



The Influence of Cultural Differences on MTN's Brand Identity and
Brand Experience in South Africa, Ghana and Cameroon



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Declaration

I, Sharon Mahlase, hereby declare that the dissertation I submit herewith for the Master's in Strategic Brand Leadership degree at the Independent Institute of Education, Vega School, is my independent work and that I have not previously submitted it for a qualification at another institution of higher education.

Sharon Mahlase

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Abstract

This study investigates how cultural differences shape consumer perceptions of MTN's brand identity and brand experience across three key African markets: South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon. Using a qualitative, interpretivist design, the research engaged twelve MTN users through semi-structured interviews and analysed the data using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis. Guided by Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism, and the Brand Experience Model, the study identifies both shared and context-specific interpretations of MTN's brand.

MTN maintains a strong, recognisable Pan-African brand anchored in its distinct yellow identity and widespread visibility, but the meanings attached to these brand elements differ across cultural contexts. In South Africa, perceptions are shaped by family heritage, respect-driven interactions, and trust in functional reliability. In Ghana, high power distance, collectivism, and strong community values frame MTN as a friendly, accessible, and culturally embedded brand. In Cameroon, MTN's youthful and expressive personality resonates with a highly indulgent and socially vibrant culture, although recent service challenges have led to increased customer scepticism.

This study makes three key contributions. First, it fills a significant gap in African cross-cultural branding research, where intra-continental comparative studies remain limited. Second, it demonstrates how cultural values can actively reconstruct a multinational brand's identity and experience, providing empirical evidence from under-researched African telecommunications markets. Third, it offers actionable insights on balancing global brand consistency with culturally grounded execution across diverse markets.

The study concludes that cultural alignment is central to building strong, resonant brand identities and experiences in Africa. It therefore recommends that MTN and similar African multinationals adopt more context-sensitive branding strategies tailored to local cultural needs. Key recommendations include improving service performance in markets with lower perceived reliability (for example, prioritising network stability and transparent communication in Cameroon); enhancing emotional engagement through culturally relevant touchpoints (such as

leveraging community festivals in Ghana and reinforcing trust-building initiatives in South Africa); strengthening sensory and cultural familiarity (for instance, using local languages, symbols, and relatable brand ambassadors in marketing); ensuring consistency in customer relationships through standardised service practices (e.g., improved customer service training and quality benchmarks across all markets); and introducing market-specific experience enhancements (for example, expanding mobile money services in Ghana or rolling out digital self-service tools in South Africa). Together, these measures aim to help MTN and similar organisations balance their Pan-African brand consistency with deep local relevance, supporting more culturally attuned branding strategies in diverse African markets.

Contents

<i>Declaration</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Abstract.....</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>List of figures</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>List of tables.....</i>	<i>x</i>
<i>List of Annexures</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Chapter 1: Introduction to the study.....</i>	<i>1</i>
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background to the study	1
1.3 Rationale	2
1.4 Problem statement	2
1.5 Research Aim and Objectives	3
1.6 Theoretical Framework	4
1.6.1 Hofstede's Theory on Culture.....	4
1.6.2 Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism (1992).....	4
1.6.3 Brakus et al (2009) Brand Experience Model.....	5
1.7 Study Setting	5
1.8 Research Methodology	6
1.9 Significance of the study	7
1.10 Chapters Outlines	8
1.11 Conclusion	8
<i>Chapter 2: Literature Review.....</i>	<i>9</i>
2.1 Introduction	9
2.2 Culture.....	10
2.2.1 Hofstede's Framework for Understanding Culture.....	11
2.2.2 Cameroon's Cultural Dimensions.....	15
2.3 International Marketing	17
2.4 Role of Culture in International Brand Marketing	18

2.4.1 Cross-cultural Marketing in International Marketing	20
2.4.2 Cross-Cultural Consumption	21
2.4.3 Cultural factors that influence consumer choices	22
2.4.4 Cultural Adaptation and Localisation in Cross-cultural Marketing	25
2.5 Cultural Diversity and Branding	27
2.5.1 Brand Identity.....	28
2.5.2 Culture and brand identity	31
2.6 Brand Experience	32
2.6.1 Brand Experience.....	32
2.6.2 The correlation between brand experience and consumer behaviour	32
2.6.3 Creating a powerful brand experience.....	33
2.6.4 Brand experience and culture.....	35
2.7 Conclusion.....	36
<i>Chapter 3: Research Methodology</i>	<i>38</i>
3.1. Introduction	38
3.1.1 The Research Onion Framework	39
3.2 Research Philosophy	40
3.2.1 Ontology	42
3.2.2. Epistemology	43
3.2.3 Axiology.....	44
3.3 Approach to Theory Development.....	45
3.4 Methodological Choice	45
3.5 Research design	46
3.5.1 Exploratory research.....	47
3.6 Research strategy	48
3.7 Time horizons.....	48
3.8 Research Techniques and Procedures	48
3.8.1 Population and sampling	49
3.8.2 Data collection	51
3.8.3 Data analysis	53
3.9 Trustworthiness	56
3.9.1 Credibility.....	56
3.9.2 Applicability/Transferability	57
3.9.3 Dependability/Consistency	57
3.6.4 Confirmability/ Neutrality	57

3.10 Ethical considerations	58
3.10.1 Ethical considerations relating to the researcher	59
3.10.2 Ethical considerations relating to participants	59
3.10.3 Ethical considerations relating to the academic institution.....	60
3.10.4 Potential ethical challenges	60
3.11 Conclusion	62
<i>Chapter 4: Data Analysis.....</i>	64
4.1 Introduction	64
4.2 The demographic profile of participants	65
4.3 Data analysis of the cultural values	66
4.3.1 Data analysis of the cultural values of South Africa MTN participants	67
4.3.2 Data analysis of the cultural values of Ghana MTN participants	71
4.3.3 Data analysis of the cultural values of Cameroon MTN participants	77
4.4 Brand Identity.....	83
4.4.1 Well-known Brand	83
4.4.2 Credible Personality	84
4.4.3 Local brand communication.....	85
4.4.4 Sound Customer Relationships	85
4.4.5 Customer brand appeal	86
4.4.6 Well-known brand.....	88
4.4.7 Brand Competence.....	89
4.4.8 Localised brand Communication.....	89
4.4.9 Accessibility	90
4.4.10 Mass Customer Brand Appeal	90
4.4.11 Well-known brand.....	91
4.4.12 Youthful brand personality.....	92
4.4.13 Localised Brand Communication	92
4.4.14 Constrained Customer Relationships	93
4.4.15 Customer brand appeal.....	93
4.4.16 Emotion Inducing.....	94
4.4.17 Emotion Inducing.....	95
4.4.18 Use of local identifiable figures	96
4.5 Conclusion.....	99
<i>Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations.....</i>	100
5.1 Introduction	100
5.2 Discussion of Findings According to Research Objectives	100

5.2.1 Objective 1: To perform a literature review on culture, brand identity and brand experience across various markets.	101
5.2.2 Objective 2: To determine an appropriate research design and methodology for conducting the study.....	101
5.2.3 Objective 3: To explore how MTN users in South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon describe their respective national cultures and shared values.	102
5.2.4 Objective 4: To assess the extent to which cultural dimensions affect customer perceptions of MTN's brand identity in each market.	105
5.2.5 Objective 5: To evaluate how cultural differences shape the brand experience of MTN customers across the three selected countries.....	108
5.2.6 Objective 6: To provide recommendations for enhancing MTN's brand identity and brand experience in culturally diverse markets.....	110
5.2.7. Summary of Key Findings by Theoretical Classification.....	110
5.5 Recommendations for enhancing MTN's brand identity and brand experience in culturally diverse markets.	113
i. Improve Service Performance in Markets with Lower Reliability Perceptions.	114
ii. Enhance Emotional Connection Using Culturally Relevant Touchpoints.	115
iii. Strengthen Sensory and Cultural Familiarity Cues.	115
iv. Improve Relational Experience Consistency	115
v. Build Market-Specific Experience Enhancements	115
5.4. Limitations of the Study	116
5.6 Implications for Future Studies.....	117
5.3 Conclusion.....	118
<i>List of References</i>	<i>119</i>

List of figures

Figure 1. 1 Theoretical Framework.....	4
Figure 2. 1 A comparison of South Africa and Ghana across Hofstede's five cultural dimensions	15
Figure 3. 1 Research Onion.....	39
Figure 5. 1 Decoding Brand Meaning in Cultural Contexts: A Cross-Market Framework Model of MTN's Brand Identity and Experience	Error! Bookmark not defined.

List of tables

Table 3. 1 Interview schedule	52
Table 4. 1 Demographic Profiles of Participants	65
Table 4. 2 Summary of the cultural values of South African participants	67
Table 4. 3 Summary of the cultural values of Ghanaian participants	71
Table 4. 4 Summary of the cultural values of Cameroonian participants	77
Table 4. 5 Summary of insights uncovered according to the Brand Identity elements of South African participants	83
Table 4. 6 Ghana Brand Identity Elements	88
Table 4. 7 Cameroon Brand Identity Elements	91
Table 4. 8 South Africa brand experience elements	94
Table 4. 9 Cameroon brand experience elements	97
Table 5. 1 Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede) Mapping	110
Table 5. 2 Brand Identity Prism Mapping	112
Table 5. 3 Brand Experience Theory Mapping.....	112

List of Annexures

Annexure A: Ethics Approval	160
Annexure B: Gatekeeper's Letter	162
Annexure C: Informed consent form	164
Annexure D: Interview guide	167
Annexure E: Interview Consent Form	170
Annexure F: Certificate of Release	172

Chapter 1: Introduction to the study

1.1 Introduction

Globalisation continues to reshape how brands operate across borders, increasing both opportunities for expansion and challenges associated with cultural diversity (Apsara & Vishnupriya, 2024). As Allan (2022) notes, cross-cultural factors significantly influence how global brands communicate and position themselves, making cultural understanding essential for companies operating in multicultural environments. For MTN, a multinational telecommunications provider with operations in 18 African countries, cultural differences play a crucial role in how consumers interpret and engage with the brand.

Africa's diverse cultural, linguistic, and social landscapes mean that consumers form brand perceptions based not only on functional performance but also on cultural expectations and values. This study therefore investigates how cultural differences influence MTN's brand identity and brand experience in South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon which are three culturally distinct markets that offer a meaningful basis for comparison.

1.2 Background to the study

MTN serves more than 297 million customers across 19 African markets (MTN, 2024). Although it remains one of the continent's strongest brands, recent reports indicate a decline in brand value driven by regulatory pressures, economic instability, and fluctuating customer experience outcomes (Brand Finance, 2024; BusinessLive, 2025). Understanding how consumers interpret MTN's brand across different countries is therefore increasingly important.

South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon were selected because they represent different cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic contexts within MTN's footprint. South Africa is a diverse and highly competitive telecommunications market; Ghana is shaped strongly by communal values and high respect for authority; and Cameroon offers a bilingual Central African context influenced by both Francophone and Anglophone cultural orientations (Barczyk et al., 2021).

Examining these markets allows for deeper insight into how cultural differences shape perceptions of MTN's brand identity and customer experience.

1.3 Rationale

Culture is widely recognised as a significant determinant of consumer behaviour, influencing how individuals interpret information and engage with brands (Solomon et al., 2019; Naik & Sharma, 2021). Cross-cultural marketing research has consistently shown that cultural values affect consumer preferences, communication styles, and perceptions of brand meaning (Vaddadi & Thandava, 2019; Sokolova, 2023). For multinational brands such as MTN, cultural misalignment can weaken brand positioning, undermine customer loyalty, and reduce perceived brand value.

Although existing scholarship discusses these cultural dynamics, most studies focus on Western, Asian, or consumer-goods markets (Yeboah-Banin & Quaye, 2021). African telecommunications markets characterised by multilingualism, collectivist orientations, and unique consumption patterns remain underexplored. This study responds to that gap by investigating cultural influences within three key African markets.

1.4 Problem statement

Existing research confirms that cultural differences significantly shape how consumers interpret brand identity and judge brand experience (Hofstede, 2011; Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009). However, most cross-cultural branding studies focus on Western, Asian, or consumer goods markets, leaving a critical gap in understanding how cultural diversity affects brand meaning in African contexts (Yeboah-Banin and Quaye, 2021; Marito, Mulyana, Rinandiyana and Taufiq, 2019; Lugina, Rudiana, Budiman and Taufiq, 2019; Kushwah, Shree, Rezaei and Sagar, 2020; Rodrigues, Brandão, Billore and Oda, 2024; Sahem, 2023; Zhou, He, Xie and Mehmood, 2024). Limited studies can be found on how cultural diversity affects branding in the telecommunications sector, and no studies could be found that focus specifically on MTN.

Brand Finance (2024) reports that MTN remains Africa's most valuable brand.

Operating in over 18 markets, MTN benefits from global visibility and financial gains but faces challenges such as regulatory pressures, inconsistent service quality, and weakening customer sentiment across regions (BusinessLive, 2025). Brand Finance (2024) further notes that MTN's brand value dropped by 26% year-on-year. These trends indicate vulnerability in MTN's brand strength and raise concerns about whether its Pan-African brand identity and customer experience still resonate within diverse cultural contexts.

Okonkwo, Edewor, and Igwe (2023:68) argue that a product or marketing approach that is successful in one culture may not be effective in another. Rammile (2009:3) asserts that it is challenging to develop cultural relevance in a continually evolving market while simultaneously maintaining brand consistency and acceptance across diverse cultures. Therefore, this study aims to understand how cultural differences influence MTN's brand identity and brand experience in its key African markets; South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon and to determine whether misalignment between brand strategy and cultural expectations may have contributed to the brand's declining equity.

1.5 Research Aim and Objectives

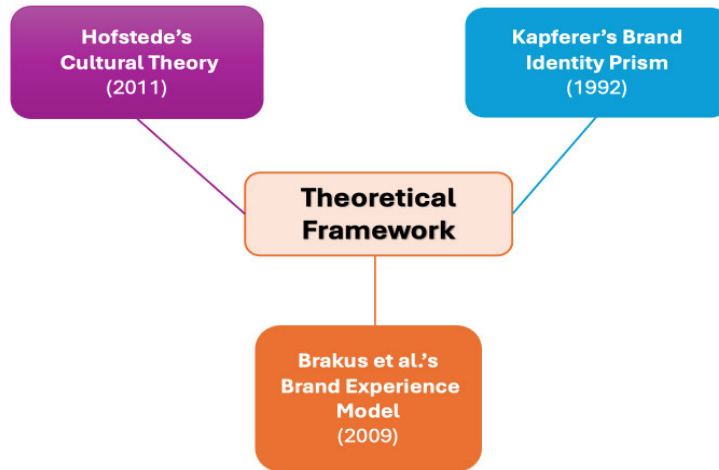
The aim of the study is to explore the influence of cultural differences on MTN's brand identity and brand experience across its key African markets, SA, Ghana, and Cameroon. The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To explore how cultural differences influence consumer perceptions of MTN's brand identity across South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon.
- To examine how cultural values shape the brand experience of MTN customers in the selected markets.
- To identify cultural similarities and differences that influence how MTN's brand is interpreted across the three countries.
- To analyse cross-market cultural dynamics that shape consumer–brand interactions with MTN.
- To provide context-specific recommendations to MTN's marketing and brand management teams on how to address local cultural differences in order to enhance the effectiveness, relevance, and consistency of MTN's brand identity and brand experience across diverse African markets

1.6 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Hofstede's cultural theory (2011), Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism (1992), and the Brand Experience Model proposed by Brakus et al. (2009) as shown in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1. 1 Theoretical Framework



Based on the concept that culture is central to the study, these theories provide a key framework for the development of this study. Moreover, they offer perspectives on how brand experience is evaluated in relation to cultural differences on MTN's brand identity.

1.6.1 Hofstede's Theory on Culture

Hofstede's model (2011) provides a systematic way to compare national cultures across dimensions such as power distance, individualism–collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation. The framework is widely used in international marketing to explain how cultural values influence consumer expectations and brand perceptions (Soares, Farhangmehr & Shoham, 2007). This supports analysis of how South African, Ghanaian, and Cameroonian cultural values may shape interpretations of MTN's brand.

1.6.2 Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism (1992)

Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism (1992) outlines six dimensions: physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image, that explain how brands communicate their identity. The model is widely applied to analyse how brands create meaning across markets (Jimenez & Tulabut, 2022). It provides a

structured lens for exploring how MTN expresses its brand identity, and how this identity is interpreted across culturally different consumer groups.

1.6.3 Brakus et al (2009) Brand Experience Model

Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello (2009) conceptualise brand experience as a multidimensional construct comprising sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural responses. This framework is particularly useful for telecommunications brands, whose consumer interactions are shaped by both emotional and functional touchpoints. It supports analysis of how MTN's brand experience varies across cultural contexts.

Together, these frameworks provide the conceptual foundation for this study. The full theoretical detail is presented in Chapter 2.

1.7 Study Setting

This study was conducted across three African markets in which MTN operates; SA, Ghana, and Cameroon. These countries were purposively selected because they represent culturally distinct contexts within MTN's footprint, allowing for a comparative exploration of how cultural dynamics influence consumer perceptions of brand identity and brand experience. SA is characterised by its cultural heterogeneity, with eleven official languages and diverse ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic groups (South African History Online, 2014). As one of MTN's most mature markets, SA offers valuable insights into brand perceptions within a highly competitive and technologically advanced telecommunications environment (MTN, 2024).

Ghana, a culturally cohesive yet diverse West African nation, presents a different consumer landscape. With strong communal values, linguistic diversity, and a rapidly expanding digital economy, Ghana presents a context where cultural norms, collective identity, and social cohesion significantly influence consumer-brand interactions (Takyi et al., 2025). MTN Ghana holds a dominant market share, making it an appropriate site for examining how a well-established brand aligns its identity within a culturally grounded society (Appiah, 2022; Appiah and Holloway, 2023). Cameroon, a Central African country with significant ethnic, linguistic, and regional diversity, further enriches the comparative context

(Achanga and Teko, 2024). Cameroon serves as an example of a market where cultural complexity and regional distinctions can significantly influence how consumers interpret brand messages and engage with brand experiences (Felix, Ndeme Richard and Godlove Nkemkiafu, 2017; Barczyk, Rarick, and Winter, 2021). MTN is a key telecommunications provider in this market, operating within a socio-cultural environment where mobile technologies are central to communication and economic participation (Lawton, 2025).

Collectively, studying these three settings enables the research to capture culturally grounded nuances in consumer perceptions across varied socio-cultural landscapes. This comparative perspective strengthens the study's aim to understand how multinational brands can maintain a coherent brand identity while adapting to cultural specificities across diverse African markets.

1.8 Research Methodology

The methodological orientation of this study was informed by the need to generate rich, context-specific insights into how cultural dynamics shape consumer perceptions of MTN's brand identity in South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon. As Khanday and Khanam (2023) note, a research methodology provides a structured approach through which a study is designed, implemented, and aligned with its objectives. In line with this view, this research adopted a qualitative, interpretivist stance, which is suitable for exploring the subjective meanings embedded within cultural contexts (Creswell, 2009; Ebohon, Ganiyu, & Ajayi, 2021).

A qualitative research approach enabled the study to explore how individuals construct and interpret their brand experiences (Creswell, 2009). The interpretivist paradigm provided the philosophical foundation for understanding consumer perceptions from their own viewpoints (Ugwu, Ekere, & Onoh, 2021). Given the exploratory nature of the research problem, an exploratory research design was considered suitable for examining a phenomenon that remains under-investigated (Singh, 2021).

Purposive sampling was used to identify MTN consumers across the three markets based on predetermined criteria relating to their engagement with the brand, as recommended for qualitative inquiries that prioritise depth over

representativeness (Bhardwaj, 2019; Khan et al., 2023). Semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary data collection tool because they allow participants to express their perspectives openly while providing a structured framework to guide the discussion (Sekaran and Bougie, 2020). Data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes related to cultural influences and brand identity. Thematic analysis is widely recognised for its ability to generate meaningful interpretations from qualitative data (Naeem et al., 2023).

1.9 Significance of the study

This study contributes to understanding how cultural differences influence brand meaning within African telecommunications markets which is an area that is underexplored academically. Practically, the findings offer MTN and similar companies insights for refining brand identity and enhancing customer experience in culturally diverse markets. The research also highlights how multinational brands can balance global brand consistency with culturally aligned local strategies.

1.10 Delimitations

This study focuses on three MTN markets, South Africa, Ghana and Cameroon. It includes only active MTN customers aged 25–44 and uses qualitative interviews. The study does not examine internal MTN operations, other telecommunications providers or quantitative measures of brand performance.

1.11 Assumptions

It is assumed that participants provide honest, accurate reflections of their perceptions and experiences. It is also assumed that cultural identity influences brand interpretation and that the selected participants adequately represent active MTN users in each market.

1.12 Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the institution, and informed consent, confidentiality and voluntary participation were upheld throughout the study. Full ethical procedures are detailed in Chapter 3.

1.10 Chapters Outlines

Chapter One introduces the research topic, outlines the background, presents the problem statement, objectives, research questions, and the significance of the study, and provides an overview of the study's structure.

Chapter two reviews relevant literature, theories and frameworks, including Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism and Brakus *et al* Brand Experience model, to build a foundation for understanding the relationship between culture and branding.

Chapter Three details the qualitative and exploratory research approach, including sampling strategies, population, data collection methods, and ethical considerations, to ensure a rigorous and systematic investigation of the study.

Chapter Four presents the study's findings, analysing qualitative data to identify patterns and themes related to cultural influences on MTN's brand experience and identity in South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon.

Chapter five interprets the findings in relation to the research objectives and theoretical frameworks, highlighting key insights, challenges, and implications for MTN's branding strategies in culturally diverse contexts. This chapter also summarises the study's key findings, revisits the research objectives, and offers practical recommendations for enhancing MTN's brand identity and brand experience across different African markets. Includes suggestions for future research. This section also outlines recommended insights and best practices for managers and marketers operating across different markets.

1.11 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study aims to explore the influence of cultural differences on brand identity and brand experience in MTN's key African markets, SA, Ghana, and Cameroon. Existing literature emphasises the critical role of cultural context in shaping consumers' perceptions of brand identity and their interactions with brands, with frameworks such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory and cross-cultural consumer behaviour models highlighting the variability of brand meaning across different societies. Given the complexity and subjectivity inherent

in cultural interpretations, this study employed a qualitative, exploratory methodology, utilising semi-structured interviews to gather detailed insights from consumers and identify emergent themes across the three markets. This approach seeks to enhance understanding of how cultural factors influence brand consistency and resonance in diverse African contexts, ultimately contributing to the development of more culturally attuned branding strategies for MTN across the continent.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter One, this study provides an overview and background on MTN's operational presence and the company's African focus, setting the foundation for

understanding the need for cross-cultural marketing and how cultural differences influence brand identity and brand experience.

The world has become increasingly interconnected yet culturally fragmented, and as a result, global brands encounter the complex challenge of maintaining a coherent identity while remaining locally relevant (Okonkwo *et al.*, 2023:69). This challenge is particularly evident in regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, where cultural diversity is both extensive and deeply rooted in consumer perspectives, communication styles, and social norms. Yeboah-Banin and Quaye (202:1-2) acknowledge that despite the growing strategic importance of Africa as a growth frontier for multinational brands, scholarly engagement with how cultural diversity affects brand identity and brand experience within African contexts remains limited. Most of the existing literature either focuses on product-based industries or are concentrated in Asian or Western markets, such as studies by several authors (Marito, Mulyana, Rinandiyana and Taufiq, 2019; Lugina, Rudiana, Budiman and Taufiq, 2019; Kushwah, Shree, Rezaei and Sagar, 2020; Rodrigues, Brandão, Billore and Oda, 2024; Sahem, 2023; Zhou, 202); Zhou, He, Xie and Mehmood, 2024), to list but a few, leaving a gap in understanding how culture shapes brand dynamics in Africa's service-led sectors such as telecommunications.

This literature review examines the concepts of culture, brand identity, and brand experience, as well as the influence of culture on brand identity and brand experience. Leveraging insights from international marketing and cross-cultural marketing studies to uncover the theoretical foundations relating to cultural influences on brand identity and brand experience. This chapter seeks to facilitate an analysis of how brand marketing is perceived and experienced across three culturally diverse African markets: South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon.

2.2 Culture

Culture refers to human communities, their individuals, social organisations, and their economic and political systems (Solomon *et al.*, 2019). As Naik and Sharma (2021: 228) explain, the culture of a region is typically characterised by its language, social norms, cuisine, geography, ethnic composition, and social beliefs, among other factors. The authors further note that these elements shape

the consumer's mindset and are deeply ingrained in their psychology, thereby influencing many of the decisions that consumers make. Their loyalty or preference towards a brand, product, or service is often affected by cultural influences (Naik & Sharma, 2021). Expanding on this perspective, Théophile and Nassè (2023:911) describe culture as comprising the shared ideas, customs, norms, attitudes, values, and behaviours characteristic of a particular group or society, emphasising that these elements can be leveraged and reflected in organisational marketing and management practices. Therefore, marketing and management practices are often tailored to align with local cultural norms and contexts.

Building on the understanding of culture and its role in marketing, Hua (2024:2) argues that in today's global marketplace, it is essential for organisations to tailor their marketing strategies to the cultural context of different markets. The author emphasises that recognising and addressing cultural differences is critical for operating effectively in diverse environments. Such culturally informed strategies allow firms to gain deeper insights into local consumer needs, thereby strengthening brand recognition and supporting successful market expansion (Hua, 2024:2).

2.2.1 Hofstede's Framework for Understanding Culture

Based on the concept that culture is central to the study, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory (2011) serves as a key framework in the development of this study. According to Soares, Farhangmehr, and Shoham (2007:280), Hofstede's framework is widely utilised in marketing and management studies. Soares *et al.* (2007:280) report that Hofstede analysed data from 116,000 questionnaires completed by over 60,000 respondents across seventy countries (Hofstede, 1984, 1991, 2001). Hofstede identified five cultural dimensions, assigned indices to nations, and associated these dimensions with demographic, geographic, economic, and political factors. This makes his framework unmatched by others in terms of comprehensiveness. It is used to develop hypotheses for cross-cultural studies and serves as the standard in international marketing research. Hofstede's dimensions serve as a basis for comparing other cultural approaches. Udeh et.al. (2023:657) reinforce their findings, highlighting the significance of cultural dimensions in international marketing as proposed by Hofstede. These

dimensions include power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint.

Hofstede's (2011) cultural dimensions provide a framework for understanding how societies differ in their values and behavioural orientations. Power distance refers to the extent to which individuals with less power accept and expect unequal distributions of power within a society. Individualism versus collectivism distinguishes between societies that prioritise personal autonomy and immediate family responsibilities and those that emphasise group cohesion and collective identity. The masculinity–femininity dimension contrasts cultures that value achievement, assertiveness, competition, and material success with those that prioritise cooperation, modesty, care for the vulnerable, and quality of life. Uncertainty avoidance reflects the degree to which members of a society feel uncomfortable with ambiguity and unpredictability, influencing whether they attempt to control future outcomes or accept uncertainty as part of life. Long-term orientation captures how societies balance the preservation of cultural traditions with the need to address current and future challenges, with future-oriented cultures valuing pragmatism, thrift, and education. Ultimately, the distinction between indulgence and restraint differentiates societies that freely allow the gratification of basic human desires from those that regulate such gratification through strict social norms.

While Hofstede's framework remains one of the most widely used tools for assessing cultural variation, scholars differ in their interpretations of its applicability. Many authors (Soares et al., 2007; Udeh et al., 2023) agree that the model offers a useful starting point for understanding cross-cultural differences in consumer behaviour, particularly in developing-country contexts where cultural norms strongly influence social interaction and organisational behaviour. However, critics such as McSweeney (2002) argue that the model oversimplifies national cultures and relies heavily on outdated data. Despite these critiques, several studies conducted in African and other emerging markets continue to apply Hofstede's dimensions because they offer a practical framework for comparing cultural tendencies across countries with limited empirical datasets.

This balance of support and limitation suggests that the model is appropriate for the current study, provided it is used interpretively rather than deterministically.

2.2.1.1 A comparison of South Africa and Ghana across Hofstede's five cultural dimensions

The following comparative scores for South Africa and Ghana were drawn from Hofstede Insights' Cultural Dimensions Tool (2025), which provides numerical indices for each dimension based on Hofstede's cross-national research. To ensure clarity, each dimension is introduced, the comparative scores are explained, and their relevance to cross-cultural branding is articulated before presenting the analysis.

a) Power Distance (SA 49 vs Ghana 80)

According to Rachwal-Mueller and Fedotova (2024:136), power distance refers to the extent to which a society accepts and is comfortable with hierarchical structures of authority. Based on the scores from the cultural index above, Ghana demonstrates a significantly higher Power Distance compared to SA, signifying a more hierarchical society where inequalities are accepted, and authority is seldom questioned. Awaah (2022:4) asserts that Ghanaian indigenous culture is characterised by a relatively high-power distance, a collectivist orientation, and an emphasis on respect for elders. Conversely, in cultures with lower power distance, such as SA, greater trust across hierarchies is fostered, encouraging creativity and idea generation (Chabika, van Schalkwyk, van Rensburg, & Müller, 2024:90).

b) Individualism vs Collectivism (SA 65 vs Ghana 15)

South Africa is moderately individualistic, indicating a society where personal achievement and autonomy are valued. Ghana's strongly collectivist culture prioritises group affiliation and loyalty. Awaah (2022: 4) explains that in individualistic societies, people are considered autonomous and focus on independence, self-sufficiency, and "I.", often valuing self-esteem and personal expression. In contrast, Awaah (2022: 4) argues that collectivist cultures view people as interdependent, emphasise group harmony, social rules, and think in terms of "we."

c) Masculinity vs Femininity (SA 63 vs Ghana 40)

South Africa has a score of 63 on this dimension, indicating a higher degree of masculinity compared to Ghana. According to Rodolaki, Barakos and HitchIn (2023:4), in societies with higher masculinity scores, there is a greater emphasis on work commitment, and managers tend to display assertiveness and decisiveness.

d) Uncertainty Avoidance (SA 49 vs Ghana 65)

Ghana's higher score reflects a pronounced preference for structure, rules, and predictability, compared to South Africa. According to Blankson, Iyer, Owusu-Frimpong, Nwankwo and Hinson (2020:629), cultures characterised by uncertainty avoidance tend to favour structured environments and consistent routines, demonstrating a preference for predictability and stability. In contrast, cultures with higher acceptance of uncertainty respond positively to change and new opportunities, exhibiting greater tolerance for ambiguity and indefinite situations.

e) Long-Term Orientation (SA 34 vs Ghana: 16)

Both countries exhibit low scores, with Ghana scoring notably lower. According to Żemojtel-Piotrowska and Piotrowski (2023:3), this dimension concerns whether individuals focus on the present, future, or past. Żemojtel-Piotrowska and Piotrowski (2023:3) stated that long-term orientation is associated with perseverance, thrift, status-based relationships, and a sense of shame. In contrast, short-term orientation is linked to tradition, consumption, generosity, face-saving, and national pride.

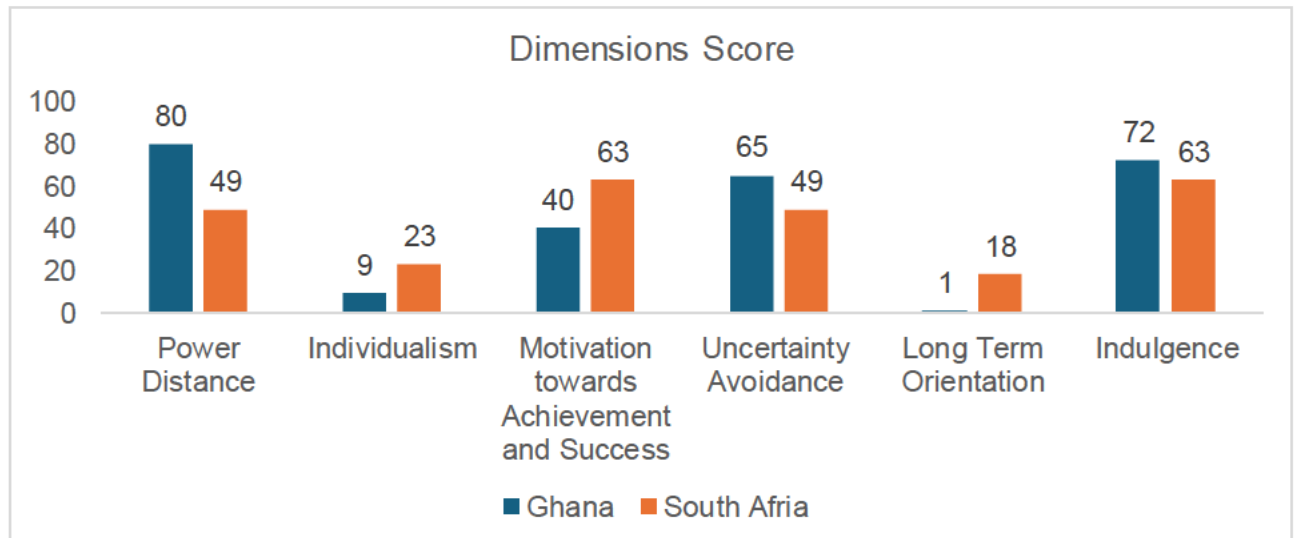
f) Indulgence vs Restraint (SA 63 vs Ghana 72)

Both countries fall within the indulgent range, with Ghana being slightly more so. According to van Pinxteren (2020:7), indulgent cultures value freedom, pleasure, and personal desires, making friendships and enjoyment central to their values. In contrast, restrained cultures emphasise duty and view life as challenging, with less focus on individual freedom (van Pinxteren, 2020:72).

A comparison of the cultural index scores of South Africa and Ghana provides an informed understanding of the cultural similarities and differences between these

countries. Cameroon is not included in Hofstede's index dataset. The index scores for South Africa and Ghana were obtained from Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Tool (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. 1 A comparison of South Africa and Ghana across Hofstede's five cultural dimensions



Source: Hofstede Insights and Cultural Tool (2025)

2.2.2 Cameroon's Cultural Dimensions

Barczyk et al. (2021:14) indicate that due to differences in language and economic status among its people, a comprehensive research-based assessment of Cameroonian culture is challenging. However, some insights into a subset of the country's culture relevant for international business can be drawn, which closely resemble the cultural findings of the Hofstede studies, Barczyk et al. (2021:14). Based on this study, the country's cultural orientation can be summarised as follows, as adopted from Barczyk et al. (2021:15-16) and other scholars.

2.2.2.1 Power Distance (intermediate with a tendency to high)

In Cameroon, elders are respected, and children care for their ageing parents. Companies typically have a single leader, and status symbols like cars and watches are important indicators of social standing (Djamen, Georges and Pernin, 2020:13).

2.2.2.2 Individualism vs Collectivism (Strongly Collectivistic)

According to Żemojtel-Piotrowska and Piotrowski (2023:2), this dimension describes the integration between individuals and primary groups. In collectivist

societies such as Cameroon, people prefer close community bonds, rely more on others for decisions, expect mutual care, and display strong loyalty to their group (Žemojtel-Piotrowska and Piotrowski, 2023:2).

2.2.2.3 Masculinity vs Femininity (Somewhat Feminine)

According to Žemojtel-Piotrowska and Piotrowski (2023:3), this dimension refers to the differences in emotional roles by gender. In feminine cultures like Cameroon, both men and women show similar traits and value modesty and social care (Žemojtel-Piotrowska & Piotrowski, 2023:3).

2.2.2.4 Uncertainty Avoidance (High)

In Cameroon, as in other high uncertainty avoidance societies, strict bureaucracy and rules make business safer and require careful planning and structure (Djamen et al., 2020:14).

2.2.2.5 Long-Term Orientation (Short-Term Oriented)

In Cameroon, short-term orientation is evident in an emphasis on tradition, consumption, generosity, face-saving, and strong national pride (Piotrowska & Piotrowski, 2023:3).

2.2.2.6 Indulgence vs Restraint (Restrained)

According to Žemojtel-Piotrowska and Piotrowski (2023:4), this dimension concerns how societies address human needs for enjoyment. Indulgent cultures typically place less emphasis on order, encourage sports, express more positive emotions, report higher levels of happiness, and, in wealthy contexts, have higher obesity rates and birth rates (Žemojtel-Piotrowska & Piotrowski, 2023:3). In contrast, restrained societies display the opposite patterns.

This comparative analysis of the three countries based on Hofstede's Cultural dimensions highlights how the cultural differences in SA, Ghana, and Cameroon uniquely influence consumer brand relationships. Therefore, brand management strategies must be tailored to the cultural context of each specific market, appreciating that what is persuasive and credible in one region may not have the same impact in another.

2.3 International Marketing

International marketing refers to the promotion and sale of products or services across multiple countries or regions. It involves creating marketing strategies that consider cultural, social, economic, and political differences between countries, and tailoring products and messages to meet the needs of various target groups (Raj & Gupta, 2023:144). Nguyen, Phan, and Dang (2020:135) describe international marketing as the conduct of business activities involving planning, pricing, promoting, and distributing a line of goods and services to customers or users in multiple countries to generate a profit. Nguyen et al. (2020:135) point out that the primary distinction between domestic marketing and international marketing lies in the fact that the latter is conducted across multiple countries. Raj and Gupta (2023:144) state that international marketing encompasses knowledge of global markets, consumer behaviour, and local regulations, as well as efficient communication and cooperation with partners and stakeholders across different regions. Moreover, the authors assert that the primary objective of international marketing is to expand a company's market reach and increase sales and revenue by entering new markets and attracting additional customer segments. However, entering new markets means navigating cross-cultural marketing challenges. Schriefer (2016) explained that cross-cultural studies compare different cultures across different countries.

Aissa and Ahmed (2024:225) found that international marketing activity requires alignment with the social environment of consumers and the culture of foreign societies. Furthermore, Udeh, Iheremeze, Abdul, Daraojimba and Oke (2023:656) highlight that in the context of international commerce, multicultural marketing exemplifies the delicate balance between cultural sensitivity and strategic business acumen. To effectively implement a multicultural marketing strategy, it is essential to acknowledge, understand, and appreciate the diversity in cultural norms. Additionally, multicultural marketing recognises the differences in perception, motives, and beliefs among consumers from different cultural backgrounds (Vaddadi and Thandava 2019). Vaddadi and Thandava (2019:74) acknowledge that for an effective multicultural marketing strategy, it is essential to identify, understand, and respect these cultural differences.

In addition to multi-cultural marketing, organisations conducting business across international borders must effectively address cross-cultural marketing challenges (Gharib, 2025). According to Gharib (2025), the implementation of cross-cultural strategies is vital for companies aiming to succeed in the global marketplace. Gharib (2025) is of the view that, as companies expand into new markets, they encounter the complexities associated with diverse cultural environments. To this effect, Sahem (2023:172) recommends that businesses should respect consumers' cultural rights and understand global market dynamics, noting that success in cross-cultural markets requires a marketing mix tailored to the cultural preferences and expectations of target consumers.

2.4 Role of Culture in International Brand Marketing

Considering the role played by culture in international marketing, Udeh, Iheremeze, Abdul, Daraojimba, and Oke (2023:656) assert that in the context of international commerce, multicultural marketing exemplifies the delicate balance between cultural sensitivity and strategic business acumen. Udeh et al. (2023:657) identified that the dynamics of multicultural marketing require a nuanced understanding and careful utilisation of cultural factors that affect consumer behaviour. Furthermore, the scope of multicultural marketing goes beyond simply acknowledging different ethnic groups within a target market. Udeh et al. (2023:657) emphasise the importance of comprehensively understanding the cultural, social, and psychological factors that shape consumer identities and preferences.

Further to the issue of multicultural marketing as discussed above, businesses like MTN, which operate in different countries, must navigate cross-cultural marketing. According to KLR Agency (2022), cross-cultural marketing is an approach that considers the differences in cultural norms and values across countries and regions, with the objective of adjusting messages, products, and services for various audiences. It involves modifying these elements to align with diverse cultural contexts, thereby engaging global audiences more efficiently. Sahem (2023:172) recommends that businesses respect consumers' cultural rights and understand global market dynamics. According to Sahem (2023:172), success in cross-cultural markets requires a marketing mix tailored to the cultural preferences and expectations of target consumers.

In Asia, cultural differences can significantly impact the perception and acceptance of products and services across various markets (Raj and Gupta, 2023:145). In China, it is customary to give gifts to friends and family on special occasions such as birthdays and holidays. This practice may influence companies' marketing strategies toward Chinese consumers, who are more inclined to buy products associated with these opportunities (Raj & Gupta, 2023:145). Moreover, cultural differences can influence how businesses perceive their customers. In Japan, it is customary to bow when greeting someone, whereas this gesture may not be appropriate in some other countries. This difference can influence how companies approach marketing to Japanese consumers (Raj & Gupta, 2023:145). Examining advertising and public relations in Asian cultures reveals that cultural dimensions have significant implications. For instance, in societies characterised by high power distance, such as many East Asian countries, advertising and public relations strategies often emphasise hierarchical structures and deference to authority figures (Netayavichit & Tantaraarj, 2024: 149). Conversely, in societies with low power distance, such as parts of Southeast Asia, communication may be more egalitarian and focused on building relationships rather than emphasising authority (Netayavichit & Tantaraarj, 2024:150).

Comparably, Udeh et al. (2023:657) note that in African countries, the multicultural marketing landscape is more pronounced due to its diverse cultures, languages, and traditions, creating unique challenges and opportunities for marketers. To support their argument, they cited Johnson, Elliott, and Grier (2010), emphasising the importance of multicultural advertising in emerging consumer markets, where marketing success depends on culturally resonant messages.

Across the literature, there is broad agreement that culture plays a decisive role in shaping consumer responses to international marketing and branding efforts (Aissa & Ahmed, 2024; Vaddadi & Thandava, 2019). Scholars consistently emphasise the need for cultural sensitivity when designing brand messages for diverse markets. However, there are differing views regarding how much adaptation is necessary. For instance, Liu (2023) maintains that global brands can successfully maintain highly standardised strategies, while Rodrigues et al. (2024)

argue that localisation is essential in culturally heterogeneous environments, especially in emerging markets where cultural norms strongly shape product relevance. These contrasting positions highlight the ongoing debate about balancing global brand coherence with local responsiveness; a tension particularly relevant to MTN as a Pan-African telecommunications brand.

2.4.1 Cross-cultural Marketing in International Marketing

Cross-cultural marketing has become an increasingly significant area within contemporary marketing scholarship, recognised for its role in understanding consumer behaviour across diverse cultural contexts. Li (2024:249) emphasises its importance in marketing research, while Sokolova (2023:148) notes that it has emerged as a distinct and evolving field within international marketing and cultural studies. Vaddadi and Thandava (2019:74) further define cross-cultural or “ethnic” marketing as a strategic approach aimed at engaging consumers whose cultural backgrounds differ from that of the marketer across key dimensions such as language, religion, social norms, values, education, and lifestyle. Together, these perspectives emphasise the increasing significance of cross-cultural marketing in navigating culturally diverse markets.

Effective cross-cultural marketing requires marketers to understand various cultural dimensions and be sensitive to differences among groups (Sahem, 2023:172). Sokolova (2023:148) further notes that cross-cultural marketing focuses on cultural factors in product, brand, and service marketing, aiming to address communication challenges across cultures, including product design, brand perception, language use, and copywriting. Similarly, Aissa and Ahmed (2024:225) noted that brands that acknowledge and respect local customs, languages, and values are more likely to establish meaningful connections and long-term loyalty. These dimensions provide marketers with a framework for understanding the cultural differences that influence marketing strategies, which were discussed in detail in the theoretical frameworks section of this study.

Sahem (2023:173) suggests that culture shapes individual and collective identity, social norms, and behavioural patterns through shared symbols and values. Despite this significance, the cultural dimension is frequently overlooked within marketing research. To address this gap, Sahem (2023:174) identifies cross-

cultural marketing as a critical approach for integrating cultural variability into strategic decision-making, enabling brands to balance global consistency with local relevance while promoting diversity and effective communication across cultural contexts.

According to Garg (2023:2166-2172), argues that cultural differences significantly influence marketing effectiveness and can be addressed through strategies such as conducting thorough cultural research and market segmentation, engage in product adaptation and localisation, provide cultural sensitivity training, collaborate with local partners or experts to tailor communication and advertising approaches accordingly, and adjust their distribution and pricing strategies to align with the unique characteristics and preferences of each market. Salam (2020:157) reports that marketing has shifted from focusing on product benefits and price to emphasising relationships and engagement. Additionally, the author elaborates that consumers today do not merely purchase goods and services; they also consider the experience associated with acquiring the product (Salam, 2020:157). In the context of globalisation and digitalisation, Li (2014:249) found that enterprises need to compete in the international market, and cultural differences pose a serious challenge to global marketing. Similarly, Harti and Rijal (2024:712) found that the dynamism of cross-cultural interactions presents both opportunities and challenges for marketers, increasing academic interest and scholarly contributions to the discourse.

2.4.2 Cross-Cultural Consumption

Cross-cultural consumption reflects the increasing complexity of consumer identities and preferences in a globalised world. As nations become more ethnically and culturally diverse due to migration, trade liberalisation, and digital exposure, the lines between domestic and foreign consumption patterns have blurred. Sheth (2021:9) states that cross-cultural consumption is becoming a central topic in consumer behaviour research due to global product mobility and the spread of cultural values via social media, e-commerce, music, and entertainment. Furthermore, Sheth (2021) explains that the interest in cross-cultural consumption is particularly relevant in African markets, where local traditions, pan-African influences, and global brand narratives converge to form a dynamic cultural marketplace. Similarly, Balasubramanian (2024:121) found that

examining customer demographics revealed information about the varied consumer base participating in cross-cultural marketing. Additionally, analysing factors affecting consumer perceptions identified the elements that contribute to interactions with cross-cultural products (Balasubramanian, 2024:121).

Limbad and Patel (2021:1) observed that consumers in developing countries tend to favour local brands with a strong brand reputation over products from foreign markets. Moreover, this preference is primarily driven by ethnocentric consumers who wish to support their national economy and promote local producers by choosing domestically manufactured goods over imported alternatives (Limbad and Patel, 2021:2). Such patterns reinforce the need for culturally attuned and locally responsive marketing strategies in diverse global markets.

2.4.3 Cultural factors that influence consumer choices

Solomon, Hogg, Askegaard and Bamossy (2019:511) emphasise that culture is essential for understanding consumer behaviour and can be seen as a society's collective memory, encompassing shared meanings, rituals, norms, and traditions. Extending this perspective, Sheth's (2021) study on cultural differences and their influence on brand identity and brand experience across MTN's African markets identified seven emerging areas of consumer behaviour research: user experiences, mindful consumption, shared consumption, cross-cultural consumption, low-income consumers, the consumption of free goods, and digital-first approaches. These insights highlight the evolving and culturally embedded nature of consumer behaviour in contemporary markets.

Rachwal-Mueller and Fedotova (2024) suggest that researchers have identified various cultural elements that influence consumer choices, emphasising the importance of understanding these factors for academics and practitioners seeking success in global markets. The following studies discuss cultural aspects, diversity and sensitivity in international marketing, in relation to consumer behaviour.

A study by Park and McMillan (2017:635) conducted in the USA and South Korea, evaluating cultural differences in online community motivations, confirmed that communities (different groups of families, villages, societies and nations) each

have distinct characteristics that set them apart from others. For instance, every family has its own traditions, and each country has unique customs and cultural practices. Park and McMillan (2017:635) explain that community members have shaped these unique qualities over time through shared experiences and agreed behaviours, noting that this uniqueness is synonymous with culture. This study confirms and necessitates the need to acknowledge and understand cultural differences and diversity in international marketing. Adding to this view, Rachwal-Mueller and Fedotova (2024:167) revealed that cultural values can predict environmentally responsible consumer choices, underscoring the significance of comprehending value-driven behaviours within distinct cultural settings (Roccas & Sagiv, 2019).

Meena (2023) noted that globalisation, homogenisation, and cultural diversity interact to influence consumer preferences and, thus, impact purchasing decisions in different ways. Adding on this view about cultural diversity, Khumalo and Zondo (2024:129) highlight that cultural diversity has consistently been a significant area of interest for both businesses and researchers over the years. They additionally state that cultural diversity has gradually increased in organisations due to globalisation. This indicates that individuals participate in the global economy, competing within an international framework. Similarly, Park and McMillan (2017) and Mehdi (2021) add that cultural diversity is acknowledged when variations in race, ethnicity, language, religion, and sexual orientation are represented within a community. Adding to this, Solomon et al. (2019:509-590) identified key cultural components, including education and social organisation, which influence consumer preferences and behaviours. These elements influence both individual purchasing decisions and collective consumption patterns, offering a comprehensive understanding of how culture affects markets worldwide. These are discussed next in the context of international marketing.

2.4.3.1 Language

Bringing the findings from Park and McMillan (2017), Khumalo and Zondo (2024) and Mehdi (2021), and Raj and Gupta (2023) made the following findings: that one of the critical cultural differences impacting international marketing strategies is language, articulating that language barriers pose significant challenges for companies in effectively conveying their brand message, product features, and

benefits to audiences across various countries. Raj and Gupta (2023) also noted that marketing language impacts consumer behaviour, advertising strategies, time perception, and product acceptance across markets. De Mooij (2021) emphasised the significance of language and communication styles, noting that language influences consumers' perceptions of brands and marketing messages. De Mooij's research indicates that advertising should be adapted both linguistically and culturally to align with local markets, suggesting that language is a crucial aspect of cultural influence on consumer behaviour.

2.4.3.2 Race

Forbes-Bell, Bardey, and Fagan (2019:11) found that Black participants were more likely to buy perfume and spend more when advertisements featured Black models, demonstrating the benefits of ethnic target marketing. This study indicates that brands miss both engagement and revenue opportunities by not representing ethnic minorities in their advertisements (Forbes-Bell et al., 2019:11). A study by Lewin, Wang and Pratap (2023:83) found that in product advertisements, changes in racial composition influenced White consumers' purchase intentions under specific priming conditions but did not significantly impact their attitudes toward the advertisement or brand. In contrast, for social advocacy advertisements, White participants generally reported more positive perceptions and purchase intentions when the advertisements featured racially diverse or all-Black model compositions (Lewin et al., 2023:83).

2.4.3.3 Ethnicity

According to Licsandru and Cui (2019:262), ethnic marketing communications carry socio-cultural significance, shaping and reinforcing social norms. When used effectively, they can affirm minority identities and acknowledge audiences both as consumers and as members of their ethnic group. As noted by Tanner, Kirkwood and Tanner (2019:116), target marketing strategies frequently consider the preferences of various ethnic groups when selecting products and brands. Research has shown, however, that not all consumers respond positively to ethnically targeted marketing efforts, highlighting the need for organisations to adjust their approaches by integrating insights from diverse perspectives (Tanner et al., 2019:116).

2.4.3.4 Religion

According to Mozammel and Haan (2023:6), religious and cultural beliefs have a strong influence on business practices and marketing in many Asian and Middle Eastern countries. Research by Daas (2019) found that Christian and Muslim values influence consumer behaviour and often guide consumers' choices, sometimes more than economic factors. This emphasises the significant impact of religion on consumption patterns, brand attitudes, ethical buying, and purchasing habits that align with religious practices and social organisations.

2.4.3.5 Sexual Orientation

According to Eisend and Hermann (2020:2), sexual orientation is defined as a persistent pattern of romantic or sexual attraction toward individuals of the opposite sex, the same sex, or both sexes. These patterns of attraction are classified as heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and asexuality. Eisend and Hermann (2020:15) found that homosexual consumers display stronger consumption-favouring traits and behaviours than heterosexual consumers, providing group identity and empowerment. Their beliefs and characteristics, rather than specific consumption patterns, set them apart and help mobilise their community. Additionally, a study by Liu, Patterson, Keller-Hamilton, Lee, Chrzan and Stevens (2023:8) revealed significant heterogeneity among sexual minoritised groups in their responses to various e-cigarette advertisement features. Specifically, these groups generally rated elements such as flavours, depictions of people, and e-liquid bottles as less appealing compared to heterosexual men (Liu et al., 2023:9).

2.4.4 Cultural Adaptation and Localisation in Cross-cultural Marketing

Balashola and Urupa (2024:4) argue that effective brand management in diverse cultural contexts requires adapting marketing strategies to local conditions. This involves addressing cultural specifics, language barriers, legal and ethical considerations, and thorough market research. Understanding and integrating these cultural differences enables companies to develop effective global branding strategies, foster a positive brand perception, and gain a competitive advantage.

Success in global branding depends on a brand's ability to adapt to cultural variations and nuances.

Rodrigues et al. (2024: 304) reinforce the argument made by Balashola and Urupa (2024), asserting that it is essential for brand managers and strategists to understand the integration of brands into consumers' lives and lifestyles. Rodrigues et al. (2024) found that while Apple and Samsung are global brands able to succeed with standardised marketing tactics, it is crucial to adapt strategies to local practices, sentiments, and consumption needs to define a brand's service offerings in regional markets. Rodrigues et al. (2024) illustrated this point by highlighting the significant increase in disposable income among Indian consumers over the past decade, coupled with extensive internet access across India, which has had a dramatic impact on the cell phone market.

In a recent study focusing on the telecommunications industry in Africa, Tejuoso, Okunnu, Odunmbaku, and Olajide (2024:57) observed that major telecommunications firms in Nigeria (MTN, Airtel, 9Mobile, and Glo) are predominantly multinational corporations, except for Glo, which Nigerian investors wholly own. Tejuoso et. al. (2024) argue that these companies often employ global advertising strategies, wherein campaigns developed for their home (foreign) markets are adapted for the Nigerian market by local agencies acting as localisation specialists, adding that this practice contributes to the dissemination of cultural imperialism. Interestingly, Tejuoso et al. (2024:57) maintain that a select group of local agencies undertakes the creative work for the adaptation; however, it seldom aligns with Nigeria's cultural aspects, such as language, characters, attire, setting, music, and other cultural values.

Liu (2023:7) explains that standardisation ensures brand consistency, simplifies operations, and reduces costs by unifying marketing strategies worldwide. This strengthens global brand identity, as seen with Apple and Coca-Cola, which use similar messaging and visuals to project universal appeal (Liu 2023). However, according to Liu (2023:7), localisation is essential in markets where culture shapes consumer choices and adapting campaigns to local customs, languages, and values helps brands connect more deeply with audiences. For example, McDonald's adjusts its menu and advertising, such as the McAloo Tikki in India

or Teriyaki Burgers in Japan to suit local preferences. Tailoring visuals, language, and tone further ensures brands are relatable and culturally sensitive (Liu, 2023:7).

Offering an alternative perspective, Zhou, He, Xie, and Mehmood (2024:14) discovered that it may be more effective to focus on enhancing existing emotional or aspirational associations rather than relying heavily on cultural integration. Additionally, managers can derive substantial benefits from incorporating cultural elements into their brand identity, as this approach can strengthen consumer connections and enhance brand equity.

2.5 Cultural Diversity and Branding

Park and McMillan (2017:635), in their comparative study of online community motivations in the United States and South Korea, highlight that individuals belong to multiple social groups, such as families, villages, societies, and nations, each characterised by distinct traditions, customs, and behavioural patterns. These unique attributes emerge over time through shared experiences and collectively accepted behaviours, forming what the authors identify as culture. This aligns with Hofstede's (1980) view of culture as the values, beliefs, norms, and behavioural patterns that shape a society, and with Hoecklin's (1995) definition of culture as a system of shared meanings learned over time. Consequently, each nation continually develops its own cumulative and distinctive cultural identity.

Khumalo and Zondo (2024:129) highlight that cultural diversity has consistently been a significant area of interest for both businesses and researchers over the years. Cultural diversity has gradually increased in organisations due to globalisation (Mehdi, 2021; Khumalo and Zondo, 2024). This indicates that individuals participate in the global economy, competing within an international framework. Mehdi (2021) suggests that cultural diversity is recognised when differences in race, ethnicity, language, nationality, religion, and sexual orientation are represented within a community. Khumalo and Zondo (2024) describe the concept of cultural diversity in terms of demographic principles, including race, language, nationality, and religion. According to Raj and Gupta (2023:144), one of the critical cultural differences impacting international marketing strategies is language, articulating that language barriers pose significant challenges for

companies in effectively conveying their brand message, product features, and benefits to audiences across various countries. The authors further note that marketing language impacts consumer behaviour, advertising strategies, time perception, and product acceptance across markets.

Raj and Gupta (2023:144) emphasise that cultural differences play a significant role in shaping consumer behaviour, with some cultures displaying stronger brand loyalty and others showing heightened price sensitivity. They further note that in many Asian contexts, consumers prioritise group identity and social cohesion over individualism and self-expression. Cultural variation also affects the effectiveness of marketing tactics: humour may resonate positively in certain cultures but be viewed as inappropriate in others, and while celebrity endorsements are effective in some markets, the use of local influencers and opinion leaders may yield greater impact elsewhere. This insight is particularly relevant in African markets, where local figures and community leaders often hold substantial cultural influence and credibility.

Much of the empirical work on cultural diversity and branding originates from developing countries, which makes it especially relevant to this study. For example, Lugina et al. (2019) demonstrate that cultural variation significantly influences brand identity formation in Indonesian markets, while Park and McMillan (2017) highlight how cultural norms shape online community behaviour in South Korea. Although these contexts differ from Africa, they share similarities with MTN's markets in terms of cultural heterogeneity, emerging-economy characteristics, and strong collectivist tendencies. Conversely, research from more developed settings (e.g., Rodrigues et al., 2023) tends to emphasise individualism and consumer autonomy, which may not fully reflect African market dynamics. This contrast underscores the importance of examining branding within African cultural contexts, where collective identity, community orientation, and socio-linguistic diversity play a more central role.

2.5.1 Brand Identity

Zwakala and Steenkamp (2023:3) assert that brand identity is a complex concept that has been explored by many scholars over the years. Keller (1998) defines brand identity as the strategic integration of image elements pertinent to the brand

that effectively communicate the product strategy. According to Li (2023:1489), brand identity represents a company's intangible assets, serving as visual markers that enable consumers to distinguish between different corporate brands and their products. Furthermore, the author states that brand identity helps customers recognise a business, and businesses can design unique brand identities to differentiate themselves from competitors. Brand identity comprises visual elements that businesses utilise to convey their values, mission, and product characteristics to consumers (Li, 2023:1490). Ianenkov, Stepanov, and Mironova, (2020:1) describe brand identity as the envisioned image of a brand guiding all marketing activities. These associations reflect the brand's value and the commitments made to consumers by the company members.

Building on the ideas above, Andrić, Oludag, and Saydam (2024:5) note that the brand identity prism is a framework that presents a visual representation of a brand's identity, outlining the main components that influence how consumers perceive the brand. It includes six elements that contribute to both the internal and external image of the brand (Andrić et al., 2024:5). These elements are physical characteristics (physique), personality, culture, relationships, reflection, and self-image (Andrić et al., 2024).

2.5.1.1 Elements of Brand Identity

Kapferer (2005) posits that the Brand Identity Prism provides brand managers with a comprehensive framework to assess their brand's strengths and weaknesses across six key dimensions, (Jimenez & Tulabut, 2022:20). According to Jimenez and Tulabut (2022:20), these dimensions: physical appearance, personality, culture, relationship, consumer reflection, and self-image, all contribute to shaping brand identity.

a) Physical appearance

According to Winata and Adiwaty (2024:3082), the physical dimension refers to a brand's visible features, such as packaging, product shape, logo, and colour, that shape customer perceptions. Since customers notice these aspects first, brands should carefully select and design them to attract their target audience (Winata & Adiwaty, 2024:3082).

b) Personality

According to Zwakala and Steenkamp (2023:5), brand personality is a key element of brand identity, giving brands human traits that may mirror customers. Brand building relies on two approaches: either consumers use brands to project their own identities ("the self is the hero") or they relate to brands as if the brand itself is the hero, fostering a connection between themselves and the brand.

c) Culture

According to Kovács (2020: 7-75), brand culture refers to the way a brand interprets its environment and defines its role within it. The culture associated with a brand can differentiate it, as the ideas and values communicated by the brand may influence consumer perceptions.

d) Relationship

According to Jimenez and Tulabut (2022:21), customer relationship management (CRM) is defined as a strategy that combines people, processes, and technology to strengthen customer relationships. A brand may symbolise a particular personal connection.

e) Consumer reflection

According to Kovács (2020: 77), each brand is associated with a typical consumer profile that may be interested in its products. Kovács (2020:77) adds that Kapferer's theory extends this idea by proposing that some individuals choose products to align themselves with a particular identity or image. In this view, the brand acts as a mirror, presenting an image that consumers may relate to or wish to emulate. Kapferer refers to this concept as the reflection of the brand (Kovács, 2020: 77).

f) Self-image

According to Zwakala and Steenkamp (2023:4), brand-self connection refers to the cognitive and emotional link between a brand and a customer's identity. Customers may associate with a brand to support personal goals, such as self-image or identity reflection (Zwakala & Steenkamp, 2023:4).

2.5.2 Culture and brand identity

Lugina, Budiman, Rudiana, and Taufiq (2019:120) posit that when creating a product's identity, marketers must consider the cultural differences within the country. According to Lugina et al. (2019:120), the relationship between brand identity and brand image can significantly affect brand awareness, indicating that brand identity has a substantial influence on brand awareness. Lugina et al. (2019:120) further emphasise that cultural awareness is crucial in developing brand identity based on cultural differences. They state that cultural awareness is a positive approach to handling the differences present within societal cultures. To this effect, Lugina et al (2019: 127) found that the higher the cultural differences in consumers in Indonesia, the higher the brand identity that was formed.

Furthermore, Raj and Gupta (2023:144) assert that cultural differences influence consumer behaviour, with some cultures exhibiting higher brand loyalty and others demonstrating greater price sensitivity. Raj and Gupta (2023:144) also indicated that in Asian cultures, consumers may be more focused on group identity and fit than individualism and self-expression (Raj & Gupta, 2023:144). Raj and Gupta (2023:144) observed that humour may be effective in certain cultures but could be inappropriate in others. They also noted that while using celebrities in advertising is suitable in some countries, it might be more advantageous to utilise local influencers and opinion leaders in other regions. This is relevant in the context of African marketing, where local celebrities and leaders are recognised for their influence. Finally, Balashova and Urupa (2024:2) found that cultural differences are a significant factor affecting brand perception across different regions of the world. The study demonstrates that cultural differences play a crucial role in shaping global branding strategies.

Kushwah, Shree, Rezaei, and Sagar (2019:491) found that culture significantly influences consumer perception of brand identity in Gulf countries and therefore cultural elements shape different perceptions and choices. While consistency helps a brand become global, adapting its identity to account for cultural differences can be an effective approach. Marketers can utilise culture-specific branding strategies to enhance the acceptability of their products among target consumers.

2.6 Brand Experience

2.6.1 Brand Experience

Salam (2020:158) defines brand experience as the sensations, emotions, cognitions, and behaviours triggered by a brand's design, identity, packaging, communications, and environments. Marhadi, Bakytbekovna, and Taralik (2024:150) describe brand experience as the combination of emotional, attitudinal, and cognitive responses triggered by brand-related factors, such as brand design, identity, packaging, and communications. Brand experience can result from various consumer actions, including searching for, shopping for, and consuming products or services associated with a brand. Thus, a range of behaviours, such as search, purchase, consumption, exploration, and product evaluation, contribute to the brand experience (Marhadi et al., 2024:150). Although the area of brand experience is still relatively new, it has gained prominence in the last decade.

Salam (2020:157) notes that marketing has shifted from focusing on product benefits and price to emphasising relationships and engagement. Additionally, consumers today do not merely purchase goods and services; instead, they consider the experience associated with acquiring the product. Within this evolving landscape, Salam (2020:158) asserts that brand experience is regarded as a relatively recent subject within established marketing concepts. In support of this view, Alijoyo and Puri (2023:1201) argue that a brand can establish a connection with consumers, thereby differentiating itself from other similar brands. They further explain that such experiences may arise either directly, through researching, purchasing, and using a product, or indirectly through exposure to brand messaging and advertising.

2.6.2 The correlation between brand experience and consumer behaviour

Marhadi et al. (2024:152) found that research across multiple countries consistently shows a positive link between brand experience and purchase intention. These studies specifically demonstrate that a favourable brand experience enhances customers' attitudes toward the brand, satisfaction, loyalty, and perceived value, which in turn results in increased purchase intentions. The studies found that factors such as willingness to buy or pay, brand personality,

multisensory marketing, and online reviews influence how brand experience affects purchase intention.

Marhadi et al. (2024:157) also found that consumer behaviour varies considerably across cultural contexts. In many Asian markets, consumers place strong emphasis on authenticity, sensory appeal, and emotional connection when engaging with brands. In India specifically, purchasing behaviour is shaped by a combination of deeply rooted cultural values, prevailing social norms, economic conditions, and technological advancements. In Malaysia, brand loyalty within the retail apparel sector has been shown to increase consumers' willingness to pay premium prices, generate positive word-of-mouth, and strengthen purchase intentions. European studies demonstrate that sensory stimulation, emotional experience, and brand design exert significant influence on purchase decisions, with findings from Portugal indicating that sensory stimulation enhances both brand equity and purchase likelihood. Similarly, in South Africa, the use of multi-sensory marketing has been found to positively affect brand attitudes, consumer experience, and purchase intent within the fashion industry.

2.6.3 Creating a powerful brand experience

Brand Experience Theory examines the dynamic interaction between brands and consumers, positing that consumers engage with brands across several dimensions: sensory experience (SE), affective experience (AE), intellectual experience (IE), behaviour, and relationships (Liu, Samsudin and Zou, 2025:7; Schmitt, 1999). Liu et al. (2025:7) argue that packaging is one of the key touchpoints of a brand, serving as the first point of contact for consumers and playing a crucial role in their decision-making process. Their findings suggest that packaging design plays a crucial role in experience-oriented markets, and therefore, brand touchpoints are key drivers of the brand experience. Consequently, identifying which touchpoints are most effective enables companies to design more targeted strategies.

The touchpoints for creating a powerful brand experience are discussed in detail below:

2.6.3.1 Sensory Experience (SE)

Zha, Foroudi, Melewar and Jin (2024:18) found that a positive sensory experience is now a key brand differentiator. Zha et al. (2024:18) argue that, in a Sensory Brand Experience environment, every store element is carefully designed to create the desired effect (Fürst et al. 2020), such as when entering a cafe or shop filled with branded sensory cues.

2.6.3.2 Affective Experience (AE)

According to Izzah, Sumartias, and Perbawasari (2023:433), consumers enter the affective experience stage, where their experiences in the brand setting (café in this case) become more meaningful. This stage influences consumers' states, emotions, and feelings due to the relationship established between brands and consumers (Izzah et al. 2023). The relationship is maintained by consistently providing elements such as excitement, enjoyment, relaxation, and fun. As a result, a strong and enduring connection is formed, which can contribute to brand loyalty (Izzah et al. 2023). Dias and Pina (2021) reported that intellectual expertise is associated with increased brand equity among consumers who display positive brand behaviour.

2.6.3.3 Brand Experience and Consumer Behaviour

Jain, Misra, Sharma, and Shukla (2021: 232) observe that consumers who are highly engaged with personalised advertisements are familiar with the brand, consider its offers, and can easily recognise and recall it. Complementing this view, Huang et al. (2023:38), brand touchpoint design involves creating and managing various points where brands interact with consumers, such as brand identity, packaging, advertising, social media, customer service, and retail environments, to boost brand awareness, enhance consumer preference, encourage purchases, and ultimately increase brand value and sales growth. Using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Huang et al. (2023) suggest that companies can gain a deeper understanding of consumers' needs and thus develop more targeted marketing strategies.

Murthy, Bhatnagar and Hussain (2025:134) indicate that brands proficient in touchpoint sensitivity facilitate more streamlined emotional experiences, which

enhance customers' emotional attachment and willingness to recommend. Murthy et al. (2025) add that by examining key constructs such as emotional mapping, touchpoint sensitivity, emotion orientation, personalised engagement, and empathetic communication, the significance of forming deeper emotional connections with customers can be enhanced. Murthy et al (2025) conclude that emotional touchpoints, which are moments within the customer journey where emotions are intensified, play a vital role in determining customer satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy.

2.6.4 Brand experience and culture

In a study by Rodrigues et al. (2023:293) on high-tech global brands Apple and Samsung in Japan, India, and Portugal, it was found that Perceived Brand Authenticity (PBE) stems from a mix of objective facts tied to culture, which presents a challenge for global brands to create both engaging and authentic experiences that foster brand love. Offering an alternative view, Grębosz-Krawczyk (2023:7) suggests that brand authenticity may originate from historical or geographical heritage. The concept of authenticity influences how consumers remember a brand, and maintaining this memory can impact consumer preferences and decisions (Grębosz-Krawczyk, 2023:7).

The study by Rodrigues et al. (2024) enhances our understanding of the impact of various dimensions of brand experience and brand authenticity on consumers through the lens of consumer culture theory, elucidating the formation of brand love as a socio-cultural phenomenon. Huang, Wang, and Young (2023:42) advise that in a highly competitive market, brands should utilise a visual design to influence consumers' emotions and decision-making processes while accommodating various cultural backgrounds. The study by Huang et al. (2023) offers practical insights for brand marketing, including establishing strong brand touchpoints, fostering deep emotional connections with consumers, and effectively managing cross-cultural communication. The discussion on these touchpoints follows.

The above insights directly inform the study's aim by highlighting the need to understand how cultural differences across South Africa, Ghana and Cameroon shape consumer interpretations of MTN's brand identity and brand experience.

The literature widely supports the view that brand experience is multidimensional and significantly shapes consumer satisfaction, loyalty, and engagement (Brakus et al., 2009; Salam, 2020). However, authors differ on which dimensions are most influential across cultural contexts. For instance, Marhadi et al. (2024) argue that affective experiences drive purchase intention more strongly in Asian markets, whereas Huang et al. (2023) highlight the predominant role of sensory cues in highly competitive consumer environments. In developing-country settings, particularly in Africa, brand experience often extends beyond functional elements to include emotional, communal, and culturally embedded interactions. This suggests that MTN's brand experience must be understood not only through universal frameworks but also within locally specific cultural realities.

2.7 Conclusion

In summary, the literature emphasises the crucial role of culture in shaping both brand identity and the brand experience. Drawing from Hofstede's cultural dimensions and region-specific studies, it is evident that cultural differences significantly influence how consumers interpret brand meaning, engage with brand narratives, and form emotional connections with brands. South Africa's individualistic and aspirational culture favours brand identities that emphasise innovation and personal empowerment, while Ghana's collectivist and hierarchical orientation supports brands that reflect communal values and social approval. Cameroon, although also collectivist, presents a distinct cultural profile with lower power distance, restrained indulgence, and a preference for modest, emotionally grounded brand communication.

Although originally developed within predominantly positivist traditions, these frameworks can be meaningfully applied within interpretivist research when used as sensitising concepts rather than rigid measurement tools. In this study, the frameworks guide interpretation rather than prediction. This aligns with interpretivism, which prioritises subjective meaning-making over generalisability.

Despite these insights, a significant gap remains in cross-cultural branding research focused on African markets, particularly in comparative intra-continental

studies. The existing literature often generalises African consumers or overlooks the nuances between different countries. This review highlights the necessity for context-specific and culturally nuanced branding strategies in diverse African markets, such as MTN's key operations in South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon. Addressing this gap will not only enhance academic understanding but also help multinational brands create consistent, yet locally resonant, brand experiences across culturally diverse environments.

Across the reviewed literature, limited empirical work exists on how cultural differences shape brand identity and brand experience within African telecommunications markets. Existing studies focus largely on Western, Asian or consumer-goods contexts, leaving an empirical and theoretical gap in understanding how multinational brands navigate intra-African cultural diversity. This study addresses this gap by offering a multi-country interpretive analysis of MTN's brand identity and brand experience across three culturally distinct African markets.

Overall, the literature demonstrates strong consensus on the importance of cultural context in shaping brand identity and brand experience, but authors differ in how they conceptualise the balance between global standardisation and local adaptation. Studies from developing and emerging markets tend to emphasise the need for culturally grounded strategies due to strong community values, linguistic diversity, and differentiated consumption patterns. In contrast, research from developed markets sometimes positions cultural influence as less dominant due to higher levels of individualism and market homogeneity. These differences reinforce the need for studies like the present one, which examine branding within African contexts where cultural influences remain highly pronounced and can meaningfully shape brand perceptions across markets.

The reviewed literature highlights important debates regarding the extent to which global brands should standardise or localise their strategies in culturally diverse markets, with scholars offering differing perspectives on the influence of national cultural values on brand identity and consumer experience. These debates directly inform the study's research problem, which centres on whether MTN's Pan-African brand identity resonates consistently across culturally distinct

markets. The literature also reinforces the need to examine how culture shapes consumers' interpretations of brand identity and brand experience, aligning with the study's aim and objectives. However, the review further reveals a lack of comparative, Africa-specific research within the telecommunications sector, clearly establishing the gap this study seeks to address.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1. Introduction

Chapter Two synthesised literature on culture, international marketing, and the concepts of brand identity and brand experience. It demonstrated how cultural factors influence consumer behaviour and brand touchpoints, applying Hofstede's dimensions to compare South Africa, Ghana (with indicative notes on Cameroon),

and highlighting how culturally attuned brand identity and multisensory experiences drive purchase intentions.

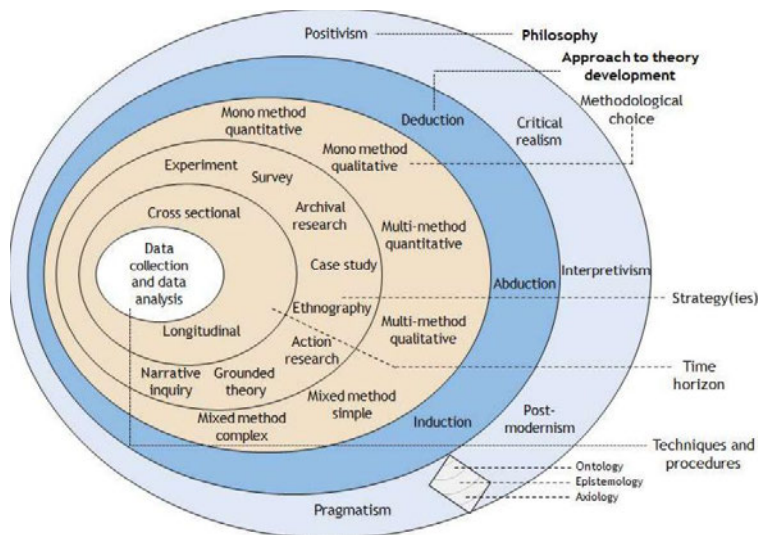
This chapter presents the methodological framework adopted for the study. To ensure methodological rigour and coherence, the design and execution of the research are structured according to the Research Onion model proposed by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2007). This model provides a comprehensive, layered approach to research design, guiding the researcher from overarching philosophical considerations through to specific data collection techniques. The framework provides a step-by-step approach, beginning with research philosophy, theory development methods, methodological choices, research strategies, and time horizons, and concluding with techniques and procedures for data collection and analysis.

3.1.1 The Research Onion Framework

Saunders et al. (2019) introduced the research onion framework as a visual guide for developing a robust research design (see Figure 3). Moreover, this research framework organises methodological decision-making into three interconnected levels. At the outermost level, researchers determine their research philosophy and approach, which guide the overall orientation of the study. The middle level consists of methodological choices, research strategies, and the time horizon, all of which shape how the research is designed and implemented. At the core of the framework are the tactical decisions relating to data collection and data analysis. The following section provides a detailed discussion of each of these decision levels (Saunders et al., 2007:130).

Figure 3. 1 Research Onion

Source: Saunders *et al.* (2007:130)



3.2 Research Philosophy

The first layer of the research onion is the research philosophy. According to Kirongo and Odoyo (2020:36), research philosophy refers to the set of beliefs regarding the nature of the reality under investigation. Kirongo and Odoyo (2020:36) assert that the selection of the appropriate type of research philosophy for a particular study area is contingent upon the specific knowledge being examined. Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019) describe research philosophy as a set of beliefs and assumptions regarding the development of expertise. This concept reflects the process that researchers undertake when initiating their research. Gamage (2025: 92) suggests that before devising a strategy for data collection, researchers should first establish a philosophical perspective, referred to as a 'paradigm', which forms the basis for evaluating the data.

The term "paradigm" was introduced in 1962 to describe a specific philosophical way of thinking (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017:26). Gamage (2025:92) expands on the definition by explaining that a paradigm encompasses a series of interrelated fundamental components that collectively form the basis for conducting research. In line with this view, Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis, and Bezuidenhout (2021: 24) argue that a paradigm serves to guide researchers in the methodology for studying a topic, identifying significant questions, and determining the appropriate processes for addressing these inquiries.

Accordingly, a paradigm allows a researcher to articulate their assumptions about society and the origins of science. It offers insights into the methodologies

employed by other researchers, helping the researcher to plan and understand their study, explore future possibilities, and determine its direction (Saunders *et al.*, 2007:112 113). Yong, Maizaitulaidawati, and Suzilawati (2023:5857) classify research into four paradigms: positivism, critical theory, realism, and interpretivism. Yong *et al.* (2023:5859) state that positivism is typically employed in quantitative research, while the other three paradigms are primarily used in qualitative research.

This study follows an interpretivism paradigm. Interpretivism is a philosophical framework that focuses on the methods through which individuals seek to comprehend their surrounding environment (Saunders *et al.*, 2007:113). According to Pervin and Mokhtar (2022:421), the interpretivist paradigm is based on the premise that people's perceptions, ideas, thoughts, and meanings can be understood through the study of their cultures. Consequently, the methods used for understanding the human and social sciences differ from those used in the physical sciences, as humans interpret their surroundings and act accordingly. Interpretivism aims to understand human behaviour from the perspective of those being studied (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2021:35). It focuses on how individuals experience their surroundings and what they find valuable and relevant, rather than seeking causal relationships to predict and control behaviour (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2021:35). Pervin and Mokhtar (2022:422) note that this paradigm enables interpretivist scholars to use varied perspectives to describe and understand phenomena within their socio-cultural contexts. This is based on the assumption that shared belief systems exist within the society being studied.

As observed by Pretorius (2024:2698), research paradigms shape how researchers perceive reality (ontology), understand the process of knowledge creation (epistemology), and consider the role of values in research (axiology). These concepts, alongside the metatheoretical and methodological positions, are discussed in detail next to outline how the researcher approached the research process for this study.

It has to be noted that interpretivism and constructivism are closely related paradigms, both grounded in the assumption that reality is socially constructed. In this study, interpretivism guides the epistemological position that meaning is

derived from participants' lived experiences, while constructivist ontology acknowledges that these meanings are shaped through social interaction. The reference to constructivism therefore complements rather than contradicts the interpretivist stance. However, to avoid conceptual ambiguity, the study is positioned primarily within interpretivism, using constructivist assumptions only to support the understanding of culturally embedded meaning-making.

3.2.1 Ontology

According to Pretorius (2024:2699), ontology examines the nature of reality. A realist ontology sees reality as objective, external, and independent of human perception, relying on empirical evidence to uncover universal truths. Conversely, a relativist ontology views reality as subjective and shaped by individual experiences, which vary across individuals and groups due to social, cultural, and historical contexts. Researchers with this perspective use qualitative methods to understand how people interpret their world, acknowledging multiple coexisting realities and focusing on capturing the richness of human experience through empathy and storytelling.

Similarly, Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2021:30) describe ontology as the study of existence and reality, questioning what is real. In this view, Ontology categorises and describes perspectives within a discipline. Therefore, the interpretivist ontological position holds that reality is socially constructed based on individual perceptions (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2021, p. 36). Furthermore, Interpretivism views reality as dynamic and subjective, influenced by personal experiences, culture, background, and internal factors (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2021, p. 36).

According to Saunders *et al.* (2009:127), Ontology refers to assumptions about the nature of reality. Although this may seem abstract and far removed from the researcher's intended research project, their ontological assumptions shape the way in which they see and study their research objects. In business and management, these research objects include organisations, management, individuals' working lives and organisational events and artefacts. The researcher's ontology, therefore, determines how they perceive the world of business and management, and consequently, their choice of research topic for their project.

Ontology includes objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism claims that social entities exist independently of perceptions, while subjectivism argues that they arise from individual experiences. Turin, Raihan, and Chowdhury (2024:2) state that interpretivist and constructivist philosophies see reality as subjective and socially constructed from personal experiences. Researchers use qualitative methods to explore these perspectives. Both philosophies acknowledge multiple socially constructed realities and employ qualitative research methods. This research aligns with interpretivism by adopting an ontological stance of subjectivism, or constructivism (Saunders *et al.*, 2007:108).

According to Fodouop Kouam (2024:2), constructivism suggests that reality is formed through social processes involving shared meanings and interpretations. It emphasises how language, culture, and social interactions influence individuals' understanding of the world. This theory is relevant to this study, as the researcher aimed to understand how culture influences individual participants' perceptions and experiences of MTN's brand identity and brand experience, to gain insights into their subjective realities (Saunders *et al.*, 2007:108–109).

3.2.2. Epistemology

Saunders *et al.* (2009:127) define epistemology as the study of knowledge, including what is considered valid and how it is communicated. While ontology appears abstract, epistemology is clearly relevant. Pretorius (2024: 2699-2700) states that epistemology examines the nature of knowledge and how it comes to be understood. Gamage (2025:93) argues that epistemology helps researchers identify sources of knowledge, such as observation, intuition, experience, or social interactions. It considers whether knowledge is objective or subjective. Epistemology also influences data collection methods, methodology choices, and criteria for evaluating credibility and reliability.

According to Sol and Heng (2022:94), selecting an epistemological approach, such as positivism, interpretivism, or pragmatism, is crucial in research, as it shapes the understanding of knowledge and reality and guides the choice of suitable research methods. This study adopts the interpretivist view of epistemology, which suggests that common sense influences human behaviour

(Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2021:35). Interpretivism asserts that facts are subjective, influenced by individual information processing and context. Explanations must consider the social context, including values, views, norms, and background (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2021:36). The interpretivist epistemology is deemed relevant to the marketing and business disciplines (Saunders *et al.*, 2007, p. 107).

3.2.3 Axiology

Gamage (2025:93) explains that axiology in research paradigms examines the influence of values and ethics on the research process. It considers researchers' personal beliefs and ethical conduct, as well as how these factors influence the interpretation of results. Additionally, axiology is significant in qualitative and interpretive research paradigms, where the researcher's subjectivity and values influence the research process and understanding of the studied phenomenon (Gamage, 2025:93). Recognising and addressing axiological considerations can improve the ethical integrity of the work, promote transparency, and lead to a more thoughtful interpretation of research findings.

Pretorius (2024: 2700-2701) argues that axiology influences the ethical and moral aspects of research. Researchers may select topics based on personal or societal values, such as social justice, equity, or sustainability. This requires them to consider the ethical implications of their work and how their perspectives might affect their research approach and findings. The interpretivist perspective on axiology emphasises the importance of acknowledging the complexities of individual realities. Consequently, to conduct meaningful research, it is essential to begin with the recognition and articulation of both the researcher's and participants' values and interpretations (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2021:38).

According to Holmes (2020:1), positionality refers to both a researcher's worldview and their stance regarding a research task within its social and political context. This relates to epistemological beliefs about knowledge. In this study, the researcher's position is to base knowledge on participants' words and experiences, rather than personal insights as an MTN employee. This research study recognised the significance and impact of these values, enhancing awareness and value judgments throughout the research process to maintain the study's credibility (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:134).

3.3 Approach to Theory Development

The second layer of the research onion is the approach to theory development. The research may adopt either inductive or deductive reasoning. According to Saunders *et al.* (2019:152), deductive reasoning is an approach in which theory-derived postulations are used to conclude. Sekaran & Bougie (2016:26) state that deductive reasoning begins with a general view of the theory and works towards a focused, specific, testable hypothesis that either proves or disproves the original theory. On the other hand, Sekaran and Bougie (2016:26) explain that inductive reasoning begins with a specific approach and gradually moves towards a more general approach, focusing on the occurrence of the phenomenon.

Therefore, this study adopted inductive reasoning. As noted by Asenahabi (2019:81), qualitative research employs an inductive approach, viewing reality as a socially constructed phenomenon with intricate, interconnected variables. This method prioritises the subject matter and gathers data from the viewpoint of those being studied. Additionally, in alignment with the research design of this study, exploratory and qualitative research frequently employs inductive reasoning (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016:26).

3.4 Methodological Choice

The third layer of the research onion is methodological choice. Khan, Raman, Sambamoorthy, and Prashanth (2023) define research methodology as a systematic approach for conducting research and collecting data to answer questions or investigate problems. It encompasses the methods, procedures, and tools that researchers utilise to plan, design, execute, and analyse their studies. Moreover, Khan *et al.* (2023) emphasise that a well-defined research methodology is crucial for ensuring the validity, reliability, and credibility of research findings.

Choosing an appropriate research approach is crucial, as it enables the researcher to make informed decisions regarding the selected research design, informed by established knowledge and expertise. Creswell (2003) stated that researchers in the social sciences, particularly those in business research, should focus on three methods: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods

approaches. According to Taherdoost (2022: 54-55), quantitative research uses numerical data from observations to describe and explain phenomena. It relies on empirical, descriptive statements about cases. Mixed-methods combine qualitative and quantitative approaches, depending on the study's purpose and research question, and can emphasise either method or both. Integrating these approaches enables researchers to tackle complex issues, particularly in fields such as social and health research.

To add to this, and in alignment with the interpretivist philosophy of understanding social constructs and their subjective nature, this research employed a qualitative approach (Saunders et al., 2016:168). According to Lim (2024: 199), qualitative methods are essential for gaining deep insights into complex phenomena. While quantitative research provides numerical data, qualitative research delves into human experiences and perspectives, capturing contexts that are often overlooked in numerical analysis. Choosing to use the qualitative research method allows researchers to connect with the subjective experiences of their subjects.

This study employs the qualitative research method. According to Ussif, Ertugrul, Coskun and Baycan (2020:84), qualitative research helps understand underlying views, reasons, opinions, and motivations. It provides insights into problems and develops ideas for quantitative research. This method gathers non-numerical data through interviews, case studies, focus groups, and observations. It covers issues in-depth and captures powerful human experiences.

According to Asenahabi (2019: 81), qualitative research focuses on exploring and understanding the meanings people assign to social or human issues. This research approach emphasises individuality, culture, and social justice, offering a comprehensive range of information that, although subjective, remains current. Asenahabi (2019:82) adds that the methods used for data collection under this design include interviews, observation, and participation.

3.5 Research design

A research design is a structured plan that integrates all components of a quantitative study to ensure that the findings are credible, minimised in bias, and

capable of being generalised to a broader population (Dannels, 2018: 402). The research design for this study begins by clearly indicating and discussing the research purpose. According to Singh (2019:28), research purposes are typically categorised into three types in research methods: descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory. Since research questions can be both illustrative and descriptive, a research project may encompass multiple objectives. The research purpose for this study is exploratory.

3.5.1 Exploratory research

By categorising the research, the researcher gains a clearer understanding of the study's purpose and objectives (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2021:14). This study employed an exploratory research approach. This study aimed to explore the influence of cultural differences on MTN's brand identity and brand experience in SA, Ghana and Cameroon. According to Singh (2021:2), exploratory research is a method used to address specific questions or phenomena. Given the intrinsic characteristics of the subject under investigation, manipulating variables or conducting research in a controlled environment is impractical. Moreover, the researcher may not be able to identify all influencing factors. Therefore, adopting an exploratory approach to the topic is more beneficial.

According to Saunders et al. (2016:392), exploratory studies employing semi-structured interviews adopt an inductive approach, facilitating the collection of valuable contextual data and enhancing comprehension of the research topic. Such research must remain adaptable to new findings, and its results are generally not applicable to the broader population (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2021:86; Sekaran and Bougie, 2015:43).

This study's exploratory research aligns with inductive approaches and qualitative methods, which collect data through interviews (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016: 43). According to Singh (2019: 28), exploratory research is directed at investigating research questions and addressing new problems that have not been previously investigated. The research aims and objectives of the study are stated below to contextualise the exploratory nature of the study.

3.6 Research strategy

The fourth layer of the research onion is research strategies. The research strategy outlines the approach the researcher intends to use to conduct the study (Saunders *et al.*, 2007). Common research strategies include experimental design, survey design, archival research, case study, ethnography, action research, grounded theory, and narrative inquiry (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). This study employed a case study strategy. According to Tariq (2025: 409), case studies are utilised in qualitative research to provide comprehensive, contextual insights into specific phenomena. In contrast to experiments or larger surveys, case studies focus on a single instance or a small number of cases, enabling a thorough examination of the topic. This approach offers an in-depth perspective on the subject, allowing the analysis of complexities and processes that quantitative methods may not fully capture.

3.7 Time horizons

A study can be conducted as either a longitudinal study or a cross-sectional study, depending on the time horizon being considered. According to Cooper and Schindler (2014: 128), longitudinal studies typically span several months, with monthly reports. On the other hand, cross-sectional studies provide a snapshot at one point in time to answer the research question. They can last anywhere from a few days to several weeks or even months. This study employed a cross-sectional design to identify the phenomena of cultural differences on MTN's brand identity and brand experience in South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon. This was in recognition of logistical and administrative constraints, including time, distance, and the availability of respondents based in different countries.

3.8 Research Techniques and Procedures

According to Taherdoost (2021:12), data collection methods are typically classified as either primary or secondary. Primary data refers to unpublished, firsthand information, while secondary data comes from previously published sources. This study uses primary data gathered through interviews. Standard primary data collection methods include questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, observation, surveys, case studies, and experiments. The data collection process is outlined below.

3.8.1 Population and sampling

Hossan, Mansor, and Jaharuddin (2023:211) describe the 'population of interest' as the entities being studied, such as individuals or organisations. This group's findings are the primary focus of their research. The 'target population' comprises the accessible individuals that the researcher intends to study (Hossan *et al.*, 2023:211). Sekaran and Bougie (2016:394) define a population as the entire set of individuals, events, or items under study. In line with this theoretical basis, the target population of this study included MTN consumers in the three selected markets (SA, Ghana, and Cameroon), representing diverse cultural groups in each market.

Bhardwaj (2019:158) defines sampling as a method for selecting individuals or groups from a larger population for research purposes. A sample is a subset of a population selected for measurement. Since examining an entire population is often impractical, researchers use sampling to select representative subsets (Khan, 2023). Proper sampling ensures findings can be generalised. Thus, a sampling strategy is essential in research for gathering data from representative participants or elements (Khan, 2023:21). An element refers to an individual member of the population, while a subject is a particular member of the sample (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016:237, 391, 396). This study refers to individuals in the sample as "participants".

As stated by Sekeran and Bougie (2016:24), sampling involves a five-step process that includes defining the population, establishing the sample frame, determining the sampling design, deciding on the sample size, and executing the sampling procedure. The sample for this study was selected using a screening questionnaire that included basic demographics (age, race, language, residential area, gender, and educational level). Out of the 4 participants per country, two males and two females were sampled. The participants were between the ages of 25 and 40, with a post-metric level of education. All participants were also required to state their race. To ensure quality respondents were selected, additional screening questions covered below were asked as part of the sample criteria, ensuring that the respondents are MTN customers in their country of residence:

- Have you used MTN services (airtime, data) on your phone to make calls, browse the internet or social media in the past 7 days?
- Have you seen, heard or interacted with the MTN brand (logo, advertising, store, event, App) in the past 7 days?

The demographic parameters (age 25–44, race, language, education) were selected because previous cross-cultural branding studies emphasise that perceptions of brand identity and experience differ across generational, racial/ethnic and socio-linguistic groups (Hofstede, 2011; Luna & Gupta, 2001; Solomon et al., 2019). The seven-day MTN usage criterion ensured that participants had recent, lived engagement with the brand's touchpoints which is consistent with Brakus et al.'s (2009) definition of brand experience as arising from direct, ongoing interactions. These criteria therefore ensured participants possessed the experiential and cultural context necessary for meaningful interpretive insight.

Sampling methods include probability sampling and non-probability sampling. This study employed a purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method commonly used in qualitative research, where participants are selected based on specific criteria. Purposive sampling ensures quality participants are chosen for the study. According to Saunders et al. (2016:301), in purposive or judgmental sampling, researchers use their judgement to select elements that best address the research question and objectives.

Participants were invited to participate in the study through an invitation form on the Facebook pages of MTN SA, MTN GH, and MTN Cameroon, likely targeting MTN customers. Participants were given an overview of the study, including its aim, data collection method, the recording of the interview, and the time required for participation. Saunders *et al.* (2016:297) suggest a sample size of five to 25 participants for semi-structured and in-depth interviews. They recommend 12 participants for in-depth interviews with a homogeneous sample and a focused research question. Given the time constraints and the semi-structured interview approach, this study included 12 participants, four from each of the three markets. Selection was based on a first-come, first-served basis among those who

indicated their willingness to participate, shared their contact details, and met the sample criteria as determined by the two screening questions.

It is acknowledged that recruitment via MTN's country Facebook pages may introduce self-selection and platform-access bias. However, it also ensured that participants were genuine MTN users, digitally active, and reflective of MTN's real-world engagement channels. The limitation is acknowledged, and future studies may use additional recruitment methods (e.g., SMS sampling, in-store intercepts) to broaden representation.

According to Saunders *et al.* (2016:297), data saturation is achieved when no new themes or significant information emerge from additional data. Sekaran and Bougie (2016:266) note that it cannot be predicted before sampling continues until saturation is reached. Due to time constraints, sample homogeneity, and sample size, saturation was estimated to be around 10 participants; therefore, a sample of 12 in this study was adequate.

Although the study includes participants from three different countries, the overall sample size of twelve participants remains small and relatively homogeneous within each market. While purposive sampling ensured that all participants were active MTN users, the limited number per country restricts the extent to which culturally diverse viewpoints can be fully represented. This limitation is acknowledged in Chapter 3, where the study notes that qualitative findings are not intended to be generalised to entire national populations. However, it is important to emphasise that the small and internally similar sample groups may reduce the depth of cross-cultural comparison, and the interpretations drawn should therefore be viewed as exploratory rather than definitive.

3.8.2 Data collection

Lim (2024: 214) states that qualitative researchers use a variety of techniques to collect extensive and detailed information. Four of these techniques involve data collection methods: archival research, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and observation. Additionally, two techniques are related to data collection strategies. Bougie and Sekaran (2020:119) indicate that interviewing participants is a prevalent method for data collection in business research. They define an

interview as a guided, purposeful conversation between two or more individuals. According to Bougie and Sekaran (2020:119), various types of interviews exist, including individual and group interviews. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, via telephone, and online.

This study primarily collected data through individual in-depth interviews. According to Lim (2024:214), in-depth interviews are a qualitative data collection method involving direct, one-on-one interactions between the researcher and the participant. This approach allows the researcher to deeply explore the participant's experiences and perspectives on a specific subject matter. The interviews were semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews use prompts to cover key topics while allowing flexibility to delve deeper into responses or follow new themes, balancing consistency and adaptability (Lim, 2024).

The in-depth interviews were conducted on Microsoft Teams (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:391). Microsoft Teams records and transcribes interviews in English and French. Every sentence captured was cross-checked to ensure the correct meaning was captured. Conducting interviews on Microsoft Teams allowed participants and the researcher to join from their preferred, comfortable locations, without geographic constraints or travel requirements.

The interview platform allowed for participants' availability, accounted for time zone differences, and provided additional timeslots for the 12 participants. Each interview was scheduled for 20 minutes, with an extra 15 minutes reserved for potential delays, such as connectivity issues. Participants were sent a participant-informed consent form, which detailed the study's aim and the procedures to be followed. The form also included the researcher's contact details for ease of communication. This is shown in annexure E. The interview schedule is shown in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3. 1 Interview time schedule

Date	Time	Market
Monday, 01 September 2025	10:00-10:45	South Africa
Monday, 01 September 2025	12:00-12:45	South Africa
Monday, 01 September 2025	14:00-14:45	South Africa
Monday, 01 September 2025	15:30-16:45	South Africa
Tuesday, 02 September 2025	11:00-11:45	Ghana
Tuesday, 02 September 2025	12:00-12:45	Ghana
Tuesday, 02 September 2025	13:30-14:15	Ghana
Tuesday, 02 September 2025	15:00-15:45	Ghana
Wednesday, 03 September 2025	11:00-11:45	Cameroon
Wednesday, 03 September 2025	12:00-12:45	Cameroon
Wednesday, 03 September 2025	13:30-14:15	Cameroon
Wednesday, 03 September 2025	15:00-15:45	Cameroon

According to Mwita (2022:313), interviews are typically classified into three main categories: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews. Mwita (2022:313) explains that structured interviews involve preparing a list of questions that the researcher follows closely during the interview. This approach does not allow for additional probing or follow-up questions beyond the prepared list (Mwita, 2023). Semi-structured interviews involve prepared leading questions, with flexibility to add new ones based on responses (Mwita, 2023). Compared to structured interviews, they allow for more detailed data collection (Mwita, 2023). Mwita (2023:313) posits that in unstructured interviews, the researcher does not prepare questions beforehand. Instead, questions are generated during the interview according to the researcher's judgment. This study employed the semi-structured interview approach. The semi-structured interview schedule in this study included open-ended, probing questions. Open-ended questions allow participants to respond freely, providing detailed descriptions of events or phenomena (Saunders et al., 2016:408; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016:146). These questions help to explore participants' perspectives and experiences comprehensively (Cooper & Schindler, 2014:333). The interview schedule is presented in Annexure A.

3.8.3 Data analysis

The qualitative data collected were transcribed using Microsoft Teams (CoPilot) and subsequently imported into ATLAS.ti for analysis. According to Herbst, Frizzarini, and Herbst (2024:1-3), ATLAS.ti is advanced software designed for researchers working with qualitative data. It streamlines the processes of coding,

querying, retrieving, and analysing large amounts of textual, graphic, audio, or visual data. The software supports effective thematic analysis, helping to manage and present qualitative research systematically and rigorously.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. This approach enabled a thorough focus on identifying meaningful patterns or themes in the interview data, providing detailed descriptions or explanations (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:579–580). The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke’s reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Campbell *et al.*, 2021:2012). This approach involves an organic analysis of data, emphasises the results, and does not rely on a fixed theoretical framework. Additionally, it is applied to qualitative research within the interpretivist paradigm (Campbell *et al.*, 2021:2021). According to Braun and Clarke (2021) and Campbell *et al.* (2021:2014), the six reflective thematic analysis consists of six phases as discussed next

3.8.3.1 *Phase One: Dataset Familiarisation*

The aim of phase one is for the researcher to develop familiarity with the data. In practice, this phase involved listening to audio transcripts and reading the transcriptions obtained from the qualitative semi-structured interviews multiple times, while making notes on observations or concepts that pertain to the dataset as a whole or to individual data items (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The researcher transcribed the data using Microsoft Teams (Copilot) and then read through the transcriptions several times to make notes on key concepts.

3.8.3.2 *Phase Two: Implementation of Coding*

Coding systematically analyses data to summarise and reduce it, focusing on categorising concepts relevant to the research question. It captures both semantic and latent meanings, organising them as coding labels linked to pertinent data sections (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The researcher identified patterns, terms, and visual elements as keywords, which encapsulate participants’ experiences and perceptions, directly derived from the data. Brief words were then assigned codes.

3.8.3.3 *Phase Three: Initial Generation of Themes*

Themes are broader shared meanings, identified through active analysis and

interpretation by the researcher. Preliminary themes were developed in line with the research question by identifying patterns and clustering similar codes together. Coded data were then grouped under these themes. The researcher kept informal notes or journals from this stage to aid in the final writing process (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

3.8.3.4 *Phase Four: Theme Development and Evaluation*

In Phase Four, the entire dataset is reviewed to determine if the preliminary themes are relevant and practical. This includes evaluating whether these themes capture key patterns in the data and coded extracts. Based on this review, themes may be removed, revised, merged, or split as needed. Relationships among themes and their connection to existing research should also be considered (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The developed codes (short words/phrases) were then organised into meaningful groups to uncover patterns and relationships, providing insights into the research question.

3.8.3.5 *Phase Five: Refinement, Definition, and Naming of Themes*

Phase five involves refining the analysis so that each theme is clearly defined and based on a specific concept. It is important to determine the message of each theme to assess its relevance to the overall data and to decide whether it should be included or excluded. Each theme should be accompanied by a summary and assigned a concise name (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In this step, the concepts from the data were understood and defined. The researcher defined each theme after the thematic analysis was complete; that is, the overarching themes were articulated based on the views and perceptions expressed by the participants

3.8.3.6 *Phase Six: Writing*

Phase six involves analytic writing to present findings from earlier phases, directly addressing the research question. The researcher emphasises editing and drafts at this stage (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The data were then presented based on the analysis of brand identity and experience, guided by the selected theoretical frameworks.

3.9 Trustworthiness

Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* (2021:295) state that trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to its validity and reliability. The researcher ensures this to maintain the accuracy and quality of the study. Supporting Du Plooy-Cilliers (2021), Kakar, Rasheed, and Rashid (2023:151) state that trustworthiness is a crucial factor influencing the rigour of qualitative research investigations, noting that Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided one of the widely accepted criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Kakar *et al.*, (2023:152) identify several measures that enhance trustworthiness in qualitative research. These measures involve a systematic research design, the credibility of the researcher, the validity of the findings, and the use of appropriate research methods. Kakar *et al.* (2023:152) state that ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research is essential because it is this trustworthiness that gives qualitative research a significant position in the academic community. There is a widespread perception that qualitative studies must be credible (Creswell and Miller, 2000; Kakar *et al.*, 2023:152). As noted by Ahmed (2024:3), meticulous record-keeping and comprehensive analysis of evidence during the research process significantly improve the ability to replicate and examine findings, thereby enhancing the credibility and reliability of qualitative research. Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* (2021:295) state that trustworthiness in qualitative research comprises four key elements: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These elements are discussed in detail next, as applied to this study.

3.9.1 Credibility

Kakar *et al.* (2023:155) referenced Merriam (1998), who equates the concept of internal validity with credibility in qualitative research. Therefore, establishing trustworthiness, particularly credibility, is deemed the most crucial factor. Additionally, other researchers also emphasise the importance of credibility, asserting that it demonstrates the accuracy of data, respondents' perspectives, and their interpretation, as noted by Kakar *et al.* (2023). According to Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* (2021:295), credibility refers to the accuracy of a researcher's interpretation of data and the participant's intended meaning. Adding to this, Kakar *et al.* (2023:155) note that a study is credible if participants recognise the researcher's interpretation of their experiences. Findings that align with common human experiences are seen as credible. Additionally, credibility is enhanced

when findings are easily understood and shareable. Peer debriefing with participants and the supervisor was conducted to verify the results. This was also done to recognise weaknesses, biases, and areas for improvement.

3.9.2 Applicability/Transferability

Kakar *et al.* (2023:155-156) assert that applicability refers to the degree to which research findings can be applied within specific contexts, populations, groups, and settings. The term transferability is often used interchangeably with applicability. When research findings can be generalised to other contexts, they are considered applicable. In qualitative studies, results are deemed applicable when individuals who were not part of the study or readers can relate these findings to their own experiences. Broad recognition of findings by a large population indicates the applicability of results in qualitative research. The research improved the transferability of the study by providing detailed descriptions of participants' behaviour, experiences, and opinions within their cultural setting, ensuring the findings can be generalised as far as possible.

3.9.3 Dependability/Consistency

Kakar *et al.* (2023:157) identify dependability as a key aspect of trustworthiness, defined by data consistency across similar contexts. Replicating findings within comparable populations or conditions suggests dependable results. It is essential that research data exhibit replication and a degree of consistency to ensure trustworthiness. In qualitative research, dependability refers to the reliability of the study. To support the dependability of this study, the researchers presented and described the research design, providing explicit details on data collection methods and data analysis procedures. Kakar *et al.* (2023:159) argue that in qualitative research, dependability requires a detailed description of the research process, enabling other researchers to replicate the study. Dependability was ensured by providing a clear and detailed description of the research design, data collection processes, and analysis procedures, allowing for transparency and potential replication.

3.6.4 Confirmability/ Neutrality

Kakar *et al.* (2023:159) define neutrality as the degree of unbiasedness of the researcher during the research and interpretation process. Some researchers use

the term “confirmability,” which refers to data consisting of participant responses rather than the researcher's choices, viewpoints, or biases. Ahmed (2024:2) states that confirmability relates to the impartiality and objectivity of research findings, ensuring that they are not influenced by the biases or preferences of the researchers. To enhance the confirmability of their results, researchers employ various methods such as peer debriefing, member checking, reflexive journaling and audit trails. Cutcliffe and McKenna (2004:127) identified audit trails as a primary method for confirming qualitative findings. Carcary (2020:127) notes that a comprehensive audit trail clearly documents the research design, data collection, analysis decisions, and interpretations that lead to findings. It requires recording specific details about both the data and its analysis. An audit trail was used in this study, documenting the data collection process, raw data, and notes from the data collection.

3.10 Ethical considerations

Laryeafio and Ogbewe (2023:95) assert that ethical considerations are essential in any research, as they allow researchers to collect critical information without causing harm to participants. They further indicate that researchers engaged in qualitative studies encounter three primary challenges related to ethics in data collection: the relationship between researcher and participants, the subjective interpretation of data and findings by the researcher, and the research design employed.

According to Mirza, Bellalem, and Mirza (2023:442), ethics addresses moral issues related to conducting research. Ethics is defined as an inquiry into what is considered right and wrong, as well as what researchers should do. It emphasises researchers' responsibilities towards the rights and interests of their participants, audience, academic community, and society. Researchers typically refer to ethical guidelines to ensure compliance with principles of good research practice. Similarly, Creswell (2009:183) states that researchers must respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of their informants. Based on this context and guidance, the following ethical guidelines were followed in this study, as they relate to the researcher, participants and the academic institution.

3.10.1 Ethical considerations relating to the researcher

The research was conducted in accordance with the following considerations to address ethical aspects of data analysis and reporting pertaining to the researcher:

- Falsifying information and distorting results: The researcher did not alter or fabricate data and maintained the integrity of the research process (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2021:308). Data collection, analysis, and reporting were conducted honestly and accurately, without manipulation to achieve the desired outcomes (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016:160). The findings were neither exaggerated nor understated, and all numerical results were presented with appropriate context (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2021:308).
- Integrity and bias: The researcher maintained integrity and recognised that research quality relies on honesty, transparency, and objectivity (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:243). To minimise bias, careful measures were taken to ensure accurate data collection, interpretation, and analysis (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2021:309).

3.10.2 Ethical considerations relating to participants

The following ethical considerations were adhered to:

- Voluntary consent: participants voluntarily engaged in the study and retained the right to withdraw at any time or to decline answering any questions they preferred not to respond to (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:244).
- Obtaining informed consent: Participants were required to provide explicit, written consent to participate in the research. This included an understanding of their rights to access their information and the ability to withdraw at any time. It was also stated in the consent form that the participants are volunteering and that their participation in the study is free from coercion and deception (Rana, Dilshad, and Ahsan, 2021:2).
- Minimising the risk of harm: participants were protected from any forms of harm, including physical injury, psychological distress, social embarrassment, financial loss, and breaches of privacy due to the adherence to the anonymity rule.
- Avoiding Deceptive Practices: This study avoided deception to minimise participant bias and improve response rates (Cooper & Schindler, 2014:31).

Participants were fully informed about the research purpose and requirements (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2021:306).

- Ensuring confidentiality and anonymity in Data collection and storage: participants were not required to provide intrusive or personal information (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016:159). Participants were assured of anonymity and assigned codes and numbers for data identification and management, e.g., SA1 for SA participant, GH1 for Ghana participant and CAM1 for Cameroon participant. The collected data was securely stored on a password-protected computer. Access to the data, which is contained within a password-protected file, is limited to the researcher. The data was retained for a limited number of years, not exceeding 5 years.

3.10.3 Ethical considerations relating to the academic institution

The research adhered to all guidelines established by The Independent Institute of Education and Vega as follows:

- The research began only after receiving ethical clearance and institutional permission, as confirmed by an ethical clearance letter (The IIE, 2021:13).
- The research employed a standardised participant consent form to ensure compliance with the institution's policies and ethical guidelines (The IIE, 2021:14).
- Researchers obtained participants' consent to be recorded during interviews using the institution's audio-visual consent form (The IIE, 2021:14).

3.10.4 Potential ethical challenges

Ethical considerations were rigorously applied to ensure the research was conducted with integrity and aligned with best practices. The following potential ethical challenges were identified, along with measures implemented to mitigate their impact:

- Conflict of Interest: Shamoo and Resnik (2022:178) define a conflict of interest as a situation in which an individual's financial, professional, personal, political, or other interests may compromise their ability to fulfil their primary professional, ethical, or legal responsibilities. The researcher has a professional conflict of interest in this study, as they are an employee of MTN. To ensure the trust of participants, this was disclosed to them

through the form, and the intention for conducting the study was clearly stated: the study is for the purposes of academic research. The researcher obtained consent from the company to conduct the study.

- **Informed Consent:** according to Rana *et al.* (2021:2), informed consent is regarded as the cornerstone of ethical research. The informed consent process functions as a contract between the researcher and the participants. Participants were provided with the necessary information in the consent form, which included the purpose of the research, what was asked of the participants, the methods being employed, how the data was utilised, the potential outcomes of the research, and any associated inconveniences and risks or consequences that the participants might encounter during the data collection process. Participants also had to sign a consent form.
- **Respect for Participants:** All individuals involved in this research should be treated with consideration and trust, particularly the volunteers. Research must be conducted with respect for the participants' dignity, regardless of age, sex, race, religion, political beliefs, lifestyle, or any other differences between the participants and the researchers. This is essential since the study focuses on cultural differences (Mirza *et al.*, 2023:442). Participants were treated with dignity, fairness, and sensitivity throughout the study. All individuals were engaged respectfully, without discrimination, and with careful attention to cultural differences relevant to the study context.
- **Protecting Confidentiality and Anonymity:** Participants in this study voluntarily provided information, and the researcher took additional measures to ensure the confidentiality of this data. Insensitive data collection methods were not used, and therefore, participants' privacy was not compromised. To avoid the risk of data breaches following collection, data was stored and managed appropriately, including throughout the publication process, as recommended by Rana *et al.* (2021:3). Anonymity was ensured by removing all identifying information from transcripts and study documents. Participants' names and any personal details were replaced with codes, and only aggregated findings were reported, preventing any individual from being identified.
- **Incentives:** It is important to avoid using material incentives when conducting research. Participants in this study were motivated by the highlighting of

community benefits from the research (Mirza *et al.*, 2023:444), and therefore no incentive to participate were offered.

- Issues of Translation: Mirza *et al.* (2023:445) state that in qualitative research, translation can introduce bias as researchers interpret meanings through their own knowledge. Despite this, translation is often crucial in ethnographic and certain qualitative studies, especially when linguistic and cultural differences exist between researchers and participants, as is the case in this study. All interviews were conducted in English and therefore no translation was necessary for the study.

3.11 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter outlined the methodological framework guiding the study, using the Research Onion model to structure decisions from philosophical assumptions to data collection and analysis procedures. Anchored in an interpretivist paradigm, the study adopted a subjectivist ontological stance, a context-dependent epistemology, and an axiological position that acknowledges the researcher's values and positionality. An inductive approach and qualitative methodological choice aligned with the study's aim to explore how cultural differences shape MTN's brand identity and brand experience across South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon. An exploratory research design and case study strategy enabled an in-depth understanding of culturally embedded consumer perceptions. A cross-sectional time horizon was selected due to feasibility considerations across multiple country contexts. Purposive sampling ensured the inclusion of culturally diverse MTN consumers, and semi-structured, in-depth interviews facilitated rich and detailed insights. Although qualitative research does not aim for statistical generalisation, the study acknowledges that a sample of 12 may limit the breadth of cultural variation captured. This sample size aligns with Creswell's recommendations for phenomenological and interpretive studies, but future research could include a larger sample to broaden representativeness. The limitation has been explicitly acknowledged.

Data were collected via Microsoft Teams and analysed using ATLAS.ti through Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis, ensuring systematic, rigorous interpretation. Overall, the methodological choices adopted in this chapter establish a coherent and credible foundation for addressing the study's research

aims and for presenting the empirical findings in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Three outlined the study's methodological framework, anchored in an interpretivist perspective. It described an inductive, qualitative, exploratory case-study design that investigated MTN's brand identity and experience across South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon, using purposive sampling (12 participants) and semi-structured interviews conducted via Microsoft Teams. Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase reflexive thematic analysis. Building on these procedures, Chapter Four presents the analysis and interprets the qualitative data to meet the study's aim and objectives, focusing on how cultural differences influence MTN's brand identity and brand experience in South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon. The chapter is divided into four major sections, each with relevant subsections that gradually deepen understanding of the findings.

In this chapter, the data are organised by themes and sub-themes, with each theme substantiated by direct quotations from participant interviews to exemplify significant insights. Together, these themes offer an in-depth analysis of how cultural factors influence the perceptions, experiences, and expressions of MTN's brand identity and brand experience across the three markets. It is organised in a logical way to clearly interpret the findings and deepen the reader's insight into how cultural dynamics influence MTN's brand identity and experience across different African markets.

4.2 The demographic profile of participants

The final sample consisted of 12 participants selected from MTN's customer base, with four individuals representing each of the markets in South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon.

Table 4. 1 Demographic Profiles of Participants

South Africa					
Code	Age	Gender	Language/s	Ethnicity	Number of years on MTN
SA 1	25-34	Male	English, Zulu, Tswana	Tswana	17 years
SA 2	25-34	Male	English, Sepedi	Pedi	> 6 years
SA 3	25-34	Female	English, Afrikaans, Tswana	Tswana	4 years
SA 4	35-44	Female	English, Zulu, Sotho	Zulu	22 years
Ghana					
	Age	Gender	Language/s	Ethnicity	Number of years on MTN
GHA 1	35-44	Male	English, Twi	Akan (Akuapem)	> 20 years
GHA 2	25-34	Male	English, Twi, Ga	Ga (Ga-Adangme)	About 6 Years
GHA 3	25-34	Female	English, Twi, Ga	Partly- Ewe, Ga (Ga-Dangme) and Akwapem	About 6 years
GHA 4	25-34	Female	English, Twi	Akan (Akuapem)	> 3 years
Cameroon					
	Age	Gender	Language/s	Ethnicity	Number of years on MTN
CAM 1	35-44	Male	French, English	Bassa	> 6 years
CAM 2	35-44	Female	French, English	Bassa	> 6 years
CAM 3	25-34	Female	English, French	Mbo	> 6 years
CAM 3	35-44	Male	English, French	Bayangi	About 20 years

All participants were of African descent and gender representative with two participants each per gender for each country. The South African participants (SA1–SA4) comprised a culturally and linguistically diverse cohort, representing Tswana, Pedi, and Zulu ethnic groups and demonstrated multilingual proficiency, communicating in English in addition to local languages such as Zulu, Sepedi, and Afrikaans. The Ghanaian participants ethnic diversity includes Akan (Akuapem), Ga (Ga-Adangme), and mixed ethnic backgrounds comprising Ewe, Ga, and Akan. Language proficiency encompassed English, Twi, and Ga, demonstrating the multilingual context of Ghanaian society. The Cameroon participants were coming from ethnic backgrounds like Bassa, Mbo, and Bayangi and all speak both French and English, reflecting Cameroon's widespread bilingualism which is an important part of its cultural identity.

With age ranges spanning between 25 and 44 years, all participants notably reported long-term use of MTN services, with durations ranging from four years to over two decades, thereby providing substantial experiential insight for the study.

The next section elaborates on the data analysis of the cultural orientations, perceptions of brand identity and brand experience for South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon, while the concluding section presents cross-market themes, emphasising areas of convergence and divergence among these cultural settings. Each table provides a summary of the identified themes and sub-themes, accompanied by participant codes that demonstrate how shared understandings were developed regarding MTN's brand.

4.3 Data analysis of the cultural values

The development and interpretation of themes were guided by Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions framework. A detailed thematic analysis of interview transcripts collected from South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon is presented below. The analysis examines themes that capture specific insights or patterns from participants. These are substantiated with direct quotations from participants to support the analysis.

4.3.1 Data analysis of the cultural values of South Africa MTN participants

Table 4.2 provides a summary of the cultural values of South African participants.

Table 4. 2 Summary of the cultural values of South African participants

Theme (context)	Sub-theme(s)	Participant Codes
Power distance orientated	Respect for Elders	SA1
	Respect for social order	SA2
	Respectful Customer Engagements	SA1, SA3
Collectivist orientation	Inherited brand loyalty	SA1
	Family Influence	SA1, SA4
	Youth Community outreach initiatives	SA3
Gender neutral brand		SA2, SA3
Preference for Consistency		SA3
Planning Orientation	Long-term orientation	SA3
	Short-term orientation	SA4
Sponsorship of entertainment initiatives		SA2

4.3.1.1 Power Distance Orientation

Participants noted that South African culture places high importance on respect and hierarchy. While honouring elders and formal roles is still valued, both social interactions and dealings with brands like MTN tend to be open communication, polite, and rooted in shared respect.

i) Respect for elders

One participant highlighted the centrality of respect, particularly respect for elders, as a core cultural value within their community.

SA1: “Yeah, as black people, we know that respect is respect. You respect your elders ...”.

ii) Respect for Social Order

SA2’s quote emphasises that cultural norms are deeply embedded in everyday behaviour, with specific rules governing how respect should be shown to adults.

“My culture has rules. Like in my culture, you can't greet adults while you standing on your legs or one of your hand is in your pocket. It comes down to respect”.

iii) Respectful customer engagements

Both SA1 and SA3 highlight that respectful treatment, whether from frontline consultants or head office, enhances their satisfaction and reinforces the perception that MTN values and prioritizes its customers.

SA1: *“The respect that I got from the consultant was very good. Also, when it came to verifying my personal information, I was satisfied with how they handled everything. It clearly shows that they have this respect for their customers”.*

SA3: *“Even from the head office, they will respond to you as a customer”.*

4.3.1.2 Collectivist orientation

The participants showed a pronounced collectivist outlook, deeply connected to family and youth community relationships. MTN is seen as more than just a service provider; it is regarded as a “household brand” woven into family customs, where loyalty and brand decisions are frequently shaped by collective use and recommendations passed down through generations.

i) Inherited brand loyalty

A participant shows that long-term family use and cultural upbringing have embedded MTN into their personal identity, creating a sense of heritage-based brand loyalty that extends beyond functional benefits.

SA1: *“MTN is the go to brand for me. But since I grew up in the culture and in the household, it's MTN or nothing. MTN has been there as a part of my life. It is like it is part of my heritage basically, because then, yeah, everyone has been using it. I grew up into it”.*

ii) Family influence

Participant SA4's quote suggests that family network patterns significantly influence brand choice, with MTN being perceived as the practical and relationally beneficial option for maintaining seamless family connectivity.

“Most of my family are MTN subscribers. So for me, it made sense to also just stay on the on the network because obviously it would be more beneficial. It'll

facilitate that connectivity within the family”.

iii) Youth Community outreach initiatives

A participant suggests that MTN's sponsorship of youth-focused events enhances brand appeal, demonstrating that culturally relevant activations positively impact their brand experience.

SA3: *“Yes, I do. I remember there was a time they were sponsoring 947 Joburg Day back then, which is an event targeting young people, which was good, very good”.*

4.3.1.3 Gender neutral brand

MTN's inclusive messaging and gender-neutral approach ensured equal representation.

i) Gender neutral brand

Two participants' perspectives indicate that participants perceive MTN's services as gender-neutral, suggesting that men and women experience the brand similarly without any noticeable gender-based differences in treatment or service quality.

SA2: *“Nah, I don't think they relate to MTN services differently because It's the same because they're not sexist. The system is the same, be it you are a male or a female”.*

SA3: *“Both men and women feel equally addressed by MTN... I think they're consistent across all groups, yeah”.*

4.3.1.4 Uncertainty Avoidance

Participants expressed a preference for stability, reliability, and clear communication, reflecting a cultural value for predictability and order. MTN's consistent network performance, transparent billing, and responsive customer support foster a sense of trust and control. At the same time, participants valued the brand's flexibility and adaptability in addressing customer needs, suggesting that while structure is appreciated, change is accepted when it enhances reliability.

i) Preference for consistency

A participant perceives that MTN's transparent billing practices and proactive communication foster trust, as customers feel informed and in control of their monthly payments.

SA3: *"Even month to month with your billing, they will send you a statement before they come debit. They'll also send you SMS. So you always know what they will debit".*

4.3.1.5 Planning Orientation

Participants displayed a mix of long-term and short-term orientations, balancing their appreciation for MTN's long-term legacy and trustworthiness with the need for practical, flexible solutions that meet immediate needs. While many valued the brand's enduring presence and its association with family heritage and aspiration, they also emphasised convenience, adaptability, and accessibility in day-to-day usage.

i) Family legacy brand

One participant illustrates strong brand loyalty rooted in family tradition, showing that MTN's long-standing presence in the household reinforces a sense of continuity and preference over competing networks.

SA1: *"I've been using MTN since. So that background of the household background of MTN is MTN. You can come with Telkom, you can come with any other brand, but MTN is MTN. So you stick to it"*

ii) Long-term Planning Oriented

Participant SA3 reflects a preference for stability and long-term commitment, indicating that their continued loyalty to MTN is driven by a desire to avoid disruption and maintain a consistent, reliable service provider.

"I like more long-term planning, future planning. So here I've been with MTN for so long. Like yes, I don't want to be changing service providers"

iii) Short-term Planning Oriented

SA4's quote suggests that some consumers prioritise short-term solutions and immediate benefits, indicating that their engagement with MTN is shaped by a focus on quick, practical outcomes rather than long-term commitment.

“Generally short-term planning, short term results because they just want to fulfill immediate needs”.

4.3.1.6 Sponsorship of entertainment initiatives

Participants demonstrated a strong focus on fun, relaxation, and self-expression, linking MTN to feelings of happiness, energy, and social connection. They viewed the brand's support of sports, music, and entertainment as boosting joy, national pride, and unity, making MTN seem like a brand that helps people celebrate and enjoy life.

SA2: *“They also do sponsor soccer matches, MTN 8. So that's time to enjoy and for leisure they do have that gig in Swaziland, Bush fire”.*

4.3.2 Data analysis of the cultural values of Ghana MTN participants

Table 4.3 provides a summary of the cultural values of Ghanaian participants

Table 4. 3 Summary of the cultural values of Ghanaian participants

Theme (context)	Sub-theme(s)	Participant Codes
Power distance oriented	Respect for authority	GH1, GH2
	Respect for Hierarchy	GH4
Collectivist orientation		GH1, GH2, GH3, GH4
Gender neutral brand appeal	Feminine appeal	GH2
	Gender Neutral appeal	GH3, GH4
Responsible Adherence	Rule Adherence	GH1, GH2
	Adherence to local values	GH2, GH4
Planning Orientation	Short-term orientated	GH1
	Strategic Orientated	GH3, GH4
	Long-term oriented	GH4
Indulgence culture	Entertainment	GH3
	Generational Self-expression	GH4

Integrated with Hofstede's Dimensions and Contextual Cultural Insights. The following themes have been uncovered from Ghanaian participants:

4.3.2.1 Power Distance orientated

Participants highlighted that Ghanaian culture places a strong emphasis on respect for authority, hierarchy, and traditional leadership. Respect is seen as a core national value, deeply ingrained in social and institutional interactions. MTN's engagement with traditional and political leaders, such as visits to chiefs' palaces, was viewed as culturally appropriate and reinforcing the brand's alignment with local norms of deference and respect.

i) Respect for Authority

Two participants emphasise that respect for authority is a deeply ingrained cultural value in Ghana, influencing everyday social interactions and expectations, including how people communicate and behave toward elders and those in positions of influence.

GH1: *"So in terms of respect for authority, Ghana has a very high respect for authority... respect for authority is very much alive and held in high".*

GH2: *"Ghana is one of the places where like people, people really like to respect authority. So, when they are speaking, even when you go somewhere and then maybe there are, there are older people there and you don't greet, it always becomes an issue like, hey, you can't even greet".*

ii) Respect for Hierarchy

A participant shows that respect and hierarchy are central cultural values in Ghana, and they perceive MTN positively because the brand aligns with these norms through visible engagements with traditional leaders and community authorities.

GH4: *"With the Ghanaian culture, respect is one of our values. I think respect after hospitality, respect is one of our core values. Respect for authority, respect for hierarchy. Especially with my ethnic group. Yes, the Ashanti king is well respected... MTN, like I said, even though they are not telling their stories for me but I see that they have a lot of engagements with officials, like going to the chief's palace".*

4.3.1.2 Collectivist orientation

Participants described Ghanaian culture as deeply collectivist, emphasising community, interdependence, and the extended family system as the foundation of social life. Belonging and mutual support are central to how people define themselves. MTN's community-oriented initiatives and its integration within local social structures were recognised as consistent with these values, positioning the brand as part of the collective fabric rather than a distant corporate entity.

GH1: *"At the heart of our culture is community. Yes, community is at the heart of our culture. Yeah. So we understand the values of the extended family in a big way... MTN not staying away from community very much. They are staying within that mold of the community as a Catalyst for individual achievement"*.

GH2: *"This year alone I have seen how important family and community is to my development, it is very important to have a community"*.

GH3: *"Community seems stronger here in my opinion than the individual. The individual is there, but community feels stronger, yeah. Because there's so many communities, communities online, communities in workplaces, communities in churches, communities in malls, communities in locations. You know, it's very easy for people to create communities in Ghana"*.

GH4: *"Ghana is more of their people. We are, we are very people focused..."*.

4.3.1.3 Gender appeal

Participants portrayed Ghanaian culture as Success is not solely measured by status or competition, but also by harmony, inclusivity, and social contribution. MTN's efforts to remain relatable and culturally attuned were viewed as consistent with these values, positioning the brand as approachable and community-minded rather than purely performance-driven.

i) Feminine appeal

One participant indicates that MTN's community initiatives, such as *Heroes of Change*, strengthen its image as a caring and socially responsible brand that aligns with Ghanaian cultural values.

GH2: *"When it comes to values, I'll say they are also a caring brand due to some of the things that they do, like MTN Heroes of Change"*.

ii) Gender neutral appeal

Participants GH3 and GH4's quotes suggest that MTN is perceived as gender-inclusive, with brand experiences shaped more by affordability and access than gender, and advertising that represents all genders equally.

GH3: *"So I feel like it's an affordability and access issue, not a gender issue. We experience the brand the same, as long as you can afford".*

GH4: *"You see most of MTN adverts communicating using Um, what do I say? All gender across. You don't see a particular gender representing in MTN adverts".*

4.3.1.4 Responsible Compliance

Participants emphasised that Ghanaian society values order, structure, and adherence to established rules. MTN's compliance with regulatory bodies and its reputation as a disciplined, law-abiding organisation were noted as reflections of these cultural expectations, reinforcing the brand's trustworthiness and credibility in the market.

i) Rule Adherence

Three participants reveal that Ghanaians value rule-following and hierarchy, perceiving MTN as a compliant, law-abiding brand whose alignment with regulatory expectations enhances its credibility and trustworthiness.

GH2: *"So in Ghana, we like to follow rules. We always like to conform to the rule of law. I mean, definitely people who do not follow like the rule of law are there, but for the majority I would like to believe that we are really big on following rules and hierarchy".*

GH1: *"I believe MTN follows the regulators, and they are also very respectful and a conformist kind of a brand".*

GH4: *"Yeah, I feel like they do follow the rules because I rarely hear of MTN getting into trouble with the law or government or the regulators".*

ii) Adherence to local values

Participants GH2 and GH4's quotes show that MTN effectively adapts to Ghanaian cultural norms by incorporating local languages, traditions, and

relatable cultural cues, making the brand feel more accessible and culturally aligned with Ghanaian consumers.

GH2: *“I see MTN trying to do a lot of things that incorporates the Ghanaian culture into it... they also try to position themselves in situations where it's like they are easily relatable to the Ghanaian consumer”.*

GH4: *“And so you see MTN ads and festivals in local languages. They identify with the people with the way they translate some of their values and their services to the local languages, just so the people they are able to identify with”.*

4.3.1.5 Planning Orientation

Participants expressed mixed views regarding time orientation in Ghana. While some described a dominant short-term focus, driven by immediate needs and quick results, others acknowledged growing attention to long-term planning and future benefits. This duality reflects a pragmatic approach in which Ghanaians balance present realities with aspirations for sustained progress and stability.

i) Short-term orientation

A participant perceives that that Ghanaian consumers are often driven by short-term needs and immediate outcomes, which may influence how they engage with MTN's services and make purchase decisions.

GH1: *“No. Short-term. The culture is about ‘I want, I want, I want’. Short-term results are what drives people here”.*

ii) Strategic Orientation

Participants GH3 and GH4 indicate that Ghanaian consumers engage with MTN for both immediate, short-term needs and longer-term financial or service benefits, demonstrating that the brand effectively caters to diverse planning horizons within the market.

GH3: *“It is both for me, MTN serves both short- and long-term goals. I know that some people are even going out of their way to invest in MTN and to acquire shares from MTN and things like that... then I mean on MoMo, there is a thing where they encourage people to save for the future. MoMo is also like an immediate wallet transacting everyday type of situation”.*

GH4: *“I think in Ghana people focus on all long-term planning, future benefits, short term results and immediate needs. It's yes, it's all, it's all”.*

ii) Long-term oriented

Ghana participant 4 alludes to long-term engagement with the brand through an insurance product, speaking to MTN being more than just a telecommunication service but also a financial services company.

GH4: *“My mom does the Ayo insurance. Come on, we all knew MTN was a telco? But they are more than a telco now, they are now also a fintech company, ensuring you for long-term”*

4.3.1.6 Indulgence culture

Participants noted that Ghanaian culture is becoming more indulgent, especially among younger people. Traditionally, Ghanaian society has valued restraint and moderation, but attitudes are shifting toward greater enjoyment, leisure, and self-expression. This change can be seen in the country's lively nightlife, thriving entertainment scene, and popular celebrations like “Dirty December”. MTN's focus on music, entertainment, and youth involvement reflects this move toward expressive enjoyment and stronger social connections.

i) Entertainment

A participant highlights that MTN is perceived as evolving beyond a traditional telecommunications provider into a broader fintech brand, offering long-term value through services like insurance that deepen consumer trust and engagement.

GH3: *“I think a lot of people like the leisure and the fun, a lot of people. I mean, the nightlife here is quite a thing, yes, especially with the Dirty December. I mean the nightlife here is crazy, crazy, crazy, crazy. There is no event you're going to organize, especially when it's entertainment that you would, it would, it would flop, it would wait. You would always get people showing up, you know, regardless of whatever event it is, but it's a small niche, intimate event or it's a full stadium, people are going to come”.*

ii) Generational Self-expression

Participant GH4 suggests that a generational shift is occurring in Ghana, where traditionally reserved cultural norms are evolving as Gen Z emerges as a more expressive and influential segment, shaping contemporary consumer behaviour.

“The typical Ghanaian is more reserved, however, looking at what is happening to the world globally, the Gen. Z's, the Gen. Z's are very, very expressive and I think because the largest population of the country and then having the Gen. Z's now positioning themselves as very expressive”.

4.3.3 Data analysis of the cultural values of Cameroon MTN participants

Table 4. 4 provides a summary of the cultural values of Cameroonian participants.

Table 4. 5 Summary of the cultural values of Cameroonian participants

Theme (context)	Sub-theme(s)	Participant Codes
Power Distance Orientation	Generational respect for hierarchy	CAM4
	One-way communication	CAM2, CAM4
Collectivist orientation	Community Focused	CAM1, CAM2
	Family Oriented	CAM4
Gender-neutral		CAM1, CAM 2, CAM3, CAM4
Uncertainty Avoidance	Adaptable rule following	CAM1,CAM2
	Rule adherence differences	CAM4
Planning Orientation	Short-term orientation	CAM2, CAM4
	Strategic Orientation	CAM1
Indulgence culture	Sponsorship of Entertainment activities	CAM1, CAM2, CAM3
	Enjoyment Culture	CAM1, CAM2, CAM3

The following themes have been uncovered from Cameroonian participants:

4.3.3.1 Power Distance Orientation

Participants described Cameroon as a society where respect for hierarchy remains culturally embedded but is evolving across generations. Older generations tend to uphold authority and defer to leadership without question,

whereas younger cohorts, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, display a more open and questioning attitude. This generational shift reflects changing expectations around communication, participation, and shared decision-making.

i) Generational respect for hierarchy

A participant perceives that respect for hierarchy in Cameroon varies by generation, with older groups strongly upholding traditional authority while younger millennials and Gen Z place less emphasis on hierarchical leadership.

CAM4: *“Respect for hierarchy is I think it's a generational thing. The millennials and Gen Zs don't really care... But it's the generation that is just ahead of us that that really adheres to that. If the governor says OK do this, they do. They respect leadership as well”.*

ii) One-way communication

The perspectives of two participants indicate that MTN staff in Cameroon are sometimes perceived as authoritative or dismissive, indicating a communication style where employees talk *at* customers rather than engaging *with* them, which can lead to feelings of not being heard or respected.

CAM2: *“They speak from their own point of view, like, OK, this is like, let's say like a mother who thinks or who says what she thinks is best for her child, but does not really listen to what the child has to say”.*

CAM4: *“I want to say they shout at the customer. They're talking at the customer. They're not talking with the customer”.*

4.3.3.2 Collectivist orientation

Participants described Cameroonian culture as collectivist, emphasising social cohesion and shared identity. MTN's prominent local presence was seen as strengthening communal ties and national identification with the brand.

i) Community Focused

CAM1 and CAM2's perceptions show that a strong sense of togetherness and collective identity shapes Cameroonian culture, with community values playing a central role in how people connect and relate to brands like MTN.

CAM1: *“Community, community. Cameroon is a community country”.*

CAM2: *“It's more about community. Yes, all of us together”.*

ii) Family Oriented

Participant CAM4 highlights the strong influence of extended family networks in Cameroon, demonstrating that family approval has a significant impact on personal decisions, including choices related to brands such as MTN.

CAM4: *“We are very family oriented and it's beyond the nuclear family. The top influencers in my life are my family. So as soon as my sisters say it's OK, it's OK”.*

4.3.3.3 Gender neutral

Participants demonstrated a culture that values ambition, competitiveness, inclusivity, and adaptability. Achievement, often seen in sports and youth engagement, is important, while gender roles are increasingly flexible. MTN's lifestyle-focused communication matches this changing mindset.

CAM1: *“No, I think that's we have no difference. We have no difference in Cameroon. I think that's the increases of women are really visible and perceptible in Cameroon. We have no difference”.*

CAM2: *“If it's gender, I would say not it's not they don't communicate to gender in specific, but they communicate to category of people because here in Cameroon sometimes you see an activity is made for women or that was originally made for women. Men are doing it also now because times are hard. So, they talk to people according to what they do and their lives rather than their gender”.*

CAM3: *“No, no, there is no strong difference. There is no difference, it's the same for everyone”.*

CAM4: *“I think MTN addresses both, addresses both quite well. I don't think there's any, there's any disparity in any way”.*

4.3.3.4 Uncertainty Avoidance

Participants noted that Cameroon values structure, but younger generations are increasingly flexible. Older Cameroonians tend to favour stability and rules, while

younger individuals tend to embrace adaptability. MTN's success lies in balancing reliable service with flexible products to meet the diverse needs of this generation.

i) Adaptable rule following

Two participants perceive that while Cameroonian culture recognises many rules, these are applied with flexibility and friendliness, indicating a balanced approach between structure and interpersonal warmth.

CAM1: *"I think rules but flexible sometimes".*

CAM2: *"Cameroonians have, they have rules that's on rules that are many rules, but I believe we are very we are so friendly that at times we tend to be flexible towards people".*

ii) Rule adherence differences

A participant notes that rule adherence in Cameroon varies by generation, with older consumers valuing structure and predictability, while younger consumers prefer flexibility. This highlights how MTN successfully accommodates both groups through tailored, age-aligned offerings.

CAM4: *"Well, it's a generational thing. It's a generational thing in Cameroon where the younger generation is more flexible, is more open to flexibility. While the older generation, the older guys are very, very big on rules and predictability and uncertainty, and somehow MTN navigates both very well because, yes, because with the younger guys, they have more flexible offers, a more flexible voice. With every other person now, it's more the rules, it's more predictability, it's more, it's more certainty".*

4.3.3.5 Planning Orientation

Participants described Cameroon as predominantly short-term oriented, with daily survival and immediate needs taking precedence over long-term planning. Economic hardship and limited resources shape a culture where practicality and short-term gains are prioritised.

i) Short-term orientation

Participants CAM2 and CAM4's quotes show that many Cameroonians prioritise short-term, day-to-day survival needs due to economic hardship, and services like MoMo are valued because they directly support these immediate financial pressures, making MTN particularly relevant in a context where long-term planning is often not feasible.

CAM2: *"Oh, times are really hard, so people think more of short-term results and immediate needs. Yes".*

CAM4: *"But to be very candid, most Cameroonians are way too poor to think long of the long haul. It's how am I surviving? How am I surviving now? How do I feed my loved ones immediately? ...That is why people who use Momo love Momo so much because they think for example there is Momo "Helep" the service where it can lend you a small amount of money depending on your usage. To handle certain things, to pay bills, to shop and other things. And just because of that, Cameroonians, especially Cameroonians that use Momo right now, really love, really love Momo. So yes, it's for example, that particular product is addressing the fact that Cameroonians live on a day-to-day".*

ii) Strategic Orientation

The participant demonstrates that while MTN effectively addresses consumers' immediate, short-term needs, its long-standing 25-year presence also signals reliability and the ability to meet long-term expectations in the Cameroonian market.

CAM1: *"Yes short-term needs they meet, but also they have been in Cameroon for 25 years, so it means they also meet long term".*

4.3.3.6 Indulgence culture

Participants characterised Cameroonian culture as highly indulgent, with a strong appreciation for enjoyment, celebration, and social expression. Leisure, fun, and vibrant social gatherings are viewed as integral parts of life and identity. Cameroonians were described as outgoing, expressive, and unreserved, embracing joy, entertainment, and collective festivity as defining cultural traits.

i) Sponsorship of Entertainment activities

Three participants perceived that MTN's sponsorship of major festivals, concerts, and university events strongly resonates with Cameroonian consumers, enhancing the brand's appeal by aligning with the country's vibrant social culture and love for celebratory community activities.

CAM1: *"Sure because we have many, many activities and festivals. MTN always sponsors the big festivals like the Sean Paul I mentioned. MTN collaborates with artists, in communities, in university games It is interesting because we are hardworking but when it comes to enjoying, we know it is time to be free and enjoy and feel good".*

CAM2: *"OK, so the first one is the concert with Sean Paul and P Square that also when I was in university because I went to an university in Goya. They did a lot activations to do with university games".*

CAM3: *"They do a very good job with sponsoring activities. Even the holidays, you know there is a concert guaranteed. There is a guarantee concert you're going to attend from MTN by MTN".*

ii) Enjoyment culture

Three participants emphasise that enjoyment is a core cultural value in Cameroon, with fun, celebration, and "good vibes" deeply shaping social life and influencing how consumers positively engage with MTN's brand activities.

CAM1: *"Enjoyment. Enjoyment is important here".*

CAM2: *"All Cameroonians are minister of enjoyment. We love to have fun and enjoyment. Yes, even the poor people. Sometimes you see them having fun".*

CAM3: *"No good vibes. Good life is Cameroonian. Enjoyment is Cameroonian".*

4.4 Brand Identity

Table 4. 6 provides a summary of insights uncovered according to the Brand Identity elements of South African participants.

Table 4. 7 Summary of insights uncovered according to the Brand Identity elements of South African participants.

Theme (context)	Sub-theme(s)	Participant Codes
Well-known Brand	Omnipresent brand	SA1, SA2
	Distinctive yellow brand colour	SA1, SA3, SA4
Credible Personality	Transparent communication	SA1, SA3
	Trustworthy customer service	SA3, SA4
Local brand communication	Relatable localized advertising	SA2, SA4
	Generational brand voice	SA3
Sound Customer Relationships	Customer Appreciation	SA1, SA2
	Long-term brand loyalty	SA1, SA4
Customer brand appeal	Universal demographic customer appeal	SA1, SA2
	Self-brand congruence	SA3, SA4

4.4.1 Well-known Brand

MTN's physical identity is anchored in its bright yellow brand colour and omnipresence.

i) Omnipresent brand

Two participants perceive MTN as widely present and accessible, with diverse service offerings that make the brand feel reliably available *"everywhere you go."*

SA1: *"For me MTN is like everywhere you go".*

SA2: *"...then now it's really everywhere you go and they have diverse offers".*

ii) Distinctive yellow brand colour

Participants SA1, SA3, and SA4's show that MTN's consistent use of yellow has created a strong visual association, making the colour instantly recognisable and central to the brand's identity.

SA1: *"...whenever I see the colour yellow, it's always associated with MTN".*

SA3: *"I just see yellow and I think the colour is well represented".*

SA4: *“When I look up the colours, obviously the yellow has always been their stable colour”*

4.4.2 Credible Personality

Participants describe MTN as credible, transparent in their communication and delivering in their customer service and promises.

i) Transparent communication

Two participants highlight MTN's strong communication practices, showing that frequent updates, reminders, and responsive customer engagement make users feel informed, supported, and valued throughout their service experience.

SA1: *“Whenever there's something going on, it's either they send you an SMS or and then you'll see the communication on your socials, it's something that they're doing OK, they're good at that at least. You know, even like let's say when you have used your 50% of your data, then they let you know that you know what you have used 50% of your data, 80% of your data. Oh wait, that it has been depleted whatsoever”.*

SA3: *“They'll send you an e-mail. Yes. Like I said, even from the head office, they will respond to you as a customer. Even month to month with your billing, they will send you a statement before they come debit. They'll also send you SMS. So you always know what they will debit”.*

ii) Trustworthy customer service

Two participants perceive that trust is a central driver of loyalty, valuing MTN because it reliably delivers on its promises, creating a sense of confidence similar to that within a community or cultural setting.

SA3: *“So trust, right? So in any cultural setting, right, you have to trust the community that you live with. Yes, so trust is important. I can say you can't just be in a cultural setting with a group of people and you don't trust . So that's for me where trust comes in. That's why I was like, you know what? Like I said earlier, I'd rather pay them money because the trust is there and I know they will deliver”.*

SA4: *“I tend to resonate more with MTN I think also it speaks to the trust. I was saying that when you look at the brand knowing that you trust it because it's going*

to deliver what it says, it's going to deliver".

4.4.3 Local brand communication

MTN is seen as localizing advertising messages, tailoring them to the population, and adapting communication to different generations.

i) Relatable localized advertising

MTN's locally grounded advertising, featuring familiar places and national symbols, enhances relatability and strengthens cultural connection with South African consumers, as perceived by two participants.

SA2: *"If you look at the adverts, you can relate to their adverts. In most of their adverts, they are shot in places which maybe you know or you can simply see or recognise that now this is in South Africa. I mean, you'll also see a South African flag in some of their adverts".*

SA4: *"And for me that is just obviously it's in Zulu, which means that obviously this is a brand trying to say something about my people being for you know the African consumers more specifically in the South African market where the Zulu tribe is quite dominant, but above that I would say it does not necessarily because of the use of the language, but even the choice of the words. Because when you think of "Sawubona" in an African culture, the first thing or one of the prominent things when we grow up that we get told is to be welcoming, whether you know the person or you don't".*

i) Generational brand voice

Participant SA3's shows that MTN's use of local lingo and Gen Z expressions in its advertising makes the brand feel culturally relevant and aligned with the everyday language of younger South Africans.

SA3: *"Like I said, they use the lingo of the people in their ads. I saw one of the YouTube ads where it was more appropriate for Gen Zs in the way they were using local lingo and expressions".*

4.4.4 Sound Customer Relationships

The brand fosters lasting relationships through consistently delivered service and

respectful interactions with its customers.

i) Customer Appreciation

Participants SA1 and SA2 state that reliable network performance and responsive customer support make them feel valued and prioritised, reinforcing a positive and personalised experience with MTN.

SA1: *"I think I'm valued. Yeah, as a customer, because yeah, I think I'm very valued due to the fact that I hardly have coverage problems".*

SA2: *"I feel really good because I feel prioritized as well. Because each time I call them, whenever I have a problem, they attend to my case and they treat it as emergency".*

ii) Long-term brand loyalty

Two participants indicate that long-term loyalty to MTN stems from consistent satisfaction, as the brand has reliably met their expectations over time.

SA1: *"I'd love to believe that for me it's quite a good brand since I've been with it for so long".*

SA4: *"Because obviously for me it ticks certain boxes that are expected to tick for the kind of services that they offer. So hence I've been with them for this long".*

4.4.5 Customer brand appeal

MTN users are characterised by diversity, connectivity, and ambition. They perceive themselves as modern individuals who value community and staying connected.

i) Universal demographic customer appeal

Participants SA1 and SA2 suggest that MTN is viewed as an inclusive brand whose services and pricing cater to all age groups and affordability levels, making it accessible to a wide range of customers.

SA1: *"When it comes to customers, right, I believe that you know that everyone can be a customer when it comes to MTN, right, regardless of age. It's usable for*

all ages”.

SA2: *“They have well-priced products which accommodates everyone across different range of affordability”.*

ii) Self-brand congruence

Participants SA3 and SA4 emphasised MTN’s status as a heritage brand in South Africa, describing it as a source of national pride with long-standing credibility. They also associated MTN customers with digital progressiveness, reflecting the brand’s alignment with modern and innovative consumer identities.

SA3: *“MTN is a legacy brand and MTN does what legacy brands do. That's why I can remember even ads from back then. So just because you grew up with seeing those brands as a child, so they become also aspirational and you tell yourself that one day when I work, I'll buy that brand or I'll afford that brand. So I do consider it also as a heritage brand in South Africa”.*

SA4: *“It is South African born or established brand, but obviously even in terms of the services it offers, I view it as a giant in its own space and of course. It's our pride and joy, like those companies that are pride and joy of the country”. The participants also mentioned that; “The picture that I have of an MTN customer is somebody who is digitally inclined, but at the same time, even if they are not exactly maybe on par with, let's say with other customers from maybe more developed countries and all of that, but it's basically somebody who is, you know, open to who is progressive digitally”.*

Table 4. 9 provides a summary of Ghana Brand Identity Elements.

Table 4. 8 Ghana Brand Identity Elements

Theme (context)	Sub-theme(s)	Participant Codes
Well-known brand	Omnipresent Brand	GH1, GH2, GH3, GH4
	Distinctive Yellow brand colour	GH1, GH4
	Market leader	GH1, GH2
Friendly brand personality	Friendly Customer engagement	GH1
	Brand competence	GH2
Localised brand communication	Localized brand message	GH1, GH4
	Generational local brand voice	GH3
Accessibility		GH1
Mass Customer Brand Appeal		GH1, GH2, GH3, GH4

4.4.6 Well-known brand

In Ghana, MTN is characterised by a prominent visual identity. The brand's distinctive yellow colour is widely recognised and associated with positivity.

i) Omnipresence Brand

Four participants, GH1, GH2, GH3, and GH4, consistently characterised MTN as highly visible and widely accessible in Ghana, describing the brand as dominant, pervasive, and present “everywhere,” which reinforces perceptions of strong market coverage and broad consumer reach.

GH1: *“MTN is everywhere”.*

GH2: *“They definitely have the numbers, they have the connectivity and as I've said earlier, they're everywhere you go”.*

GH3: *“First of all, they are very forceful as a brand. They are everywhere and try as much as possible to reach everyone”.*

GH4: *“They are taking up every space. They are dominating everywhere. You see them everywhere”.*

ii) Distinctive yellow brand colour

Two participants state that MTN's yellow branding is strongly embedded in the Ghanaian market, with the colour widely associated with the brand and symbolising positivity and aspiration qualities that resonate particularly well with the country's youthful population.

GH1: *“Yellow, yellow has it’s, I mean now it’s connected to MTN. Wherever you go, when you see yellow, the first thing that comes to mind is MTN because somehow they tried to splash the whole country with yellow”.*

GH4: *“...even their colour, I think the colour yellow I know has to do with bright stuffs, has to do with positivity and in Ghana, you know, the large number of our population is youthful and most of the youth are aspiring or aiming higher”.*

iii) Market-leader

Two participants portrayed MTN as the dominant market leader in Ghana, consistently describing the brand as powerful, pioneering, and the largest telecommunications provider in the country.

GH1: *“MTN is like a leader. Pioneer. Big boy. Dominant. Yeah. Dominant”.*

GH2: *“I’ll describe them as a very big brand. They are, one of the biggest, in fact, the biggest telco company in Ghana”.*

4.4.7 Brand Competence

Participant GH2 reflected on the brand’s functional competence in enabling secure, efficient, and convenient financial transactions.

GH2: *“...and MoMo also plays a very vital role for me because I tend to carry less cash, because me when I hold cash, I spend it much quicker than when it is in my mobile money wallet. Yeah, so I usually pay a lot of things with my with MoMo, so it’s very convenient for me”.*

4.4.8 Localised brand Communication

Findings show that Ghana has two key dimensions of MTN’s culturally attuned communication strategy.

i) Localised brand message

Participants highlighted that MTN effectively localises its communication by using dominant local languages in advertisements and during cultural festivals, making the brand more relatable and culturally embedded within the Ghanaian context.

GH1: *“...for example, they're communicating with local languages. The focus is on the dominant languages”.*

GH4: *“And so you see MTN ads or their logo during those festivals, you see them in those local languages”.*

ii) Generational local brand voice

Participant GH3's account suggests that MTN adapts its brand voice across segments, using energetic and vibrant communication for youth-focused offerings like MTN Pulse, while adopting a more calm and formal tone for products aimed at older or more traditional audiences, such as fibre broadband.

GH3: *“So, in terms of how MTN Pulse shows up, they are more energetic, they are more vibey. So, they tap more like the younger generation or the younger demographic. Cause that's their space. But then when it comes to you know like MTN fibre broadband they also communicate differently, in a more respectful and calm or serious way”.*

4.4.9 Accessibility

MTN Ghana fosters relationships built on reliability, inclusivity, and support. Through accessible services, prompt responsiveness, and consistent performance, the brand cultivates trust and community engagement, effectively positioning MTN as a dependable partner in daily communications and societal interactions.

GH1: *“Over 20 years ago, during a field trip in one of the remotest parts of Ghana, MTN was the only network we could access. In that moment, it felt like light at the end of a dark tunnel ...the only connection to the world. That experience has stayed with me ever since”.*

4.4.10 Mass Customer Brand Appeal

Across all four participants, MTN was consistently described as an inclusive, mass-market brand, with GH1–GH4 emphasising that the company offers products for every socioeconomic group and communicates in ways that speak to consumers “across the divide,” positioning MTN as a network accessible and relevant to all Ghanaians.

GH1: *“There is something for everyone no matter where you stand and even in communication they try to reflect that they speak to all manner of people across the divide”.*

GH2: *“I don't really think they are a network meant for just rich people, but now I feel like there are more mass market, just that they are still expensive because their bundles, their bundles will still rank on the expensive side. I feel like now anybody at all can use MTN”.*

GH3: *“So, I see the customer as everyone you know. MTN is basically for everyone, it's everyone, it's for everyone. So, they have from the high value and customer all the way to the mass markets. To the very, very low ends”*

GH4: *“I think it's a mass brand. MTN is a mass brand, yes. I see myself as part of the customers because I feel like it is for everyone”.*

Table 4. 9 provides a summary of Cameroon Brand Identity Elements.

Table 4. 10 Cameroon Brand Identity Elements

Theme (context)	Sub-theme(s)	Participant Codes
Well-known Brand	Omnipresent Brand	CAM1, CAM3
	Distinctive yellow branding	CAM1
Youthful Brand Personality		CAM2, CAM3
Localised Brand Communication		CAM1, CAM2, CAM3
Constrained Customer Relationships	Declining Service Trust	CAM3, CAM4
Customer brand appeal	Pan African brand appeal	CAM1, CAM4
	High-end customer appeal	CAM1

4.4.11 Well-known brand

In Cameroon, MTN is distinguished by its prominent visibility and comprehensive network coverage. The brand's signature yellow symbolizes energy, accessibility, and optimism, establishing MTN as a distinctive and easily recognizable presence in daily life.

i) Omnipresent Brand

Participants emphasised MTN's extensive market penetration in Cameroon, describing the brand as highly visible "everywhere," including in suburban and remote areas, with a strong on-the-ground presence reinforced through brand ambassadors and foot soldiers.

CAM1: *"MTN is everywhere in Cameroon". It is yellow and blue everywhere. It is in the blood".*

CAM3: *"...because it is present, MTN is present everywhere, you know, even in suburbs you find, you find it there. Yes, yeah, even in remote areas".*

CAM3: *"MTN presence is really highly felt in the market. It's highly felt through brand ambassadors, foot soldiers and all of that".*

ii) Distinctive yellow branding

A participant states that MTN's yellow and blue branding is deeply embedded within the Cameroonian environment, creating a strong, almost instinctive association that positions the brand as part of everyday life.

CAM1: *"MTN is yellow and blue everywhere. It is in the blood".*

4.4.12 Youthful brand personality

MTN is seen in Cameroon as energetic, lively, and friendly. The brand's upbeat and interactive nature matches the youthful vibe of the country's culture. With its inviting approach and regular involvement in daily life, MTN presents itself as both modern and down-to-earth, thereby strengthening its reputation as a company that connects with people and celebrates their spirit and positivity.

CAM2: *"They do a lot for the Youth, yes, they're always doing something for the youth, they have this platform, Yamo platform for young people".*

CAM3: *"So I'd say MTN is a youthful brand, very colourful and attached to the Cameroonian people".*

4.4.13 Localised Brand Communication

Participants noted that MTN's use of local languages, Pidgin, and culturally familiar expressions connects well with Cameroon's diverse communities. Unlike competitors that primarily use French, MTN is perceived as inclusive and

relatable. Its recognition of Cameroon's linguistic diversity, with over 150 spoken languages, was also viewed as a positive effort to reach a broad consumer base.

CAM1: *"...because when I see MTN in their verbal language, they use pidgin. A pidgin is a language created in different regions spoken by many communities. This language is spoken by the masses, the person who have not money, so I can relate with MTN because I see they want to include everyone and talk to every other person. Orange is only French".*

CAM2: *"I think because when they talk, and when they use the colors, the way they use the colours and the language, the jargon in Cameroon, Yes, it connects with people".*

CAM3: *"And in terms of language, I would love to say we have over 150 languages spoken in Cameroon, but they try as much as, yes, they try as much as possible to satisfy the major languages".*

4.4.14 Constrained Customer Relationships

Participants reported increasing scepticism and frustration with MTN's customer service in Cameroon. Many now doubt the brand's reliability, viewing competitors as more responsive. Positive perceptions have shifted to disappointment and fatigue, leading to a decline in trust in MTN's services.

CAM3: *"From my perspective, I feel quite sceptical. I often find myself wondering what MTN will actually deliver next, because most times they don't follow through".*

CAM4: *"It used to evoke a lot of nostalgia. Now to be very candid. It's just anger. And it's really, really, really frustrating. MTN customer service is terrible. It is non-existent".*

4.4.15 Customer brand appeal

MTN is widely seen as an aspirational brand in Cameroon, valued for its Pan-African identity and authentic African image. It is also associated with a premium, well-off customer base, while Orange is viewed as more youth-oriented.

i) Pan African brand appeal

Participants CAM1 and CAM4 highlighted a strong cultural affinity with MTN's

Pan-African identity, noting that unlike Orange, which is perceived as more France-aligned, MTN is viewed as an African, Anglo-Saxon brand, making it more appealing even to Francophone consumers.

CAM1: *“Orange is French only, MTN is Pan African, I like Pan African and not French only. So I prefer MTN even though I am Francophone”.*

CAM4: *“I feel MTN is African. MTN is African. MTN has been there. It's Anglo-Saxon, exactly Anglo-Saxon and it's African”.*

ii) High-end customer appeal

Participant CAM1 notes that MTN is sometimes perceived as a premium or higher-status network in certain communities, associated with wealthier users, while Orange is viewed as the more youth-oriented and accessible alternative.

“In my area, MTN is generally seen as a brand for rich people. People often view it as the network for those who are ‘well off,’ while Orange is perceived as a network for the youth”.

Table 4. 11 provides a summary of South Africa brand experience elements.

Table 4. 12 South Africa brand experience elements

Theme (context)	Sub-theme(s)	Participant Codes
Emotion inducing	Sense of serenity	SA1, SA4
	Mixed emotions	SA3

4.4.16 Emotion Inducing

South African participants articulated an emotion-inducing brand experience, framing MTN as a brand that evokes serene emotions, with elements of mixed emotions.

i) Sense of Serenity

SA1 and SA2 participants described that MTN induce emotions of joy, peace and security, speaking to how the brand delivers on its brand experience.

SA1: *“So for me, those are the emotions of joy and peace of mind”*

SA4: *“I think it brings a sense of security”*

ii) Mixed emotions

Contrary to SA1 and SA4 however, SA3 indicated that the brand induces mixed emotions, both negative and positive with negative emotions stemming from pricing effects.

SA3: *“I have both positive and negative emotions. There's one positive in terms of I know that I'll always be connected. Then the second one is that it's very expensive. So the positive is the network reliability”.*

Table 4.6 provides a summary of Ghana Brand Experience Elements.

Table 4.6 Summary of Ghana Brand Experience Elements

Theme (context)	Sub-theme(s)	Participant Codes
Emotion Inducing	Sense of warmth	GH1
	Indifferent emotions	GH3
	Mixed emotions	GH2
Use of local identifiable figures	Use of mass appeal ambassadors	GH1
	Use of influencers	GH3

4.4.17 Emotion Inducing

Participants describe positive emotional associations with MTN, however, there is also an element of neutrality in emotional connection.

i) Sense of warmth

A participant suggests that MTN evokes a sense of warmth and positive connection, with the brand's identity and communication perceived as inviting and emotionally engaging.

GH1: *“Well, MTN is warm, yeah. So let me say because of the sun is warm in terms of how they want to connect to the consumer or how they connect to me”.*

ii) Indifferent emotions

A participant indicates emotional neutrality toward MTN, suggesting that the brand does not strongly evoke positive or negative feelings and is experienced in a more utilitarian, rather than affective, manner.

GH3: *“I wouldn't say it evokes any emotion in particular. I'm feeling indifferent about this if I'm going to be honest”.*

iii) Mixed emotions

Participants' remarks reflect a mixed emotional experience with MTN, indicating simultaneous appreciation and frustration, which suggests fluctuating satisfaction and a complex, ambivalent relationship with the brand.

GH2: *“That's a very interesting question because I feel like I have a love hate relationship with MTN currently”.*

4.4.18 Use of local identifiable figures

A relational connection is strengthened through mass-market ambassadors like Samini, who are chosen because they represent the everyday Ghanaian.

i) Use of mass appeal ambassadors

MTN's strategic use of influential local figures, such as well-known musicians and long-standing community-based ambassadors, to strengthen brand reach and authenticity, demonstrating how culturally relevant influencers help MTN connect effectively with the broader Ghanaian population.

GH1: *“One of the dominant people they used for brand ambassador work and so on was a top musician who was very connected to the mass. His name is Samini. Samini is big and Samini was used to drive the brand in terms of getting it to everyone in Ghana”.*

ii) Use of influencers

GH1 and GH3 indicated the strategic use of influencers in campaigns, which ordinary Ghanaians can relate to.

GH1: *“The influencer or the woman they are using to drive the communication has been with the brand ever since it launched to today and she's been part of the brand's story. Therefore, it makes sense, and we can all see because we know the woman was picked from the community”*

GH3: *“They use influencers”.*

Table 4. 13 Cameroon brand experience elements

Theme (context)	Sub-theme(s)	Participant Codes
Emotion Inducing	Sense of privilege	CAM1
	Sense of validation	CAM4
	Scepticism	CAM3
Entrenched Relationship		CAM1,CAM2
Use of local identifiable figures		CAM2

4.4.19 Emotion Inducing

Several participants express positive emotions, such as pride and a sense of being valued; however, at the same time, there is a clear emotional strain.

i) Sense of privilege

A participant indicates that being an MTN customer evokes a sense of pride and privilege, suggesting that the brand holds a positive and elevated status in their personal perception.

CAM1: *“I think I am privileged to be with MTN... It makes me feel good”.*

ii) Sense of validation

A participant suggests that MTN's use of Anglophone-friendly communication fosters a strong sense of recognition and belonging among Anglophone Cameroonians, enhancing their emotional connection to the brand.

CAM4: *“MTN is very loved by Anglophone Cameroonians... we feel seen when the communications speak our language”.*

iii) Scepticism

A participant indicates that MTN evokes a sense of scepticism, suggesting underlying concerns regarding the brand’s trustworthiness or consistency, which contribute to a more cautious and critical emotional response.

CAM3: *“Like I said, really, MTN evokes scepticism”.*

4.4.20 Entrenched relationship

Relationally, MTN is experienced as deeply embedded in community life.

CAM1: *“The brand has really impacted people in Cameroon and MTN do things bigger and better”.*

CAM2: *“What I can say is it's actually very closer to the public”.*

4.4.21 Use of local identifiable figures

Participants show that MTN’s visual communications are perceived as highly relatable.

CAM2: *“The fact that every time I see a print or an outdoor advert, I can see myself. I can see my aunties, I can see my uncles. So it is very relatable. Through the visuals I can I can relate from the way they're speaking”.*

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided an in-depth thematic analysis of interviews with MTN customers from South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon. By examining both within each market and across all three, the analysis highlighted how cultural values and personal experiences shape consumers' perceptions of MTN's brand identity and experience. Five main themes emerged throughout the study: Brand Identity and Personality, Cultural Relevance and Adaptation, Brand Experience, Community and Hierarchy, and the Role of Cultural Dimensions. These themes were examined using the study's theoretical frameworks: Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism, and Schmitt's Brand Experience Theory, which helped maintain the conceptual soundness and thoroughness of the analysis.

Cross-market analysis indicated that MTN is widely seen as a culturally embedded, emotionally resonant, and community-focused brand. However, markets differed in service experience, language inclusion, price sensitivity, and communication styles, reflecting broader socio-cultural factors like power distance, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and time orientation.

To conclude, this chapter has established an empirical basis for the forthcoming analysis and recommendations. The findings presented will inform actionable strategies for MTN to enhance its brand relevance and effectively engage consumers across culturally diverse markets throughout the continent.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

Chapter Four analysed interview data from South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon, identifying country-specific and cross-cutting themes that explain how cultural values shape perceptions of MTN's brand identity and experience. Major findings highlight MTN's omnipresence and distinctive visual identity (yellow), the role of family and collectivism in driving loyalty (South Africa), culturally localised and generationally tailored communications with mixed emotional responses (Ghana), and strong market presence coupled with growing service scepticism (Cameroon). Chapter Five synthesises these insights to draw theoretical implications, provide practical recommendations for MTN's cross-market branding, outline study limitations, and suggest avenues for future research.

This final chapter presents the consolidated findings of the study, offering critical insight into how cultural differences influence MTN's brand identity and brand experience across three key African markets: South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon. The chapter aligns directly with the study's overarching aim, which was to explore the influence of cultural differences on MTN's brand identity and brand experience across culturally diverse markets. This concluding chapter revisits the research problem, considering the data presented in the preceding chapters, and provides a concise synthesis of the key findings.

The chapter is structured around the five secondary research objectives formulated to support the study in achieving its aim. Section 5.2 discusses each objective individually, linking empirical insights to the study's thematic analysis. Section 5.3 presents strategic recommendations for MTN and its related stakeholders, while Section 5.4 addresses the research limitations. The final section concludes the study and suggests avenues for future academic research.

5.2 Discussion of Findings According to Research Objectives

This section outlines the findings derived from the analysis of the study's collected data, with reference to the Literature Review in Chapter 2. To address the

research aim, the findings are presented in conjunction with the study's objectives.

5.2.1 Objective 1: To perform a literature review on culture, brand identity and brand experience across various markets.

The literature review built a solid theoretical basis for exploring how culture, brand identity, and brand experience interact in different markets. Hofstede's cultural dimensions gave a structured way to understand how national values shape consumer behaviours and interpretations. Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism offered a thorough framework for analysing the ways brands express meaning, as well as how consumers view a brand's personality, culture, and relationships. Additionally, Brakus et al.'s brand experience model explained the sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and relational aspects of how consumers connect with brands. By combining these theories, the review showed how culture, identity, and experiences are closely linked, which helped frame the study and guide analysis across the three markets.

5.2.2 Objective 2: To determine an appropriate research design and methodology for conducting the study

The research used a qualitative, exploratory approach grounded in interpretivist philosophy and reflexive thematic analysis. By conducting semi-structured interviews with 12 participants from three different countries (four participants per market), the study gathered detailed and context-rich data. This methodology supported a thorough investigation of cultural nuances, emotional responses, and personal interpretations of brand meaning, aligning with established qualitative practices in cultural and consumer research.

Purposive sampling ensured participants knew MTN's services and brand touchpoints, making their input relevant. This improved the credibility of the findings. The cross-country interview structure enabled effective comparison, particularly for evaluating national cultural values.

Overall, the methodological framework proved robust for addressing the study's

aim. The integration of established theoretical models into the coding framework (i.e. Hofstede, Kapferer, Schmitt) allowed for a theoretically grounded but emergent approach to analysis. Themes were not imposed but rather surfaced organically, then mapped to the frameworks, ensuring both rigour and authenticity. This will be demonstrated in the coming sections of this Chapter.

5.2.3 Objective 3: To explore how MTN users in South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon describe their respective national cultures and shared values.

Participants across South Africa, Ghana and Cameroon described their national cultures using dimensions that closely align with Hofstede's cultural value patterns, specifically power distance, collectivism, gender roles, uncertainty avoidance, time orientation, and indulgence. These cultural norms shaped how they interpreted MTN's communication, behaviour, and brand presence in their local contexts.

South African participants highlighted the importance of respect, family influence, consistency, and a balanced time orientation, which informed their expectations of respectful service, reliability, and long-term brand trust. Ghanaian participants emphasised strong respect for authority, community identity, rule adherence, and an emerging indulgent youth culture, shaping their perception of MTN as a community-aligned, compliant, and culturally attentive brand. Cameroonian participants described a culture characterised by hierarchy, collectivism, flexibility in rule application, a short-term survival orientation, and a strong enjoyment ethos, which influenced their perceptions of MTN's relevance, flexibility, and participation in entertainment-driven communal life.

The following insights capture summarised findings in relation to Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory:

Power Distance Orientation: across all three countries, participants framed their cultures as respectful of hierarchy, though in evolving ways. In South Africa, respect took the form of interpersonal politeness and orderly customer engagement (e.g., respectful verification and treatment in-store). In Ghana,

respect was tied to authority structures, traditional leadership, and formal social order, shaping praise for MTN's engagement with chiefs and officials (e.g., visits to palaces). In Cameroon, respect for hierarchy was generationally differentiated, with older groups maintaining deference and younger groups questioning top-down communication; this shaped critiques of MTN's one-way, "talking at" customers communication style. These cultural lenses influenced how participants judged MTN's tone and interpersonal behaviour, indicating that brand communication is interpreted through deeply embedded norms of authority and respect.

Collectivist Orientation: a strong collectivist ethos shaped perceptions of MTN across markets. South Africans described MTN as a "household" brand passed through generations, reinforcing inherited loyalty and family-driven usage patterns. Ghanaians framed community as central to national identity, making MTN's community engagements and visibility culturally aligned and socially meaningful. Cameroonians emphasised strong social cohesion and extended family influence, with MTN perceived as actively present within communal life and widely used across social networks. In each country, MTN was evaluated not just as a telecom provider, but as a brand embedded within collective routines, shared values, and community practices.

Gender Roles and Brand Neutrality: participants consistently described gender roles in their contexts as increasingly fluid or non-prescriptive. In South Africa, MTN was seen as gender-neutral, addressing men and women equally in communication and service experiences. In Ghana, participants highlighted both a caring, feminine appeal (e.g., Heroes of Change) and a gender-neutral advertising presence that includes all identities without preference. In Cameroon, rising gender inclusivity was described as a national trend, making MTN's non-gendered messaging culturally aligned with evolving norms. Across markets, MTN's broad, inclusive tone resonated with participants' perceptions of shifting gender norms.

Uncertainty Avoidance: though expressed differently, participants in all three countries described cultural expectations for structure and predictability. South Africans valued stability, reliable billing and network consistency, and transparent

updates. Ghanaians emphasised the importance of rule adherence and compliance, praising MTN for operating within regulatory boundaries and reflecting social expectations of discipline and order. Cameroonians described a duality: older generations valued strict adherence while younger people preferred flexibility. MTN's ability to offer both rule-driven and flexible products (e.g., different MoMo features) was described as culturally appropriate. This indicates that cultural tolerance for uncertainty shaped what "competent" and "trustworthy" meant in each market.

Planning Orientation: time orientation varied notably across the three countries. South Africa showed both long-term loyalty (brand heritage, decade-long usage) and short-term convenience needs, shaping expectations of sustained performance and day-to-day reliability. Ghana presented a blend of short-term "immediate results" attitudes and increasing interest in long-term planning, reflected in investment behaviour and MoMo savings usage. Cameroon showed a stronger short-term orientation driven by economic constraints and survival priorities, shaping the appeal of MoMo credit and daily-need services; however, MTN's long-term presence still carried weight for some participants. Time orientation shaped expectations around MTN's products, messaging, and value delivery.

Indulgence and Expression: indulgence was most strongly expressed in Ghana and Cameroon. South Africans referenced entertainment and relaxation mainly through brand sponsorships (e.g., MTN 8, music events- 947 Joburg day and Bushfire), linking MTN with enjoyment and social connection. Ghanaians described a vibrant leisure culture, especially among youth, reflected in nightlife and expressive lifestyles, making MTN's involvement in music and entertainment culturally resonant. Cameroonians described enjoyment as a deeply rooted cultural value, expressed through concerts, festivals, and shared social celebrations that MTN actively sponsors and supports. Indulgence reinforced participants' interpretation of MTN as a brand aligned with expression, joy, and social vibrancy.

Across South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon, participants interpreted their national cultures through values linked to hierarchy, community, gender inclusivity, rule

orientation, time perspective, and enjoyment. These cultural orientations directly shaped how they understood and engaged with the MTN brand. MTN was not evaluated in isolation but through culturally grounded expectations around respect, family, authority, predictability, survival needs, and collective enjoyment. As a result, participants' perceptions of the brand reflected the ways MTN appeared to align with or respond to these deeply embedded cultural norms.

5.2.4 Objective 4: To assess the extent to which cultural dimensions affect customer perceptions of MTN's brand identity in each market.

Across South Africa, Ghana and Cameroon, MTN's brand identity was interpreted through five consistent dimensions: visual identity, brand personality, localised communication, customer relationships and customer appeal. While the core identity elements were similar across markets, the meaning attached to each element differed based on local contexts. In South Africa, MTN was experienced as credible, transparent and respectful; in Ghana, as friendly, competent and community-aligned; and in Cameroon, as youthful and Pan-African but increasingly strained by customer service shortcomings. These interpretations shaped participants' overall perceptions of the brand, demonstrating that MTN's brand identity is both continentally coherent and locally reconstructed through lived experience.

The following insights capture summarised findings in relation to Kampfer's Brand Identity Prism:

Omnipresence and the Distinctive Yellow Colour (visual identity)

In all three markets, MTN's brand identity was consistently anchored in its omnipresent visibility and its distinctive yellow colour. South African participants described MTN as "everywhere you go" and immediately associated yellow with the brand. Ghanaian participants echoed this, describing MTN as "everywhere" and "dominating every space", with yellow interpreted as symbolising positivity and aspiration. Cameroonian participants similarly framed MTN's yellow presence as "in the blood," visible in both urban and remote settings. Across all markets, MTN's colour and physical presence formed the foundation of its brand identity, creating a sense of recognisability and scale

Credibility, Friendliness, and Youthfulness Brand Personality: participants across markets attached personality traits to MTN that shaped how they perceived the brand's character. In South Africa, MTN was perceived as credible, demonstrated through transparent communication and trustworthy service delivery (e.g., consistent billing notifications, proactive SMS updates) . In Ghana, participants also described the brand as friendly and approachable, particularly in customer engagements (GH1). MTN's competence in financial services (MoMo) further added to perceptions of functional reliability. In Cameroon, participants emphasised MTN's youthful, energetic and colourful personality. These descriptions show that while MTN maintains a pan-African visual identity, its personality is interpreted differently across markets, credible in South Africa, friendly in Ghana, youthful and vibrant in Cameroon.

Localised Communication: Language, Cultural Relevance, and Generational Voice

Localised communication was a strong component of MTN's brand identity across all three markets. South African participants described MTN's ads as recognisably local as set in familiar places, using SA languages and cultural expressions. Ghanaian participants similarly highlighted communication in dominant local languages and MTN's visibility in festivals and community events. Cameroonian participants strongly emphasised the use of Pidgin and familiar jargon as signals of inclusivity. Generational voice also emerged in both South Africa and Ghana. Collectively, these findings show that MTN's brand identity is interpreted as culturally and linguistically adaptive, reinforcing perceptions of relevance and connection.

Customer Relationships: Trust, Appreciation, and Service Experience

Participants across markets interpreted MTN's identity through the quality of customer relationships. South Africans experienced MTN as valuing customers, demonstrated through respectful service, prioritisation and long-term loyalty. Ghanaians described MTN as accessible, supportive and dependable, with long-standing positive encounters such as being the only network available in remote areas. Cameroonians, however, expressed increasing dissatisfaction, describing service as unreliable and frustrating. These differences illustrate how customer

relationship experiences strongly influence the interpretation of MTN's identity, reinforcing it in South Africa and Ghana, undermining it in Cameroon.

Customer Brand Appeal: Mass, Pan-African, and Aspirational Positioning

Participants interpreted MTN's audience and customer appeal in ways that reflected local perceptions of accessibility and prestige. In South Africa, participants viewed MTN as appealing to "everyone regardless of age" and aligning with aspirational, digitally progressive identities. In Ghana, MTN was framed as a mass-market brand serving all segments, from high-value customers to low-income groups. In Cameroon, MTN carried both Pan-African appeal and high-end associations while also being valued for its African identity. These patterns show that brand identity is perceived as inclusive and accessible across markets yet locally filtered through socioeconomic and cultural lenses.

The study shows that cultural factors shape how people in South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon view MTN's brand identity. While MTN maintains a consistent brand image, each market interprets it through local cultural norms. South Africans value credibility and clear communication, Ghanaians focus on communal values and friendliness, and Cameroonians respond to cultural expressiveness and linguistic diversity, though service issues affect their trust. Thus, culture drives both common brand traits across Africa and unique perspectives in each country.

The findings are consistent with previous literature such as that of Lugina et al. (2019) whose findings indicate that greater cultural diversity among Indonesian consumers leads to a stronger brand identity. Raj and Gupta (2023) found that, for African markets, leveraging local influencers is often more beneficial. Similarly, Balashova and Urupa (2024:2) confirm that cultural differences significantly shape brand perception and global branding strategies. Lastly, Kushwah et al. (2019:491) found that culture significantly influences brand identity perceptions in Gulf countries. Brands should tailor their identity and marketing strategies to local cultures for better acceptance.

5.2.5 Objective 5: To evaluate how cultural differences shape the brand experience of MTN customers across the three selected countries.

Participants across the three markets described MTN's brand experience through emotional, relational and culturally embedded interactions. While MTN's continental brand promise is consistent, participants' lived experiences of the brand differed across South Africa, Ghana and Cameroon. These differences were expressed through emotions evoked by the brand, the depth of customer–brand relationships and the presence of familiar cultural cues in MTN's communication.

The following insights capture summarised findings in relation to Brakus Brand Experience Theory:

Emotional Brand Experience: Warmth, Security and Mixed Feelings

Emotional responses were central to how participants made sense of MTN's brand experience, but the intensity and direction of these emotions varied across countries. South African participants described MTN as evoking serenity, peace of mind and security. However, mixed emotions were also present, describing simultaneous satisfaction with network reliability and frustration with high prices. Ghanaian participants described MTN as warm, while also expressing indifference or love-hate emotions. Cameroonian participants described a broader spectrum of emotions: privilege, **validation** through culturally relevant communication, and scepticism.

Across markets, MTN's emotional brand experience was shaped by a balance between positive reassurance (reliability, security, warmth) and moments of strain (pricing concerns, service inconsistency). These emotional interpretations strongly influenced perceptions of MTN's dependability and customer value.

Relational Brand Experience: Depth of Connection and Community Integration

Relational experiences reflected how deeply participants felt connected to MTN, often shaped by longevity of use, community presence and cultural alignment. In South Africa, relationships were shaped by long-term usage and trust in network

stability, with emotions such as feeling “prioritised” emerging in earlier identity findings. However, relational strain surfaced through inconsistent in-store service. Ghanaian participants emphasised MTN’s presence in community life, with the use of mass-appeal ambassadors like Samini strengthening connection. This aligned with Ghana’s collectivist orientation, making MTN feel familiar and socially embedded. Cameroonian participants described MTN’s relationship with customers as entrenched, with the brand seen as close to the public and deeply integrated in daily life.

The relational experience showed MTN being consistently positioned as a socially embedded brand, though the strength of the relationship varied. South Africa expressed stability mixed with service frustration; Ghana demonstrated strong communal resonance; and Cameroon highlighted closeness alongside pockets of scepticism.

Cultural Familiarity in Brand Experience: Use of Local Identifiable Figures

Cultural cues played a significant role in shaping how participants experienced MTN’s brand meaning. While South Africa’s Brand Experience findings did not explicitly emphasise local figures, earlier identity findings described recognisable local settings and languages contributing to familiarity. Ghana’s brand experience prominently featured local identifiable figures, with ambassadors drawn from the community and widely recognised personalities enhancing relatability. These cues reinforced authenticity and grounded the brand experience in everyday Ghanaian life. Cameroonian participants strongly emphasised the use of ordinary, relatable people in MTN’s visuals. This created a sense of recognition and personal relevance.

Across Ghana and Cameroon, identifiable cultural figures were central to the brand experience. In South Africa, cultural familiarity emerged through local language and context rather than public figures. Overall, the use of culturally representative individuals enhanced emotional connection and strengthened perceived authenticity.

This study findings show that cultural differences significantly influence how customers in South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon perceive the MTN brand.

While emotional and relational aspects are important everywhere, their meanings differ: South Africans value reliability and security, Ghanaians prioritize warmth and community, and Cameroonians focus on sensory cues but may feel ambivalent due to service issues. Overall, local cultural norms shape distinct brand experiences across these markets despite MTN's Pan-African identity.

This study supports Rodrigues et al. (2023) in showing that cultural context shapes perceived brand authenticity and affects how brand experiences are felt. Like their work with global brands, MTN's meaning varies across markets, highlighting culture's role in brand experience and perception. Contrary to Grębosz-Krawczyk (2023), who focuses on heritage, this study finds that cultural relevance, local language, and community connections are more influential for authenticity in African markets. Findings also align with Huang, Wang, and Young (2023), as participants responded strongly to visual, emotional, and culturally tailored communication. Overall, the research demonstrates that cultural diversity significantly shapes brand meaning and authenticity in Africa, where brand experience is still an emerging field.

5.2.6 Objective 6: To provide recommendations for enhancing MTN's brand identity and brand experience in culturally diverse markets.

5.2.7. Summary of Key Findings by Theoretical Classification

Table 5. 1 provides a summary of the Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede) Mapping.

Table 5. 2 Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede) Mapping

Dimension	South Africa	Ghana	Cameroon
Power Distance	Moderate	High	High (generationally mixed)
Collectivism	Collectivist tendencies	Strongly collectivist	Strongly collectivist
Uncertainty Avoidance	Moderate	High	Low to Mixed
Masculinity/Femininity	Balanced	Moderately masculine	Balanced
Long-term Orientation	Mixed/Moderate	Emerging	Short-term oriented

The Cultural Dimensions Mapping table applies Hofstede's cultural framework to

interpret how participants in South Africa, Ghana and Cameroon described their national cultures and how these values shaped their perceptions of MTN's brand. By comparing the dominant cultural patterns across power distance, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity–femininity and long-term orientation, the mapping highlights the extent to which deeply rooted cultural norms influence how customers relate to MTN. These differences help explain variations in emotional responses, expectations of service, interpretations of brand identity and the lived brand experience across the three markets. The mapping offers strategic insight into how MTN can strengthen cultural alignment by tailoring communication, service delivery and market engagement to culturally specific expectations. The following section will now review this study's findings in relation to the literature review already presented in Chapter 2.

In Chapter Two of this study (p.19-22), theory on cultural dimensions by previous studies was presented. The findings of this study largely support the patterns predicted by Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Consistent with the literature, Ghanaian participants demonstrated a strong collectivist orientation and high power distance, which aligned with their preference for respectful, community-centred brand communication. South African participants reflected moderate individualism and lower power distance, which corresponded with more direct expectations of service performance and reliability, in line with theoretical predictions.

Cameroon's findings similarly aligned with the literature in demonstrating strong collectivism and cultural expressiveness, although participants showed a more mixed orientation toward uncertainty avoidance than the high levels suggested by existing studies such as that of Żemojtel-Piotrowska and Piotrowski (2023). Furthermore, while theory positions Cameroon as somewhat feminine and short-term oriented, the empirical data revealed a more nuanced picture, with participants emphasising both cultural warmth and pragmatic service expectations. Overall, the study found strong convergence with Hofstede's dimensions across markets, with only minor divergences relating to uncertainty avoidance and elements of long-term orientation in Cameroon.

Table 5. 3 Brand Identity Prism Mapping

Prism Element	Identity Dimension	South Africa	Ghana	Cameroon
Physique	Visual Identity	Strong visibility; recognisable	Highly dominant; widely visible	Highly visible; embedded
Personality	Brand Personality	Credible; trustworthy	Friendly; competent	Youthful; vibrant
Culture	Localised Communication	High localisation	High localisation	High localisation (Pidgin)
Relationship	Customer Relationships	Moderately strong	Strong	Mixed/Weakening
Reflection	Customer Appeal	Broad/mass market	Mass market	Pan-African/middle-high income perception
Self-Image	Brand Impression	Progressive; quality focused	Aspirational; community aligned	Proud; African identity

The Brand Identity Mapping Table applies Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism to compare how MTN's identity is interpreted across South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon. The table organises key identity elements such as physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image, and summarises how participants in each market experience these dimensions. By drawing directly from participant insights, the mapping highlights both the consistency of MTN's core identity and the variations that emerge when identity cues are filtered through different cultural contexts. This comparative view provides a clear understanding of how MTN's brand identity resonates across markets and where adaptations may strengthen alignment with local expectations.

Table 5. 4 Brand Experience Theory Mapping

Experience Dimension	South Africa	Ghana	Cameroon
Sensory	Familiar; culturally recognisable	Warm; highly visible	Highly relatable; local imagery
Affective	Positive (security, joy) with some frustration	Warm to neutral; love-hate at times	Mixed (privilege, validation, skepticism)
Cognitive	Reliable; competent	Functionally competent (MoMo)	Mixed competence; strong presence but service concerns
Behavioural	Long-term habitual use	High daily engagement; MoMo-driven	Frequent use; some service frustration
Relational	Stable; family influence	Strong communal connection	Close but strained in parts

The Brand Experience Theory mapping table applies Schmitt's (1999) framework

to illustrate how consumers experience MTN across South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon. It organises brand interactions into four experiential dimensions: sensory, emotional, behavioural, and relational. Using direct insights from participants, the table reflects how MTN's communication, service delivery, and community presence generate specific consumer responses within each market. This comparative view highlights both similarities and differences in how customers interpret MTN's brand, providing a deeper understanding of how cultural context influences customer engagement and the broader meaning attached to the brand.

5.5 Recommendations for enhancing MTN's brand identity and brand experience in culturally diverse markets.

The findings indicate that cultural differences shape how MTN's brand identity and brand experience are interpreted across South Africa, Ghana and Cameroon. The following recommendations outline clear, actionable steps that MTN can take to strengthen identity consistency while improving cultural relevance in each market.

5.5.1.1 Recommendations for Brand Identity: To MTN Brand and Marketing management teams across markets.

i. Strengthen Core Visual Identity Consistency.

- Standardise MTN's yellow brand palette, typography and visual layout across all markets to ensure recognisable brand presence.
- Develop a unified continental brand template that all OpCos must follow for ATL, digital and retail visibility.

ii. Tailor Communication Style to Cultural Context.

- In South Africa, emphasise credibility, transparency and service reliability in messaging, as participants respond strongly to functional proof points.

- In Ghana, use culturally resonant visuals, local languages, and festival-linked messaging that mirrors the communal and celebratory aspects valued by consumers.
- In Cameroon, incorporate Pidgin where appropriate, and use everyday relatable figures and contexts that reflect the expressive and diverse cultural fabric.

iii. Refine Brand Personality Expression.

- Maintain MTN's overarching personality (bold, friendly, progressive) while adapting tonality:
 - SA: credible, straightforward, trustworthy
 - Ghana: warm, community-forward, youthful
 - Cameroon: friendly, expressive, youthful but grounded in reliability

iv. Strengthen Internal Brand Alignment.

- Require each market to produce a quarterly “Brand Identity Compliance Report” to monitor deviations and ensure minimum consistency across positioning, personality, tone, and visual frameworks.
- Introduce mandatory creative reviews for major campaigns to align with MTN Group CI standards.

5.5.1.2 Recommendations for Brand Experience: To MTN Customer Experience, Digital and Service Team

i. Improve Service Performance in Markets with Lower Reliability Perceptions.

- In **Cameroon**, prioritise network stability, customer service responsiveness and transparent communication about service interruptions, as these were the strongest experience pain points.
- Provide additional training for frontline staff in low-performing markets to ensure relational consistency.

ii. Enhance Emotional Connection Using Culturally Relevant Touchpoints.

- In **Ghana**, deepen the community-based activations linked to festivals, youth culture and social gatherings, as these strongly shape positive emotional experiences.
- In **South Africa**, focus on experiences that reinforce safety, trust and functional security, such as simplified customer support and outage notifications.

iii. Strengthen Sensory and Cultural Familiarity Cues.

- Use local ambassadors, relatable imagery and cultural symbols in above-the-line (ATL) and digital communication for each market.
- Produce culturally tailored content series (short videos, social posts, micro-campaigns) that speak to each country's social identity, language and preferred communication style.

iv. Improve Relational Experience Consistency

- Standardise customer-facing behaviours across markets and ensure that every market follows minimum relational experience guidelines.
- Introduce measurable relational KPIs (e.g., first-contact resolution, friendliness scores, wait-time thresholds) that must be met quarterly.

v. Build Market-Specific Experience Enhancements

- **Ghana:** expand MoMo convenience-driven experiences (QR payments, frictionless top-ups, merchant integrations) as these shape strong behavioural engagement.
- **South Africa:** invest in digital self-service, outage mapping and reliability dashboards to reinforce expectations of functional excellence.
- **Cameroon:** develop “Trust Repair” initiatives, including service recovery messaging and community-based service education.

5.4. Limitations of the Study

Limitations describe the constraints present in the study (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2021:314). The following identified limitations were present in this study:

- The study relied on a small, purposive sample from three markets, which limits the generalisability of findings to the wider MTN customer base across Africa.
- Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which depend on participants' ability to recall and articulate experiences; some insights may therefore reflect selective memory or subjective interpretation.
- Cultural interpretations were based on self-reported perceptions, and not all cultural dimensions may have been fully observable within the interview context.
- The analysis focused on three specific markets (South Africa, Ghana and Cameroon); cultural, brand identity and experience dynamics may differ in other MTN OpCos not included in this study.
- The study examined brand identity and brand experience from the consumer perspective only, without incorporating MTN's internal brand strategy or operational constraints, which may also influence brand consistency.
- As a qualitative study, the findings reflect context-specific depth rather than statistical representation, and future studies may benefit from quantitative validation across larger populations.
- The study was confined to South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon, and although these are key MTN markets, the findings cannot be generalised to the broader African context without further investigation.
- Interviews conducted in English may have limited the depth of cultural expression for participants whose first language differs, potentially affecting the richness and authenticity of cultural insights, especially in multilingual contexts like Cameroon.
- A further limitation is that, although cultural themes were derived directly from participant narratives, some interpretations may appear broader than the specific quotes due to the inherently interpretive nature of cultural research. However, each cultural conclusion was supported by recurring

patterns within the data, and no interpretation was included unless it was consistently reflected across multiple participants within a country.

5.6 Implications for Future Studies

Drawing upon the findings of this study, numerous avenues for future research can be identified to further advance understanding of the interplay between culture, brand identity, and brand experience in African markets for the telecommunications and other related industries.

- Future research could expand the sample size across more MTN markets to examine whether the cultural, identity and experience patterns identified in South Africa, Ghana and Cameroon hold true across the broader African footprint.
- Comparative studies between telco brands within the same markets would help determine whether the cultural influences observed are MTN-specific or reflect broader industry-wide consumer expectations.
- Longitudinal studies could explore how brand identity and experience perceptions evolve as MTN advances its digital transformation agenda, especially in relation to mobile money, digital self-service and youth-focused platforms.
- Future researchers may also investigate how emerging cultural dynamics, such as increasing digital literacy, youth culture shifts and post-pandemic behavioural changes, reshape interpretations of brand identity and brand experience.

5.3 Conclusion

This study examined how cultural dimensions shape consumer perceptions of MTN's brand identity and brand experience across South Africa, Ghana and Cameroon. The findings demonstrate that culture plays a central role in how customers interpret MTN's communication, personality, service interactions and overall market presence. Although MTN presents a unified Pan-African brand, the study found that cultural norms such as collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, time orientation and indulgence influence how identity cues and experience touchpoints are understood in each market. MTN's brand identity was consistently recognised through its strong visual presence, mass-market appeal and use of culturally familiar language, yet the meaning attached to these elements varied by market. Similarly, the brand experience was shaped by emotional reactions, habitual usage, relational closeness and cognitive evaluations of reliability and service quality, with clear differences between the three countries. Together, these findings highlight the importance of balancing continental brand cohesion with culturally aligned execution. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of how global and regional brands operating in diverse African markets can strengthen consistency while remaining relevant to local expectations. It also demonstrates the value of integrating cultural theory with brand identity and brand experience frameworks to explain how consumers construct meaning around a brand. Overall, the research underscores that cultural alignment is essential for building strong, coherent and resonant brands in multicultural contexts, while focusing on localisation where possible.

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ANNEXURES

Annexure A: Ethics Approval



Our Ref: M. 1080425
Enquiries: research@iie.ac.za

30 April 2025



Proposal Approval and Conditional Ethical Clearance for Master of Commerce in Strategic Brand Leadership



Student name: Sharon Mamoneng Mahlase
Student number: S [REDACTED]
Brand and campus: IIEVega



Dear Sharon,



We are pleased to inform you that the Higher Degrees Committee considered and approved your research proposal titled: *The Influence of cultural differences on Brand Experience and Identity across MTN's key African markets: a comparative study in South Africa, Ghana and Cameroon*, with minor revisions.

You are requested to critically reflect on the Academic Seminar feedback and address the recommendations under the guidance and to the satisfaction of your supervisor. The HDC members are confident that the feedback will improve the quality of your research and assist you in navigating the research process successfully.

This study has been granted conditional ethics clearance. This means that you must resubmit the revised research proposal, literature review, and research methodology chapters together with the data collection instrument, participant informed consent form/research cover letter, and if applicable gatekeeper's letter to the IIE Higher Degrees Committee before you proceed with data collection. You may only proceed with data collection after the Higher Degrees Committee released an Ethical Clearance letter to you.

Kindly note that the updated proposal will be considered with the research ethical clearance application, and if the feedback is not adequately addressed, it will influence the outcome of the research ethics application.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact your programme team or supervisor directly.



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Directors: GD Whyte (UK), JDR Oesch, MD Aitken, SCD Lurie
Group Company Secretary: CB Crouse



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Dr Reza Hosseini

Chair: Higher Degrees Committee

Annexure B: Gatekeeper's Letter

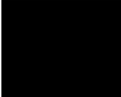
Sharon Mahlase

Senior Manager: Media, Group Marketing

MTN Group



07 July 2025



Mr. Paul Norman

Group Chief Human Resources Officer

MTN Group

Innovation Centre

Fairland, Johannesburg

Subject: Request for Permission to Conduct Academic Research Involving MTN Customers

Dear Mr. Norman,

I hope this message finds you well.

I am writing to formally request permission to conduct a research study involving MTN customers as part of my academic requirements. I am currently pursuing a Master's degree in Strategic Brand Leadership at the Vega School of Brand Leadership. The study is strictly for academic purposes and forms part of the fulfilment of my postgraduate qualification. My supervisor's name is Professor Sandra Perks.

The research topic is titled: **"The Influence of Cultural Differences on MTN's Brand Identity and Brand Experience in South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon."** The study seeks to understand how cultural contexts shape customer perceptions and experiences of the MTN brand across these key markets.

The research will be qualitative in nature and will involve a sample of MTN customers in the three countries. No internal staff, operations, or confidential company data will be required or used in the study. All ethical guidelines relating to informed consent, anonymity, and voluntary participation will be strictly observed. The findings will be used solely for academic purposes and can be shared with MTN Group Marketing if deemed relevant or insightful.

I am conducting this research in my personal academic capacity; however, I am currently employed as a **Senior Manager: Media in Group Marketing**, reporting to **Mrs. Bernice Samuels**. I remain committed to the highest standards of professionalism and data integrity throughout the process.

I kindly seek your approval to proceed with this research. Should you require any additional information or documentation (such as the university's ethical clearance or interview guide), I am happy to provide it.

Thank you for considering this request. I would be grateful for your support.

Warm regards,

Sharon Mahlase

Senior Manager: Media, Group Marketing

MTN Group

Annexure C: Informed consent form



Annexure H – PARTICIPANT OR RESPONDENT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants
To whom it may concern, My name is MAMONENG SHARON MAHLASE and I am a student at The IIE's VEGA SCHOOL . I am currently conducting research under the supervision of PROFESSOR, SANDRA PERKS about THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES ON MTN'S BRAND IDENTITY AND BRAND EXPERIENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA, GHANA AND CAMEROON. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN BRAND MANAGEMENT ACROSS DIFFERENT MARKETS. 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 YOUR INSIGHTS WILL PROVIDE VALUABLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN BRAND MANAGEMENT IN YOUR COUNTRY). If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to INTERVIEW YOU FOR APPROXIMATELY 30-45 MINUTES ONLINE (MICROSOFT TEAMS) ON THIS RESEARCH TOPIC. 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 TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICE PROVIDER- MTN. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating. Detail the potential risks and how it will be managed by the researcher. Indicate how the ethical considerations will be applied in the context of the study.
Do I have to participate in the study?
• Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary; • If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so; • Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.
Will my identity be protected?

I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at MTN AND MTN GROUP, 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 MCOM IN STRATEGIC BRAND LEADERSHIP. 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:

SHARON MAHLASE



The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:

PROFESSOR SANDRA PERKS



Participant or respondent Informed Consent – Audio and Visual Recordings.

I agree to participate in the research conducted by [INSERT YOUR FULL NAMES AND SURNAME] 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:

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

Signature	Date
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Annexure D: Interview guide

Semi-structured interview questions

Research Topic: The Influence of Cultural Differences on MTN's Brand Identity and Brand Experience in South Africa, Ghana, and Cameroon

Section A: Participant Background & Qualification

1. Age:

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18–24
- ☐ 25–34
- ☐ 35–44
- ☐ 45–54
- ☐ 55+

2. Gender:

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Prefer not to say

3. Race/Ethnic Group:

- ☐ Black African
- ☐ White
- ☐ Coloured
- ☐ Indian/Asian
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

4. Country of Residence:

- ☐ South Africa
- ☐ Ghana
- ☐ Cameroon

5. Are you currently an MTN user or subscriber?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No → (End interview; only MTN users should be included)

6. How long have you been using MTN?

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1–3 years
- ☐ 4–6 years
- ☐ More than 6 years

7. Which MTN services do you currently use? (Select all that apply):

- ☐ Mobile voice (calls)
- ☐ SMS
- ☐ Mobile data
- ☐ MoMo/MTN Mobile Money
- ☐ Fibre/Home Internet
- ☐ MTN App / MyMTN Services
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

Section B: Brand Identity and Brand Experience

Now let's talk about your experience and perception of MTN as a brand. Please feel free to share openly.

1. How would you describe MTN as a brand in your country? (Prompts: What kind of personality or image comes to mind when you think of MTN?)
2. What values or characteristics do you associate with the MTN brand? (Prompts: Trustworthy, innovative, caring, affordable, etc.)
3. Do you think MTN's brand identity reflects your culture or local values? Why or why not?
4. Do you think the way MTN presents itself (logo, colours, adverts, etc.) fits your country's cultural context? Please explain.
5. In your opinion, how does MTN's brand differ from its competitors (e.g., Vodacom, Orange, Airtel)?
6. Can you describe a memorable experience you've had with MTN—positive or negative?
7. How does MTN make you feel as a customer? (Prompts: Do you feel valued, frustrated, empowered, proud, indifferent, etc.?)
8. Do you believe MTN understands and respects your needs as a consumer in your country? Why or why not?
9. Have you interacted with MTN customer service? What was that experience like?
10. How would you describe MTN's advertising and communication in your country? Does it speak to you culturally? Please explain.

Section C: Cultural Influence

11. What role does your culture play in how you perceive and engage with brands like MTN?
12. Do you feel that MTN communicates in a way that is culturally relevant to people in your country? Why or why not?
13. Do you think your country's cultural values influence your expectations of service from MTN? If yes, how?
14. What could MTN do better to reflect your culture in their brand and services?

Closing

15. Any final thoughts on how MTN can improve your brand experience as a customer in your country?

Annexure E: Interview Consent Form



Research Topic: The Influence of Cultural Differences on MTN's Brand Identity and Brand Experience in South Africa, Ghana and Cameroon

Dear Participant

The following interview is being conducted in line with the academic requirements of The Independent Institute of Education as part of the **Masters in Strategic Brand Leadership**. My name is **Sharon Mamoneng Mahlase**, and I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Professor **SANDRA PERKS** about **the influence of Cultural Differences on MTN's Brand identity and Brand Experience in South Africa, Ghana and Cameroon**.

The purpose of the semi-structured interview will help explore how cultural differences influence MTN's Brand Identity and Brand Experience. Your insights will provide valuable contributions to understanding the role of culture in brand management in your country.

What participation involves:

- Completing this short survey to register your interest and availability (which you have completed, thank you).
- Selected participants will then be contacted to schedule a one-on-one semi-structured interview (approximately 30-45 minutes).
- Interviews will be conducted online (on Microsoft Teams)

Confidentiality:

All responses will be treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes. Data will be anonymized in the final report, and no personal information will be shared without your consent.

Voluntary participation:

Participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any stage without consequence.

PLEASE NOTE

There are no known positive or negative consequences associated with your participation in this survey and follow-up semi-structured interviews. No personal identifying information will be collected during the survey or asked from you, all information will remain anonymous. Collected data will be analyzed and presented for scholarly purposes and submitted as part of the final Research Mini-dissertation submission.

This research topic and survey questionnaire questions have been reviewed and approved in accordance with the ethical procedures of the Independent Institute of Education and Ethical Clearance was obtained.

As the researcher I declare that:

- I am bound by the requirements of ethical and sound research practices.
- I will obtain informed consent in writing from all participants after disclosing all the information that would be needed to give this consent.
- I will only use this data for these research purposes and in no other way.
- I will protect the anonymity, confidentiality and privacy of participants and associated institutions or structures.
- I will only use recording methods (written, audio, video) consented to and in the manner consented to.

Should you have any concerns or questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [REDACTED] or my supervisor Prof SANDRA PERKS at [REDACTED]. Participation is voluntary, and your responses will remain confidential. Contact details for the draw will be kept separate from your answers.

My contact number is [REDACTED]

Annexure F: Certificate of Release