

RESEARCH (RESE8419)**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES****VARSAITY COLLEGE SANDTON****Bachelor of Arts Honours in Communication science****RESEARCH BY:****Full names: Sibonelo Mavuso****Student no: 16005304****TITLE:****The role that cultural differences play on individual perception of brand image.**

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Abstract:

Brand communicators need to become aware of difference within cultures and consumer behaviour to stay competitive in today's business environment. Even though brands aim to communicate the same image, the image of those brands may still be perceived differently due to differences in cultural values. The aim of this study is to explore how cultural differences among consumers affect the perception of brand image, mainly among young adults in Johannesburg. Previous literature provided evidence that people in different cultures do not process information in the same way (Baldwin, Coleman, Gonzalaz & Shenoy-Packer, 2014). Since brand meaning is to a great extent the result of human interpretation it is thus predicted that brand meanings differ across cultures. The problem being studied is that many times, a brand will need to adapt their offerings to different cultures because the culture is the prime determinant of consumers' attitude and behaviours (Jandt, 2015). To fulfil the purpose of this research a qualitative research approach was applied. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants studying at a higher institution in Johannesburg. To facilitate the data analysis, the main steps of thematic analysis were used. By use of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory the analysis yielded that brand image can have different meanings for individuals, and that culture can influence the way individuals perceive a brand. This study seeks to provide brand communicator's with deep insight into consumers' cultural behaviour, as scholars have previously stated the same brand image cannot hold universal meaning. This is imperative because a clear brand image conveys the success of the product and gives results with increased sales and revenues.

1: Research Title:

The role that cultural differences play on individual perceptions of brand image.

2: Introduction:

The establishment and marking of brands in different societies has increasingly become a challenging task for brand communicators who need to take into consideration cultural differences as a factor that is likely to influence how individual's perceive brands (Alampay, 2015).

2.1: Contextualisation/ Background:

How consumers evaluate brands and respond to different branding practices has been a central topic in cross-cultural communication studies for decades. Alampay (2015) writes that for companies and marketers to develop and maintain strong brands, they need to know how to engage with culturally different consumers through powerful and effective communication is critical. Studies have argued that even if identical positioning is applied across settings, the same brand might be perceived differently in different cultures (Kenneth, 2019).

A major consequence of culture is its impact on consumption patterns of individuals and institutions. Depending on the underlying cultural philosophy consumers tend to follow certain consumption patterns (Alampay, 2015). Successful brands have been able to adapt their branding strategies in line with this dominant cultural philosophy and weave their brands into the cultural fibre (Maree, 2019). One of the underlying premises of branding is its ability to reduce customers' search cost and perceived risk by standardization of images, messages, communications, attributes and features. As such brands generally strive to maintain their defining brand images across markets. This standardization which forms the fundamental building block of a brand itself poses the first challenge in cross-cultural situations (William, 2015). Many a time, brands will need to adapt their offerings to different cultures and this violates the standardization principle (Alampay, 2015). Therefore deftly handling the standardization and adoption issue becomes extremely crucial (Maree, 2019).

The student researcher has explored why it is crucial to find a solution to the cross-cultural differences in consumer brand image perception according to the work of several authors, and the student researcher has further detailed the arguments that have resulted from this work. The scholar notes that to date, most research about cross-cultural communication has focused on international perceptions of communication, with little or no attention paid to determining the difference in cross-cultural communication within a local context in South Africa (Kenneth, 2019).

Therefore, the social consequence of cross-cultural differences within the South African setting has yet received adequate attention, and also the limited work which foregrounds the research; it is this gap which the student researcher seeks to fill. The literature review will further discuss the interpretive paradigm and outline its relevance to the study. Additionally, Hofstede's Dimensions of national cultures will be critically discussed as to how it relates to the proposed research. Moreover, the literature review will conceptualise the key terms. The methodology of the research will then be discussed with intensive focus and emphasise details on how the research will be conducted on numerous factors relating to methodology, additionally, the anticipated contribution and the limitations of the proposed research will be discussed.

2.2: Rational

The student researcher is pursuing postgraduate studies in communication science. Cross-cultural studies within the field of communications are imperative, as this can improve the perceptions and understanding of messages within communication channels (Gudykunst & Kim, 2002). The research links to the researcher's degree as it seeks to understand the communication differences within cultures; this is an important factor in communication studies (Tubb & Moss, 2008).

As it is established the purpose of communication science is to encourage the understanding of ethical, political and cultural factors within communications (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010). This, therefore, connects with the research problem that the social consequence of cross-cultural differences within the South African setting has yet received adequate attention (Kenneth, 2019). Many times, a brand will need to adapt their offerings to different cultures, because culture is the prime determinant

of consumers' attitude and behaviours (Kenneth, 2019). Currently, cross-cultural research on brand image perception is based on international studies, with little to no attention to the South African population (Kenneth, 2019). This research is critical within the South African context because the population of South Africa is one of the most complex and diverse in the world; therefore it remains imperative for brands to strategically position themselves within the South African market as culture becomes a crucial factor that determines the brands' success (Jandt, 2015).

2.3: Problem statement:

As it is established the population of South Africa is one of the most complex and diverse in the world. To date, most research about cross-cultural communication has focused on international perceptions of communication, with little or no attention paid to determining the difference in cross-cultural communication within a local context in South Africa (Kenneth, 2019). Therefore, the social consequence of cross-cultural differences within the South African setting has yet received adequate attention. The problem being studied is that many times, a brand will need to adapt their offerings to different cultures because the culture is the prime determinant of consumers' attitude and behaviours (Jandt, 2015).

In general, research in cross-cultural branding has discovered that culture might motivate corporate decision-makers to deliberately choose a different brand positioning in different settings. However, even if identical positioning is applied across settings, the same brand might be perceived differently in different cultures (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010). The differences may be caused due to: the adaptation of advertising to better adjust to cultural traditions and norms; and different understanding of applied communication (Tubbs & Moss, 2008). Researchers have argued that national cultural differences are engraved in consumers' perception (Gudykunst & Kim, 2002). Therefore, although metaphors are used by advertising creators to convey brand image and enhance brand information, little is understood about consumers' comprehension of intended meaning, even less about consumers' comprehension in different cultural settings (Jandt, 2015).

2.4: Research Purpose:

Cultural differences are a major factor that has an impact on the success or failure of a brand (Jandt, 2015). As brands enter different cultures, it becomes imperative for them to carefully tread the standardisation- customisation continuum wherein they not only manage to retain the inherent brand identity but also alter their brand image to accommodate different cultures (Du Plooy, 2009). Hereby, the purpose of this research is to explore how cultural differences among consumers affect the perception of brand image, mainly among young adults in Johannesburg.

2.5: Research question (s):

Main research question

What role do cultural differences play on individual perceptions of brand image?

Sub-question:

Which cultural differences influence individual perceptions of brand image?

2.6: Objectives:

1. To determine whether cultural differences affect brand image.
2. To explore the role that cultural differences play on individual perceptions of brand image.
3. To explore how these cultural differences could negatively affect the way a brand is perceived.

3: Literature Review:

3.1 Theoretical foundation:

Hofstede's Dimensions of national cultures:

The Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, developed by Geert Hofstede, is a framework used to understand the differences in culture across countries and to

discern the ways that business is done across different cultures. In simple terms, this theory is used to distinguish between different national cultures, the dimensions of culture and their impact (Hofstede, 2001).

Hofstede identified six categories that define culture:

Power distance index (PDI): This index is defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of organisations or institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 2001).

High power distance index indicates that culture accepts inequity and power differences, encourages bureaucracy and shows high respect for rank and authority. Low power distance index indicates that culture encourages flat structures, decentralised decision-making responsibility, and emphasizes power distribution (Hofstede, Hoof, Walenberg & De Jong, 2007).

Individual vs. collectivism (IDV): This index explores the degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups and their perceived obligation and dependence on groups (Hofstede, 2001).

Individualism indicates that there is a greater importance on attaining personal goals. A person's self-image in this category is defined as "I". Collectivism indicates that there is a greater importance on the goals and well-being of the group. A person self-image in this category is defined as "we" (Hofstede, Hoof, Walenberg & De Jong, 2007).

Uncertainty avoidance (UAI): This index refers to a society's tolerance for ambiguity. In which people embrace or avert an event of something unexpected or unknown (Hofstede, 2001).

High certainty avoidance index indicates low tolerance for uncertainty and risk-taking. The unknown is minimised through strict rules and regulations. Low indicates a high tolerance for uncertainty and risk-taking. The unknown is more openly accepted, are there are lax rules and regulations (Hofstede, 2001)

Masculinity vs. femininity (MAS): In this dimension, masculinity is a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness. Its counterpart represents a

preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life (Hofstede, 2001).

Masculinity comes with the characteristics of distinct gender roles, assertive, and concentrated on material achievement and wealth building. Femininity comes with characteristics of fluid gender roles, modest, nurturing, and concerned with the quality of life (Hofstede, Hoof, Walenberg & De Jong, 2007).

Long-term orientation vs. short term orientation (LTO): This dimension associates the connection of the past with current and future actions/challenges (Hofstede, 2001).

Long-term orientation shows focus on the future and involves delaying short-term success or gratification to achieve long-term success (Hofstede, Hoof, Walenberg & De Jong, 2007). This emphasises persistence, perseverance, and long-term growth. Short-term orientation shows focus on the near future, involves delivering short-term success or gratification and place a stronger emphasises on the present than the future. This emphasises quick results and respect for tradition (Hofstede, 2001).

Indulgence vs. restraint (IND): Refers to the degree of freedom that social norms give to citizens in fulfilling their human desire (Hofstede, 2001).

Indulgence indicates that society allows relatively free gratification related to enjoying life and having fun. Restraint indicates that society suppresses the gratification of needs and regulates it through social norms (Hofstede, 2001).

Relevance:

Hofstede's work has won recognition among researchers and academics throughout the years. According to Neuman (2011:243), "Hofstede has become one of the most widely cited social scientists of our time." However, arguments have run against his study. This framework has been questioned and criticized for its validity and reliability. For instance, Maree (2019) claimed that nations are not appropriate units for analysing cultures as they cannot be divided by borders. Others have argued that one single company cannot represent an entire culture, as well as research, is outdated and no modern value today (Leedy & Ormond, 2016).

Conversely, although the study has been criticized, it is significantly larger than many others that have been surveyed in the area of cross-cultural studies. According to De Mooij (2011), experts in the field of branding and culture, Hofstede's theory has proven to be a useful tool for understanding differences in consumer behaviour across cultures and the model has been applied to several areas within global branding and advertising. Furthermore, scholars argue that to understand cultural meaning in the context of brand image, Hofstede's cultural dimensions serve great assistance (Babbie, 2011). As this study investigates how young adults with different cultural backgrounds perceive the image of brands, which is partly achieved by using the concept of brand image, Hofstede's framework will be applied to this study. Furthermore, Franzen and Moriarty (2019) argue that to understand cultural meaning in the context of brand image, Hofstede's cultural dimensions serve as a great assistance.

Hofstede's model has been applied to explain the consumer's preference for cars. According to De Mooij (2011), the dimensions of masculinity/femininity and uncertainty avoidance are important in consumers' motives for choosing cars. De Mooij and Hofstede (2011) found that cultures that score low on both uncertainty avoidance and masculinity (Sweden) have a preference for safety to protect the family and value for money. In this cultural cluster safety and functional aspects are often more important than design and technology. In contrast, cultures with the configuration of high masculinity and weak uncertainty avoidance (USA, China) have status needs and prefer big cars with powerful motors and prefer sturdy sport utility vehicles. Moreover, the importance of 'international image' she noted was related to collectivistic cultures scoring high on power distance, serving as a status motive (Babbie, 2011).

Further, De Mooij and Hofstede (2011) found that a high price delivers status in collectivistic cultures, as a high price is associated with quality and quality also contains social meaning to members in these cultures. Thus, a high price might not only signal high quality but also social status, prestige and belonging. Another factor, 'enjoyment to drive' was found to be more important to people in high individualistic cultures, reflecting pleasure-seeking. Preference of cars of European make she found was related to long-term orientation, whereas design was a factor preferred

among members in high power distance cultures (Foscht, Maloles, Swaaboda, Morschette & Sinha, 2018).

3.2: Literature review:

The role of culture in brand image perception:

In general, research in cross-cultural branding has discovered that culture might motivate corporate decision-makers to deliberately choose a different brand positioning in different settings. However, even if identical positioning is applied across settings, the same brand might be perceived differently in different cultures (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010). The differences may be caused due to: the adaptation of advertising to better adjust to cultural traditions and norms; and different understanding of applied communication (Leedy & Ormond, 2016). Researchers have argued that cultural differences are engraved in consumers' perception (Gudykunst & Kim, 2017). Therefore, although metaphors are used by advertising creators to convey brand image and enhance brand information, little is understood about consumers' comprehension of intended meaning, even less about consumers' comprehension in different cultural settings (Jant, 2015).

Effects of culture on perception:

Can one say that there is a world external to their mind; that is independent of one's awareness' of it? Greaff (2017:12) states it dramatically by stating "the relationship between the individual and the environment is so extensive that it almost overstates the distinction between the two to speak of a relationship at all". If an individual's perceptions and thoughts processes are such a part of "what is out there," what then is the relationship between changes in the cultural environment and who we are? Hsieh (2013) points out that humans shape their environment and, hence, it could be said that the human brain shapes itself to a human-made environment. The human brain is shaped by the external world and shapes the perception of the external world. While the effects of culture on perception are independent of language, language influences thoughts. The same situation can be interpreted differently by diverse people (Green & Wind, 2015).

Perception and thoughts are not independent of the cultural environment; henceforth, the human brain is shaped by both the external world and shapes an individual's perception of the external world (Keller, 2016). The neurological process of becoming aware of our environment is affected by culture. The Greek ideal of a strong individual identity and the Chinese idea of harmony affected both the sensation and perception process in each culture (Kumar, 2011). Perception is usually thought of as having three steps, selection, organisation, and interpretation, each affected by culture (Maree, 2019).

The process connected to the understanding the perceived brand image may be affected by different cultures (De Mooiji & Hofstede, 2011). Companies and marketers alike cannot hope to understand consumer behaviour without first understanding the meaning that consumers attach to their possessions (Samovar, Porter, McDaniel & Roy, 2013). Literature increasingly suggests that the strength of a brand is not based on creating a difference in consumer perception but due to the meaning that a brand creates and therefore managing the brand meaning is a task essential to a successful “strong brand” strategy. The meaning of a brand is not predetermined in brand identity (Neuman, 2011). Brand image is constructed in consumers' minds. Thus, it depends on the consumers' knowledge base. One of the most important reasons for the differences in the knowledge base is the difference in culture (Leedy & Ormond, 2016).

Processing of information and culture

The literature provided evidence that people in different cultures do not process information in the same way (Baldwin, Coleman, Gonzalaz & Shenoy-Packer, 2014). Since brand meaning is to a great extent the result of human interpretation it is thus predicted that brand meanings differ across cultures. The presented literature argues that in low context cultures individuals have narrower, functionally-oriented association with brands, whereas in high context cultures individuals have broader situational and symbolic associations (Du Plooy, 2009). Brand communicators are advised to be more prudent in cross-cultural research as well as to become aware of the cultural specifics in the target audience, so that their communication is better targeted. Specifically, researchers found that collective cultures are more field-dependent (Foscht, Maloles, Swoboda, Morschett & Sinha, 2018). They pay great

attention to the context and focus on the relationship between objects and the field. One of the most noticeable causes of different brand interpretation is language. Pictures are assumed to be universal and easier to standardise. Nevertheless, pictures cause more subtle and therefore potentially more serious problems (Francis, Lam & Walls, 2018). The reason is that it is even more difficult to understand how pictures are understood by consumers in different cultures. Especially in the light that consumers belonging to integrated cultures associate more associations that are wider in their meaning than consumers in specific cultures (Grace & O'Cass, 2015).

Brand meaning across cultures:

Green and Wind (2015) speak of mental links between brand names, images and cognitions in a consumers' memory that causes the brand to acquire meaning. They also different between four layers of brand meaning, depending on the level of socialisation at which the meaning gets created, starting with the private meaning to the social one.

Messages, events and experiences that consumers find the most meaningful are those which are most connected to their core values (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2015). Due to differences in culturally-based traditions, religions, and histories, individual's in distinct cultures tend to hold different sets of values and preferences. Henceforth, altering beliefs and values can directly change the meaning of transmitted messages, events and experiences (Keller, 2019). The same experience or incident takes on different meanings to different individuals depending on their internal mind maps and embedded previous knowledge (Williman, 2015).

Some researchers such as Francis, Lam and Walls (2018), suggest that marketers should take into account cultural diversity within countries as well as between them because culture has numerous limitations. Nonetheless, according to scholars nationality remains the most viable proxy for culture because the members of a nation share an understanding of its institutional systems abound of identity, and an experiential understanding of the world (Grace & O'Cass, 2015). Additionally, it tends to stay stable over time, because of its mechanism to resist change across generations (Gudykunst & Kim, 2017).

In their study of variations in consumer interpretation of brand image perception, Leedy & Ormond (2016) explain that the interpretation of visual stimuli in branding is linked to literary and cultural traditions that differ across cultural groups. Franzen and Moriarty (2019) conducted a study in which they hypothesis and then confirm through empirical research that consumers from Eastern cultures, who tend to be holistic thinkers, perceive higher brand extension fit and evaluate brand extensions more favourable than their more analytical Western counterparts do.

In another study, Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars (2015) speak of numbers and their meanings and confirm with an experiment that brands consisting of numbers have an extra meaning that is understood only by some societies, in their study American's, due to the excess meaning of certain numbers in those cultures. In cross-cultural research of beauty and health visual representations, confirmed that different cultures do not interpret beauty and health symbols equally, the same authors in another research Leedy & Ormond (2016) studied the understanding appeal of controversial Benetton advertisements across cultures and again revealed inconsistencies. To summarise, culture acts as an astringent screener that momentarily influences the meaning of how a brand image is perceived (Kumar, 2011).

Based on the three exposed theoretical pillars, three propositions can be constructed. Firstly, the meaning is a product of personal values and beliefs; secondly, personal values and beliefs are different in different cultures and consequently, a brand meaning is different in different cultures (Graeff, 2017). These propositions directed the empirical part of research in which it was the aim to discover to what extent the meanings of global brands are associated with symbolic or functional meanings in culturally different contexts.

Conclusion of the literature review:

In light of the past literature brands strategists are advised to become aware of the cultural specifics in which they communicate, so that their communication is better targeted. The literature has found that that people in different cultures do not process information in the same way. Since brand meaning is to a great extent the result of human interpretation it is thus predicted that brand meanings differ across cultures.

Messages, events and experiences that consumers find the most meaningful are those which are most connected to their core values.

Due to differences in culturally-based traditions, religions, and histories, individual's in distinct cultures tend to hold different sets of values and preferences. Previous literature has proven that the social consequence of cross-cultural differences in brand image perception within the South African setting has yet received adequate attention, as this literature largely makes mention of national differences within European and Asian countries in the perception of brand image. This is the gap which the proposed research seeks to fill. The current state of the literature focuses on few elements which impact differences in cultural perception, these elements are largely based of cognitive difference and very little on behavioural differences amongst cultures and the impact that cultural behaviour of individuals has on the perception of brand image.

4: Conceptualisation:

Culture:

Culture is described by Littlejohn, Foss and Oetzel, (2017) as any group in which members share elements of identity and communication pattern. These groups may include nations, communicates, ethnicities, social groups, gender and so forth. It is further argued that one's exposure and interaction within these groups ultimately shapes their understanding, perceptions and actions. Concerning this study culture refers to the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular group. This concept will be investigated by analysing the patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols.

Young adults:

Developmental psychologists define young adults as a person in their teens or early twenties (Babbie, 2011). For this study young adult refers to individuals between the ages of 19-23 studying at a higher institution in Johannesburg.

Brand image:

Brand image is defined as the general impression of a product held by real or potential consumers (Franzen & Moriarty, 2019). For this study, brand image refers to the current view of customers about a brand of associations within the minds of the public. It signifies what the brand presently stands for. It's the sets of beliefs held about a specific brand. This concept will be operationalised by identifying the consist strategy of brands.

Cross-cultural:

Cross-cultural is defined as recognising the differences among business people of different nations, backgrounds and ethnicities, and the importance of bridging them (Jandt, 2015). Concerning this research cross-cultural is a concept that looks at how cultural factors in different cultures influence human behaviour and their perceptions of brand image, some cultures, for example, might stress individualism and importance of personal autonomy. Other cultures, however, may place a higher value on collectivism and cooperation among members. This concept will be investigated by analysing how people from differing cultural backgrounds communicate, in similar and different ways among themselves, and how they endeavour to communicate across cultures.

Cultural factors:

Cultural factors encompass the set of beliefs, moral, values, traditions, language and laws held in common by a nation, community, or other defined group (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010). Regarding this study this concepts refer to the comprised set of values, beliefs, customs and ideologies of a particular group. These are factors that can influence individuals within society. This concept will be investigated by highlighting how socio-demographic variables contribute to cultural factors. This will include the unspoken rules of conduct within a group, such as acceptable social standards, by use of Hofstede's dimensions of culture, which includes: Power distance index, individualism vs. collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity vs. femininity, long-term orientation vs. short-term orientation and indulgence vs. restraint.

Perception:

Perception is defined as how something is regarded understood, or interpreted (Keller, 2016). Concerning this research, perception refers to what individuals believe a product or service represents, not what the company owning the brand says it does. This refers to the process where an individual's take in sensory information to interact with the environment. This concept will be investigated by analysing the viewpoints that different individuals have concerning brand image.

5: Methodology:**5.1: Research paradigm:**

This study is of the interpretivism paradigm. Interpretivism requires researchers to interpret elements of the study, thus interpretivism integrates human interest into a study. Accordingly, interpretive researchers assume that access to reality is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meaning and instruments (Maree, 2019). Development of interpretive philosophy is based on the critique of positivism in social sciences. Accordingly, this philosophy emphasizes qualitative analysis over quantitative analysis (Willam, 2015).

Interpretivism is associated with the philosophical position of idealism, and is used to group diverse approaches, including social constructs, phenomenology and hermeneutics; approaches that reject the objectivist view that meaning resides within the world independently of consciousness (Willam, 2015). According to the interpretive approach, the researcher as a social actor needs to appreciate differences between people. Moreover, interpretivism studies usually focus on meaning and may employ multiple methods to reflect different aspects of the issue (Neuman, 2011).

Interpretivist approach is based on a naturalistic approach of data collection such as interviews and observations. Secondary data research is also popular with interpretivism worldview. In this type of studies, meanings emerge usually towards the end of the research process (Maree, 2019).

In general, the interpretivism approach is based on the following beliefs:

Relativist ontology: assumes that reality, as we know it is constructed intersubjectively through the meaning and understanding developed socially and experientially (Du Plooy, 2009). To substantiate this argument, studies on culture and cultural differences state that the world does not exist apart from our experiences of it. Human behaviour is subjective and dynamic (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010).

Epistemology: Assumes that we cannot separate ourselves from what we know. The objects of investigation are linked such that how we understand the world is a central part of how we understand ourselves others and the world (Maree, 2019).

Metatheory: Interpretivist states that theory should tell a story to create an in-depth understanding of others and their reality (Walliman, 2015).

Methodology: Subjective qualitative methods are used (Walliman, 2015).

Axiology: Uniqueness is valued. This study maintains that human action is meaningful and that people, therefore, ascribe meaning both to their actions and the actions of others. The task of the researcher is to interpret and gain an understanding of human actions and then describe them from the perspective of the group being studied (Maree, 2019).

The adoption of interpretivism allows for cultural differences in brand image perception to be studied at a great level of depth. Primary data generated through interpretivism studies might be associated with a high level of validity because data in such studies tend to be trustworthy and honest (Leedy & Ormond, 2016). Kenneth (2019) points out that one reason for choosing an interpretive worldview is when the study concerns an issue or problem, and a complex and detailed understanding of the issue needs to be explored. Interpretivism worldview is undertaken under the circumstances when the research needs to collect more information from the participants' stories, thoughts and experiences (Kumar, 2011).

One of the characteristics of the interpretive worldview is that the context or setting in which the individual lives or works, or participants address their stories, is taken into account in the examining process. Neuman (2011) also claims that stories and the

contexts in which the participants tell their stories cannot be separated, even though the context could be their home, family or work.

5.2: Research design:

This study was **qualitative**. The reason for this choice is that qualitative data offers depth and detail; it looks deeper than analysing ranks and counts by recording attitudes, feelings and behaviour (Du Plooy, 2009). This method creates openness', as it encourages people to expand on their responses, and this can open new areas not initially considered (Du Plooy, 2009). Qualitative research stimulates people's individual experience; a detailed picture can be built up about why people act in a certain way and their feelings about these actions. **Cross-sectional** research studies are based on the observation that takes place in different groups at one time.

The benefit of a cross-sectional study design concerning the study is that it allowed the researcher to compare many different variables at a time. Cross-sectional research involves using different groups of people who differ in the variable of interest but share other characteristics, such as socioeconomic status, educational background, and ethnicity (Czerniewicz, 2004, p.675).

The defining feature of a cross-sectional study is that it can compare different population groups at a single time. This means there is no experimental procedure, so no variables were manipulated by the researcher. Instead of experimenting, the researcher will record the information that she observes in the group she is examining (Fiske & Ladd, 2004, p.678). Findings are drawn from whatever fits into the frame (Zheng, 2009, p.78). Concerning this research, the researcher analysed cultural differences and socioeconomic status concerning cross-cultural difference among consumers affecting brand image perception. This will, therefore, assist in answering the research sub-question which is which cultural difference influence individual perceptions of brand image?

Deductive approach begins with the general and ends with the specific (Maree, 2019). The researcher started with a social theory and then tested its implication with data. Deductive approach offered the possibility to explain causal relationships between concepts and variables (Kenneth, 2019). Therefore making it suitable in understanding how culture has an impact in the manner in which brand image is

perceived by consumers. Deductive approach offers the possibility to explain causal relationships between concepts and variables. Therefore making it suitable in understanding the role cultural differences play in brand image perception (Willam, 2015).

Exploratory research seeks to collect new information about a topic that has not been researched before. As cultural and societal factors change, new areas of research evolve and emerge continuously (Leedy & Ormond, 2005). Concerning this study the discourse regarding the effects of globalisation on cultural diversity is a challenging debate. Due to brands unprecedented access to cultures, a much wider audience than ever before has a gateway to see, hear and experience phenomena that were never accessible previously.

6: Population and sample:

6.1: Population:

The population refers to a comprehensive group of individuals, institutions or objects with common characteristics that are the interest of the research (du Plooy, 2009). The population in this research are young adults studying at a higher institution in Johannesburg.

6.2: Unit of Analysis

According to du Plooy (2009), the units of analysis are the smallest component that can be studied. The unit of analysis for this study are Individuals between the ages of 19-23, studying at a higher institution in Johannesburg.

6.3: Target population and accessible population:

A target population refers to the entire group of objects or individuals to which academics are interested in generalising conclusions (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). The target population in this study are all young adults.

The accessible population refers to the units of analysis within the researchers target population that can be accessed (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). The accessible population

of this study are young adults between the ages of 19-23 studying at a higher institution in Johannesburg.

6.4: Sample size:

In the study, a sample size of seven (7) was we used. Semi-structured interviews can be time-consuming; it is important not to have a sample size that that is too small (Babbie, 2011). A sample size that is too small reduces the power of the study and increases the margin of error, which can render the study meaningless (Du Plooy, 2009). To ensure meaningful results, the study adjusted the sample size to seven based on the required confidence level and margin error, as well as the expected deviation among individuals.

6.5: Parameters:

It was first intended that the population in this study would to be young adults studying in Sandton, however, that changed after the researcher realised that due to technological advancement a more diverse group of young adults can be approached and be included in the study. Therefore, this study included young adults in Johannesburg, to narrow the focus; the student researcher only selected young adults studying at a higher institution in Johannesburg. The researcher then selected young adults who are between the ages of 19-23 to make up the sample. Through this method, the scholar guaranteed that each element of the sample assisted with the research since each element fits the population parameters of the study (Babbie, 2011).

6.6: Non-probability sampling:

Non-probability sampling is a sampling technique where the odds of any member being selected for a sample cannot be calculated. It involves random selection (Babbie, 2011). Non-probability sampling is used when it is nearly impossible to determine who the entire population is or when it is difficult to gain access to the entire population which is the case with the proposed study (Bloch, 2009).

A major advantage with non-probability sampling is that compared to probability sampling, it is cost and time effective because the sample is known to the researcher. The participants' are most likely to be front coming with answering questions as compared to people randomly selected as they have high motivation level to participate (Cotton, 2009).

6.7: Purposive sampling:

The student researcher purposefully chose the elements that they wish to include in the sample, based on a set of characteristics, which include young adults between the ages of 19-23, studying at a higher institution in Johannesburg. The researcher analysed the population and the research question and determined what characteristics fit the research (Bloch, 2009). The researchers then cautiously selected a sample from the population that had these characteristics and disregarded those that do not (Cotton, 2009). The scholar purposefully chose the elements that they wished to include in the simple, based on a set of characteristics. This research included young adults between the ages of 19-23 studying at a higher institution in Johannesburg. The scholar analysed the population and the research question, and determine what characteristics from the population were important for the research (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). The researcher cautiously selected a sample from the population that had these characteristics and disregarded those that did not (Thomas, 2008, p.67).

The population in this research included all young adults. To narrow the focus, the student researcher selected only young adults between the ages of 19-23 studying at a higher institution in Johannesburg. The author then selected young adults that needed to make up the sample and disregarded those who were not within the stipulated age group.

The advantage of this method of sampling is that the researcher guaranteed that each element of the sample assisted with the research since each element fits with the population parameters of the study (Czerniewicz, 2004). If an element did not fit, it was disregarded by the scholar.

The flexibility of purposive sampling allowed the researcher to save time while they were collecting data (Heeks, 2018). It offered a process that was adaptive as

circumstances change, even if it occurs in an unanticipated way. The researcher met multiple needs and interests while still maintaining the foundation of a singular focal point (Chisholm, 2004). This becomes critical because the sample must make it possible to produce a final logical outcome that is representative of the population. The researcher took a non-random approach to generate results that can then provide more information about future decisions that need to be made (Jackson, 2008, p.78).

7: Data collection methods:

Semi-structured interview: This is a method of research used mostly in the social sciences. A semi-structured interview is open; allowing new ideas to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee says (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). The interviewer in a semi-structured interview generally has a framework of themes to be explored. The interviewer can express their opinions and ask questions to the interviewees during the interview which can encourage them to give more useful information, such as their opinions toward sensitive issues, to the qualitative research (Babbie, 2011). The interviewee can easily give the reasons for their answers during the interviews. The structure part of semi-structured interviews gives interviewees' reliable, comparable qualitative data as well (Chisholm, 2004).

7.1: Research execution:

The student researcher intended to conduct face to face interviews', unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 outbreak interviews were conducted via Zoom. It was first proposed that interviews would be conducted via Microsoft Teams, however, after consulting participants about which platform would they be comfortable with, all of them chose to be interviewed over Zoom, as it was apparent that this platform is easier to use and more robust than others.

- The researcher got hold of participants by going through her contact list and analysing who from the contact list fits the research parameters.

- The first seven people on the researchers' contact list who met the research parameters were contacted via WhatsApp. This WhatsApp message asked participants if they are willing to participate in the research. Through a WhatsApp message, the prospective participants were given key information to allow them to make an informed decision about whether or not to participate in the research.
- However, two out of the seven potential participants could not participate in the research as one stated that they did not have access to internet connection during the lockdown period. The other prospective participant stated that they have load shedding during the period the scholar intended to conduct research. Therefore, two new individuals were approached on WhatsApp by the scholar and they agreed to participate in the study after reading the consent form.
- This WhatsApp message further contained information about the aims of the research. In that regard, the student researcher made sure there was informed consent. Sufficient information that a reasonable person would want to have to the participant was presented in an understandable language such that the potential subject can make an informed judgement about participation (Fiske & Ladd, 2004).
- Key information elements which were included in the WhatsApp message:
 - A statement that the project is research and participation is voluntary.
 - A summary of the purpose of the research, procedures, and duration of participation
 - Reasonable, foreseeable risks or discomfort.
- After contacting each participant via WhatsApp, different dates were suggested for the interviews. These interviews took place from the 10th of August till the 13th of August. The researcher conducted two interviews per day, except on the 13th of August where only one interview was conducted.

Some interviews took place at 10 am while other interviews took place at 5 pm.

- In preparation for the virtual interview, participants were asked to download the App Zoom on their computer. To avoid any technical difficulties during the interview, participants were told prior that preferred browsers are Microsoft Edge and Google Chrome.
- After a suitable date was selected for each participant, on the day of the interview, the researcher sent the Zoom log in details to the participant.
- The student researcher explained in detail the purpose of the research and how the results will be used and interpreted. This was to make certain that the participant is comfortable and well informed about the proposed research. This part took an estimate of 7 minutes.
- Thereafter, the researcher gave the participant time to ask any questions, should they have or raise any concerns. This was to ensure that the participant has received full clarify. This took 3-5 minutes depending on the participant.
- Subsequently, the student researcher asked the participant the questions as provided in the addendum. The researcher read the questions to the participant. The answers were written in a notepad by the researcher, the answers were also recorded on the Zoom app. This procedure took between 30-40 minutes to complete depending on the participants' ability to elaborate on their answer. The responses were collected immediately since the interview was recorded live.

- The researcher then thanked the participant for their time and asked if they have anything to add.

8: Data analysis method:

Thematic analysis is a method of analysing qualitative data. It is mainly applied to a set of texts, such as interview transcripts (Du Plooy, 2009). This is a process of data reduction employing identifying themes. The researcher closely examined the data to identify common themes, topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly from the participants'. This method permitted the researcher to grow the range of the study past individual experiences and provides flexibility (Leedy & Ormond, 2005). Deductive coding, researchers often use deductive coding by using a list of themes known or anticipated to be found in the data, normally derived from the literature review. In this approach, there is a possibility that new and unexpected codes are identified which need to be added to the coding scheme. However, the this research made use of an inductive coding approach; the student researcher allowed codes to emerge from scrutinising the text. The development of codes themes and categories from raw data is an iterative process and described as the constant comparative method.

Below are the eight steps which were used in the process of thematic analysis:

1: Prepare the data:

The student researcher transcribed the raw data that she has collected into written text before she started with the analysis (du Plooy, 2009). This was the data derived from the interviews.

Not all raw data was relevant or useful (Green & Wind, 2015). For example, the researchers intended to transcribe text from the interviews, the decision of what to include and what to exclude was guided by the research goal and question.

2: Defining the coding unit to be analysed:

During this step, the student researcher indicated whether they are going to use individual words, phrases, symbols, sentences or paragraphs as the coding unit (Babbie, 2011). It is a way of organising data into manageable chunks.

In this step, the author examined the data (text) closely and decided how to break it down into parts (Hsieh, 2017). The researcher compared and grouped these parts in terms of relations, similarities and dissimilarities. Different parts of the data were marked with appropriate codes to identify them for further analysis. The researcher was led by the research question in identifying the coding units'.

3: Developing categories and coding scheme or conceptual framework:

This step involved grouping related coding units together to form categories of codes (Hsieh, 2017). The author developed the coding scheme from previously conducted studies and theories since the proposed study is deductive.

An important aspect of coding is that the researcher described every code, and theme clearly to allow the researcher to apply it to the text as dependably as possible (Leedy & Ormond, 2016). The student researcher also developed a coding book to ensure the consistency of the coding. A coding book describes category names, definitions or rules for assigning codes.

4: Testing the coding scheme on a sample text:

This step involved testing the clarity and consistency of the category definitions on a sample of the data (Heeks, 2018). Coding definitions and rules will be redefined if the level of consistency is low. During this stage, all doubts and problems related to the coding categories was resolved.

5: Coding all text:

Coding the data refers to the scrutiny of the researcher's data and taking note of all the relevant and meaningful sections and items (Chisholm, 2004). Thematic coding will be used in the proposed research. Thematic coding is a process of data reduction employing identifying themes. In thematic coding, the student researcher will use deductive coding by using a list of themes anticipated to be found in the

data, usually derived from the literature review (Gudmudsdottir, 2010). In this step, the conceptual framework is applied to all text. The student researcher will therefore identify, isolate and contextualise all the bits of data that would inform the research questions based on the conceptual framework. This will involve an immersive and close reading whilst applying the coding scheme (Alampay, 2015).

6: Assessing your coding consistency:

Once all coding has been completed, the researcher rechecked the consistency with which the coding was conducted (Du Plooy, 2009).

7: Concluding the coded data:

This step involved the interpretation of the themes or categories identified. At this stage, the student researcher will make inferences and present the reconstruction of meanings derived from the data (Bloch, 2009).

In this step, the author relied on her ability to augment the analysis with their interpretation by drawing on existing theories and previously conducted studies, and their sense of the meaning of the text (Fiske, 2004, p.98). Since this type of interpretation is context-sensitive, the student researcher considered and described how the meanings that have been reconstructed from the analysis of the text are linked to the border context of cultural differences in brand image perception (Alampay, 2015).

8: Reporting your methods and findings:

During this step, the researcher reported on the process that she has applied in the analysis as completely and as accurately as possible (Du Plooy, 2009).

9: Trustworthiness:

- **Credibility** refers to the accuracy to which the reader interpreted the data that was provided by the participants (Du Plooy, 2014). Credibility is increased when the findings are believable from the participants' viewpoint (Cotton, 2009). Since the research focused on the cultural difference that impacts

consumer's perception of brand image, among young adults. The goal is for these young adults to find the description of their lives believable. The scholar asked participants to review the data collected so that they can see the researcher's interpretation of the data. This gave participants the chance to verify their statements and fill in any gaps from earlier interviews. Trust is was an important aspect.

- **Transferability** refers to the ability of the findings to be applied to a similar situation and delivering similar results (Du Plooy, 2009). This would allow for generalisation within an approach that does not lend itself to generalised findings (Czerniewicz, 2004). This means it is the degree to which the results and analysis can be applied beyond a specific research project. This research cannot prove definitively that outcomes based on interpretation of data are transferable, but it can establish that is likely. Nevertheless, the student researcher in the study enhanced transferability by doing a thorough job of describing the research context and the assumption that were central to the research.
- **Dependability** refers to the quality of the process of integration that takes place between the data collection method, data analysis and theory generated from the data (Gudmundsdottir, 2010). Dependability emphasizes the need for the researcher to account for the ever-changing context within which the research occurs (Cotton, 2009). The researcher will account for this by keeping up to date with the changing marketing and communication strategies being implanted by brand communicators.
- **Conformability**: This specifies how well the findings flow from the data (Bloch, 2009). Therefore, this researcher described the research process fully to assist others in scrutinising the research design. The aim is that others who look at the data must come to similar conclusions as the student researcher did (Cotton, 2009). To enhance conformability within the study, the researcher documented the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study. After the study, the researcher conducted a data audit

that examined the data collection and analysis procedures and make judgements about the potential for bias or distortion.

The research aimed to show that the findings are credible. The study also strived to demonstrate that if the study is repeated, the same results will be obtained.

10: Findings and interpretations:

The below section will outline the findings of the study. Findings in this study were interpreted by the use of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory. Before participants were asked to answer questions relating to their perception of brand image, they were first asked to define what culture means to them. Later participants were asked to identify their culture concerning:

- Power distance index
- Individualism vs. collectivism
- Uncertainty avoidance
- Masculinity vs. Femininity
- Long-term orientation vs. short-term orientation
- Indulgence vs. restraint

(Hofstede, 2001).

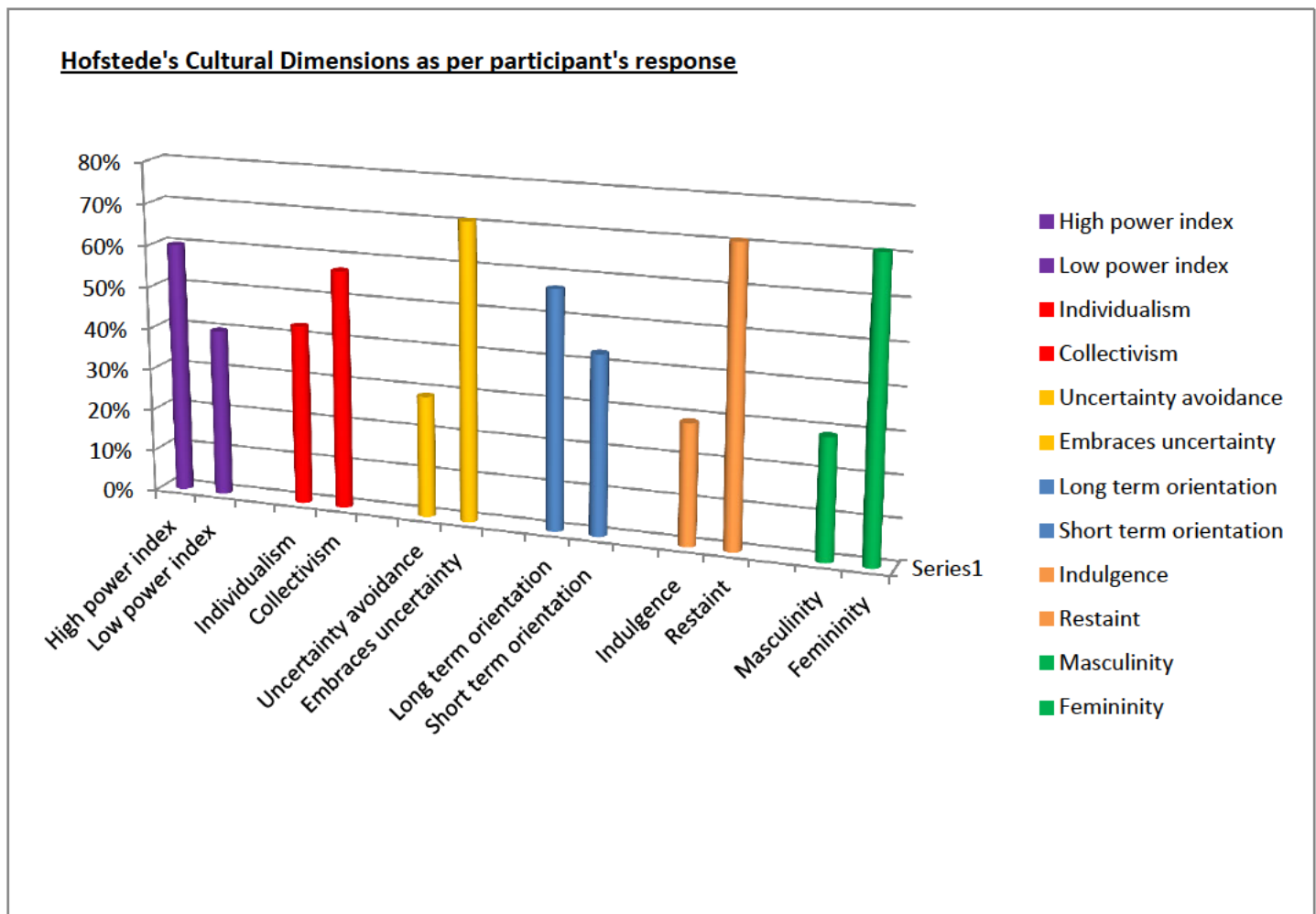


Figure 1: Indexes of Hofstede's cultural differences among participants in the study.

To ensure diversity of the sample participants were mixed in gender by use of three males and four females, from each of the participants that were studied at a higher institution in Johannesburg. The age ranged from 19-23 years old. An important criterion for answering the research questions and objectives was that the study needed to be inclusive of participants from different backgrounds and ethnicity. Furthermore, the study required the participants to be able to communicate in English.

What do you value most in a brand?

4 out of the 7 participants identified their culture as one of collectivism. Participants from collectivism dimension displayed quality as an element which makes a brand valuable, with 3 of out the 4 participants who identified their culture as collectivism using the term '*quality*' to describe a brand as valuable. Similarly, participants who

identified their culture as one of individualism used the terms '*famous*' or '*popular*' to explain what made a brand valuable.

Participants from individualistic cultures stressed individual goals. This was evident when participant B who identified their culture as individualism stated: "*What I value most about a brand is how it makes me look and how popular the brand will make me feel when I am with my friends*". Collectivism focuses on group goals and what is best for the overall group. Previous literature has argued that the differences may be caused due to: the adaptation of advertising to better adjust to cultural traditions and norms; and different understanding of applied communication (Leedy & Ormond, 2016). Researchers have argued that cultural differences are engraved in consumers' perception (Gudykunst & Kim, 2017).

In your own opinion, which characteristics within a brand make a brand stand out for you?

2 of the 7 participants identified their culture as one of masculinity. Participants who identified their culture as one of femininity instead of masculinity used softer characteristics to answer this question, by using themes such as '*beautiful*', and '*gentle*'. While the remaining 5 participants who identified their culture as one of masculinity used terms such as '*tough*', '*strong*' or '*bold*'.

According to Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory within the femininity cultural index; female characteristics are held at a high standard and are valued. While on the contrary within the masculinity cultural index female characteristics are classified as a sign of failure and weakness (Hsieh, 2017). Literature has argued that the human brain is shaped by the external world and shapes the perception of the external world. While the effects of culture on perception are independent of language, language influences thoughts. The same situation can be interpreted differently by diverse people (Green & Wind, 2015).

In your opinion, does 'expensive' constitute a good and reliable brand? Elaborate on your answer.

There were considerable differences between participants who identified their culture as one that embraces uncertainty or avoids it. 5 out of the 7 participants identified

their culture as one that embraces uncertainty, while 2 out of 7 identified their culture as one where uncertainty is avoided. 100% of the participants who stated that uncertainty is avoided in their culture, relied upon saying yes, expensive does constitute a good and reliable brand. The most popular reason for their answer was that expensive means good quality. While 99.99% of those who identified their culture as one that embraces uncertainty answered no when asked this question. With participant C who identified their culture as one that embraces uncertainty, rhetorically stating, *"Whoever believes the rule that expensive is better is foolish."*

According to Hofstede's dimensions of culture, participants who score a high degree in the uncertainty avoidance index opt for stiff codes of behaviour, guidelines, laws, and generally rely on absolute truth. A lower degree in the uncertainty index shows more acceptance of differing thoughts or ideas (Gudmundsdottir, 2010). According to literature culture acts as an astringent screener that momentarily influences the meaning of how a brand image is perceived (Kumar, 2011).

In your opinion, is durability an important factor when considering brands? Motivate your answer.

4 out of the 7 participants identified their culture as long-term orientation while the remaining 3 participants identified their culture as short-term orientation. 100% of participants who identified their culture as short-term orientation stated that durability is not an important factor. However, 3 out of the 4 participants who identified their culture as long-term stated that durability is a critical factor. These participants linked durability with saving money and high quality.

Participant E who identified their culture as short-term orientation stated that: *"Durability is not important because what matters is how good the item or brand looks like."* According to literature based on the three exposed theoretical pillars, three propositions can be constructed. Firstly, the meaning is a product of personal values and beliefs; secondly, personal values and beliefs are different in different cultures and consequently, a brand meaning is different in different cultures (Graeff, 2017).

Does a brands history play a vital role when considering a brand? Motivate your answer.

Participants who identified their culture as having high power index perceived brand history as an important factor as compared to those who identified their culture as low on power index.

One participant who identified their culture as high on the power index stated: *"What a brand did in the past, shows that they have the power to excel, which makes them good."* On the other hand, 100% of the participants who identified their culture as low on the power index stated that history is not vital when considering a brand.

In the power distance index inequality and power are largely embedded in history (Hofstede, 2001). A higher degree of the Index indicates that hierarchy is established and executed in society, without doubt, or reason. A lower degree of the Index signifies that people question authority and attempt to distribute power (Green & Wind, 2015).

How important is environmental friendliness when considering a brand? Why, or why not?

2 out of the 7 participants identified their culture as one of indulgence while the remaining 5 identified their culture as one of restraint. There was a clear link between the indulgence vs. restraint dimension. 100% of participants who identified their culture as one of indulgence stated that environmental friendliness is not important while considering a brand, subsequently, 100% of participants who identified their culture as one of restraint stated that environmental friendliness is vital when considering a brand.

Indulgence is defined as a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun. Its counterpart is defined as a society that controls the gratification of needs and regulates it through strict social norms (Jandt, 2015).

In your opinion, do expensive brands add any value to your position in society? Please motivate your answer.

All 4 out of the 7 participants who identified their culture as one of collectivism stated that expensive brands do not add value to their position in society. However, 2 out of the 3 participants who identified their culture as one of individualism stated that expensive brands do indeed add to their position in society.

Participants who identified their culture as one of individualism emphasized "I" verse "we" to answer this question. Their counterpart answered this question by referring to their tightly integrated relationships with their families and others in their in-groups. These in-groups are laced with undoubted loyalty and support each other when a conflict arises with another in-group (Hofstede, 2001).

What kinds of brands within your culture are considered a sign of success?

Masculinity and femininity dimension played a critical role in gaining perceptive of the participants' response by answering this question.

Participants who identified their culture as one of masculinity named expensive and high-end brands as those that are a sign of success; however those who identified their culture as one of femininity used themes such as "*homely*" to explain what kind of brands are considered a sign of success.

In the dimension of masculinity vs. femininity, masculinity as a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success, while femininity represents a preference for cooperation modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life (Gudmundsdottir, 2010). According to previous literature, how consumers consider brands in accordance to their culture has proven to be useful for analysing consumer behaviour for brand choices as it reveals how consumer feel about brands, rather than what physical characteristics they associate them with (Green & Wind, 2015).

10.1. Discussion of the research objectives and question (s)

Research objective one:

The first research objective aimed to determine whether cultural differences affect brand image. This research objective flowed out of the main research question. The literature provided evidence that people in different cultures do not process information in the same way (Hsieh, 2017). Since brand meaning is to a great extent the result of human interpretation it is thus predicted that brand meanings differ across cultures. The presented literature argues that in low context cultures individuals have narrower, functionally-oriented association with brands, whereas in high context cultures individuals have broader situational and symbolic associations (Du Plooy, 2009).

When participants were asked to identify their culture according to Hofstede's cultural dimension there was a strong link between their answer and their perception of brand image. The cultural background has become a means for people to have a worldview about brand perception, as seen by the findings relating to the participants in the question about what they value in a brand. Relating to this question Participants from collectivism dimension displayed quality as an element which makes a brand valuable, with 3 of out the 4 participants who identified their culture as collectivism using the term 'quality' to describe a brand a valuable.

Research objective two:

The second objective was to explore the role that cultural differences play on individual perceptions of brand image. The second objective was also critical in answering the research sub-question in terms of which cultural differences influence individual perceptions of brand image. This was explored throughout the interview questions. The answers to the interview questions provided clear evidence that brands that have the same image are perceived differently in different cultures despite identical positioning. This was evident when participants were asked: "*what kind of brands are a sign of success in your culture?*" Participants who identified their culture as one of masculinity named expensive and high-end brands as those

that are a sign of success; however those who identified their culture as one of femininity used themes such as *"homely"* to explain what kind of brands are considered a sign of success.

Furthermore, as identified in Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory the effects of a society's culture on the values of its members and behaviour is critical (Jandt, 2015). Cultural factors such as Power distance index, individualism vs. collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity vs. femininity, long-term orientation vs. short-term orientation and indulgence vs. restraint had a large impact on how the individual's perceived brand image (Hofstede, 2001).

Research objective three:

The third objective was to explore how cultural differences could negatively affect the way a brand is perceived. This objective further linked to the research problem being studied which is that many times, a brand will need to adapt their offerings to different cultures because the culture is the prime determinant of consumers' attitude and behaviours (Jandt, 2015). Previous literature states that the human brain is shaped by the external world and this later shapes the perception of brand image. While the effects of culture on perception are independent of language, language influences thoughts. The same situation can be interpreted differently by diverse people (Green & Wind, 2015). This may further have a negative impact on how cultural different individuals perceive brands, as seen when participants were asked: *"in your opinion, does 'expensive' constitute a good and reliable brand?"*

Participants whose culture had a lower degree in the uncertainty avoidance index had a negative perception of expensive brands, while participants who had a higher degree in uncertainty avoidance index had a positive perception of expensive brands.

Research question

What role do cultural differences play on individual perceptions of brand image?

In closing, previous literature and finding of this study have indicated that cultural differences play a critical role in individual perceptions of brand image. People in different cultures do not process information in the same way (Hsieh, 2017). Since brand meaning is to a great extent the result of human interpretation it is thus predicted that brand meanings differ across cultures.

The role that cultural differences play on individual perception of brand image is that despite a brand taking an identical positioning it will be understood differently across cultures. This means that if a brand wishes to achieve the same brand perception across cultures, the brand needs to create brand positioning strategies that emphasize the characteristics that enable consumers to perceive the product in a similar way. These cultural differences may foster individuals to preserve brands negatively or positively depending on what perception they have created about the brand due to their cultural background. As seen in the study that when participants were asked: *"In your opinion, does 'expensive' constitute a good and reliable brand?"*

Participants whose culture had a lower degree in the uncertainty avoidance index had a negative perception of expensive brands, while participants who had a higher degree in uncertainty avoidance index had a positive perception of expensive brands.

Research sub-question

Which cultural differences influence individual perceptions of brand image?

De Mooij and Hofstede (2011) found that a high price delivers status in collectivistic cultures, as a high price is associated with quality and quality also contains social meaning to members in these cultures. Thus, a high price might not only signal high quality but also social status, prestige and belonging. The research findings have indicated that cultural differences such as power distance index, individualism vs.

collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity vs. femininity, long-term orientation vs. short-term orientation and indulgence vs. restraint had an influence on the individual's perceived brand image (Hofstede, 2001). Furthermore, Hsieh (2013) points out that humans shape their environment and, hence, it could be said that the human brain shapes itself to a human-made environment. The human brain is shaped by the external world and shapes the perception of the external world. While the effects of culture on perception are independent of language, language influences thoughts. The same situation can be interpreted differently by diverse people (Green & Wind, 2015).

Hofstede's cultural dimensions:	Concepts and sentences used during the interview by participants reflecting Hofstede's cultural dimension on their view of brand image:
High power index	"Expensive" and "power" were common concepts when describing brands for participants who identified their culture as low power index. For these participants expensive brands indicated a form of structure that remains unchallenged.
Low power index	Key concept by participants who identified their culture as low power index showed less rigid ways in their perception of brand image.
Individualism	"I" "me" "personally", these were concepts that participants who identified their culture as one of individualism used.
Collectivism	"We" "in my culture", were concepts that participants who identified as collectivism strongly used when answering questions. These participants referred strongly to their cultural group as a whole and little to themselves.
Uncertainty avoidance	The quality of a brand was a determining factor participant who identified their culture as one of uncertainty. The key concept was quality
Embraces uncertainty	Spontaneity was a key concept for participants who identified their culture as one that embraces uncertainty.
Masculinity	"Strong" "bold" "tough" was the key concepts used by participants who identified their culture as one of

	masculinity.
Femininity	<i>“Gentle” “soft” “homely” “beautiful”</i> were key concepts participants who identified their culture as femininity used to define brands.
Long term orientation	“Brand durability” was a key concept for participants who identified their culture as one of long term orientation.
Short term orientation	Immediate reward was a common concept for participants who identified their culture as short term orientation. Brands image on Environmental friendliness was not important for these participants.
Indulgence	“Instant gratification” was a key concept for participants who identified their culture part of indulgence.
Restraint	Future consideration when perceiving brands was a common concept for participants who identified their culture as restraint.

Figure 2: Table indicting interview concepts and words used by participates that linked to Hofstede’s cultural dimensions.

11: Conclusion:

11.1: Anticipated contribution:

The study seeks to make a research contribution. It aims to contribute to the understanding and development of cross-cultural differences in consumer brand image perception. This will, therefore, contribute towards the advancement of human knowledge by adding something new by prioritising the need for brand communicators to make efforts to better understand cultural difference within consumers (Jandt, 2015). This means brand communicators will understand that they first need to develop an understanding of cross-cultural differences among consumers before communicating brand image, as brand communication needs to be carefully thought-out.

The main importance of cross-cultural communication research within brand image perception is knowledge beyond the confinements of one particular surrounding context, encompassing a universal perspective in understanding human behaviour. As the study involves the comparisons of different cultures, with aims to understand variations of human behaviour as it is influenced by cultural context. The research seeks to give a clear picture of the impact of culture in the market place. This is a critical component of brand success for two reasons. Firstly, it seeks to provide brand communicators with the knowledge to make effective decisions regarding brand image communication.

Secondly, the study seeks to provide brand communicator's with deep insight into consumers' cultural behaviour, as scholars have previously stated the same brand image cannot hold universal meaning. When consumers understand the intended meaning of a brand image it gives confidence to the consumers' as they feel that the brand is sincere and clear in its vision to create the best. Brands can use the research findings to tailor their brand image to different cultures and improve cross-cultural communication. Findings in the study may work to rectify the biases that may persist in brand communication across different cultures. Furthermore, the scholar would recommend that a larger sample is used for further research to get a wider scope into the role that cultural differences play on individual perception of brand image.

11.2: Ethical considerations:

The following were critical in the ethical considerations of this research:

Voluntary participation of respondents: The level of effort involved in clarifying voluntariness in the study were not fixed and depended on several circumstances, such as the respondent's abilities to resist pressures like inducements, authority figures, or other forms of persuasion. Special care, therefore, was taken to eliminate undue pressure (real and perceived) when research subjects have diminished the capacity to refuse.

In this instance, the student researcher informed participants of their right to refuse to participate or withdraw from the research.

The research refused to exclude participants from the academic debate by offending, insulting or downgrading them. The ***researcher aimed to avoid all offensive and discriminatory language and attitudes***, which would have the unintended result of excluding participants from the research.

Anonymity is a research protocol in which neither the researcher nor the reader of the findings can identify a respondent-based on their responses; this is the state of being anonymous (Cotton, 2009). The study did not collect identifying information of research participants.

Maintaining ***the privacy*** of information collected from research participants means that only the researcher or individuals of the research team can identify the responses of individual subjects (Heeks, 2018). The student researcher in the research made every effort to prevent anyone outside of the project from connecting individual subjects with their responses.

Acknowledgement of works of other authors used in any part of the dissertation with the use of Harvard referencing system: As ***references*** have an important role in many parts of a manuscript, failure to sufficiently cite other can reduce the credibility of the proposed research (Compaine, 2001). In this study every statement of fact or description of previous findings was referenced by the use of Harvard referencing.

In its purest sense, the idea of **objectivity** assumes that truth or independent reality exists outside of any investigation or observation. The researcher's task in this model was to uncover this reality without contaminating it in any way (Gudykunst & Kim, 2017). This notion, that a researcher can observe or uncover phenomena without affecting them is increasingly rejected, especially in the social sciences. In qualitative research, a realistic aim is for the researcher to remain impartial; to acknowledge their preconceptions and to operate in an as unbiased and value-free way as possible (Keller, 2016).

The researcher's own biases may affect how the research is interpreted (Du Plooy, 2009), as the cultural background of individual shapes their reality and how they perceive the world around them (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2015). That is important because those biases influence the way the research is communicated in subtle ways. To minimize bias, the researcher moved toward cultural relativism by showing unconditional positive regard and being cognizant of their cultural assumptions (Francis, Lam & Walls, 2018). Complete cultural relativism is never 100 per cent achievable.

Respondent validation, which is allowing participants to read through the data and analyses and provide feedback on the researcher's interpretations of their responses, provided the researcher with a method of checking for inconsistencies, this challenged the researcher's assumptions, and provided the scholar with an opportunity to re-analyse the data (Fiske & Ladd, 2004).

11.3: Limitations:

Limitations are shortcomings, conditions or influences that cannot be controlled by the researcher that place restrictions on the methodology and conclusions (Czerniewicz, 2004).

Qualitative research is often criticised as biased, small scale, anecdotal or lacking rigour; however, when carried out properly it is unbiased, in-depth, valid, credible and rigorous (Chisholm, 2004). The research assessed the extent to which claims are supported by convincing evidence. Examining the data for trustworthiness assess both the objectivity and credibility of the research.

Qualitative researchers have been criticised for overusing interviews at the expense of other methods (Cotton, 2009). Qualitative research has numerous strengths when properly conducted (Bloch, 2009).

This research was heavily dependent on the individual skills of the researcher and more easily influenced by the researcher's personal biases and idiosyncrasies. Rigour is more difficult to maintain, assess, and demonstrate. The volume of data makes analysis and interpretation time-consuming.

The researcher's presence during data gathering, which was unavoidable within this research, may have affected the subjects' responses (Chisholm, 2004). Issues of anonymity and confidentiality could have present problems when presenting findings (Compaine, 2001). The Covid-19 outbreak also contributed to the limitations of the study, as face to face interviews could not be conducted. This meant that the student researcher could not engage adequately in analysing participants' body language, and body language plays a virtual role in analysing data. Often online interviews turn out to be inconvenient because of low internet speed or disturbance in the line. It was also unfortunate that the researcher could not guarantee that participants will have data or Wi-Fi connection to participate in the study. Load-shedding was also a limitation, because during one interview the scholar expressed power cuts, which led to the interview being rescheduled.

Moreover, the findings of the proposed research cannot be generalised to the study population. This is because fewer people were studied. Collection of qualitative data is generally more time consuming than quantitative data collection and therefore unless the budget allows it is necessary to include a smaller size.

12: Closing remarks:

In light of the above research, for companies and marketers to develop and maintain strong brands, the need to know how to engage with culturally different consumers through powerful and effective communication is critical. Studies have argued that even if identical positioning is applied across settings, the same brand might be perceived differently in different cultures. Hereby, the purpose of this research was to explore how cultural differences among consumers affect the perception of brand

image, mainly among young adults studying at a higher institution in Johannesburg. The study also found that a semi-structured interview is open; which allowed new ideas to be brought up during the interview made this the most appropriate data collection technique.

Generally, The main research question which is, what role do cultural differences play on individual perceptions of brand image? Was answered by indicating that the role that cultural differences play on individual perception of brand image is that despite a brand taking an identical positioning it will be understood differently across cultures. This means that if a brand wishes to achieve the same brand perception across cultures, the brand needs to create brand positioning strategies that emphasize the characteristics that enable consumers to perceive the product in a similar way. These cultural differences may foster individuals to preserve brands negatively or positively depending on what perception they have created about the brand due to their cultural background.

Furthermore, the above research found that the second objective was imperative in answering the research sub-question in terms of which cultural differences influence individual perceptions of brand image. This was explored throughout the interview questions. The answers to the interview questions provided clear evidence that brands that have the same image are perceived differently in different cultures despite identical positioning. The research problem was that to date, most research about cross-cultural communication has focused on international perceptions of communication, with little or no attention paid to determining the difference in cross-cultural communication within a local context in South Africa (Kenneth, 2019). Therefore, the social consequence of cross-cultural differences within the South African setting has yet received adequate attention. The above study filled this gap by studying young adults in South Africa, by means of young adults' studying at a higher institution in Johannesburg. The research aimed to show that the findings are credible.

13: Annexure A: Concept Document Template

TITLE: The role that cultural differences play on individual perception of brand image.

Research Purpose/ Objective	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors/ Sources	Literature Review – Conceptual Framework	Paradigm	Approach	Data Collection Method(s)	Ethics	Anticipated Findings	References
To explore how cultural differences affect the perception of brand image, mainly among young adults in Sandton. Cultural.	What role do cultural differences play on individual perceptions of brand image?	The social consequences of cross-cultural differences within S.A setting have yet received adequate attention. Brands need to adapt their offerings to different cultures, as culture is the determinant of behaviour.	Du Plooy-Cilliers, F and Louw. Gudykunst, WB and Kim, YY. Jandt, FE. Littlejohn, SW and Foss, KA. Tubbs, S and Moss, S.	Theme 1: The role of culture in brand image perception. Theme 2: Effects of culture on perception. Theme 3: Processing of information and culture. Theme 4: Brand meaning across culture.	Paradigm Interpretivism Epistemology Expand knowledge beyond the confinements of one particular surrounding context, covering a general perspective in human behaviour. Ontology Assumes that reality, as we know it is constructed intersubjectively through the meaning and understanding developed socially and experientially Axiology Uniqueness is valued. The proposed study maintains that human action is meaningful and that people ascribe meaning to their actions.	Qualitative	Semi-structured interview.	Researcher seeks to maintain privacy of info collected from participants. Only the research team can identify the responses of individuals. Informed consent forms will be written in easily understood language.	1) Brands can have different meanings for individuals in different cultures. 2) Culture influences the way persons perceive a brand. 3) Same brand is perceived differently in different cultures despite its identical positioning.	Babbie, E.2011. Introduction to social research. 5 th edition. Belmont:Wadsworth. Martin, JN, Nakayama, TN, van Rheedee van Oudtshoorn, GP and Schutte PJ.2013. <i>Experiencing intercultural communication: an introduction</i> . Southern African edition. McGraw-Hill Education Europe.
						Population				
						Population Parameters Young adults between the ages of 19-23. Studying at a higher institution in Johannesburg.				
Research Problem	Secondary Questions/ Hypotheses/ Objectives	Key Concepts	Key Theories			Sampling	Data Analysis Method(s)	Limitations	Anticipated Contribution	
Little or no attention has been paid to determining the difference in cross-cultural communication within a local context in S.A.	1) To explore the effects of culture in the perception of brand image. 2) To identify the consequences of cross-cultural communication in brand image perception.	1)Brand image 2)Cross-cultural 3)Culture 4)Cultural factors 5)Perception 6)young adults	Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory			Probability or non-probability Non-Probability Sampling method Purposive sampling Size 7	Unit of Analysis Young adults between the ages of 19-23, studying at a higher institution in Johannesburg. Data Analysis Method(s) Thematic analysis	It's time-consuming. Results of qualitative research can't be verified. Difficult to investigate causality. Subjective. Study cannot be generalised.	1) Brands can use these findings to tailor their brand image to different cultures and improve cross-cultural communication. 2)Findings May work to rectify biases that may persist in brand communication across different cultures	Tubbs, S and Moss, S.2008. <i>Human communication</i> . 11 th edition. New York.

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15. Addendum: Interview questions:

THEME 1: Your culture

1. What does the term “culture” mean to you?
2. In relation to your own culture, how important are power and status? Please motivate your answer.
3. Individualism is the principle of being independent and self-reliant, while to the contrary, collectivism is the practice of giving a group priority over each individual in it. When considering your culture do you identify as individualistic or as collectivism? Motivate your answer.
4. Does your culture have distinct gender roles or are gender roles fluid? Motivate your answer.
5. Long-term orientation shows focus on the future and involve delaying short term success to achieve long term success, while short-term orientation shows focus on the near future, and places strong emphasises on living in the moment. Regarding your culture do you fall under long-term orientation or short-term orientation? Motivate your answer.
6. In relation to your own culture, do you embrace spontaneity or do you prefer predictability and structure? Motivate your answer.

THEME 2: BRANDING

7. What do you value most in a brand?
8. In your own opinion, which characteristics within a brand make a brand stand out for you?
9. In your opinion, does ‘expensive’ constitute a good and reliable brand? Elaborate on your answer.
10. In your opinion, is durability an important factor when considering brands? Motivate your answer.

11. Does a brands history play a vital role when considering a brand? Motivate your answer.
12. How important is environmental friendliness when considering a brand? Why, or why not?
13. In your opinion, do expensive brands add any value to your position in society? Please motivate your answer.
14. What kinds of brands within your culture are considered a sign of success?

16: Addendum: Example of data analyse

LOW

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

HIGH

Egalitarian.
How Expense
a brand is not
critical.

Power distance

Hierarchal. Expensive brands
give these individuals a sense
of power.

Open to
change.
Durability is
unimportant
when
considering
brands

Uncertainty Avoidance

Prefer routine. Durability is
critical when considering
brands.

"We" Brands
that are
acceptable
within their
group are
important

Collectivism vs. individualism

"I" what is important is
what the brand means
to them personally,
and not the collective.

Gentleness is
critical when
speaking of
brands.

Femininity vs. masculinity

Power is critical when
speaking of brands.

Has Traditional
expectation of
brands

Short term vs. long term

Futuristic. Considers both
the history and current
conduct of a brand

Rigid, have
external focus
of control.
Factors such
as
environmental
friendliness
are important
when
considering
brands

Restraint vs. indulgence

Free, have internal
focus of control.
Factors such as
environmental
are not critical when
considering brands.

17: ANNEXURE C: EXPLANATORY INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

To whom it may concern,

My name is Sibonelo Mavuso and I am a student at Varsity College, Sandton. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Jenna-Lee Ramnarain about Cross-cultural differences in consumer brand image perception. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of human knowledge by adding something new by prioritising the need for brands to make efforts to better understand cultural difference among consumers, for them to maintain a strong brand image.

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

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

I would like to invite you to participate in this research because you fit the population parameters of the research. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to ask you questions via an interview that I will conduct via Microsoft teams.

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

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

Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your perception of brand image. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.

Do I have to participate in the study?

- Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary;
- If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so;

- Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.

Will my identity be protected?

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

What will happen to the information that participants provide?

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

What happens if I have more questions about the study?

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

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

My contact details are as follows:
Sibonelo Mavuso

The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:
Jenna-Lee Ramnarain

18: Consent form for participants

I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by (your name) about (insert aim of research/ brief summary of exactly what you are researching)

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

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

Signature

Date

19: Consent form for audio-recording/ video recording

I, _____, agree to allow (your name) to audio record my interviews as part of the research about (insert aim of research/ brief summary of exactly what you are researching)

.

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

1. My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.
2. The recordings will be stored in a password protected file on the researcher's computer.
3. Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.

Signature

Date



24 JULY 2020

Student name: Sibonelo Mavuso

Student number: 16005304

Campus: IIE's Varsity College

Re: Approval of Bachelor of Arts in Communication Proposal and Ethics Clearance

HONOURS ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus research panel, a subcommittee of The Independent Institute of Education's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.

There are some aspects that you still need to address in your proposal. You will need to address these aspects in consultation with your supervisor before you may proceed (see below):

Please discuss with your supervisor/navigator/lecturer how you will address these issues listed below:

Please note: **Your fieldwork may only proceed once you address the following issues:**

- Title suggestion: *The role that cultural differences play on individual perceptions of brand image.*
- Please rework your objectives to align with this new title.
- Please make all the changes suggested/recommended by your supervisor.
- Please review your questions – In order to assess cultural differences, you will need to ask questions about the culture of the respondents. This doesn't come through here.
- Be mindful of how you structure/frame your questions when attending to the above.

In the event of you deciding to change your research methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethical clearance letter will be issued.

We wish you all the best with your research!

GENERAL CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED IN RELATION TO RESEARCH

Permission is granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted.

Please note: The panel has not considered the merits, accuracy or ethical soundness of the research. The only merits examined are the use of The IIE as a sample.

Permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. The researcher(s) will need to obtain informed consent in writing from all of the participants in his/ her sample if the study is not anonymous.
2. The researcher(s) may only use the data collected for research purposes and in no other way.
3. Photographs of human subjects may only be taken if relevant to the research, informed consent was obtained, and even with informed consent, the photographs may not be published on any online platforms.
4. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
5. No names or identifying information of participants may be used within the research and the research must be voluntary.
6. Please make it clear that the information will not be used punitively in any way and participants may in no way be counselled/advised based on this.

Supervisor:

JENNA-LEE RAMNARAIN

Head Academic

DR STELLAH LUBINGA