brand image. Brands need to consider how their image resonates across diverse cultural contexts in today's global market as demonstrated by South African luxury brands like Maxhosa Africa and Thebe Magugu, that incorporate local heritage into their global appeal (Makhitha, 2020). Other theoretical models that help to explain the influence of brand image on consumer behaviour are Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (1991) and Aaker's Brand Equity Model

(1991). Strong brand images encourage loyalty and positive associations, which is how Aaker's model builds brand equity. This model explains the creation of brand equity from consumers' brand awareness to associations and brand loyalty and perceived quality. It also informs how South Africa's luxury brands could establish strong, positive brand images.

On the other hand, Ajzen's theory relates brand image to consumer attitudes, social influences, and perceived control, which all influence purchasing behaviour. Azjen's theory postulates that behavioural intentions precede behaviour in response to the attitude toward that behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Considering the role of the brand image, consumer's attitude towards luxury elements, their social circle influences, and the capacity to afford the luxury collectively determine buying behaviour.

2.1.5 Components of brand image

A brand's image is made up of various important elements that influence how people view and interact with it. One of the main components is brand associations, or the qualities and advantages that consumers associate with a brand. Positive brand associations can boost brand equity and differentiation in a crowded market, according to Keller (1993), who emphasises the significance of these associations in shaping consumer perceptions. The other crucial component is brand personality, or the human qualities associated with a brand. This idea facilitates the development of long-term relationships and brand loyalty by creating emotional connections with customers (Aaker, 1997). More recently, research by He and Li (2021) emphasised how, in the digital age of today, brand personality, specifically sincerity and competence, has a major impact on customer loyalty and brand trust.

Moreover, a key element of brand image is the consumer experience, which includes interactions with the brand on an emotional level, the quality of the products, and customer service. Positive consumer experiences greatly affect brand perceptions and loyalty, especially when they are consistent with the brand's promise, according to Grönroos (2007) and more recent research by Iglesias, Ind & Schultz (2020).

Combining personality, identity, communication, and customer experience with brand associations, results in a brand image that appeals to customers and fosters trust, loyalty, and long-term success in the marketplace. These are all elements that are closely related to the factors that influence brand image which will be discussed in the following section.

Brand perception is primarily influenced by a company's positioning in the market level of customer satisfaction and cultural relevance. Internal brand management strategies support the development of a positive brand image by guaranteeing coherence and consistency among these components. Brands that better understand the anatomy of their components and the drivers that influence them are more likely to engage with customers and enjoy long-term marketplace success.

Factors influencing brand image

Three key components of building a strong brand image are perceived quality, emotional connection, and consistency. According to Keller (2020), these elements influence how consumers perceive the image of a brand. As defined in the perceptual view of product quality by Rodrigues *et al.* (2022) and Haris *et al.* (2022), that is essential to a positive brand image, where a high-quality product—indicated with factors such as design, durability, and reliability—can represent high value for brands. Brands that consistently prove reliable and deliver high-quality products tend to build better reputations and keep customers coming back. The emotional connection formed by the customers when they are engaged with a brand also helps create the brand image, as emotionally over-involved customers build stronger ties with the brands, resulting in their advocacy (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Thomson *et al.*, 2005). This connection is usually formed through brand storytelling followed by a series of emotions, such as joy, nostalgia, or belonging, which brings the community closer. These not only help with retention but also willingness to pay for exclusivity. Brand messaging and experience are consistent in maximizing brand identity. Consistent messaging allows consumers to make fewer mistakes about the brand, where it is easier for them to see it than easily remember it or have a distrust of the latter (Wang & Chen, 2020). When you take these factors as a whole, quality perception coupled with an emotional connection and the ability to be consistent creates a foundation for a brand image that is resonant, reliable, and has the ability to create true customer loyalty.

Furthermore, the luxury sector relies heavily on brand image. Brand image has a tremendous impact on consumer behaviour and luxury purchase decisions. Image differentiates itself from the pronunciation of brand awareness above, as it is actually

measured through readership or viewership of an advertisement and goes beyond just gaining a noticeable share of a target individual's attention (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). Positive and negative associations that consumers have with a certain brand are substantiated over time through advertising campaigns (Otto & Bryce, 2008), word-of-mouth referrals, and customer experience (Moore et al., 2003). The interjection here is to state that how luxury brands are considered in South Africa depends on several other socio-economic constructs, which at some point can be traced back to historical context and parity with good morals towards European values and economic status. With the increased exposure to global trends through digital media, consumer sensibilities are constantly changing (Hennings, Wiedmann, & Klaarman, 2012), which calls for luxury brands to become agile and adaptive.

Luxury brand perceptions amongst consumers are underpinned by history, socioeconomics, and culture in South Africa. According to Makhitha (2020), the perception of luxury brands among South African consumers is evolving due to both exposure of local luxury brands on the global platform as well as socio-economic changes within the country.

Examining how brand identity and image affect consumers' opinions of luxury fashion brands in South Africa is the aim of this research, especially in light of the integration of cultural heritage. According to Kotler and Keller's (2016) theoretical framework, deliberate and strategic brand identity creation goes beyond surface-level components to establish profound and meaningful connections with customers. This study supports these foundations. The study will look at the ways in which luxury brands in South Africa convey their brand identity and how these endeavours affect consumer perceptions, particularly in cases where the brand's cultural heritage is an important selling point.

Theoretical Development of Brand Image and Identity Concepts

In South Africa, where cultural legacy is valued, branding plays a critical role in shaping consumers perceptions of and interactions with high-end fashion labels. Understanding fundamental branding concepts like brand image and brand identity is crucial to understanding consumer perceptions and behaviours (Keller, 1993:7; Aaker, 1996:68; De Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998:419; Kapferer, 2008:174). Brand image as defined by Keller (1993:7), is how consumers remember and perceive a brand because of their

existing brand associations. The brands general customer experience, benefits, and features are covered by these connections. These associations are increasingly influenced by a brand's ability to integrate and represent cultural heritage in the South African luxury fashion market. This is because it can boost brand loyalty and fortify emotional ties with consumers.

Conversely, brand identity refers to the external manifestation of a company's goods or services, such as its name, logo, style of communication design, and the promise it makes to customers (Aaker, 1996:68; De Chernatony, 1999:165). It is crucial to incorporate cultural heritage into these external manifestations in the South African context. According to Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:45), luxury brands are not only set apart in a competitive market, but also have their identity matched with the values and cultural quirks of the local customer base. This helps to set expectations and foster brand loyalty. Foundational branding theories that explain the interaction between brand image and brand identity have been articulated by academics like Keller, Aaker, and Kapferer. In the South African luxury market, where cultural heritage plays a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions, these theories are especially pertinent. Table 2.4 below goes into further detail on these ideas and provides a theoretical framework for comprehending how luxury brands, particularly those that integrate cultural heritage into their brand strategies, succeed through brand identity and image.

The basic concepts of branding comprise brand image and identity, so it is perfectly understood that they play a vital role in the way that consumers perceive and behave towards a brand (Keller, 1993:7; Aaker, 1996:68; De Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998:419; Kapferer, 2008:174). Keller (1993:7) defined brand image as the consumer's perception of a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in the consumer's memory. It includes a host of brand attributes, benefits, and overall consumer experiences. However, brand identity on the other hand, refers to the outward expression of an organisation or product or service, including its name, logo, design, communication style, and the overall guarantee to consumers (Aaker, 1996:68; De Chernatony, 1999:165). This outward expression is crucial as it shapes consumer expectations and loyalty (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000:45).

According to scholars Keller, Aaker, and Kapferer there are three foundational branding theories used to explain the concept of brand image and brand identity. Table 2.4. below explains how these ideas are presented.

Table 2-1: Brand image and brand identity as explained by foundational branding theories

Theory	Brand image	Brand identity	Application to luxury brands
Keller's Brand Equity model (1993)	The consumer's perception of a brand shaped by brand associations held in memory (Keller, 1993:3). This perception is influenced by the brand's name, logo, and design elements, all of which contribute to an elegant and exclusive image.	The visible elements of a brand, such as its name, logo, etc. (Keller 1993:4). More of its external brand identity, visual and communicative elements embodying the brand.	The Louis Vuitton monogram represents its high-quality and exclusive nature, reinforcing the prestigious image of the brand.
Aaker's Brand Identity Model (1996)	Brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations (Aaker, 1996:69), provide a framework for measuring the dimensions of brand equity. Brand Name: This is the crux of any organisation that generates and retains your equity.	A multidimensional approach to brand identity which comprises the brand as a product, organisation, person, and symbol forming a comprehensive brand identity (Aaker, 1996:74). Such a holistic perspective enables luxury brands to communicate their	Adding gravitas to its brand symbolism in this way, essentially makes Chanel a timeless and sophisticated brand.

		heritage, craftsmanship, and exclusivity effectively.	
Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism (1992)	Reflects the six dimensions of consumer perception shaped by physique, personality culture, relationship, reflection, self-image (Kapferer 1992:38) in today's brand creation process perspective. Together, these dimensions comprise a consumer sentiment of depth and complexity as it applies to the brand.	The combination of six elements to form a cohesive and recognisable brand identity (Kapferer, 1992:40). This consistency helps maintain the brand's quality and coherence across all touchpoints.	Both Louis Vuitton and Chanel effectively use the six dimensions to create a strong and aspirational luxury brand identity.

Table 2-1: discusses the principal theories of brand image and brand identity by Keller (1993), Aaker (1996), and Kapferer (1992). Each theory gives a different view of the relationship between brand image and brand identity. On the other hand, Keller's model is focused on the mental representations of brand associations and external brand elements and demonstrates how they work toward a final destination in luxury brands' perceived exclusivity and quality. Aaker's model builds on this by highlighting the role of perceived quality, loyalty, and associations, as well as a more detailed identity mix that consists of many layers of the brand. Kapferer prism introduced an elaborate breakdown of the elements that play a role in influencing consumer perception and brand identity, thereby emphasising the need for a coherent persona and brand consistency. In combination, these theories highlight the complexity and multifaceted nature of both brand image and brand identity in regard to luxury brands. All of these factors need to be understood by luxury brands that want to build and maintain a strong, identifiable, prestigious, and niche position in the market.

Although it is important for South African luxury brands to be somewhat focused on the

affluent consumer globally, they must still utilise local cultural symbols within their logos and designs that will have affectation with other cultural groups as well. Even with high earners, South African luxury brands can create brand loyalty and build brand equity through a focus on local craftsmanship and quality, identifying both the aspirational in an affordable entry way into this realm as well as the more extravagant segments of consumers looking for high-end goods. These six dimensions of Kapferer's prism allow South African luxury brands to articulate a full identity, which resonates locally by its nature and is capable of competing effortlessly with other established international brands across high-earning (i.e., affluent) and diverse consumer segments. Economic inequality, cultural pluralism, and transnational brands will be the drivers behind it. If luxury brands want a market that is large or alluring enough to justify their being visible and exclusivity part of the reality, they should become aware of these factors. Based on the theoretical analyses of the previous section, it is clear that luxury brands have to navigate through a complex landscape of meanings shaped by cultural, economic, and social determinants affecting how consumers perceive their products. The theoretical bases of Keller, Aaker, and Kapferer on brand image and identity provide useful explanations on how luxury brands could create their own originality. Integrating indigenous cultural symbols and storytelling into brand identity are important strategies for luxury brands in South Africa. Using Kapferer's prism, brands clearly articulate what they stand for and can target mass affluents from diverse cultural backgrounds. From that sense of authenticity, people get attached to the community, and this also raises the perceived quality and loyalty.

International competitors and economic inequality affect the opportunity for South African luxury brands to establish themselves in the market. Overcoming these challenges will require these brands to have a clear sense of what differentiates them from those that compete for the attention of a similar target market. In this segment, we will explore the impact that these attributes of social resonance, cultural heritage, and local craftsmanship exert on brand image and identity, influencing customer engagement and loyalty in a hypercompetitive market.

Luxury Brands' Unique Attributes Regarding Brand Image and Identity

Luxury brands have the unique ability to make us feel exclusive in a world of fast fashion and quick dying trends. Brand image and identity strategies carefully construct these

attributes. In addition to the usual universal pillars of every luxury brand, South African consumers want to feel a connection with their distinct cultural heritage. Luxury goods sales in South Africa, according to the Statista report on the luxury goods market of this country, point to a tendency among successful brands - they are those that combine an appealing part of local culture with their globally operating brand narrative elements (Statista, 2024).

The discussion provided by Centobelli *et al.*'s (2024) study on slowing the fast fashion industry reads that luxury brands, with these exclusive and culturally resonant identities, are "in opposition to the rapidly changing trend of fast fashion". The insistence on brand longevity is interesting, adding weight to the sustainability argument in luxury branding and paralleling findings of Chevalier & Mazzalovo (2012) who found, amongst others, that South African consumers desire a combination of exclusivity with cultural connectedness from these brands. This vantage point adds muscle to the argument that luxury brands will have to establish a much stronger brand architecture, which is not only relevant in terms of global standards but also adheres closely with local cultural values.

Insights into how luxury brands negotiate the South African market and create distinctive identities that appeal to local consumer tastes can be gained by delving into these important theories and models in the sections that follow.

2.1.6 Key Theories and Methods in understanding luxury brand perception

Spence (1973) and the Signalling Theory: This theory suggests that brands send signals to consumers about their values through price, quality, and exclusivity. One of the ways luxury brands signal their superior quality and prestige to South African consumers is through high prices or exclusive placement. **The Luxury Value Perception Model** (Wiedmann, Hennigs, and Siebels, 2007) This model defines four dimensions of luxury value perception: financial, functional, individual, and social. It provides a pragmatic lens to help make sense of the significance of various key attributes linked to luxury brands by South African consumers.

To navigate the muddled waters of consumer luxury preferences, brands need to champion unique traits tied to their identity and persona. Spence's Signalling Theory, from back in 1973, argues that luxury brands are fundamentally signals of exclusivity and quality, bringing to light the induced conflict between ever-changing fast fashion trends and the eternal

classicism of luxury. This theory provides the basis for an analysis of how luxury brands articulate their value to consumers, particularly in a culturally bonded market like South Africa, where consumers attribute heightened significance to luxury.

Additionally, Wiedmann, Hennigs, and Siebel's (2007) Luxury Value Perception Model provides a further explanation of the reasons behind attractiveness, which is positioned in the luxury brand: This model identifies significant factors such as emotional, functional, and social value to demonstrate that South African consumers desire not just the global standards of luxury—exclusivity, quality, and prestige—but, in addition, a connection to their own culture. Deciphering the results from Centobelli et al. (2024) gives even more importance to the interaction of these factors, emphasising that luxury brands should concentrate on brand longevity and that fast fashion mentality should be rebutted with sustainability strategies applied by luxury brands. Within this paradigm, the intertwining of local cultural symbols is exemplified in the deliberate infusion of global luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton, who enter a new and highly successful market within South Africa, with David Tlale being an equivalent champion on those shores. African consumers place attributes toward exclusivity and cultural connectedness. Brands that can incorporate these cultural aspects into their brand narratives not only expand their market appeal but also miss the opportunity to speak to consumers aspirations. Before building upon how these vital theories and models guide actions for luxury brands aiming to achieve a loud impact in an infringing saturated market, this section will elaborate on each of them further.

Understanding the idiosyncratic relationships between social import and restricted access to cultural heritage in this market allows us to better understand the nuances of consumer behaviour.

Purchase Behaviour of the South African Consumer

For brands looking to crack the South African market, it is imperative that the true shopping behaviour of this target consumer be understood. Preferences can be shaped by the state of the economy and social structures, as well as individual values. To summarise, South African consumers have an intersection of aspiration and pragmatism in their buying behaviours. According to Business Insider South Africa (2014), consumer pressure in respect of conscientious consumption is not only forcing consumers to balance lifestyle desires with priorities such as value, colour, and product utility.

Nonetheless, there is still a clear research gap in our knowledge of the unique incentives and cognitive processes of South African luxury buyers, particularly with relation to the impact of local culture on their purchasing decisions. A significant portion of the extant literature concentrates on international luxury markets, frequently disregarding South Africa's distinct socioeconomic terrain and wide range of consumer preferences. Furthermore, not much research has been done on how South Africa's cultural diversity and economic inequality affect the country's patterns of luxury consumption. Key theories of consumer behaviour that can illuminate South Africans' interactions with luxury brands are crucial to bridging these gaps.

2.1.7 Key Theories and Methods in consumer behaviour



Figure 2.1: Model of consumer decision-making.

Source: Osei & Abenyin (2016)

Figure 2.2 above illustrates the Consumer Decision-Making Process by Blackwell, Miniard & Engel (2006).

This will show you how customers progress through these phases on the way to a purchase. While these stages do not always proceed linearly for consumers, local issues such as socioeconomic impulse, cultural identity, or aspirational motives may have led South African consumers to display these results in different patterns. This process is indeed critical to tracking the purchasing journey of the South African luxury consumers and will help brands in developing targeted strategies to encompass each phase:

Need Recognition: Luxury consumers realise the need often goes beyond the functional. Rather, it signals a desire for status, identity, or self-expression. In South Africa, consumers know luxury can be a means of “social currency,” enhancing perceived social status, but they also may appreciate the more intimate, private objectives luxury can fulfil—such as personal goals of confidence and achievement.

Research: Buying a luxury item frequently calls for extensive study. When evaluating a brand's heritage, exclusivity, and value alignment, South African consumers—particularly those in the upper and aspirational middle classes—may give social media peer recommendations and brand storytelling top priority.

Evaluation of Alternatives: South African consumers assess luxury brands in this step based on factors such as exclusivity, quality, cost, and cultural significance. Global giants like Gucci or Louis Vuitton can be compared to local luxury brands like Thebe Magugu or Rich Mnisi, and decisions about cultural pride greatly impact those decisions.

Emotional Purchase: This final purchase involves a mixture of emotional satisfaction, practical functionality, and financial support. Aspirational purchase behaviour among South African consumers is prevalent, with luxury perceived as a long-term investment or success reward.

Post-Purchase Outcome: Whether the luxury item truly lived up to its purpose by providing status (social acceptance, better self-esteem, etc.) for South African consumers. The

customer persistence in this phase is crucial to building brand loyalty.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943): Maslow's theory is especially pertinent to the luxury market, as purchasing decisions are influenced by higher-order needs like self-actualisation and esteem. Luxury items frequently represent success, social standing, and individual achievement in South Africa. However, given the socioeconomic difficulties that many South African consumers encounter, it is also important to take into account the aspirational nature of these purchases. Luxury brands have to figure out how to appeal to consumers' practical needs as well as the emotional fulfilment that these products bring.

Thus, the integration of the Consumer Decision-Making Process and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs serves to create a strong basis through which to understand South African luxury consumer behaviour. However, further research into cultural identity, socioeconomic circumstances, and aspirational motivations is necessary for luxury brands to develop appropriate strategies for operating in this market.

Research Gaps in Brand Image and Identity in the Luxury Sector

Research by academics like Azemi *et al.* (2022) and Blasi *et al.* (2020:78) identify the significant gaps in literature in terms of brand image, brand identity, and consumer perceptions. This study seeks to answer the question with specific emphasis on South Africa in order to close these gaps.

Brand identity vs. brand image for luxury products

One of the largest gaps in the currently published literature on this topic lies between how consumers respond to these cues and how luxury brands perceive their brand identity and image. Unlike industry areas that emphasise quality or worth over practicality, which are aggressive candidates for regeneration, luxury manufacturers who showcase their uniqueness and market their products far from their actual location, all under the guise of their documented rest history and craft expertise. There is a need for more insight into how these elements influence perceptions of luxury brand identity and image within the South African luxury realm. As Azemi *et al.*, (2022) acknowledge, is in examining how South

African consumers differentiate between these brand elements, as most research on this topic examines differentiation across a range of global brands. By examining the regional luxury brand identities and images from a symbolic consumer perception perspective, this study fills a gap in the literature. It is especially relevant for strategies that appeal to the cultural sensibilities of South African consumers. This study contributes to this literature gap by exploring the regional luxury brand images or identities and mappings of such categorical knowledge from a symbolic consumer perception perspective, particularly pertinent for approaches that resonate with South African consumers' cultural sensibilities.

How cultural heritage distinguishes luxury brands

Although luxury markets in South Africa are growing, the potential for cultural heritage to be a unique factor is largely unexplored. Although Chevalier and Mazzalovo (2012) acknowledge the significance of cultural narratives in branding context, little empirical literature exists on how South African luxury brands utilise cultural heritage to create an iconic brand identity. To bridge this gap, this study explores how South African luxury fashion brands cultivate cultural heritage as part of their brand identity and its influence on consumer perceptions. African Business (2020:12) stated that South Africa is the largest market for luxury goods in Africa, due to a high density of HNWIs. However, research investigating localised luxury identities for cultural heritage fusion-orientated application to South Africans is lacking. This study attempts to address this by exploring the cultural authenticity and how it is leveraged by local luxury brands such as Rich Mnisi and Thebe Magugu in their brand strategies, and how this translates into consumer preferences that lead to loyalty.

There is an extensive body of literature on luxury brand identity concerned with brand authenticity and emotional resonance, facilitating the development of brand-consumer relationships. According to Aaker (1996), when a brand has depth, it is able to engender consumers' loyalty. But in a multicultural environment like South Africa, this identity should be fluid, it should actually be rooted in local culture, and adapting it with the consumer values. This study suggests that generalist luxury branding is unable to effectively balance the diverse nuances of local consumer preferences.

2.1.8 The influence of cultural identity on brand perception

In emerging markets like South Africa, cultural heritage is a major factor in determining how consumers view premium brands. As stated by Okonkwo (2007) and Appiah-Nimo *et al.* (2023:67), luxury brands that include cultural components into their brand narratives are more likely to appeal to customers who value cultural authenticity. The precise cultural elements that South African luxury brands can leverage to build stronger relationships with customers have, however, received little attention in the literature. In order to close the gap, this study examines the cultural factors that shape South African consumers' perceptions of luxury brand identity and image as well as how these brands can best use these factors in their marketing campaigns.

2.1.9 Understanding branding and cultural values

Han, Nunes, and Drèze (2010) point out that in order to appeal to particular consumer segments that value discretion, luxury brands frequently use subtle branding. Little is known about how this subtle branding approach functions in the South African luxury market, where cultural identity and values play a major role in consumer behaviour. This paper investigates how South African consumers' perceptions of and loyalty to brands can be improved by subtle branding that is in line with cultural heritage.

2.1.10 Practical implications for strategic brand management

The results of this study will have a big impact on luxury brand managers who want to use cultural heritage to build stronger brand identities in South Africa. Beverland (2004) highlights that in luxury markets, customer loyalty is primarily influenced by authenticity and cultural significance. The results of this study will give managers of luxury brands practical advice on how to create marketing plans that reflect the cultural values of South African customers forging deeper emotional bonds and encouraging steadfast loyalty.

By understanding how cultural heritage shapes our perceptions of consumer brands, luxury brands also gain insights to create custom-made localisation strategies that focus on authenticity and yet are connected to the local culture. In a country like South Africa where purchasing decisions are greatly influenced by the consumer's cultural identity (Okonkwo 2007), it is essential. This research would provide a roadmap for luxury brands to emulate

in making themselves immune from global players who may struggle to recreate such levels of cultural authenticity (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012).

In a time when customers prefer to search for brands that mirror their cultural identity and values, aligning their identity with the local cultural heritage can lead luxury brands to lasting brand loyalty. Finally, the findings of this study will help luxury brands in South Africa to form lasting relations with their consumers as well as differentiate themselves from other competitors through effective cultural integration.

Conclusion

The researcher attempted in this chapter to present deeper content regarding the basic concepts of brand image and brand identity as well as their significance about consumer perception and behaviour. According to the analysis, understanding South African consumer perceptions is not a one-dimensional task; rather, it is psychological, social, and cultural factors that shape how South African consumers conceptualise saving and spending behaviours. This study of the above makes way for how these factors influence South African luxury brand management.

Three models in particular—Kapferer’s Brand Identity, Prism Aaker’s Brand Identity Model, and Keller’s Brand Equity Model—explain how luxury brands manage to stake their claim on the high ground of the market.

In the South African context, this means that consumer perceptions of luxury brands are complex and characterised by a unique interplay between history, culture, and socio-economic status. The research illustrates that South African consumers, under the influence of social and psychological variables, tread a fine line between realistic decision-making and aspiration. Additionally, in the words of Makhitha (2020) and Centobelli et al. (2022), luxury brands have to combine local awkwardness with global acceptance in order to reach this market.

Brand image has been reported to significantly influence consumer loyalty (Aaker, 1991), perceived quality (Keller, 1993), and emotional attachments with brands (Thomson *et al.*, 2005). Consistency and reliability are crucial, but so is awareness of both local climate and cultural capital when building a robust brand identity in South Africa. Based on the information presented in this chapter, various research gaps are highlighted, especially

regarding how the cultural and economic diversity of South African consumers influences their perceptions of luxury brands. The following chapter will describe the research methodology, which is characterised by the use of a qualitative approach to determine the attitudes and behaviours of South African consumers with respect to a luxury brand.

This chapter's theoretical contributions serve as the foundation for the research methodology that fills in the gaps that have been identified. The purpose of this study is to better understand how South African consumers view luxury brands and how their perceptions influence their attitudes and behaviours by employing a qualitative approach. As a type of qualitative research, semi-structured interviews are widely used to explore the complex and situation-specific factors covered, such as the possible influence of socioeconomic diversity, cultural identity, and aspirations on how people view luxury brands. The study makes sure that the literature review and the empirical investigation are suitably aligned by placing the research design within the main theoretical threads established here. In order to better understand how brand identity and image are developed and viewed within the South African luxury market, the Kapferer, Aaker, and Keller models will be used to guide the themes and questions of the interviews. Some of the major methodological choices made will be covered in greater detail in this chapter, such as the use of inductive analysis to identify emerging themes and purposive sampling to target South African consumers of luxury brands with cultural significance. Motivated by this strategy, our goal is to provide luxury brands with an actionable data design that will enable them to create well-rounded local-global plans that are appropriate for the various cultural narratives that exist both above and below their brand standards. By using this method, the study is able to put theoretical viewpoints into practice and offer practical advice on how luxury brands can better align their marketing plans, consumer engagement initiatives, and brand storytelling with South African consumers expectations. This will be in line with the goals of the study and directly address the main research problem.

3 Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter builds upon the discussion in Chapter 1 about the methodology used for this study. Saunders *et al.*'s (2007) research onion approach for describing the methodology followed, provided the most comprehensive framework. This is due to its layered strategy, where each layer systematically considers a facet of research design and, in this way maps out a consistent, holistic inquiry into the problem itself. Therefore, using the research onion framework, this chapter gives a complete explanation of the investigation structure and system utilised as a part of this study. It includes the philosophical stance, research approaches, methodological choices, strategies for data collection and analysis, the applicable time horizon of the study, and techniques and procedures to outline the population and sample size. The chapter also discusses the instruments for data collection, reliability and validity of data, and limitation scenarios such as ethical concerns based on the research onion framework developed by Saunders *et al.* (2007). Such a framework was adopted for its systematic nature, which guarantees each layer of the study is thoroughly thought out and connects with one another towards achieving overarching research aims. Each of the elements of the framework are discussed in the sections that follow.

Philosophical Stance

The research philosophy, as described by Saunders *et al.* (2007:107), is the first layer on the outer side of the onion and acts as an approach towards the research. There are various philosophical approaches when approaching research, namely: interpretivism, positivism, realism, and pragmatism. The table below, Table 3.1 provides an overview of the epistemological, ontological, and axiological issues relating to each research approach.

The study adopts an interpretivist research philosophy, which is suitable for qualitative research that seeks to examine the plethora of human experiences within social worlds. An interpretivist philosophy is adopted because it is ideal for qualitative research evidencing the true nature of human behaviour or social settings (Saunders *et al.*, 2007:108). Creswell (2013) defines interpretivist research as focused on subjective meaning - the way that participants themselves define their reality. This is consistent with Denzin and Lincoln

(2018), who suggest that interpretivism allows researchers to recognise the intricate context of human behaviour and social reality which is appropriate within this study's context where the understanding of the meanings and experiences of participants within their own context is understood. As this study is focusing on luxury brands in South Africa - more specifically consumer opinions and perceptions towards brand image and identity among this social population – it is best framed under an interpretivist approach, as it helps one design their research effectively with the acquisition of the totality that makes up what we know and have learned about human experiences within a given context. This is further supported by Guba and Lincon (1994) and Smith *et al.* (2003) who confirm that the interpretivist approach allows for the in-depth study of how participants view and make meaning from their experiences and is well suited to studies that aim to achieve rich, nuanced understandings of human behaviour because it recognises the contextualised nature of social reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Interpretivism is inherently participant-centred, concentrating on the personal viewpoints and assessments of participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:10). This approach emphasises people and their subjectivity, recognising that human behaviour is the result of social interactions shaped by experiences, ideas linked to analytical theories, and processes associated with a constructivist worldview. Interpretivist research, by emphasising the stories and perspectives of participants, has the potential to penetrate deeper into the complexities and subtleties of human behaviour than quantitative research can. Such detail is required to understand micro definitions of consumer perception in the case of luxury brands but will be difficult to gain from a participant-excluded research approach. This approach aligns with interpretivist philosophy that emphasises the meaning and richness of qualitative data rather than just quantity, which provides a deeper insight into the research problem.

Table 3-1: Motivation for interpretivism as the selected approach for this research study

Characteristics	Reasons for employing interpretivism in this study	Benefits of interpretivism
Subjectivity: Acknowledges the	The complexities of luxury brands are inherent to	Cultural Findings: Provides insight into how

subjective nature of human experiences (Schwandt, 2000:193). This source gives the insight for the interpretivist philosophy in research instead of only quality.	complex social and psychological dimensions.	different cultural and social contexts in South Africa impact consumer recognition of luxury brands. Interpretivism, according to Geertz (1973), advocates that understanding consumer behaviour operates in the context of cultural values and thereby a proper knowledge about what those influences are would provide insights into how marketing works at various levels.
Contextual understanding - this is understanding things against the background of culture and society (Geertz, 1973:5). Geertz makes it abundantly clear that cultural context is of primary importance and this will be critical in our examination of the luxury brand perceptions in South Africa.	It is informed by personal experiences, societal norms and cultural contexts of how consumers perceive these brands.	Depth: Allows for the retrieval of a hefty, in-depth data that may show off motive strength patterns and contrary behaviours and attitudes. On the one hand, Flick (2014:12), contends that qualitative research methods central to interpretivism are effective in allowing researchers to uncover rich and detailed insights which can help reveal underlying patterns and themes.
Produces Rich, Qualitative Data: Values detailed, descriptive data over numerical data	An interpretivist methodology also enables researchers to capture the depth and richness of these	Dynamic Interpretation: Ideal for flexible and adaptive research process, with emerging themes and

(Creswell, 2013:45). This material provides a comprehensive look into an interpretivist design of qualitative research by using practical advice culled from Creswell's work.	perceptions, thereby clarifying a detailed comprehension that supersedes mere quantification.	insights. Therefore, as Charmaz (2006:10) reminds us that interpretivist research is iterative in nature providing a means of being flexible to allow themes and insights emerge or evolve during the period of analysis.
---	---	---

Research Approaches

Considering the research methodology for this study, a single instrumental case study approach was chosen as the best-suited design to achieve the aims of the study. This was done according to Yin (2018) argument that case studies are useful primarily when a researcher wants to answer a how or why question, and the emphasis must be on a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context. How South African consumers perceive luxury brands needs to be understood—hence the study, since brand perception is complex and multifaceted and needs a context-rich analytical approach. Because of the lack of research in the field of luxury brand perception within South Africa, an exploratory case study achieves the level of depth that will realise new insights.

According to Eisenhardt (1989), case study research is consistent with the inductive methodology of the study, allowing theory to emerge from data. Qualitative research is vital to this study because it allows a more detailed understanding of consumer perspectives. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) assert that qualitative research is appropriate for exploring the complex and context-dependent nature of brand image and identity. This perspective is especially important for understanding the mechanisms consumers respond to luxury brands because social and cultural contexts are intertwined with the emotions and psychological facets.

By employing non-numerical data sources such as focus group observations and individual interviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), the study can explore the rich, deep experiences of

participants in ways that are impossible to achieve using quantitative approaches. Qualitative research is fundamental to the inductive methodology of this study because it allows theory development from participants lived experiences.

While quantitative approaches are appropriate for generalising results and identifying trends, they may lack the depth or richness necessary to understand luxury brand perception in a particular culture, as in South Africa (Creswell, 2013). Even though the logical methodology of it is suited to test theories that are already well-established, it may not be relative to more nuanced distinctions between individual behaviours and belief systems (Bryman, 2012).

On the other hand, mixed-methods research offers a more detailed view but requires large amounts of resources and caution with data integration as it encompasses qualitative and quantitative methods (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). That will have a more respectful nature towards the study (which is primarily exploratory theories). The current research uses a single case study design, as these designs are appropriate when the focus is on a specific context or situation (Yin, 2018). With this design, an exploration of luxury brand perception pertinent to the local market can be achieved in SA. The instrumental case study in this instance provides insights into a wider problem (Stake, 1995): the way that consumers understand luxury brands; specifically, how South African consumers must interpret a very particular set of social, cultural, and economic contexts.

The study captures both individual and collective meanings that people associate with luxury brands (Creswell, 2013) via its qualitative element of semi-structured interviews, which is an essential aspect of understanding consumers perceived meaning. One way to understand not just the beliefs and practices but also the experiences of luxury consumers in South Africa is by collecting qualitative data through interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Such techniques allow for open-ended inquiry—in an under-researched area like South African consumers' view of luxury brands, this is vital. The inductive nature of this process aligns with Strauss and Corbin's (1998) claim that qualitative research is most appropriate for generating new knowledge in domains where theory has not been sufficiently developed due to the lack of prior studies covering the topic.

In short, the single instrumental case study methodology aligns with this research objective as it is useful to develop an in-depth understanding of consumer attitudes in a specific

market context. The research can focus on qualitative methods to explore one of the consumer perspectives about luxury brands. This will contribute to a contextually anchored theory that shall advance our understanding about the identity and brand equity of luxury brands in South Africa (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2018).

Research Strategy

Research strategy refers to the general methodology for data collection and analysis that we will be using in our project to answer the research questions, thus falling under the fourth layer of the research onion. There are various strategies, each with their respective strengths and weaknesses (Saunders et al., 2007), and the choice of strategy should depend on the research questions and objectives.

Bryman (2016) describes survey action research, grounded theory, ethnography, experimentation, survey study case study, and archival research as different types of research strategies.

Choosing a research strategy is crucial to ensuring that the research design is coherent and in line with the study's objectives. Changing one variable to see if it affects another requires conducting experimental research. According to Creswell (2013), this tactic is usually applied by testing hypotheses in controlled environments using control and experimental groups. This method gives the researcher a great deal of control over the variables and is very effective at establishing causality. It is frequently unsuitable for examining intricate social phenomena and may lack realism. Using questionnaires or structured interviews or surveys gathers information from a sizeable number of respondents. Generalisations about the population can be made with this method's efficiency in collecting quantitative data (Saunders *et al.*, 2007). Surveys are reasonably priced to conduct and can be applied to a large population. Still, they are rigid in format and frequently offer only surface-level insights and may have low response rates. A single case or several cases are examined in-depth within their actual settings as part of case study research. Understanding complex phenomena in their natural environments is one area in which this approach excels (Saunders *et al.*, 2007).

Though they require a lot of resources and may not be very generalisable, case studies provide in-depth qualitative data. While producing scientific knowledge, action research

seeks to address a problem inside a community or organisation. Planning, acting, observing and reflecting are all part of this iterative process (Saunders *et al.*, 2007). Although action research is useful and feasible, it can be challenging to generalise and needs support from stakeholders.

This study aims to find out how consumers in South Africa perceive luxury brand identity and image so semi-structured interviews are considered appropriate. According to Bryman (2016), semi-structured interviews facilitate greater flexibility in questioning, which allows the researcher to probe deeper into each participant's perspectives and experiences. For this study 25 to 30-minute interviews conducted online using tools like MS Teams, Skype, and Zoom will be used in the data collection process. As per Guest, Namey and Mitchell (2013), this duration is suitable for thoroughly investigating participants perceptions while reducing burnout.

Research Choices

This layer is concerned with the methodology used. The selection of a research methodology is a critical determinant of how data is gathered, analysed, and interpreted, influencing the overall depth and scope of the study. The methodological choice affects how well the research can address the questions posed, the quality of the findings, and the practicality of the research process. Here, we explore different methodological approaches and justify the selection of a mono-method qualitative design for this particular study.

This study needs to have a structure in terms of how data is gathered, analysed, and interpreted. It is followed by the potential impact of these choices on research output and how deep or wide an inquiry can go. In selecting a methodological approach, the nature of the research question plays into how responses to this type of question may be garnered and what data might need to be collected.

Generally speaking, methodologically selected research approaches fall into one of three categories: designs that employ a mono-, multi-, or mixed method. Each category serves a distinct function depending on the nature of the research questions and objectives as well as the specific phenomenon being studied. The suitability of any particular method is largely determined by the desired outcome, whether the study aims to quantify relationships,

examine phenomena in detail, or combine both qualitative and quantitative insights.

A mono-method quantitative study uses the same method to obtain quantitative data (e.g., experiment, survey). As Bryman (2012) specifically points out, this strategy is effective when the purpose of a study is to test hypotheses or statistical relationships between measurable variables. Its simplicity and focused range are its greatest strengths, best used for finding general trends across a population or performing rather primitive theory testing.

According to Tashakkori et al. (2010), this is the correct approach when answering complex research questions that require different data sources and analytical methods to be resolved. As per de Vaus (2010), this is the correct approach when answering complex research questions that require different data sources and analytical methods to be resolved. But, since the data is heterogeneous, this complex design required coordination and is often difficult to implement well.

Justification for a qualitative design with mono-method

A mono-method qualitative design is used to provide the in-depth and holistic insights of South African consumer perceptions of luxury brands. This approach is essential considering the qualitative techniques focus on knowing rich and detailed information regarding stories, experiences, etc. It might not be captured using quantitative approaches. The study will explore complex phenomena such as social influences, cultural influences, and personal narratives affecting consumer perceptions towards luxury brands. In line with Creswell (2013) asserting that qualitative research focuses on the subjective aspects of social life, this study aims to analyse customer experiences in depth using qualitative methods. This means that qualitative data is needed to explore the depth and richness of data required to fully understand luxury brand perceptions. Qualitative methods allow insight into participants lived experiences. This is important to study in the luxury market as consumer behaviour will differ because of cultural and experiential influences (Mason, 2010). Cultural differences, in particular, have a major impact on the perceptions of consumers regarding luxury. Patton (2015) notes that contextual research accounts for the social norms, values, and traditions that are central to participants perceptions. Since South Africa is largely important to study in the luxury market as consumer behaviour will differ because of cultural and experiential influences (Mason, 2010). Having diverse cultures, this method is a good way to capture these small differences. Moreover, the methodology should

avoid rich qualitative data to be diluted by using both qualitative and quantitative methods. By focusing solely on qualitative data collection, the research ensures that participant journeys and experiences will always be in focus.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), qualitative research is a window to explore the details of how specific social phenomena or human behaviours occur, which might simply be ignored in quantitative terms. Luxury is often linked with elements such as status, culture, and identity in luxury branding—all of which should be studied qualitatively. The one-method qualitative design, which ultimately allows for a deeper exploration of the meaning, motivation, and attitudes around consumer behaviour, is appropriate bearing in mind that the objective of this study is to explore consumers perceptions of luxury brand identities and brand images in South Africa.

Time Horizon

This layer is specific to the time horizon layer of the research onion of Saunders (2007) and explains how we think about time when conducting research. Two basic types of research are included in this layer: cross-sectional and longitudinal. Supported by the hermeneutic approach to qualitative research, this study used a cross-sectional time horizon measure conducting one-time data collection in South Africa on consumer perceptions of brand identity and image associated with luxury brands.

Cross-sectional study

This type of study helps in exploring existing trends and behaviours, as it involves measuring the participants at a single point in time with regard to their experiences or attitudes. The nature of this approach gives us a snapshot of how consumers interact with luxury brands at the moment, which is very insightful from a marketing perspective in fast-moving markets where consumer preferences change quickly (Bryman, 2016). The efficiency of this technique is one of its merits because only once for data collection is needed to be performed (Saunders, 2007; Lewis & Thornhill, 2019), when compared with the longitudinal studies, which are resource-demanding and provide data over time. Alongside this fact, cross-sectional studies are inexpensive and convenient to use in resource-constrained environments by utilising focus groups or interviews (Creswell, 2014).

Cross-sectional studies offer important insights into luxury brand positioning and relations

to consumers and are usually less involved compared to longitudinal studies when aiming to understand perceptions towards luxury brands in modern-day consumers. As this study aims to examine the South African both timely and resource-efficient brand identity to the most fluid part of the luxury brand market. consumers understanding of luxury brand identity and image at this time, a cross-sectional design affords an effective and timely method for data collection. It combines both timely and resource-efficient by tapping into the most fluid part of the luxury brand market.

Techniques and Procedures

This innermost layer contains specific, technical, and analytical approaches that will facilitate the collection of data. In the following discussion, we will outline details of the means and methods used to collect the data required for this research study.

The collection of data: semi-structured interviews Semi-structured interviews, the primary approach to data collection, represent one of the key techniques employed to gain insight into how consumers perceive luxury brands. Purposeful sampling will be conducted in order to ensure that the selected individuals actually have sufficient experience and knowledge about luxury brands. It has an important place in finding individuals with deep domain experience for input. The data will be collected through semi-structured interviews by online video conference method. This step will allow participants to have the freedom but also help curate qualitative data in an orderly fashion.

To balance the time constraints for participants, interviews will last about 25 to 30 minutes, although there should be plenty of room to discuss important topics. The conversations will be driven using a topic guide, which consists of open-ended questions that are designed to promote conversational sharing of ideas. This approach maintains balance between structure and flexibility so interviewers can steer the conversation without losing all of the important topics. Making use of open-ended questions enables you to receive more thorough answers, which is essential for identifying the detailed disposition and conduct of your consumers in relation to luxury brands.

Sampling strategy

The sampling strategy for this study is that it must succeed in getting the views of consumers who have a particular interest in luxury and cultural heritage as a nexus point within the

South African context. Resonant South African luxury fashion brands are the ones being engaged by these individuals, and this is very important due to heritage and identity. Both this consumer group and the designer curated for them are unique, marking an appreciation for luxury apparel that encapsulates South African folklore and exudes top-tier exclusivity. A purposive sampling technique will be used in order to ensure that the study participants who are recruited are experienced and knowledgeable about high-end fashion brands respecting South African heritage.

Focus will therefore be on consumers who engage with luxury fashion brands such as Rich Mnisi and Thebe Magugu explore South Africa's rich cultural heritage in their collections. This sample is particularly important because it captures a consumer base that embodies the intersection of luxury branding and culture, key to understanding how local heritage influences perceptions of luxuries. South African designers, who are well regarded internationally for their disruptive blending of traditional and contemporary styles, creating collections that can be widely accessible to international high-end markets abroad, had directly informed some of this sampling choice. Designers such as Thebe Magugu and Rich Mnisi, who have gained global recognition for their creative combinations of South African narratives and bold cultural statements (Ndlovu, 2021), have propelled South Africa to the fore in the world of luxury fashion.

Due to the unique character of this targeted population, it is anticipated that four to six participants will be sufficient to achieve saturation. This approach ensures that the data collected is deep and aligned with the purpose of the study.

Method of collecting and analysing data

A well-articulated process for data collection and analysis will be implemented to ensure that the tools and methods of study are aligned with its objectives. This section details the methods that were used to collect and process the data.

The main tool for data collection will be interview guides, designed to facilitate semi-structured, in-depth interviews. These guides will include open-ended questions about major themes related to the image and perception of luxury brands among consumers. As highlighted by Braun and Clarke (2019), the semi-structured guides allow the researcher to pursue salient themes mentioned by participants, thus leading to a more substantiated and

stimulating exploration of participant frames.

Because this study is focused on the brand image and identity of luxury brands, semi-structured interviews allow researchers to go beyond scratching the surface. They give one an opportunity to explore the impact of cultural heritage, the need for exclusivity and status symbols on consumer perceptions, and ask deeper questions than five-point rating scales, for example.

This is consistent with the principles of interpretive philosophy, which emphasise meanings and personal stories as the starting point for research (Saunders et al., 2019).

The questions were derived from an intensive study of academic literature on luxury brand identity and the relationship between consumer and brand. According to Kapferer and Bastien (2017), luxury brands rely on exclusivity, heritage, and emotional engagement, so it is important to explore how South African consumers define luxury in their own context. Subsequently, Aaker's (1997) brand personality model and Fournier's (1998) brand relationship theory provided a basis for understanding how consumers apply meaning and identity to luxury brands.

Because the luxury market in South Africa is unique, a hybrid influenced by both global brand narratives and local cultural nuances, the interview questions tried to encompass this dynamic. Participants were asked about their sense of what luxury meant, if they had any preference for indigenous over imported luxury brands, and the roles exclusivity and accessibility played in their purchasing decisions.

The guide for the interviews was structured around the four key themes, which were, in turn, shaped around the research objectives of the study, and aligned with the literature on luxury brand image, cultural identity and exclusivity:

1. Defining Luxury in the South African Context – Participants were asked to define what luxury meant to them and which qualities they associated with luxury brands. This is in line with literature that describes luxury as a synthesis of exclusivity, superior quality, and symbolic meaning (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). Luxury brands differ in their aesthetic appeal, craftsmanship, and social distinction, which contribute to them being aspirational products (Ko & Megehee, 2012). By contrast, in South

Africa, luxury is mediated by socio-economic dynamics and is characterised by intertwined status-seeking behaviour (Truong et al., 2009).

2. Cultural Heritage and Brand Perception - The questions were aimed at discerning whether cultural identity influences brand preferences and how local luxury brands are perceived. It appears that cultural heritage features significantly in consumer preferences, especially in emerging markets (Bian & Forsythe, 2012). Local design powerhouses like Thebe Magugu and Rich Mnisi have utilised culture to speak to local and global audiences. Beverland (2004) shows that emotional engagement and cultural strength with luxury brands add significant enhancement as the consumers channel their communal sense to the ethnically linking nature of the brand's identity.
3. Exclusivity vs. Accessibility - It was explored in this area to what extent luxury brands in South Africa should strive for exclusive markets or open themselves up to a broader audience. The exclusiveness of luxury brands has been an important feature of luxury value (Dubois & Paternault, 1995), though it has been suggested that more inclusive luxury experiences are increasingly desirable (Dion & Borraz, 2017). This is particularly relevant for the South African market, where exclusivity is a significant status marker, though younger consumers are concentrating on their experiences above material ownership in the context of consuming luxury (Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Siebels, 2009).
4. Global vs. Local Luxury Brand Appeal – Participants had to indicate whether international luxury brands have more status than those formed from roots in local society and why. According to the research by Kapferer and Bastien (2012), foreign luxury brands are often perceived as more aspirational thanks to their heritage and origins from European centres of fashion, such as Paris and Milan. On the other hand, in South Africa, local luxury brands are thriving as they mirror authentic indigenous narratives and identity (Okonkwo, 2007). Research suggests that localising brand identity in emerging luxury markets allows companies to leverage cultural pride and authenticity for a competitive advantage (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008).

Open-ended questions allowed respondents to express their own experiences and views, eliciting unexpected themes throughout the courses of the interview. Consequently, this approach is consistent with qualitative research best practices since it allows for more informed insights on subjective brand perceptions (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2019).

One of the major strengths of semi-structured interviews is that available issues can be pursued as they emerge in interaction. In contrast to closed interviews, where responses are closed off before a possibility is exhausted, semi-structured interviews allow for the researcher to enquire further or seek further unique perspectives (Bryman, 2016).

For instance, if a participant mentions in a general forum that luxury brands can be considered an art form, the interviewer might take the occasion to ask about this concept. What is the role of personal identity in their consumption choices for luxury goods? How does seeking social status differ from looking for high-quality merchandise with other people's money? Such an approach looks at the industry from a consumer perspective, which is in line with the aims of this study.

Using semi-structured interviews in this study was a conscious and justified choice, as such methodology provided an in-depth exploration of contextualised luxury brands' consumer perceptions. This systematic approach to the development of the qualitative interview guide, through the use of theoretical frameworks, correspondence to research aims, and pilot testing, facilitates both that these were theoretically relevant and that there remains the flexibility necessary for qualitative-focused investigation.

Data analysis will primarily involve thematic analysis for uncovering trend themes and insights within the interviews and observational notes as well as it is broadly recognised as a rigorous approach for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning in qualitative data (Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis is particularly effective for qualitative research as it provides a systematic framework for the researcher to analyse participants' responses in relation to certain themes, making them identifiable and interpretable. The reason we take this systematic approach is to be able to guarantee that the research findings, in fact, are well-constructed, reliable, and replicable (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

The analysis will yield themes that correspond with the research study's aims, concentrating on significant topics such as consumer loyalty, exclusivity, cultural relevance, and the identity of luxury brands. Additionally, the comprehensive desktop research undertaken during the data collection process will furnish a comparative lens, facilitating the integration of existing knowledge with new perspectives derived from interviews. This is in agreement with Fusch and Ness (2015), where they mention that the triangulation of data is in favour

of qualitative research which enhances the validity of qualitative research.

Through the identification of patterns or discrepancies between primary and secondary data, this comparative approach will enhance the analysis and expand our knowledge of South Africa's luxury consumer marketplace. The study intends to capture the nuances of South African consumers' perceptions of luxury brands, specifically how these perceptions are shaped by factors like cultural heritage exclusivity and identity. The study uses thematic analysis in addition to desktop research and participant observation as techniques of data collection to achieve a triangulated approach to the research problem (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Data Collection and Analysis Framework

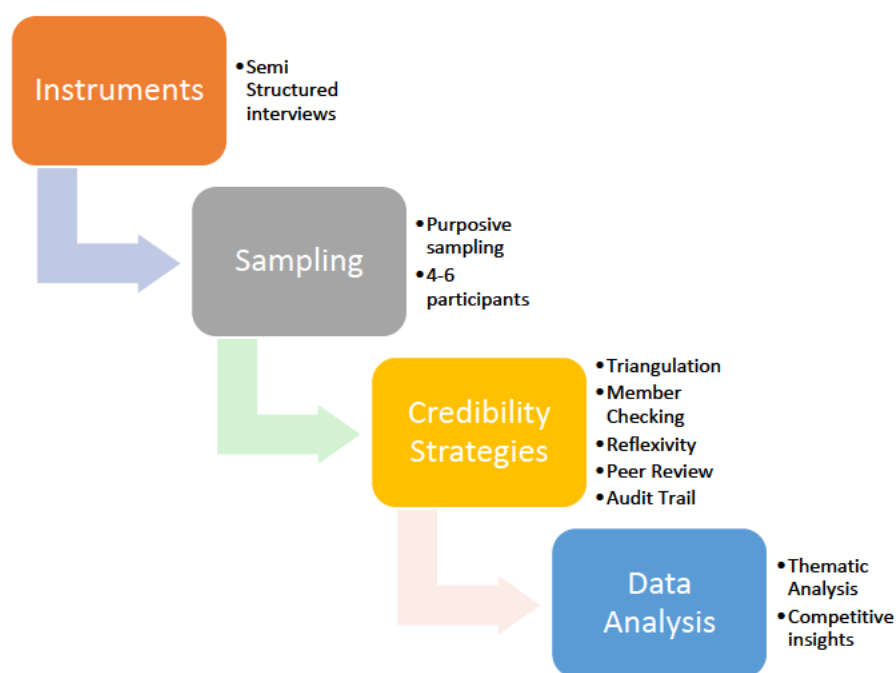


Figure 3.1 Data Collection and Analysis Framework

Source: (Lebuso, R, 2025)

This framework describes a cyclical, iterative process and the way that data collection feeds into analysis and findings contribute to new developing themes. These are constantly validated by credibility strategies and their alignment with the research objectives. The process involves cycles of refinement iteration between and across stages where feedback

from participants/hierarchy and secondary data are run into the model, setting the stage for robust predictive insights from credible evidence. The framework, therefore, acts as a map that situates each element of the study while also maintaining a systematic and rigorous approach to achieving a nuanced understanding of how luxury brands are perceived by South African consumers.

The areas in which the interview guide focuses are:

The identity and image of the luxury brand - Luxury brands can be characterised by their own symbolic meaning, exclusivity, and superior quality that converts them in consumers' eyes to their prestigious status (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). The intrinsic aspects of the identity of a luxury brand (e.g., craftsmanship, heritage) and extrinsic aspects (e.g., consumer perception, brand positioning) shape what a luxury brand means (Ko, Costello & Taylor, 2019). With luxury as the overarching theme, we can look at luxury through the lens of socio-economics, especially in South Africa, as we consume luxury brands to communicate a certain identity that is indicative of wealth and aspiration (Truong et al., 2009). Redefining luxury has resulted in increasing the focus on experience and perceptions rather than price and exclusivity among younger consumers (Dubois & Laurent, 1995).

Branding with cultural relevance and heritage - Consumer cultural identity is an important component of consumer-brand relationships, especially in emerging markets where local heritage has significant implications for purchase behaviour (Bian & Forsythe, 2012). South African luxury fashion brands like Thebe Magugu and Rich Mnisi have managed to weave culturally specific narratives into their brand DNA and have been well received both locally and abroad. According to Beverland (2004), when luxury brands engage consumers emotionally and narrate cultural stories, they support the perceived authenticity of luxury brands and assist in creating a strong bond with consumers. Cultural relevance is also regarded as a key sector requirement within the South African luxury market context as demand for brands that showcase local craftsmanship and heritage continues to grow (Wiedmann, Hennigs & Siebels, 2009).

Brand loyalty and exclusivity - Exclusivity is arguably still a fundamental principle in luxury branding from which brand loyalty emerges as one of the most important benefits offered (Dion & Borraz, 2017). Consumers associate rarity and prestige with luxury brands, both of

which increase their desirability (Kapferer, 1998). On the other hand, within the South African luxury market, a multidimensional continuum where accessibility is gaining increasing relevance, mainly for millennial consumers who prioritise experiences over opulent goods (Dubois & Paternault, 1995). Nonetheless, exclusivity remains a salient feature of luxury consumption, with scarce products and individualised services strengthening customer loyalty to brands (Ko & Megehee, 2012).

Quality and Emotional Attachment - Luxury brands are not only defined by their high-quality materials but by their emotional relationships with the consumer (Wiedmann et al., 2009). Luxury brand emotional attachments appear to correlate with individual identity and self-awareness hence, a consumer-brand relationship extends beyond the purchasing act and becomes considerably psychological (Schade, Hegner, Horstmann & Brinkmann, 2016). Both quality and meaningful brand narratives are sought by the South African luxury consumer, contributing to long-term brand commitment (Ko et al., 2019). This is particularly evident in the growing 'quiet luxury' trend, which places an emphasis on understated elegance, craftsmanship, and artistry over ostentatious branding (Bhogaita, 2024).

So that the instrument aligns with the study objectives, the questions are designed based on the conceptual frameworks presented in the overview literature, such as Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism, Aaker's Brand Identity Model, and Keller's Brand Equity Model. This method reinforces the connection of the literature with the hands-on investigation.

This study of South African consumers of luxury brands that celebrate cultural heritage (for example, Thebe Magugu, Rich Mnisi) is based on purposive sampling of 4-6 participants. This sample size aligns with qualitative research best practices, in which the goal is to reach data saturation—the moment when new themes or insights no longer emerge from further interviews (Creswell, 2013).

Participant Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

For the study to successfully gather relevant data about how luxury brands are perceived in South Africa, participant selection is crucial. In order to ensure that the responses are drawn from people with relevant experience and market knowledge, this research specifically

targets luxury consumers who have made luxury purchases in the past. This improves the effectiveness of the study. Because it focuses on actual consumer insights rather than speculation, this approach aids in the validation of the research findings (Kapferer & Bastien, 2017). Additionally, when marketing to culturally conscious consumers, it acknowledges how cultural heritage shapes brand identity and how companies can engage with the right kind of content (Tripp, 2023). Involving customers who are connected to cultural imagery and heritage is essential because luxury brands typically use and promote cultural narratives to boost their appeal and exclusivity. In South Africa, where culture is deeply ingrained and shapes consumer behaviour and brand loyalty, this is significant (Ko & Megehee, 2012).

That demographic—urban South African consumers—is the same population most likely to be exposed to luxury branding, marketing, and lifestyle aspirations in its targeting of luxury brands. Cities like Johannesburg and Cape Town in South Africa are major luxury hubs where global and local luxury brands are being interacted with by consumers (Okonkwo, 2007). The decision to recruit participants from a range of socio-economic backgrounds facilitates the study of the relationship between luxury brands and cultural identity/exclusivity (Husic & Cicic, 2009).

It allows for deep insights into the complexities of South African consumer perceptions and a sample that is both representative of the study's focus and diverse.

Strategies for Credibility and Trustworthiness

Several strategies for credibility and trustworthiness are used to ensure that the study's findings are robust and reliable. The study employs triangulation, which means it cross-verifies data collected through interviews, desk research, and participant observations to enhance the accuracy of the data. This method helps to reduce biases and guarantees that results are not determined by a single source (Flick, 2018).

Credibility is further ensured by member checking, which refers to participants being able to review their transcriptions to confirm their perspectives are accurately portrayed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Such practice adds greater ethical integrity to the study and improves the trust between the researcher and the participants in the study (Birt et al., 2016).

The researcher's reflexivity is essential to keep them unbiased during the research. The

researcher also counters the risk of data biasness in influencing data interpretation by an ongoing process of being wary about his own biases and prejudices (Berger, 2015) . To achieve this we use a more generalised method by avoiding the most sophisticated languages.

The peer review process ensures that findings are approved by academic peers, so interpretations are logical, based on evidence, and free of subjective distortions. This practice improves the scholarly rigour of the study and strengthens its conclusions' reliability (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

An audit trail preserves transparency by allowing replication of each stage of data collection, coding, and analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The systematic nature of documentation of the study enables future researchers to take a look at the study methodology, repeat the study if needed, and further add to the body of knowledge of the field.

Finally, the primary analytical method is thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This widely used qualitative methodology facilitates identifying recurring themes, patterns, and tensions within the data. This systematic way of technique allows the study to dive deeper into consumer perceptions without losing out on the analytical comparison-driven nature.

These strategies, together with a close consideration of participant selection criteria, provide a comprehensive and credible analysis of the prevalence of luxury brands among South African consumers. However, quite interestingly so, segments such as established luxury consumers, affluent critics and urban South African demographic segments have also been included, ensuring a mix of diversity with a focus in exploring the topic. At the same time, methodological rigour in this regard can be achieved by triangulation, member checking, reflexivity, peer review, and thematic analysis, as well as further guaranteeing that the findings here are valid and replicable and thus make an important contribution to the literature specifically focused on luxury brand perceptions in South Africa.

Thematic analysis is a six-phase process:

Familiarisation: This step involves reading and rereading the interview transcripts and observational notes to familiarise oneself with the data. 2. Identifying meaningful segments of data (i.e., statements relevant to the research questions) to generate initial codes. 3.

Searching for Themes: Collating codes into potential themes and gathering all the data relevant to each potential theme. 4. Refining themes: Reviewing themes to ensure clarity, coherence, and relevance. 5. Defining and Naming Themes: Giving each theme a clear, analytical name. 6. Draughting the Report: Connecting themes to literature to address the research questions.

The themes from the thematic analysis inform the way the study is aligned to the theoretical models discussed in the literature review. By triangulating data, insights increase finding's "practical" relevance for luxury brand managers wanting to penetrate the South African market. Not only does this approach help to validate the study findings, but it also ensures ethical research by giving participants a voice in the research process. This coupling of their worldview and the use of a modern study design allows for a robust and relevant study and complements the nuanced view of South African luxury consumers.

3.1.1 Data validity and reliability

Trustworthiness, credibility, and reliability are necessary to uphold the integrity of qualitative data. The credibility and reliability of the findings will be facilitated through strategies such as member checking, triangulation, and maintaining a detailed audit trail. Guba and Lincoln (1985) furthered the idea that trustworthiness in qualitative research is established by four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (1985:301). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985:314), member checking is an acceptance of findings by the participants that they are a true representation of reality, enhancing credibility duties. Triangulation means using more than one source, method, or researcher to check on information reliability (Denzin, 1978:291). First, the systematic audit trail enhances transparency and replicability in the research process, supporting dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:319).

Validity and reliability of data are integral to qualitative research as they ensure the integrity of findings. In order to overcome these issues, this study will use a range of strategies in accordance with the Guba (1985) approach to trustworthiness in qualitative research. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—these are the four criteria Guba and Lincoln (1985) provide to evaluate trustworthiness. These standards provide a robust

framework for ensuring that the research findings reflect the true experiences of participants and are accurate and relevant. In prioritising credibility, triangulation will be applied using diverse methods and sources of data to validate that there is consistency across the findings. This enhanced understanding of consumer perceptions of luxury brands will be achieved through triangulation from the semi-structured interview, desktop research, and participant observation results.

Member checking will also allow members the opportunity to review and ensure their contributions are accurately captured and interpreted. Participant validation plays an important role in the qualitative research process—it can be defined as a step taken to ensure that the findings of each study reflect reality as perceived by participants.

Reliability will be addressed by the use of standardised tools and processes that achieve consistency in data collection. Interviews will be conducted by means of an interview guide, ensuring that a set of fundamental questions are asked to all participants while still allowing flexibility in the explorative use of follow-up questions based on participant answers. This strategy helps ensure that the procedures of the study can be reproduced and provide similar results across different participants and settings. In addition, an extensive audit trail will be maintained during the course of research.

That means carefully documenting every decision made during the entire process of a study, from collecting data to analysing it, so that researchers down the line know how—and if they have to replicate—what was done.

The audit trail could enhance the credibility of the study through openness and verifiability. Confirmability and transferability are also important features of Guba's method.

External validity or transferability: The ability to apply the results to other groups, settings, or time frames. Although this study focuses on South African luxury brand consumers only, detailed background information about the participants and the research context will be provided for consideration of potential extrapolation in other contexts. Confirmability ensures that results are shaped by participants and not researcher bias. A reflexive journal will be maintained throughout the research process to document reflections on potential biases and decisions in attempting to achieve objectivity.

This research, however, will be aligned with the paradigm advanced by Guba (1981) as described earlier and will use member checking, triangulation, and an open audit trail to ensure its results can meet its challenges of trustworthiness—validity, applicability/relevance (use), reliability/consistency/credibility, and confirmability. In total, these steps will ensure that the study achieves a valid and genuine understanding of South African consumer perceptions of luxury brands.

Limitations of the research

This part also mentions possible limitations, like restrictions in the data collection. In light of these challenges, we may need to make adjustments—perhaps revisiting the sample size or changing how we collect data. Examples of some limitations when using qualitative datasets are that qualitative data is inherently subjective and may lead to bias; in addition, it depends on participants deciding to share their own experiences. Qualitative data can seem a little more fluffy and manipulative in that sense. Qualitative research also requires a great deal from its participants, since they must be prepared to share their experiences with as much minimisation of probability bias. This study is cross-sectional in nature, and it only measures data at one timepoint, which also complicates the ability to track changes over time. Because of this temporal restriction, the data analysis can only be performed for what was occurring near the time and when the data are collected, which might reduce how far results can be generalised through time (i.e., transfer of findings across relevant points in time) (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

This means that ethics (or ethical principles) guided the research as a whole and rightfully so, because it's our responsibility to uphold the rights, dignity, and welfare of all participants in the study. Several critical ethical considerations were applied to protect participants and safeguard the integrity of the research process. All subjects gave informed consent prior to their participation in the study. All participants were fully informed about the research objectives, parameters, and protocols and were made aware of their right to withdraw at any time. Before conducting the interviews, an indemnity form was signed by the participants;

this is simply a way to ensure that they were aware of their participation in the study being voluntary and that they were able to withdraw at any time during the process. This procedure was aligned with the guidelines by Orb *et al.*, (2000) however, all private information obtained from the interviews was anonymised to protect the identities of participants. For ethical principles ensuring transparency and the freedom of participants. All information remained confidential throughout the course of the research. However, all private information unique to the interviews was anonymised to protect the identities of participants. The data were identified by a unique but anonymous identifier, allowing to track the identity of each participant without disclosing names or any personal information, and sensitive information was encrypted. As the data was only accessible to designated members of the research team, confidentiality norms were strictly maintained in accordance with recognised ethical standards. The study philosophy was based on honouring the participants. The research was conducted mindfully to ensure participants were treated with respect and dignity. The semi-structured interviews allowed for open and unbiased discussion of participant perspectives and experiences. A non-intrusive supportive environment was created so that at each stage of the study, participants were comfortable and secure. Before data collection commenced, the research design was submitted to an institutional ethics committee for review and approval. This was necessary to ensure the research adhered to ethical guidelines for human subjects research. The study was conducted in good faith, as the ethics committee gave a positive opinion on the design of research related to protection via gold standards for participant safeguarding.

Additionally, precautions were taken to prevent discomfort and possible harms among participants. In our study, the interview questions were intentionally prepared to be less intrusive and not emphasising the need of the HR person for status withdrawal in hard situations. Participants could withdraw at any point of the study without consequence if they displayed signs of discomfort or distress.

This approach fulfilled the commitment to ethical research by prioritising participant welfare and ensuring that no harm was caused to participants while collecting data. Taken together, these aforementioned ethical reflections presented a robust rationale for conducting the research ethically and sensitively, respecting the participants' rights and welfare.

Data Analysis

Inductive data analysis was used so that concepts came from the data (and themes) rather than being dictated by existing conceptions. This ensured that the conclusions were rooted in lived experiences while allowing an in-depth exploration of consumer meaning and interpretation concerning luxury brands.

Data patterns and theoretical insights were produced by the combined application of grounded theory and thematic analysis from qualitative information gained from the interviews with participants exploring their experiences, preferences, and changing behaviours. Participants responses were analysed for patterns and themes according to the basic principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The initial stage of this process was understanding the data, which meant reading and re-reading the interview transcripts until I encountered all relevant forms of information. Following this initial step, specific segments of data were tagged with concepts or ideas representing key themes in the coding.

The codes were then placed in broader groups to create themes that reflected a close alignment with the study questions. Themes such as perceptions of the identity of luxury brands, cultural heritage, and customer loyalty informed insights into how South African consumers interact with and interpret luxury fashion brands.

The thematic analysis was inductive and iterative, continuously reviewing the data to further develop and elaborate on themes that were emerging. To further the analysis, grounded theory with systematic development of theories from data (the original concept by Glaser and Strauss in 1967) was applied.

The objective of the study was to generate new insights into South African consumers' perceptions of a luxury brand, in particular one with cultural heritage, using this approach. The grounded theory approach resulted in overarching theories on how exclusivity and accessibility influence the loyalty of customers, as well as the role of cultural resonance in the identity aspect of luxury brands. Both thematic analysis and grounded theory allow conclusions to arise from the data rather than to be fitted into a preconceived framework; therefore, an inductive approach was used.

Conclusion

In summary, in order to inform and capture consumer perceptions of a given brand, which in turn affects engagement with the target audience and turns them into a potential customer base, a deeper understanding of consumer perceptions regarding the brand image and identity of luxury brands in South Africa is necessary. The aim of this study is to use a qualitative research approach to examine consumer perceptions of luxury brand identity and image in South Africa. Using an inductive approach to extract theories from rich, high-quality data, the research methodology is motivated by an interpretive philosophical perspective. The South African market is doing well because many luxury car brands are fighting against two luxury car brands. Aggressive rivalry in South Africa is benefiting overall brand growth. This study fills a research void, offers implications for brand managers, and provides substantial strategic insight to industry experts.

Semi-structured interviews are used for data collection, as this method is well-documented in being able to capture rich consumer experiential insights. This approach, when sophisticated with good quality interview guides and observational checklists produces strong, well-collected research data. As such, purposive sampling was employed to recruit participants with experience and knowledge that was relevant for the research question in order to make the results meaningful.

All ethical issues were taken into consideration and the study was conducted properly. The protocol and methods used are extremely relevant to the research questions addressed, greatly adding to existing literature, reflective practice and industry.

The process of data analysis is covered in the following chapter, which employs grounded theory and thematic analysis to organise, code, and interpret all of the qualitative data. Important themes will be found, and theoretical frameworks will be built through this process to explain how South African consumers perceive luxury brand identity and image. In luxury brand marketing and management, this newly acquired knowledge will provide a strong foundation for comprehending and leveraging these perceptions.

4 Data Analysis

Introduction to Data Analysis

In this chapter, we present the findings of the study that explores urban South African consumer perceptions of luxury fashion brand identity and image. But this study goes further in an attempt to understand what consumers mean by luxury brands in a more subjective way through an interpretive research philosophy as set out by approaching the phenomenon from cultural, social, and economic points of view. As stated by Creswell (2013), the interpretive methodology allows investigating the subjective and multiple meanings that participants attach to phenomena. This method is particularly suitable for research focused on consumer behaviour across multiple domains.

This was achieved using qualitative analysis by way of inductive reasoning. In fact, the research must be inductive to ensure that themes are developed from data rather than tested against preconceived ideas (Bryman, 2012). The semi-structured interviews enabled an in-depth expression of the participants' experiences and perspectives, aligning with the qualitative research methods proposed by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) because of flexibility in questioning. The six participants, who represented the population of urban consumers also known to be more familiar with luxury fashion brands, were selected through purposive sampling (Patton, 2015), and they provided a rich dataset for analysis. Thematic analysis was utilised to acquire and for trends in the interview data.

One crucial qualitative research technique that is especially helpful for spotting themes in participant narratives is thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). A key component of interpretivist research, this approach made it possible to directly extract key themes from the data, guaranteeing that the conclusions fairly reflect participants actual experiences (Willig 2013). The analysis of the data yielded several themes, including the role of social and environmental responsibility in brand image, cultural meanings attached to luxury brands, and luxury as a marker of status, among others. In particular, these aligned with legacy literature on luxury market consumer behaviour where it is explained that, more-so in emerging economies, luxury goods serve as social distinction markers (Husic and Cicic, 2009; Shukla, 2010).

The in-depth examination of these themes in the ensuing sections will demonstrate how

South African consumers understand luxury fashion brand identities and brand images within their distinct urban setting. The purpose of this analysis is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of luxury brand perceptions in modern South Africa. To that end, direct quotes and examples from the interview data are presented.

Sampling Selection Criteria

Participants in this study were chosen using a purposive sample technique with an emphasis on customers who have previously interacted with luxury fashion brands in the setting of urban South Africa. Because purposeful sampling enables the targeted selection of participants who are most likely to provide rich pertinent and insightful data, it is a good fit for qualitative research (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015). Selecting people who have interacted with and formed opinions on luxury brands like Thebe Magugu and Rich Mnisi, which are representative of the intersection between local culture and luxury identity, was essential in order to meet the research objective of understanding consumer perceptions towards luxury brand image and identity.

Since the focus of the qualitative, interpretivist research is on the depth and quality of the data rather than its breadth, the decision to restrict the sample size to six participants is appropriate (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Data saturation is a fundamental idea in qualitative research, and Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) showed that it can frequently be reached with as few as six interviews, especially when the study is focused on a homogeneous group with particular characteristics. In this instance, the homogeneity is attributed to the participants' shared experience with luxury brand consumption in an urban African setting, allowing for a thorough examination of their perceptions without the need for a larger sample size (Mason, 2010). Furthermore, because their opinions of luxury brands are influenced by both local and global cultural values and influences, South African urban luxury consumers represent a distinctive target market. Because of this duality, their insights are especially useful for comprehending how the image and identity of luxury brands are created in South Africa, where social status, heritage, and exclusivity are significant factors (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012).

The study can delve deeply into the complex ways that luxury brand identity resonates with

or deviates from South African cultural identity by concentrating on a smaller, carefully selected group of participants. Additionally, restricting the sample size is consistent with the exploratory character of the research, wherein obtaining profound insights into consumer perceptions is the primary objective rather than generalising findings. When participants have specific knowledge that is pertinent to the context, smaller samples are frequently adequate (Morse, 2000). This method guarantees that every interview yields significant, comprehensive data that can be interpreted to discern important themes and trends, thereby enhancing our comprehension of the perceptions of luxury brands in South Africa's cities (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Age, financial status, and exposure to both domestic and foreign luxury brands were all taken into consideration when choosing the six participants, who were meant to represent a cross-section of urban consumers of luxury brands. In emerging markets such as South Africa, where the definition of luxury is being redefined in ways that are culturally specific, this guarantees that the findings are not only credible but also pertinent to the larger discourse on luxury consumption (Bain & Company, 2021).

Data Analysis Approach

4.1.1 Thematic analysis

Qualitative research analysis techniques are frequently used for identifying, analysing, and reporting themes or patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This flexible and sensitive method of data analysis allows researchers to examine complex processes and reveal timely insights. Thematic analysis is described by Braun and Clarke (2006) as a qualitative research tool for systematically identifying, organising, and describing themes within a data set, helping the reader to understand meanings generated from participants experiences and perceptions. As such, a thematic analysis was selected for this study examining consumer perceptions of luxury brands in an urban South Africa context. This way, the researcher was able to explore participants conceptions and interactions with luxury brands in their daily lives.

Procedure for data analysis

Thematic analysis is a systematic process usually comprised of six steps: familiarising yourself with the data; generating initial codes; seeking themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report. Semi-structured interview data for this study were transcribed before each narrative was repeatedly examined to ensure they were

understood from the perspective of the participant. Stage Two: Derived codes from key themes identified in transcripts (distinct, concise labels summing up elements within the data). Thematic codes (e.g., luxury as identity/luxury as a status symbol and cultural significance of luxury) then emerged from the discussions, suggesting that several types stood out in terms of participants' views of luxury brands. For the theme search of the data specific to this research study, these codes were grouped into larger, more general categories that aligned with the objectives of the study. Similarly, understanding the complex perceptions of luxury brands requires recognising common themes such as price sensitivity, customer loyalty, and luxury as a symbol of social status. Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012) also support this thematic categorisation, adding that a theme is a pattern that captures something important about the data set in relation to the research question and represents some level of response or meaning within the data set.

Topics related to how consumers interpreted perception

Once the researcher had developed the themes, it was the stage of reviewing and refining them to ensure that they were mutually exclusive enough to provide incremental insights into how consumers make sense of luxury brands yet also consistent with the data. Bearing in mind the research questions, the final themes were created from these broader conclusions to capture and report the essence of participant narratives. The idea that luxury brands are signs of social success and distinction aligns with Veblen's (1899) notion of conspicuous consumption in our theme of luxury as status symbols. In addition, the subject of cultural identity and brand resonance also highlights the importance of luxury brands in local, specific, and personal contexts, which is particularly poignant in urban South Africa, where global luxury brands often rub against local cultural identities. This thematic interpretation showed the interpretivist stance of the research, which provides insights into ways in which participants make sense of luxury brands through their social and cultural contexts. Nowell et al. This allows the researcher to participate in an interpretive process—an instinctual synthesis of personal experience with the data (Baker, 2017), which gives a nuanced interpretation.

Thematic analysis revealed insights regarding urban South African consumers' perceptions of luxury brands. A thematic analysis was used to show how luxury brands symbolise success identity and values. Findings were presented within a framework based on the themes of luxury as a symbol of status, congruence between brand and cultural identity,

brand loyalty price sensitivity, digital savviness in purchasing decisions, effectiveness of influencer marketing, counterfeit culture, and so on. By employing this data analytic approach, the research was able to stay true to the participant narratives while also producing findings that contribute to broader discussions related to luxury consumption and brand identification in South Africa.

Thematic Map

Main Theme 1: Luxury as a Social Status Symbol

- └─ Sub-theme 1.1: High Social Standing
- └─ Sub-theme 1.2: Peer Influence

Main Theme 2: Brand Resonance with Cultural Identity

- └─ Sub-theme 2.1: Local Cultural Connection
- └─ Sub-theme 2.2: Global vs. Local Perception

Main Theme 3: Brand Loyalty

- └─ Sub-theme 3.1: Emotional Attachment
- └─ Sub-theme 3.2: Exclusivity and Personalized Experiences

Main Theme 4: Price Sensitivity

- └─ Sub-theme 4.1: Value vs. Price
- └─ Sub-theme 4.2: Willingness to Pay for Luxury

Main Theme 5: Digital Engagement

- └─ Sub-theme 5.1: Social Media Influence
- └─ Sub-theme 5.2: E-commerce and Online Presence

Main Theme 6: Counterfeit Culture and Authenticity

- └─ Sub-theme 6.1: Impact of Counterfeits
- └─ Sub-theme 6.2: Desire for Authenticity

Figure 4.1 Thematic Map

Source: (Lebuso, R. 2024)

Codes and Themes Were Identified using the Thematic Map

Main Theme 1: Luxury as a Symbol of Social Status

Sub-theme 1: High Social Standing Coding: Participants used words or phrases related to prestige (e.g., prestige, success, recognition, status/class). Here are statements describing how being associated with luxury brands improves their prestige in society.

Interpretation: This sub-theme describes how consumers use luxury brands to reinforce or augment their position in social hierarchies.

Sub-theme 1.2: Peer Influence Coding: Mentions of the influence of friends, family, or colleagues on luxury brand preferences, such as “My friends wear this” or “This brand is trendy in my social network.” Insight: Counter-consumption as peer validation emerges as one of the top drivers that shape consumer preferences, highlighting that luxury consumption is a social pursuit.

Main Theme 2: Brand Resonance with Cultural Identity

Sub-theme 2.1: Connection to Local Culture Coding: This refers to the way brands specify the occupancies in local design, material, or symbols, making them resonate from cultural heritage. For instance, participants mentioning labels such as Thebe Magugu or Rich Mnisi. Significance: Luxury brands honour and celebrate South Africa's cultural heritage.

Sub-theme 2.2: Global vs. Local Perception Coding: Remarks that contrast luxury brands from abroad with those from the local market, e.g., “Local brands feel more personal”, or “global brands are more aspirational.” Stated differently, this sub-theme highlights conflicts between the local relevance of a brand and its global reach.

Main Theme 3: Brand Loyalty

Sub-theme 3.1: Attachment to Emotions Coding: Words such as “I love this brand,” “It feels like it understands me,” or “I’ve been loyal to this brand for years” indicate emotional ties. Meaning: Emotions lead towards long-term loyalty based on trust and values.

Sub-theme 3.2: Exclusivity and Customised Experiences Coding: Loyalty reasons include exclusivity around events, limited-edition products, or personalised shopping experiences. Key takeaway: The ideal curation of little-known brands cultivates intimacy and repeat

purchases.

Main Theme 4: Price Sensitivity

Sub-theme 4.1: Value vs. Price Coding: Comments that compare product quality to its price, such as “it’s worth the investment” or “it’s overpriced for what you get.” Interpretation: Customers consider both the tangible and intangible value of luxury goods relative to their cost when deciding to purchase.

Statements such as “I don’t mind paying more for quality” or “luxury should be expensive” are examples of pay-for-luxury coding. Interpretation: For some customers, paying a premium indicates exclusivity and status. The function of social media coding: References to influencers brand campaigns or social media content influenced the decision to purchase. This means that brands’ presence on social media sites is the key factor for forming performance because these websites inspire and encourage, just as sophisticated marketing channels do.

Main Theme 5: Maintaining a Strong Online Presence: References to in-store experiences, such as “I like to try before I buy” or “I love going to the store.” Interpretation: Digital access and convenience are becoming more important aspects of a luxury shopping experience.

Main Theme 6: Counterfeit Culture and Authenticity

Sub-theme 6.1: The effect of counterfeits Coding: Threat of fake products diluting brand identity, e.g., “There are so many fakes out there.” Analysis: The influence of counterfeiting: consumer trust and perceived value.

Sub-theme 6.2: Need for authenticity Coding: Comments highlighting authenticity as a differentiating factor, including “I only get the original” or “authenticity is what luxury stands for.” Interpretation: The combination between authenticity and luxury branding, which describes bounded authenticity by some luxury brands since authenticity prevents the sale of counterfeits and helps maintain integrity within the brand.

The various interpretations of these themes underscore the intricate nature of consumer perceptions regarding luxury brands in South Africa. They reveal the interaction of cultural identity, social status, digital engagement, and financial considerations that imbue luxury

with significance. Brands that successfully navigate this landscape can align these aspirations with the relevance to their target market and to South Africans by addressing themes that resonate deeply.

Interpretation of themes

The qualitative analysis of luxury brand perceptions provides some key insights, especially when social identity and cultural resonance are considered. Three strands of meaning derived from the interviews resulted in six findings that together give insight into the perception of luxury brands in an urban South African context: (1) luxury as a social status symbol, (2) cultural identity with brand resonance, (3) price-sensitive brand loyalists; and digital engagement (5); influencer marketing as a self-care genre (6); and counterfeit culture. Below, we will discuss how the interpretation of themes is tied to the research aims of this study.

4.1.1.1 *Luxury as a social status symbol*

Owning luxury goods is a sign of wealth and success according to participants who noted that luxury as a social status symbol emerged as a dominant theme in line with Veblen's (1899) theory of conspicuous consumption. Younger, urban respondents typically associate luxury brands with social success, and one participant claims that these brands increase social visibility. According to Kapferer (2012), luxury goods are regarded as indicators of both individual success and group recognition, which is consistent with the idea of luxury as both personal achievement and social recognition. Modern trends have popularised the idea of quiet luxury, which may be in contrast to the overt displays of wealth associated with "nouveau riche" consumer behaviour, which places an emphasis on visible luxury. Indeed, academic research on changing consumer behaviours shows that luxury experiences rather than material extravagance and sustainability values over ostentatious consumption seem preferable to Gen Z, especially (Kapferer & Bastien 2012). The gap between this and each generation shows a shift in consumer priorities, where ethical and sustainable consumption plays a pivotal role towards shaping the modern-day definition of luxury where new-age consumers will build their ideas on. In conclusion, then, luxury brands in South Africa are not limited to products but rather cultural icons of social identity and status. These symbols are closely tied to both individual success and the validation of society as a whole. Such nuanced perception addresses the complexity surrounding luxury and its entanglement with contemporary theorisation of consumption and social change, especially among younger

generations seeking meaningful experiences rather than tangible products.

Sustainable luxury can translate as something that is in opposition to the behaviour that Veblen (1899) described as conspicuous consumption of luxury brands, i.e., the ostentatious display of wealth by purchasing highly visible forms of luxury goods. On the other hand, quiet luxury finds its attracting powers on consumers who are weary of these blatant signals of wealth (Eckhardt *et al.*, 2015). Wealthy individuals desiring to showcase their wealth in more subtle and sophisticated ways as opposed to feeling the need to show it off have been partaking of this trend more and more.

These brands are often distinguished by understated elegance and eye, not so much for their badge but rather an affluent history of craft serving as a watchdog of quality. Examples include Brunello Cucinelli, The Row, Loro Piana, and Hermès. Their products are not branded; however, they are known for their impeccable quality, understated design, and exclusivity. Such a shift towards the simpler side of luxury might be significant in terms of South Africa's luxe industry. For example, as indicated by consumer perceptions from thematic analysis, luxury brands in urban South Africa are often imbued with notions of identity and status. On the other hand, of course, quiet luxury is simply one more manifestation of a trend away from conspicuous consumption and towards better experiences, ethical consumption, and less overtly extravagant displays of wealth among younger demographics who are increasingly valuing authenticity and sustainability.

This theme also speaks directly to our first objective, the perception of luxury brands by consumers, as it basically expresses that through luxury consumption, consumers not only purchase products but also status and success. In South Africa, where consumer identity is defined by socioeconomic stature and historical footprint of a brand or an organisation, luxury brands are seen as your badge of status and success. Due to the nature of this status symbol element and its impact on brand identity and image, it relates to objectives 2 and the 3 as well as status symbol objective. By association, luxury brands may be connected with ambitions for status or upward social mobility, which are both exclusive aspirations by nature. Investigating the influence of social and cultural values related to status on consumers own views towards luxury brands aids in answering objective 4 because it finds out what factors of society affect human attitude.

4.1.1.2 Brand resonance and cultural identity

The second theme pertains to brand resonance and cultural identity. It delves into the ways in which South African culture and the surrounding socio-cultural context shape consumers' perceptions of luxury brands. It was stated by the participants that their assessment of a luxury brand's value and appeal is heavily influenced by how much it connects with their cultural identity. This theme highlights how important cultural relevance is in influencing consumer perceptions with positive perceptions more likely to be associated with brands that represent or incorporate aspects of local culture and South African heritage.

It was evident from the participants' preferences that luxury brands with global prestige but local cultural symbols were preferred. Consumers favoured brands that incorporated both uniqueness and cultural heritage. Participant six mentioned that luxury brands like Thebe Magugu seem more relatable to us. *"I identify with their designs."* This illustrates the growing importance of luxury brands that are inspired locally and embody African culture. As stated by participant six; *"As a South African, I don't feel like I can relate to some of the major international brands"*. It was challenging for international luxury brands that had no local ties to evoke strong feelings. This is consistent with Ko and Megehee's (2012) theory that stronger brand bonds are fostered by striking a balance between local culture and international prestige as well as Beverland's (2004) assertion that cultural resonance strengthens brand attachment.

A number of respondents noted that they were more emotionally connected to luxury brands that used genuine cultural messaging. Companies were judged to be more sincere and representative of cultural pride when they incorporated regional materials, traditional designs, or African craftsmanship into their products. Rich Mnisi, for instance, was commended by a number of respondents for his ability to combine opulent fashion with African themes which they saw as a potent symbol of their culture and history.

Many of the participants talked about how they felt proud to own products that represented their culture and how they associated certain brands with South African excellence. Participants were more likely to support brands that represent who we are when they were associated with local success stories or highlighted African excellence. According to Holt's (2004) theory of cultural branding, successful brands frequently serve as channels for cultural expressions that connect with a particular audience. This finding supports that

theory.

When it came to brands that celebrated South African culture, participants showed greater brand loyalty. Culturally appropriate brands promoted a sense of inclusion and representation. Participant five said; *“Seeing traditional patterns used by companies like MaXhosa makes me think of my origins. Wearing things that honour my culture makes me feel good about myself, and this connection keeps me faithful.”* This demonstrates how emotionally charged branding that is sensitive to cultural differences forges lasting bonds with customers. Even though they were prized for their status, international luxury brands were unable to evoke the same feeling. This lends credence to Kapferer and Bastien’s (2012) claim that companies that take cultural norms into account cultivate deeper connections with their customers.

Conceptual Framework: Brand Resonance and Cultural Identity: According to Holt (2004), brands are frequently viewed as bearers of cultural meanings which is consistent with the cultural branding theory. The symbolic value of a brand is what gives consumers their meaning and, in this case, it is determined by how closely the brand’s image aligns with the consumers cultural identity. According to the research, luxury brands need to strike a balance between local cultural significance and the prestige of luxury goods available globally in order to succeed in South Africa. Brands like MaXhosa and Thebe Magugu show how incorporating cultural components can increase brand resonance because they represent both African identity and global sophistication.

South Africa, with its multi-cultural background but one collective identity, provides an internationally recognised example of how you do luxury. This theme heavily supports objectives 6 and 7, which focus on the impact of consumer perceptions of cultural heritage factor-based brand image versus identity. Luxury brands that tap into aspects of the culture or ethos by promoting localised models and components within South Africa may resonate positively with customers in South Africa who would associate a sense of pride, authenticity, and locality with them. This is critically important in markets where consumers are seeking brands that resonate with their cultural narratives because it helps to establish an emotional connection. Moreover, this theme contributes to objective 5 as it highlights the role of cultural match on brand identity perception that ultimately encourages brand loyalty and distinctiveness of a brand from others in the local market while also providing insight into the

way consumers react to brands utilising local cultural values, contributing to objective 1.

In summary, the second theme illustrates the degree to which cultural identity plays a role in driving South African luxury consumers attitudes toward and loyalty to brands. This indicates that local heritage brands and authentic cultural symbols are favoured, as the results emphasise keyword frequency of fame, which means a luxury brand is likely to build emotional bonds with its audience if it resonates well culturally. This means that international luxury brands must consider the culture and characteristics of their target market, particularly in South Africa, where cultural pride and identity are paramount to both consumer-brand and appealing.

4.1.1.3 Customer loyalty to luxury brands

Consumer loyalty to luxury brands is the third theme that emerged from the data. Often motivated by personal identity, status, association, and the emotional experience that comes with interacting with luxury products, this theme investigates the emotional and behavioural commitment that participants expressed toward particular luxury brands. Brand heritage, emotional attachment, and the social currency these brands offer within particular social circles all seem to have an impact on luxury brand loyalty in urban South Africa. Emotional and social attachments are the foundation of brand loyalty. Participants frequently showed a strong sense of loyalty to specific luxury brands that they thought were aspirational and consistently high-quality. This fidelity frequently extended to emotional ties associated with brand identity and image surpassing the practical advantages of the products themselves. Participant one provided an example of this; *“Once I started purchasing from Longchamp, I just stuck with it. Wearing something that everyone knows is exclusive gives you a certain feeling that goes beyond simply looking good.”* This quotation emphasises how loyalty transcends a product’s practical use to an emotional experience donning a luxury item becomes a mark of social acceptance and personal success. A strong desire to continuously repurchase a good or service in spite of external factors or marketing campaigns aimed at encouraging behaviour changes is what Oliver (1999) defines as loyalty.

Participants expressed a sense of pride and belonging that comes with owning a luxury brand demonstrating the prominence of emotional loyalty in the context of luxury brands. Because of the emotional investment they have made in their favourite luxury brands, the data show that participants are less likely to switch brands even when presented with newer

or competing luxury brands. According to Sirgy (1982), people are loyal to brands that reflect or improve their self-image. This emotional attachment is consistent with the self-concept theory. By satisfying both emotional needs and social desires, self-congruence between the consumers' identity and the brand's perceived identity strengthens loyalty. Because they fit with the consumers' self-image, luxury brands that speak to urban South African consumers' aspirations for success and social status are more likely to win their loyalty. Following is a brief discussion of the sub-themes that surfaced during analysis.

Urban South African consumers' loyalty to luxury brands is influenced by several key factors which this theme highlights. The sub-themes of **Social Capital and Brand Loyalty** as well as **Loyalty via Authenticity and Brand Heritage** became through this theme. 1. Authenticity and brand heritage encourage loyalty. Brands with a long history and a reputation for being authentic were favoured by participants. Deeper emotional connections are fostered by luxury brands that sustain their exclusivity and craftsmanship over time. *"It's not just about the logo - I've been wearing Louis Vuitton for years", said participant one. "I find meaning in the brand's history."* This opinion concurs with Beverland's (2004) claim that emotional loyalty to a brand is fostered by authenticity, producing value that lasts longer than the product itself. Because luxury brands are perceived as exclusive, customers are highly motivated to remain loyal to them as they try to stand out in the social crowd. Because scarcity elevates social status, participant six observed; *"There's something special about donning something difficult to obtain."* This result is consistent with the luxury strategy of Kapferer and Bastien (2012), which highlights the increased emotional commitment and loyalty that come from selectivity and prestige.

Brand Loyalty and Social Capital: Another important component that has been identified as influencing brand loyalty is social capital. The participants acknowledged that they improved their social status by remaining loyal to luxury brands. Indicating how owning a luxury brand functions as a social badge, participant number three said; *"People know I'm serious about fashion and success when they see me with [luxury brand]."* This is consistent with Bourdieu's (1984) theory of social capital which holds that luxury goods are a source of cultural and symbolic capital that enable people to rise in society. Loyalty to luxury brands is not just a matter of taste for urban South Africans, it is a calculated decision to uphold or improve social standing.

Conceptual Framework: Brand Loyalty and Self-Concept Theory. In luxury contexts, Self-Congruence Theory (Sirgy, 1982) provides a framework for comprehending brand loyalty. According to this theory, people are more loyal to brands that represent the way they want to see themselves. According to the participants, the reason they remained loyal to luxury brands was because these brands enabled them to express their identity and aspirations. Brand characteristics like exclusivity and sophistication are important because they connect with consumers' values and increase brand loyalty according to the brand personality framework (Aaker, 1997).

In conclusion, South African urban consumers' loyalty to luxury brands can be attributed in large part to social capital, emotional attachment, and brand heritage. Participants underlined that their loyalty is supported not only by the quality of the product, but also by emotional appeal and social standing. Through exclusivity, self-expression, and cultural alignment, luxury brands foster strong emotional bonds. These companies should keep highlighting their heritage, genuineness, and unique positioning in order to win over customers.

4.1.1.4 Perceived value and price sensitivity.

This theme investigates the connection between luxury brand prices and the sense of value held by urban South African consumers. Regarding the high expenses of owning a luxury item, participants' opinions were divided, as they frequently alternated between considering the cost as a barrier to entry and as a sign of exclusivity.

Participants acknowledged that access to certain brands is frequently impeded by luxury prices. However, many also believed that the brand's prestige is increased by its high prices. As participant five noted; *"The cost makes it feel special - like not everyone can have it."* This is consistent with the theory of rarity (Kapferer and Laurent, 2016) which postulates that greater costs erect a psychological barrier that raises desirability.

Although some participants questioned whether the high cost of luxury goods was justified, they acknowledged the prestige that came with them. For brands that promised exclusivity and quality, many consumers were ready to pay more. "I won't buy it though if it seems like I'm only paying for the name," said participant number three. According to this value-driven strategy, when evaluating the price of luxury brands, consumers should give priority to social

recognition and quality.

Many participants noted they focused on key investment pieces, such as classic watches and totes, because of the steep price you pay for luxury goods. In the words of participant one, "I tend to buy classic pieces that I won't use for a long time." Bain & Company (2021) 19.

Price-sensitive shoppers are exploring the luxury retail market for access to quality products at a lower price point. Participant five shared, "I do online shopping for pre-owned luxury stuff because price-wise it is super affordable." This trend is in line with Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen (2015), whose findings highlight that resale markets provide an attainable gateway into luxury consumption.

Participants in the luxury goods context drew upon status symbols derived from these goods to justify their high prices. Participant number six was clear, adding that "it's not just about the product itself; it's about what it stands for." Reduced conspicuous consumption: Veblen (1899) not only proposed theory noble but also highlighted social visibility and identity, which play an important role in whether or not consumers choose luxury goods.

This is especially true of brand loyalty and consumer price sensitivity in the split-market luxury market characteristic of a developing country like South Africa. The focus of this theme moves the discussion around Goal 2 and Goal 3 forward by exploring how brand identity and images of luxury affect consumer loyalty.

When there are disparities in income, luxury consumers in South Africa may be devoted to businesses that offer good value or that have a strong cultural connection, even if those businesses are more costly. Because price sensitivity analysis can demonstrate how economic factors impact the perception of luxury brands, influencing their perceived accessibility and exclusivity, this theme also supports Objectives 4 and 5. The importance of cultural identity in consumer decision-making is highlighted by the fact that brands with a strong cultural connection may be able to retain customers even at higher prices, demonstrating how cultural heritage may influence price sensitivity – a linkage to objective

Some consumers see luxury brands as aspirational goals given the economic disparities in

South Africa. Even though there are more urban middle-class people, price sensitivity is still a major problem. *“It sometimes takes me months to save up enough money to buy a luxury item,”* one participant said.

All things considered, urban South African consumers who interact with luxury brands prioritise perceived value and price sensitivity. Luxury goods can be expensive, but this adds to their exclusivity and symbolic value, which makes them more appealing to some customers. Participants weigh many more aspects in addition to price when deciding whether a purchase is warranted: quality, gratification of emotional and other needs, and taste/property status. Additionally, the rise of the investment category and the resale market are in many ways a reflection of new strategies consumers are developing to navigate between their desire for luxury and their growing sensitivity to price.

Brand Communication and Digital Engagement.

The final thematic analysis theme relates to the impact of luxury brand digital platform interactions with South African consumers affecting consumer perceptions of the brands. In this age of fast-growing social media and e-commerce, luxury brands deploy digital tools to enhance experiences for customers, raise awareness, and drive loyalty. Among other findings, participants stressed that a brand's ability to deliver great content and connect emotionally or through an engaging social experience will define their view on luxury as well as seamless online shopping experiences.

The Opulence in the Age of the Digital Revolution: Luxury brands have historically been able to retain their scarcity through in-person experiences and limited accessibility. Still, the digital space has forced a balance between accessibility and visibility. Attendees stressed that brands cannot rely solely on selling with digital tools to build emotional connections. Another person added: I love how luxury brands are creative on Instagram or TikTok. It makes them seem much friendlier. This aligns with younger consumers seeking more relatable and creative interactions through the digital medium. According to Kapferer and Bastien (2012), to maintain their high status, luxury labels must walk a fine line between exclusivity and accessibility.

Luxury brands have been significantly affected by the rise of UGC (user generated content) and influencer marketing. The participants noted that brands are showing similar products

on social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok to encourage two-way communication with consumers. *"When I see influencers that I follow wear specific brands, I feel the need to buy into those brands,"* one participant said. It shows how influencers aspire and encourage Gen Z and millennial demand. Several participants also emphasised the importance of visual storytelling, with one suggesting that even if a luxury brand's aspirational prices create distance, the brand creates an enticing online environment to encourage interaction. Exclusive content such as limited-edition releases and behind-the-scenes videos was considered essential by respondents to the luxury experience. One respondent said: *"When a brand gives you exclusive access only because you subscribed, it makes you feel like you're in a club because of it."*

Brand communication and digital brand engagement have now become non-negotiables within the luxury brand strategy in South Africa. An organisation's ability to create bespoke, beautiful, and genuine online experiences is one of the key drivers of customers excitement about luxury brands. While digital also provides a platform for increased visibility, luxury brands need to tread carefully in balancing both accessibility and exclusivity if they are to retain their heritage and prestige within the digital realm. And as South Africa's luxury market matures, not only will local cultural dynamics be critical in maintaining brand relevance and customer retention but also in integrating them into global digital strategies. Navigating the challenges of the digital age, luxury brands can capture and retain the interest of South African consumers with personalised, authentic, and non-mass digital experiences.

Influencers on Social Media and Brand Value: Although influencers can increase brand awareness, too much cooperation runs the risk of lessening a company's unique selling point. One participant said, *"It starts to feel less special when I see a luxury brand working with too many influencers."*

Global vs. local participants stressed the need for luxury brands to strike a balance between local relevance and global reach. In *Digital Luxury: Local Dynamics*, placing a premium on companies that integrate local culture into their digital narratives. *"I feel more loyal to a global brand when they recognise our culture,"* said one participant. *"It indicates that they are aware of us."*

Luxury brands interact with South African consumers through influencer partnerships and online advertising on social media, especially with younger and tech-savvy audiences. By

providing insights into how brand identity is preserved and interpreted in virtual environments, digital engagement also helps us achieve objective 5 by deepening our understanding of how consumers view brand accessibility, exclusivity, and authenticity. Examining digital engagement in this theme helps achieve objective 1, which demonstrates how online interactions affect consumer perceptions, especially in a market where digital channels are increasingly ingrained in everyday life.

In conclusion, brand communication and digital engagement are now essential elements of South Africa's luxury brand strategy. Luxury brands need to tread carefully when balancing accessibility and exclusivity in order to maintain their heritage and prestige in the digital sphere, even though digital platforms present opportunities for greater visibility. Furthermore, as South Africa's luxury market develops further, retaining brand relevance and cultivating customer loyalty will depend heavily on how local cultural dynamics are incorporated into global digital strategies. While negotiating the challenges of the digital era, luxury brands can maintain and increase their appeal to South African consumers by providing individualised, genuine, and exclusive digital experiences.

4.1.1.5 Effectiveness of Influencer Marketing

This section aims to provide the findings to address the second research objective aimed to explore the effectiveness of Instagram influencers as an effective advertising tool. It was found that both Millennial and Gen Z consumers believe that influencer marketing has been beneficial and offered product recommendations and therefore an effective advertising tool. This finding is based on a response from respondent 1, a Gen Z, who explains that *"influencers that I follow often promote brands, but it often goes unnoticed. I notice the promoted products when it is relevant. An example would be skincare products, a beauty influencer I follow promoted a brand and subsequently purchased the brand. I was very happy with the promoted product and now trust the influencer more"*. Therefore, for respondent 1, Instagram influencer marketing created brand awareness which ultimately translated to conversion for a particular product. Further, respondent 4, a Millennial, highlighted that *"influencers who authentically promote brands are more effective. I have purchased products that have been promoted by influencers but based off their authentic sharing of their experience or demonstration of use of the product rather than just posting the product itself"*. Therefore, authenticity is key for the effectiveness of influencer marketing

in terms of positively influencing consumer buying behaviour.

However, some respondents suggested that while influencer marketing is an effective advertising tool, conversion or purchase may not be the result. Influencer marketing can create brand awareness and encourage brand engagement as was the case for respondent 2, a Gen Z, who suggests that *“it is very unlikely that I would purchase the product directly after seeing a promoted post by an influencer. But I am more likely to look for more information on that brand or product, especially if it was not a product on my radar”*. This view is further supported by respondent 6, a Millennial, who highlights that *“It is more likely that I will click on a link for more information on the product in terms of price, availability, and the product details rather than purchasing immediately. I would seek further information and or more reviews especially if a new product”*.

Therefore, in terms of research objective 2, which was to explore the effectiveness of influencer marketing as an effective advertising tool the findings suggest that influencer marketing is an effective advertising tool for brands as it provides information on the brand or product as well as encouraging purchase for both cohorts. Influencer marketing can move Millennial and Gen Z consumers through the marketing funnel from awareness to consideration and ultimately conversion. In relation to the effect of influencer marketing on consumers, it is evident from the findings that influencer marketing positively effects consumers in terms of sharing of new brands, brand experiences and product information.

4.1.1.6 Counterfeit culture and authenticity

The landscape of the luxury market and consumer perceptions have been significantly impacted by the spread of counterfeit goods. The integrity of luxury brands is jeopardised by counterfeiting, which also affects how consumers view value and authenticity. In this discussion, we look at these dynamics and their implications on luxury, both domestically and globally.

In fact, this provides a double whammy to consumer perception of the brand, particularly in the luxury market. To begin with, they can lead to brand dilution, whereby the existence of cheap imitations makes real luxury items feel less prestigious and exclusive. According to Phau and Teah (2009), counterfeit goods dilute the identity of luxury brands when there is

too much overarching purpose. If consumers come to view luxury goods as accessible instead of exclusive, this can be harmful to the aspirational value that is generally inherent with a luxury brand. Counterfeiting also creates a lack of credibility and trust between consumers and luxury brands. The increase in counterfeit products (Cordell *et al.*, 1996) leads to doubts on product authenticity and therefore discourages customers from purchasing. Serial customers might question the actual cost of genuine goods in light of the fake counterparts circulating on the market and how it impacts their loyalty to a particular brand. This is particularly the case in South Africa, where socioeconomic factors mean that customers may opt for fake goods instead of pricier choices. Counterfeit culture resonates with highly popular and intoxicating market trends, devaluing the authenticity and value of products.

Customers may hesitate to buy because of their doubts about the legitimacy of products due to the rise in counterfeit goods (Cordell *et al.*, 1996). Customers may wonder if the higher cost of authentic products is warranted given the availability of fake substitutes, which can have an impact on their loyalty to a brand. This phenomenon is especially noticeable in South Africa, where socioeconomic considerations may lead some customers to choose counterfeit goods over more expensive alternatives. The genuineness and worth of the items are greatly influenced by counterfeit culture.

On the other hand, luxury goods' authenticity continues to be a strong selling point for buyers. Many people view genuine luxury goods as symbols of excellence, skill, and cultural legacy. According to Beverland (2006), consumers seek authenticity as a form of identity expression, leading them to prefer genuine products over counterfeits. Genuine luxury brands are made more desirable by the cultural narratives that are ingrained in them and strike a deep chord with consumers. Recent interviews with participants revealed that a key determinant in their decisions to buy is their emotional attachment to real luxury goods. For many buyers, real luxury goods are investments in their social standing and sense of self as much as products. According to Vigneron and Johnson's (2004) research, luxury brands foster strong emotional connections that are challenging to replicate with knockoff goods. This feeling is consistent with their findings. Furthermore, the significance of sustainable development and ethical consumption is rising, especially among younger customers.

Local nuances are important to take into account, even though the dynamics of authenticity

and counterfeit culture are similar in local and global luxury markets. The luxury market in South Africa is distinguished by a special meeting point of socioeconomic diversity and cultural identity. On the opposite end of the counterfeiting scale, we've seen an emerging eco-system of local luxury brands celebrating cultural identity as a counterbalance to ubiquitous fake goods. These companies appeal to customers who are increasingly aware of the impact of what they buy by focusing on quality and authenticity, not just providing large volumes at a low price with a faraway footprint. The luxury market faces a worldwide problem when it comes to counterfeiting, especially where the demand for luxury goods is greater. As an example, counterfeit goods have developed rapidly in Asian markets, resulting in the adoption of stricter anti-counterfeiting measures by luxury brands (Eisend, 2019). The fact that various cultures hold unique concepts about luxury and authenticity poses another challenge for global brands trying to create viable marketing strategies and brand positioning.

Counterfeit culture poses a serious threat to luxury brands, as it undermines the perception of exclusivity and authenticity associated with luxury products. This motif is essential to research goal 2, 3 and 4 as counterfeit goods have direct implications damage consumer perception (especially when buyers cannot differentiate between high-end counterfeiting and true luxury goods). It could influence the perception of luxury brands, with fake goods becoming more readily available in South African stores. Furthermore, in this case number 5 comes into play, as counterfeit culture forces luxury brands to strengthen their identity through increased messaging of exclusivity and authenticity. Third, this theme aligns with goal 6 as it explores the role of consumer perceptions resulting from particular cultural attitudes towards counterfeits in terms of culture pride and preference for real luxury over bubble knockoffs.

At the bottom line, due to fact that pseudo-luxury plays a significant role in driving consumer behaviours and brand images in both China and abroad, one of the most fundamental questions in respect with luxury market from economic perspective is about the relationship between counterfeit culture and authenticity. More than simple imitation, counterfeiting destroys the exclusivity, authenticity and emotional tie that luxury brands labour to create. With the escalating challenges in the maturity of consumer perception, luxury brands need to fully understand how these dynamics works before running their businesses. Counterfeit competition cannot reach consumers by reminding them of authenticity and an inextricable

tie to cultural narratives for their product: luxury brands have to stay relevant and desirable at least on par with fake products.

Trustworthiness, Credibility and Reliability

Credibility

Credibility is one of the most vital components for qualitative research, as it assures that diverse viewpoints are faithfully captured and reflect real-life experiences (Draper & Hamberger, 2020). To enhance the validity of the study, members were requested to validate that the interview scripts accurately reflected what participants stated and how well they understood researchers and vice versa. This is what we refer to as member checking. Member checking is a reliable method for validating qualitative data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) – because it ensures that the voices of the participants are represented correctly. Finally, the continued genuine nature of consumer perceptions was preserved through providing consumers with the benefits of semi structured and semi-structured interviews that contained open-ended questions designed to encourage in-depth responses. By enabling a more thorough analysis of customer experiences, Korstjens and Moser (2018) argue that this flexible design method enhances the validity of the data gathered.

Member Checking

It is widely agreed that member checking is a reliable way of assessing whether data is true (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This process includes presenting preliminary findings to the participants and asking them to confirm or correct any interpretations.

By validating responses, researchers reduce the chances of misrepresentation and produce much cleaner data.

Participant Insights: A respondent placed great value on the angle of luxury branding being of local market culture, and this was not included in his or her original interview; they observed while looking through the tapes. After reviewing the transcript, he added, "It can be seen that luxury branding is not only about superiority but also a form of illustration—a company that really dips down into its African roots and is created by Africans."

Triangulation

The use of triangulation is considered to be more than just one viewpoint. It also enhances research credibility (Flick, 2018). In the present study, data triangulation, methodological triangulation, and investigator triangulation were used to validate themes.

Data triangulation meant analysing the perspectives from the semi-structured interviews. Methodological triangulation combined primary qualitative data with secondary research on luxury branding in South Africa. The research tried a variety of approaches to counteract any bias from themselves, such as external peer reviews. In this way, these tactics combined to ensure that consumers' views were properly presented.

Long-term engagement (Shenton, 2004) means constantly interacting with the sample units to develop trust and gain a better understanding of the topic. Hence, the methodology was followed by multiple rounds of communication to understand each consumer's preferences as they evolved.

In the interviews, exclusivity was frequently cited as a key component of luxury branding. Some participants were eager to emphasise emotional resonance and heritage storytelling as crucial elements in influencing how people perceive luxury however, they went into further detail about these elements as the conversations progressed.

4.1.2 Transferability

Despite the study's concentration on urban South African consumers, the knowledge gained can serve as a basis for comprehending more general consumer behaviours in various socioeconomic and geographic contexts within the country. The degree to which the results of one study can be applied to different groups or contexts is referred to as transferability. Even though qualitative research is by its very nature context-specific, the results can be used as a benchmark for other urban and even semi-urban areas because they provide a detailed account of the study's setting participant demographics and cultural quirks (Creswell, 2013). According to research by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2015), transferability is improved when data is richly contextualised so that other researchers or practitioners can make well-informed decisions about how applicable the findings are to their own context.

Reliability

To guarantee reliability and confirmability, this study used a systematic and transparent process. Throughout the data analysis process, which was carried out in compliance with an open audit trail, decisions regarding coding, theme development and interpretation were meticulously recorded. This aligns with the suggestions put forth by Shenton (2004), who emphasises the necessity of an audit trail to demonstrate the reliability of qualitative research. This study's audit trail, which aids in other researcher's tracking the research process and validating its findings, contains thorough notes on how themes like luxury as a social status symbol and cultural resonance arose from the data. The researcher remained reflexive throughout the process so as to ensure confirmability, acknowledging their own potential biases and working to mitigate these effects in how the data were interpreted. As such, Nowell *et al.*, (2017) stress the importance of reflexivity in maintaining objectivity and ensuring that findings accurately reflect the perspectives of participants instead of the researcher's preferences.

The thematic map shows how the main themes were identified. Across interviews, a theme of "Luxury as a Social Status Symbol" emerged. The following coding schema was utilised:

Code 1: References to exclusivity and high price points. Code 2: Connections to wealth and social prestige. Code 3: The emotional aspects of luxury branding.

Although qualitative research is context-specific by nature, transferability allows for its findings to be generalisable (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015).

Presentation of Data

The data in Table 4-1 illustrates how South African consumers perceive luxury brands and how they relate to a number of important topics, including influencer marketing, digital platforms, social standing versus cultural resonance, and even brand loyalty. These patterns illuminated how local customers interact with luxury brands, balancing cultural identity with international cachet.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The diversity of perspectives reflected in Table 4-2 demonstrates the varied demographic profiles of the respondents. Each participant's perceptions are shaped by industry roles, socioeconomic backgrounds, and exposure to luxury goods. The sample is made up of young professionals, entrepreneurs, and marketing specialists, providing cross-industry perspectives on the luxury landscape.

Thematic analysis and main findings

The thematic analysis summarised in Table 4-3 reveals important insights regarding the way South African consumers think about and live with luxury brands. This framework links the academic viewpoints with the qualitative data uncovered in the research.

When Luxury Becomes a Status Symbol - Luxury brands are still status symbols, reflecting signs of social stratification, and exclusivity is at the heart of brand prestige. This aligns with the theories of Vickers & Renand (2003) and Bourdieu (1984) regarding symbolic consumption and cultural capital.

Cultural Identity and Brand Resonance Authenticity and cultural relevance encourage consumers to move towards brands that support African heritage (Ko & Lee, 2011). Such is the evolution of fabrication trends toward Afrocentric luxe, where continued popularity, South African designers like Thebe Magugu and Rich Mnisi are fusing culture with cache.

Price Sensitivity and Brand Loyalty Due to their rarity and aspirational nature, South African consumers may even justify purchasing these brands at a premium as exclusivity is traditionally well respected (Truong et al., 2009). But price sensitivity continues to be an issue, especially within an affordable, income-driven economy.

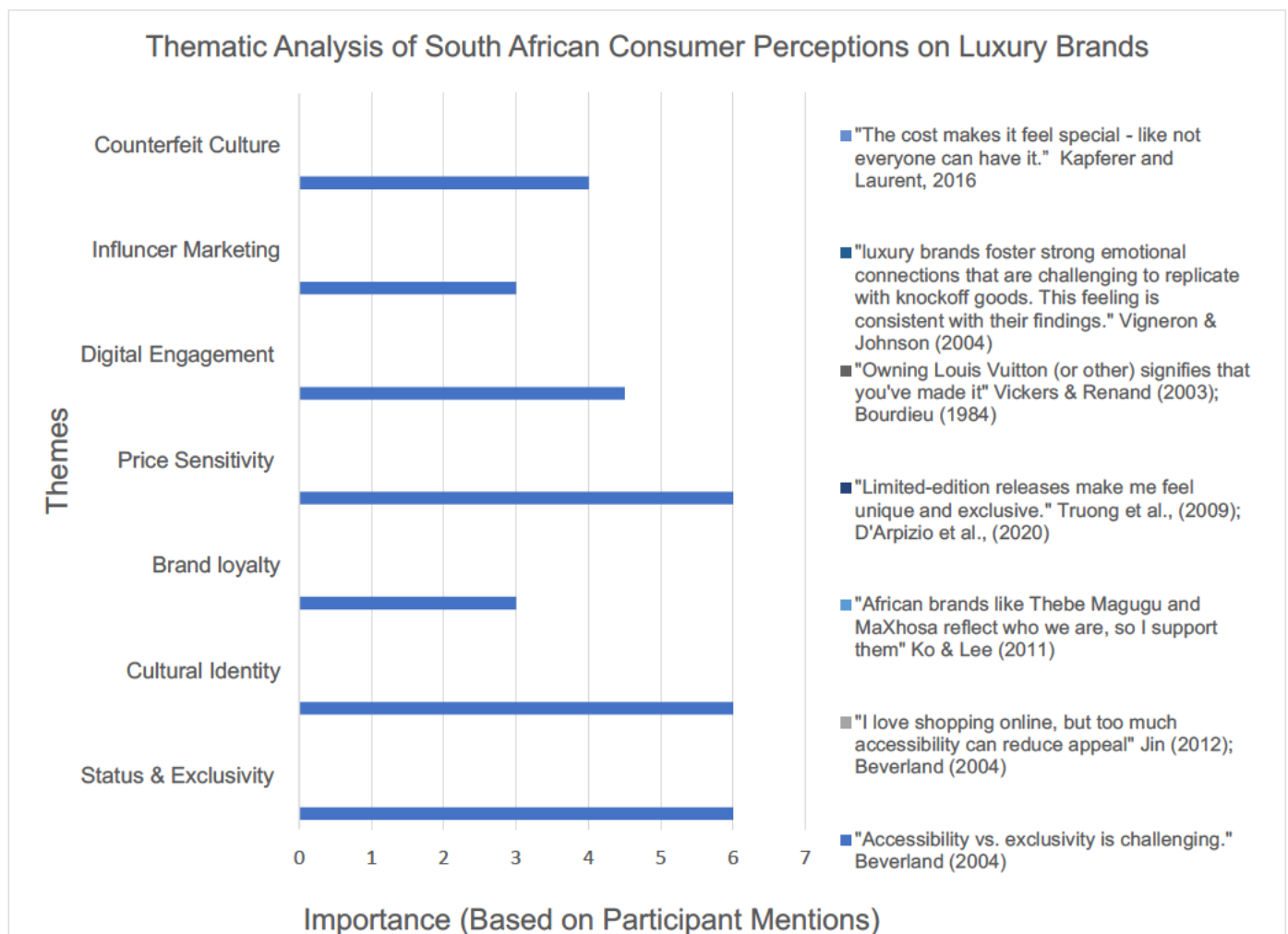
Digital Engagement and Accessibility And luxury brands have embraced digital platforms, which have counterbalancing forces to both exclusivity and online reach. On the other hand, brands run the risk of overexposure, which may undermine their prestige (Jin, 2012; Beverland, 2004). Quiet luxury trends—understated branding appealing to wealthy South African consumers—are also facilitated by social media.

The Impact of Influencer Marketing - When influencers and authentic brand storytelling connect, influencer marketing becomes a powerful tool for building consumer perception. South African luxury consumers have a heightened tendency to engage with brands whose ambassadors align with their lifestyle and aspirations.

The Culture of Fakes and Faux Brands - As South African consumers have conflicting perceptions regarding replicas, the counterfeit luxury market presents a unique set of challenges. Counterfeits are seen by some as a means of accessing aspirational branding but are rejected by others on the grounds of their inferior emotional and symbolic value (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004).

4.1.3 Data visualisation

Table 4-1. Thematic Analysis of South African Consumer Perceptions on Luxury Brands



The results in Table 4-1 reflect the perceptions of luxury brands among South African consumers and highlight themes such as influencer marketing, digital channels, social status versus cultural resonance, and brand loyalty.

Table 4-2. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Respondent	Age	Race	Gender	Occupation	Location	Socioeconomic Background	Relevance to study
Respondent 1	35	Black	Female	Officer Manager and Distribution Support at Investment Management Firm	Rosebank, Johannesburg	Middle Class	Exposed to luxury brands from an early age and has access to the asset management sector which is primarily linked to luxury purchases as an investment.
Respondent 2	31	Coloured	Female	Logistics Officer in the events industry	Oakdene, Johannesburg	Middle Class	Access to the events industry that provides insights into the cultural relevance and engagement

							t of luxury preferences.
Respondent 3	39	White	Female	Owner of boutique PR and Marketing Agency	Johannesburg	Upper Middle Class	Bespoke luxury insights from a PR and marketing industry background, knowledgeable and valuable insights on brand image and identity.
Respondent 4	33	Black	Female	Event Manager	Lonehill, Johannesburg	Upper Middle Class	Experience in event management sharing insights into industry trends, cultural resonance in luxury brands.
Respondent 5	40	Black	Male	Entrepreneur	Northriding, Johannesburg	Upper Middle Class	Solid understanding of the business

							perspective of the luxury industry and cultural appreciation of South African and international luxury.
Respondent 6	27	Black	Female	Creative at Marketing and Events Agency	Florida, Johannesburg	Middle Class	Young creative with insights on the dynamic generational shifts within the perception and consumption of luxury. Strong knowledge of digital engagement, influencer marketing, counterfeit culture and cultural resonance locally and internationally.

The demographic profiles of the respondents (including but not limited to industry roles and socioeconomic backgrounds) are detailed in Table 4-2, demonstrating the diversity of backgrounds that shape their luxury perceptions.

Table 4-3. Thematic analysis—key insights.

Theme	Key Insights	Scholarly Reference
Luxury as a social status symbol	Luxury brands serve as markers of distinction and social status; exclusivity is key to brand prestige.	Vickers & Renand (2003); Bourdieu (1984)
Brand resonance with cultural identity	Consumers are drawn to brands that resonate with African heritage, reflecting authenticity and cultural relevance.	Ko & Lee (2011)
Brand loyalty price sensitivity	Consumers value uniqueness and rarity, linking luxury brands to elevated social status.	Truong <i>et al</i> (2009)
Digital engagement	Digital platforms offer accessibility to luxury brands, balancing exclusivity with reach but risk overexposure.	Jin (2012); Beverland (2004)
Effectiveness of influencer marketing	Authenticity is key for the effectiveness of influencer marketing in terms of positively influencing consumer buying behaviour.	
Counterfeit culture	Luxury brands foster strong	Vigneron & Johnson (2004)

	emotional connections that are challenging to replicate with knockoff goods. This feeling is consistent with their findings.	
--	--	--

Finally, Table 4-3 summarises the findings related to each theme and cites relevant literature that supports these hypothesised links between cultural identity, brand class, online availability, and counterfeits' legitimacy challenges. This data visualisation is an excellent way to illustrate the different dimensions of the luxury consumer in South Africa.

The Luxury Pyramid (Figure 4.1) visualises where luxury brands may be positioned according to exclusivity and accessibility as market segments using thematic analysis and its principal findings. The high-end luxury or aspirational social media brands that confirm South African consumer tastes with regards to exclusivity and prestige—key themes in this study—are reflected by the pyramid. South African consumers are so driven by the idea of luxury that they will reach for the sparse few brands available to buy at the top of the pyramid—those in categories defined as Beyond or Absolute (think Hermès, Ferrari)—simply because these embody their notions of exclusivity. The pyramid also illustrates how local luxury brands can leverage cultural assets as a basis for differentiated positioning. By incorporating South African heritage, aspirational luxury brands can pair accessibility and exclusivity, bolstering mass appeal. This model can therefore be used as a reference to make sense of how consumer perceptions of cultural identity mapped against the global expectations of luxury branding exclusivity in the digital age, which simultaneously challenged and amplified these brands exclusive stature.

4.1.4 The Luxury Pyramid

The Luxury Pyramid

Figure 4.1 Illustrates how the local brands can integrate the adaptation to global luxury markets through a sense of place, exclusivity, and accessibility based on aspirational or high-end segments of the pyramid.



Figure 4.2: The Luxury Pyramid

Source: (GAM Investments, 2024)

Views of exclusivity and status among South African consumers are generally in line with the higher levels of the pyramid, such as the Absolute and Beyond categories (e.g., Ferrari and Hermès), which are regarded as exclusive, adding to their allure. Even the Luxury Pyramid, which categorises brands in terms of their perceived exclusivity and position in the market, can therefore be used to reconcile with what is found in this analysis section. South African consumers generally regard views of exclusivity and status (higher up the pyramid) similar to the higher-levels of the pyramid (Absolute & Beyond, e.g., Ferrari, Hermès), as work well viewed as exclusive enhances attractiveness. If the cultural link is made, aspirational or luxury brands may hold back a bit more of their existing local identities. Hence, this conceptual framework will give us a deeper understanding of perceptions of consumer cultural identities and the unique positioning of luxury brands towards keeping their exclusivity in an ever-remotely simultaneous world.

To enrich our understanding of luxury-brand perceptions of consumers from urban South Africa, we apply the Luxury Brand Pyramid model (Kapferer-Bastien 2012). It sorts luxury brands according to their place in the market, from aspirational all the way through and up to beyond luxury. The pyramid also offers a useful framework for exploring different consumer segments attitudes and behaviours towards luxury brands as well as how these luxury brands relate to status, exclusivity, and cultural identity in the South African context.

Desired Elegance: Based on the results of the interviews, a significant number of younger participants recognised Longchamp, Karl Lagerfeld, and Balenciaga as symbols of luxury that are both progressively more accessible and desirable. These companies are classified by the pyramid's Aspirational Luxury category as premium brands that cater to consumers who want to rise in social standing and offer luxury goods at an entry-level price point. The desire to possess luxury items is strongly associated with symbolic consumption, as proposed by Dubois and Laurent (1994), in which buyers buy items not only for their inherent worth but also for the social status they bestow. As one respondent pointed out, *"A pair of red Louis Vuitton sneakers have always been my dream pair. People seem to notice it, I believe, especially among my friends. In addition to being fashionable, it conveys your unique style."*

This is consistent with Okonkwo's (2007) research which contends that younger consumers are inspired by luxury brands' social visibility, especially those that are associated with aspiration. Even if customers lack the funds to purchase more upscale goods, these brands provide a means of social capital that enables them to indicate their status.

Elegant and luxurious. Positioned in the High-End Luxury tier as we proceed up the pyramid are names like Rolex, Dior, and Louis Vuitton. These brands are exclusive and prestigious, but they are still reasonably accessible in South African retail spaces according to respondents from older age groups or higher income brackets. One participant for example shared; *"True luxury conjures up images of labels like Louis Vuitton or Rolex. Having one of these pieces is about timeless value more than fashion. It represents a quality investment."*

This is consistent with research from Kapferer and Bastien (2012) who claim that High-End brands are renowned for their durability and craftsmanship, drawing in customers who are looking for long-term value in addition to status. Owning such products indicates a person's appreciation and knowledge of high-end luxury goods, which is in line with Bourdieu's (1984) discussion of cultural capital and how these brands are perceived as investments.

Absolute Luxury. Absolute Luxury is represented in the pyramid by companies like Chanel and Hermès. Offering a blend of history, exclusivity, and craftsmanship that is frequently out of reach for many customers, these brands are regarded as the height of luxury. As one

respondent put it; *“Hermès is invincible in my eyes. It’s not just pricey, it’s also out of reach. A Birkin bag is my indicator that a person has attained the pinnacle of exclusivity and wealth.”*

This comment reflects Vigneron and Johnson’s (2004) concept of the Veblen effect, where consumers perceive value in a brand not only because of its intrinsic qualities, but also due to its inaccessibility and high price. According to Kapferer and Laurent (2016) , these absolute brands reinforce the impression of social distance, since only a small number of people can afford to be a part of their exclusive ecosystem.

Above and Beyond Luxury. Researchers found that participants in this study mentioned the Beyond Luxury tier, which includes brands like Audemars Piguet and Ferrari less frequently. However, while talking about aspirational goals one respondent made reference to the concept of extreme luxury; “A Ferrari Maranello in my opinion would be the pinnacle of luxury. It’s a way of life not just a product. When you own something like that, you’re in an elite group.”

The results of Dion and Arnould (2011), who contend that luxury consumption at this level transcends material possession and becomes an immersive lifestyle experience are reflected in this. Rather than being linked to conventional luxury consumption, these brands are positioned as experiences of ultimate exclusivity and hyper-luxury, a term that denotes social and economic privilege that goes beyond simple wealth.

Conclusion

Building on thematic concepts around luxury brand status, cultural identity, exclusivity, and accessibility identified in the semi-structured interviews presented in Chapter 5, this chapter seeks to consider broader insights into consumer behaviour within urban South Africa. Cultural identity suggests that consumers in South Africa link their luxury brands to exclusivity, social class, and urban culture. According to the individuals the research describes brands like MaXhosa and Louis Vuitton fulfil a desire for authenticity and recognition, providing both cultural identity and symbols of success.

This observation is consistent with the Luxury Pyramid, which groups brands according to perceived exclusivity and status and it is closely related to Bourdieu's (1984) theory of social

stratification. The desire for exclusivity is another important finding. Consumers who prioritise rarity and limited editions tend to be drawn to the higher echelons of the luxury pyramid, which are occupied by companies like Hermès and Ferrari. This research examined the harmony between accessibility and exclusivity particularly as it relates to digital platforms, which raise access to luxury but run the risk of undermining a brands prestige. By highlighting the difficult task of preserving exclusivity in an age of e-commerce and social media, this research expands on the academic work of Beverland (2004) and Jin (2012).

Eventually the significance of cultural identity began to grow, especially in the way local brands honour African heritage (e.g., Thebe Magugu) are regarded as desirable and real. This is in line with research done in 2011 by Ko and Lee on the cultural appeal of luxury brands that use regional narratives. There is a clear connection between exclusivity, status, and cultural identity in the way that these insights, which are backed by academic research, provide a logical progression in understanding how urban South African consumers perceive luxury brands. This conversation prepares the reader for the last chapter, which will address the wider ramifications for luxury brand marketing tactics in South Africa.

5 Findings, Recommendations and Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis by summarising the information from the semi-structured interviews to gain insight into South African consumers' perceptions of luxury brands. We deal with key elements according to research objectives and aims, such as when cultural identity interacts with luxury brand status, exclusive influence on loyalty, or how balance between exclusivity and accessibility constitutes the essence of true luxury. It situates these insights relative to the broader academic literature, all whilst considering both the dynamic nature of international luxury and South African markets. A description of the research problem is provided, followed by a narrative presentation of the findings requiring a detailed discussion of the main conclusions obtained based on the interviews. This chapter provides an analysis of the data related closely to the main research questions around which this study is built. Each theme is further enriched and grounded by directly including participants' first-hand accounts to convey what each finding meant in practice.

The recommendations then stem from these findings and provide valuable insights for luxury brands that desire to enter the South African market. Rooted in the trends we have spotted (most notably, the demand for sustainability and the desire for personalisation), these recommendations are grounded in practical, fact-based ideas for future strategies. The final chapter provides a discussion that relates the findings and recommendations to the overall research objectives. This section consists of the theoretical and practical implications of the research, followed by how consumers in South Africa conceptualise luxury brands differently based on this study. We end with a comprehensive and detailed conclusion considering limitations as well as possible directions for future research.

5.2 Key Findings

The study results offer an in-depth reflection on how luxury is practiced within South Africa, focusing on the multiplicity of cultural identity and limited exclusivity. In order to contextualise these findings into the literature, we can explore several different theories focusing on consumer behaviour and brand perception.

Luxury & Status: One of the most apparent themes we saw come through the data was

that luxury brands are status signals. This concurs with the work of Kapferer and Bastien (2012), who say that luxury brands can convey a feeling of exclusivity and status, which is impossible in the case of mass brands. The glaring income disparity and emerging middle class create an aspirational status for luxury brands in South Africa, where the ownership of such commodities points towards success and a degree of social mobility. It is evidenced by the responses from subjects, and they mentioned that purchasing luxury brands was more respectable to the social status accompanied by this product than its substantive value. Another respondent added, for example, that ownership of a luxury label like Rich Mnisi or Thebe Magugu communicated social success in a way local non-luxury brands couldn't. This finding is aligned with Bourdieu's (1984) theory of cultural capital, which explains luxury consumption in relation to social stratification. Where South African identities are partly determined by negotiating a post-apartheid identity, this idea takes on further dimensions. From this double signalling of status (exclusivity) and identity (cultural resonance), brands that do so can fulfil two needs.

Culture imprint and cognisant marketing: Incorporation of South African culture into luxury brands is one of the primary research questions that arise with regards to taxonomising effects on consumer perceptions. Brands that celebrated African storytelling design and artistry gave customers an emotional tie. This is in line with Holt (2004), who contends that brands must be culturally relevant and aligned with collective identity myths of their audiences to achieve deep emotional ties. According to participants, brands that radiate South Africa's cultural roots are appealing. They identified the use of indigenous forms, symbols, and stories in luxury goods as a way to increase brand accessibility and allow for cultural pride among consumers. One respondent spoke about a piece she bought from Rich Mnisi's collection and how wearing it made her feel like she was representing her heritage authentically and stylishly.

The Exclusiveness and the Availability: Another of the most interesting findings is related to the contradiction concerning luxury brands, which are exclusive but should have greater consumer reach. While many South African consumers will aspire to affordable entry points such as limited-edition products or collaborations with local artists, exclusivity remains an essential aspect of luxury branding. This supports Vickers and Renand's (2003) results, who found that although luxury brand allure belongs to their scarcity and exclusivity, the modern consumer—particularly in emerging countries—wants brands to strike a balance between

intrinsic and extrinsic resources. South African luxury brands face a unique challenge to balance being exclusive with being culturally relevant and accessible to the masses. To tackle this problem, a few of the participants proposed that brands establish themselves in more inviting spaces like pop-up shops and launch at culturally relevant locations or offer lower price point products. Even more supportive evidence for a balance between inaccessibility and accessibility comes from the Dubois and Laurent (1994) study. They argue that to appease consumer desires for aspirational products, luxury brands in emerging markets must thread the needle between not offending too many people and being too exclusive.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

5.3.1 Luxury brands in the eyes of South Africans: While geographically limited to South Africa and temporally to one specific sector, this interpretive empirical work makes an important contribution to understanding the meaning of luxury in South Africa amongst consumers. However, the study covered a particular category of South African urban consumer with a small sample size. Consumer attitudes among this cohort, exposed to metropolitan life, greater metropolitan exposure to global trends, and higher disposable income, will not necessarily be representative of wider South African consumers. The research's focus on urban settings fails to account for the perspectives of consumers in less urbanised or rural settings, where the meaning and desirability of luxury may differ based on other cultural, economic and social factors. The small sample size is a limitation of the study, which makes it difficult to see if the findings can necessarily be applied to the South African consumer market as a whole given the major socio-economic, cultural and regional differences that characterise this consumer base. As a result, few conclusions can be generalised regarding other developing markets or the South African population more broadly.

5.3.2 Multisensory experience for luxury: Future studies should consider utilising a larger sample size with a wider variety of consumers to obtain opinions from various perspectives in the consumer setting, including how luxury consumption is perceived among consumers located at rural and peri-urban terrain based on its multisensory attributes because preceding literature had focused more on urban residents as subjects. This study could not

exclude temporal changes in the perception of consumers due to the cross-sectional design and that data were collected only on one occasion. As luxury brands and trends change, particularly with the growing power of Gen Z consumers, longitudinal studies might be more useful in understanding shifts in consumer preferences as they pursue reactions to brand strategies and market conditions. A longitudinal design would also allow researchers to track the gradual change in consumer perceptions of luxury brands, especially with regard to the increasing internationalisation of cultural heritage (Silverstein and Fiske, 2003) in the global luxury pierce market. This study is qualitative, and the results are interpretive and vulnerable to researcher bias. Although a rigorous and systematic thematic analysis was performed as an interpretive approach to the data, the subjective nature of this study limits replication. This methodology could be complemented with quantitative surveys in future research to determine the extent of generalisability of the findings among other customer segments.

Emphasis on Cultural Heritage: Though the study sheds light on the importance of cultural heritage in luxury branding, it did not examine other factors that may have had stronger effects on consumer perceptions like sex representation, sustainable practice or digital innovations. Luxury had been grossly underestimated, as luxury is growing significantly in the aspects contained in these named elements and should be studied even more (continued external research focus) as they highlight logic over economic incentive.

By examining attitudes at a single point in time the cross-sectional approach of the study restricts its ability to capture the dynamic nature of customer perceptions. Views of luxury brands are dynamic and influenced by a variety of factors including economic trends, cultural developments and long-term marketing strategies. The way that luxury is viewed over time for instance can change significantly due to generational shifts changes in disposable income or major events like the COVID-19 pandemic. There has also been no investigation into long-term brand loyalty and relationships which are frequently developed through continuous interactions. Potentially useful insights into how consumer perceptions of luxury brands change in response to these diverse influences may be provided by future studies that take a longitudinal approach.

The single focus of the study on South African urban consumers ignores the possible variation in how luxury is perceived in different socioeconomic and geographic contexts. Comparing rural and peri-urban consumers to their urban counterparts, the former frequently

encounter disparities in access to luxury brands, cultural influences, and purchasing power. While rural consumers may value practicality, cultural symbolism, or aspirational qualities connected to their local context, urban consumers may associate luxury with global trends and cosmopolitan lifestyles. Further influencing how luxury is viewed and used are differences in access to physical retail locations or online platforms, which are prevalent in rural areas. By leaving out these comparative insights, the study restricts its capacity to offer a comprehensive picture of how South African consumers interact with luxury brands in various contexts, thereby creating a useful space for further investigation.

This investigation sheds light on the perceptions of luxury brands among urban consumers in South Africa, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of luxury in this particular environment. However, the limitations identified in the study call for a cautious approach to interpreting the results. The research's focus on a specific geographic and demographic group—namely, urban consumers with higher disposable incomes and exposure to global trends—restricts the generalisability of the findings to the broader South African demographic, particularly those residing in rural and peri-urban areas. The research's cross-sectional design also limits its ability to capture the dynamic shifts in luxury perceptions that could result from long-term branding strategies, generational shifts, or economic fluctuations. Although thorough, the qualitative and interpretive approach lacks the quantitative data that could increase the findings applicability and is prone to subjective biases. Additionally, the study's concentration on cultural heritage overlooks other vital elements, such as sustainable practices, digital advancements, and gender representation, which are increasingly influential in contemporary luxury consumption. Future research that employs larger, more varied samples, longitudinal methodologies, and mixed methods could address these shortcomings and yield a more nuanced understanding of luxury brand perceptions within South Africa's diverse consumer landscape.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following practical suggestions could be useful for researchers and managers of luxury brands in future years.

Deepening Bonds with Heritage: High-end firms ought to expand their links with South Africa. To do this, their designs can include traditional ones like motifs, etc. from local

textiles. Brands can work with local artisans as well as their communities to curate culturally relevant, authentic collections, fuelling brand loyalty through emotional affinitive bonds.

Scholarly context: The argument made by Holt (2004) is that good brands resonate with the cultural myths of their target markets. South African narration-driven themes of resilience, creativity, and diversity can rightly be integrated into luxury branding strategies. As Gen Z and Millennials abandon flashy consumption in favour of quiet luxury, the latter must emphasise scarcity via well-planned events, tailored products, and personalised services.

Objectives 1, 2, and 3: Experts suggest that in South Africa luxury brands need to adapt to the growing global trend towards experiential luxury (where greater importance is given to unique passion-aligning experiences that yield emotional satisfaction) in order to obtain a deeper understanding of consumer perceptions of value/logo-congruence, which impact brand image. Luxury brands experiential marketing in South Africa allows access to the depth of exclusivity and association alluded to above to examine how brand identity perception of self vs. other or similar subjects examined in this study.

Objectives 6 and 7: Aspects of these experiences emotionally tied to regional customs and values can also be incorporated by brands to evaluate heritage—the cross-cultural impact on consumer perceived brand image and identity as well.

Luxury consumers in South Africa and beyond are slowly but surely paying more attention to sustainability ethics and responsible consumption. By adopting environmentally friendly practices and being transparent about their supply chains and sourcing, luxury brands can improve their brand image and create trust.

Consumers from the future will demand more and better from all those luxury brands who are still managing to enjoy their social and environmental irresponsibility by keeping up appearances. They also call upon luxury brands to embrace sustainability, which may include circular fashion principles, waste reduction, and ethically sourced materials. Certifications and transparency are important for luxury brands that want to attract clients who value an ethical supply chain.

Digital and Tech Engagement: For luxury brands to attract the increasingly tech-inclined segment of consumers in South Africa, where access to the internet is continuously expanding, digital touch points must be complemented with physical experiences. Businesses must acquire advanced technology to enhance their online presence and attract customers with interactive content. Possible future research would investigate how digital strategy enactments shape consumer perceptions for luxury brands, specifically in the context of developing countries such as South Africa. Companies should consider investing in the latest technologies and extending their operations on the web with interesting experiences to determine how luxury goods are conceptualised by South African consumers (Objective 1) and form an image of brands based on their associations (Objectives 2 and 3).

5.5 Recommendations for future research

Exploring the Role of Cultural Identity in Consumers' Perceptions of Luxury Brands:

Even though the importance of cultural identity has been discussed within this study, much more work could be conducted into how luxury brands can advance their links with different ethnic groups. This opens avenues for further studies to investigate how companies can adjust their strategies of appealing to consumers from various cultural backgrounds in a culturally diverse country such as South Africa.

Potential areas for investigation include the ramifications of incorporating indigenous South African design aspects, such as patterns, symbols, and materials, into luxury items. The role of storytelling and local heritage in luxury branding campaigns, focusing on whether these strategies foster enhanced emotional and cultural connections with consumers. Comparative research that highlights minute differences in consumer expectations by analysing how cultural identity affects luxury perceptions across South Africa's many provinces and ethnic groups. Furthermore, researchers could examine how local narratives interact with cross-cultural influences like Pan-Africanism or Western trends, which could either enhance or undermine the perceived authenticity of luxury brands.

Effects of Digital Luxury Experiences: As luxury brands navigate how they are digitally experienced by consumers, future researchers should study the extent to which technology can enrich or dilute a comparable brand identity. Research can investigate how these innovations affect brand loyalty in local and global contexts (e.g., virtual stores, AI-driven

personalisation) or digital interactions (e.g., consumers emotional attachment to luxury brands). In future research, a focus to analyse the relationship between sustainability and luxury brand value, how ethical practices of luxury brands affect fashion consumer loyalty and brand image could be suggested in the luxury market context. It may be interesting to do research that compares consumer reactions to sustainability between emerging markets (like South Africa) against other established luxury markets around the world.

As digital interactions increasingly define consumer experiences, future research should delve into the following areas:

- The role of emerging technologies, including virtual reality showrooms, metaverse activations, and AI-driven personalisation, in shaping the perceptions of luxury consumers in developing markets like South Africa.
- The impact on traditional luxury attributes, particularly in relation to scarcity and exclusivity of digital strategies such as augmented reality for product trials and gamified brand interactions.
- The connection between luxury online experiences and customer trust with a focus on how companies can boost brand loyalty through the use of effective omnichannel strategies that seamlessly blend digital and physical experiences.

The way that South African urban and rural consumers interact with digital luxury may also be examined by researchers, which could provide crucial insights for brands looking to adjust their strategy.

Quiet luxury with Gen Z: The trend of quiet luxury as a preference seen by Gen Z is also something that requires further insight on. Future studies may explore Gen Z and other younger luxury consumers in South Africa perceptions and valuations of quiet luxury relative to consumers in other international markets, as well as older generations. This could give rich hints with regards to the manner in which extravagance brands need to adjust to arrive at this developing market. Going forward, luxury brands will have to harness technology, sustainability, and cultural identity while adapting to local and global shifts in consumer preference. Future research should build on these findings by exploring the complex interrelationships between luxury brand image and consumer perception and trends in the global luxury market.

Experiential Luxury in Emerging Markets: In emerging markets like South Africa, consumers are increasingly prioritising unique and emotionally compelling experiences over traditional material possessions, a trend known as experiential luxury. Experience marketing offers luxury brands a special chance to enhance their emotional resonance and exclusivity. Brands can boost consumer loyalty and engagement by offering experiences that are closely linked to South African culture, like exclusive tours of artisanal workshops or partnerships with local artists for private cultural events. Furthermore, as technology develops and the distinction between digital and real-world experiences becomes hazier, brands can look into hybrid models like virtual experiences that mimic the exclusivity of live events. Traditional experiential marketing techniques, for example, can be enhanced by offering digital displays of limited collections or virtual insights into the inner workings of brands. Future studies could examine the relationship between accessibility and experiential luxury, evaluating how well luxury brands can strike a balance between exclusivity and wider appeal, especially with aspirational customers. Gaining insight into how South African consumers respond to these strategies would help tailor experiential luxury to the distinct cultural and economic context of emerging markets.

Glocal (global and local) brand identity dynamics: Luxury brands in South Africa face the intricate challenge of balancing adherence to global brand standards with the need to connect with local cultural narratives. For South African consumers, the integration of local cultural elements—such as campaigns featuring regional ambassadors, collaborations with local artisans, or heritage-inspired designs—can foster deeper emotional connections with the brand. However, it remains uncertain how these efforts impact brand perception: does localisation enhance a luxury brand's prestige and authenticity, or does it risk compromising its global exclusivity? Future research could delve into this balance by examining consumer perceptions of global-local brand identity dynamics, providing insights into how luxury brands can formulate culturally resonant strategies without jeopardising their international image. Furthermore, finding out if South African consumers react differently to localisation efforts across the country would be helpful for brands trying to negotiate its cultural diversity. These studies could shed light on the challenges of attracting customers in a country where purchasing power and cultural identity differ greatly among demographic groups.

It is essential for future research to engage with established theoretical frameworks to deepen the understanding of luxury branding in South Africa. Holt's (2004) Cultural Branding

Framework provides a pertinent approach to investigate how luxury brands can connect with South Africa's cultural myths, such as resilience, creativity, and diversity, in order to create emotionally engaging narratives. The Luxury Pyramid Model also deserves attention in this regard, particularly as changing consumer preferences for sustainability, subtle luxury, and experiential marketing challenge traditional concepts of exclusivity and value in luxury markets. Moreover, Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour presents a comprehensive framework for exploring how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence consumer behaviour in the luxury sector. Researchers might, for instance, look at how social norms within aspirational consumer groups influence the desirability of particular luxury brands or how attitudes toward sustainability and ethical issues impact luxury purchasing behaviours. By combining these theoretical stances, future research can provide insightful information about the intricate relationships among consumer perception, luxury brand image, and new market trends, making substantial contributions to both academic discourse and real-world applications.

5.6 Conclusion

Ultimately, this study contributes immensely to our understanding of South African consumers' perceptions of luxury brands with a focus on local customs. The results highlight the importance of exclusivity and status linked to cultural identity for driving consumer attitudes. These results further the case to demand luxury brands adapt their brand strategies by reflecting regional heritage and consequently increasing authenticity and consumer connectivity. Despite its many limitations, the study provides useful and actionable insights for brand management practice as well as further research.

The purpose of this research is to explore how consumers perceive luxury brands in South Africa with regards to brand identity and image, particularly in connection with respect for cultural heritage.

Based on the guidance of the sub-questions, the research has explored general consumer perceptions of luxury brands and what happens if cultural heritage is imposed into brand identity. By focusing on these sub-questions, the study aimed to understand the perception and response of South African consumers towards luxury brands incorporating aspects of their own local heritage. This study aims to determine whether cultural heritage is a necessity

in helping South African luxury brands establish a deeper connection with their target market. The purpose of the study was to examine luxury brands and brand identity in South Africa. In summary, the three key findings indicate that South African consumers conceptualise luxury brands as non-homogenous and experience significant shifts in their perceptions of a brand when it incorporates cultural heritage into its identity. This insinuated that the cultural ingredients have a powerful emotional pull among local consumers, elevating their feeling of authenticity as well as brand loyalty. Having this kind of relationship helps in ensuring brand loyalty among consumers who value heritage as a status or identity marker. Brands of luxury incorporating South African culture, sense of style are usually more inclined, the study said, to foster a long-term relationship. This indicates that cultural heritage is not only favourable but also one of the potential key aspects for luxury brands to target this market. Brand loyalty and trust build in the South African luxury market on components of brand identity and image that are determined through cultural relevance, according to previous studies, Lee finds.

This study also aimed to assess the impact of cultural heritage on consumer perceptions. Thus, achieving these aims allows this research to make a contribution towards an understanding of consumer behaviour in the SA luxury landscape and offer useful suggestions for luxury brands seeking to align their brand and identity with traditional cultural practices. And finally, the research shows that it is essential to strike a balance between exclusivity and accessibility, with cultural resonance increasing brand identity. Besides more global luxury trends, this opens a way for further research into using local brand cultural heritage to maximise prestige and loyal customer relationships as part of the brand architecture.

Reference List

- Aaker, D.A. 1991. *Managing Brand Equity: Capitalizing on the Value of a Brand Name*. Free Press. (p. 12)
- Aaker, D.A. 1991a. *Managing Brand Equity*. The Free Press, New York, 206.
- Aaker, D.A. 1996. *Building Strong Brands*. New York: Free Press, p. 68.
- Aaker, D.A. 2020. *Managing Brand Equity: Capitalizing on the Value of a Brand Name*. New York: Free Press.
- Aaker, D.A. 2014. *Aaker on Branding: 20 Principles That Drive Success*. New York: Morgan James Publishing.
- Aaker, D.A. and Joachimsthaler, E. 2000. *Brand Leadership*. New York: Free Press, p. 45.
- Aaker, J.L. 1997. Dimensions of brand personality. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 34(3), 347-356.
- Ajzen, I. 1991. *The theory of planned behaviour*. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179-211. (Online). Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978\(91\)90020-T](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T). [Accessed 28 October 2024].
- Amatulli, C., De Angelis, M., Pichierri, M. & Guido, G. 2021. Luxury purchasing in emerging markets: The role of status consumption and conspicuous consumption. *Journal of Business Research*, 124, 535-543.
- Amine, A. 1998. Customers' true brand loyalty: The central role of commitment. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 6(4), 305-319. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/096525498346577>.
- Andrivet, M. 2023. The Power of a Strong Brand Identity: Definition, Importance, and Key Elements. (Online). Available at: <https://www.thebrandingjournal.com/2023/03/brand-identity/>. [Accessed 28 May 2024].

Appiah-Nimo, K., Muthambi, A. & Devey, R. 2023. Consumer-based brand equity of South African luxury fashion brands. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*. (Online). doi.org/10.1108/jfmm-10-2021-0277. [Accessed 14 April 2024].

Azemi, Y., Ozuem, W., Wiid, R. & Hobson, A. 2022. Luxury fashion brand customers' perceptions of mobile marketing: Evidence of multiple communications and marketing channels. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 66, 102944.

Bain & Company. 2021. "Luxury goods worldwide market study." Bain & Company. (Online). Available at: <https://www.bain.com/global-luxury-report>. [Accessed 28 October 2024].

Banet-Weiser, S. 2012. *Authentic TM: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*. New York: New York University Press.

Bang, H. & Su, J. 2022. Who uses virtual wardrobes? Investigating the role of consumer traits in the intention to adopt virtual wardrobes. *Sustainability*, 14(3), 1209.

Belk, R. W. 1988. Possessions and the Extended Self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15(2), 139–168. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2489522>.

Bengtsson, A., Bardhi, F. & Venkatraman, M. 2010. "How global brands travel with consumers: An examination of the relationship between brand consumption and international travel." *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37(2), 331-344.

Berger, R. 2015. Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 219-234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475>.

Bernarto, I., Bachtiar, D., Sudibyo, A.W. & Suryawan, R. 2020. The Influence of Brand Image on Customer Loyalty through Customer Satisfaction: An Empirical Study on Women Consumers of Wardah Cosmetic Products in Indonesia. *Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business*, 7(12), pp. 123.

Bernarto, I., Berlianto, M.P., Meilani, Y.F.C.P., Masman, R.R. & Suryawan, I.N. 2020. The

influence of brand awareness, brand image, and brand trust on brand loyalty. *Jurnal Manajemen*, 24(3), 412-426.

Beverland, M.B. 2004. Uncovering "theories-in-use": Building luxury wine brands. *European Journal of Marketing*, 38(3/4), 446-466.

Beverland, M. B. 2004. Uncovering 'theories-in-use': Building luxury wine brands." *European Journal of Marketing*, 38(3/4), 446-466. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560410518603>.

Beverland, M.B. 2006. The 'real thing': Branding authenticity in the luxury wine trade. *Journal of Business Research*, 59(2), 251-258.

Beverland, M. 2021. *Building Brand Authenticity: 7 Habits of Iconic Brands*. London: Kogan Page.

Bhardwaj, V. & Fairhurst, A. 2010. "Fast fashion: Response to changes in the fashion industry." *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, 20(1), 165-173.

Bhogaita, V. 2024. *What is Quiet Luxury Fashion? The Rise of Discreet Elegance*. POMP MMXIX. (Online). Available at: <https://pomp.store/blogs/journal/quiet-luxury-meaning-and-definition#:~:text=Quiet%20luxury%2C%20as%20the%20name,sweatshirt%20in%20certified%20organic%20cotton>. [Accessed 06 January 2025].

Bian, Q., & Forsythe, S. (2012). *Purchase intention for luxury brands: A cross cultural comparison*. *Journal of Business Research*, 65(10), 1443-1451. (Online) Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.10.010>. [Accessed 28 October 2024].

Binns, T. & Nel, E. 2016. "Africa's Creative Cities: The Case of Cape Town." *City, Culture and Society*, 7(2), 115-123.

Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. 2016. Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation? *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13), 1802-1811. <https://doi:10.1177/1049732316654870>.

Blasi, S., Brigato, L. & Sedita, S.R. 2020. Eco-friendliness and fashion perceptual attributes of fashion brands: An analysis of consumers' perceptions based on twitter data mining. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 244, 118701.

Bourdieu, P. 1984. *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Harvard University Press.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

Brown, M. & Kim, S. 2023. Creating Favourable Brand Impressions: The Impact of Public Perception. *Journal of Consumer Behavior*, 45(2), 75-89. <https://doi.org/10.1000/jcb.2023.0021>.

Brown, S. 2001. *Marketing: The Retro Revolution*. London: Sage Publications.

Bryman, A. 2016. *Social research methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Bryman, A. 2016. *Social Research Methods*. Oxford University Press.

Budiyono, E. and Novandalina, A. 2022. The Effect of Perceived Quality and Brand Image on Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty: An Empirical Study of the Automobile Industry in Indonesia. *Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business*, 9(4), pp. 323-330.

Budiyono, R. & Novandalina, A. 2022. Influence of Brand Image, Brand Trust and Perceived Product Quality on the Decision of Purchasing. *Jurnal Stie Semarang (Edisi Elektronik)*, 14(1).

Business, A. 2021. Big spenders: Africa's luxury goods market. (Online). Available at: <https://african.business/2020/01/economy/big-spenders-africas-luxury-goods-market>. [Accessed 31 May 2024].

Calderón-Fajardo, V., Molinillo, S., Anaya-Sánchez, R. & Ekinci, Y. 2023. Brand personality: Current insights and future research directions. *Journal of Business Research*, 166, 114062.

Castleberry, A., & Nolen, A. 2018. *Thematic analysis of qualitative research data: Is it as easy as it sounds?* Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning, 10(6), 807-815. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cptl.2018.03.019>

Center of Expertise for Urban Programming. (n.d.). *Defining urban contexts*. (Online). Available at: <https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Defining%20urban%20contexts%2012.11.17.pdf>. [Accessed 06 January 2025].

Centobelli, P., Abbate, S., Nadeem, S.P. & Garza-Reyes, J.A. 2022. Slowing the fast fashion industry: An all-round perspective. *Journal of Business Research*, 140, 118-133.

Centobelli, P., Abbate, S., Nadeem, S.P. & Garza-Reyes, J.A. 2020. "Slowing the fast fashion industry: An all-round perspective." *Environmental Impact Assessment Review*, 85, 106478.

Centobelli, Piera & Abbate, Stefano & Nadeem, Simon & Garza-Reyes, Jose Arturo. 2022. Slowing the fast fashion industry: An all-round perspective. *Current Opinion in Green and Sustainable Chemistry*. 38. 100684. 10.1016/j.cogsc.2022.100684.

Chadha, R. & Husband, P. 2006. *The Cult of the Luxury Brand: Inside Asia's Love Affair with Luxury*. Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Charmaz, K. 2006. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. London: Sage Publications. p. 10.

Chevalier, M. & Mazzalovo, G. 2012. *Luxury Brand Management: A World of Privilege*. John Wiley & Sons.

Chikane, T. 2022. Brand Differentiation in African and Global Markets. *Journal of Global Marketing*, 34(2), pp. 169.

Chipp, K., Kleyn, N. & Manzi, T. 2011. Catch-up and replication and the case of South Africa's luxury brands. *International Marketing Review*, 28(4), 379-400.

Coetzee, R. 2018. The role of cultural heritage in the luxury branding of fashion in South Africa. *Journal of Brand Management*, 25(4), 311-328.

Coetzee, Z. 2018. Global versus local brands in South Africa: an empirical analysis of consumer perceptions. Faculty of Commerce, School of Management Studies. <http://hdl.handle.net/11427/31537>.

Cordell, V.V., Wong, A. & Thoresen, M. 1996. Counterfeit versus genuine: An exploratory study of the impact of counterfeit goods on brand equity. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 5(3), 28-38.

Creswell, J.W. 2013. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J.W. 2013. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J.W., & Poth, C.N. 2018. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Crewe, L. 2016. "Placing fashion: Art, space, display and the building of luxury fashion markets through retail design." *Progress in Human Geography*, 40(4), 511-529.

Crosswaite, Inka. 2014. Afro Luxe: The Meaning of Luxury in South Africa. Doi: 10.1057/9781137330536_18.

D'Arpizio, C., Levato, F., Prete, F. & de Montgolfier, J. 2022. *True-Luxury Global Consumer Insight*. Bain & Company.

D'Arpizio, C., Levato, F., Kamel, M.A., & Montgolfier, J.D. 2022. *Luxury goods worldwide market study: Spring 2022*. Bain & Company. (Online) Available at: <https://www.bain.com/insights/luxury-goods-worldwide-market-study-spring-2022/>. [Accessed 28 October 2024].

D'Arpizio, C. *et al.*, 2022. From surging recovery to elegant advance: The Evolving Future of Luxury, Bain. (Online). Available at: <https://www.bain.com/insights/from-surging-recovery-to-elegant-advance-the-evolving-future-of-luxury/>. [Accessed: 28 October 2024].

Davies, G., Chun, R., Da Silva, R. & Roper, S. 2003. *Corporate Reputation and Competitiveness*. Routledge.

De Chernatony, L. and Dall'Olmo Riley, F. 1998. Modelling the components of the brand. *European Journal of Marketing*, 32(11/12), p. 419.

De Chernatony, L. 1999. Brand Management Through Narrowing the Gap Between Brand Identity and Brand Reputation. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 15(1-3), p. 165.

Denzin, N. K. 1978. *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods* (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. 2018. *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.

DiCicco-Bloom, B. & Crabtree, B.F. 2006. The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education*, 40(4), 314-321.

Dinnie, K. 2008. *Nation Branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice*. Routledge.

Dion, D., & Arnould, E. J. 2011. Retail luxury strategy: Assembling charisma through art and magic. *Journal of Retailing*, 87(4), 502-520. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2011.09.001>

Dlamini, S. & Mhlongo, B. 2022. Luxury Brand Perception in the African Context. *African Journal of Marketing Management*, 13(3), pp. 134.

Dubois, B., Laurent, G. & Czellar, S. 2001. Consumer rapport to luxury: Analysing complex and ambivalent attitudes. *Les Cahiers de Recherche*, 736, 1-56.

- Dubois, B., Laurent, G., & Czellar, S. 2021. Consumer segments in luxury markets: How segmentation contributes to luxury brand success. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 37(3-4), 427-448.
- Eckhardt, G.M., Belk, R., & Wilson, J.A.J. 2015. The rise of inconspicuous consumption. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 31(7-8), 807-826.
- Eisenhardt, K.M. 1989. Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*. 14(4), 532-550.
- Eisendhardt, M. 2019. The impact of counterfeiting on brand equity: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Business Research*, 106, 245-261.
- Eisenhardt, K.M., & Graebner, M.E. 2007. *Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges*. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1), 25-32. (Online). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2007.24160888>. [Accessed 28 October 2024].
- Engel, J.F., Blackwell, R.D. and Miniard, P.W. 1990. *Consumer Behavior*. 6th Edition, Dryden Press, Hinsdale.
- Eriksson, P., & Kovalainen, A. 2015. *Qualitative methods in business research* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S.A. & Alkassim, R.S. 2016. Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1-4.
- Euromonitor International. 2022. Luxury Goods in South Africa. *Euromonitor International*.
- Exchange, M. 2022. South African Fashion Brands on the Global Stage. *Journal of Fashion Business*, 29(3), pp. 78.
- Exchange. 2022. Top 10 Fashion brands in Africa. (Online). Available at: <https://furtherafrica.com/2022/12/03/top-10-fashion-brands-in-africa/>. [Accessed 27 May 2024].

Fionda, A.M. & Moore, C.M. 2009. The anatomy of the luxury fashion brand. *Journal of Brand Management*, 16(5-6), pp. 347-363.

Flick, U. 2014. *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. 5th ed. London: Sage Publications. p. 12.

Flick, U. 2018. *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. 6th ed. (Online). Available at: <https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/an-introduction-to-qualitative-research/book261109> [Accessed 24 January 2025].

Fogg, M. 2020. "Thebe Magugu: A New Wave of African Fashion." *Vogue*, 15 October.

Fournier, S. 1998. Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research. *Journal of Consumer Research*. 24. 343-73. <https://doi.org/10.1086/209515>.

France, C., Grace, D., Lo Iacono, J. & Carlini, J. 2020. Exploring the interplay between customer perceived brand value and customer brand co-creation behaviour dimensions. *Journal of brand Management*, 27, 466-480.

France, C., Merrilees, B. & Miller, D. 2020. Customer Perceptions of Brand and Brand Image. *Journal of Brand Management*, 27(1), pp. 67.

Gabriel, M.B. 2023. The economics of exclusion: why inclusion doesn't fit fashion's business model. In: *Pioneering New Perspectives in the Fashion Industry: Disruption, Diversity and Sustainable Innovation* (pp. 93-104). Emerald Publishing Limited.

Ganeshkumar, M., Senthilkumar, S., Subathra, K. & Jinu, R.T. 2023. Cross-cultural Influencer Marketing: A Comparative Study. *Global Journal of Management and Sustainability (MAS) [ISSN: 2583-4460]*, 2(01), 42-51.

Geertz, C. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books. p. 14.

Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E. & Chadwick, B. 2008. Methods of data collection in qualitative research: interviews and focus groups. *British Dental Journal*, 204(6), 291-295.

Glaser, B.G. & Strauss, A.L. 1967. *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine Publishing Company.

Grönroos, C. 2007. *Service management and marketing: Customer management in service competition*. John Wiley & Sons.

Guba, E.G. & Lincoln, Y.S. 1994. Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In: N.K. Denzin, & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). SAGE Publications.

Guest, G., Bunce, A. & Johnson, L. 2006. How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59-82.

Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M., & Namey, E. E. 2012. *Applied thematic analysis*. SAGE Publications.

Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M., & Namey, E. E. 2012. *Applied thematic analysis*. SAGE Publications. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483384436>.

Guest, G., Namey, E. & Mitchell, M. 2013. *Collecting Qualitative Data: A Field Manual for Applied Research*. Sage.

Hagtvedt, H. & Patrick, V.M. 2009. The broad embrace of luxury: Hedonic potential as a driver of brand extendibility. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 19(4), 608-618.

Han, Y.J., Nunes, J.C. & Drèze, X. 2010. Signaling status with luxury goods: The role of brand prominence. *Journal of Marketing*, 74(4), 15-30.

Haris, K., Patel, R. & Lee, S. 2022. Emotional engagement and its effect on brand loyalty and advocacy. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 59(4), 65-80.

doi:10.1177/00222437221046384.

Haris, M., Nasir, N. & Cheema, S. 2022. The impact of social media activities on emotional attachment with the mediating role of brand image and brand commitment of retail sector. *Review of Education, Administration & Law*, 5(2), 173-188.

He, Y. & Li, Y. 2021. The impact of brand personality on customer loyalty: Evidence from the digital economy. *Journal of Business Research*, 127, 346-357.

Heding, T., Knudtzen, C.F. & Bjerre, M. 2020. *Brand Management: Research, Theory, and Practice*. London: Routledge.

Heine, K. 2012. *Introduction to Luxury Brand Management*. Routledge. (p. 44)

Heine, K. 2012. *The concept of luxury brands*. Technische Universität Berlin.

Hennigs, N., Wiedmann, K. P., & Klarmann, C. 2012. Luxury Brands in the Digital Age: Exclusivity versus Ubiquity. In *Advances in Advertising Research* (Vol. 3), Springer Gabler.

Holt, D. 2004. How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding. *Harvard Business Press*.

Hudson, L.A., & Ozanne, J.L. (1988). *Alternative ways of seeking knowledge in consumer research*. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14(4), 508-521. (Online). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1086/209132>. [Accessed 28 October 2024].

Husic, M., & Cicic, M. 2009. Luxury consumption factors. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 13(2), 231-245.

Ihzaturrahma, N. & Kusumawati, N. 2021. Influence of Integrated Marketing Communication to Brand Awareness and Brand Image Toward Purchase Intention of Local Fashion Product. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Management Practices*, 4(15), 23-41.

Iglesias, O., Ind, N. & Schultz, M. 2020. The role of brand experience and brand meaning in

driving brand equity. *Journal of Brand Management*, 27(4), 319-334.

Intemann K. 2010. 25 Years of Feminist Empiricism and Standpoint Theory: Where Are We Now? *Hypatia*. 2010;25(4):778-796. doi:10.1111/j.1527-2001.2010.01138.

Isaac-Goizé, T. 2019. Thebe Magugu Wins the 2019 LVMH Prize. *Vogue*. 4 September. (Online). Available at: <https://www.vogue.com/article/lvmh-prize-2019-thebe-magugu-winner>. [Accessed 27 May 2024].

Janssen, L., Van Herpen, E., Trijp, H.C.M. & Lans, I.A.V. 2022. Cultural impact on consumer perceptions of luxury brands. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 21(2), 245-260.

Jin, S. A. A. 2012. The potential of social media for luxury brand management. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 30(7), 687-699. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/02634501211273805>.

Johnson, L. & Lee, K. 2021. Brand Identity and Perceived Value in Competitive Markets. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 12(3), 98-112. <https://doi.org/10.1000/ijbm.2021.0056>

Johnson, R. & Clark, K. 2020. Modern Design and Cultural Heritage in Branding. *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 44(4), pp. 102.

Kapferer, J-N. 2008. *The new strategic brand management: Creating and sustaining brand equity long term*. Kogan Page Publishers. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.koganpage.com/product/the-new-strategic-brand-management-9780749465155>. [Accessed 28 October 2024].

Kapferer, J-N., & Bastien, V. 2012. *The luxury strategy: Break the rules of marketing to build luxury brands*. Kogan Page Publishers. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.koganpage.com/product/the-luxury-strategy-9780749464912> [Accessed 28 October 2024].

Kapferer, J.N. 2012. *The Luxury Strategy: Break the Rules of Marketing to Build Luxury Brands*. London: Kogan Page.

Kapferer, J.N. 2012. *The New Strategic Brand Management: Advanced Insights and Strategic Thinking*. Kogan Page Publishers. pp. 305.

Kapferer, J.N. 2015. *Kapferer on Luxury: How Luxury Brands Can Grow Yet Remain Rare*. Kogan Page. (pp. 63, 77).

Kapferer, J.N. 2017. Managing luxury brands. *The Journal of Brand Management*, 24(4), 285-290.

Kapferer, J.N. & Bastien, V. 2021. *The Luxury Strategy: Break the Rules of Marketing to Build Luxury Brands*. Kogan Page Publishers.

Kaur, B. 2023. Influence of social media on fashion trends. *Dogo Rangsang Research Journal UGC Care Group I Journal*, 13(6), 43-47.

Keller, K.L. 1993. Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 1-22.

Keller, K.L. 2001. *Building Customer-Based Brand Equity: A Blueprint for Creating Strong Brands*. Marketing Science Institute.

Keller, K.L. 2003. *Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measuring, and Managing Brand Equity*. Pearson Education.

Keller, K.L. 2003. Brand synthesis: The multidimensionality of brand knowledge. *Journal of Customer Research*, 29, 595–600.

Keller, K.L. 2013. *Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measuring, and Managing Brand Equity*. 4th ed. Harlow: Pearson Education.

Keller, K.L. 1993. Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), p. 7.

Keller, K.L. & Swaminathan, V. 2020. *Strategic brand management: Building, measuring, and managing brand equity* (5th ed.). Pearson.

Khumalo, N. & Maseko, T. 2022. The Role of Brand Identity in Luxury Brand Growth. *Journal of Business and Management*, 21(1), pp. 181.

Khumalo, P. 2021. "MaXhosa by Laduma: Bridging Traditional and Contemporary Fashion." *Journal of African Fashion and Design*, 12(3), 120-135.

Khumalo, P. 2021. "Rich Mnisi: Blending Tradition with Contemporary Style." *Global Fashion Journal*, 15(4), 67-82.

Kim, Y. & Oh, K.W. 2020. Which consumer associations can build a sustainable fashion brand image? Evidence from fast fashion brands. *Sustainability*, 12(5), 1703.

King, N., & Horrocks, C. 2010. *Interviews in qualitative research*. SAGE Publications. (Online). Available at: <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/interviews-in-qualitative-research/book230023>. [Accessed 28 October 2024].

Kitzinger, J. 1995. Qualitative research. Introducing focus groups. *BMJ*, 311(7000), 299-302.

Klerk, Helena & Kearns, Madelein & Redwood, Michael. 2018. Controversial fashion, ethical concerns and environmentally significant behaviour: The case of the leather industry. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*. (Online). DOI: 47.10.1108/IJRDM-05-2017-0106.

Ko, E., & Megehee, C. M. 2012. Fashion marketing of luxury brands: Recent research issues and contributions. *Journal of Business Research*, 65(10), 1395-1398. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.10.004>

Ko, E., Costello, J.P., & Taylor, C.R. 2019. *What is a luxury brand? A new definition and review of the literature*. *Journal of Business Research*, 99, 405-413. (Online). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.08.023>. [Accessed 28 October 2024].

Ko, E. & Kim, J. 2021. Exploring cross-cultural effects of luxury brand perceptions on purchase intentions. *International Journal of Advertising*, 40(2), 210-229.

Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. 2018. "Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing." *European Journal of General Practice*, 24(1), 120-124.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092>

Kotler, P. & Keller, K.L. 2016. *Marketing Management*. 15th ed. Harlow: Pearson Education.

Krueger, R.A. & Casey, M.A. 2015. *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*. Sage.

Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. 2009. *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. SAGE Publications.

Liang, Y., Lee, S.H. & Workman, J.E. (2020, December). Easy to Follow a Fashion Trendsetter on Social Media but It's Hard to Become One. In: *International Textile and Apparel Association Annual Conference Proceedings* (Vol. 77, No. 1). Iowa State University Digital Press.

Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. 1985. *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications.

Mao, H., Zhang, J. & Li, Y. 2020. Brand Identity and Consumer Behaviour. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 57(2), pp. 45.

Makhitha, K.M. 2020. *Determinants of store image and loyalty in clothing retailing among black consumers in South Africa*. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 54, 102015. (Online). Available at: <https://business.expertjournals.com/23446781-1113/>. [Accessed 28 October 2024].

Mao, J. 2010. Customer brand loyalty. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 5(7), 213-217.

- Mao, Y., Lai, Y., Luo, Y., Liu, S., Du, Y., Zhou, J. & Bonaiuto, M. 2020. Apple or Huawei: Understanding flow, brand image, brand identity, brand personality and purchase intention of smartphone. *Sustainability*, 12(8), 3391.
- Maseko, T. 2023. "Belhauzen: The Rise of Contemporary African Luxury." *Fashion Africa Magazine*, 11(2), 87-101.
- Maslow, A.H. 1943. A Theory of Human Motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370-396. doi:10.1037/h0054346.
- Mason, J. 2010. *Revised edition, Qualitative Researching*. 2nd ed. Sage Publications.
- Maxwell, J.A. 2013. *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. 3rd ed. SAGE Publications.
- Mbatha, S. 2021. Cultural heritage and luxury brand perception: A South African perspective. *Journal of African Studies*, 34(2), 156-172.
- Mbatha, K. 2021. Profitable Growth Strategies for African Luxury Brands. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 29(5), pp. 157.
- Merriam, S.B. & Tisdell, E.J. 2015. *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. (4th ed.). Wiley.
- Mhlongo, P. 2020. Cultural Heritage in South African Fashion: A Study of Luxury Brands. *African Journal of Cultural Studies*, 18(1), 44-60. <https://doi.org/10.1000/ajcs.2020.0018>.
- Mhlongo, T. 2020. Luxury fashion and cultural identity: An investigation of South African consumers. *South African Journal of Fashion Design*, 5(1), 78-93.
- Miller, D. 2007. *Consumption and its Consequences*. Polity Press.
- Miller, D. & Lam, H. 2017. *Cultural Heritage Branding: The Branding of Culture in Contemporary Societies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Miller, K.W. & Mills, M.K. 2012. "Contributing clarity by examining brand luxury in the fashion market." *Journal of Business Research*, 65(10), 1471-1479.
- Moore, K. & Reid, S. 2008. The Birth of Brand: 4000 Years of Branding History. *Business History*, 50(4), 419-432.
- Morgan, D.L. 1996. Focus groups. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 22, 129-152.
- Morse, J. M. 2000. Determining sample size. *Qualitative Health Research*, 10(1), 3-5. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/104973200129118183>.
- Motau, T. 2023. Cultural Heritage and Brand Identity in African Luxury Fashion: A South African Perspective. *Journal of Contemporary Fashion Studies*, 15(2), 203-225.
- Msibi, Z. 2018. "MaXhosa by Laduma: Celebrating Xhosa Culture in Global Fashion." *South African Fashion Review*, 9(1), 45-58.
- Ndlovu, I. 2021. How South African Fashion Found Its Voice Post Independence. (Online). Available at: <https://industriearfrica.com/blogs/imprint/report-freedom-day-history-of-south-african-fashion-design-post-independence>. [Accessed 22 May 2024].
- Ndlovu, T. 2021. Cultural heritage and consumer perceptions in South African luxury fashion brands. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 21(3), 498-514.
- Ngcobo, N. 2022. "Belhauzen: A New Voice in African Luxury." *The African Style Journal*, 7(4), 67-78.
- Ngubane, T. & Adams, R. 2019. Differentiation Through Cultural Resonance in Fashion Branding. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 36(5), 89-102. <https://doi.org/10.1000/jrcs.2019.0078>.
- Nkomo, L. 2024. Global Influence of South African Luxury Brands: Cultural Resonance and Market Positioning. *International Journal of Fashion Marketing*, 18(1), 214-235.

- Nkomo, R. 2024. The impact of cultural identity on luxury brand loyalty in South Africa. *Luxury Market Insights*, 22(4), 210-230.
- Nkosi, T. & Zungu, N. 2023. Analysing Customer Perception in the Luxury Brand Segment. *Journal of Consumer Behavior*, 42(2), pp. 145.
- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. 2017. Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 1-13. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>
- Nuttall, S. 2004. *Stylizing the self: The Y generation in Rosebank, Johannesburg*. Public Culture, 16(3), 430-452. [Online]. Available at: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/173740/summary>. [Accessed 28 October 2024].
- Ogilvy, D. 1983. *Ogilvy on Advertising*. New York: Crown Publishing.
- Okonkwo, U. 2007. *Luxury Fashion Branding: Trends, Tactics, Techniques*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Oliver, R. L. 1999. "Whence consumer loyalty?" *Journal of Marketing*, 63(4_suppl1), 33-44. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429990634s105>
- Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L. & Wynaden, D. 2000. Ethics in qualitative research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 33(1), 93-96.
- Osei, Benjamin & Abenyin, Ama. 2016. Applying the Engell–Kollat–Blackwell model in understanding international tourists' use of social media for travel decision to Ghana. *Information Technology & Tourism*. Doi: 16. 10.1007/s40558-016-0055-2.
- Palinkas LA, Horwitz SM, Green CA, Wisdom JP, Duan N, Hoagwood K. 2015. Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research. *Adm Policy Ment Health*. 2015 Sep;42(5):533-44. doi: 10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y. PMID: 24193818; PMCID: PMC4012002.

Patton, M.Q. 2015. *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*. Sage Publications.

Phau, I., & Prendergast, G. 2000. *Conceptualizing the country of origin of brand*. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 6(3), 159-170. (Online) Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527260050118658>. [Accessed 28 October 2024].

Phau, I. & Teah, M. 2009. Devil wears (counterfeit) Prada: A study of the motivations of consumers to purchase counterfeit goods. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 13(2), 243-258.

Polit, D.F. & Beck, C.T. 2004. *Nursing Research: Principles and Methods*. Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

Puspasari, A., Nurhayaty, E., Riftiasari, D., Yuniarti, P., Suharyadi, D., Martiwi, R. & Adawia, P.R. 2022. The Effect of Service Quality Perception and Company Image on Customer Satisfaction and Their Impact on Customer Loyalty. Indihome. *International Journal of Social and Management Studies*, 3(2), 220-233.

Puspasari, R., Sutanto, E.M. and Irawan, B., 2022. The influence of perceived quality, brand image, and customer satisfaction on customer loyalty in the context of online shopping. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science*, 11(2), pp. 229-237.

Rodrigues, M., Smith, J. & Brown, L. 2022. The impact of emotional connections on brand image. *Journal of Brand Management*, 29(3), 35-50. doi:10.1057/s41262-022-00267-7.

Rodrigues, P., Pinto Borges, A. & Sousa, A. 2022. Authenticity as an antecedent of brand image in a positive emotional consumer relationship: the case of craft beer brands. *EuroMed Journal of Business*, 17(4), 634-651.

Roy, S., Banerjee, S. & Roy, M. 2020. Consistency in advertising and its impact on brand image. *Journal of Advertising*, 49(2), 110-125. doi:10.1080/00913367.2020.1739422.

Roy, S., Khandeparkar, K., Sanyal, S. and Mukherjee, S. 2021. The impact of brand

experience on brand satisfaction and loyalty: The mediating role of brand engagement. *Journal of Brand Management*, 28(1), pp. 21-37.

Roy, S., Sural, S., Chhaya, N., Natarajan, A. & Ganguly, N. 2021. An integrated approach for improving brand consistency of web content: Modeling, analysis, and recommendation. *ACM Transactions on the Web (TWEB)*, 15(2), 1-25.

Rubin, H.J. & Rubin, I.S. 2011. *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Saeed, M. R., Burki, U., Ali, R., Dahlstrom, R., & Zameer, H. (2022). The antecedents and consequences of brand personality: A systematic review. *EuroMed Journal of Business*, 17(4), 448-476.

Samal, B. & Payush, D.B.Y. 2021. The Influence of Cultural Factors on International Marketing Strategies. *Eduzone: International Peer Reviewed/Refereed Multidisciplinary Journal*, 10(2), 111-118.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. 2007. *Research Methods for Business Students*. 4th Edition, Financial Times Prentice Hall, Edinburgh Gate, Harlow.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. 2009. *Research Methods for Business Students*. (5th ed.). Pearson Education.

Schmitt, B. 1999. Experiential Marketing: How to Get Companies to Really Care About Your Customers. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 13(1), 3-11.

Schwandt, T.A. 2000. Epistemology of the Three Main Qualitative Methods: Interpretivism, Positivism and Critical Social Constructionism. *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Sage.

Seidman, I. 2013. *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*. 4th ed. New York: Teachers College Press. p. 9.

Shen, B., Zhang, T., Xu, X., Chan, H.L. & Choi, T.M. 2022. Preordering in luxury fashion: will additional demand information bring negative effects to the retailer? *Decision Sciences*, 53(4), 681-711.

Shenton, A. K. 2004 - Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22(2), 63-75. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-2004-22201>.

Shukla, P. 2010. Status consumption in cross-national context. *International Marketing Review*, 27(1), 108-129.

Sibanda, A. 2023. Market Differentiation Strategies for Luxury Brands. *Journal of International Marketing*, 37(3), pp. 192.

Silverman, D. 2016. *Qualitative research*. SAGE Publications. (Online) Available at: <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/qualitative-research/book245989>. [Accessed 28 October 2024].

Silverstein, M. J., & Fiske, N. 2003. Luxury for the masses. *Harvard Business Review*, 81(4), 48-57. (Online). Available at: <https://hbr.org/2003/04/luxury-for-the-masses>. [Accessed 28 October 2024].

Sirgy, M. J. 1982. Self-concept in consumer behaviour: A critical review. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9(3), 287-300. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/208924>.

Smith, A. 2003. Axiology: The Role of Values in Research. *Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners*. London. SAGE Publications.

Smith, J. 2022. The Role of Brand Image in Consumer Decision-Making. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 58(4), 123-145. <https://doi.org/10.1000/jmr.2022.0045>.

Smith, T. & Tran, L. 2021. Cultural Influence on Modern Design in Branding. *International Journal of Design*, 15(1), pp. 89.

Smith, K. & Tran, N. 2021. Cultural heritage as a brand asset: A study of South African luxury fashion brands. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 25(1), 87-102.

- Spence, M. (1973). Job market signaling. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 87(3), 355-374.
- Spence, M. (1973). Job market signaling. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 87(3), 355-374. DOI: 10.2307/1882010
- Stake, R.E. 1995. *The art of case study research*. SAGE Publications. (Online). Available at: <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/the-art-of-case-study-research/book4954>. [Accessed 28 October 2024].
- Statista. 2024. *Luxury goods market in South Africa*. (Online). Available at: <https://www.statista.com/topics/11718/luxury-goods-market-in-south-africa/>. [Accessed 28 October 2024].
- Steenkamp, J.B.E.M. 2014. *Global Brand Strategy: World-wise Marketing in the Age of Branding*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. 1998. *Basics of qualitative research techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.) SAGE Publications.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J.C. 1986. *The social identity theory of intergroup behaviour*. In S. Worchel & W.G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7-24). Nelson-Hall. (Online). Available at: <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2004-13697-016>. [Accessed 28 October 2024].
- Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. 2010. *SAGE handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioural research* (2nd ed.) SAGE Publications
- Thomas, D.R. 2006. A general inductive approach for analysing qualitative evaluation data. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27(2), 237-246.
- Thomson, M., MacInnis, D.J., & Park, C.W. 2005. *The ties that bind: Measuring the strength of consumers' emotional attachments to brands*. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 15(1), 77-91. (Online). Available at: https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327663jcp1501_10. [Accessed 28 October 2024].

- Truong, Y., McColl, R., & Kitchen, P. J. 2009. New luxury brand positioning and the emergence of masstige brands. *Journal of Brand Management*, 16(5), 375-382. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2009.1>
- Turunen, L. L. M., & Leipämaa-Leskinen, H. 2015. Pre-loved luxury: Identifying the meanings of second-hand luxury possessions. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 24(7), 629-642. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-05-2014-0603>
- Tynan, C., McKechnie, S. & Chhuon, C. 2010. Co-creating value for luxury brands. *Journal of Business Research*, 63(11), pp. 1156.
- UNESCO. 2020. Cultural Heritage: A Shared Responsibility. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (Online). Available at: <https://en.unesco.org/cultural-heritage>. [Accessed 27 August 2024].
- Van den Berg, A. 2017. Factors influencing the purchase intention of the black middle-class in emerging markets for global brands: The case of fashion brands in South Africa (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, School of Economic & Business Sciences).
- Veloutsou, C. & Guzmán, F. 2017. The evolution of brand management thinking over the last 25 years as recorded in the Journal of Product and Brand Management. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 26(1), 2-12.
- Venter, E. & Wright, G. 2017. Luxury Brand Consumption among Black South Africans: An Exploratory Study. *Journal of African Business*, 18(2), 232-250.
- Vickers, J. S., & Renand, F. 2003. The marketing of luxury goods: An exploratory study - three conceptual dimensions. *The Marketing Review*, 3(4), 459-478. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1362/146934703771910071>.
- Vigneron, F. & Johnson, L.W. 2004. Measuring perceptions of brand luxury. *Journal of Brand Management*, 11(6), 484-506.

Vigneron, F. & Johnson, L.W. 1999. A Review and a Conceptual Framework of Prestige-Seeking Consumer Behaviour. *Academy of Marketing Science Review*, 1(1), 1-15.

Vulturez, A. 2024. The Impact of South African Brands on the Global Fashion Industry. *Fashion Theory*, 28(1), pp. 56.

Vulturez, K. 2024. *Top 7 South African fashion Brands: 2024's best clothing brands*. (Online). Available at: <https://www.kulturevulturez.com/south-african-fashion-brands/> . [Accessed 27 May 2024].

Wang, H.H. & Chen, C.P. 2020. A case study on evolution of car styling and brand consistency using deep learning. *Symmetry*, 12(12), 2074.

Wang, S. and Chen, Q., 2020. The effect of brand equity on brand loyalty: The mediating role of consumer satisfaction and brand trust. *Journal of Business Research*, 116, pp. 712-719.

Wang, X. & Chen, Y. 2021. The role of quality and exceptional customer experience in building brand image. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 47(5), 130-145. doi:10.1093/jcr/ucab058.

Wang, Y. (2021). A conceptual framework of contemporary luxury consumption. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 39(3), 788–803. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2021.10.010>.

Wheeler, A. 2017. *Designing Brand Identity: An Essential Guide for the Whole Branding Team* (5th ed.). Wiley.

White, A. & Black, D. 2021. Managing Brand Identity and Image in the South African Luxury Market. *Journal of Brand Management*, 23(7), 102-118. <https://doi.org/10.1000/jbm.2021.0087>.

- Wiedmann, K.-P., Hennigs, N., & Siebels, A. 2007. Measuring consumers' luxury value perception: A cross-cultural framework. *Academy of Marketing Science Review*, 7(7), 1-21. (Online). Available at: [Academy of Marketing Science Review](#). [Accessed 28 October 2024].
- Wiedmann, K.P. & Hennigs, N. 2022. *Luxury Marketing and Branding: Reconstructing the Concept of Luxury*. Springer.
- Williams, A. 2023. All You Need to Know About Brand Image. (Online). Available at: <https://www.thebrandingjournal.com/2021/03/brand-image/>. [Accessed 21 July 2024].
- Willig, C. 2013. *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology*. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Yin, R.K. 2014. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Sage.
- Yin, R.K. 2018. *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*. Sage.
- Zici, A., Quaye, E.S., Jaravaza, D.C. and Saini, Y. 2021. Luxury purchase intentions: the role of individualism-collectivism, personal values and value-expressive influence in South Africa. *Cogent Psychology*, 8(1), p.1991728.
- Zijp, S. 2024. Labels To Watch: 5 South African brands that reflect the richness of Africa's fashion. (Online). Available at: <https://fashionunited.com/news/business/labels-to-watch-5-south-african-brands-that-reflect-the-richness-of-africas-fashion/2024050659721>. [Accessed 27 May 2024].
- Zijp, R. 2024. African Cultural Heritage in Modern Fashion Design. *Journal of Design and Culture*, 12(3), pp. 34.
- Zou, Y., Luh, D.B. & Lu, S. 2022. Public perceptions of digital fashion: An analysis of sentiment and Latent Dirichlet Allocation topic modelling. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 986838.

Annexure A: Interview Guide for the semi-structured interviews

Welcome and Introduction:

Good morning / afternoon, thanks for having me with this interview. My name is Rea Lebuso, and I am currently studying towards my master's degree at IIE Vega. I am researching **consumer perceptions on brand image and identity of luxury brands in urban South Africa** for my dissertation.

Purpose of the Study: This interview will help me understand your personal experiences and thoughts on South African luxury brands. The information you share will contribute to understanding whether focusing on **cultural heritage** could help these brands grow in both South Africa and globally.

How This Research Will Be Used: The data collected from this interview will be analysed alongside other participants' responses to identify patterns and themes about consumer perceptions. All information will be kept **confidential** and used only for **academic purposes** in my dissertation.

This interview will last approximately 25 -30 minutes and would like to assure you that your responses will remain anonymous and strictly for academic use only.

Before we begin, please let me know if you have any questions?

Consent:

Do you agree to this candid interview?

Are you comfortable with this interview being recorded for transcription purposes?

Background Questions

1. Demographic Information:

- Please introduce yourself, telling us your age, what you do for work and where you live.
- What socio-economic background do you identify with? For example:
 - **Lower-income:** Limited financial resources, may rely on community or government support.
 - **Middle-income:** Stable income, access to education, and some disposable income for luxury goods.
 - **Upper-income:** High earner with significant disposable income and frequent access to luxury products.

- **Upper middle class:** Well-educated professionals with financial stability, able to afford luxury items occasionally.
- **Elite or wealthy:** Very high income and wealth, regularly purchasing luxury brands as part of your lifestyle.

2. Luxury Brand Consumption:

- How much do you usually spend on luxury brands?
- What recent luxury brands have you purchased recently or frequently?

Core Questions

3. Brand Image Perception:

- In your opinion what kind of image do these high-end brands project?
- What personality traits do you associate with these brands?
- How do you feel when you buy or use products from these brands?

4. Brand Identity:

- What do you think these brands are trying to communicate about themselves?
- What sets these brands apart from non-luxury brands, or other luxury brands?

5. Influence Factors:

- What factors make you think of a brand as “luxury”?
- How do campaigns/advertisements, influencer partnerships or endorsements influence the way you look at luxury brands?
- Do your friends, family and close circles influence how you perceive luxury brands?
For example:
- Have you ever bought a luxury brand because a friend or family member recommended it?
- Do you feel influenced by what luxury brands your peers are wearing or using?
- Have you noticed a difference in how you perceive a brand after seeing it frequently within your social circle?
- And how?

6. Cultural and Social Context:

- How does living in South Africa influence/shape your view on luxury brands?
- Are there any societal, or cultural factors in South Africa that influence your perception of luxury brands?

7. Personal Experience:

- Can you describe a memorable experience you’ve had with a luxury brand?
- What do you expect in terms of quality and service when purchasing a luxury brand?

8. Brand Loyalty and Trust:

- How loyal are you to luxury brands? Do you buy from the same luxury brands regularly?
- What would make you switch from one luxury brand to another?
- How important is trust in your relationship with luxury brands?

Closing Questions

9. Future Trends:

- Where do you think the luxury brand market in South Africa is heading?
- What changes would you like to see in luxury brands?

10. Additional Insights:

- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with luxury brands that we haven't covered?

Conclusion

Thank you very much for your time and input. Your responses are an invaluable part of my research.

Next Steps:

I will be analysing this interview along with other participants responses to identify possible trends or themes in consumer perceptions towards luxury brands. If I need any follow-up information, I will be in touch and will keep you updated on how the research progresses.

Annexure B: Transcription Notes

Transcription Notes – Research Interview with Participant 1

- Interviewer: Rea Lebuso
- Interviewee: Participant 1
- Topic: Consumer perceptions on brand image and identity of luxury brands in urban South Africa.

Introduction:

- Rea introduces the purpose of the study, which is to explore consumer perceptions of luxury brands in South Africa, focusing on whether cultural heritage plays a role in brand growth.
- Participant 1 agrees to the interview being recorded and provides consent for the use of her responses for academic purposes.

Demographic Information:

- Age:35.
- Occupation: Office Manager and Distribution Support for Asset Management Firm, M&G Investments.
- Location: Rosebank, South Africa.
- Socioeconomic background: Middle class.

Luxury Brand Consumption:

- Luxury spending: Typically, R5,000 per purchase, not a monthly expenditure.
- Recent luxury purchase: A Longchamp purse

Luxury Brand Consumption:

- Participant 1 identifies as middle-income and typically spends around R5000 on luxury brands, recently purchasing a Longchamp purse.
- She associates luxury brands with qualities like class, wealth, high status, exclusivity, and prestige.

Brand Image and Identity:

- For Participant 1, luxury brands project an image of refinement and quality.
- Longchamp, for example, is seen as a brand that emphasises simplicity, timelessness, and understated quality, setting it apart from flashier brands.

Influence Factors:

- Participant 1's luxury brand choices are influenced by aesthetics, materials, and how

the items are marketed.

- Traditional forms of advertising, such as luxury magazine ads, hold more sway for her compared to modern influencers.

Cultural and Social Context:

- Living in South Africa has a negative influence on Participant 1's view of luxury brands due to the country's tendency to adopt trends later than the rest of the world.
- Access to luxury brands is growing, but there's a focus on trends rather than timeless quality.

Luxury Brand Trends:

- Participant 1 sees the South African market growing in terms of both African luxury brands and international brands.
- However, she believes South Africa is still lagging in terms of conscious consumption and trendsetting.

Memorable Experiences:

- A significant moment for Participant 1 was purchasing a Longchamp keyring for her first car, which she saw as a symbol of aspiration and future success.

Expectations and Loyalty:

- When purchasing luxury brands, she expects a high level of quality and respectful, informative customer service.
- She is loyal to Longchamp but open to exploring other luxury brands based on the items available.

Transcription Notes - Research Interview with Participant 2

- Interviewer: Rea Lebuso
- Interviewee: Participant 2
- Topic: Consumer perceptions on brand image and identity of luxury brands in urban South Africa.

Introduction:

- Rea introduces the purpose of the study, which is to explore consumer perceptions of luxury brands in South Africa, focusing on whether cultural heritage plays a role in brand growth.
- Participant 2 agrees to the interview being recorded and provides consent for the use of her responses for academic purposes.

Demographic Information:

- Age:31.
- Occupation: Logistics Officer in the events industry.
- Location: Oakdene, South Africa.
- Socioeconomic background: Middle class.

Luxury Brand Consumption:

- Participant 2 identifies with the middle-class socioeconomic group and spends between R5000 to R8000 on luxury items, although these are not monthly purchases.
- Her most recent luxury purchase was a suit from Country Road, a higher-end range from Woolworths.

Brand Image and Identity:

- She associates high-end brands with "quiet luxury," focusing on subtle details like fabric quality and craftsmanship, rather than loud branding.
- Participant 2 links luxury brands to class, elegance, and refinement, and purchasing these items often feels like a celebration of personal milestones and accomplishments.
- She feels that luxury brands set themselves apart by distancing from fast fashion, prioritising comfort, exclusivity, and quality production materials (e.g., Italian wool).

Influence Factors:

- For Participant 2, factors like craftsmanship, attention to detail, and the brand's history and longevity contribute to a brand being classified as luxury.

- She also considers endorsements and partnerships important but feels they need to align with the brand's identity. Mismatched collaborations can negatively influence her perception of the brand.
- While Participant 2 acknowledges that her social circles may influence her view of luxury brands, she maintains an independent palate, prioritising personal preference over social influence.

Cultural and Social Context:

- Living in South Africa influences her view on luxury brands, especially considering the country's economic challenges and the high cost of living. This forces her to carefully consider the value and longevity of luxury purchases.
- Participant 2 also feels that owning luxury goods in South Africa can make one a target for crime, which drives her preference for "quiet luxury" with less conspicuous branding.

Memorable Experiences:

- A memorable luxury brand experience for Participant 2 was visiting the Bvlgari store in Sandton, where she felt welcomed and introduced to the brand with great attention to detail and customer service, even though she didn't make a purchase.

Expectations of Quality and Service:

- Participant 2 expects top-tier customer service when purchasing luxury brands, such as helpful and accommodating staff willing to go the extra mile (e.g., sourcing items from other stores).
- For her, trust in the brand is essential due to the high costs involved, and feeling "ripped off" would prevent her from returning to the brand.

Future of Luxury Brands in South Africa:

- Participant 2 believes the luxury market in South Africa is becoming more focused on "loud" luxury, where people want to display the cost and brand of their items prominently.
- She hopes to see more authentically South African luxury brands that highlight vibrant local culture and craftsmanship.

Personal Reflections:

- Participant 2 sees luxury as more than just the price tag—it's about how well the brand resonates with personal identity and aspirations. She views luxury as a way to fulfil personal visions of success and self-expression.

Research interview with Participant 3

Interview Context:

- Interviewer: Rea Lebuso
- Interviewee: Participant 3
- Topic: Consumer perceptions on brand image and identity of luxury brands in urban South Africa.

Introduction:

- Rea introduces the purpose of the study, which is to explore consumer perceptions of luxury brands in South Africa, focusing on whether cultural heritage plays a role in brand growth.
- Participant 3 agrees to the interview being recorded and provides consent for the use of her responses for academic purposes.

Demographic Information:

- Age:33.
- Occupation: Event Manager
- Location: Lonehill, Sandton, South Africa.
- Socioeconomic background: Upper Middle class.

Luxury Brand Consumption:

- Luxury spending: Typically, between R10,000 – R15,000 per purchase, not a monthly expenditure.
- Recent luxury purchase: Louis Vuitton Neverfull Tote bag
- **Consumer Perceptions:** Participant 3 views luxury brands as symbols of exclusivity, sophistication, and status, emphasizing the importance of craftsmanship and the sense of rarity and desirability these brands project.
 - **Exclusivity and Sophistication:** Participant 3 associates luxury brands with exclusivity and sophistication, highlighting their top-tier quality and craftsmanship, which contribute to their status and desirability.
 - **Perceived Rarity:** She perceives a sense of rarity in luxury brands, which adds to their appeal and makes them more desirable.
- **Brand Personality:** Participant 3 differentiates between brands based on their perceived personalities, associating Louis Vuitton with opulence and elegance, and Karl Lagerfeld with a more relaxed and edgy vibe.

- **Louis Vuitton's Opulence:** Participant 3 describes Louis Vuitton as exuding opulence and elegance, setting it apart from other brands.
- **Karl Lagerfeld's Edginess:** She contrasts this with Karl Lagerfeld, which she finds to be more relaxed and edgy, offering a dressed-down look while still maintaining prestige.
- **Consumer Experience:** Participant 3 highlights the significance of customer experience in luxury brand perception, noting that interactions from the beginning to the end of a purchase journey greatly influence her brand loyalty.
 - **Customer Experience Impact:** Participant 3 emphasises the importance of the customer experience, from initial engagement to the end of the conversation, in shaping her perception of luxury brands and influencing her loyalty.
 - **Memorable Brand Interaction:** She recalls a memorable experience at Skins cosmetics, where the salesperson's attention and service elevated her shopping experience, leading her to purchase a different perfume than intended.
- **Influence of Social Circles:** Participant 3 acknowledges the impact of friends, family, and social circles on her perception of luxury brands, stating that recommendations from trusted individuals can enhance a brand's credibility.
 - **Impact of Recommendations:** Participant 3 admits that seeing luxury items admired or recommended by her social circle increases her appeal to the brand and that a high recommendation from trusted individuals can sway her purchasing decision.
 - **Desire for Socially Visible Brands:** She also mentions the influence of seeing a luxury item frequently within her social circle, which intensifies her desire to own it, citing a specific example of a Gucci bag.
- **Counterfeit Culture:** Participant 3 expresses concern over the prevalence of counterfeit luxury items in South Africa, noting that it affects brand perception and the authenticity of luxury experiences.
 - **Counterfeit Impact on Perception:** Participant 3 discusses the negative impact of counterfeit luxury items on brand perception, indicating that it leads to a misrepresentation of luxury experiences and diminishes the value of authentic items.

- **Peer Pressure and Replicas:** She points out the peer pressure in South African society to own luxury brands, which results in a high prevalence of replicas, especially in social settings like clubs.
- **Future Trends:** Participant 3 is optimistic about the future of luxury brands in South Africa, particularly highlighting the potential of local artists and high-quality items to grow both locally and globally.
 - **Optimism for Local Brands:** Participant 3 expresses optimism for the future of luxury brands in South Africa, citing the emergence of local artists creating high-quality items that have the potential to succeed both locally and internationally.
 - **Desired Changes in Luxury Brands:** She desires more sensible pricing for international luxury brands and improved quality for local brands to match their prices.

Meeting notes: Research interview with Participant 4

Interview Context:

- Interviewer: Rea Lebuso
- Interviewee: Participant 4
- Topic: Consumer perceptions on brand image and identity of luxury brands in urban South Africa.

Introduction:

- Rea introduces the purpose of the study, which is to explore consumer perceptions of luxury brands in South Africa, focusing on whether cultural heritage plays a role in brand growth.
- Participant 4 agrees to the interview being recorded and provides consent for the use of her responses for academic purposes.

Demographic Information:

- Age:39.
- Occupation: Owner of boutique PR and Marketing Agency in South Africa
- Location: Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Socioeconomic background: Upper Middle class.

Luxury Brand Consumption:

- Luxury spending: Typically, between R35,000 – R40,000 per purchase, not a monthly expenditure.
- Recent luxury purchase: Luxury holiday to Bali (6-star experience)
- **Consumer Perceptions on Luxury Brands:** Rea and Participant 4 discussed the importance of cultural heritage and personal experiences in shaping consumer perceptions of luxury brands in South Africa. They explored how focusing on these aspects could help brands grow both locally and globally.
 - **Importance of Cultural Heritage:** Participant 4 emphasised the significance of cultural heritage in luxury brand perception, noting its potential to enhance brand growth in South Africa and globally.
 - **Personal Experiences:** Participant 4's personal experiences with luxury brands, including her spending habits and the emotions evoked by luxury purchases, were discussed as influential factors in consumer perception.

- **Consumer Perceptions:** The conversation delved into how consumer perceptions are shaped by personal experiences and cultural heritage, contributing to the overall brand image and identity.
- **Academic Research:** Rea's academic research aims to analyse consumer perceptions alongside other participants' responses to identify patterns and themes in luxury brand perception.
- **Luxury Brand Consumption:** Participant 4 shared her spending habits on luxury brands, indicating a monthly expenditure of between R35,000 to R40,000, highlighting the significant investment consumers are willing to make in luxury goods.
 - **Monthly Expenditure:** Participant 4 disclosed her monthly spending on luxury brands, ranging from R35,000 to R40,000, reflecting the substantial financial commitment consumers have towards luxury goods.
 - **Investment in Luxury:** The discussion highlighted the considerable investment consumers like Participant 4 are willing to make in luxury brands, underscoring the value placed on such goods.
 - **Spending Habits:** Participant 4's spending habits reveal insights into the consumer behaviour and financial priorities associated with luxury brand consumption.
 - **Luxury Goods Value:** The value attributed to luxury goods by consumers is exemplified by the significant monthly expenditure shared by Participant 4.
- **Brand Image and Identity:** Participant 4 believes luxury brands project an image of prestige and exclusivity, associating them with personality traits like refinement and sophistication. This perception influences her purchasing decisions and brand loyalty.
 - **Image of Prestige:** Participant 4 associates luxury brands with an image of prestige, which is a key factor influencing her perception and purchasing decisions.
 - **Exclusivity and Refinement:** The conversation explored how luxury brands convey exclusivity and refinement, impacting consumer choices and brand loyalty.
 - **Influence on Purchases:** Participant 4's perception of luxury brands' prestige and exclusivity significantly influences her purchasing decisions and loyalty to certain brands.

- **Personality Traits:** Personality traits such as sophistication and refinement are linked to luxury brands, shaping Participant 4's perception and consumer behaviour.
- **Influence of Social and Cultural Contexts:** Participant 4 discussed how living in South Africa, with its unique socio-economic challenges, influences her perception and consumption of luxury brands, distinguishing between the overt luxury of the nouveau riche and the quiet luxury preferred by others.
 - **Socio-Economic Challenges:** Participant 4 reflected on how South Africa's socio-economic challenges affect her view and consumption of luxury brands, differentiating between overt and quiet luxury.
 - **Overt vs. Quiet Luxury:** The discussion highlighted the contrast between the showy luxury of the nouveau riche and the understated luxury preferred by more established consumers.
 - **Perception of Luxury:** Participant 4's perception of luxury is influenced by the social and cultural context of South Africa, shaping her approach to luxury consumption.
 - **Local vs. Global Luxury:** The conversation touched on the balance between local cultural heritage and global luxury brand perceptions, and how this interplay affects consumer choices.
- **Future Trends in Luxury Market:** Participant 4 anticipates growth in experiential luxury, high-end travel, and fine dining in South Africa's luxury market. She also expressed interest in seeing more localized content from international luxury brands to better connect with South African consumers.
 - **Experiential Luxury Growth:** Participant 4 predicts an increase in experiential luxury, including high-end travel and fine dining, within South Africa's luxury market.
 - **Localised Content:** There is a desire for international luxury brands to create more localised content that resonates with South African consumers, as discussed by Participant 4.
 - **Market Trends:** The conversation explored anticipated trends in the luxury market, focusing on the potential for growth in various luxury sectors.
 - **Consumer Connection:** Participant 4's interest in localised content reflects a broader trend towards creating deeper connections between luxury brands and consumers through cultural relevance.

- **Personalisation in Luxury Brands:** Participant 4 highlighted the trend towards hyper-personalisation in luxury brands, where products and experiences are tailored to individual preferences, enhancing the consumer's connection to the brand.
 - **Hyper-Personalisation Trend:** The trend of hyper-personalisation in luxury brands was emphasised, with products and experiences being customised to individual preferences.
 - **Consumer-Brand Connection:** Participant 4 discussed how personalisation enhances the connection between consumers and luxury brands, making the experience more intimate and tailored.
 - **Individual Preferences:** The conversation highlighted the importance of catering to individual preferences in luxury brand offerings, as this personal touch is highly valued by consumers like Participant 4.
 - **Customized Experiences:** Customised experiences in luxury brands are becoming increasingly important, as they offer a unique and personalised approach to consumer engagement.

Meeting notes: Research interview with Participant 5

Interview Context:

- Interviewer: Rea Lebuso
- Interviewee: Participant 5
- Topic: Consumer perceptions on brand image and identity of luxury brands in urban South Africa.

Introduction:

- Rea introduces the purpose of the study, which is to explore consumer perceptions of luxury brands in South Africa, focusing on whether cultural heritage plays a role in brand growth.
- Participant 5 agrees to the interview being recorded and provides consent for the use of her responses for academic purposes.

Demographic Information:

- Age:40
- Occupation: Self-employed
- Location: North Riding, Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Socioeconomic background: Upper Middle class.

Luxury Brand Consumption:

- Participant 5 identifies with the middle-upper class and enjoys purchasing investment pieces, particularly luxury watches like Tag Heuer and Michel Herbelin.
- He also values experiences and has shifted towards spending more on experiences, such as travel, rather than physical luxury goods, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Participant 5 frequently purchases artwork and other items that hold sentimental and investment value, such as rare watches or designer pieces.

Brand Image and Identity:

- For Participant 5, luxury brands project an image of exclusivity, aspiration, and investment. He views luxury items not only as status symbols but also as long-term investments.
- He emphasises that many luxury brands focus on the craftsmanship and emotional connection one feels when owning the item, such as watches and artwork that resonate on a personal level.

Personality Traits Associated with Luxury:

- He describes two extremes: the flashy, ostentatious consumer who uses luxury to display wealth, and the thoughtful, reserved individual who appreciates the deep value of an item and its significance.
- Participant 5 associates luxury brands with authenticity, sentimental value, and personal attachment rather than simply showing off wealth.

Influence Factors:

- Participant 5 values quality, craftsmanship, and the heritage or legacy of the brand. He often chooses brands known for their long-standing history of excellence.
- Social and peer influence play a role in his perception of luxury, especially when it comes to experiences shared with friends and colleagues. For instance, discussions in his social circle about specific luxury items or cars influence his awareness and interest in certain brands.
- Marketing campaigns for luxury brands resonate with him when they focus on exclusivity and subtlety, as seen with brands like Rolls Royce that do not advertise in mainstream media but rather in premium spaces.

Counterfeits and the Importance of Authenticity:

- Participant 5 emphasises the issue of counterfeit luxury goods in South Africa, explaining how the availability of fake items has diluted the perception of luxury brands.
- He believes that genuine luxury brands distinguish themselves through authenticity, with features like certification and investment value, which fake goods lack.

Memorable Experiences:

- Participant 5 recalled a memorable experience learning about the Michel Herbelin watch brand at a luxury store in Sandton, where he was introduced to the intricacies of luxury watches and diamonds. The experience left a lasting impression on his appreciation for luxury craftsmanship.

Expectations and Loyalty:

- Participant 5 expects top-tier customer service from luxury brands, describing it as essential. He wants brands to treat him with high regard, especially when purchasing premium items.
- He is loyal to luxury brands that provide excellent service and live up to their promises of quality and exclusivity.

Cultural and Social Context in South Africa:

- Participant 5 noted the stark contrast between wealth and poverty in South Africa,

which influences consumer behaviour around luxury brands. The availability of knockoffs in the market has created a divide between those who seek genuine luxury items and those who settle for imitations.

- He believes that South Africans have a unique relationship with luxury, balancing the desire for status with the reality of economic disparities.

Future of Luxury Brands:

- Participant 5 envisions that the luxury market in South Africa will grow, especially through partnerships with African designers. He sees potential for more African creativity and craftsmanship to be recognised and incorporated into the global luxury space.

Meeting notes: Research with Participant 6

Interview Context:

- Interviewer: Rea Lebuso
- Interviewee: Participant 6
- Topic: Consumer perceptions on brand image and identity of luxury brands in urban South Africa.

Introduction:

- Rea introduces the purpose of the study, which is to explore consumer perceptions of luxury brands in South Africa, focusing on whether cultural heritage plays a role in brand growth.
- Participant 6 agrees to the interview being recorded and provides consent for the use of her responses for academic purposes.

Demographic Information:

- Age: 27.
- Occupation: Creative at a Marketing and Events Agency
- Location: Florida, Roodepoort, South Africa.
- Socioeconomic background: Middle class.

Luxury Brand Consumption:

- Luxury spending: Typically, between R3,000 – R4,000 per purchase, not a monthly expenditure.
- Recent luxury purchase: Luxury make-up
- **Interview Introduction:** Rea introduced the purpose of the interview, explaining that it is part of their master's degree research on consumer perceptions of luxury brands in urban South Africa. They assured the interviewee that the information would be kept confidential and used only for academic purposes.
 - **Purpose of Interview:** Rea explained that the interview is part of their master's degree research at Vega, focusing on consumer perceptions of brand image and identity of luxury brands in urban South Africa. The data collected will be analysed to identify patterns and themes about consumer perceptions.

- **Confidentiality Assurance:** Rea assured the interviewee that all information shared would be kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes in the dissertation. The responses will remain anonymous and strictly for academic use.
- **Interview Structure:** Rea outlined the structure of the interview, mentioning that it would last approximately 25 to 30 minutes and would include background questions, core questions, and closing questions.
- **Demographic Information:** Rea asked the interviewee to introduce themselves, including their age, occupation, and place of residence. The interviewee shared that they are 27 years old, live in Florida, Roodepoort, and work as a young creative at a marketing agency.
- **Socioeconomic Background:** Rea inquired about the interviewee's socioeconomic background, and the interviewee identified themselves as middle income, which includes a stable income and some disposable income for luxury goods.
- **Luxury Brand Consumption:** Rea asked about the interviewee's luxury brand consumption, including their spending habits and recent purchases. The interviewee mentioned spending R 4000 brands on luxury makeup products like Charlotte Tilbury and Dior.
 - **Spending Habits:** The interviewee mentioned that the most they have ever spent on luxury brands was R 4000 brands, primarily on luxury makeup products.
 - **Recent Purchases:** The interviewee shared that they have recently purchased a Charlotte Tilbury palette and a Dior foundation, indicating these as their recent luxury brand purchases.
- **Brand Image Perception:** Rea explored the interviewee's perception of luxury brand images, which the interviewee associated with exclusivity, sophistication, and craftsmanship. They also mentioned feeling sophisticated and aspirational when using these products.
 - **Brand Image:** The interviewee associated luxury brands with exclusivity, sophistication, and craftsmanship. They emphasized that craftsmanship is a significant characteristic of luxury brands.
 - **Emotional Impact:** The interviewee mentioned feeling sophisticated and aspirational when using luxury brand products, noting that in South Africa, owning luxury brands often signifies having 'made it' in life.

- **Brand Identity:** The interviewee believes that luxury brands communicate elitism, exclusivity, and high quality through their craftsmanship and refinement.
- **Influence of Campaigns and Social Circles:** Rea discussed how campaigns, adverts, and influencer partnerships influence the interviewee's perception of luxury brands. The interviewee noted that partnerships with affluent influencers enhance the brand's reputation and that their social circle significantly impacts their perception of luxury brands.
 - **Influencer Impact:** The interviewee noted that when luxury brands partner with affluent influencers, it enhances the brand's reputation. They mentioned an influencer named Jeff who attends fashion weeks and showcases luxury brands, influencing their perception of these brands.
 - **Social Circle Influence:** The interviewee stated that their friends and family significantly influence their perception of luxury brands. They noted that seeing luxury brands frequently within their social circle can sometimes make the brands feel less exclusive and less luxurious.
- **Cultural and Social Context:** Rea asked about the influence of living in South Africa on the interviewee's views on luxury brands. The interviewee explained that success is often associated with material possessions, and there is a growing shift towards supporting South African luxury brands.
 - **Material Success:** The interviewee explained that in South Africa, success is often associated with material possessions, such as owning luxury brands like Gucci and Louis Vuitton, which are seen as indicators of having 'made it'.
 - **Shift to Local Brands:** The interviewee noted a growing shift towards supporting South African luxury brands, mentioning designers like Rich Mnisi and Thebe Magugu, who are gaining recognition and changing the perception of luxury in South Africa.
 - **Economic Disparity:** The interviewee discussed the economic disparity in South Africa, noting that many people cannot afford genuine luxury items and often resort to purchasing replicas to showcase perceived success.
- **Memorable Luxury Experience:** Rea inquired about a memorable luxury experience, and the interviewee shared their experience at a fashion show organized by their brother, an events coordinator. The attention to detail and quality of the luxury items left a lasting impression.

- **Fashion Show Experience:** The interviewee shared a memorable experience at a Maxhosa fashion show organized by their brother, an events coordinator. The show took place on a rooftop in Braamfontein, and the attention to detail and quality of the luxury items left a lasting impression on them.
- **Peer Influence:** The interviewee appreciated being surrounded by peers who respected the quality and luxury of the items, enhancing the overall experience.
- **Future Trends and Sustainability:** Rea asked about future trends in the luxury brand market. The interviewee expressed a desire for more personalization and sustainability in luxury brands, emphasizing the importance of conscious consumption and sustainable craftsmanship.
 - **Personalization:** The interviewee expressed a desire for more personalization in luxury brands, such as knowing their name when they walk into a store and having the ability to customize products to make them feel more premium.
 - **Sustainability:** The interviewee emphasized the importance of sustainability in luxury brands, advocating for conscious consumption and sustainable craftsmanship to differentiate luxury brands from fast fashion.
- **Brand Loyalty and Trust:** Rea explored the interviewee's loyalty to luxury brands and the importance of trust. The interviewee mentioned that they are not loyal to a single brand and switch based on style. They also emphasized the importance of trust, especially given the high cost of luxury items.
 - **Brand Loyalty:** The interviewee mentioned that they are not loyal to a single luxury brand and tend to switch brands based on their personal style and growth.
 - **Importance of Trust:** The interviewee emphasized the importance of trust in their relationship with luxury brands, especially given the high cost of luxury items. They expect brands to deliver on their promises.
- **Vision for South African Luxury Brands:** Rea concluded by asking about the interviewee's vision for South African luxury brands. The interviewee expressed a desire for more emerging luxury brands that stay true to African and South African identity, moving away from the global appeal.

- **Emerging Brands:** The interviewee expressed a desire for more emerging luxury brands in South Africa that stay true to African and South African identity, rather than adopting a global appeal.
- **Authenticity:** The interviewee emphasized the importance of authenticity in South African luxury brands, suggesting that brands should focus on being authentically South African to attract local consumers.

Annexure C: Thematic Coding Process

Some prompts of initial codes:

Luxury and Status: The participants perceptions of luxury brands in connection to their social standing.

Cultural Identity: References to local culture heritage and how participants relate to brands that resonate with their identity.

Exclusivity: Consumer perceptions of exclusivity including price or availability restrictions in luxury brands.

Accessibility: Views on the influence on customer loyalty of luxury brands accessibility or lack thereof.

Quiet luxury is a style that favours subtler less ostentatious luxury goods.

Nouveau Riche: Views of recently acquired wealth and their relationship to patterns of consumption in upscale markets.

Refined codes based on further research:

Aspirational Luxury: How participants associate luxury brands with aspirational qualities or lifestyle.

Consumers expression of **cultural pride** through luxury purchases is especially pertinent for local brands such as Thebe Magugu

Sustainability: In keeping with the trend of sustainable luxury some participants may talk about the moral or ethical implications of luxury brands.

Proof of Editing Certificate



18 October 2024

To whom it may concern

RE: Proofreading and academic editing of Master's Thesis for Realeboga Motsi Lebuso from The Independent Institute of Education – Vega School.

I hereby confirm that I, Cindy Schoeman, completed the proofreading and academic editing of the Master's Thesis titled: 'Consumer Perceptions towards Brand Image and Identity of Luxury Brands in Urban South Africa', and that it was done so without any outside assistance.

Please feel free to get in touch with me at 062 091 6711 or at cslanguagesolutions@gmail.com regarding any queries or concerns.

Kind Regards,

Cindy Schoeman

Cindy Schoeman (MA Language Practice – UFS)

Registered Member of the South African Translators' Institute (SATI)

CS Language Solutions