



**Queer Marginality and Planning for Brand Resonance: A Qualitative
Critique of the South African Advertising Industry**

by

Khangelani Dziba

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Supervisor: Doctor Carla Enslin

Co-Supervisor: Doctor Nceba Ndzwayiba

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the dissertation submitted for the Master of Arts in Creative Brand Leadership degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for a degree.

Khangelani Dziba

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Dedication

The commencement of this study came about at a time when I was undergoing so much unrest and uncertainty in my life. This is a reality for many 20-year-olds who are ever-evolving and trying to navigate life towards unearthing their true purpose. My North star, however, always remained that despite the difficulties, I had committed to doing the work, both from a personal and professional perspective, which is what continued to give me hope. It was also the understanding that I wanted to have an impact and create change, not only for my own lived experience; but for my community that remains underrepresented and voiceless in spaces that are often oppressive to our existence. This work is a labour of love, sweat, tears, and sacrifice, in many respects, but I would not trade this experience for anything.

While there are many that this work is dedicated to, I would like to narrow it down to just a few in this prose, namely, my family, abantu bakwaDziba, who have always cheered me on in my endeavours to lift up the family name. Ndiyayibulela inxaso yenu ngokungazenzisiyo, kwaye; it has never been lost on me that I come from a lineage of hard-working people. To my late mom – Nomfundo Dziba, grandmother – Nozipho Dziba and Father – Justice Ncekana, ndiyathemba ukuba I have made you proud in my efforts. While life without you has been a great mountain, I have grown stronger in spirit, knowing that you live in me and that I carry all your teachings on love and empathy with me. I pray that I may be able to use these opportunities to also better the life of my sister – Sibongiseni and my niece Kwakhanya Ncekana who need to know that life is a journey, and the destination is ever evolving.

Last but not least, I dedicate this work to both the advertising industry and my queer community. We are always unlearning and learning about things that make us great but also where we can do better. The issue of queer rights and representation should not only be a matter that concerns some more than others but must be a human right we all strive to uphold. Yes, our levels of advocacy may not always be the same, but we all can elect to do something to change the things we do like about the world. My hope is that this work inspires robust engagement and the challenging of the status quo. May it also encourage many like me to invest in academic contributions that will

indeed keep the industry relevant with contemporary developments and equip future generations of this industry with the knowledge they need to lead brands and industry.

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instil in me. Thank you unreservedly and may this favour be extended to many more like me who need your support.

Abstract

Advertising scholars and international practitioners are progressively adopting a queer identity theoretical lens as part of their approach to crafting creative brand strategies aimed at connecting brands with diverse people and meaningful social causes. Scholars who have examined the ongoing reproduction of heteronormative gender binaries in brand advertising have found a concerning chase for queer purchasing power in what is termed the “dream market” or “pink pound” rather than engendering genuine social change. Scholars also allude to the nonrecognition of the gender and queer identity spectrum which has led to the misrepresentation of queer people in advertisements, but thus far, there is a paucity of related South African research.

The aim of the study was to examine the social constructions of gender and queer identity in advertising through the lens of brand communication planners; and to understand how the voices of the queer community are included in the planning and production of advertisements that resonate.

This study adopted queer theory and brand resonance theory as the framework for better understanding how brands can begin to form more meaningful connections with consumers, in particular those from the queer community. Methodologically, a critical qualitative research approach to investigate the experiences of brand communication planners and creative directors in South African advertising agencies was applied. Data was collected using semi structured interviews. Queer theory and brand resonance theory were used to analyse and theorise the emerging themes.

From the findings, five key themes emerged. In theme one, it was determined that there are negative and positive connotations to gender and queer identity constructs from a brand advertising industry perspective. Theme two elucidates that the brand topic and brief are chiefly determined by clients, and while agencies can advise, it is ultimately the client who holds the power of decision. In theme three, the process and development of brand advertisements and the specific roles of brand communication planners (research) and creative directors (produce), are explored. Theme four details that the objective of the brief; either a brand narrative that tells a story or a pure product

sell approach, which will determine the likelihood of queer identity inclusion in the advertisement produced. The last theme culminates in participants conceding that the role of advertising is influential in shaping culture and subcultures, and therefore, they have a social responsibility to represent and reflect marginalised communities, such as the queer community, but that this requires brand leaders acquiesce and commitment if it is to be realised. The findings were further explored in a workshop with one of South Africa's leading fashion retailers to further gain insights from a client perspective. The workshop facilitated and ultimately revealed how the matter at hand was systemic. To resolve this ongoing complex matter, both agencies and clients need to develop better ways of working together to ensure meaningful inclusivity is achieved at the highest level.

It was concluded that while participants understand that gender is fluid, the nuances of different queer identities are not extensively understood or represented in advertising and therefore they remain marginalised. As all segments of society should be able to see themselves reflected in the brands they support (resonance), agencies should advocate more forcefully for brand leaders to partner with them to create and action authentic queer community reflection in their brand productions. This could further help raise social awareness and contribute towards building a more just and inclusive society.

Keywords: brand leadership, brand resonance, heteronormativity, inclusivity, queer.

Definition and introduction of Key Terms

This section provides the definition and introduction to some key terms that are used and reoccur in this study. These include terms such as brand resonance, queer, heteronormativity, and cis-gender popularly used in the gender studies discipline.

TERM	DEFINITION
Brand Resonance	This study adopts Keller's (2009) definition of brand resonance. Keller (2009) explicates brand resonance as a field of study and practice that is concerned with understanding the brand's relationship with consumers. Keller (2009) views this relationship as pivotal to the sustainable success of the brand. The key constituents of brand resonance encompass brand awareness and brand image (perception), and both these become possible by creating brand affinity and brand meaning in the minds of customers, resulting in brand love, support, and loyalty. In his Brand Equity Ten Model, Aaker (1996) emphasises loyalty as a dimension and measure of success for brands that successfully resonate with consumers. Thus, for any brand to thrive in the market, it needs to operate in an environment where it clearly showcases its understanding of the social environment that it is situated in and the nuanced consumer profile it aims to leverage to ensure the brand is relevant to their lives.
Queer	Historically, the phrase "queer" was used as a tool of oppression with the intent of silencing and invisibilising the existence of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Questioning, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Pansexual and gender fluid and gender binary non-conforming persons (LGBTQQIAP+) (D'Emilio's 2016). Thus, the term was used as an oppressive weapon to sustain the "Otherness" of human subjects whose ways of being were regarded as socially deviant and religiously repulsive; and to maintain a particular social order that upholds cis-heteronormative ways of being as the "Godly" standard (D'Emilio's 2016). The queer community has since reappropriated the term and used it as a strategy of asserting queer human existence and to demand gender justice. In this study, the term queer is used within this later context to denote the politicisation of the term, to challenge unequal power relations, the normalcy and hegemony of heteronormativity. The term is also used within the context of it having been reassigned a positive (empowering) meaning that mobilises the queer community on a global scale, to unite behind a common cause of fighting against oppression and to develop a positive self-image. The term is further used as an accepted umbrella term to refer to the LGBTQQIAP+ community interchangeably throughout the

	study. Queer theory as a result is used as a lens upon which I seek to challenge heteronormative assumptions and approaches to the representation of queer people in brand advertisements. It further provides a lens upon which I seek to challenge what we have come to know as “truths” about gender and queer identity which have in many instances been reinforced and legitimated in media including advertising.
Marginality	In this study, I adopt Raja’s (2019) definition of marginality. Raja (2019) defines marginality within the context of postcolonial and cultural studies and locates its origins in the colonialism period in which it was presupposed that a particular centre, standard, and socially acceptable way of being ought to have been maintained and aspired to. Failure to conform to the standard or norm meant that people could be reduced, othered and marginalised. Marginalisation exists and continues to thrive through politics, power, and discourses that reinforce particular social scripts and a discursive framework that further legitimates the structure of the centre itself (Raja 2019).
Heteronormativity	In this study, Werner’s (1993), Wittig (1980), and Rich’s (1980) definition of heteronormativity is adopted. Werner (1993) defines heteronormativity as a term that emerged in the 1980s to signify the social and political currency accorded to heterosexism, its reproduction and regularisation, ontologically, epistemologically and methodologically in all facets of social and organisational life. Heteronormativity upholds the belief that heterosexuality, which is predicated on the gender binary – male and female performing socially prescribed and acceptable roles – is the norm and a default sexual orientation and therefore sexual and marital relations are most fitting between people of the opposite sex. Heteronormative assumptions, as Wittig (1980) and Rich (1980) posit, “enable straight minds to develop a totalizing interpretation of history, social reality, culture, and other subjective phenomenon that interweave an interlocking network of the symbolic order through language”.
Cisgender	Heteronormativity is predicated on the notion of humans as being cis-gendered. Cisgender refers to people whose gender identity matches the sex that they were assigned at birth (APA, 2015). Cisgender is linked to social acceptance of sex and gender as binary. Thus, the cisgender binary system splits the members of the society into one of two sets of gender roles, gender identities, and attributes based on the sex they are born with.

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CHAPTER 1

CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Globally, the advertising industry is on a growth trajectory to transcend its conventional position of advertising as a medium focused mainly on product functional benefits and sales objectives (Frolova 2014; MINAR 2016). The shift is towards positioning advertising as a strategic lever for building meaningful brands (Enslin & de Beer 2015; Enslin 2019) that have a strong psychological and emotional resonance within a diverse consumer base (Keller 2009; Badrinarayanan, Suh, & Kim 2016) and add value in humanising society (Masito 2014; Naidoo & Abratt 2018). The advertising industry (also referred to as the industry henceforth) is progressively appreciating the importance of gaining an in-depth understanding of the political and sociocultural dynamics at play in the environments in which their brands exist (Das 2017) and leveraging these to craft targeted advertisements that enhance brand resonance, brand equity, and social change (Enslin & de Beer 2015; MINAR 2016).

Locally, South Africa's advertising industry is one of the most progressive industries in the world. When only measured on financial metrics, the local industry is often taken for granted as it contributes a meagre 36.6 billion South African rand (approximately 2.5 billion U.S. dollars) to the advertising industry globally (Guttmann 2019). While this financial contribution may seem somewhat immaterial, the local advertising industry competes head and shoulders above some of its global counterparts on product innovation, novel approaches to advertising, and brand communication (Wingfield 2016). This marks a noteworthy evolution of the local industry since its formation in the 1800s. It further signifies the transformational journey the industry has undertaken to become one of the global players in novelty and inclusivity (Wingfield 2016).

Despite this remarkable progress, the advertising strategies developed by brand communication planners and creative directors in advertising agencies are often less

attuned to social causes that are of significance to diverse consumers, particularly the need to address the prevailing problem of marginalisation of queer people. Possibly, one of the contributing factors to this lower-than-desired brand social consciousness is the palpable influence of Euro-American cultural trends in the local industry (Okoro 2012; Biondi 2019), a phenomenon that can be attributed partly to the modern-day reality of a rapidly shrinking global community to become what Friedman (2005) termed the “flat world”.

Technology, as one of the driving forces of rapid globalisation, is advancing at a fast pace, connecting humanity, societies, and economies in a manner that allows brands and cultures to permeate and redefine traditional national borders and cultural boundaries (Friedman 2005). As a result, the exchange of ideologies and cultures has become more inescapable and is mostly beneficial. However, there is a latent risk of reproducing the hegemonic Western centric, and Euro-American Christonormative ideologies of humanism that buttress the view that “West is best” (Booyesen 2007). Such hegemonic notions reify the undertones of a backward and inferior African continent, cultures and ways of being (Nweke & Nwoye 2016) and buttress the naturalised sexed and gendered hierarchies that institutionalise the oppressive idea of a procreating a heteropatriarchal “nuclear” family (McEwen 2016; 2021). According to McEwen (2021), despite the work that has been done by liberation and decolonisation movements to transform and dismantle the stronghold of coloniality in terms of society’s construction of knowing, doing, and being gender roles, there is much more that still needs to be done to disempower its dominance and legacy. This is particularly in terms of the equal liberation rights being enjoyed by marginalised members of society (McEwen 2021).

Heteropatriarchy, as feminists and scholars of gender studies elucidate, is an interlocking system of unequal social and political power in which cisgender heterosexual men are positioned at the apex of the hierarchy as the superior head of the nuclear family within society and are rewarded for presenting masculine traits (Butler 1988; Jenzen & Munt 2013). In this discourse, women, as the masculine binary opposite, are seen as fragile, feminine, and subservient to men (Kates 1999; Paechter 2018). This institutionalised cis-heteropatriarchal structure assumes that the world is

naturally, thus indisputably, binary and heterosexual. As such, humans who do not fit meticulously into this gender binary are made invisible and/or hyper-individualised as abnormal and deserving of some form of psychological, psychiatric, surgical, and/or spiritual intervention (Jenzen & Munt 2013; Ndzwayiba & Steyn 2019). McKaiser (2012) clarifies that the assumption of Africa as an inherently (cis) heteropatriarchal continent is misguided. McKaiser (2012) contends that these heteronormative assumptions are a Western import and a historical embarrassment. Tamale (2011; 2020) confirms that Africa has always been a place and space for pluriversal genders and sexualities. Her central argument is that contrary to contemporary misconceptions of Africa as an inherently heterosexual continent, ideals fuelled by Western and colonial ideology, this continent has and will always remain the place and space of pluriversal genders and sexualities (Tamale 2020).

Thus, in this discourse, creative brand leadership can play a pivotal role in bringing about social change through the curation of advertisements that challenge the taken-for-granted heteropatriarchal assumptions. By so doing, the industry will contribute towards the building of brands that genuinely add value to people's lives and realise greater brand resonance and brand equity.

1.2 Literature Review and Insights

Queer bodies live in a social and organisational context that forces them often to hide their true self from the wrath and judgement of a predominantly heterosexual society. Critical scholars in gender studies, such as Judith Butler (1993), Sylvia Tamale (2011; 2020), John D'Emilio (2016), and Haley McEwen (2016; 2021), relentlessly expose the copious cruelties that inhibit queer bodies' freedom in a society and an economy that refuses to recognise queer people as legitimate humans. These marginalising tendencies are continuously reproduced in various parts of society, including in media and, by extension, advertising (Jacobs & Meeusen 2021). The core of advertising is to market to consumers by appealing to a particular narrative that has relevance to their lived experience, thereby influencing their buying behaviour (Mailki 2020). This process in brand advertising is referred to as brand resonance.

Brand resonance is a theoretical construct that was founded by leading marketing scholar Kevin Keller (2009) as part of his *Customer-based Brand Equity Model*. The model prioritises the customer and ensures key steps are followed by brands in advertising to build relationships with their consumers. This relationship allows for consumers to be able to connect with brands and their purpose through advertising as a vehicle of their brand communication. This insight highlights how advertising plays a crucial role in society insofar as resonating with all consumers (Spence 2009) by educating, challenging, and shifting perceptions on issues like queer marginality in advertising. Brand resonance enables an understanding of how critical it is for brands to establish themselves within the psyche of the consumer as a way of establishing solid meaning and purpose (Aaker 1996; Keller 2019). Brand resonance also allows consumers to see themselves adequately reflected in the brands they choose to support, thereby allowing brands to achieve brand equity in terms of financial gain and having a relationship with consumers (Keller 2019). Literature that investigates the extent to which organisations plan for brand resonance and incorporate queer voices in their planning is sparse. This study aims to contribute towards the closure of this gap by interviewing key role players in the planning of advertising in leading agencies in South Africa with the objective of understanding their social constructions of gender and whether these constructions reproduce or challenge queer marginality.

1.3 Problem Statement, Research Aim, Question, and Objectives

1.3.1 Problem statement

While more work needs to be done to transform the embedded cis-heteropatriarchal ideas of gender and sexuality in South Africa, there is increasing education, awareness campaigns and forms of activism that are calling for the recognition of gender as a continuum. Relatedly, South Africa's brand advertising industry has also become more inclusive of queer people and nonbinary people. Some of the most contemporary case studies that can be referenced from 2021 include, but are not limited to, the work done by brands such as Rich Mnisi, LUX, Chicken Licken, Vodacom, and Stimrol.

Notwithstanding this progress, South Africa's advertising industry, as a microcosm of society, is implicated in the reproduction of cis-heteronormative standards through nonrecognition of queer identity as a continuum in the planning and production of advertisements. Additionally, when the industry produces queer-inclusive advertisements, the advertisements often misappropriate queer liberation activism for the sole purpose of achieving the objectives of the pink economy or pink capitalism (Disemelo 2015).

Pink capitalism is predicated on the belief that queer people have more disposable income and buying power compared to heterosexual families (Disemelo, 2015; D'Emilio, 2016). The pink economy is attractive to brands as it contributes an estimated US\$16 trillion to the world economy (LGBT Capital 2016). In the scramble for queer consumers, brand communication planners and creative directors tend to produce advertisements that portray queer bodies within the extremes of ultra-femininity and hyper-masculinity to consumers (Timke & O'Barr 2017), a perspective that reifies and reinforces the existence of queer bodies through the prism of heteronormative male-female cis-gender binary (King 2016). This misappropriation, misrepresentation, and nonrepresentation of queer people triggered the researcher's interest to study and better understand the processes followed by the advertising industry, as well as the values of practitioners that are involved in the process of planning and producing advertisements that resonate with all. It can be reasoned that such values influence both the process of producing the advertisement and the outcome.

1.3.2 Research aim

The main aim of this study is to understand the South African brand communication planners' and creative directors' social constructions of queer identity and how queer voices are included in the planning for brand resonance in advertising.

1.3.2

1.3.3 Research question

Bearing in mind the aim of the study, the main research question of this study was thusly phrased as follows:

How do South African advertising brand communication planners and creative directors in the advertising industry understand queer identity, and how do they include the voices of queer people in their planning for brand resonance in advertisements?

1.3.4 Objectives

To adequately address the main aim, the following objectives were formulated:

- To explore brand communication planners' and creative directors' social construction of gender and queer identity which may also reinforce forms of queer exclusion;
- To establish how South African brand communication planners and creative directors include/or exclude queer identities in the planning of brand advertisements to achieve brand resonance; and
- To understand the role the advertising industry could play in the emancipation and liberation of queer people through advertisements that resonate with consumers or identify the challenges that might lead to the industry being resistant to playing an emancipatory role.

1.4 Research Methodology

1.4.1 Research design

I used research design as the glue that held my research inquiry together and to guide my strategic approach in terms of how to best execute this study in a scholarly, orderly, and systematic manner (Kumar 2011). According to Farooq (2019), the research design encompasses strategic guiding principles and a detailed plan aimed at

assisting the researcher in making key decisions about research methods, population groups, sampling techniques, data collection, and data analysis procedures to answer the main research question of an inquiry, thereby addressing the research objectives by carrying out precisely outlined procedures that must be followed in describing, explaining and predicting phenomena. Dawadi, Shrestha & Giri (2021) expound that research design may adopt and follow the principles of a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed method approach.

In this study, I investigated the South African brand communication planners' and creative directors' social constructions of queer identity and how they included the voices and lived experiences of the queer community in the planning of brand resonance in South African brand advertisements. Therefore, a qualitative research method was selected as the most suitable for collecting, analysing, and interpreting empirical data to answer the main research question of this inquiry. More specifically, I adopted a critical qualitative research (CQR) approach to investigate the possible entrenched normative ideas of gender and sexuality in the advertising industry. Hardcastle, Usher and Holmes (2006) explicate that critical qualitative research connects social phenomena to broader social and historical events to uncover the ubiquitous structures of power, concealed assumptions, taken-for-granted dogmas, and related tyrannical discourses with the aim of calling for real social change.

Below is a visual diagram illustrating the procedure followed in conducting and completing this study:

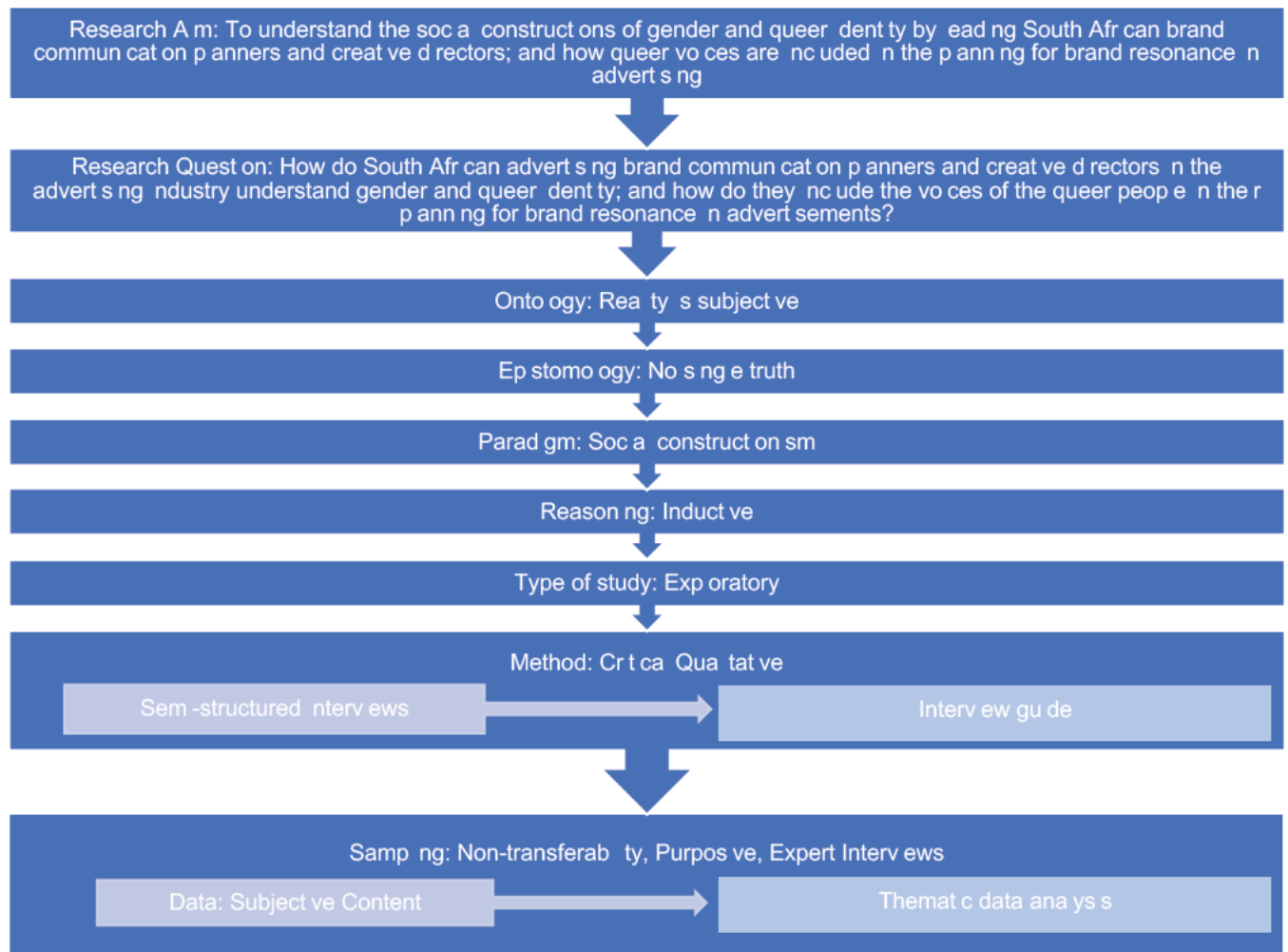


Figure 1 A visual diagram illustrating the procedure followed in conduction and completion of this study

1.4.2 Data analysis

According to the Bangladesh Education Article (2010), data analysis comprises several steps which this study adhered to. These steps include recognising and getting a sense of the themes using the right focal point, stepping back from the details, and identifying patterns that can be grouped in code systems upon which information can then be encoded. The themes were then interpreted within the context of the theory and conceptual frameworks outlined in chapter two with the aim of consolidating knowledge and developing new knowledge.

1.4.3 Research findings

The five themes discovered during the data analysis are briefly presented below and are discussed in more detail in chapter four of this study.

Theme	Subthemes
1. Positive and negative connotations to gender and queer identity	1.1. Should not be approached as a ticking-of-boxes exercise in advertisement curation 1.2. Understanding of gender and queer identity as a continuum 1.3. Self-examination and self-correction when it come to issues of gender and identity (key constructs) 1.4. Importance of having queer people represented and part of the industry insofar as work environments
2. Clients determine the topic and brief	2.1. Some participants acknowledge the importance of diversity in internal teams and brands they represent as a way of driving diversity in thinking and approach 2.2. Participants highlighted the importance of the ads that are inclusive need not drive on stereotypes or just be done as a way of ticking boxes 2.3. Most of the participants called out the need for a naturalised approach that will resonate with all
3. The development of advertisements and participants' role assignments	3.1. Key differentiator markers between brand communication planner and creative director as the research component that informs strategic direction and creation 3.2. No inclusion of (external) queer-identifying parties to examine the resonance of strategies except for team members within agencies who identify as queer (if at all)

- | | | |
|---|------|--|
| | 3.3. | Role players in influencing gender consideration in the process of creating advertisements from both a strategy and creative direction perspective |
| 4. Functional versus emotive briefs | 4.1. | Depending on the job at hand: Brand storytelling and product sell determines the extent to which queer-led characters are considered |
| | 4.2. | Brands that allow for self-expression are more prone to be inclusive than others |
| 5. The societal responsibility of advertising | 5.1. | Promote tolerance and patience in society |
| | 5.2. | Educate society (trends and acceptable behaviours) |
| | 5.3. | Shaping and changing narratives in society (creating acceptable cultures) |
| | 5.4. | Being representative and diverse in thinking and hiring of teams |

1.5 Reliability and Validity

Given that this study was a critical qualitative study, it was imperative that I ensure reliability and validity throughout the study to ensure the overall trustworthiness of the study. This is due to the nature of qualitative research that can become skewed through subjectivity and inconsistencies. While my axiological and ontological position was declared, I still needed to achieve a high degree of reliability and validity. I achieved this by ensuring that a clearly defined process was outlined and consistently followed as well as thoroughly documented so that the process could be replicated by other researchers. I further ensured to remain truthful and transparent in my reporting on the participant's views expressed and engaged with from the data collected.

1.6 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were paramount to this study due to working with top agencies who further shared details about the brands they work with and clients who carry strong brand reputations. To ensure that ethical standards were upheld, I obtained informed consent from each research participant and committed to anonymity and confidentiality of both the brands involved and the identity of the research participants.

1.7 Limitations and Delimitations

The occurrence of a global health pandemic, referred to as COVID 19, during the commencement of this study caused much unrest and uncertainty for the researcher. Most of what was of 2020/2021 was profoundly impacted by the pandemic, which is when the study commenced and the primary research was completed. The researcher had committed to conducting face-to-face interviews with the research participants, but, due to the pandemic and the need for the population to socially distance, they were forced to conduct the interviews via internet-based telecommunication platforms, including Zoom and Microsoft Teams. These came with their own set of challenges such as internet connectivity at times, which meant the researcher sometimes had a shorter time with the participants to engage in further detail in some areas that arose during the interviews. An additional limitation was the use of thematic analysis to analyse the qualitative data. While the researcher was rigorous in their efforts to ensure reliability and validity throughout the data analysis process, thematic analysis still leans heavily on interpretation and subjectivity on behalf of the researcher (André, 2020; Javadi & Zarea 2016). The researcher was aware of this limitation and remained mindful of it throughout the thematic analysis, regularly returning to the data as well as the literature to ensure that whatever findings were unearthed were substantiated.

The most prominent delimitation to this study was the selection of the best agencies to represent the South African advertising industry. This is because it may be argued that they do not necessarily represent the industry as a whole and perhaps the efforts that are being made by some agencies and brands. However, given that there is limited research on this subject matter and limited documentation of the strides being

made, particularly by the South African advertising industry, the reason to contend that much more can and should be done is sustained. This exploratory study with research participants revealed this gap and aimed to provide a point of departure for practitioners who are committed to improving the social fibre of society.

In addition, the research participants themselves were purposefully selected based on their role within the best-practice agencies to narrate their lived professional experience as the richest source of information for this study. Thusly, the sampling used to select these participants is extensively outlined and rationalised in Chapter three.

A further delimitation is due to the ethical considerations of anonymity and confidentiality of the participants and the brands that they represent. While releasing this information could be beneficial for the study, the ethical code needs to foremost be honoured.

1.8 Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 – Chapter one provided an introduction and background context to the study. It further outlined the problem statement and objectives in the context of the reviewed literature. It concluded by providing a view on the methodological approach and by reflecting on the limitations and delimitations of the study.

Chapter 2: Chapter two provides a literature review. The chapter focusses on key seminal works and empirical studies relating to gender and queer identity and brand resonance. The literature review draws from a broad range of scholarship across critical theory, postcolonial, radical feminism, and brand leadership disciplines to address the main research question.

Chapter 3: Chapter three outlines the research design, philosophical assumptions, research approach, and strategies applied to collect, analyse, and secure the quality of the data. The chapter concludes with an outline of how research ethics were adhered to throughout this investigation.

Chapter 4: Chapter four gives an account of the findings of the study. Key themes and their subthemes are delineated. Literature is further used to make sense of these emergent themes.

Chapter 5: As a concluding chapter, chapter five provides a summary of findings and discussions, limitations, and recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter provided the background context to this study, which aims to understand brand communication planners' and creative directors' social constructions of gender and queer identity. Linked to this research aim was the need to understand how the voices and lived experiences of queer people were included in the planning for brand resonance in South African advertisements. This was further informed by the principles of brand resonance which centre the importance of brands connecting with all its consumers to be able to continue leveraging brand equity (Keller 2019). In this study, the connection of brands with all its consumers should not exclude the queer community, especially the spectrum of identities that exists within the community. The chapter presented the main research problem, research aim, and objectives. Key definitions of key terms were also provided as a prelude to the remainder of the study.

Chapter two seeks to gain rich insights into the scholarship related to the focus of this study by drawing from literature that exists both in a local and international context. The chapter sketches the literature review related to queer identity and brand resonance. It begins with an outline of seminal works on queer theory to elucidate the critical feminist intellectual debates on the intersections of gender and sexuality and how these social constructs are deeply connected with queer marginality as the focus of this inquiry. Literature on brand leadership is then explored with a key focus on brand resonance and contemporary debates on the critical role of brand advertising in the transformation of society, especially as it relates to gender inclusivity and justice. The chapter is concluded with a reflection on these debates and identifying a lacuna in the existing literature, followed by how this study intends to contribute towards the closure of the said lacuna.

2.2 Queer Theory

Queer theory is an interdisciplinary field of study that emerged in gay and lesbian studies, post-structuralism, literary deconstruction, third wave feminism, and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory (Kates 1999; Spargo 2000). Queer theory arose in the late 70s and early 80s and gained prominence in the 1990s, building on the earlier works of critical thinkers such as Michele Foucault (1976), Adriana Rich (1980), and Monique Wittig (1980) who had, through written text and pedagogical practice, advocated for the challenging of the marginalising heteropatriarchal assumptions and practices in society and organisations (Marcus 2005; Rocha-Rodrigues 2016). Akin to all postmodern thought, queer theory rejects the modernist notion of human beings as sovereign, self-knowing, independent agents, and makers of meaning or reasoning (Kates, 1999). Instead, queer theory advances the notion of a decentred subject who is historically and culturally embedded within social relations and whose sexual influences depend on historical, social, and cultural influences and discourses that constitute one's self-understanding of gender and sexual identity (Butler 1990).

As a branch of critical philosophy, queer theory is an anti-essentialism body of knowledge that upholds the radical feminist ideology which posits that the personal is political (Harnisch 1969). This blurs the lines between the public and the private sphere to render the private as the sphere of inequality, hierarchy, and domination, which is held intact by the hegemonic ideology of the heteropatriarchal nuclear family (Butler 1998; Watson 2005). Queer theory shines the spotlight on unequal power relationships and exposes how dominant discourses of gender and sexuality are organised, reproduced, and maintained through perceived oppressive heteronormative sociocultural norms (Jenzen & Munt 2013).

Spargo (2000) conceptualises queer theory as not a representation of a single or systematic theoretical and methodological framework, but a series of critical intellectual engagements aimed at interrogating and overturning the normalised "fixity" of the relations between sex, gender and desire. Queer theory, as Spargo (2000) explains, draws on a broad range of critical thought and praxis to challenge this fixity. Queer theory encompasses the following: critical reading and analyses of

representations of same-sex desire in literary texts, media, films, music, images, analyses of political and social power relations of gender and sexuality, criticism of sex and gender binary systems, studies of transsexual and transgender identification, and perceived transgressive desires (Spargo 2000).

At the core of queer theory is the determination to debunk the dominant knowledge paradigms of sex, gender, and sexuality and to render these as products of power that are strategically deployed to buttress the status quo of inequality and compulsory heteronormativity (Rich 1980). Queer theorists are committed to illuminating the subordinated voices that stand in opposition to the unabated privileging of normative genders and the ongoing maintenance of heteropatriarchal social relations to ensure that these normalised exclusive notions of gender and sexuality are no longer reproduced in social and cultural institutions (Rocha-Rodrigues 2016). Social institutions, as Rocha – Rodrigues (2016) explains, also include business, art, education, and advertising.

Scholars of queer theory generally adopt the social constructionism paradigm to deconstruct the essentialist notions of sex, gender, and sexuality. The essentialist paradigm comprehends sex, gender, and sexuality as fixed phenomena of biology and nature with concrete assigned gender roles, where people are either born male or female and instinctively know and behave according to their sex and gender assignment (Butler 1990). Social constructionism, which encompasses queer theory, rejects this essentialist notion that sexuality is an instinctual, innate, or a “hard-wired” attribute; instead, it views sex, gender, and sexuality as free-floating social constructs that are made comprehensible through assigned social and cultural meanings (Butler, 1990).

In an essay titled “*The deadly elasticity of heteronormative assumptions*”, Ndzwayiba & Steyn (2019) clarify that sex signifies biological attributes or anatomy, gender denotes sociocultural role expectations imposed upon sexed “male-female” human subjects, while sexual orientation refers to desire and attraction. These authors explain that society holds a problematic ideology that, if one is born with male or female genitalia (sex), it is given that they automatically identify as a boy or a girl (gender)

and therefore must perform normatively as masculine or feminine, respectively, and will naturally be sexually attracted to each other (sexual orientation). Ndzwayiba & Steyn (2019) defiantly contend that sex, gender, and sexuality must never be conflated as one does not automatically equate to the other.

Tamale (2011) explains that sex, gender, and sexuality are deeply complex, nuanced, free-floating, and multilayered in nature. Butler (1993) adds that gender is a cultural construct that is imposed upon the surface of matter, understood either as the body or its given sex. Butler expands that gender involves cultural and traditional behaviours and role expectations associated with and assigned to male- or female-bodied persons at birth. She contends that these socially assigned behaviours are expected to be performed throughout one's lifetime. For these reasons, Butler (1993) theorises gender as performative and cultural construct rather than a biological phenomenon or a fact of nature.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler (1990) explains that gender is performative in the sense of a copy for which there is no original. She argues that because gender must be constantly reproduced, its structure is always vulnerable to mutation and subversion. In a later work, Butler (2000) contends that the norm has a temporality that subjects it to a vulnerability and subversion from within and to a future that cannot be fully anticipated. In the essay on gender performativity, Butler (1993) had earlier explained that gender performativity does not necessarily imply acting from a theatrical point of view or as a discipline. Rather, performativity denotes the questioning of whether the individual is acting out or expressing their gender in the way they want to or as a direct influence of sociocultural and environmental impositions that are beyond their control. Thus, society, rather than biology, carries a significant psychological influence on how gender is perceived, performed, and policed by both the self and others. According to Butler (1993), the body, which she interprets as the individual and how "they"¹ express themselves, is influenced by sociological aspects of gender. The

¹ "They" in this instance is used to defy the he-she gender binary. Thus, "they" is used in a singular form but denote gender neutrality.

sociological scripts, in turn, are reflective of the socially and psychologically embedded dominant heteropatriarchal knowledge paradigms (Trotter 2018).

The heteropatriarchal knowledge paradigms of sex and gender are best explained by Foucault (1992) who frames these social constructs within the context of power. Foucault explains that power is neither an institution nor a structure, and that power is not a certain strength either, but the word that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. According to Foucault (1992), power is invasive and unspoken in nature; power normalises and naturalises certain ways of being. When what is deemed as “normal” is interpreted to have been transgressed, be it covertly, overtly, psychologically, or psychically, power imprisons or punishes the disruptor for deviating from the prescribed normalcy. Power, in normalised gender norms, lies in negating of the reality that there are pluriversal genders and sexualities and that individuals have the right to defy the norm without having to contend with the threat of punishment by society (Ndzwayiba & Steyn 2019).

Building on Foucault’s (1992) framework of gender and power, Butler (1993) adds that power does not exist on its own. Power is a by-product and effect of the dominant taking hold of reality and forcing themselves into existence. Thus, when bodies are constructed or presented as feminine or masculine, such constructions and gender performance reveal the effects of the dominant heteronormative paradigm. The dominance of the heteronormative paradigm thrives only because it is unquestioned and maintained. It is assumed to be the way things should be, as the natural order. However, when the norm is challenged, its dominance is dismantled, resulting in an uproar by those who subscribe to its dominance (Trotter 2018). Regrettably, most people who do not fit into the dominant heteronormative script find it hard to challenge the status quo and opt to rather conform and suffer in silence. Conformance is an innate response of the ego which seeks social acceptance and belonging. By so doing, queer bodies surrender to societal control and power. This act of surrendering inevitably implies that they can never be truly themselves in society and their autonomy is thus undermined (Trotter 2018). It is on these grounds that critical queer theorists and critical gender scholars (Butler 1993; Tamale 2011; McEwen 2016) implore the unpacking and debunking of the use of the very term

'queer' in daily language to ensure that its use is empowering rather than oppressive. Advertising, as is further discussed in this chapter, is a powerful tool that is used by the industry to shape and inform consumer behaviour (Haider & Shakib 2017; Mailki 2020). This study contends that instead of purely influencing buying behaviour, its role should comprise encouraging consumers to think differently about societal issues, including those affecting the visibility and representation of queer people. This would help brands and the industry achieve what Keller (2009) terms brand resonance, which is essentially concerned with how the industry builds affinities and relationships that would ultimately liberate the queer community, thereby affirming its existence.

The above scholars and seminal voices aptly lay the foundation upon which this study takes its arguments and point of departure. The arguments presented show how the social construction of queer identity needs to be interrogated within the advertising industry and explored in terms of how this informs the approach taken by brand communication planners and creative directors in the process of curating brand advertisements in South Africa. It does this by not only showing that our constructions of gender are influenced by societal norms and practices that not only take hold of what happens in social spaces; but may also influence how industry practitioners subsequently bring these ways of portraying gender into the production of advertisements that reinforce the exclusion of queer people. Below, I discuss empirical studies that examined queer realities in the advertising industry.

2.3 Empirical Studies on Queer Marginality in Advertising

Brand advertising scholars, institutions, and authors in the global north such as Dorthy (1993), Kates (1999), Chasin (2001), Raymond (2003), Rocha-Rodrigues (2016), Nölke (2017) and Roderick (2017) are progressively adopting queer theory to critically reflect on the ways in which the brand advertising industry reproduces male-female gender binaries and heteropatriarchy to elucidate the role that the industry plays in the misappropriation, non-recognition, and misrepresentation of queer people, with the aim of challenging and changing these stereotypes. Their work provides a point of departure for this study in the South African context that is to a large degree sparse in literature that investigates this phenomenon from an academic perspective.

For instance, Britain's Lloyds Banking Group (2016) conducted an online survey with a sample of 2 200 respondents in England and Wales to examine the portrayal of minority groups in advertising. Methodologically, the research looked at the top 20 advertising spenders in 2015 to establish how well diversity and inclusion across the spectrum of race, gender, and disability, amongst other social categories, were reflected in advertising. The study included more than 40 brands and 1 340 television and press advertisements. The findings show that only 19% of people of colour are featured in advertising and a meagre 0.06% are from the queer community despite the queer community making up 1.7% of the British population. Approximately 79% of the surveyed participants indicated that gay women are underrepresented in advertising compared to bisexual people (56%), gay men (49%), and disabled people (44%).

Roderick's (2017) article titled "Why are advertisers still failing to represent gay women?" asks the rhetorical question "when was an ad featuring a gay woman seen?". Roderick (2017) retorts that the probability of recalling one is slim due to the paucity of commercials that represent lesbian women. Roderick clarifies that brands have been slightly more inclusive of gay men but less so of lesbians. Roderick (2017) attributes this to brands becoming aware of the gay market or the pink pound in the 1990s. Advertisers became more attracted to gay males, particularly gay male couples who were viewed as having double income and no resulting children (Roderick 2017), albeit it is a rapidly changing reality. It is within this context that gay men started to play a bigger role in advertising. However, as Roderick contends, the portrayal of lesbians remains uncommon and stereotypical when an advertisement is finally produced.

Additionally, Nölke (2017) conducted an intersectional longitudinal analysis of LGBTQQIAP+ specific mainstream media advertisements as part of her PhD research. Nölke (2017) analysed the explicit representations of LGBTQQIAP+ people in mainstream advertising between 2009 and 2015. The study found that while the number of explicit portrayals of LGBTQQIAP+ characters had risen significantly in advertisements, 230 out of 240 intersections that portrayed queer people remained invisible. Nölke further found that in using an ad format that was human-interest

centred, advertisers moved away from hyper-sexualisation towards real individuals' stories of love and family. However, most of the produced advertisements were offensive, exclusive, and/or only spoke to a subsection of the broader queer community. The study further found that there was a continued erasure of marginalized groups in mainstream advertising and that there was a perpetuation of a heteronormative domesticised version of "gayness". The study concluded that straight consumers are the underlying target group of LGBTQQIAP+ explicit advertising, causing non-target market effects that alienate large parts of the LGBTQQIAP+ community because of their overt exclusion.

Gillian Oakenfull (2012) is amongst the leading scholars in researching gay and lesbian representation in advertising. Oakenfull's work on queer identity in advertising draws from psychology, sociology, and feminist theory to examine the effect of gay identity and gender on gays' and lesbians' attitudes toward several types of advertising content that are most used to target gay consumers. Oakenfull (2007) empirically tested whether gay males' and lesbians' responses to gay-oriented advertising content are moderated by individual characteristics such as the degree to which they identify as gay and their gender, and by the explicitness and gender of gay-oriented advertising imagery. Eisend & Hermann (2019) conducted a follow-up study which reinforced some of the findings found by Oakenfull. Their study also revealed new findings about queer audiences having negative responses to heterosexual imagery. There were further negative responses to incongruences relating to imagery, consumer characteristics, culture values, explicitness of imagery, endorser gender, and product type of homosexual imagery (Eisend & Hermann 2019). Planning for better resonance would allow for a more nuanced way of executing imagery and advertisements that are relevant to consumers.

Oakenfull (2013) argues that the advertising industry must shift towards normalising and incorporating different identities that form part of the LGBTQQIAP+ umbrella term. Chasin (2001) adds that the failure to normalise queer voices would inevitably perpetuate the production of imagery in mainstream advertisements that do not appeal to the LGBTQQIAP+ community.

In the context of South Africa, the historical legacy of apartheid in South African advertising can be said to have had a major influence on why certain advertising practices took the form and shape the way they did. More specifically, the industry itself has only recently undergone change after having to contend with many factors. According to Asmall (2010), the influence of the apartheid regime was the foundation upon which the industry was based when Television (TV) advertising came into effect in 1978. This was particularly because when TVs were introduced in 1976, they were targeted at white people, whereas TV advertising would need to start speaking to all members of the society and not just some (Asmall 2010). The main contestation by the then ruling government centred race pollination through advertising, which would give power and rise to the voices of black people who at the time were viewed as inferior to their white counterparts (Asmall 2010). In the context of this study, the apartheid regime, therefore, was not only about racial segregation but also criminalisation of same sex relations thus making South Africa a white heterosexual state.

Over the last 27 years, however, democracy has come into effect and many people of all races are viewed as equal from a constitutional point of view. This has resulted in changes in the way advertising is approached post-apartheid in 1994 for all races. The marketplace is no longer considered primarily for 'whites' but further caters for people of all races (Maisela 1985). As a consequence, advertising agencies and brands in most cases have taken a firm stance towards culturally diverse advertising to appeal to those who were previously excluded from the attention of advertisers. While this has notably contributed to the facilitation of change in the country in recent years, it has also enhanced the stereotypes that exist in South African communities.

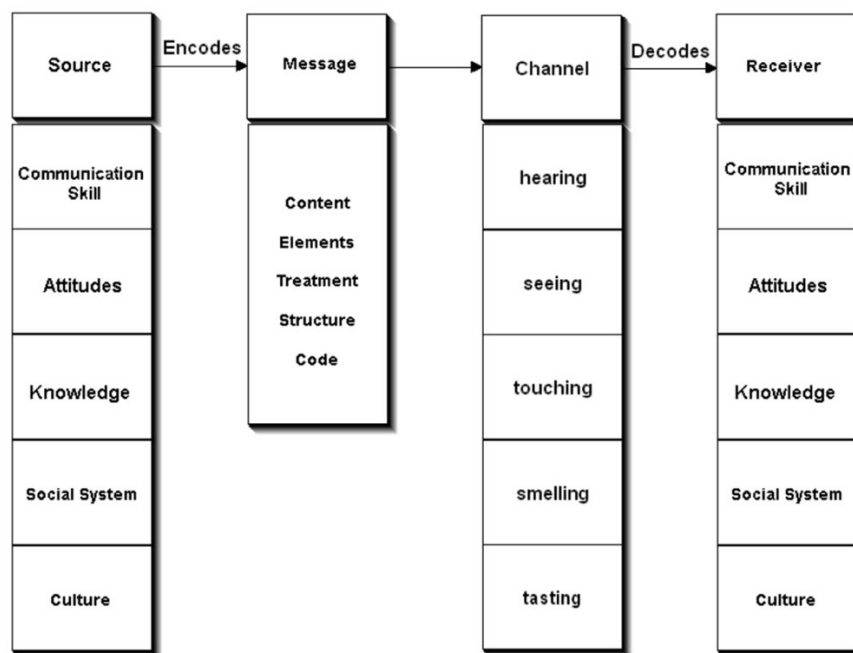
An understanding of this historical background also begins to illustrate how the changes and transformation of the country centring on race have taken many years and political will; and when looking at other areas of improvement that are needed for maligned groups particularly where gender is concerned, it can be inferred that it is a process that will need to be addressed with much vigour and intent. The alienation of marginalised consumer schemas is essentially what this study seeks to examine regarding the queer community. This is precisely because of the influence and power the advertising industry has on different segments of consumers and, by extension,

society in terms of social roles and images that are acceptable and desirable (Pollay & Mittal 1993; Burns 2003). The opposite of alienation is resonance and is a theoretical lens that this study adopts.

2.4 Brand Advertising Theory, Target Market Profiling, and Segmentation

According to Mokoena, in an interview with Between10and5 (2019), the advertising industry is based on David Berlo's (1960) Sender Messenger Channel Receiver (SMCR) model that prioritizes the following key constructs: sender, message channel, and receiver. Essentially, Berlo (1960) described factors affecting the individual components in the communication, making it more efficient. The model (Figure 2) further focusses on the encoding and decoding processes which happens before the sender sends the message and before the receiver receives the message (Businessstopia, 2018). The encoding process is important in the context of queer theory as it potentially highlights how the sender's very own social construction has an influence on what the sender receives and decodes through the embedded message in the advertisement. This model was developed in a particular context and the advertising industry's business module was created in response to it (Mokoena 2019).

Berlo's Model of Communication



A Source encodes a message for a channel to a receiver who decodes the message:
S-M-C-R Model.

Figure 2 Berlo's (1960) Source-Message-Channel-Receiver Model of Communication. Developed from Process of communication: An introduction to theory and practice.

According to Haider and Shakid (2017), advertising's influence and how advertisements work is a question that most marketers and managers try to find an answer to. The primary objective of an advertisement is usually to impact the consumer's buying behaviour (Haider & Shakib 2017; Mailki 2020). Shumaila (2013) suggests that most of the time, consumers' buying behaviour is influenced by their liking or disliking of the advertisement of the product advertised. The consumer behaviour towards a product, according to Gorn (1982), is wholly dependent on advertising, without any consideration of the features of the product. Haider & Shakib (2017) conducted a study on the influence of advertisements on consumer behaviour and found that people have access to an almost endless supply of advertisements. This informed the four key variables measured which were determined to give meaning to advertisements, namely, *entertainment*, *familiarity*, *social role image*, and *advertisement spending*. They conclude that consumers are attracted to advertisements that are novel, entertaining, and that grab their attention (Haider & Shakib, 2017).

Entertainment, as a variable, is a significant advertising strategy for increasing its effectiveness and imploring consumers to make a purchase (Madden & Weinberger 1982). The second variable, *familiarity*, is created in advertisements for certain brands and is an important factor affecting consumer buying behaviour (Haider & Shakib 2017). In a study carried out by Macinnis and Park (1991) to investigate the effects of familiar songs in advertising and consumer behaviour, consumers depicted satisfaction for products with familiar songs and a significant relationship was confirmed between the level of familiarity of the songs in advertising and its amiability (Haider & Shakib 2017). Thirdly, *social role and image*, as a variable, reflects those advertisements that influence individuals' lifestyle and the extent to which an individual seeks to present him- or herself in a socially acceptable manner. The inference here is that consumers learn about new and acceptable lifestyles, images, and trends through advertisements (Pollay & Mittal 1993; Burns 2003) by illustrating the position of the ideal to the consumer, thereby stimulating social action toward the purchase of that product. Lastly, *advertising spending* as a variable also creates a positive impression about a brand in the minds of the consumers. Aaker and Jacobson (1994) found a positive relationship between advertising and perceived quality. Hence, advertising spending is considered positively related to the perceived quality of the product, leading to greater numbers of purchases from that brand as consumers generally prefer to purchase from a well-known brand to avoid disappointment over quality (Haider & Shakib 2017).

Berlo's (1960) model depicts the process followed by advertisers through their brand communication planners and creative directors in the planning and production of advertisements. Kapferer (1992) identifies Physique in his first pillar of the brand-identity prism model. Physique is central to brand resonance and speaks to how consumers identify the brand and its functionality in their lives. Literature suggests a strong focus on advertisings' influence on consumer behaviour, insofar as conversion. Advertising's ability to influence consumer purchases means that it has had an effect as opposed to those that are unable to convert consumer purchase.

While these are notable measures, the literature reviewed indicates an important gap in the process related to testing and ensuring issues of representation are considered

and packaged effectively to suit those it is targeted for. In other words, where sex and gender constructs are concerned, there is no evidence to date that suggests how far brand managers go to define these in their briefs to agencies. Briefs to agencies inform how brand communication planners and creative directors go about approaching their response to brand challenges through advertisements (WARC from Home 2020). This point of tension should be particularly addressed in understanding how segmentation and target profiling (STP) work in brand advertising. STP in consumer research and studies generally speaks to demographic, geographic, sociographic, and psychographic constructs (Dreten et al. 2021).

According to the National Public Research (2019), STP is advantageous because it provides a more competent advertisement. Advertising is more effective when the market is segmented, thereby opening up alternative markets that have not been explored (National Public Research 2019). In addition, market segmentation aids brands to develop new products, discover markets, and spurs them to be focussed (National Public Research 2019).

Hanlon (2021) states that the needs of each segment are not the same, therefore marketing messages must be designed for each segment to highlight and centre the relevant benefits and features required. This is different to applying a one-size-fits-all approach to consumer types. This approach is more efficient, delivering the right mix to the same group of people rather than a scattergun approach. This is particularly important in the planning stages of brand advertisements. However, contemporary gender scholars, who investigate the intersectionality of gender and marketing, argue that this lens of segmentation and target profiling is outdated and predicated on systemic power dynamics aimed at maintaining and reproducing a narrative that is one-sided, particularly about gender, while the consumer is already one step ahead (Dreten et al. 2021).

Dreten et al. (2021), argue that this, together with the ever-changing socio-environment of consumers related to the male-female dichotomy, is socially categorised and further witnessed in how marketing, and by extension advertising, is approached. Dreten et al. (2021), further contend that the environment in which

marketing exists needs to be informed by the evolution of the political movements and socio-political issues that consumers stand for and that influence their point of view, such as Black Lives Matter, the Me-Too movement, and Trans Lives Matter projects. These sociocultural events indicate an evolved consumer relating to their identity politics that, by extension, should influence how segmentation and target profiling are approached. This will allow brand marketing experts, brand communication planners, and their creative colleagues to move from an essentialist approach to segmentation towards an understanding of how fluid identity is thereby producing efforts that resonate with consumers with this evolving point of view (Dreton et al. 2021). Taking the research question and objectives into consideration, this thinking aligns to what the study aims to address through understanding brand communication planners' and creative directors' conceptions of gender and if they include the voices of queer communities in their planning for brand advertisements that resonate.

2.5 Brand Resonance

Queer theory and segment target profiling reviewed in the preceding sections of this literature review are critical in unearthing who is traditionally targeted and often alienated when planning for brand advertisements. According to WARC from Home (2021), the process followed in advertising when planning for creative execution comprises key role players who inform the brief, the strategic approach which ultimately leads to creative execution, otherwise referred to in this study as creative productions. In this process of planning, chiefly to be achieved is resonance insofar as entrenching the key brand message in a manner that resonates with the targeted consumer (Pollay & Mittal 1993; Burns 2003). As has been illuminated in literature, the opposite of alienation is brand resonance.

Brand resonance as a model has been used by various researchers across disciplines to assess the extent to which brands and businesses have been able to establish effective relationships with their consumers (Moura et al. 2019). Kevin Lane Keller (2009), a professor at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College, is world-

renowned for developing the brand resonance theory. Brand resonance was earlier proposed in Keller's (1993) Customer-Based Brand Equity Model, which played a critical part in establishing the steps to be followed by brand custodians in building strong brand relationships (Raut, Brito, & Pawar 2020). The brand resonance theory is grounded in consumer behaviour theory and is part of a trio of models (brand positioning, brand resonance, and brand value chain) developed by Keller in the founding years of his academic career. The theory offers marketers a comprehensive set of tools to devise branding strategies and tactics to maximize profits and long-term brand equity (Keller 2016).

According to Raut et al. (2020), the first stage in the Customer-based Brand Equity Model comprises awareness of the brand in the minds of consumers, while the second stage comprises reaching the consumers' social and psychological needs through brand performance. Accordingly, once consumers feel satisfied with a brand, they proceed to create a brand image in their mind which directs them in their decision-making process. The third stage elicits positive consumer responses towards a brand by judging the brand based on its performance and the image that has been developed in their mind. The judgements and feelings towards a brand explain the consumer impact on the brands and the level of brand identification that the consumer has and shares with fellow consumers. This leads to the final stage of the model, which is brand resonance that consumers develop through the successful achievement of the previous stages (Raut et al. 2020). In essence, brand resonance aids consumers in their process of achieving a level of brand identification.

The stages of Keller's brand resonance development are represented in Figure 3.

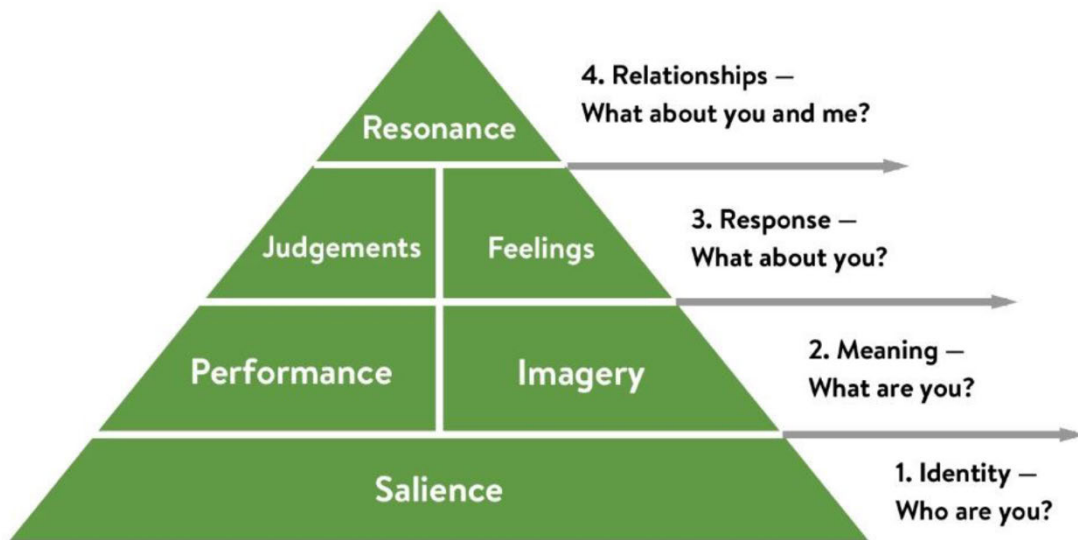


Figure 3 Brand Resonance Pyramid (Keller, 2019)

Keller (2009) later defined brand resonance as the relationship between the consumer, the brand, and the extent to which the consumer feels connected to or in sync with the brand. The brand resonance stage comprises brand awareness, brand performance, brand image, brand feelings, brand judgement, brand loyalty, brand attachment, brand community, and brand engagement. Brand resonance reflects the intensity and depth of the psychological and emotional bond or attachment customers have with the brand (Keller 2009). The successful production of brand resonance results in active volitional behaviour for the brand's benefit (Badrinarayanan, Suh, & Kim 2016). Keller (2009) further postulates that brand resonance has four dimensions that can be used to measure its effectiveness, namely:

- **Behavioural loyalty** – this refers to the number of repeat purchases by consumers.
- **Attitudinal attachment** – this refers to whether consumers view the brand as being something special in the broader context.
- **Sense of community** – this occurs when customers feel a kindship or an affiliation with the brand; and

- **Active engagement** – this refers to the consumer's willingness to invest personal resources in the brand, and these include time, money, and energy, etc.

When a consumer is exhibiting all four dimensions of brand resonance, they have the strongest relationship with the brand and provide even greater worth. Brands such as Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren, Apple, eBay, and Harley-Davidson, for instance, tend to have more resonance due to the inherently high levels of customer interest and activity. As a result, their consumers are likely to turn into brand ambassadors (Keller 2009). According to Raut et al. (2020), high levels of brand resonance are desirable for brands precisely because they will continue to leverage brand equity through financial reward, which is as a result of connecting with its consumers and by repeat purchase and loyalty. The relevance of brand equity is that it is possible to achieve much higher levels of it as a result of brand resonance, which sits at the top of the pyramid (Figure 3).

Marketing scholars have applied the brand resonance theory to products and industries as a way of measuring the impact the model has on growing businesses and, most importantly, the long-term relationship with consumers (Moura et al. 2019; Keller 2019; Habib, Hamadneh & Khan 2021). What they have significantly found is that the model can be considered a valuable tool to manage brands in establishing meaningful relationships with consumers by ensuring that consumers are able to see themselves reflected in the brand communication that targets them. This is an important consideration given the fact that at the core of brand resonance is ensuring that there is a psychological and emotional connection between consumers and brands. The psychological and emotional connection is achieved when consumers see themselves reflected in brand communication as it affirms their community with the brands that they are attached and loyal to (Keller 2009). However, and central to this study's research aim and objectives, the connection with all consumers, including the queer community, is not something that has been happening consistently and enough, particularly in the South African advertising industry. Brand resonance theory highlights the brand equity benefits of speaking to consumers through brand communication, which makes them feel a sense of community. Studies conducted by

Moura et al. (2019) and Raut et al. (2020), provide practical considerations of how each of the constructs that lead to brand resonance can be strengthened. Brands that are seeking resonance through various touchpoints of their productions, including advertising targeted at the queer community, will need to establish meaning within the minds of the intended target market (Havas Group 2021; Kantar 2019). The establishment of meaning can only be achieved by firmly cementing the brand's purpose and reason for being, which needs to align with their target audience and will then result in brand resonance.

In the context of this study, brand resonance is central in highlighting how the advertising industry needs to evolve with its consumers to establish high levels of brand identification and intense connections with all segment target profiles. To this degree, this study has observed the lack of representation and inclusivity of the queer community and its spectrum in South African brand advertising. It uses the queer theory and brand resonance theory as constructs that will aid the industry address this lacuna guided by meaningful, purposeful brand leadership that can play a bigger role towards the transformation and inclusivity of all consumers.

2.6 Planning for Brand Resonance

According to the literature reviewed, there are several ways in which brands, and by extension their advertising agencies, can go about planning for brand resonance. These may comprise leveraging what Keller (2019) refers to as secondary associations to build brand equity. An extension to his brand resonance construct, *secondary associations* comprises tapping into marketing communications – in their broadest form – to build associations and connections with consumers (Keller 2019). This may include, but is not limited to, partnering with notable persons (celebrity endorsements) or causes that are aligned to the brand's values, further establishing meaning within the minds of consumers. Undertaking this endeavour may change the image the consumer has built of the brand, depending on the authenticity of the alignment or prior knowledge of the brand association, thereby enhancing or negatively changing brand identification based on the kind of inference consumers may make (Keller, 2019). This sentiment is aligned to the aims and objectives of this

study, which centre the discussion around queer representation and how brands can further build meaning in the community by better planning for inclusive brand advertisements that will resonate with all segment target profiles. Establishing meaning and purpose through brand leadership and Goodvertising in the context of planning for brand resonance would be one way of achieving secondary associations that could build brand equity.

2.6.1 Meaningful and purposeful brands

The importance of meaningful brands as an extension of brand resonance is critical in this study as both constructs are viewed as being interlinked. The interlink is notable in Keller's (2009) stage-two Brand Equity Pyramid which highlights how consumers assess Performance (brands meeting their functional needs through their product or services) and Imagery (which is concerned with the extrinsic feelings and expectations consumers have of brands). *Brand Meaning* was established in 2009 by the Havas Group, the world's largest communications company founded by Charles Louis Havas in 1835, as part of their bi-annual study. The study subsequently found, after surveying over 395,000 people around the world, that there is a continuous deepening cynicism, alongside a growing expectation gap in consumers' relationships with brands and businesses. The survey further found a significant long-term trend towards consumers desperately seeking authenticity – meaningful and sustainable action benefitting society and the planet – but feeling sorely let down by perceived empty promises. According to Havas Group (2021), that, as a result of this sentiment, brand meaningfulness has consistently declined in the minds of consumers since the bi-annual global survey began in 2009. Their 2021 study, which measures brand 'meaning' in functional, personal, and collective terms, depicts the grim reality that 75% of brands could disappear overnight and most people would not care or would easily find a replacement. However, the 2021 survey carried out in mid-2020, during the height of the pandemic, also demonstrates a growing lack of trust in brands, with 71% of people having little faith that they will deliver on their promises. Even more alarming, only 34% of the consumers surveyed thought that companies are transparent about their commitments and promises.

Deloitte Insights' (2021), the most recent study titled "*Global Marketing Trends Find Your Focus*" conducted two studies aimed at consumers and marketing executives that found that meaningful brands or brands that matter and add value to society are most likely to thrive and resonate more with their target market. This was due to several factors their research revealed, the chief of which was the fact that such brands understand who they are and have honed the art of communicating with their stakeholders through things and causes they believe in in contemporary society (Deloitte Insights 2021). Therefore, such brands have a solid understanding of their business, how they conduct business, with whom, and to whom with the ability to move with the purpose, authenticity, and agility that centres on the human experience consumers have with their brands (Deloitte Insights 2021).

Neumeier (2005), Spence (2009), Rushing (2010), and Hsu (2016) are some of the leading seminal voices and scholars on brand purpose. They explicate that brand purpose is not just a concept that brands and businesses can choose to ignore; rather, it is the beginning of all success or failure undertaken in entering into the marketplace (Spence 2009). Recent studies by Havas Group (2021), Kantar (2019), & Deloitte (2019) are proof points of how this sentiment around purpose is not something that any brand that wants to thrive in the marketplace can elect to ignore. Rather, they must recognise it as an imperative that forms part of the organisation for it to permeate the hearts and minds of the consumers that they service, thus leading to greater business objectives being met over time. Chief of these business objectives is brand resonance being achieved at its highest level. Purpose 2020 (Kantar 2019) is a study that shows the rapid growth of businesses that have been able to apply impactful and authentic purposeful strategies in their organisations and business approaches in their pursuit of resonance. The purpose of any organisation must be aligned to the values that are upheld by their consumers who, day in and day out, go out of their way to demonstrate their support for the brand and its purpose. This reveals the questions that a brand needs to understand and answer (Figure 4) in terms of who they are, what they stand for and do, and why they do it in relation to the consumers they are trying to build an affinity with (Neumeier, 2005; 2020).

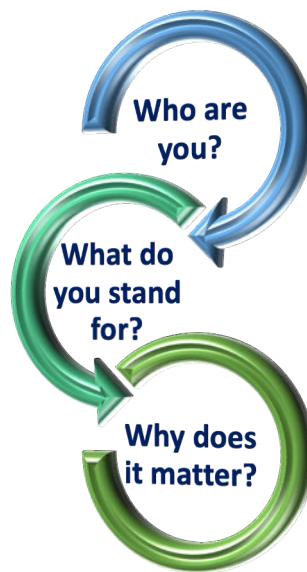


Figure 4 A Diagrammatic Depiction of Neumeier's (2005) pertinent questions

These questions are pertinent, given that most brands do not always speak to consumers in an individualised manner and tend to operate most times from a prism and an approach that is informed by the socio-political ideology that all things normal and natural are either male or female and straight (Ndzwayiba & Steyn 2019). Thus, the need to establish a deeper sense of understanding of consumers in their variety and diversity and build relationships through brands that go beyond positioning the functional benefits of products but that also demonstrate, through their actions, the values that they stand for (Hsu 2016).

The Havas Group (2021) study echoes this sentiment, even in its latest survey, which indicates that 66% of consumers demand meaningful experiences from brands and this is only possible when brands acknowledge their own existence as vibrant ecosystems in which unique and compelling reasons for being are central to all that they do and wish to achieve (Enslin 2019). Essentially, brands that matter co-curate solutions between organisations and consumers that will add value and give meaningful brand experiences. Advertising becomes an integral part of ensuring that this authentic meaning is given life through planning and creative production for resonance with the consumer.

The insight is that a meaningful brand is reciprocal and understands the human needs that their consumers care about (Hsu 2016). In fact, consumers are now the driving force that pressure companies to change their marketing practices to be more purpose-led, meaningful, and reflective of what is happening in society (Havas Group 2021). Essentially, brands are operating in an era where their purpose needs to be the driving force behind their success in the marketplace, balancing the communication of functional benefits by positioning more of the emotional benefits that build connections with consumers. This insight connects fundamentally to the salience, feeling, and resonance stages of the Brand Equity Pyramid, which ultimately centre the consumer's level of awareness of the brand in relation to their own scheme, the emotions and reactions of consumers towards brands, and finally depicting the relationship consumers have built with brands.

This can be interpreted as meaning that brands that are aware of the changing needs of consumers and deliver on societal needs are most likely to resonate with consumers and enjoy their support. To this end, a meaningful brand invests in community conversations (Enslin & de Beer 2015). Thus, social listening is key and will allow brands, and by extension their agencies, to plan for socially relevant and meaningful strategies that will be executed through brand advertisements that resonate. Findings by Katar (2019), Deloitte (2019; 2021), and Havas Group (2021) emphasise this insight by highlighting that consumers, particularly GenZ, value brands that speak on issues they care about. These issues are vast in nature and relate to cultural factors, inclusion and diversity, and content that leads to social change and the embracing of diversity (Havas Group 2021). Such strategies allow stakeholders to engage and share their experiences, as suggested by Keller (2009; 2019) who advocates for integrated marketing communication approaches to build brand equity.

Brand equity in relation to this study is defined through two interdependent prisms. The first is concerned with the commercial aspects yielded from brand communication, while the second definition takes a more humancentric approach and is concerned with the levels of social impact used to achieve business objectives (Deloitte Insights

2021). To effectively entrench the meaning and purpose brands stand for to ensure there is sufficient planning towards brand resonance, brand leadership is required.

2.6.2 Brand Leadership and Goodvertising

The brand leadership concept derives its existence from the field of brand management (Chang & Ko 2014), and more specifically from the pioneering work of David Aaker (1996). Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) theorise brand leadership as a supportive brand process and the ability of the brand to consistently achieve excellence. According to Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000), brand leadership leverages organisational structures, processes, and cultures to allocate brand building resources globally to create synergies and global strategies that enforce local synergy. In other words, it is about understanding the context or environment in which brands exist and its ability to align their core reason for being at every touchpoint to resonate with consumers (Neumeier 2020). Brand leadership highlights salient points associated with achieving the highest level of the Brand Equity Pyramid – brand resonance – which essentially involves establishing authenticity and understanding the consumer to be able to communicate effectively with them, thereby building a psychological and emotional connection and a sense of community. Neumeier (2020) deduces that it is about being able to use a universal brand matrix of messaging that essentially allows people to engage and interpret them in their own way, as evidence of brand resonance.

Typical brands that have been able to master this from a global perspective and across the various case studies reviewed include, but are not limited to, Airbnb, Apple, Google, Netflix, Nike, Uber, and Virgin who have glocalised their strategies so that they indeed have resonance with local markets while still accelerating a global narrative. A key feature of brand resonance in brand leadership is the brand's ability to influence perceptions and raise the brand's competitive advantage over others (Aaker 1996; Habib, Hamadneh & Khan 2021). Once the brand is developed and established in the minds of the targeted consumers, it procures and cultivates brand loyalty (Chang & Ko 2014). Thus, once a brand attains brand resonance and permeates its target market, it can influence society in a significant way. This implies

that such a brand is able to elect how it is received in society by committing to the causes that matter to the society and to its true brand identity over a long period of time (Das 2017). Brand resonance requires what MINAR (2016) refers to as Goodvertising. In a study titled “*Goodvertising as a paradigmatic change in contemporary advertising and corporate strategy*”, MINAR (2016) argues that contemporary consumers are not merely looking for brand advertising that mirrors and reflects society back to itself. Instead, modern consumers require brand advertising to remark on the state of the world with the intention of improving it (Deloitte Insights 2021). Consumers are looking for brand advertising that calls also on people and consumers to change. MINAR’s (2016) assertions illuminate the role of advertising in brand building and the evolution of its constituency, which is more empowered and enlightened, to demand more from the brands they support. According to MINAR (2016), advertising ceases to be a mirror and begins to call for change where it thinks the change is important and ethically right.

The success of this insight is further emphasised in the Deloitte Insights study (2021) that shows that once businesses and brands plan for brand resonance by adapting to the changing environment through causes and initiatives that resonate with consumers, they will be rewarded with loyalty and attachment through repeat purchases and election of their brands over competitor brands (Habib, Hamadneh & Khan 2021). To achieve this, however, a great level of authenticity linked to the brand’s values is required, which speaks to Neumeier’s (2020) assertion around the brand’s core reasons for being and differentiation. The brand’s core reason for being and differentiation thus speaks to consumers’ values, which then leads to a sense of community and, ultimately, active engagement. The following case studies bring to life the principles of planning for brand resonance through purpose and Goodvertising, particularly targeted at the queer community, thereby impacting social change through challenging and shifting of perceptions of gender and brands.

Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren are but two brands that introduced campaigns in 2020 that spoke authentically and bore testament to the argument made by MINAR as it relates to the LGBTQQIAP+ community (Refer to Annexure A and B). While Pride month globally was impacted by the novel COVID-19, which placed countries under

lockdown and human contact with crowds was not permissible, the celebrations certainly did not stop (Kim 2020). Calvin Klein launched its #PROUDINMYCALVINS campaign, which celebrated self-expression and the full spectrum of LGBTQQIAP+ identities, thereby reinforcing the existence of the community in its variety. Figure 5 below, stars nine different models, actors, artists, and activists in the LGBTQQIAP+ community who the brand elected to use as faces of the campaign, namely: Tommy Dorfman, Chella Man, MaryV, Pablo Vittar, Jari Jones, Mina Gerges, Gia Woods, Reece King, and Ama Elsesser. The campaign introduced imagery shot by photographer Ryan McGinley to exude individuality and pride in the most beautiful way (Kim 2020). Calvin Klein's goal was for the LGBTQQIAP+ community to feel fully represented by the range of faces and perspectives, with each talent being chosen for their authentic experiences.



Calvin Klein #PROUDINMYCALVINS Campaign

Model: Jari Jones, Trans Black Woman

2020

Figure 5 (Black trans model Jari Jones fronts Calvin Klein's Pride campaign, CNN 2020)

Ralph Lauren was another brand that spoke truth to power in its activism around the LGBTQQIAP+ community that raised awareness amongst its stakeholders and consumers. On the 22nd of June 2020, the brand launched its digital marketing campaign titled “*We Stand Together*”, which aimed to continue its 30-year commitment to the queer community by not only raising awareness around issues facing the community but by further donating a portion of the proceeds made through the sale of the new capsule range to the Stonewall Community Foundation, to aid communities around the world (DeAcetis 2020). The campaign showcased stories of inclusion, freedom, equality, and self-love, featuring a diverse group of individuals who each created their own unique content for the campaign through elegant self-portraits and videos (DeAcetis 2020). The cast included: actor, model and activist Indya Moore; writer, producer, and actor Dan Levy; singer and actor Jeremy Pope; illustrator Ricard Haines and artist Deep Pool; models Erika Linder and Heather Kemesky; author Sara K. Broom; producer and director Greg Berlanti alongside soccer player and producer Robbie Rogers; chef Kristen Kish; US army veteran Anthony Woods, TikTok duo Ebony and Denise from Team2Mon; as well as photographer Micaiah Carter, Soraya Zaman, and Cass Bird with family. Keller’s (2009) third dimension of community wherein consumers feel a sense of kinship and affiliation with the brand are further entrenched by these case studies, thus demonstrating the point called on by various contemporary trends, and reports in this study’s literature reviewed.



Polo Ralph Lauren

Pride Capsule Collection

2020

Figure 6 (Pride Capsule Collection, Marketing the Rainbow 2020)

MINAR's sentiments align with and add to the work of pioneering thinkers in the field of advertising. These include Bruce Barton in 1923, Roose Reeves in 1950, David Ogilvy in 1955, Theodore Levitt in 1960, and Phillip Rotter in 1967 who focussed on product functional benefits and sales objectives. MINAR's (2016) thinking is revolutionary in that it calls for change within the brand itself by making it possible for brands to look inwardly in terms of the change it wants to bring about in society. It further calls for change amongst those who are leading the brand and those who are involved in the value chain of producing an advertisement. In this study, brand communication planners and creative directors are identified as some of the major role players to bring about this change. Such changes would reflect in the quality and inclusivity of the advertisements that are produced and a deeper commitment to affecting a broader change at a societal level. Das (2017) suggests that this type of change can be achieved when brands gain an in-depth understanding of the political and sociocultural environment in which they exist and communicate in a way that will achieve resonance through the causes associated with in broader society (Keller 2019). MINAR (2016) concludes that Goodvertising has the potential of leading to brands gaining the strong support of consumers if they are inclusive, authentic, and involve consumers in campaigns that drive social change.

2.7 Conclusion

This study adopted an interdisciplinary perspective to interrogate brand communication planners and creative directors' social constructions of gender and queer identity, and how these practitioners included queer people in the planning of brand advertisements. The aim was to understand how brand communication planners and creative directors include queer voices and lived experiences in the planning and production of advertisements that (should) resonate with the LGBTQQIAP+ community. The study applied two key theories, namely, *queer theory* and *brand resonance*, to establish the point of departure when undertaking the study. The literature reviewed from both perspectives revealed salient insights that were critical to informing the lens adopted.

From a queer theory perspective, the literature confirms that the dominant construction of gender and sexuality is predicated on the teachings of society in terms of the entrenched and accepted sociocultural roles assumed by the male and female (Butler, 1993). Literature also confirmed that society's framework of gender is socially constructed and thus not a fact of nature or biology (Butler, 1990; 1993; 1998). People who do not conform to the discursive frameworks or societal reference of what is deemed to be legitimate according to societal standards are, as a result, marginalised (Raja, 2019) and, once these are threatened, society punishes those acts that go against these norms. The queer community, as a result of this cis-gender identity normalcy, has been marginalised and illegitimated. The queer theory literature reviewed, problematises this by further illuminating the complexity of gender and cautions against the conflation of sex and gender as both denote different meanings (Ndzwayiba & Steyn, 2019). Queer theory adopts a process of debunking the dominant knowledge paradigms of sex, gender, and sexuality and demonstrates that these are products of power that are strategically deployed to maintain a status quo of inequality and compulsory heteronormativity (Rich 1986; Raja, 2019). This theoretical foreground would thus allow the researcher to be able to interrogate the research participant's conception of gender and how this influences their inclusion or unintentional exclusion of queer people in their planning and production of advertisements.

Albeit mostly found in the global north, there are empirical studies that have examined queer marginality in advertising by leading scholars as a way of challenging the representation and misrepresentation of the LGBTQQIAP+ community (Dorty 1993; Kates 1999; Chasin 2001; Raymond 2003 & Rocha-Rodrigues 2016; Nölke 2017; Roderick 2017). The reviewed theoretical and empirical literature shows that some in the advertising industry are progressively engaged in the critical work of deconstructing the gender binary using one or a combination of theory and models, as discussed in this chapter (Chasin 2001 & Rocha-Rodrigues 2016). Thus far, scholars in this domain tend largely to focus on deconstructing the representation of gender through the heteronormative binary lens in advertisements. Some authors lament the continuing exclusion of minority groups, including the broader spectrum of LGBTQQIAP+ people. Others argue that the evident limited growth in the inclusion of

gay men, particularly gay male couples, in advertisements is largely driven by capitalist interest within the confines of the pink pound rather than a genuine intent to engender real social change (Chasin 2001). Other scholars lament the lack of representation of lesbian women in advertising and signal problems with the stereotypical representation of queer people in the few advertisements that are produced.

Brand resonance (Keller 2009; 2019) is concerned with the extent to which brands are able to build relationships and connections with consumers, which can ultimately be leveraged to achieve brand equity. This is through ensuring that the four dimensions of Keller's (2009) Brand Equity Model are achieved in terms of loyalty, attachment, community, and engagement. Keller's (2009) model illuminates how the psychology and emotions of consumers matter through representation and are able to see themselves authentically portrayed by brands. It is brands like Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren, explored in this chapter, who set the tone globally on how not to exploit the pink economy. Rather, they are examples of what it means to plan for brand resonance with the purpose of engendering meaningful change and what it means to be allies of the LGBTQQIAP+ community at every touchpoint of their brands. This is particularly important in terms of how brands position their relationship with the community. The brand resonance theory was adopted as a suitable lens to merge with queer theory in this interdisciplinary study to understand the relationship between the advertising industry and the queer community. Not only that, but it was adopted as a lens through which to critically study how gender is understood and interpreted in brand advertisements to achieve brand resonance with a broader spectrum of society, particularly in emerging markets such as the global south – South Africa.

Some of the key guiding principles include authenticity (Havas Group 2021) and the understanding of consumers in terms of what is of value to them regarding the brands they choose to support (Deloitte 2019; 2021). This would then lead to brands being able to communicate effectively with consumers by leveraging secondary associations to land their core reasons of being, also referred to as meaning and purpose (Keller 2009; 2019 & Neumeier 2005; 2020) in this chapter. Once this stage has been activated, the four dimensions of brand resonance can be achieved, thereby creating a greater sense of community and engagement that would allow for greater

conversations that in turn yield not only equity but also influence how consumers view society (Aaker 1996). Furthermore, having a greater sense of community with consumers also allows brands to be able to tap into contemporary trends as a way of co-creating brand solutions that resonate.

Central to this study are these principles and how they can be used to create an environment in advertising where it is more inclusive of queer people and further working with the community in planning for resonance rather than alienating the community in its spectrum. The implementation of these key insights would achieve what MINAR (2016) advocates for in terms of advertising, ceasing to merely reflect society on itself and instead engendering much needed change for marginalised members of the LGBTQQIAP+ community.

The building of the relationship with the queer community could establish good grounds that brand communication planners and creative directors can tap into when they are planning their strategies to produce advertisements. The theorisation of brand resonance is not only important for brands but also for their advertising agencies who act as their custodians for what needs to happen in the market. Studies reviewed by Havas Group (2021), Kantar (2019), and Deloitte (2019; 2021) prove the importance of brand resonance by showcasing evidence of what can be achieved when brands understand their consumers and align their values with what matters to them.

The preceding discussion provided an overview of the salient literature on theories and empirical studies that are relevant to the main research aim and objectives. Leading scholars' work on queer theory that challenges the fixity of sex, gender, and sexuality was explored and queer theory in brand advertising, which challenges the status quo and argues for a new dispensation, was adopted. The chapter further outlined the literature that bemoans the prevailing nonrecognition and misrepresentation of queer people in the advertising industry across the globe and the limited inclusion of gay men in advertisements in pursuit of the pink pound rather than queer emancipation as a legitimate social issue. The literature reviewed has also explored brand resonance as a key construct towards planning in advertising and demonstrated that the purpose must be an intrinsic part of each brand (Havas Group,

2021). The chapter then explored brand purpose as an ideal approach for driving resonance and attaining meaningful brand status.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter two outlined the main theories and empirical research studies on queer identity and brand resonance. Reviewed literature on these two main theories that underpin this interdisciplinary study showed the contemporary debates in academia and practice and a lens through which I could explore how brand communication planners and creative directors in the advertising industry plan to achieve brand resonance with the queer community.

Chapter three, therefore, outlines the research design, philosophical assumptions, and the research approach and techniques applied to answer the main research question of this inquiry, which is phrased as follows: How do South African advertising brand communication planners and creative directors in the advertising industry understand queer identity, and how do they include the voices of the queer community in their planning for brand resonance in advertisements?

The main research aim and question was developed based on the fact that the literature that investigates the extent to which organisations plan for brand resonance and incorporate queer voices in their planning is sparse. The opportunity to address this lacuna meant that I would have to address the arising insights by interrogating the root cause of this phenomenon. Through my subobjectives, this would allow me to be able to explore the lived professional experiences of the participants and propose practical solutions to be considered by the industry on how to approach matters relating to gender and queer identity in the advertising industry. My research design and the paradigm I adopted in this study are aligned with this thinking and are discussed with great care in the proceeding sections of this chapter.

3.2 Research Design

The research design can be described as the glue that holds the various parts of the research inquiry together (Peniel 2015); it is a roadmap that guides the researcher on how to best execute the investigation of a particular phenomenon in a scholarly, orderly, and systematic manner (Kumar 2011). Research design encompasses a framework of guiding principles and a detailed plan aimed at assisting the researcher in making key decisions about research methods, population groups, sampling techniques, data collection, and data analysis procedures to answer the main research question of inquiry, thereby addressing the research objectives (Farooq, 2019). Thus, according to Kumar (2011) and Farooq (2019), research design can be summarised as an enabler of new knowledge acquisition through adherence to a meticulous plan that sketches how the research is to be carried out and a precise outline of the procedures the researcher must follow in describing, explaining, and predicting phenomena. Dawadi, Shrestha, and Giri (2021) expound that research design may adopt and follow the principles of a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method approach.

This study investigated the South African brand communication planners' and creative directors' social constructions of queer identity and how these practitioners included the voices and lived experiences of the queer community in the planning of brand resonance in South African brand advertisements. Accordingly, a qualitative research method was selected as more appropriate for collecting, analysing, and interpreting empirical data to answer the main research question of this inquiry. More specifically, the researcher adopted a critical qualitative research approach to investigate the possible entrenched normative ideas of gender and sexuality amongst brand communication planners and creative directors in the South African advertising industry.

3.3 Research Paradigm for this Study

Hallenbone and Priest (2009) explain that research paradigms involve an outline of the researcher's worldviews or belief systems that inform the researcher's theoretical, epistemological, ontological, axiological, and rhetorical assumptions. In this study, I will focus on clarifying my epistemological, ontological, and axiological position as well as the research approach used to guide this study.

In qualitative research, Guba and Lincoln (1994) postulate that there are four main contending research paradigms; these include positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and constructionism. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), positivism and later post-positivism are grounded in the traditional scientific view of "objectivism". Positivism and post-positivism aim to prove or disprove a prior hypothesis, a paradigm further associated with quantitative studies (Guba & Lincoln 1994). Hence, these quantitative research paradigms align with measured propositions or formulas that illuminate functional relationships. Social constructionism (discussed in 3.3.1) was selected as the research paradigm based on the research question, theoretical framework, and the purpose of this inquiry.

3.3.1 Social constructionism

Galbin (2014) postulates that social constructionism forms part of sociological and later communication theory. Social constructionism is concerned with how human subjects come to know what they construct and accept as the truth (Galbin 2014; Burr 2015). Contrary to positivism and post-positivism, which can be observed and tested, social constructionism draws from a broad range of critical approaches, including discourse analysis, critical race theory, critical disability theory, queer theory, deconstruction, decoloniality, and post-coloniality to argue that truth is subjective and shaped by social and cultural experiences (Burr 2015).

Social constructionism rejects the modernist idea of absolute truth (Galbin 2014). Truth, knowledge, and reality, according to social constructionism, are historically and socially relative, constructed, nuanced, and negotiable. Galbin (2014) clarifies that

what is accepted as reality is in fact an artefact of history and culture. Truth and reality, from a social constructionism perspective, are constituted through language; knowledge is sustained by social processes and reflexivity in human beings is emphasized (Galbin 2014). Society is thus observed as existing as a subjective-objective reality. Cojocaru & Bragaru (2012) add that social constructionism focusses on meaning and power. Power is not a property of the objects and events themselves but a social construction (Cojocaru & Bragaru 2012). Thus, meaning is a product of the prevailing cultural frame of social, linguistic, discursive, and symbolic practices. Owen (1995) concludes that truth and reality are products of social processes and ongoing interactions amongst humans. Burr (2015) warns that these social interactions perform the function of constructing what is acceptable and who is included and excluded.

Social constructionism is congruent with the objectives of this study as the study aims to understand how individuals (brand communication planners and creative directors) construct and give meaning to gender and sexuality, and to challenge the reproduction of dominant normative ways of being and doing gender and sexuality in the industry, with the aim of advocating for alternative possibilities that emancipate those who are excluded and silenced (Harney 2014).

3.3.2 Ontology

Blaikie (2010) defines ontology as the science or study of being. Ontology is mainly concerned with the nature of reality and the interrogation of the belief systems that inform our interpretation of what constitutes a fact. Ontology questions the researcher's stance towards reality and is perceived as objective and/or subjective.

My ontological position in this study is that reality is subjective and intricately linked to lived human experiences and how human subjects interpret and make sense of such experiences. Thus, reality does not exist outside of human experience. I reasoned on these grounds that gaining an in-depth understanding of how brand communication planners and creative directors understand gender and queer identity and consider the voices of queer bodies in their strategies and brand advertisement creation would

be critical to identifying their engagement, understanding, and possible misconceptions in planning for brand resonance.

3.3.3 Epistemology

Epistemology primarily focusses on how we get to know, what we know and the relationship between the researcher and the subject/object of inquiry (Hallebone & Priest 2009). Pioneer pre-modernism thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle believed that knowledge came from supernatural powers and therefore resided outside of human experience (Feldman 2000). These intellectuals believed that knowledge could be understood through faith-based or divine revelation. Contrarily, modernists such as Galileo, Emmanuel Kant, and Rene Descartes contested the beliefs of pre-modernists, arguing that knowledge can be acquired through rationality and scientific approaches (Markie 2021). Modernists' epistemological position is therefore more aligned with quantitative and experimental research designs and assumes the objectivist epistemological position.

Postmodernist, post-structuralist, and critical thinkers – including Nietzsche, Derrida, Heidegger, Lacan, Husserl, and Foucault – challenge the modernist epistemological position and argue that knowledge is always contingent, situated, subjective, and mediated by history, social context, and lived human experiences (Barret 1997; Hossain & Karrim 2013). This postmodernist epistemological position rejects the idea of neutrality of knowledge. It advocates for the acceptance of multiple knowledge systems, multiple ways of knowing, and the reduction of the distance between the researcher and the phenomenon of inquiry (Nicol 2009). In this study, I adopted a postmodernism, post structural critical epistemological position as they align with the research objectives of this study, which sought to gain rich insights on how brand communication planners and creative directors understand queer identity and include queer voices in their work.

3.3.4 Axiology

Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2012) postulate that axiology is concerned with the values researchers bring into the research inquiry and how such values influence judgements in the research. Axiology requires the researcher to reflect, accept, and declare their stance and subjectivity in relation to the phenomenon of inquiry (Li 2016) and how researchers influence the process of research and research outcomes (Lee & Lings 2008). Fox (2014) adds that researchers should never attempt to be or claim to be unbiased regarding social science and qualitative-led studies. This is precisely because, unlike in natural sciences, the researcher in the social sciences is an active part of the research, particularly when it comes to interpreting and understanding the data collected, which cannot exist outside of their own biases.

In this study, I aligned with Creswell (2007) who argues that research is value-laden and subjective and advises researchers to declare their axiological position. In line with this guidance, I declare that I am an openly gay, black man operating within the South African marketing and brand communications industry as a professional. My aim through this study was to establish an understanding of the processes undertaken in the planning and production of advertisements that resonate, and if such processes ensure the inclusion of queer people as a spectrum in consideration of the set of variables, including segmentation and profiling, which inform outcomes. This is largely because I observed, during my time working in the industry and as an audience of advertisements, that the industry elects in endeavouring to achieve their bottom line, to represent certain identities of the queer community while erasing the existence of many others who fall under the queer umbrella but who nevertheless support the brands. While the constitution confers equal rights to all, in my experience and observations throughout my daily professional engagement with peers, there seems to be a recurring reproduction of heteronormative views of gender and sexuality and a persistent exclusion of queer voices in the planning for brand resonance.

It is my quest, therefore, to adopt a scholarly approach to investigating the social constructions of queer identity and the extent to which queer voices are included in the planning of advertisements for brand resonance. It is my view that the advertising

industry has a big influence and impact in the shaping and/or reproduction of social norms and perspectives and that this influence can be leveraged to drive real social change.

3.4 Research Approach and Strategy

In this section, I map out the use of qualitative research approaches in advertising and elaborate on critical qualitative research as the selected design for this study.

3.4.1 Underpinnings of qualitative research approaches in advertising

The use of qualitative research approaches in advertising has seen a rise since the paradigm shift in the 1980s (Scott 2006). According to Scott (2006), who conducted an analysis of the types of studies that have emerged over the years relating to advertising, this is as a result of a shift in epistemology that has encompassed more of an interpretive approach (Belk 2017). As a result of this, the axiological lens adopted by researchers in this field of advertising has also had to shift. The implications of this paradigm shift have further meant that the ways in which advertisements are engaged with by audiences are more nuanced. In other words, the advertisement is now viewed as a text layered with meaning that the consumer reads and interprets according to their own subjective understanding of what message is meant to be delivered (Scott 2006).

Furthermore, qualitative research in the twentieth century, where its rise emerged, has taken influences from cultural studies and critical theory perspectives, which has meant that the background of researchers in this field varies from history, sociology, semiotics, psychology, and women studies disciplines (Scott 2006; Belk 2017). The influence of these backgrounds has produced different voices and perspectives in advertising that is able to communicate more than the functional impacts of advertising towards more sociological impacts of the narratives imbedded within advertisements (Belk 2017). Qualitative in advertising has enabled researchers to determine more about how consumers see themselves reflected in advertisements and to what extent this has meaning and influence on their lives. The qualitative methodological lens used

in advertising has been critiqued for being retrospective in approach in terms of evaluating consumer reactions before, during, and after an advertisement with no real impact or influence on what can be done practically by the industry over and above shaping policy and informing other areas of study (Belk 2017). This study aims to contribute towards the closure of that methodological gap.

3.4.2 Critical qualitative research (CQR) approach

Critical Qualitative Research (CQR) Inquiry was used as an approach for this study. This decision is informed by the fact that CQR is useful for interrogating and addressing institutional, societal, and structural patterns of oppression and marginalisation (Steinberg & Cannella 2012). According to Hardcastle et al. (2006), CQR is grounded in critical theory and enables researchers to identify a need for change and allows for transformative actions to be generated to reinstate social justice and address unequal power relations.

CQR challenges modernist orientations towards research by using social theory, designs, and research practices that emerge from critical questions such as: Who/what is un/heard? Who/what is un/silenced? Who is dis/privileged? Who is dis/qualified? How are forms of inclusion/exclusion being created? How are the relations of power constructed and managed? How do various forms of privilege and oppression intersect to impact life possibilities for various individuals and groups? How do the arts inform research? How can multiple knowledge aspects be engaged in research? How can research be socially just? (Steinberg & Cannella 2012). These questions are central to the proposed study.

CQR is appropriate for this study because it draws from the principles of critical theory (Carspecken 1996; Hardcastle et al. 2006), embraces queer theory (Watson 2005), and can be linked to theories of social change and brand resonance. The use of CQR in this study was further predicated on Carspecken's (1996) contention that CQR is a form of activism that explores with the intent to overturn complex systems of supremacy, power, and subjugation.

I used CQR in this study because it aims to understand and illuminate the lived experiences of marginalised social groups in different contexts. Hardcastle et al. (2006) explicate that critical qualitative research connects social phenomena to broader social and historical events to uncover the ubiquitous structures of power, concealed assumptions, taken-for-granted dogmas, and related tyrannical discourses with the aim of calling for real social change. Lodh (1996) aptly surmises the principles of critical theory upon CQR is predicated on the philosophical position of freeing or “emancipating” people from overt and covert patterns of oppression and domination. The CQR perspective is emergent in advertising, but has given researchers like me, tools to identify a need for change and transformation in areas that are sometimes overlooked intentionally and/or unintentionally, thereby causing power relations and oppression of those who do not fit the cis-gender heteropatriarchal binary.

3.4.3 Research population

According to Shukla (2020), there is a clear distinction to be made between a research population and sample. In essence, the research population refers to the community of people the research aims to have results inferred upon while the sample are the participants selected to represent the population (Shukla, 2020). Shukla (2020) further contends that the success, reliability, and trustworthiness of a study are all dependent on the right sample selection.

The participants in this study comprised industry brand communication planners and creative directors from leading agencies in South Africa who shape and influence brand advertisement approaches. These two groups are central in the planning and production of an advertisement. According to Deltek (2020), the production of an advertisement entails working on a client brief, developing a creative concept that will resonate with audiences, the internal signing off the creative concept that is then taken for the client’s approval, until it reaches the final approval process. The final approval stage may entail the choices of imagery, semantics, text, language, storylines, colour, tonality, imagery, typography, symbolism, and budget for the advertisement. Brand communication planners and creative directors play a vital role in this process. Therefore, they are likely to bring varying ideologies that may influence both the

process and the product, which result in either progressive or adverse effects for genderqueer people.

3.4.4 Locating the research sample and participants

Maxwell (2008) posits that locating participants can be a challenge for researchers for a number of reasons. Some of the reasons include the reluctance of participants to take part in the study due to the fear of being exposed for not knowing much about the subject matter, participants' unavailability due to pre-confirmed commitments, concerns about confidentiality and anonymity, and general research apathy (Maxwell 2008). Campbell and McLean (2003) further warn researchers to be careful not to treat participants as a homogenous group without paying attention to the stratifications that may exist amongst potential participants. Stratification, according to these authors, could include race, gender, and class, all of which require an acute sensitivity and a clear understanding of how to approach each of these potential participants.

In this study, I reviewed the agency winners of prestigious industry awards in the South African advertising industry and targeted the brand planners and creative directors working in these agencies for participation in this study, as these are representatives of the highest levels of their agencies.

More specifically, I systematically reviewed industry awards listings from AdFocus. AdFocus is an award platform that is highly recognised within the industry for honouring the best agencies and practitioners who have produced notable results in terms of strategic thinking and execution, business performance and growth, management, and empowerment (AdFocus 2019). These AdFocus awards also recognise campaigns that affect and improve the bottom line, contribute towards social change, and strengthen the moral fibre of society.

I systematically reviewed the list of AdFocus 2019 winners and selected the top 15 agencies first. I resolved to select the top 5 within the 15 winning agencies and invited the brand communication planners and senior creative directors working in these agencies to participate in the study

3.4.5 Sampling

Sampling enables the researcher to select the most suitable population group for gaining rich insights from their views and experiences of the phenomenon of inquiry (Shukla 2020; Adams, Khan & Raeside 2014). In this study, I applied a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling refers to a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide in a study that cannot be acquired from other samples (Maxwell 2008).

I purposively selected senior brand communication planners and senior creative directors from five award-winning agencies from the initial list of fifteen who agreed to participate in this inquiry. To establish contact with the brand communication planners and senior creative directors, I approached the Managing Director (MD) of each of these selected agencies. I emailed each MD directly, introducing the purpose of the study, requesting the agency's participation, and, if agreeing to participate, to also assist with the contact details of the senior brand communication planners and senior creative directors.

Upon receipt of confirmation of participation and the details of the senior brand communication planners and senior creative directors, I progressed to email them, introducing the study and alerting them to the fact that they have been recommended by their MDs as the best persons to speak to for this inquiry.

Those who agreed to progress with participation, I sent emails to set up the time to conduct the interviews. If any participant declined participation, I applied a snowballing technique by requesting them to refer me to a peer from the top 15 award-winning agencies. Through this process, I managed to secure a total of 10 participants with whom I made contact by email correspondence (see Annexure B).

The number of participants was guided by data saturation. Thus, I stopped recruiting new participants when I realised that the data collected fairly represented the social

realities of the studied population group and that no new themes could emerge, as correctly argued by Maxwell (2008).

3.4.6 Interview guide and data collection

To begin the process of data collection, I developed a research guide containing semi structured interview questions and sub questions (see Annexure A). The research guide assisted in directing the flow of the discussion with participants and kept me mindful of the research question and the objectives of the study. Therefore, I used semi structured interviews as the most appropriate method for collecting data for this critical qualitative research study. Five semi structured interview questions (see ANNEXURE A) were designed ahead of time with expert guidance from my supervisors and the leading qualitative researcher, Dr Lida Groenewald.

According to the Sociology Department of Harvard (2020), interview guides are the backbone of any study conducted by a researcher. They inform the order in which the interview questions are asked and constructed after drawing insights from the reviewed literature to frame the approach adopted. Accordingly, the interview guide acts as a reminder to the researcher about the key questions to unpack with participants and further allows participants to narrate their stories, which are later analysed by the researcher. In this transdisciplinary study, I drew from key and seminal ideas from both in queer theory as well as from the brand leadership school of thought to construct the questions that I included in the research guide to help answer the main research question of this study.

I further consulted with academic scholars and leading practitioners in the field of qualitative research insofar as the depth and breadth of my exploratory study. Through the counsel of scholars such as Dr Lida Groenewald, I was able to allay concerns around the following issues:

- 1) The first concern was around the number of participants, given that this was an exploratory study, and that data saturation starts from five participants and above (Maxwell, 2008). I then conceded that no more than ten participants

would be needed for the interviews, which was further affirmed during the data collection phase, further explored in chapter four of this study.

- 2) The second concern was around whether I needed to interview brand managers, brand communication planners, and creative directors or if it would suffice to focus on key role players in agencies. Through the advice given by Dr Groenewald during our consultation, it was agreed that, given that this study was focussed on gaining key insights that would further open topics for future exploration, interviewing select senior brand communication planners and senior creative directors would suffice. Their working relationship is key in ensuring brand resonance is achieved. Dr Groenewald further advised that for the study to be able to make a greater impact, insofar as brand managers were concerned, a wider participant group across categories would be needed, which would then enable the study to make broad recommendations. In chapter five, this point is revisited.
- 3) Thirdly, and lastly, I sought clarity on issuing the interview questions to participants before the interviews occurred so they could be fully prepared. Dr Groenewald and Dr Ndzwayiba advised that this would not be necessary as we needed to get the most authentic answers and engagement from participants.

As per the interview guide (Annexure A), I opened each interview by introducing myself and the study. I thanked the participants for agreeing to take part in this study. I assured them that participation is voluntary and that their identity and views will be protected and not used for any other purpose outside of the objectives of this study. I emphasised that participants are not obliged to answer questions that they feel uncomfortable to answer, and that they are free to terminate the interview at any stage, should they feel so.

I then requested permission to record the interviews before commencement. I opened the interview by asking each participant to share their background in advertising. I did so to gain a more in-depth understanding of their experience in the industry, their role, as well as their seniority in each agency.

I then progressed to ask each participant to share with me their understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality more broadly. I progressed to ask how they think their understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality influenced how they conceive gender and sexuality when planning, developing, and producing advertisements. I asked whether they think such constructions enable them to produce advertisements that resonate with a broader audience, including queer people. The interview guide concluded by seeking to understand whether the participants felt that, in their professional experience, certain product categories and brands needed to consider how we include queer identities in the planning and production of brand advertisements that resonate, ultimately allowing them to share recommendations for the industry to consider, going forward.

In accordance with Stuckey (2013), the interview questions were constructed in such a way that they would allow the participants to narrate their views and lived professional experiences aligned with the social constructionist philosophical perspective and the CQR approach.

3.4.7 Data storage

According to Bloomberg, Cooper, and Schindler (2008), data storage is particularly important for a qualitative study to determine the quality of the results. In this study, I conducted recorded interviews with devices that would allow me to be able to play back, transcribe the interviews and engage with, after the interviews.

The recording devices were fully charged, and backup charges were brought along to ensure that, should anything go wrong, the interviews could be continued. I stored the data on my password protected cell phone and laptop devices as backup and labelled them accordingly so that I would be able to refer to them when I needed to do. The devices were not shared with anyone else to maintain the anonymity of the participating agencies.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis began with the transcription of recordings, which were safely stored in a home office. The transcripts were then grouped accordingly to A – J titles to protect the anonymity of my participants. I then progressed to analyse, and with emerging key themes determined and matched with the field notes that were made both of my interpretation of the environment and the participant's engagement with the questions being posed.

Below is a detailed account of how I analysed the data and determined the key themes.

3.5.1 Data analysis step 1: Data familiarisation and presentation

During this step of data analysis, I transcribed the interviews to yield written data from ten interviews. I set out to familiarise myself with the interview transcripts and commenced the first analysis of the data. Percy et al. (2015) recommends that, when using thematic inductive analysis, the data of each participant be analysed individually. I thus worked with one interview transcript at a time, immersing myself in the data and making notes on the side of each transcript where notable comments needed to be made. According to Nowell et al. (2017), these notes should contain the initial thoughts, interpretations, meaning, insights, and questions that emerged from the data, creating a sort of preliminary coding through inductive analysis. Once all responses from the participants had been analysed individually, data emerging from all individual analyses were brought together and synthesised as a whole, identifying emerging trends and patterns (Percy et al. 2015). A coding system for these notes was developed to maintain the ethical code I had committed to insofar as agency anonymity and confidentiality. Codes were assigned to the participants and the agencies they represented.

3.5.2 Data analysis step 2: Coding

To commence with data analysis, I transcribed my interviews with the participants and familiarised myself with the data. Through the notes captured, I had commenced with coding, a process of organising and sorting the data so that broad volumes of data could be placed into smaller segments, making the data more manageable to work with (Stuckey 2015).

According to Vaismoradi et al. (2016), this initial part of the analysis is termed the “open coding process” and forms part of conceptual coding. It further comprises of extracting coded notes that described the data and coded in the context of the subject matter being studied.

The notes made during the review of the interview transcriptions were informed by the participants’ responses that formed a particular narrative. I read through the participants’ responses, considered the context from which they had responded to the question, and then interpreted their narrations using inductive reasoning (Stuckey 2015).

At the core of inductive reasoning is the subsequent analyses of the data by the researcher who identifies the patterns that can be extracted from it, thus leading to broader conclusions (Wilson 2016). Unlike deductive reasoning that starts off with the main hypothesis to be proved or disproved, inductive reasoning starts off with a small observation or question and works its way up to theory by examining related issues (Wilson 2016). It is for this reason that inductive reasoning was elected as the best lens to approach this study, thereby answering my research question while also addressing the research aim and objectives that informed the inception of this study.

In the analysis, a paragraph of the narrative was reviewed and considered alongside the notes made that attributed meaning and summarised what I believed the participant was saying within the context of a literature foundation (Stuckey 2015). Notes were made using inductive reasoning as I had theoretical knowledge of the subject matter and was thus able to interpret the responses within the context of the

literature reviewed (Stuckey 2015). For further synthesis, I reviewed the notes jotted down next to each narrative, as advised by Percy et al. (2015), to retain the focus on the research purpose and research questions at the beginning stages of coding. I then revisited the initial notes, and reviewed and updated the notes where necessary in accordance with the research purpose and the relevance thereof. I also needed to ensure that I cross-correlated each note with the participant's verbatim responses from the interview again to ensure I had read and interpreted the meaning therein correctly. This would enable me to clearly motivate the reasoning behind the conceptual code contained in the note (Percy et al. 2015; Stuckey 2015).

The first codes emerging acted as summaries of content. In some instances, I experienced several notes and codes as duplications, conflicting opinions, and off-topic comments that yielded notes that did not seem relevant to the research questions. To ensure that I had a clear way of being able to deal with these occurrences, I applied investigator triangulation and gained a second investigator's input (Mayer 2015) around the duplicated data. This proved to be an important step for, had I not triangulated at that point, I may have been inclined to disregard any data deemed irrelevant and repetitive and only reported on single occurrences of data, deemed more important, which would have compromised the trustworthiness of the study significantly.

According to the literature, repetitiveness in initial data codes provides rich insight that informs the strength of emerging themes (Vaismoradi et al. 2016). As such, I did not eliminate duplicated notes or initial codes but allowed the repetition to provide insight into themes. Vaismoradi et al. (2016) further suggest that the researcher can address the most relevant and important codes at this point, withholding from making final decisions until later in the data analysis process. According to Percy et al. (2015), researchers should exclude initial codes that are interesting but not relevant to the research questions. Instead, it is recommended that these interesting codes be stored for later reference. This was later confirmed at the investigator triangulation stage by one of my academic supervisors regarding themes and nuances that could be used to form part of my recommendations for future studies.

As such, I did not delete notes that seemed unrelated. Instead, they formed part of my notes that would be later reviewed, and focus was prioritised on the most relevant notes. These were highlighted in colours that could be referred to in the categorisation stages. The highlighted green, pink, orange, yellow and red notes on the interview transcripts then became the first emerging conceptual codes (see Annexure E).

3.5.3 Data analysis step 3: Categories

Following the labelled coded notes from Microsoft Word documents, these needed to be organised into a structure of categories. I captured these through a method used by other scholars which involved the use of Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. Microsoft Excel is advocated by scholars to offer an easily accessible platform to capture complex data and terminology as opposed to using a software program such as Atlas.ti, which would require pre-programming to inform the data terminology and coding (Van Loggerenberg, Enslin & Terblanche-Smit 2019).

Each of the five participating agencies were allocated a tab and spreadsheet and the aim was to collect the first coded data from their two participants on one page. The aim was not to compare individual responses but to rather review them as a collective to arrive at the relevant themes. This did, however, require allocating categories where the data belonged and fitted (Elo et al. 2014), related to the two disciplines in this study, namely, from the queer theory and brand resonance perspective. While these are two different disciplines, they both form part of one study which is classified as transdisciplinary as it brings them together as a way of critically reflecting on key issues around gender and queer identity in the advertising industry and how the better understanding of them could lead to better planning for advertisements that resonate with all consumers.

3.5.4 Data analysis step 4: Themes

Following the correct sorting of responses, which were then sorted into categories, it resulted in five spreadsheets with a rich bank of notes captured per coding category. According to Nowell et al. (2017), a researcher should, at this point, start searching for

themes in the coded responses. A theme could be established by linking responses together into categories or patterns revealed by reoccurring or common notes, or some thread of thinking or reasoning that joins the data sensibly (Nowell et al. 2017; Vaismoradi et al. 2016).

Participant interviews elicited key insights into their key constructs on gender and queer identity as well as brand resonance and brand leadership. These formed the foundation of the categories that determined the key themes which needed to be further explored in the context of literature.

3.6 Quality of Data Collection and Analysis

Treharne and Damien (2015; 2017) identify five critical aspects for ensuring quality in qualitative studies, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity. Treharne & Damien (2015; 2017) add three other facets to these, namely personal reflexivity and end-user involvement, transferability of findings, and triangulation of data sources. In this study, most of these facets were relevant and could be applied to a degree.

In line with the guidance of Treharne & Damien (2015) for assessing the credibility of the findings, I involved the participants in assessing whether the findings are reflective of their experiences. To ensure trustworthiness during this theme identification process, I ensured that the process was well-documented and motivated by a control document that comprised colour-coded themes to “group” them together visually. A theoretical argument, supported by the literature, was held throughout the process of interpretation and inductive reasoning that informed the theme identification (Noble & Smith 2015). The emerging themes and subthemes were presented and then discussed in the context of the participants’ responses and literature reviewed in chapter four.

The debriefing of my findings further occurred with my supervisors who also advised on areas that further needed clarity and were aligned with the study’s aim and objectives.

Regarding transferability, and to ensure that there was harmony in the evaluation of the experiences participants had in relation to my line of reasoning, rich descriptions of the participants' responses in relation to theory and my interpretations are provided in chapter four. Given that this is a qualitative research study, it must be emphasised that data represents the views of the participants and can therefore not be applied to other people and the sector.

To ensure dependability, a clearly defined research guide that was linked to the main research question and objectives was formulated and used in the data collection stage of this study. I also reported on the process of data collection, participant selection, and data analysis. I then provided participants' verbatim statements to provide clarity on the source of the key themes that emerged in this study as presented in chapter four.

To achieve conformability, I ensured to apply a systematic approach during the collection of primary research in which I would confirm statements and my correct understanding of those sentiments with each participant. This was for the express reason warned by researchers in which the inquirer would need to avoid misinterpreting statements to suit their own objectives (Pilot & Beck 2014). Furthermore, the participants' responses in terms of verbatim statements were used to support my interpretation of the data, which subsequently yielded themes discussed in further detail in chapter four.

Taking guidance from Lincoln's et al. (2011) definition of authenticity in the determination of the quality of a study, I needed to ensure that the study could add meaningful change in practice. To examine the strength of this study and its findings, I further engaged with the marketing executive of a leading retailer to gain their reactions of insights, which further formed part of my discussion in chapters four and five.

My personal reflexivity is declared under my axiological position and did not overshadow my responsibility to this study, which was to examine the participants'

responses in the context of literature. My positionality as a professional in the industry with an interest of advancing the emancipation of queer people in advertising was constantly monitored by continuously ensuring that my own subjective feelings did not manipulate the participants' responses to suit my bias. Chapter four provides further evidence on how this was achieved.

3.7 Report Writing

According to Kerr (2020), there are a few recurring challenges researchers encounter when writing qualitative studies. Amongst these are what she terms anecdotalist and unfocussed results where researchers elect to use only the data that conveniently supports their hypothesis, to answer their research question without giving a thorough analysis to the totality of the data collected. Silverman (2005; 2011; 2017) states that it is critical for researchers to firstly, know their data and, secondly, decide what to focus on and say about the data. This is for the express reason that, while all the data presented may provide insights, one cannot report on the entire story and therefore the need to select the relevant and important parts to the study to be presented (Kerr, 2020 & Silverman, 2005; 2011; 2017). Furthermore, regarding the trustworthiness and reliability of the study, verbatim statements must be used (Stuckey 2015; Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen & Snelgrove 2016). However, Kerr (2020) suggests that it is not always feasible to use every statement captured during data analysis and the researcher should select to use a statement(s) that is reflective and illustrative of the identified broader theme, sentiment, or category.

The analysis process followed, was to first sit with the data that had been transcribed, and then delineate emerging themes and statements from the participants, which were then used as a guide to go back to the literature to help best unpack them and their meanings within the context of the research question and study. I also had to be conscious of my writing style regarding sentence construction and ensure that my axiological positionality did not overshadow the findings from the participants' responses. In extension, I used creative language and narration styles as a way of further engaging the reader and giving them a sense of the nature of the interaction with the participants during the data collection process. Chatfield (2018) suggests this

as a key differentiator in qualitative studies versus quantitative studies in that more leeway is given to researchers to explore and incorporate different methods and approaches to report writing. This is particularly key in studies that report on sex and gender roles, and which aim to give a more in-depth understanding of the nuances involved therein.

3.8 Ethics

According to Louw (2014), ethics are to a researcher what impartiality is to a judge. Ethics are the cornerstone of research, and, without it, the delicate and complex interweave of research falls apart in undesirable ways (Louw 2014). Therefore, maintaining trustworthiness is at the core of qualitative research. The implications of any study do not only affect the researcher or the participants but, further to that, a bigger community that relies on studies produced to make informed decisions that could affect broader communities. It is for this reason that I adopted a highly ethical stance that not only protects me but also the participants who form part of this study. To do this, key steps had to be followed, which are detailed herein.

To ensure that participants felt protected, and that I had their buy-in in terms of trust, this study was aligned with the code of ethics prescribed by the Vega Institution and Research Ethics Committee of The IIE verbally issued during the proposal defence I underwent before the commencement of the study. In line with these guidelines, participants were informed verbally and in writing about the purpose and process the research would take. This was to ensure that the participants fully understood what the study was about and that they gave informed consent to participate in the study (Louw 2014). The participants were all highly educated professionals and would thus be able to comprehend the contents of the request for participation letter issued to them. This eliminated the possibility of participants being taken advantage of because of a lack of understanding of what the study was about and its processes (Louw 2014).

Participation in the study was voluntary, and this was highlighted in the electronic participation invite (see Annexure B). Once participants agreed, a letter of information, together with a consent form (see Annexure D), was sent via email, requesting

permission to use the information arising from the interview and to cite them anonymously, for the purposes of this research. The communication entailed the research process and the sources of data that I required. I proceeded with the data collection after receiving confirmation and consent from each participant. According to Louw (2014), confidentiality and anonymity are not synonymous and do not refer to the same concept. It is important to establish the differences to understand why I chose to go the route I did with the participants. Anonymity refers to not being able to identify participants' responses to the study using their identities or in any other way (Louw 2014). This approach is popularly utilised when the researcher is making use of questionnaires that do not ask the participants to provide their name or any other identifying information, or where the researcher is able to mark unidentified responses (Louw 2014).

Confidentiality involves the researcher assuring participants that, even though the researcher can match participants' identities to their research responses, they will only be known to the researcher and will not be made available to anyone else, thereby ensuring participants' anonymity in the research document (Louw 2014). To ensure that participants' responses would be truthful and meaningful, they needed to be reassured that their interview responses and data obtained would remain confidential. It is for this reason that all information provided by the participating candidates remained strictly confidential.

The raw data was not shared with anyone and was not used for any purpose other than that of this study. Participants were informed in advance about the nature of the study, the data that would be collected, how it would be used and published, and the purpose and meaning of the research. It included my background and qualifications as the researcher. Each research participant was requested to engage with the document and every interview commenced with the confirmation of the informed consent of the participant.

Brand reputation and the anonymity of the agencies represented were key ethical considerations, given that they are amongst the top companies in the industry. Anonymity was assured by stating that the name of the agencies and the examples of

brands they shared with me, would not be revealed in research publications but would be replaced by an anonymous symbol. In the anonymous publishing of findings, the companies were identified as Brands A, B, C, D, and E and the participants were identified by a generic role description (e.g., “Brand Communication Planner” and “Creative Director”). To further protect participants’ identities from victimisation and eliminate the revelation of sensitive information on competitors, participating agencies were restricted from obtaining findings pertaining to their own company’s research participants’ responses. Instead, all participating companies were assured that they would receive insight into the collective responses from all companies in the study, as presented in the research findings, once the study was completed and passed by the examiners. Individual participant responses were not released at any stage, nor were the brands selected exposed in any way.

3.9 Conclusion

Chapter three outlined the research design, research paradigm, philosophical assumptions, and the research approach and techniques adopted to solve the main research question of this inquiry. This strategic approach was important in ensuring that key ground was covered when undertaking this study and would ensure a great measure of quality control, trustworthiness, and reliability of the study. The chapter gave an outline of the critical qualitative research design as the selected appropriate approach for this study. This approach was well-suited to the study objectives as it was my aim to critically engage with participants to gain an in-depth understanding of the industry on gender and queer identity and how the voices and lived experiences of the queer community are included in the planning of advertisements that resonate.

Considering the location of queer theory within the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory (Butler 1988; Watson 2005; Jenzen & Munt 2013) and the importance of ensuring congruency between theoretical frameworks, research design, and philosophical assumptions, I selected and discussed social constructionism as the most fitting paradigm for this inquiry in creative brand leadership. Social constructionism, as a paradigm aligned to in this study, allowed me to see the subjective nature of things we come to know through advertising, culture, and society. I provided a justification for

selecting social constructionism by drawing from the reviewed literature that applied queer theory in advertising to show the compatibility between planning for brand resonance and queer theory with social constructionism. I then progressed to discuss my ontological, epistemological, and axiological positions, all of which uphold subjectivism, constituting reality and truth in line with social constructionism, and the theoretical framework of critical queer theory and brand resonance theory.

In the concluding parts of this chapter three, I progressed to outline the data collection and analysis techniques, which were to maintain trustworthiness and reliability. I further discussed how I applied the purposive sampling method to select the sample of senior brand communication planners and senior creative directors who participated in this study as key role players in the industry. The application of purposive sampling would thus result in outlining how I located the research participants. The use of semi structured interviews for data collection was intentional as I aimed to gain rich insights that would inform the themes delineated and critically interrogated in chapter four. The chapter concluded with an outline of how I adhered to the ethical codes in conducting the research.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter three outlined the research approach and techniques adopted to solve the main research question of this inquiry by stipulating the research design, paradigm, and philosophical assumptions applied in this study. The strategic approach was critical in ensuring that key ground was covered in the conduct of this study, which would ensure trustworthiness (Pilot & Beck 2014) herein. This was, in part, to cement what Louw (2014) regards as imperative in the ethical approach of any qualitative research study conducted. Given that this was an exploratory study in nature, aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the industry by way of engaging ten participants for layered insights that informed the key themes delineated during the data analysis stage, a critical qualitative approach was suitably adopted.

The exploratory research approach, using critical qualitative methods, allowed me to become an active participant in the research by way of engaging with the research participants and seeking to deepen my understanding regarding their subjective experiences and expert opinions (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere 2015; Rahi 2017). It further enabled me, when it came to the analysis of data, to be able to identify intersectionality relating to marginalised groups in advertising, particularly relating to gender and queer identities (Chan 2020) and how these are often overlooked due to multiple factors that go beyond the social constructions of the research participants. Semi-structured interviews, guided by five open-ended questions, were used to inform the interviews conducted (see Annexure A). These were further recorded with the permission of each of the research participants. The recordings of the participants provided the point of departure for chapter four, which outlines the practical data analysis process followed to arrive at findings.

At the core of the critical qualitative data analysis process is maintaining trustworthiness (Louw 2014) while also identifying areas of alienation and oppression (Steinberg & Cannella 2012). As a researcher, I therefore needed to become immersed in the data and apply inductive reasoning to the interpretation of data, making sense of it and giving it suitable meaning (Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen, & Kyngäs 2014; Nowell, Norris, White & Moules 2017; Vaismoradi et al. 2016). To guard against any bias and maintain a high level of trustworthiness, I had to rigorously document the data analysis process by implementing key tactics, which allowed transparency and clear motivation supported by the literature reviewed, for every step and decision made (Elo et al. 2014; Nowell et al. 2017; Vaismoradi et al. 2016).

Chapter four shows how critical qualitative data analysis was applied using thematic analysis with inductive reasoning. It introduces the themes and subthemes that emerged from the thematic analysis. My research findings are presented in Section 4.3.2, where themes and subthemes are discussed within the context of literature, quotes, and/or insights from interview responses which are used to support the discussion. Representative participant quotations are used to support the arguments made by several participants who shared similar sentiments (Kerr 2020). As such, participant quotations are used to maintain the focus of this study insofar as its narration.

To ensure that there is clarity of meaning and consistency through the discussion, a sliding scale (Table 1) was established, which indicates the ratio of responses from all participants interviewed.

Table 1 A sliding scale denoting participant response ratio

Term	Sliding Scale
All participants	All 10 participants comprised brand communication planners and creative directors
Most participants	At least 7 of the 10 participants
Many Participants	Between 5 – 7 of the 10 participants
Some participants	Between 2 – 4 of the 10 participants
Some brand communication planners	2 - 3 out of the 5
Some creative directors	2 - 3 out of the 5

4.2 Critical Qualitative Content Analysis Through Thematic Induction

Using a critical qualitative research method, ten recorded semi structured interviews with industry experts were yielded. The research guide was imperative to give a clearly guided structure for the expert participants to follow and make the best use of their time in terms of offering valuable insights that match their experiences and opinions related to the questions (see Annexure A) (Flick 2018). Nine of the ten interviews were conducted virtually using Microsoft Teams and Zoom as a way of complying with COVID-19 social distancing protocol. The tenth interview was conducted in person and at the office ground of one participant who indicated their preference to be in person. The safety and comfort of all participants was always prioritised.

The interviews were all conducted within the 60-minute time allocation for each participant. Where technological complications arose because of Wi-Fi connectivity, we had to run through the interviews swiftly to ensure we captured the essence of key questions within the time allocated. The number of interviews was guided by Maxwell's (2008) Principle of Data Saturation, which implies that the data collected fairly represents the social reality of the studied population group. It was after the fourth and fifth interviews conducted that, as the researcher, I started to pick up a repetition of information in both cohorts of participants' responses, which comprised five senior brand communication planners and five senior creative directors, to whom the prepared questions were posed. I started becoming acutely aware of this in the case of the brand communication planners and creative directors narrating the processes followed by their agencies to produce advertisements. This repetition further

proceeded in the latter part of the interview conducted and the questions in the research guide around the roles of clients and brands in shaping inclusion and diversity in advertisements, and ultimately culture in society. This indicated that data saturation was achieved and that no new insights would necessarily emerge by the ninth and tenth interview conducted (Maxwell 2008).

The research interviews conducted were transcribed to present written data in the form of words (Vaismoradi et al. 2016). Critical qualitative content analysis was performed, and the data systematically analysed, categorised, and/or grouped and sorted into a presentation of meaningful findings (Elo et al. 2014). Vaismoradi et al. (2016) assert that content analysis and thematic analysis are both suitable approaches to analyse qualitative data, and the two terms are often used synonymously. Their similarities include the background from which the researcher approaches the data and searching for meaning and themes in the data presented (Elo et al. 2014; Vaismoradi et al. 2016). However, a researcher using a pure qualitative content analysis approach would limit themselves to either observed content data or the exploring of an underlying theme (Percy et al. 2015). Percy et al. (2015) and Vaismoradi et al. (2016) further suggest that researchers who analyse content with thematic analysis have a wider scope and more flexible ways to work with the data. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to work with the actual content in categories and use inductive reasoning to generate themes and look deeper than the manifested data in categories to identify underlying themes (Vaismoradi et al. 2016). In the latter part of this chapter, this approach is applied to the analysis of data.

According to Stuckey (2013), qualitative data collected through semi structured interviews can be analysed effectively by using thematic analysis and brings to light different types of analyses from which the researcher can draw. These are inductive analysis, theoretical analysis, or thematic analysis, which are constantly compared (Percy et al. 2015). In selecting the type of thematic analysis that would be best suited to this study, I considered its purpose, which was to essentially explore, within the context of brand advertising, brand communication planners' and creative directors' understanding of gender and queer identity and how they included or exclude queer

identities in the planning and production of South African brand advertisements that resonate.

The research purpose suggested that, at the completion of the data analysis process, it would suitably reveal exploratory findings regarding the industry and some of its practices. As such, an inductive approach to thematic analysis was selected, which required me as the researcher to set aside any preconceptions or hypotheses, allowing the data to speak for itself. The role of the researcher applying inductive reasoning was important for this study as it would allow me to make sense of the data, summarising it, categorising and grouping the data, thus allowing themes or patterns to emerge from it (Nowell et al. 2017).

4.3 Introduction of Themes and Subthemes

According to Percy et al. (2015), themes are described as “patterns of patterns”, requiring the researcher to weave emerging patterns from the data analysis into themes. Theme descriptors were used to hold each theme constructed using simple language that would ensure the theme title clearly stated what the theme was about and described how each identified theme related to the research purpose and question (Vaismoradi et al. 2016). Each theme title was thus written in a manner that highlighted the key constructs of the theme and provided a statement of how the key construct of the theme related to the purpose and research questions (Percy et al. 2015). Vaismoradi et al. (2016) opine those subthemes are used to make sense of broader and overarching themes by offering summaries and examples of participant responses. The subthemes were, therefore, assigned to give meaning to the theme identification descriptor.

4.3.1 Decisions guiding theme and subtheme identification

Given that the clear purpose of the study was to gain in-depth insights from all ten participants, whose sum of insights would be more valuable than an individual’s insight (Percy et al. 2015), I elected not to compare and contrast participants’ responses; rather, I searched for similarities in their collective insights. While there were subtle

nuances in the functions of some of the key role players in agencies, in terms of brand communication planners and creative directors, most of them, when analysed as totality, offered depth and texture to the study in terms of recurring themes and lines of reasoning.

4.3.2 Themes and subthemes identified

Considering the contextual relevance of literature review insights and the decision made to focus on collective responses, the results of the thematic data analysis yielded five themes, presented alongside with their subthemes. Themes and subthemes are summarised in Table 2 and are outlined in detail thereafter.

Table 2 Themes and subthemes

Theme	Subthemes
6. Positive and negative connotations to gender and queer identity	6.1. Should not be approached as a ticking-of-boxes exercise in advertisement curation 6.2. Understanding of gender and queer identity as a continuum 6.3. Self-examination and self-correction when it come to issues of gender and identity (key constructs) 6.4. Importance of having queer people represented and part of the industry insofar as work environments
7. Clients determine the topic and brief	7.1. Some participants acknowledge the importance of diversity in the internal teams and brands they represent as a way of driving diversity in thinking and approach 7.2. Participants highlighted the importance of ads that are inclusive need not drive on stereotypes, or just be done as a way of ticking boxes 7.3. Most of the participants called out the need for a naturalised approach that will resonate with all

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|---|---|
| 8. The development of advertisements and participants' role assignments | 8.1. Key differentiator markers between brand communication planner and creative director as the research component that informs strategic direction and creation

8.2. No inclusion of (external) queer identifying parties to examine the resonance of strategies except for team members within agencies who identify as queer (if at all)

8.3. Role players in influencing gender considerations in the process of creating advertisements from both a strategy and creative direction perspective |
| 9. Functional versus emotive briefs | 9.1. Depending on the job at hand: Brand storytelling and product sell determines the extent to which queer led characters are considered

9.2. Brands that allow for self-expression are more prone to be inclusive than others |
| 10. The societal responsibility of advertising | 10.1. Promote tolerance and patience in society
10.2. Educate society (trends and acceptable behaviours)
10.3. Shaping and changing narratives in society (creating acceptable cultures)
10.4. Being representative and diverse in thinking and hiring of teams |

4.4 Research Findings and Discussion

Below, I proceed to discuss the emerging themes in the context of this transdisciplinary study using the participants' responses and reviewed literature. Verbatim statements appear in italics and serve to affirm lines of reasoning, the study's authenticity and trustworthiness through the portrayal of the reflections and lived experiences of the participants interviewed (Connelly 2016). Furthermore, for the integrity of the research applicability, credibility, consistency, and trustworthiness strategies were the evaluation criteria applied, as well as being open, direct, and using actual statements

highlighted by the participants for each theme (Hammarberg, Kirkman & De Lacey 2016).

4.4.1 Theme one: Positive and negative connotations to gender and queer identity

In theme one, the participants explained that there are negative and positive connotations regarding gender and queer identity. The various connotations are attributed to several factors pertaining to brand audience and brand custodian readiness.

The initial section of the interview guide aimed to elicit thoughts, words, and emotions participants felt regarding gender and queer identity constructs. It also aimed to understand some of the associations that they related to them regarding the level of importance in the consideration sets of advertisement creation. This was critical to establish, particularly because of the arguments made within the queer theory realm, lamenting that one's conception of gender and queer identity is socially constructed through heteropatriarchal assumptions and practices in society and organisations (Marcus 2005; Rocha-Rodrigues 2016). These heteropatriarchal assumptions thrive, according to Jenzen & Munt (2013), only because they are not challenged. They are reproduced and maintained through oppressive heteronormative sociocultural norms that are perpetuated in various parts of society, including the advertising industry (Rocha-Rodrigues 2016).

Through some of the participants' responses, the positive and negative connotations were affirmed within a very complex and nuanced context. While there was consensus that the inclusion of queer identities in advertisements was important, it became a much tougher conversation to have with some of the participants' clients because of the connotations associated with queerness. This is evidenced by some of the word choices that were used by some of the participants to describe these, words and thoughts that came to mind when describing queer and gender identity within the context of the industry such as *political*, *contentious*, *emotionally charged*, and *tricky*. While they claim to have agency cultures that internally allow for differences in ways

of being and expression, which would lead to teams creating work for audiences who are diverse, it was not always something that could be integrated into their solutions. Furthermore, even though they were open to learning and unlearning certain ideas held about gender and queer identity, they expressed that this cannot only be something that agencies believe in and practice. In other words, in a country that is still evolving, still opening up to learning about the different perspectives that people may come from, not everyone is at the same level of acceptance. This makes advertising a tougher job insofar as educating clients and audiences and thereby ensuring everyone receives targeted brand messaging in the same way.

P I think we live in a very conservative country; I think we still live in a very Christian country. I think Christian norms are still...I don't know. I just think that our country is super conservative. So, anything that's slightly different is like, woo, that's different.

The above statement shared by the participant further reveals several layers connected to the hesitance and resistance towards transforming the South African advertising industry; namely, that the industry is still predicated on the values and norms of a heteropatriarchal society. The heteropatriarchal society reifies normativity and once that normalcy is challenged, instead of embracing it, it resists and rejects it completely (Butler 1990; 1993) thus leading to the marginalisation of those being othered (Raja 2019). Tamale's (2020) work, which aims to expose the depth and extent to which colonial rule over Africans at large has had, shows that we have also come to believe that anything that is outside of Western Christian tradition is unAfrican. She argues that colonialism aimed to erase the pluriversal nature of gender and sexuality in Africans and instilled an ideology that there could only be one way of doing gender, and that is cisgender-orientated (Tamale 2020; McEwen 2021). This is evidenced by instances wherein an opportunity is presented to be inclusive of queer people, even to a limited extent, is not always welcomed because it is interpreted as a threat to the stability of the brand and could trigger possible conversations about brand associations that the client might not want to be part of.

Some of the participants felt that the negativity stemmed from the views held by clients in terms of what the priority is for them, which is in essence to drive the bottom line,

but is also sometimes shadowed by their own prejudices against issues of gender and sexuality.

P ...This is your own prejudice. So, there's that tension as well between the clients and what they're comfortable with. And they often use the brand as the scapegoat for their own feelings on a subject matter. And it's naughty. They go, ooh, that's a bit weird and we're like don't say weird, that's not weird, this is normal. Don't say that. And then they're like, oh, I meant for the brand. And we're like, no, you meant for you. So, you've gotta fix those things out.

P We have a client and they're a really, really big brand in South Africa but they are very, very conservative, and the client's almost hypersensitive[...] for example, if there are two male characters spending too much time together, let's say they go on a holiday together, for a weekend, it's not like a bros trip, they misconstrue it as being too gay, and the word they used was...he said something like it's too gay, basically.

Social constructivism as the philosophical assumption upheld in this study, assists in understanding the above statement and sentiment. It also contextualises what has come to be known as “too gay”, “acceptable”, and “nonacceptable” ways of acting in society, which is based on a set of norms and roles assigned to male and female bodies. To change the status quo, most participants conceded that the journey needs to be undertaken by both agencies and clients. This observation was narrated in some of the reactions the participants frequently observed in some of their clients who vehemently disagreed with having queer identifying persons as part of any of their brand communication for fear of “backlash” or alienating their existing customers. Thus, the negative and positive reactions towards gender and queer identity constructs in the context of the industry and the importance thereof in the creation of brand advertisements by agencies.

P ...I think a lot of sort of mainstream big brands feel worried about alienating their existing customers or alienating the masses of South Africa, regardless of the constitution[...] [Clients] are really worried to alienate their existing client base or sort of deter them with values that aren't necessarily mainstream and Christian and family.

A critical observation can further be made from the above statement as it relates to the stronghold certain ideologies about genders that do not conform to the norm immediately alienate those that are viewed as superior. Similar comparisons can be made to the resistance of polarised advertisements pre-1994 of black and white people as evidenced in the historical account of the industry by Asmall (2010), which needed to change and has eventually led to the transformation thereof because of the new political dispensation. This was never thought of as a possibility, but it can to fruition which ultimately reinforces the idea of intention and purpose leading to much needed change in society.

While this was the key theme that emerged in the discussion with participants on the importance of considering gender and queer identity constructs in the planning and production of advertisements that resonate with both brand communication planners and creative directors, indicated that it is important to establish an approach that is not merely about “ticking of boxes” when producing brand advertisements that are targeted or inclusive of queer people. This perspective illustrates how heteronormativity is reinforced by holding views of the queer community that render heterosexual couples, straight, and cisgender people as ‘unremarkable’, and as the ‘norm’ that transcends box checking and the potential to ‘shock’. In other words, queer people are seen as ‘novelty’ and this not only contradicts the effort to meaningfully engage LGBTQQIAP+ narratives, but to recognise LGBTQQIAP+ people as part of the society, and to mainstream queer representation.

The importance of understanding how to create the right body of work that would resonate for all audiences (Spence 2016) without necessarily offending the queer community but also not giving an opportunity for other audiences to feel that, when brands are making use of queer images in their brand advertisements, they are being disingenuous, is the subject of the first subtheme.

P You want a conservative person to look at an ad and go...or a piece of communication and go, oh, look, it's totally normal for that to happen. I need to adjust myself to realise that that's normal and I shouldn't be reacting the way I do to these kinds of things.

P which means that you're not ticking boxes, which means that overall you have people in the right place at the right time.

This was a critical observation from all participants because, in cases where such work is not done in an authentic and meaningful manner, as has been seen in recent brand campaigns throughout the years of 2020 and 2021, audiences are able to call out brands in a direct manner across social media platforms which sometimes offers brands valuable insights about what their brands are not doing or should be doing better. Three contemporary examples of this relate to campaigns executed by *Adidas*, *Clicks*, and *Nikon* that raised pertinent questions about a brand's responsibility to be more conscious, diverse, and inclusive when considering gender and race in not only their campaign productions but in their leadership, executive, and marketing teams who are ultimately responsible for signing off on brand communication material across platforms (Times Live 2021; Bizcommunity 2020).

P Social media allows people to vent their frustration a lot more quickly but at the same time also vent key insights into either where things have gone very right or ultimately where things are going very, very wrong.

The participant's insight above is supported by Enslin (2019), who argues that brands need to understand that they exist in an ecosystem in which unique and compelling reasons for being are central to all that they do and wish to achieve. Authenticity in the clarity of why and for whom brands do what they do is another insight that can be drawn from this sentiment to enable brands to exist in an environment where they will thrive and resonate with consumers (Neumeier 2020). The use of data analytics she adds, allows brands to gain insights about consumer behavioural patterns relating to their brands and category, which enables them to move progressively from a position where they need to use descriptive (what happened?) and diagnostic (how did this happen?) data to more predictive (what will happen?) and prescriptive (how we can make it happen?) for success.

The second subtheme relates to the understanding most of the participants had about gender and sexuality being fluid and in some cases being a continuum. Despite the compelling background established in theory by queer scholars around constructions

of gender and queer identity, most brand communication planners and creative director participants interviewed seemed to have a clear understanding of the distinctions to be made between the two constructs. They further acknowledged that what they had come to know about these two constructs was socially constructed in a society that aimed to make sense of its people through assigning certain gender behavioural norms and acceptable practices to particular sex orientations to maintain a particular social order and status quo (Kate 1999; Tamale 2020; McEwen 2021). Furthermore, the participants were not ignorant to the fact that gender and queer identity is ever evolving and, as practitioners, they had to educate themselves about the nuances that are always emerging.

P I think the idea of queerness, in my interpretation and observation, has probably evolved and has probably expanded quite greatly over the last probably decade or so, and especially over the last few years has included so many more subsects and so many more definitions.

This included the importance of understanding and using the correct gender pronouns when referring to queer audiences and how to correctly refer to the queer community in their communication strategies, which ultimately informed the planning and production of brand advertisements that resonate. This was an important contemporary component to consider, according to most creative directors and brand communication planners, because communication across any platform is always targeted and needs to be designed in a way that will be effective and have resonance with the target audience, as indicated by Berlo (1960) and Keller (2009).

P ...[if] anything, I'm always trying to understand more. Because we also know that we started with very simple definitions of different genders and, over time, that has increased and is still increasing.

The third subtheme relates to the importance of self-examination and self-correction when it came to issues of gender and queer identity constructs because, in the rare cases that agencies were called upon to create work that was queer-centred, they needed to ensure they had the know-how, both in terms of resources and delivery of productions, that would have resonance. This was not always an easy task as some

of the participants felt that they needed working environments that were open to imparting knowledge to those who may not have it at their disposal. A critical part of this imparting of knowledge is that it should not be the responsibility of marginalised to sensitise cis-people who are not actively seeking to evolve their thinking and approach to queerness. A key narrative brought to the fore, especially by team members in organisations that identified as queer, was the need to be able to speak out to certain nuances that other team members may not always understand about the community. This would enable both brand communication planners and creative directors to create work that resonates and captivates audiences.

P It's like how do we create an environment where learning about the subject doesn't feel scary?...Because it's very...cancel culture is so hectic... I think what I would like to share is I think we need to find a way, [for] everyone, to I guess safely speak around the subject without a fear of in your learning you're gonna be called out for being ignorant in trying to learn, in your process of trying to learn.

Chan (2020) highlights the importance of acknowledging one's positionality as a critical qualitative researcher and how it privileges and deprivileges others around them. This is also the reason expressed by Maxwell (2008) for locating participants and having them agree to be part of the research for they fear not knowing much about a particular subject. For me as a researcher, I acknowledged my axiological and ontological position, which I used to create a space upon which participants felt free to engage and ask questions that would lead to them having a better understanding.

The fourth subtheme was specific to the importance of having queer people represented and as part of the industry, insofar as work environments. This was a narrative that most of the heads of each department felt was a necessary direction to follow so that their work was representative of not only what their clients need to be called out on but also representative of the society in which they exist. The participants, in their reflections, were particularly critical of the composition of their teams and realised that perhaps not enough was done to encourage team members to bring their true selves into the work environment, and that this could be intentionally and significantly changed.

P I think first and foremost, when you look at the current working environment, I think it's exceptionally important. I'd even go a step further and call it a vital component. I would say the same thing about the wider working environment. And I think that predicates it on a very simple principle is that we sell ourselves in the ability to tell authentic stories in a very creative way, and I don't believe we can do that if we don't have the right inputs and the right inclusive work frames to include people that live those stories on a day-to-day basis, and I think it's exceptionally important to also diversify and include the right people in these environments so that we're representing these very important but also delicate stories in the right kind of way.

P you need to have an environment that allows people to be themselves and have their views so that the work can be created like that.

The above reflection reveals in many ways what most agencies and brands are still struggling with regarding being representative not only of race but also of gender issues that are key in society. In many ways, it also reveals the privilege both in said and unsaid ways enjoyed by cis-gendered people who do not have to fight to be seen as their cis-gendered nature renders them legitimate without question because they are the perceived majority and norm (Butler 1990; 1993). Therefore, the positive and negative connotations are informed by this often unchallenged rule.

4.4.2 Theme two: Clients determine the advertisement topic and brief

Theme two elucidates that the importance of the topic is chiefly determined by clients insofar as briefing and agencies in the interpretation of briefs.

During the interview, participants were asked their overall attitudes on the role gender and queer identity plays in the construction of advertisements – what makes it important vs not. Most of the participants' responses started off by acknowledging the importance of inclusion and diversity across the board as it relates to issues of gender and sexuality. These were emphasised in reflections shared during the initial part of the interviews where in-depth discussions were facilitated. This was particularly highlighted when unpacking segmentation in briefs that were issued by clients.

Chief to arise from these discussions with all participants, was that client segmentation in briefs never calls out the differences between sex, gender, and sexuality and, as a result, these constructs are conflated to mean the same thing when referring to male and female target markets. Not only do they conflate these constructs, but they also further exclude a big community with varying identities from the society that contributes immensely to the success of brands and the economy.

P In my experience or observation there haven't been historically any particular briefs that have come in with a queer focus on them. And maybe that is also something that needs to be considered is are queer audiences or queer consumers as themselves really being spoken to in a more holistic and authentic way?

The exclusion of the queer community in communications, and more specifically advertising, is as a result of a historical framing that is Western in approach and idealises in many ways Christonormative practices and ways of being which only recognises straight male and female audiences (Ndzwayiba & Steyn 2019; McEwen 2021).

According to the literature, this point of tension can be particularly addressed in understanding how segmentation and target profiling (STP) works in brand advertising to produce tailored and considered advertisements for specific markets. In addition, market segmentation assists companies develop new products, discover underserved markets, and spurs them to be focussed (National Public Research 2019). Hanlon (2020) argues that the needs of each segment are not the same and, as a result, marketing messages captured through brand advertisements need to be designed for individual segments that highlight relevant benefits and features rather than providing a one-size-fits-all approach for all customer types. Using the principles and insights derived from queer theory and brand resonance theory, this implies that there is a need for segmentation to move from an essentialist paradigm to one that is more inclusive and diverse. Accordingly, this approach is more efficient and delivers the right mix to the same group of people rather than a scattergun approach (Hanlon 2020). This approach would, as a result, achieve what Haung et al. (2014) refer to as brand resonance.

Dreten et al. (2021) are key in advancing a shift that has taken effect in audiences' schema and an imperative for contemporary marketing that speaks to the needs of the millennial as a key market. Essentially, the essentialist approach to approaching segmentation in the briefs issued to agencies is not necessarily relevant to all consumers. In fact, it is exclusionary and centres one particular narrative about gender identity. For this shift to take effect, brands would need to acknowledge the current nuances that exist with identity and evolve to the moment we are in insofar as how consumers identify (Deloitte, 2021).

Most participants further highlighted the fact that, within the briefs they work on, it is always important to ensure that, through the planning of brand advertisement productions, they highlight key brand messages that ensure the advertisement resonates with its target market. This segued into the importance of defining the type of advertisements to be created in terms of whether they need to highlight the purely functional benefits of the products, or the emotional benefits, which allows for storytelling wherein multiple characters can be cast. According to the participants, the difference between the two categories is that, in functional advertisements, the zeitgeist might not be as important to highlight as it would be in an advertisement that is more emotive in the approach, in which case the self-expression of the character would be key to the success of the advertisement and would thusly form part of the approach adopted. Therefore, a broader consideration of the best-suited zeitgeist would be required and explored further.

P Also depending on what the piece of work is. If it's a product ad and we're just trying to sell a certain bank product, then there's less of a focus on what the zeitgeist is. But if it's an ad, for example if we're doing a [Company X] ad, that is very much rooted in cultural insight then identity is something we would interrogate quite a lot and within that we would look at...I don't wanna use the word political correctness but making sure that we are giving enough light to all of the different identities that do exist. So, you might not end up seeing it physically in the end product but I think it is something that is a topic of debate while we are thinking and producing the work.

While this may be true, queer theory (Butler 1988; Watson 2005; Jenzen & Munt 2013) enables us to understand that it is essentially crucial for brands and agencies to recognise that issues of gender do not merely arise when there is a need to tell brand stories. Actually, gender matters are everywhere and dealing with them in sensitive and sympathetic ways would be an opportunity to realise that they exist in every aspect of marketing and should thus be considered throughout the value chain, thereby achieving psychological connections and ultimately brand resonance (Keller 2009). The robust engagements that occur in creative boardrooms should ultimately influence the outcomes of planned brand advertisements. This is evidenced by contemporary studies produced by institutions such as Havas Media Group (2019) and scholars such as MINAR (2016) and Hsu (2016) who highlight the generational call of millennials that brands are more purpose driven, as this adds more meaning to the brands they support. Furthermore, it implies that, even in the approach to functional versus emotive advertisements, there needs to be an evolution in how the advertisements produced are treated to deliver to a higher purpose that will resonate with all consumers (Spence, 2009).

Some of the brand communication planners highlighted that, they were the first port of call in regard to establishing the strategic platform while the creative productions of creative directors allow for more creativity in terms of interpretation. This relates particularly to the interpretation of segments through leads and sub characters used in advertisements, in which case there might be more of an opportunity to be more inclusive and diverse in the end production. This was seen as key, given the current context in which advertising exists, where audiences are more inclined to call upon brands to be representative of the society across platforms. This, however, would only be seen in the public eye if approved by their clients (brand managers), whom they expressed were often hesitant to explore issues of gender and queer identity in their brand communication. This was because of the “backlash” they feared might come from the general public. Some of the participants conceded that their responsibility could be to challenge this assumption by educating clients on what audiences are calling for, based on research and insight. This links to the first subtheme where most participants called for having diverse teams working in agencies, who would be able to interpret briefs from different perspectives. It is also important to have leadership in

agencies involved in the work of advocating for more inclusive creative productions with their clients (Das, 2017). A more liberal approach to advertising that is attuned to the developments taking place in society in terms of how consumers identity and choose to express is the ideal (Havas Media Group, 2019). However, the structure of power and domination as highlighted by queer scholars in the reviewed literature reveals that power manifests itself in both said and unspoken ways by reifying that which it deems acceptable and rejecting that which goes against the norm which ultimately challenges the social order (Butler 1990;1993). In the case of the experiences had by agency participants in this it is in both said and unspoken ways, demonstrated by the rejection of the many efforts underway to transform the ways in which society deals with issues of marginality and visibility, it does not come without resistance to maintain the status quo (McEwen 2021 & Raja 2019).

The second subtheme spoke to the importance of not being stereotypical in the approach and having the ability to create advertisements that feature queer bodies in a neutralised context. This was partly because advertisements need to appeal to a broader audience but also do not incite unwanted backlash from the general public.

P I guess in a sense, normalising so that this isn't a weird thing for another...and weird is not what it is, I use weird in terms of contextualising the audience who are gonna look at it and think this is actually okay, this is how the world is and I need to be more accepting of this.

However, agencies are at the behest of their clients' requirements and, depending on the clients' receptiveness to the idea of using queer inclusive strategies and creative treatment, they may elect to adopt this approach or proceed without it. This is despite what the strategic agency partners may view as an appropriate brand solution to the brief issued.

P I can't remember what the actual storyline was but in one of the scenes there was a lesbian couple who kissed. And, so, we present the script and we were so excited about this ad, and the client was like absolutely not, there's no way I'm putting a lesbian couple who kiss in my ad. No. I won't be able to even get this past the Board. And for me that's just another example of kind of the very conservative attitudes that do exist and a lot of the times it's not because the

agency isn't thinking that way or isn't presenting work like that but we get bombed. We get bombed all the time because clients just are too afraid. They aren't brave enough to be like, actually, that's actually reflecting reality. They see it as you're reflecting an alternative point of view and nobody wants to be alternative. We'd rather go with the mainstream point of view because that is what it is. And I think until we get to a point where we aren't viewing queer identity as the alternative, then that narrative is never going to be changed.

The above statement and experience of the participant in many ways reveals the privilege of heterosexual people that prevails and asserts its dominance over queer people as their comfort always has to be considered in society. While its intention is to drive a positive sentiment and the protection of the broader interests of consumers, it reveals how deeply entrenched social constructions can be particularly about gender and queerness. It provides impetus to the arguments made by many gender scholars reviewed in the literature on how the power dynamics between those who are seen to be in power and those who are not will always be imbalanced, thereby always marginalising the voiceless. It also reveals the importance of the need for transformation programmes to not only be championed by agencies. It should in fact be a conscious effort undertaken from the highest level of leadership in organisations to filter down to its people who live out the mandate of businesses.

4.4.3 Theme three: The development of advertisements and participants' role assignments

In theme three, it was determined that agencies follow a similar process when developing brand advertisements, with specific roles being assigned to brand communication planners (research) and creative directors (produce).

Regarding the role of advocacy, which can lead to social change and social consciousness, led by advertising on socio-political issues and the causes millennials stand for (MINAR 2016; Das 2017), it is essential to understand the role players of advertisement development in agencies and determine to what extent their influence spans. This is especially important considering the different models used to encode and decode brand messages for consumers to engage with across platforms (Berlo

1960), and the tactics used to influence their buying behaviour (Haider & Shakib 2017). It is important to debunk how sex, gender, and sexuality are applied in advertisement creation and reassess the role queer people can play in ensuring that their narratives are considered in an authentic manner.

According to all participants interviewed, the roles of agencies and clients are two completely different jobs with a unifying objective to ensure that brands achieve their bottom-line. Accordingly, clients brief their agencies and agencies respond to the briefs with an appropriate solution to an emerging brand challenge(s). After the agencies have responded to a brief, with all things considered, clients decide to either go with the agency's recommendations, or not. In cases where the relationship has been established over time, some agencies are able to play a more advisory role to their clients in terms of influencing their decision to take more calculated risks that could ultimately shift the needle and win audiences over. However, clients are essentially the ones that have the final sign-off on all advertisements produced before they are syndicated on media platforms. This once again reveals the power dynamics that exist between clients and their agencies.

When specifically looking at the roles of both brand communication planners and creative directors, there are distinct functions they are meant to fulfil. The participants narrated some notable role differences, however, that come together to form an ecosystem that provides a service to their clients. Specifically, there are three operational main role players in agencies, namely Lead Strategist, Lead Creative Director, and Lead Businessperson. These are the people who are tasked with collecting briefs from clients and subsequently distilling them into something that is workable across teams. Central to this study, however, is the role of the brand communication planner and creative director who are largely responsible for the outcomes in terms of the planning and production of advertisements that resonate.

Following the clear description of role players, the first subtheme that emerged was centred around the key differentiating markers between brand communication planners and creative directors. The role of brand communication planners, as theorised by leading scholars in advertising, is to establish a key ground from which

creative directors will be able to curate effective advertisements (Barton in 1923; Reeves in 1950; Ogilvy in 1955; Levitt in 1960; and Rotter in 1967). The participants distinguished between what brand communication planners do and what creative directors are responsible for. From a brand communication planning point of view, all participants indicated that they are responsible for three key aspects: *the business challenge* – in which they unpack what the brand needs to address through communication, and go out to the target market; *competitor analyses* – in which they identify what similar brands in particular segments are doing, who the target market should be, and how markets are responding to creative productions already being flighted and ultimately informing clients what they could do differently; and, lastly, they are responsible for *defining the strategic platform*, which is the insight from which creatives take their point of departure to be able to conceptualise and produce brand advertisements.

The creative director's role, according to all the participants, is to take what has been presented in the strategies and interpret it into advertising that will resonate with the target market, as defined in the client briefs and strategy, thus aiding brands to achieve their aim through their communication channels. Creative directors also work with their external stakeholders in the process of conceptualising, ideating, and bringing the production to life. The stakeholders, according to some of the creative directors, comprise a large variety of specialist artisans who come together to bring to life the advertisement(s).

The second subtheme relates to the inclusion of (external) queer identifying parties to examine the resonance of strategies. Participants indicated the need for *diversity and diversity of thought*. This was viewed as critical by all participants as it would enable them to create work that is relevant and has resonance with the people for whom they cater solutions. The second part of the reflections was related to the fact that, while they did not include external queer people in the review of their strategies, the brand communication planners relied heavily on internal team members who identified openly as queer to speak out on issues relating to how their community was represented. While queer identifying members of teams could not speak on behalf of the entire community because of the pluriversal nature that exists within the spectrum

of the queer community, to some degree, their voices would be heard and reflected in the work. This ethnographic experience was encouraged and seen as an opportunity to learn from their lived experiences, while creative directors endeavoured to work with the best people to creatively interpret the nuances involved in productions.

P I think from the conceptualisation phase of an idea, I think the role of people is quite small, just based on the percentage of people actually conceptualising the actual piece. But once it gets into the actual execution, the good creatives are opening that up to partner and collaborate with the right people and bring it to life in the right way.

The third subtheme relates to role players' influence on gender consideration in the process of creating advertisements from both a strategy and creative direction perspective. All participants highlighted that it was rarely something they thought about with most of the clients they worked with. Some went as far as saying that in South Africa it is a new ground that needs further exploration in comparison to their American and UK counterparts.

P I guess I would just say, the countries that you've mentioned, they're progressive in every sense. Technologically, economically, they're at the forefront of everything. So, for me, it makes sense that they would then also be at the forefront of that. But having said that, in those places, it's polarising, it's still polarising, it will always be polarising. It's never not going to be controversial to use a queer. Not for the next hundred and fifty years. I don't know. If you look at America, UK, all kinds of people that are completely outspoken on either side of the fence. So, they're leading in one way but they're also creating some of the strongest opposing voices in another.

From a South African perspective, the participants suggested that the consideration of gender was largely informed by the fact that briefs issued by their clients were very generic in nature in terms of covering the key functional grounds to be addressed. However, when it came to unpacking gender identity and various other issues relating to this topic, the briefs did not consider the nuances of the construct.

P Look, it depends on the job itself. So, if we're looking at... 'cause I guess what you don't wanna do is you don't wanna put something like that in for shock

value or to make a point. So, if there's no natural role for it in what you're doing, we don't address it, we'll be honest. It doesn't come up.

This perspective illustrates how heteronormativity is reinforced. Views of LGBTQQIAP+ people in this light reinforce heteronormativity, rendering heterosexual couples, straight, and cisgender people as 'unremarkable', and as the 'norm' that transcends box checking and the potential to 'shock'. In other words, LGBTQQIAP+ people are seen as 'novelty' and this not only contradicts the effort to meaningfully engage LGBTQQIAP+ narrative, but to recognise LGBTQQIAP+ people as part of the society, and to mainstream queer representation. This can largely be attributed to the fact that *gender* is a construct that is loosely defined in the industry and is predominantly understood in the context of cis-gender norms and practices that assume everything in nature to be straight, male, and female (Ndzwayiba & Steyn 2019). However, as is contended by Ndzwayiba & Steyn (2019), sex, gender, and sexuality must never be conflated as one does not automatically equate to the other. These constructs are deeply complex, nuanced, free-floating, and multilayered in nature (Tamale 2011). It is this rationalisation that perhaps needs to be understood in depth by both agencies and the clients they service that would perhaps result in a change regarding the consideration of gender in advertising. According to the responses shared by the participants, when it came to the consideration of sex, gender, and sexuality in the process of planning and producing advertisements, while it may not always be something that is needed according to the briefs issued, it was something that needed to be interrogated by both agencies and clients, who are brand custodians. The reason is that advertising as an industry exists in a diverse society and thus needs to be reflective of all its people.

P I guess it's a kind of chicken-and-egg scenario whether is it the creative's responsibility or is it the corporate's responsibility to be driving that? I think it's a bit of a difficult one because on the one hand you could argue that if creatives and agencies put more representation in their work, the clients would buy it. On the other hand, you could also argue if clients demanded more representation in their work, the creatives would put it in.

All of the brand communication planners and creative directors conceded that agencies and clients are key role players in ensuring that this is considered as part of

advertisement productions. This is especially when brand solutions call for it and it would authentically speak to audiences. While agencies need to interrogate briefs extensively and challenge conventional approaches regarding the production of advertisements, clients also need to advocate for such productions. Most of the participants indicated that agencies should take on more of an advisory role when there is an opportunity to do work that is inclusive of queer people and vehemently motivated for this. In turn, clients need to be more trusting and allow their agencies to lead them, based off research findings, into spaces where insights derived from the research suggest that this is where their target market is and represents what the brand stands for. In this regard, a salient example was given where some of the participants were successful in leading their clients and executing this very need, which has, in turn, won their clients accolades over the years. This not only won awards but resonated deeply with audiences across the binary and challenged consumers to think differently about gender and queer identity. They attributed this to the trust that their clients had in them and served as a point of proof of how their informative counsels allowed them to produce advertisements over the years that could take them into new territories and resonate deeply with consumers. Furthermore, this further evidence Keller's (2009) point around salience and how, when consumers see themselves reflected in brands, they build psychological and emotional connections that lead to loyalty and engagement that ultimately influences brand equity and affinity.

P I must tell you, when I compare that to the amount of response and the mails that we got from young people who have been trying to be who they are in front of their communities, in front of their parents, for the longest time and who received inspiration through that, that makes it all worth it. And, for me, if you're a brand that wants to stand as a part of society, then I think that the best thing that you can do is to use your muscle towards shifting that society towards a positive space. And, for me, inclusivity will always be positive.

However, gender as a construct and the nuances related to it are not always a consideration, especially where it relates to the various queer identities. The participants all conceded that there needs to be more conversation in the advertising industry that would influence the outlook and output of brand communications,

ultimately leading to a change that is intentionally called for and systemically channelled.

4.4.4 Functional versus emotive briefs

In theme four, most of the participants express that it is crucial to understand what the objectives of the brief are insofar as brands want either a brand narrative that tells a story or if a pure product-selling approach is what they require.

Participants' reasonings and opinions were sought on whether product categories and brands are more likely to consider queer representation in their approaches. This was, in part, to assess whether the brand resonance theory could be applied in particular categories over others or not. While most participants felt strongly about brands being representative of all, as called for by Spence (2009), some participants felt that younger brands, referred to by them as "challenger brands" in the industry, were considered more fluid and, as a result, more agile in relation to exploring new territories and approaches that are inclusive of queer identities. The observation made by the participants in relation to *traditional brands* and *challenger brands* reveals how institutional and organisational culture is often tougher to change because of how deeply entrenched its ideology and power is maintained to ensure certain ways of doing things in organisations is unchanged to not disrupt or cause unrest. This belief, however, is often the root cause of why change never occurs in organisations and archaic ways of doing things persist. This is an indication of how brand leadership is needed to be able to chart a new dispensation and world order for brands (Das 2017).

However, most of the participants conceded that there is also an opportunity for established brands to shift their perspective, which could lead to approaches that are more inclusive and reflective of society. Furthermore, this was seen as an essential step that would signal to other larger brands that this is a key factor that could propel them to follow suit. This is the desired effect and what brand leadership should essentially be about (Aaker 1996; Chang & Ko 2014; Das 2017).

P *[When] these kind of movements happen, it's when a staunch or perceived staunch category like banking can step into that space...it's exactly what is*

needed because when they do it then another one of the big banks sees that actually we can do it and actually it didn't get them brandished or hated by everybody.

The issue of categorisation is one where participants highlighted that, in an ideal world, representation would not be category-specific. However, the reality is different and in the main, brands that are, at their core, led by self-expression are those predisposed to explore queer representation, more so than with other categories. Chief of the brand categories mentioned include *Alcohol and beverage, Banking, Beauty, Fashion, Fast food, Lifestyle, and Technology*. However, the readiness of both clients and consumers to engage with featured queer content, especially as lead characters in advertisements, needs to be considered. Some of the brand communication planner participants suggested that this was happening rapidly and was informed by the insights they had gained across platforms, particularly social media platforms, where audiences share their views and opinions on brands in real-time (Enslin 2019). While it may seem that advocating for the use of queer identities across categories of brands are a much harder sell for agencies, some of the participants contend that it was a necessary part of advertising. They did, however, caution on the authentic use of queer bodies and to not merely be performative in their approach, claiming to be an ally that has relevance in the lives of the queer community, but it should instead form part of the brand identity. This is affirmed by some of the participants, who brought the brand's intention into the discussion regarding making use of queer identities and whether it is "necessary" as part of the brand communication strategy, insofar as resonating with audiences.

P I guess it comes down to what do you wanna say about your brand? What is the story? And what is using that queer person in your ad say[ing] about your brand? What do you want...don't just use it...is it representation for representation's sake?...I think there's an argument for that as well, for representation for representation's sake. But like I said, I don't think we're at a stage yet that having a queer person isn't a statement in some way.

The above sentiment emphasises what D'Emilio (2016) advocates for in the reclaiming of certain words that were previously used in an oppressive manner. The evolution being significantly called for is that these words, which form part of the community's

identity, are now being adopted positively and used in the advancement of queer narratives and agendas. Through advertising, this is possible, further cementing the importance of not only including queer people in campaigns to gain from the pink economy, but rather, it should form part of who and what brands are about (Neumeier 2005; 2018; 2020). Through the various touchpoints, consumers should be able to see themselves reflected in brands and have equal brand experiences (Enslin 2019).

4.4.5 Theme five: The societal responsibility of advertising

In theme five, most of the participants concede that advertising plays a crucial role in society and therefore has a responsibility to change from perpetuating historical norms to educating, challenging, and shifting public perceptions.

While the role of advertising is understood as driving brand awareness of products in the market and influencing consumers' buying behaviours (Haider & Shakib 2017; Mailk, 2020), its role in society has evolved from being mere punters of the functional benefits of brand products. What has increasingly resonated with consumers and audiences is brand advertising that is meaningful and purpose lead (MINAR 2016; Hsu 2016; Enslin & de Beer 2015). Brand advertising called for is that which does not merely reflect to society what it is and what it knows. Rather, it should empower consumers to think differently about the world they live in. According to MINAR (2016) and Talbot (2020), this is where the value of brands comes from; brand advertising that is change driven in nature. MINAR (2016) refers to this kind of brand advertising as Goodvertising which, when done well, has the potential for leading brands to gain the support of a broader spectrum of consumers.

The sentiment shared by most of the participants regarding the role of advertising affirms MINAR's (2016) scholarly arguments and Talbot's (2020) assertion in an article published in Forbes titled "*The New Focus for Brand Management Teams*". They assert that, in an ideal world, advertising should advance issues around social consciousness, which is what millennials are increasingly demanding (MINAR 2016; Kantar 2019). This is arguably what the new target market has been able to do in setting the agenda for brands (BizTrends 2021). Within its position of influence,

advertising can ensure representation across all levels of society, including those relating to gender and queer identity.

Some of the participants further contend that the advocacy for representation has been happening organically for cis-gender identifying audiences, i.e., representation of women and black lives which are intersectional (Chan 2020). Accordingly, they argue that perhaps it is time for greater consideration and more profound action to be taken for all other marginalised and excluded groups, like those of the queer community.

P I think in the same way that advertising has played a role in creating a lot of these issues, it's gotta play a role in fixing a lot of them. I think we have played on the stereotype for so many years and it's quite harmful. I think we've got such a powerful role to play in society's life and it's gotta be channelled to rather the good versus the bad.

For this to happen, some of the participants across the different disciplines appealed for patience and willingness to teach one another about matters they may not know much about. This included matters relating to how to better understand gender and queer identity constructs. This, they suggested, could yield positive results across the board, including for clients, agencies, and consumers, ultimately impacting how brand advertising is planned for and produced from both a strategic and creative direction perspective. Another key imperative was the creation of agency cultures that allow for diversity. This relates particularly to those in positions of power being intentional about hiring people who are representative of society to be able to create work that is representative and will truly resonate with consumers. Hiring diverse people according to the participants would allow for greater diverse thinking and ideas from all points of view in agencies and brand management teams. This would encourage the appropriate interpretation of brand messages in advertisements to resonate effectively. This was more important for the creative director respondents who saw themselves as the drivers behind the ideas and communications that go out into the market.

P ...while it is sort of something that we are very happy to talk about it is a huge, enormous task to make it happen. But we are certainly key drivers and at the forefront of making sure that it is brought up in meetings, even if it makes it awkward. We're making sure that representation is always there and we're always thinking about it in ways that normally brand stakeholders or brand managers aren't. And, so, we have a very sort of great responsibility to make sure that the work that we put out and the people that we work with and the stories that we tell are inclusive of people who have been marginalised or people who we would not normally engage with.

Participants realised their responsibility in the role advertising plays in creating cultures and subcultures and how they are perceived and accepted in society.

P The other half of the time is that we need to remember that advertising creates culture. So, actually, at the end of the day we have a massive responsibility, I think, as advertisers to...because what we say becomes popular culture.

The brand advertising industry plays a role in educating society about trends and acceptable behaviours, which ultimately influence changing narratives in society. Therefore, being inclusive and diverse in all its approaches, the industry plays a significant role. Essentially, regarding the role of advertising, all participants interviewed felt that the industry has a role to play in advocating for equal representation in the brands they work with. This is more especially when there is a brand fit, arguing that this would need to happen in an authentic and progressive manner for all. Advertising, accordingly, is considered critical in some ways for setting the agenda and conversations on what should be seen as acceptable and part of popular culture.

4.5 Conclusion

The research findings emerging from the thematic analysis of data obtained from transcribed interviews yielded five themes with subthemes. These findings presented rich insights and an in-depth understanding of brand communication planners and creative directors regarding gender and queer identity and the inclusion or exclusion of queer people in the planning and production of brand advertisements that resonate.

In the first theme, I unpacked the associations that participants had regarding gender and queer identity. It emerged that most of the participants could clearly distinguish between these two constructs and that indeed sex, gender, and sexuality should not be conflated to mean the same thing, as argued by gender and diversity studies scholars (Ndzwayiba & Steyn 2019). The participants further understood gender as a continuum that exists in a society that still upholds Christian values, which, as a result, does not always welcome a sexual orientation that is diverse in nature as it goes against societal norms and binary sets (McEwen 2021). When it came to advertising, participants conveyed that while the work they produce for clients is always subject to mutation and should be influenced by trends, insights, and research across different platforms and channels, it was not always possible to include queer people in their productions because of certain variables that needed to be considered. These included the conservative nature of clients, the fear of backlash from a perceived lack of readiness in audiences, and brands that do not want to position themselves in ways that cause consumer's unrest. In other words, they could not be seen to be alienating current consumers through the type of advertisements produced. While this may be an argument to be considered, contemporary research from international counterparts suggests that contemporary consumers are not looking for brands that are wanting to "play it safe". Instead, they are looking for brands with purpose and that stand for and champion causes that resonate with their lives. This is evidenced in the literature by research institutions such as Kantar (2019) and Havas Media Group (2021).

In the instances where brands had the opportunity to be allies of the community and produce advertisements that resonate with the queer community, the participants agreed that it should not be approached as a "ticking of boxes" exercise. Rather, it should be authentic and approached in a way that resonates with the audience. This section concludes with the participants stating the importance of having queer people represented in advertisements and, most poignantly, as part of the industry in the work environment to ensure that agencies produce work that is relevant and reflective of the society as a whole.

The second theme emerging informed the need to understand how sex, gender, and sexuality play a role in the process of planning and producing brand advertisements that resonate. This was both in terms of how agencies approach these constructs in their brand communication planning and creative direction and the extent to which brands would be willing to have them considered in the brand advertisements they sign off. Most participants expressed that this factor is determined by their clients in terms of what they define and incorporate as sex, gender, and sexuality in the briefs they issue to agencies. They acknowledge that agencies could challenge and debunk these key constructs and find suitable ways to be more inclusive in brand solutions. Granted, they may be challenged by their clients on whether this would be the right approach for their brands. However, the role of agencies, as participants agreed, is to push boundaries and reflect the society in its diverse nature in the work they produce for brands. As asserted by Das (2017), this is precisely what brand leadership should stand for.

In addition to segmentation, target profiling, and encoding and decoding of messages in advertisements (National Public Research 2019; Berlo 1960), it was necessary to understand the role and influence of different role players in the production of advertisements as the industry largely follows a source, message, channel, and receiver (SMCR) model that ultimately informs consumers and can result in a call to action (CTA). Thus, in the third theme, participants expressed their responsibilities and the role they play in producing the final outcomes of the advertisement. The key differentiator markers between brand communication planners and creative directors are the research component that deals heavily with the psychographic and contextual analysis of the environments that brands want to be a part of. This enables brand communication planners to find rich insights that inform the strategic direction followed by creative directors in the planning and production of an advertisement. Clients also play a role in allowing agencies to explore different territories and in the ultimate approval of the final advertisement.

In guarding against a cis-gendered approach to producing ads that include queer narratives, it was necessary to determine how queer people were included in the process. According to the participants interviewed, they did not include external people

who identified as queer to examine the resonance of strategies. If at all, it was instead catered for by team members within agencies who identified as members of the LGBTQQIAP+ community. In the case of creative directors, they have started to consult specialists to help them create work that is not stereotypical when the opportunity was presented, which albeit was not often.

The fourth emerging theme was centred around categories that participants, in their expert opinions, felt were more predisposed to consider gender and sexuality in their brands. Chief to be unearthed was that most participants spoke of understanding what the brief from the client requires in terms of a functional or emotive approach. For brands that lead with more of an emotive approach, the participants highlighted that there would be an opportunity to be more inclusive and diverse. This was in terms of the ability to include queer lead characters that could challenge the status quo on issues of gender, thereby promoting a space where consumers would be educated more on trends and acceptable behaviours.

The prominent categories the participants highlighted as being able to play a meaningful role in this regard are *alcohol and beverage, banking, beauty, fashion, fast food, lifestyle, and technology*. While these were some of the categories to be highlighted by the participants, it also presents an opportunity for the industry to ask themselves the three questions posed by Neumeier (2005; 2018), in an attempt to build affinity with consumers and establishing the purpose of the brand – *Who are you? What do you stand for? Why does it matter?* If these questions are answered in a fair and enlightened manner, it will enable brands to lead with purpose and traverse into spaces that would ultimately create opportunities for others to follow, which is precisely what brand leadership is about (Das 2017).

The fifth and final theme regarded the role and responsibilities of advertisers and advertising in educating, challenging, and shifting perceptions. This was stated as being crucial by the participants and is informed by the position the industry holds in terms of contributing towards the shaping of diverse narratives and creating acceptable cultures for society to engage with. It is therefore key for the industry to be

diverse, not only in the work it creates but also in the teams that were hired by agencies and brands, to be truly reflective of the society within which it exists.

Based on the data reviewed and the themes arising with reference to the research question, there is an opportunity to include and represent queer people in advertisements. However, the understanding of queer identity by agencies does not mean that they will always get the opportunity to create work that is inclusive of the community. This is for several reasons brought forward by the participants as it relates to 1) client briefs that do not specify gender and queer identity demographics, and 2) client approval or dismissal of creative solutions that include queer characters and narratives. The participants further acknowledged the nuances and areas where they felt they could do better in addressing this matter by, specifically, 1) probing further and delving into different territories when distilling briefs, and 2) having diverse work environments and teams that can bring evolved and diverse ways of thinking into agencies.

The key highlight is that, while agencies understand gender and building this understanding into their approaches, this is only one part of the equation. The challenge to be overcome is systemic and essentially needs all to come on board if the status quo is to be changed. This will and must include clients and the brands that they lead. It was conceded by the participants that the role of advertising has an enormous societal influence and should thus be used for good, in shaping and changing narratives that will ultimately advance the inclusion of all communities as envisioned in the South African constitution (The Constitution, 1996). Chapter 5 of this study proceeds to present an overview of this study, limitations, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter presented the results of the data collected, which indicates five themes with their subthemes that needed to be considered in the context of the South African advertising landscape. This was particularly in the context of this study, which aimed to understand South African brand communication planners' and creative directors' social constructions of queer identity and how queer voices are included in the planning for brand resonance in advertising. To adequately address this aim, the following objectives were formulated:

- To explore brand communication planners' and creative directors' social construction of gender and queer identity, which may also reinforce forms of queer exclusion;
- To establish how South African brand communication planners and creative directors include/or exclude queer identities in the planning of brand advertisements to achieve brand resonance; and
- To understand the role the advertising industry could play in the emancipation and liberation of queer people through advertisements that resonate with consumers or identify the challenges that might lead to the industry being resistant to playing an emancipatory role.

This undertaking ultimately provided rich insights on the participants' conceptions of the key constructs being studied and how they include or exclude queer voices in the planning for brand resonance in advertising.

Inclusiveness, equality, diversity, and conversation foregrounding historic and contemporary change movements such as LGBTQQIAP+ and Black Lives Matter (BLM) are movements that were part of public discourse even prior to the

commencement of this study (Rim 2020). These were part of the discourse within the advertising industry and increased in momentum during the undertaking of this study (Dernikos 2017; Dreyer, Trent, Anderson & Askew 2020). The rise of these movements can be foregrounded by the understanding of studies conducted by various stakeholders in academe and practice, which centre the rise of millennials' voices that are purpose-driven and seek change in society (Havas Media Group 2019). By extension and implication, brands across industries have had to stand for causes that are more pronounced and aligned to their consumers' beliefs as a way of maintaining relevance and brand resonance. The advertising industry is situated at the centre of these changes and is always mutating its existence against this very reality.

This study, therefore, made suitable enquiries into the South African advertising industry, which serves to ignite a much needed debate about transformation as it relates to diversity and inclusion of marginalised groups (Masito, 2020). Central to this study is the queer community and the pluriversal nature of the community. In 2020, debates amongst industry practitioners were sparked as a result of brands seen in the public domain as being tone-deaf and alienating and lacking diversity and inclusivity (Between10and5 2020). This led to calls for transformation across the value chain of the industry. The rise in debate during this period illustrates further how action plans without measurable social objectives continue to lead to frustration and unrest. It is against this social backdrop the themes emerging from the study were presented and discussed in depth within the context of the literature reviewed, which led to the formulation of the main research aim and objectives.

I thusly proceed to discuss these emerging primary and secondary findings in the context of the research objectives. The themes unearthed in the thematic analysis were conducted in the context of the literature reviewed and, in many ways, supported the insights emerging regarding gender, queer identity, and brand resonance. I conclude the chapter by offering suitable recommendations, notwithstanding the delimitations of this study, which serve as a lacuna for future researchers in queer marginality and brand resonance in South African advertising.

5.2 Discussion of themes and subthemes in relation to the main aim and objectives of the study

In this section, the objectives of this study lead an in-depth discussion on what was achieved in relation to the themes and subthemes emerging. The research guide questions are further brought into discussion in terms of how they were used to achieve the objectives set out.

5.2.1 The research objectives

Objective one: To explore brand communication planners' and creative directors' social construction of gender and queer identity.

To address the first objective, the following question was posed to the participants: What is the top-of-mind associations relating to gender and queer identity in the brand advertising industry?

This particular question sought to establish the thoughts and words that would be used by the participants to express their understanding of gender and queer identity. This was important to establish in the context of the main aim and the first objective of this study, which was to explore brand communication planners' and creative directors' social constructions of gender and queer identity. This was especially because of the central argument made by contemporary South African queer scholars such as Ndzwayiba & Steyn (2019) who lament that sex, gender, and sexuality should not be conflated to mean the same thing as it promotes a cis-gendered and heteronormative approach to identity. Ncube (2021) agrees that it perpetuates and further feeds into the narrative that anything that does not conform to the binary is immediately assumed to be unAfrican. It is Tamale (2011; 2020) and McKaiser (2012) who refute the Western and Christonormative approach to gender and argue for the understanding of gender and sexuality as being nuanced and multi-layered, particularly in the context of Africa as whole.

The brand communication planners' and creative directors' social construction of gender and queer identity was in fact multi-layered as they understood, in their retort of gender and sexuality, that these were two different constructs. This explanation was in line with the research objective one and the insights arising from the literature reviewed in chapter two. A more nuanced finding and theme emerged, however, in this part of the discussion with the participants wherein it was established that there were positive and negative connotations to gender and queer identity. These sentiments during my discussion with all participants across the specialties were echoed in terms of the Christian values most grew up with, which upheld a particular education on the roles and functions to be performed by the male and female bodies (Butler 1993; McEwen 2021). These ultimately influenced how they further approached the planning and production of advertisements and, furthermore, the reactions they had experienced in their profession relating to other forms of expression of gender identity.

Social constructivism, which is the epistemological assumption and paradigm adopted by this study, provides a context on how the very assumption of gender identity being fixed and an innate inheritance of the bodies we are born with is problematic (Butler 1993) and further results in social constructs of society that seek to maintain a particular social order (Butler 1990). According to Butler (1990), this social order is thus seen as the norm and any threat to it is immediately frowned upon, punished through rejection, and marginalised (Raja 2019).

While the participants were amenable to learning and unlearning certain societal perceptions upheld on gender and sexuality, it was not something they could influence on their own as agency partners to brands, especially if they wanted to include such insights about sex and gender in the brand strategies and creative productions planned for brand resonance. The reason for this is because of the sentiments shared by Butler (1990; 1993) on the maintenance of a particular social order and power dynamics. The initial objective was, therefore, critical in establishing the context from which brand communication planners and creative directors stem, which influenced their approach to sex and gender in advertising. The understanding of this lens would align or be misaligned with the findings put forward by contemporary gender scholars.

It must be noted, therefore, that there was a clear understanding from the participants on what sex and gender constructs denoted and how they should be applied. Subtheme 1.1 – 1.4 demonstrate this understanding and how the participants treat the matter of gender and sexuality in the planning and production of advertisements, which in part also speak to objective two of this study.

Theme	Subthemes
11. Positive and negative connotations of gender and queer identity	11.1. Should not be approached as a ticking-of-boxes exercise in advertisement curation
	11.2. Understanding of gender and queer identity as a continuum
	11.3. Self-examination and self-correction regarding issues of gender and identity (key constructs)
	11.4. Importance of having queer people represented and part of the industry insofar as work environments

Theme one refers to there being negative and positive connotations to gender and queer identity and, more specifically, subtheme 1.3 regarding some of the participants' self-examination of how they approach gender and sexuality, which is an example of how heightened their awareness is of the fluidity involved with gender and sexuality in contemporary society and the desired need to engender change. However, the negative connotations were not necessarily associated with the participants' own conceptions of gender and queer identity, which were more reflective of current times that have seen gender being expressed in different forms and facets. In fact, they attempted to bring these constructs and concepts into some of the productions they were tasked with. However, in the instance where they could potentially incorporate gender fluidity and queer inclusive ideas into brand solutions and brand advertisements, it was often rejected by their clients. The rejection of queer inclusivity is as a result of social constructions that aim to maintain a particular social order around heteronormativity (Bulter 1990; 1993; Raja 2019; McEwen 2021). This insight is linked to theme two, which is discussed under objective two.

Objective two: To establish how South African brand communication planners and creative directors include or exclude queer identities in the planning of brand advertisements to achieve brand resonance.

Several questions were developed in the interview guide to answer to this objective, which led to themes two, three, and four, with their respective subthemes that interlink with one another. The first question in the interview guide aimed to establish the attitudes that emerged when referring to gender and queer identity. What arose in the discussion with the participants thus revealed that clients determine the topics that can be explored through their briefs to agencies and that they are key role players in influencing the outcome of the process, followed by brand communication planners and creative directors in their production of advertisements (refer to theme two and subtheme 3.3). This revelation was not necessarily referring to the team structures of the agencies and the consultants they worked with that were queer identifying. Rather, it was pertaining to whether queer featuring advertisements would ultimately get to be seen in the public domain and in their brands. It is the critical theory realm which exposes the positionality of certain stakeholders and how, in both said and unsaid ways, they perpetuate the maintenance of a particular social order. This cements Butler's (1993) argument on how power and dominance thrive in certain spaces unabated. Understanding the overall attitudes in relation to the second objective elicited the key reasons why the participants held the views they did.

Resoundingly, most of the participants indicated that gender and queer identity, in the process of planning and producing advertisements, was largely predicated on the value their clients held in terms of being inclusive and diverse in their brands.

I think, to be honest with you, we probably don't give it as much sort of rigour, that we do the more sort of traditional gender...because normally in the segmentation it comes and it's already quite rigid and, so, we probably should give it more attention and make sure that every single brief is looking through that lens.

This was largely pinned to the kind of briefs being issued to agencies that often do nothing to debunk demographics and socio-psychographics. It can therefore be argued that, indeed, the meaning of these constructs is often taken for granted. They

are in fact approached from a cis-gendered and heteropatriarchal approach, which is alienating of the varying spectrum of marginalised groups such as the LGBTQQIAP+ people. As was evidenced and discussed in the literature, sex, gender, and sexuality should not be conflated (Ndzwayiba & Steyn, 2019) and, if it is accepted that this argument is true, it becomes evident that how brands currently categorise demographics and socio-psychographics and how brand advertising agencies respond to briefs issued by their clients is problematic and requires re-evaluation. This relates particularly to how, when the industry refers to gender in briefs, it refers to the biological nature of bodies, but within this classification of sex there is a disparity, complexity, and exclusion of people who do not necessarily identify with the prescribed binary constructs. Contemporary literature further showed that this essentialist way of approaching segmentation and consumer profiling is alienating, oppressive, and reinforcing of cis-gendered heteropatriarchal binaries (Dreten et al. 2021).

While the agency participants interviewed agreed that their role should be to educate clients on the environment in which their brands exist, and in terms of the varying identity prisms that need to be represented through the various brand touchpoints to achieve resonance (Enslin 2019; Neumeier 2020), their influence could only go as far as their clients allowed. The power dynamics between clients and their agencies are evident, which if not used progressively could yield further oppressive reproductions of marginality and exclusion.

Subthemes 2.1 (some participants acknowledge the importance of diversity in internal teams and brands they represent as a way of driving diversity in thinking and approach) and 3.2 (no inclusion of (external) queer identifying parties to examine the resonance of strategies except for team members within agencies who identify as queer (if at all)) demonstrates how some of the agencies realised the importance of diversity in internal teams and brands they represent as a way of driving diversity in thinking and approach. This realisation answered, in many ways, the objective two of this study on how the agencies realised an opportunity to be more inclusive of queer identities in their planning process.

Alcoff's (1996) text, in the literature reviewed, contends a priori of points around how, when others speak for or on behalf of "them", it distorts the meaning and truth of the people being spoken for. These include centering a particular narrative from a particular position that may not necessarily resonate with others or may affect those who are listening and how they interpret what is said, or how the one who is speaking is influenced by their set of experiences that may not be the same as those who they are speaking for. She further contends that it does not mean that others should or cannot use their position to advocate for those who may not be able to speak for themselves. Rather, she suggests the need for being more aware of how complex this task is and how it needs to be an assumed collaborative role. This could not be truer for the brand advertising industry, which is positioned in such an influential role in society and thus needs to be aware of its responsibility. This argument segues to a contemporary discussion in Ormsher's (2021) text, which argues the importance of having queer people involved from the inception of any brand advertisements that targets the community, as this would be empowering, rather than having others represent their narrative according to how they perceive it. This argument should be further used as a best practice guide on how brand communication planners and creative directors could better improve their approach to producing advertisements that resonate. This would allow brands to build meaningful relationships with consumers who would ultimately see themselves reflected in the communication of the brands that they have pledged loyalty towards (Keller 2009; Raut et al. 2020; Raut, Brito, & Pawar 2020).

Most of the participants narrated that it was very rare that they had the opportunity to action what has been documented in contemporary literature, primarily because of the nature of the agencies, which is fast-paced and often lacks the budgets to conduct focus groups to test the resonance of brand advertisements centring queer people. According to the participants, this task was not spoken of and the responsibility was left to team members who openly identified as queer, particularly from a strategic planning point of view. Some of the creative director participants did, however, try to seek queer identifying consultants to help them bring queer-centred narratives to life in ways that would resonate. If Alcoff (1996) is understood correctly, being non-inclusive both in agencies and brands is problematic and perhaps it is something that

agencies and brands should start looking into and having clear interventions towards addressing it.

A contemporary example of this reform can be seen in the work being done by global players such as the *Gay Times* who launched a new band of influencers called *GT113*. The platform sought to transform how *Gay Times* spoke to its audience and introduced radical change. This would be by allowing these influencers to create a platform through 2021 that would allow them to narrate their own lived experiences as a way of enabling the brand to extend its reach far beyond one social network (Sutcliffe 2021). This case study is an example of how both brand resonance is achieved by centring the lived experiences of the audiences who consume *Gay Times* content and having them share relatable narratives to broader readers, which would allow them to build even stronger relationships and loyalty towards the brand (Keller 2009). This case study further served to act as a testament to what Alcoff (1996) is arguing for regarding allowing often marginalised people to share their own stories. The *Gay Times* case study is also an example of how subtheme 2.2 (participants highlighted the importance of ads that are inclusive, need not drive on stereotypes, or just be done as a way of ticking boxes) addressed insofar as the importance of ads that are inclusive not driving on stereotypes as this would lack authenticity. What this study was not able to answer to this end was the extent to which agencies could go about creating queer-centred advertisements that featured queer people through a naturalised approach that would resonate with all consumers as were suggested in subtheme 2.3 (most of the participants called out the need for a naturalised approach that will resonate with all).

To further answer to objective two, I needed to understand what processes were followed by agencies in the creation of brand advertisements that resonate. The answer to this question would further elicit to what extent queer people were included in the planning and production of brand advertisements that resonate. I did this by asking questions that would enable the participants to establish the role they played in the value chain and understanding the extent brand resonance (Keller 2009), brand purpose, and social change (MINAR 2016) constructs reviewed in the literature would arise in the discussions.

The roles described by the participants were in line with those established by the founding fathers of advertising – Bruce Barton in 1923, Rose Lee in 1950, David Ogilvy in 1955, Theodore Levitt in 1960, and Phillip Rotter in 1967. They understood that the role of advertising was highly functional with clear sales objectives and thus had to ensure the uptake of the brand product. While this still forms part of the core of advertising and a measure of success for brand communication planners and creative directors, the approach has evolved to include more sociocultural trends around inclusivity and diversity. This is evidenced by contemporary studies highlighting the generational call of millennials that brands should be more purpose driven, as this adds more meaning to the brands they support (Havas Media Group 2019; Dreten et al. 2021). MINAR (2016) and Hsu (2016) argue that advertising for the millennial is much more hinged on the brands' ability to communicate their purpose through their advertisements that ultimately compels consumers to pledge their loyalty towards the brands. This sentiment was shared and echoed in most participants' responses, despite their role differences. They were clear that the work they produce for consumers today through advertising needs to be informed by the socio-environment it exists in for it to have brand resonance. To this end, they declared their mission to employ team members, where possible, who reflect the diversity of society and the diversity in thinking. Participants narrated the importance of being diverse and inclusive to their team members to have different voices and perspectives shaping the work they produce through strategy and advertisements.

While the focus of this study was on participants whose background was from agencies, the importance of diversity in thinking, organisational culture, and representation in brands was not, and should not be, understood as a priority that only applies to the advertising agency industry. An equal part of successfully achieving diversity and inclusion of all in society needs to be a matter that corporate brands prioritise as part of their mandate as well. This would ensure that the voices of those who are often marginalised are heard and efforts are made to redress the inequalities. This thinking addresses the second objective of this study and supports the argument made by Alcott's (1996) seminal work that exposes the problem of speaking for others and Ormsher's (2021) text that investigates how advertisers can work responsibly with

trans talent. In other words, how can brands, and by extension agencies, be more inclusive of those that they aim to represent in the planning and production of brand advertisements that resonate?

The last and final section in answering objective two of this study considered whether the matter of gender and queer identity inclusivity was product category specific. This was informed by the literature that revealed that advertising had both functional and emotive approaches that could be applied in the production of advertisements (WARC from Home 2020). The participants' responses indicated that they needed to understand the briefs from brands in the context of these approaches before applying them.

Some of the participants agreed that, while there should not be certain brand categories that would be viewed as being able to opt in or out of being inclusive of queer people in their brands, this was tougher for brands that were more traditionally entrenched and well-established. The reason for their inflexibility was rooted in capitalistic priorities that aim to achieve the business bottom-line rather than build a relationship with their consumers and become involved with them. The participants stated that this was influenced by several factors, which include those identified in themes one and two, on the perceived unreadiness of consumers to engage with advertisements that do not necessarily reflect a cis-gendered schema. It was also because, from a brand perspective, it was sometimes harder to try something new when something has always worked for the brand in the past. This hesitance may result in brands being less relevant, appearing to be less innovative, and as a result lose resonance with its involved consumers (Havas Media Group 2019). Participants did, however, reflect that younger brands, which some referred to as "challenger brands", are more fluid and, as a result, more agile and able to explore new territories that are inclusive of queer identities. Furthermore, most of the participants concede that there is an opportunity within established brands to tap heavily into what brand leadership is about (Das, 2017) and shift perspectives that will encourage them to be more inclusive and reflective of society. The ability to do this would place them in a position to influence other bigger brands across categories to do the same.

While the participants reflected on the issue of queer representation being better suited to certain categories such as the alcohol and beverage, banking, beauty, fashion, fast foods, lifestyle, and technology sectors, it was because the approach to the planning and production of advertisements for these categories was more likely to allow for self-expression expressed in subtheme 4.2 (brands that allow for self-expression are more prone to be inclusive than others). This encourages the use of diverse identities who use these products and services. However, the participants experienced resistance from some clients who did not always allow for these approaches to come to life as evidenced in theme two (clients determine the topic and brief). Further arising was the authentic use of queer bodies and not merely being performative or ticking boxes, as argued by Ormsher (2021) and Houston (2021). Rather, it should form part of who and what brands are about, thereby achieving brand resonance through various touchpoints where queer consumers are able to see themselves reflected in brands equally, have brand experiences, and ultimately build connections with brands (Keller 2009; Enslin 2019; Neumeier 2020).

Objective three: To understand the role the advertising industry could play in the emancipation and liberation of queer people through advertisements that resonate with consumers

To sufficiently answer to this objective, open-ended questions were posed to the participants to the extent that participants' thoughts and recommendations on the issue of gender and queer identity in advertising could be answered. The question(s) and themes that emerged allowed for me to holistically reflect on the participants' responses in the context of the overall aim and objectives of this study, rendering the recommendations that they too expressed would be useful in how the industry approached the matter of representation, inclusivity, and diversity. It was important to establish this understanding, considering the trajectory international counterparts have taken in brand advertising, to ensure that inclusivity and representation are at the centre of what they do (see Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren examples in Chapter 2) and in line with what their millennial consumer is calling for from the brands that they choose to support (Havas Media Group 2019).

South Africa is influenced by global trends and, therefore, if the advancement of marginalised groups is a project that has taken up globally, it should be championed in the same manner as all other social causes around race and class are championed through brands. This is in line with what Deloitte (2019) demonstrates in their recent market study that shows how meaningful brands are those with the intention of resonating with their target market, that bring meaning and matter to today's purpose-driven consumer who wants to derive value from brands that influence social change in society. The Meaningful Brands Index for 2021 further revealed two significant statistics that informed the third objective and should perhaps have advertisers and brand managers strongly consider moving forward as it relates to brand resonance. These were found that 73% of the respondents wanted brands that will make a difference for the betterment of society and the planet and that they would not care if 75% of brands disappeared overnight. This revelation further entrenched the importance of brand communication building that would ultimately ensure meaningful and harmonious strategies with operational analytics and design, to ensure success, and most importantly the survival of brands (Enslin 2019).

The relevance of this insight is that it ignites brand resonance thinking, which essentially centres the relationships brands build with consumers, and ultimately society, through causes that they care about as a way of creating meaning in their lives. The meaning created achieves the objective of being purposeful in society and influencing the shift of perceptions that could ultimately lead to social change. As evidenced by the studies reviewed, today's value for brands will come from Goodvertising, brand advertising that is change-driven in nature (MINAR 2016; Talbot 2020). When done well, it has the potential of leading brands to gain support from a broader spectrum of consumers while making a positive impact on society.

Significantly, most of the participants interviewed affirmed that advertising plays a very influential role in society by virtue of being able to shape culture and subculture trends in the lives of consumers. It does this, according to the participants, by reinforcing what is seen in society as acceptable and this forms part of brand narratives and ultimately brand resonance. It is because of this influence potential that advertising should intentionally advance issues pertaining to the rise of social consciousness, which is

what millennials are increasingly calling for from brands (Havas Media Group 2019) and is aligned to theme three and subthemes 5.1 (promote tolerance and patience in society), 5.2 (educate society (trends and acceptable behaviours)), and 5.3 (shaping and changing narratives in society (creating acceptable cultures)). This was specifically stated by one participant as follows:

The other half of the time is that we need to remember that advertising creates culture. So at the end of the day we have a massive responsibility, I think, as advertisers to...because what we say becomes popular culture.

According to BizTrends (2021), consumers are now at the forefront of setting the agenda for brands in terms of the kind of content they want to see coming from them. Therefore, within its position of influence, advertising can shift the narrative on issues relating to marginalised groups and ensure representation across all levels of society, including those relating to gender and queer identity. Additionally, some of the participants indicated that the advocacy for representation of cis-gender identifying consumers, i.e., representation of women and black lives, has reached a stage where it happens organically.

Here's the crazy thing. We've done that with the heteronormative society. We understand them in all their complexities because that's all we've ever known. But the minute you start to talk about someone who's different, then it's like, oh, my God, when will it ever stop? Will I ever get it? No. I say for as long as we are willing to share information, let's be open.

It is for this reason that the participants affirm that there could be no better time to start considering the subject matter of queer representation and further action championing issues relating to queer communities in a more profound way. To ensure that this level of inclusion and representation is authentically achieved, the participants acknowledged that it needs to be a collaborative effort with those they aim to speak to through their brands.

It is for this reason that the participants appealed for patience and for the queer community to be willing to teach them about nuances that they do not always get right, to avoid misrepresenting the community. This would achieve what Alcoff (1996),

Houston (2021), and Ormsher (2021) call for: to work together with marginalised voices and tell their stories in an authentic and meaningful way. This approach would further have resonance with the broader community and educate them about a community that has often been underrepresented in its entirety. It would further position brands as working together with those that have not always been given the opportunity to influence and shape advertising.

Subtheme 5.4 (being representative and diverse in thinking and hiring of teams) demonstrated how internally, the participants further suggested that they could improve the agency culture to allow for more diversity and inclusion in the types of human resources employed and work environments that encourage different ways of approaching brand challenges. This, they stated, would need to be an assignment for those in leadership positions and who can influence decisions made. Ultimately, the participants conceded that brand advertising could play a more meaningful role in society and exploit its assets to empower those who may not have the platform. This sentiment is further called for by 73% of consumers who believe brands must act now (Havas Group 2021). For this to happen successfully, however, both agencies and the clients they lead would need to take on this task with the intent of changing, shaping, and influencing society as a way of achieving brand resonance. This would allow consumers to see themselves and things that matter to them reflected through the brands they are loyal towards (Aaker 1996; Keller, 2009; 2019).

To this end, the final theme (the societal responsibility of advertising) aligns with the third objective of this study, which was to ascertain the extent to which the advertising industry could play an emancipatory and liberating role for queer people through brand advertisements that resonate with consumers. It was made evident by the participants' narrated experiences that, to achieve emancipation, this needed to be an endeavour embarked on internally and externally by organisations. This was precisely because the advertising industry is quite influential and shapes subcultures in both spoken and unspoken ways. It was also made clear that, if the agenda of emancipation is made a priority across the different touchpoints of advertising, much desired change and transformation could be achieved and there could be a greater level of brand resonance. Furthermore, the project of change and transformation for the betterment

of the queer community needs to be a matter of priority for all decision makers in the value chain and not just some.

In this chapter, the complex matter of the inclusion of diversity is demonstrated by referencing seminal voices and leading scholars in queer advertising, which is contextualised within the literature review chapter of this study (Dorty 1993 Kates 1999; Raymond 2003; Rocha-Rodrigues 2016; Chasin 2017). It also explores efforts made to challenge the status quo by gender scholars through marketing. By locating the history of South Africa's context and sharing contemporary studies that reveal how brands can achieve brand resonance, the study encourages practitioners to be consumer-centred (Keller 2009; Neumeier 2005; 2018). This can be achieved by moving with the evolution of the consumer identity and the causes that matter the most to them, and thereby creating meaningful connections and brand resonance.

The chapter exposes how this endeavour cannot only be championed by agencies but needs the leadership of brand custodians as well to ensure it is an ethos that forms part of their brand identity. This can also only be achieved when all stakeholders in organisations support that mandate through the various touchpoints of brands.

5.2.2 The research aim

As indicated in the beginning of this chapter discussion, the questions in the interview guide aimed at gaining rich insights into the understanding of how gender and queer identity was understood by the participants; and how they included or excluded the voices of queer people in the planning of brand advertisements that resonate. The thematic analysis revealed in many ways how there was an understanding of the nuances involved in gender and queer identity; however, there was still a lack of inclusion of queer voices in the planning of brand advertisements not because there was no desire to be inclusive by agencies. Rather, it was as a result of the many stakeholders involved in ultimately allowing queer voices to be seen and heard through brands. While agencies aimed to be reflective of the society they existed in, it was their clients who determined whether their creative productions were approved and received the go-ahead for syndication across platforms. These productions at times

may have been worked on by team members who identified an opportunity to be inclusive of queer people through characters who portray the community's narratives. However, if a client had not challenged their own social construction of gender and queer identity, it would be seen as an inappropriate advertisement in the context of their consumers who they assumed were not being ready to engage with inclusive advertisements, given the cultural dynamics and Christonormative makeup of the South African society (Butler 1993; Ndzwayiba & Steyn 2019; McEwen 2021).

However, as has been evidenced by recent studies, consumers are evolving and, in order for brands to resonate and build meaningful relationships with them (Keller 2009), brands must start using their platforms and various touchpoints (Enslin 2019 & Neumeier 2020) to connect with consumers on the social issues they care about, which include the advocacy and emancipation of marginalised groups in society such as the LGBTQQIAP+ community (Havas Media Group 2021; Deloitte 2019). Advertising could, therefore, be explored as a vehicle to further implement the effective and authentic inclusion of queer people to drive awareness of their causes, leading towards the emancipation of the community. To achieve this desired outcome, it would need clients and their agencies to collaboratively work on brand communication solutions that will appeal to their consumers and have the necessary impact to change the status quo.

While some effort has been made to drive the narrative around transformation, inclusion, and diversity, a great deal more still needs to be done to ensure that it reflects the lived experiences of all. This was evidenced by the number of debates within the industry (Times Live 2021; Bizcommunity 2020) during the undertaking of this study, which gave impetus to its timing and contribution to the industry. For a shift to occur, an understanding of why it is important for brands to be inclusive needs to be established and the wider practical implications researched with the aim of solving some of the challenges industry experiences with producing brand advertising that resonates. Brand communication planners and creative directors were selected as the participants in this study because they are the ones who plan and produce advertisements.

This study was exploratory in nature, which required a qualitative research approach that comes with the implicit limitation that the findings are not generalisable. However, the thematic analysis and findings do provide a foundation for further studies that are specifically needed within the South African context where related studies are extremely limited. The focus of this study centred on agencies – brand communication planners and creative directors. What became evident in the study is the fear that some brand leaders – marketing directors, marketing managers, and brand managers – have, which inhibited them from being able to traverse into spaces where they do not know what the outcome will be. This was a sentiment that was shared by most of the participants interviewed, which seems to be as a result of many influences, including power relations that lead to fear and an inability to adapt and change.

So, it's quite a challenge to sort of have to bring to the table casting sort of a queer person in a lead role or a queer influencer or a transgender influencer. Because that kind of stuff scares the pants off people and scares the pants off clients because not only do they have their sort of money on the line, they also have their reputation, and I think they don't think like we do. They don't realise that maybe brands that celebrate queer, transgender, sort of non-binary, whatever, they don't realise how much sort of...what is the word? They'd be celebrated for that and I think they're just too afraid to because they're afraid of the backlash.

To gain high-level insight into this result, with a view to proposing research recommendations, I engaged with a team of senior brand and marketing managers leading a portfolio of fashion, beauty, and lifestyle brands at one of South Africa's leading fashion retailers in an hour-long discussion session during September 2021 and at the completion of my study. The fashion industry emerged as one of the categories that most of the interviewed participants suggested to be one that was and should be able to include narratives that speak to broader gender identities. Ethical clearance was received from the Head of Corporate Communications, provided that the organisation and participants remain anonymous. Although not part of the primary research design, I wished to uphold the social constructivism paradigm with reference to truth being subjective and shaped by social and cultural experiences (Burr 2015). This discussion session commenced with a brief reflection on the key research themes to hone in on themes two and three, which centred the research participants' clients and their influence on the production of brand advertisements that resonate.

The discussion that ensued offered insights into ways brand and marketing practitioners (clients) could begin to change the status quo within their organisation and have discussions with their agencies towards planning advertisements for brand resonance.

The engagement with marketing managers revealed five additional insights:

1. **New ways of doing:** The team reasoned that for legacy brands it is often a challenge to include new ways of doing marketing. This is particularly true when what was done before is not seen as “not working” for brands and there exists no need to adopt new approaches. This reflection aligned to theme four (functional versus emotive briefs) of this study and the question relating to the product category that would be aligned to considering queer identities as part of their approach to their brand communication. What the managers did concede, however, is that their market is shifting in terms of how audiences identify and therefore their communication should start being reflective of this. The right approach was aligned to contemporary research led by organisations such as Deloitte (2019) and Havas Media Group (2021).
2. **Institutional fears:** The challenge they indicated they need to address is embedded in the institutional fear that arrests them from doing anything outside of the binary. Butler (1993) refers to this phenomenon as being influenced by power dynamics that thrive unabated to maintain a particular social order which is aligned to themes one (positive and negative connotations to gender and queer identity), two (clients determine the topic and brief), and four (functional versus emotive briefs) of the primary research results. To change this reality, the brand and marketing executives of this fashion retailer indicated that brand leadership advocacy would be required from the top levels of organisations and filtered down to its individual brands and departmental stores so it could be experienced across the brands’ respective touchpoints. This insight aligns with arguments made in contemporary debates and scholarship on the importance of decision making and leadership in organisations being central to driving and

effecting change (Das 2017; Deloitte 2019). It also links to the observations made by agencies on their clients in the primary research that highlighted that clients had other stakeholders they had to account to in their business, thus making it difficult to make decisions that will not be supported at the highest level. Furthermore, if brand leaders indeed believed in it as a cause, they would have to push for its authentic inclusion across the brand's touchpoints to ensure that brand resonance is achieved (Havas Group 2021; Kantar 2019).

3. **Debunking key constructs in briefs:** It emerged that the marketing and brand managers indeed felt that they could do more to unpack the briefs they issued to their agencies, which was connected to the discussions arising in theme two (clients determine the topic and brief) that spoke to the sociographic of consumers and how segmentation is approached by brands. Chief of the things they felt that they could change to achieve the inclusion of all marginalised groups, was in their beauty and fashion brands, a category that arose in theme four of the primary research on brands prone to consider gender and queer identity. They suggested that they could be broader in their consideration set of their segmentation to be inclusive of varying identities. This was precisely because the key target groups they market to include millennials and GenZ who live by the principle of “no judgement” and fluidity. By extension, non-judgement would therefore, include queer identifying audiences, thus challenging stereotypes and using their brands as a vehicle for advocating for change. Objective three (to understand the role the advertising industry could play in the emancipation and liberation of queer people through advertisements that resonate with consumers) aimed to address this emergence and is what theme five (the societal responsibility of advertising) spoke to in this study.
4. **The need for authenticity:** The key callout as part of their retort was to ensure that the work they produced was not merely an exercise in ticking boxes as it would lose its authenticity. This act would lead to consumers calling them out for their inauthenticity. Theme one (positive and negative connotations to gender and queer identity) sought to address the issue of authenticity and was a recurring retort to the initial primary research findings.

5. **Capitalism vs consumer responsibility and purpose:** More profoundly was the acknowledgement of the need to shift from shareholder (capitalism) responsibility to more of a stakeholder focus (consumer) and lead with purpose. Contemporary studies by MINAR (2016), Havas Media Group (2019; 2021), and Dreten et al. (2021) in the literature reviewed spoke specifically to the theme of purpose. As a practical suggestion, this would mean that brands could start having policies that ensure internal change is achieved through the framework of its leadership, the teams that form part of who they are, and then move from there to support various LGBTQQIAP+ organisations and communities, throughout the year, both financially and with programmes designed for them. D'Emilio (2016), in the literature reviewed, specially advanced for the emancipation of the queer community and for brands to not exploit the pink economy for what they can gain from it. In this way, brands can avoid being seen as merely trying to tap into the pink economy with no real salience and resonance built with the community (Houston 2021; Keller 2009). The brand and marketing executives' sentiments in this regard were that for this change to be achieved, they had to begin to do the work of addressing the systemic nature of things and solving challenges from the grassroots level, led by customer research rather than assumptions. This explained their hesitance and resistance at times to pivot, albeit this not being acceptable in the current climate. To achieve brand resonance, they also stated that all role players in the business, and not just marketing teams, needed to be included.

With the above additional insights as the foreground, that bring the relationship between brands and consumers to the spotlight, it becomes more important that the role between agencies and their clients is harnessed. This is precisely because agencies ultimately reflect society and the brand's potential target market, thus tasked with ensuring that the mandate of change, resonance, and transformation is achieved through advertising. This is evidenced both in themes one and two, where participants acknowledge that their role is to strategically advise their clients on the insights that they have garnered from consumers and their psychographics from research, which are far more nuanced than they are often allowed to reflect. It is, however, a

relationship between brands and agencies that constantly needs to be reviewed to ensure that brand resonance is a practice that is brought to life more often in boardrooms and through the various works produced for brands because, as narrated by the participants in the primary research study, while they may bring matters of inclusion and diversity to their client to include queer identifying voices in their planned advertisements, it is the influence and power of clients that prohibits them from being consumer-facing.

Furthermore, with the increasing calls that have been made for brands to be more diverse and representative, a conservative stance may not be one that can be maintained for much longer (Bizcommunity 2020; Houston 2021; Times Live 2021). Rather, an approach that is recommended by Houston (2021), who engaged with various brand leaders in her review of the extent to which brands can truly resonate with queer consumers and be true allies of the LGBTQQIAP+ community, simply changing brand logos during Pride month is not enough or necessarily the right way to go about it. The matter of transformation, diversity, and inclusion needs to be purposively championed. Purpose, and by extension resonance, is achieved when brands are able to undertake the mission of clearly defining *who* they are, *what* they stand for, and showcasing *why* they matter (Neumeier 2005; 2018).

It seems, given the core primary research findings and the additional insights that emerged from the discussion with the brand and marketing managers, there are interrelated factors both affecting agencies and their clients. From an agency practitioner perspective, there is resistance and hesitance to be inclusive of queer voices in the planning and production of advertisements by clients because of their social construction and the desire to focus on achieving the bottom line (financial gain), which is the desired outcome of a successful advertisement and/or campaign. What emerges from their clients' perspective (albeit a single discussion with one leading corporate in a defined industry), however, is that the resistance and hesitance is as a result of institutional fears that have a legacy that has never been successfully challenged across structures and positions. This grim reality following the discussion with both groups of participants reveals that, while there are strides that have been made to overcome the lack of inclusion and diversity to ensure that brands resonate

with broader consumers, much more still needs to be done. For this change to be achieved, it would need the involvement of all stakeholders to challenge the current state of the entire ecosystem and take the necessary steps towards ensuring there is a shift to realise the importance of brand resonance as a possible framework to achieve business objectives.

Below is a Brand Resonance Systemic Loop that aims to highlight the structural challenges within the industry that could be explored as a tool to begin to peel the layers involved in achieving brand resonance.

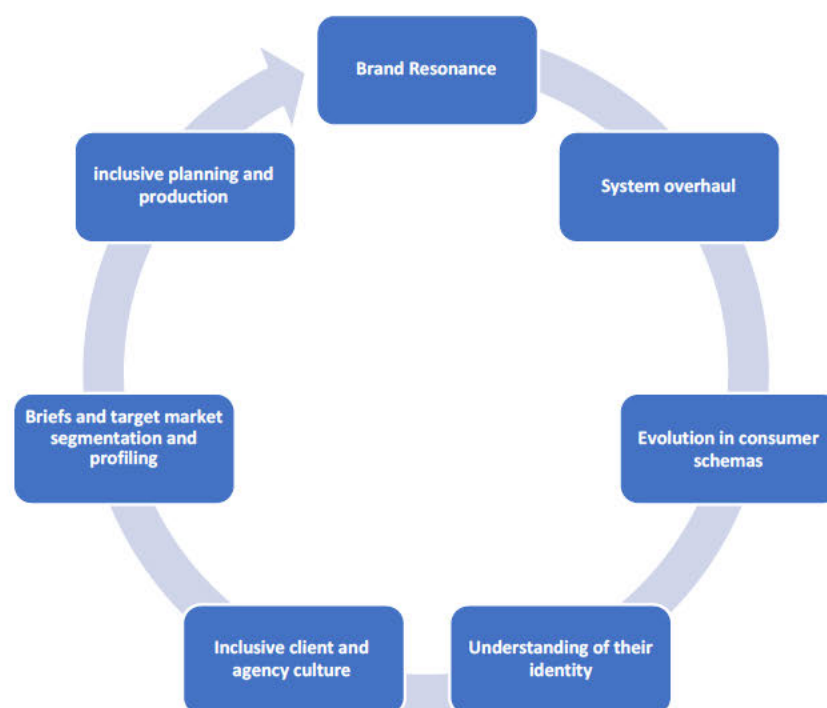


Figure 7 Brand Resonance Systemic Loop

Figure 7 presents a Systemic Loop on how Brand Resonance can be further achieved in the context of the primary research conducted, the themes that emerged from the analysis of the participants' responses in this study, and the discussion with the brand marketing managers from a leading fashion retail company. It comprises and proposes seven interconnected steps that can be explored by the industry and further research to ensure brand resonance is ultimately achieved.

The first step refers to a *System Overhaul*, which was informed by the first theme and its subthemes (positive and negative connotations to gender and queer identity) and the first two additional insights (new ways of doing and institutional fears) from my discussion with the brand and marketing managers where it emerged that the challenges faced by the industry, as it relates to the aim and objectives of this study, were interlinked and complex. These challenges did not merely involve one stakeholder to resolve them but needed all decision makers in advertising involved to come together to change the status quo. In fact, the matter needed both brand and agency stakeholders who, within their own structures, had various other role players to get involved in the project of transforming the industry and achieving resonance with all its consumers through their brand communication, which comprises advertisements they created. From a brand perspective, the project of transformation would involve brand marketing executives and decision makers in leadership positions clearly defining their purpose and whom they exist for. This would need to be led by insights on who their target profile is and understanding the things they care about as a way of integrating them into their brand communication strategies to achieve brand resonance (Kantar 2019; Havas Media Group 2021). From an agency perspective, it would further involve ensuring that the teams working on briefs from their clients are diverse, inclusive, and reflective of the society they exist in. Furthermore, they would need to challenge the fears of their clients relating to exploring new ways of approaching brand communication to achieve brand resonance with their current and new consumers. This they would be able to achieve by keeping abreast with the latest contemporary research studies produced by contemporary scholars and practitioners that are armed with insights they could use to lead their clients to new and unexplored terrains.

The second and third steps relate to *Consumer Schema* and understanding of their *Nuanced Identities* and are linked to theme two (clients determine the topic and brief) and insight three (debunking key constructs in briefs). These two insights reveal that the appreciation of the developments occurs not only in industry but in the consumer schema in terms of their more nuanced identities as evidenced by research conducted by various institutions (Havas Media Group 2021; Deloitte 2019; Kantar 2019; Bizcommunity 2020), which would allow brands and industry to evolve and create

brand communication strategies and advertisements that are more diverse and inclusive of marginalised groups and identities. The returns of doing this would ensure brands achieve resonance and build meaningful relationships with their consumers that would ultimately breed loyalty and affinity to brands (Keller 2009).

Fourthly, *Inclusive Client and Agency Culture*, which is linked to theme five of the primary research, would allow both stakeholders to achieve a lot more in terms of working closely together with more diverse people in terms of background and identity that would lead to the fifth step where practitioners would be able to interrogate briefs with more vigour, thus allowing industry to see segmentation in a less egalitarian manner and create relevant strategies and brand advertisement productions that resonate. These two steps are interrelated to themes three (the development of advertisements and participants' role assignments) and four (functional versus emotive briefs) and additional insight five (the need for authenticity) from the discussion with the marketing managers.

The sixth step ultimately relates to inclusive planning and production, which essentially highlights the need to further collaborate with queer people to ensure relevant strategies and advertisement production, which would lead to the seventh and final stage of brand resonance where a relationship and emotional connection is finally established and built with consumers (Keller 2009). These link back to theme five (the societal responsibility of advertising) and additional insight five (capitalism vs consumer responsibility and purpose).

5.3 Research Recommendations

The above systemic view proposes a lens that could allow the industry to reflect on how it needs an overhaul in terms of challenging what has always been known about how to approach advertising from a functional perspective to one that resonates with all its consumers. In this way, it would be able to develop strategies and produce advertisements that shape practice, academe, and society, which is what this study aimed to achieve through the research purpose and question. While it could not answer all research areas that must be investigated, it provides a starting point from

which South African queer scholars and practitioners can begin to explore further on the issue of inclusion and marginality in advertising, ultimately leading to brand resonance.

Future studies aiming to understand the realities of South Africa's brand managers' perspectives in the alcohol and beverage, banking, beauty, fashion, fast foods, lifestyle, and technology sectors, as mentioned by most of the participants, would be vital in providing further insights on the plausibility of this shift and it is a new way on how advertising should be done. Closely linked to this research area would be to also understand why legacy brands tend to struggle to adapt to the evolving consumer, especially if this is what their consumers are calling for, as evidenced by contemporary literature (Kantar 2019; Deloitte 2019; Havas Media Group 2021). The findings from studies of this nature would further provide insights on how such resistance might be harmful to brands who are hoping to resonate with millennials. This area of study would further need to investigate the leading causes behind institutional fears and how these can perhaps be addressed by highlighting issues emanating from a brand leadership and structure perspective where decisions are made. The system loop is also proposed as a viewpoint from which we can begin to see the interconnected nature of the structures that govern organisations and culture.

Future researchers should also examine the following areas that the study could not answer:

- How the South African public responds to diverse gender- and sexuality-inclusive advertisements and how the authentic use of queer bodies in advertisements could be further seen as a way of promoting social cohesion. This is precisely because of what the reviewed literature has suggested about the dominant role of social teaching in society and its influence on the role perceptions society understands male and female bodies need to enact (McEwen 2021). The answer to this research question would further allow the industry the ability to understand its impact on society by shaping and influencing mutating cultural norms and practices, thus achieving or highlighting the failure to achieve what MINAR (2016) terms Goodvertising.

- Other studies could also consider the lived experiences of brand marketing managers in the industries mentioned in theme four and further probe into what kind of challenges they face regarding achieving brand resonance with the queer community through their brand communication. Steps two and three in the Systemic Loop alludes to the importance of this evolution, based on a set primary research findings and a discussion with select brand and marketing managers, which were suitable to meet the objectives of this exploratory study.
- Future research could also consider what interventions are enacted by brands and agencies to ensure inclusivity is achieved and who are the custodians responsible for ensuring that these are implemented on a day-to-day basis in the brand experiences consumers have. This would need to include the implementation of programmes that would allow for workspaces to be sensitised to matters pertaining to the community, relating to language and terms to be used when referring to particular identities. The Systemic Loop further highlights how this sensitisation is an integral part of a systemic overhaul.
- Furthermore, how can brands and agencies go about creating harmony in organisational cultures that allow employees to express their gender identity and ensure that it is included in the work they produce and to attract talent for diversity and inclusivity in the brand, marketing, and creative industries? Step four in the Systemic Loop provides an impetus for why inclusive work cultures contribute to the better delivery of brand solutions that are considered and resonate.
- How do brand communication planners and creative directors create advertisements that resonate with all consumers while not alienating any segment of society? This is particularly key when looking at the themes arising from themes two (clients determine the topic and brief) and three (the development of advertisements and participants' role assignments).

- How do brands understand the categorisation of sociographics, particularly when looking at theme two (clients determine the topic and brief) and step three in the Systemic Loop, and how do their advertising agencies respond to briefs issued by them specifically when analysing segmentation?
- Furthermore, researchers should also investigate the extent to which differentiation can be achieved through brands electing to support key social causes as part of their mandate that resonates with key populations. Such studies would perhaps introduce more insights on what can be achieved through policies and programmes that can be explored in organisations to achieve transformation. In the context of this study's research aim and objectives and the reviewed literature, this would be an advocacy on how brands should not merely tap into the queer community's struggle to benefit from the pink pound (Disemelo 2015). Rather, it should show how the adoption of societal causes, such as that of the LGBTQQIAP+ community, through purpose orientation could lead to societal change through brands which would in turn yield brand equity.
- How can more established brands use their positionality to shift perspectives in practice and society that will encourage them to be more inclusive of all parts of society?
- Why South African brands and industries should start collaborating with consumers, particularly millennials and GenZ, in creating meaningful and impactful brand solutions to ensure they resonate more?
- How can the power dynamics between clients and their agencies be resolved and used progressively to avoid the oppressive reproductions of marginality and exclusion in advertising? Step four of the Systemic Loop in this study proposes an inclusive and diverse working culture.

The theoretical contribution of this study can be in Berlo's (1960) Sender, Message, Channel, and Receiver model where we can understand how advertising is conducted,

and we can begin to see an opportunity through the findings of this study of how it can be improved to be inclusive of consumers. What has been found through the literature reviewed on brand resonance is the importance of being inclusive of consumer insights in order to achieve brand resonance at the highest level (Kapferer 1992; Keller 2009; MINAR 2016; Ormsher's 2021; Sutcliffe 2021). This would ultimately mean that, in the model that the advertising industry is based on, there is a gap that needs to be filled insofar as testing the resonance of the messaging and its effectiveness when it leaves the sender (proposed insert in orange) with the queer community. Once brand resonance is achieved at this stage, it would mean that the message can be syndicated across channels after which the receiver will engage with it. With a much broader audience, there would be another opportunity to ensure brand resonance is achieved at its peak, hence the last and final stage is proposed to reinforce its presence.

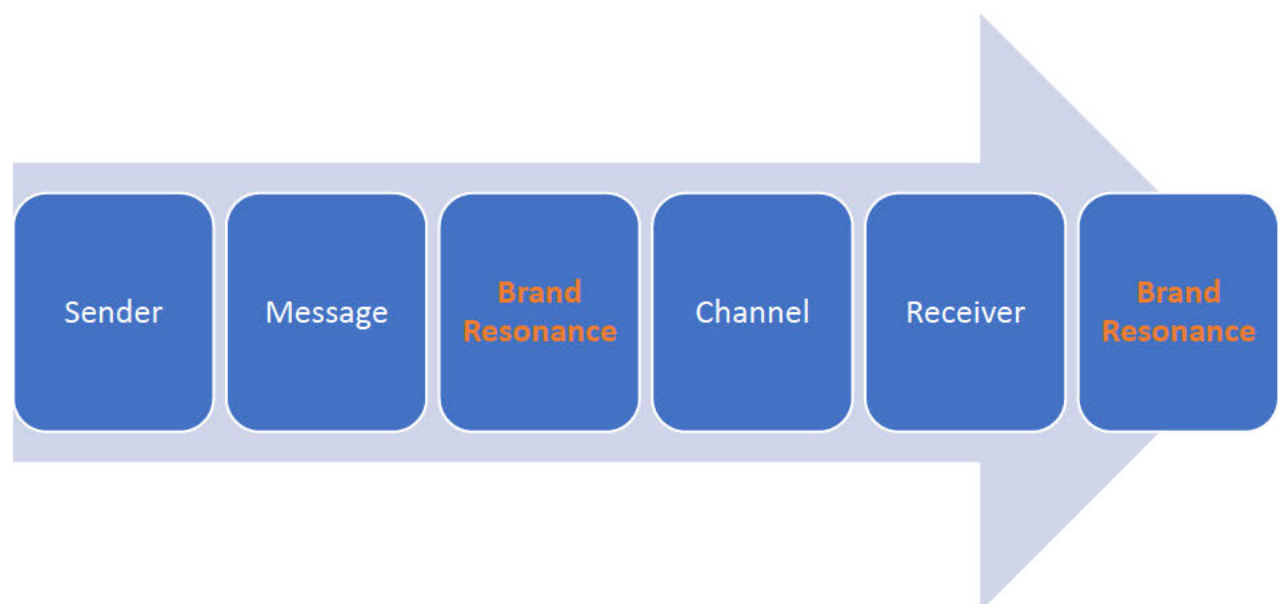


Figure 8 A revised and proposed new version to Berlo's (1960) Sender, Message, Channel, and Receiver model to suit contemporary developments within the industry and ensure brand resonance with consumers.

This is even more crucial for the queer community who are often represented through a single lens when in fact there is a much wider spectrum, as is evidenced in the reviewed literature, thematic analysis, and additional insights gained. While it may add another layer to the work conducted by brand communication planners and creative directors, it will ensure that a greater level of due diligence is conducted towards

achieving inclusivity and, ultimately, brand resonance. It was this study's aim to contribute towards the sparse literature as a notable lacuna that documents the lived experiences of South African practitioners relating to queer marginality and brand resonance.

5.4 Limitations and Delimitations

According to Kriukow (2020), the identification of the limitations and delimitations of a researcher's study is not by any means a way of discrediting the work that has been put into the study. Rather, it is a way of demonstrating critical reflections of how far the study could go and further assist future researchers in finding better ways to improve on the study and the topic being investigated (Kriukow 2020). As such, the limitations of my study were informed by my selected research methodology, which was qualitative and exploratory in nature. Therefore, the selection of my sample was purposive with the intent of answering to a particular set of objectives that would be used to gain rich insights on a particular segment of the industry with the intention of initiating dialogue on the issue of marginality, queer identity, and resonance (Maxwell 2008). The findings therefore were limited to the group of participants engaged with and were by no means generalisable. They were, however, collated as a way of contributing to contemporary debates taking place with the intent of leading to social change in practice, academe, and society.

From a research methodology perspective, I relied on a critical qualitative method that would allow me to reflect on the injustices and marginality of those often overlooked. However, to be able to have a more rounded discussion and contribution to academe and practice, a mixed methods approach with a larger sample across industries would allow the study to have more of an influence on society at large. Furthermore, the study only conducted once-off interviews with participants and could have adopted a more longitudinal approach to have more depth over a period that could have more researcher insights to contribute to the industry as a whole.

The delimitations of this study were informed by the aims and objectives, which were focussed on a particular set of outcomes. As such, my focus was not on the broader

industry. Rather, it was on brand communication planners and creative directors who answered to a particular set of questions that were interlinked to arrive at a rich set of insights. The study aimed to ensure that the social construction and lived professional experience of the purposive sample were critically reflected on to understand why things were the way they were in the industry. This understanding would offer the industry an opportunity to reflect objectively with the aim of improving and addressing the status quo. Therefore, focus groups with brand and marketing managers across different industries might also be worth considering in further research.

5.5 Significance of the Study

The study was conducted with 10 participants comprising 5 brand communication planners and 5 creative directors from 5 leading South African advertising agencies, as informed by my sample framework and the listings from AdFocus who provided valuable insights to this study (AdFocus 2019). The insights the participants provided were invaluable as they highlighted what is a deeply rooted challenge regarding the representation of marginalised groups in advertising, particularly relating to the spectrum of the queer community. The lack of representation, diversity, and inclusion is, furthermore, one that gained much prominence during the commencement of the study, thus making it relevant to its time and offering valuable insights to the industry.

The literature reviewed further provided insights on some of the reasons why the issue of representation, diversity, and inclusion in advertising continues to thrive unabated, thus not achieving brand resonance. It showed the deeply entrenched nature of colonialism and marginalisation and how these constructs still find their way into different industries, including that of advertising, on which this study's focus was centred. Research studies aimed at addressing some of these issues relating specifically to the queer community were mostly focussed on global countries outside of Africa with a methodological approach that sought to address the impact queer advertising had on different societies. This study identified a lacuna wherein the genesis of the advertiser's thinking (social constructions) needed to be contextualised within their lived professional experiences. Therefore, the main aim of the study was to understand the social construction of gender in South African advertising brand

communication planners and creative directors and how they included queer people in the planning for brand resonance in advertising. This was answered through a methodological approach, which was qualitative in nature, that allowed for the gaining of rich insights from a South African perspective.

The study, therefore, adds significance to the body of scholarly work conducted in the advertising industry, challenges practitioners to think more deeply about issues of representation towards achieving resonance with consumers, and challenges the society at large to debunk why and how it has come to have the views it has on gender and queer identity. With increasing calls for brands to become more meaningful and purpose-driven towards the causes that their consumers care about, the study contributes towards these contemporary debates with practical suggestions that could be explored by the industry for application.

5.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study set out to seek an understanding of the South African advertising industry as it relates to gender and queer identity. It also set out to determine the extent to which queer voices are included in the planning for brand resonance in the production of brand advertisements. The following objectives were further set out to guide the focus and outcomes of the study:

- To explore brand communication planners' and creative directors' social constructions of gender and queer identity;
- To establish how South African brand communication planners and creative directors include queer identities in the planning of brand advertisements to achieve brand resonance; and
- To understand the role the advertising industry could play in the emancipation and liberation of queer people through advertisements that resonate with consumers.

The objectives were partially answered with certain areas that can be further examined by future researchers as put forward in the recommendation section of this study. The

study concludes by trying to understand the extent to which the industry can play a role in the emancipation of marginalised groups such as the queer community. What emerged from the findings is a deeply rooted and systemic reality that needs to be addressed and redressed by all stakeholders in the industry.

In response to the research question and objectives, it is concluded that, in participating brand communication planners' and creative directors' social construction of gender, there is an understanding that gender is fluid, which in many ways supports some of the findings arising in the literature reviewed. This understanding also shows how there has been an evolution in practitioners' thinking, but the nuances of the different queer identities are not extensively understood or actively represented in advertising, which impact brand building and the actualisation of brand resonance.

Queer people are marginalised as their lived experiences and the narratives of external queer voices are not utilised in the production of advertisements and, when needed, this task is usually fulfilled, to a limited extent, by internally employed, queer-identifying staff. The participants, however, acknowledge that, as architects of culture, brand advertising and their clients have a seminal social responsibility to be inclusive and representative of marginalised segments of society, such as the queer community. To achieve broader brand resonance and equity requires agencies to advocate more forcefully for brand leaders to partner with them, to create and action authentic queer community reflection in their brand productions and ultimately meaningful brands. This could help raise awareness and contribute towards building a more just and equitable society.

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ANNEXURE A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

RESEARCH PROTOCOL

INTERVIEW DISCUSSION GUIDE: GENDER & QUEER IDENTITY STUDY

A. WELCOMING & BACKGROUND [5 mins]

Good day (*mention the participant's name*). Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. My name is Khangelani Dziba. I am a Masters' student in Brand Leadership at Vega Institute. As part of the completion of my degree I am conducting research to **gain an in-depth understanding of how and to what extent South African advertising strategists, creative directors and brand managers in advertising agencies consider gender and queer identity in the curation and production of advertisements.**

Kindly note that participation in this study is **voluntary**. May I ask you to please complete the attached consent form and declaration of confidentiality sent to you via email. You and your organisation will not, under any circumstances, be identified in the report of this study. I am required to **record** the interview, but this is only to ensure that my analysis is reliable as I will not be able to remember or make notes of everything that we will discuss.

The interview will take about an **hour**. And remember, there are **no right or wrong answers**; it is only your honest opinion that counts! Do you have any questions?

B. PARTICIPANT BACKGROUND [5 mins]

1. Just to kick off our conversation, please tell me a bit more about yourself, your **experience** in the advertising agency and your **current role**?

C. TOP-OR-MIND ASSOCIATIONS [10 mins]

2. What are your **first thoughts, words, emotions** that come to mind when I say **gender identity**? No explanations – just mention whatever comes to mind. It can be positive or negative!
3. And then, what are your **first thoughts, words, emotions** that come to mind when I say **queer identity**? No explanations – just mention whatever comes to mind. It can be positive or negative!

For the purposes of this study gender and queer identity is seen within a spectrum and non-gender conforming. Is there anything you would like to add or change to this definition?

D. OVERALL ATTITUDE [5 mins]

4. How **important is the topic** of gender and queer identity in the process of producing an advert within [agency's name]?
 - *Probe*: What makes it important vs. not?

E. THE AD DEVELOPMENT PROCESS [20 min]

5. What are the typical **steps in the process of producing an advert** that your company follows? Please describe it from the **brief to delivery** of the final product.
[Interviewer to note broad steps]

Let's stand still on **each step** of this process [*moderator to probe with each step*]:

- What is **your role** during this step?
- To what extent does gender considerations (i.e., decisions about sex, gender, and sexuality) come into play during [this step]?

- Which **role players** influence gender considerations (i.e., decisions about sex, gender, and sexuality) during [this step]? [*Probe **what** they do and **how** they influence it*]
- [Remember to probe the **role of client** during each step if not mentioned spontaneously].
- How would that **work within the context of queer identity**? In other words, how do queer people get included during this process (if at all)? Please give examples where possible.

F. THE ROLE OF PRODUCT CATEGORY AND BRAND [5 min]

6. Are certain **brands or product categories** more **prone to consider queer identity** in their ad campaigns? Which are these? Again, I will not identify any brand in my study, just categories.
 - What makes queer identity important for [category/brand]? In other words, how does queer identity fit into [category/brand]? [*Probe for each*]. Please provide some practical examples where possible.

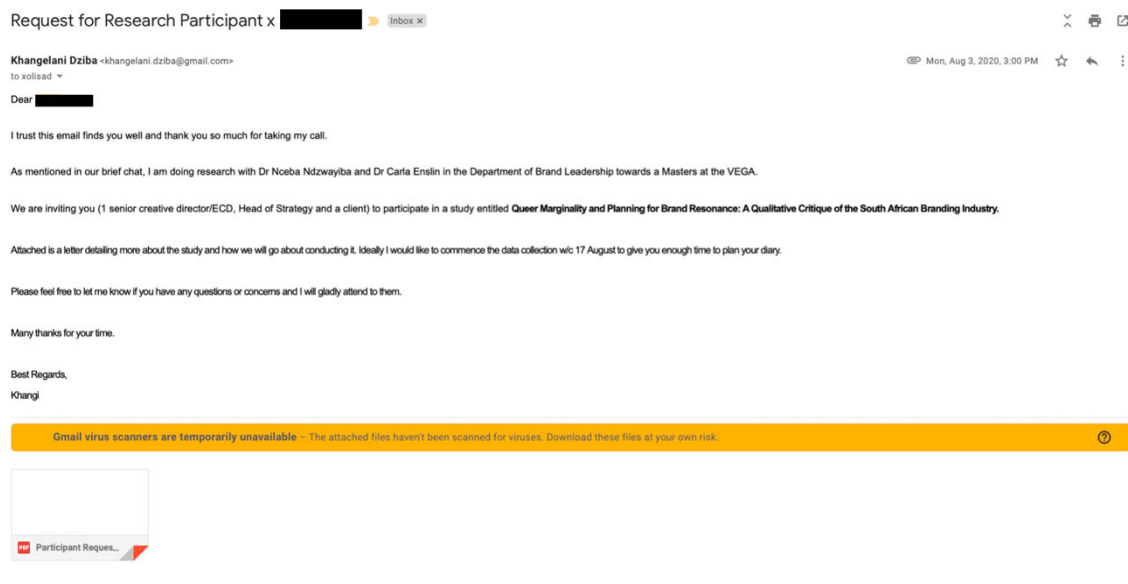
G. PARTICIPANT RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION [10 min]

7. **What role** do you think advertising practitioners can play in raising more awareness about queer identities?
8. **How** would you say you as an individual, and the teams you work with could ensure that queer voices and lived experiences are factored in brand advertising?
9. Is there **anything else** you would like to share with me on this subject?

Thank the participant and end discussion

ANNEXURE B: RESEARCHER CORRESPONDENCE WITH PARTICIPANTS

PARTICIPANT EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE



ANNEXURE C: INFORMATION SHEET

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Ethics clearance reference number:

Research permission reference number:

01 August 2020

Title: A study of the relationship between Brand Communication Strategies and Queer Identity

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Khangelani Dziba and I am doing research with Dr Nceba Ndzwayiba and Dr Carla Enslin in the Department of Brand Leadership towards a Master's at the VEGA. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled ***A study of the relationship between Brand Communication Strategies and Queer Identity***.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

I am conducting this research to find out how best to challenge heteronormative assumptions about queer identity in the marketing and brand communications industry. I reason that the reproduction of heteronormativity can be attributed to the invisibilisation of queer bodies and muting of queer narratives in mainstream economy, media and brand communication strategies. This persisting queer marginalisation results in a discourse in which industry players speak at, about and on behalf of, but without the queer voices. In this proposed study I seek to contribute towards the challenging and transformation of this abounding Eurocentric heteronormative gender binary model so as to advance a new social reality that is congruent with the universal values of equality and justice for all.

WHY YOU ARE BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

As a colleague and active participant in the marketing and brand communications industry myself, I have chosen to approach you to be a part of this study because you are a prominent voice and leader in the industry and your insights would contribute profoundly to the success of this study. The study is particularly interested in the lived experiences of industry players and supporters and as such, will be limited to a group of 10 participants all of whom I have worked with before or have been recommended by fellow industry colleagues.

THE NATURE OF YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study will involve audio and video taping to keep track of the contents discussed and will follow a set of semi-structured questions to guide our discussion. The questions will cover your understanding and interpretation of the brand communications industry and that of queer identity thereby linking the two to understand how you see them play hand-in-hand in the work you do. The interview should not be more than an hour at a place of convenience for you.

WITHDRAWING FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason should the need arise.

INFORMATION CONVEYED AND YOUR IDENTITY CONFIDENTIALITY

You have the right to insist that your name will not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, will know about your involvement in this research. No one will be able to connect you to the answers you give, your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you

will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings

For data analyses purposes, *a transcriber will be commissioned and have access to the footage. However, confidentiality will be maintained by issuing a confidentiality agreement for signing.* Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records. Your anonymous data may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles and/or conference proceedings. Should the need arise, your privacy will be protected in any publication of the information.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher and the school for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet at VEGA for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. After this period, hard copies will be shredded and/or electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software programme.

PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY

Participation in this study will be voluntary and as such, no payments or incentives will be issued to any participant.

STUDY ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the postgraduate department in Brand Leadership, VEGA. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Khangelani Dziba [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Dr Nceba Ndzwayiba [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] and/or Dr Carla Enslin [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.

ANNEXURE D: CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the one-on-one interview with recording devices (video and voice recorder).

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname..... (please print)

Participant Signature.....Date.....

Researcher's Name & Surname.....(please print)

Researcher's signature.....Date.....

ANNEXURE E: ANALYSED TRANSCRIPT EXAMPLE WITH NOTES

C	F	I Hello, xxx. P Hello. How are you? I Fine and you. P Good, thanks. Sorry, is my camera on? Excuse me. I It's off. P There we go. I Ah, stunning. It's nice to finally put a face to the name. P Sure. I How is the day going? P It's alright, thank you. It's a little bit back to back, as it always is with these calls. There's no travel time allowed for anything. It's like the next one starts as the next one ends. I It's like we're always on. P Totally. I Awesome. So, I'm gonna get straight into it because I don't want to waste too much of your time. P Go for it.	
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		I Of course, as you know, my name is Khangi and I'm a masters' student at Vega working towards my brand leadership masters'. And, of course, the topic that I'm looking into is really just trying to understand and get an in-depth understanding of brand communication planners as well as creative directors' understanding of queer identity and gender and how that plays a role in, I suppose, the curation of advertisements. The interview should be about sixty minutes or so. And it's voluntary, of course. P How long did you say? Sixty minutes? I Ja. About sixty minutes. I've got a list of – P [INDISTINCT – VOICE CLARITY – 00:01:27] check you've got me for sixty minutes, though. I It's from half 'til half past [CROSSTALK]. P Okay, you're good. I And, basically, I've got five questions, all of which have sub-questions if I need to probe a little bit more. So, it won't be too laborious. Cool. So, I think maybe let's start off with unpacking a little bit more about your role in terms of what you do on a day-to-day basis. P What would you like to know? I So, what is your role at xxx and what do you do?	
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	P I guess [INDISTINCT – VOICE CLARITY] I'm an executive [INDISTINCT – VOICE CLARITY] – I Sorry, I lost you there. P I'm overseeing... Just hold on. Just give me one sec. Am I back? I Ja. I can hear you now. It's fine if you want to switch off the camera. We can just [CROSSTALK – 00:02:33]. P No, I don't mind. My computer switches networks sometimes, which is a bit odd. I don't know why it does it. So, basically, executive creative director means you are...you've taken a little bit of a step away from being purely involved in all the creative work on a day-to-day basis and overseeing the actual nitty-gritty. You have an overall view of the quality control of the agency, making sure the work is of a level and on brand. You kind of sit at sort of a...definitely more of an overseeing role than an absolute hands-on creator of work. So, that's sort of three quarters of your job. And the other half to...sorry, other quarter, sometimes half, I guess we're all working way beyond a hundred percent at the moment, is looking at the administration of the business from a creative point of view. So, staff hiring, policies, salaries, fuck, dude, just literally the business end of the creative side, which is kind	Section one: Most senior in this position at xxx overseeing to quality control and the administrative side of things of the business unit.
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		of a boring role, it's not what you wanna be doing. Like how is the air-conditioning affecting the vibe in the agency? Let's have a discussion around that. What's the policy on this? So, there's a lot of broader business conversations that are being had that you have to sit in and make sure that there's a creative lens on it in terms of the way it's solved and that it benefits...the overall creative output of the company is not compromised by those sort of business decisions as well. So, that's the second half of it. How do you make sure the company is run in a way that is, I guess, suitable for good creative outputs and then the other side of it is making sure that the good creative output is achieved when working? There's a lot there. I could probably answer the question in a better way if I had to say it again now. If I had to start at the beginning. I No worries. There's no right or wrong answers, so we just keep going. And how long have you been doing the work that you've been doing? P <u>Look, I've been in the industry now for about twenty years. I started in nineteen ninety-eight. So, let's say twenty-two years. I started on the project management side of the industry then left, went and studied copy and</u>	Worth noting the succession plan of employees at xxxx who all have started off at Account Managers and are now Partners at the agency. Section two: conceptions of gender and queer identity Participant F's conception of gender and queer identity can be categorised in two categories. The first relates to his understanding of it being fluid. In it being fluid, there
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	<u>design, and then came back as a writer. And then as I've progressed, got more to a management role, and just sort of doing, like I said, less of the day-to-day actual writing and art direction and design and more just focussing on the running of the people who are doing that and the management of that.</u> I Cool. We're gonna get into the second part of the interview, which I'd like for us to spend about ten minutes or so, and it really looks at what kind of...<u>what are the first thoughts, feelings, words that come to you when I ask you about gender identity?</u> There's no right or wrong. It could be negative. It could be positive. Shoot your shot. P I'm just tryna think of how to answer it in the right way 'cause I don't wanna ramble, I wanna give you good answers you can use. 'Cause I imagine you want this information to be succinct. I It's absolutely fine. Anything that comes to mind first. P Okay, no. So, <u>I guess my first side of it is there's no negative or positive feeling to it either way.</u> I think that for me the studio...and I'm looking at this from a studio lens and a creative lens. <u>I think the more diverse a studio is based on the make-up of the people, the stronger and more diverse the work is. So. I'm quite</u>	are certain nuances he acknowledges he needs to get right both in terms of his professional career and the people he works with. This relates to the theme of hiring more diverse people as part of his team so that they are able to produce the best work possible for their clients but will also resonate with audiences. The second part to his answer relates to the correct use of pronouns – he/him, she/her, they/them etc. He views this as insecurity on his part and emphasises the importance of getting this aspect right in the work that he does that often exposes him to queer people, particularly on recent projects worked on. In a way, his answer links back to Participant A who spoke about the importance of self-correction, awareness and education. NB: The example given is precisely what this study is about and is really about understanding that we cannot apply the same brush strokes to represent queer identities. NB: This shift that is happening has been informed by what audiences/consumers are ready to see more of.
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	<u>into having all sorts of people or all sorts of orientations. races. genders. etcetera. because I think overall it makes a more diverse studio which means the work is more diverse.</u> But the same guys doing the same...from the same background, all the work's gonna look the same. So, that's the first thing. I'm quite into it and I like what it brings to my studio. That's the first thing. <u>The second thing for me though is a slight negative but not a negative in the way that you think. It does expose a little bit of insecurity in myself just in terms that I'm not sure how to always best address or handle subject matter with people.</u> So, are you saying he or she? How do you call a person? How do you address a person without being offensive? And it's not a negative, it's just it does expose me a little bit just in terms of my knowledge and my ability to be not a shit person in dealing with it and to be sensitive. So, that's a personal insecurity but it's not a negative slant or feeling towards anything. It's a personal thing that I need to fix. I Sure, and – P And [INDISTINCT – VOICE CLARITY – 00:07:49] <u>just to give you a practical example. We're working on a new commercial with xxxx at the moment and we</u>	It is interestingly notable that gender and queer identity in this scenario have to be unpacked in order for them to make sense or else they can be confused to mean the same thing. It goes to shows how when not quite understood they could easily be conflated which is what scholars like, Tamele, McKween, Ndzwayiba and Steyn warn against. NB: Understanding of queer identity can be summarised in his initial answer albeit he had to be guided. NB: It is interesting how this part of the discussion regarding the use of the word queer unlocks much discussion in terms of its meaning for the community as well as those who are outside of it. Which could probably explain the sensitivity around it and why some people shy away from it because it conjures up different feelings
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		<u>are...in the commercial. we're dealing with a lot of how do we showcase different people in this ad? So. how do we showcase someone who is straight? How do we show someone who is gay? How do we show someone who is non-binary? How do we show them in ways that don't point a finger at the people but we allow them to be portrayed as themselves in a normalised situation? It's quite tricky.</u> And then when you start having conversations with directors and people are being called he or she or then people are they and you're like, oh, God, this is so...it's a minefield of things you've gotta be careful of. And I guess that's where the industry finds itself right now is how is it shaping around this new dimension. It's interesting. I Sjoel. So, would you say the same feelings apply or what would you say your views and feelings are around queer identity then? Because we've just addressed gender identity, now we move into queer identity. P To help me, could you define what you mean by queer identity? And then I can give you an answer on what I feel about it. So, what's your definition of that? I Sure. So, for this particular study, queer identity and gender identity are viewed as very sort of nebulous	and emotions for people from different generations who associate different meanings to it. NB: This discussion between myself and the participant emphasises John D'Emilio stance and advocacy for the positive use of the word QUEER. He argues that it needs to be positive and empowering. The conversation is proof point of how when we take time to educate one another about each other's worldview. Section three: overall attitude
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	constructs. So, from a sex perspective, it's very much biological. If we look at issues of gender, we look at whether you identify as gay, straight, non-binary. And then from a sexuality perspective it would be more who do you find attractive sexually? Who do you end up with? P And that is the queer element of what you're asking me? I Yes. P For me, there's no issue there for me at all. It's still the initial part. It's like what's the right way to be respectful and acknowledging people that are different orientations. For me, who you're attracted to is less of an issue. That is who it is. It doesn't matter. But it's how do I make you feel in my company? Are you being respected? Are you being seen? Those are more important and I think those are the insecurities I have which apply from the previous part still. Once you move on to who you're into, it's irrelevant. I don't have to address who you're into. That's quite plain to see. You know what I mean? I Sure. And there's obviously...as my literature review showcases actually, the usage of the word queer has definitely found itself evolving over the years in terms of it no longer just being a derogatory	NB: Herein again features the theme of normalization/naturalization. Key in this retort is remembering to be inclusive of all. NB: Interesting how the conservative are being carefully considered in Participant F's response. I think from a critical theorist perspective this may be a bit problematic in that it sounds too considerate of the comfort of cis-gender folk at the expense of the community. This rationalization does however make sense given that we are part of a diverse audience in South Africa. NB: Workplaces as safe spaces to be able to fully bring oneself fully is a key theme that has emerged throughout. Secondly, queer people/allies need to be able to work in spaces that celebrate them and allow them to be able to reflect themselves in the work they do. If this is true for agencies, surely then it should be true for brands in South Africa.
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		word but it's used, in a way, to drive advocacy and to showcase visibility of these all these different spectrum [sic] of people that actually exist and sometimes are erased from conversations and representation across different platforms. P <u>I do think that word needs to be unpacked a bit more for a broader audience though because I think, based on what you've said around it being a derogatory thing of someone being queer...and I could be totally ignorant on this but...and please correct me if I'm wrong 'cause I'd love to learn through this interview as well but queer is definitely an older term associated with two males as opposed to less of a gay female couple. for argument's sake. And I think a lot of the broader audience who are older and maybe not having conversations like this or dealing with jobs that I'm dealing with. let's say older people. when the word queer is being used as a unifying word or an educational work now in media and discussion. I feel it might still have that same connotation that's just around being gay specifically. I Absolutely. And [CROSSTALK – 00:12:04] –</u>	This discussion on the importance of gender and queer identity in this discussion is addressed in two parts. One: from an industry perspective and consciousness around how to represent the queer community whilst the second part speaks to the importance of workplaces being liberal enough for people to bring themselves to work. Section four: Ad development Similarities in terms of agency process is very much the same.
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		<u>P Two gay men. So, somehow, that education needs to happen on a broader level.</u> <u>I Ja. And which is why queer [CROSSTALK] –</u> <u>P And probably the people aren't willing to engage with that content matter as well, to be honest.</u> <u>I And which is why queer scholars keep advocating for its usage in the right kind of context in order for it to get rid of this negative connotation that is around it. So, we're very much of aware of that. Cool. I'm gonna get into the third part which really looks at [CROSSTALK] –</u> P How am I doing? I I think you're doing well. Keep at it. It's natural. I like the way it's just flowing. The third part really just looks at how important is the topic of gender and queer identity in the process of creating an advertisement within xxx stable. P <u>I guess there's two parts to that now. So, I think you've gotta split it out into what the creative output is. So, in the ad that you make, are you portraying the right message? Are you doing it in a positive way? Are you doing it in a way that's not pointing people out and making them feel isolated, making...and, I guess in a sense, normalising so</u>	NB: Herein in this process lays the opportunity to bring in the discussion on gender and queer identity by way of unpacking demographics. NB: Brand planners are key role players in all agencies.
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		that this isn't a weird thing for another...and weird is not what it is, I use weird in terms of contextualising the audience who are gonna look at it and think this is actually okay. this is how the world is and I need to be more accepting of this. I think that's what you want from your output. You want a conservative person to look at an ad and go...or a piece of communication and go, oh, look, it's totally normal for that to happen. I need to adjust myself to realise that that's normal and I shouldn't be reacting the way I do to these kinds of things. So, I guess that's the responsibility that we have in terms of what we put out, making this normal for everyone else and everyone going, oh, jeez, I shouldn't be reacting the way I am. So, that's my goal in the work. That's the first part. The second part though is how do you...how does gender play a role in creating that work? So, in the environment that these ads are being conceptualised, discussed, spoken about, people of varying genders, sexual orientations, etcetera, need to feel that they have the environment to actually voice their opinions and create work that is authentic and, if the environments that we work in is not welcoming of all people, then those people will never have a voice and then the	NB: Recurring theme around the consideration of queer identities
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		work will never be diverse and it will never be authentic, therefore the ad that gets put out will never be normalising things and making people question the way they are. So, it's two points. You have a responsibility to make sure the work is putting the right message out and normalising everyone else rather than making them feel outcasts and not part of society and not able to be themselves, first part. Second part is you need to have an environment that allows people to be themselves and have their views so that the work can be created like that. So, those are the two things for me that are important. I Okay, great. P <u>And. sorry. I think that goes beyond just what we're talking around from a gender point of view here. I think it's just normal male/female dynamics. Just a male-dominated workplace. are male and female equally represented? Race. age. etcetera. etcetera. I think everyone's gotta feel in a safe space. so to speak. So. it goes beyond what we're just talking about now.</u> I Awesome. I'd like to actually just circle back to the process that you guys follow when you are creating	NB: Fashion as a category where it would not be necessarily irrelevant
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		advertisements. So, from brief to strategy to the execution, what is the process that you guys actually follow, step by step? P So, what we normally do is we'll go...are you just asking generally? I Just generally. P Cool. Generally. So, basically what we'll do is we will...the client will come to us with a thing. We need to do an ad to talk about our new website. We want everyone to shop on the website. We don't want anyone to come to the shop anymore. Basic example. They will tell us a whole bunch of stuff around that, they'll tell myself who's the executive creative director, they'll tell the head strategists, and they'll tell the business lead, sort of the main client contact. They'll give us a whole bunch of information. We will then distil that information down into a brief that we think is the ask. We think this is what you want based on what you've told us. We will show that to them. They will say, yes, we agree on that. This is what we want. Please add these two other things. But now it's a complete ask. We then take that internally. We do a thing called a kickstart where the strategy guys will come in with three points of view as to how this could come to	NB: Authenticity and naturalization Associations of treading with care when it comes to queer matters. An indication perhaps of the industry's lack of readiness or tools to deal with it effectively?
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	life, three insights into the target market. The creative team will bring three or four pieces of work that they think are particularly inspiring around this particular subject, whether it's fashion websites or just other websites they think are good, just bring some general inspiration. And the business lead will lead all the competitor work in the market, what are the competitors doing? And we will then have a sit-around. We'll discuss what those things are. Do we need more strategic directions? Are we happy with this kind of inspiration work? Oh, you forgot this competitor or, this person, they're not in the category but they're doing something interesting over there. can we bring that in? We'll get all that together. We'll stick all that up on a wall. And then the creative team will go away and start conceptualising the ads themselves. The strategic team will go away and look for further insight into the market to help give more nuance to the work. Hey, people, did you know people are shopping like this actually? More people use their phone than their desktop. Those kind of insights which then, through the process, gets fed to the creative team to continually feed them with more stimulus. Once that's done, we start having reviews of the work and then I will sit with...so, the	• Creative have a role insofar as everyone involved in creating the advertisement • But creative is lead by strategy team and they take lead from them • Clients also have a role in ultimately approving work produced by agencies for go live Client are seemingly always careful of their brands insofar as not being "out there" even when agencies come up with ads that use queer people in the context required Sometimes client it would seem reject the use of queer images even when recommended by the agency partners based on their own prejudice and they use brand as a scapegoat
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		first two reviews will be just me and the creative team, no other people, just to get the ideas very...this is the headline, this is the picture, this is the that, so that when we bring the strategy team and the business team into it, it's very clear what they're looking at. It's not someone's vision of what might be. You're like these are three ads that we think could work. What do you like about them? What do you not like? What should we change? What would you like to make better? And through that we go, cool, those two are out, we didn't think of that, sorry, bad idea, this, that. Okay, this is the one. We then polish that one, make it perfect, and we build a presentation that sets up all the evidence to make sure that that ad is the absolute right one. So, you start presenting it. From slide one to slide twenty, you tell the story so that, when they see the ad on slide twenty-one, it's the obvious choice. It has to be that. And, also, by doing that process, it also makes us torture test what we've got to make sure it's correct. And then we go and present to the clients and then they tell us they hate it and we have to start over. I I've had clients like that. I'm actually interested in finding out a little bit more then...'cause it seems there's a lot of research, there's a lot of insights that inform what	Some of the words used such as “weird” and “sensitive material” infer that there is still a stigma around this the subject matter. NB: The tension around doing what is right and reflective of society vs doing what is safe but will guarantee bottom line. There is understanding client and brands who do not know how to deal with newness but are will to learn then there is evading the matter because this is not something you want to be involved in which is problematic and single minded.
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	you do and things around psychographics and demographics probably play a role. To what extent then are issues of gender, as it relates sex, gender, and sexuality, considered in the mix of all of that work? P <u>Look, it depends on the job itself.</u> So, if we're looking at...'cause I guess what you don't wanna do is you don't wanna put something like that in for shock value or to make a point. So, if there's no natural role for it in what you're doing, we don't address it, we'll be honest. It doesn't come up. But if you're looking at what we're doing for xxx right now where the way people dress is important and it's particularly important with the way people identify sexually because it's got to do with body types, it's got to do with are you shopping the menswear section because you're...based on your genetics, you're kind of big, so you've gotta shop in the menswear as opposed to the women's, or things like that. So, it does become quite a big thing there. So, then we go, okay, cool, what other ads have been done around this topic? So, then we go and look specifically around how those...we're not gonna copy that ad but how have they treated this subject matter? And then we'll go deeper into social media and start going	Participant F narrates an example that is relevant to the subject matter and how client's prejudice caused him to pull rank and how their utterances ended up offending a queer member of the team but because they did not understand how their words would resonate with the next person though there was nothing wrong with what they had done and that in fact the team member was being insubordinate
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		through...we've got lots of sort of A-ls that are able to track certain conversations. So, we'll go and look for trending conversations around, let's say, shopping for basics and gender-neutral online shopping, how do people do it? Because as soon as you shoot someone in...you could put a guy and a girl next to each other and have the girl wearing the guy's T-shirt and the guy wearing the girl's T-shirt but now all of a sudden you've assigned a gender to the clothes and someone who's gender-neutral who doesn't necessarily identify as man or female in a sense, their body type might not work like that. So, you go, well, how did they address that? What's the right way to do it? What are people's concerns? What are they saying about their frustrations around shopping? And we start looking into all those conversations online. 'Cause I think that's where the real...there's obviously also research surveys and qualitative research that's been done, interviews that have been conducted by yourself, and then you get, I guess, a distilled version of the information but if you actually get out there and start reading what people are saying, that's where the real, more gritty stuff is and that's where we start to go look for that. So, the strategy team would be deployed to go and look for those insights, to go	NB: I applaud how Participant F as a manager in this instance handled and resolved the matter and that is precisely what agency partners are for and what advertising is about.
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		and look for those gems, and then bring them back and go, guys, we like this ad. Out of the three ads you've shown us, this is the best one but the scene where you talk around sexuality or the way you're depicting this person is wrong because of this, and we've read this information here and it shows us it's wrong, so we need to adjust that to make it correct and then the whole ad is fine. That scene is now correct. So, it's an organic process. If the thing comes up, we will definitely look at it and go, sjoe, that needs to be addressed. And I think also how it happens is, if any scene or any piece of communication that's got any sort of potential for...I don't wanna say a potential for drama at this point because the world is very emotionally charged around all topics at the moment. You've gotta do your homework before you put something out. So, even just outside of the subject that we're talking about, I think the same process applies. If there's something in a piece of work that's feeling wrong or not sitting well with someone in the room, it's their responsibility to raise it and then we need to interrogate it and get it to a point where it's correct. I Sjoe. I'm actually interested now to find out a little bit more about the ecosystem of influence. And the	NB: New word coined to mean the coming together or generations, genders and cultures to create advertisements that are reflective of the society we live in.
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	ecosystem of influence in terms of this issue of consideration of gender. So, do clients have a role in influencing whether that is done? Is it more of a strategy department thing? Whose role is it and who influences it the most? P Look, again, it's not one person. I think if you had to look at who influences it the most, you go, okay, cool, well, what's the tangible expression of this thing we're talking about. It's the ad itself. So, how hard have the creatives pushed a certain look and feel in a direction? How far has the director pushed the way he shoots it? How far has the photographer pushed the way they shoot it in terms of whatever sort of, I guess, angle they have on the subject matter. So, there's a very direct creative force behind that and I think that's ultimately the tangible part of it which will have the most effect in terms of what goes out into the marketplace. Strategically, you might go we need to be aware of this subject matter and we need to have a point of view on why we're doing it like this, and we'll take that point of view to the client. The strategic, I guess, impact is that, yes, we must be aware of it and this is the direction it should go but the hard push will come from the creatives who are actually bringing it to life and how they interpret	NB This seems to be the general answers in the interviews that they are most reliant on team members within agencies to give feedback on queer matters. In the case where they aren't any, they do not outsource which is sometime problematic because then a stereotypical ad is produced and is not reflective of the entire community. NB: The advertising industry is niche and therefore even the people looking after queer interest are niche or close to none – inference from the statement made by the participant NB: This is reassuring. The role from conceptualisation of queer people may be small but when executing there is a bringing on board of subject experts. I believe this is an interest that should be looked after on both sides though.
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it. Like anything. If it's a painter, what is their interpretation of it, creatively? And then the final thing is the client ultimately who goes, sioe. guys. I am really not comfortable with you showing that at all. It's too out there. Our brand is way more conservative. Our clientele will not...that will freak them out. We don't want that. And you go. well. what do you mean freak them out? That's a very negative statement to make. How could you say that this is normal? This is your view on what's gonna freak people out. not necessarily your clients'. So, you can't use words like that. And then again it's like the creatives are now pushing back against the client to say this is how it is. this is an accurate reflection. this photographer is queer and understands the narrative and understands the subject matter. that's why we chose to work with him because we're shooting sensitive material. so we wanted to work with people who understand. and what you are saying is incorrect because this person is representative of where we need to go. This is your own prejudice. So, there's that tension as well between the clients and what they're comfortable with. And they often use the brand as the scapegoat

Section five: brands and categories

- Fashion
- Lifestyle
- Banking
- Technology
- The above all can consider and make use of queer identities but their expressions will be different
- The big question that must be answered when done is that does it speak authentically to the brand and will it resonate with audiences it is intended for

for their own feelings on a subject matter. And it's naughty. They go. ooh, that's a bit weird and we're like don't say weird. that's not weird. this is normal. Don't say that. And then they're like. oh. I meant for the brand. And we're like. no. you meant for you. So. you've gotta fix those things out.

I Ja. Because if you look at the spectrum of people who support brands, they actually go as far as including queer people. And for brands that brand managers may sometimes think, oh, no, our audience will not respond well to this, you'll find actually that it is heavily supported by queer people but they're not represented in any form of communication, any ad, or anything like that.

P Ja. I think also it's very odd the way they view things but. also. they're very...sjoe. you must see how...they're just under so much pressure as well. I don't agree with their point of view but I can...on most things but I can see why they respond and do things the way they do in all categories. again not just what we're talking about. based on the situation they find them in. They've gotta deliver. they've gotta sell. they've gotta do this. Then you go you guys are putting this thing into my ad that's potentially gonna

Marty and Keller's theory/thinking can be applied here.

cause a bit of controversy for me. potentially gonna cause a bit of an...internally people are gonna ask me why I did this. and it's quite...it's a big ship for me. I'm not comfortable. whereas if I just go with what I know it's a sure thing. so let's just do that and could you...guys. would you mind not doing it like this. Well. then that's not normal. Then now you're creating a false sense of reality and that's not responsible.

I There's definitely a point of tension between what is normal and what seems right and what is actually going on in the market and also my personal view as a manager or whatever, and now balancing all of that has got to be a hard one.

P I can't actually speak in specifics around this example I'm gonna give you. It just wouldn't be professional of me. But I'll give you a more or less view is that someone the other day on a call said I'm really not comfortable with this thing that you're showing me. And then the director...'cause we're all on calls now like this and the director had quite a weird reaction. And then I got a call from the person, from the client, afterwards and they said to me, listen, I said what I said and I saw the director's reaction on the call and I just want you to know that we're

		<u>not making an art film here, we're making an ad, and the director's reaction really worried me because, if he can't see past taking that thing that I was uncomfortable with out of the commercial, we're not going to do this ad with him. And I said just hold on. I said the problem with what has just happened now, the director's reaction has actually got nothing to do with removing the scene from the commercial. The director's reaction is directly a result of what you said out loud, which was offensive to a number of people on the call, and you didn't realise you were doing that. And, so, a lot of what you said, personal...what the manager thinks, what the brand view is, what's normal, what's right in the world, and managing all of that and helping bringing all the people up to speed with what's happening culturally out there which is what is very good about what you're doing.</u> I And is there ever a resolve? Were you able to resolve that? P Ja, I was absolutely able to resolve it. But I had the sidebar conversation and I said, look, this is what you did was wrong. That kind of thing you can't...and to be fair...well, not to be fair 'cause it's not right, people must adjust, but it's an older person who's not used to dealing	Section six: brands and advertising's role Recurring theme of accepting work spaces
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		with this level of...and I know this is a passé term but this level of sort of [INDISTINCT – VOICE CLARITY – 00:32:18] culture around things, not used to it all, hadn't even heard the word before. So, I can have the conversation and then we solve the problem and ultimately they get what they want, there was no misunderstanding actually, it was just...but the reaction has occurred and now the opinion of that person is instated and that I can't fix. I And what you're touching on there for me reminds me very much of a conversation that I had yesterday about the importance of, I guess, intergenerational brand managers or managers working together. Because you are speaking to a completely different audience. So, if you're a forty-five-year-old who is doing whatever brand management role and your job is actually targeted at twenty-year-olds, you can't really fully achieve that or fully achieve, I guess...what am I trying to say here? Fully achieve the right kind of treatment or brief or whatever that goes out because it's not entirely one hundred. P I don't know if I heard you correctly but I think we might have come up with a new word for your research. Instead	Diversity of thought insofar as teams hired that are reflective of the world we live in Inclusivity and I think this will further help with the kinds of challenges we are seeing with the ads being produced today that have caused serious tension. This diversity however needs to be filtered right through to leadership of organisations!!!
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		of intergenerational, it's intergenderrational [sic]. It might be – I I'm gonna write that down, XXX. P ...a thing or a theme or something that you could explore for – I I'm going to write that down. P ...fifty marks. I I'm going to write that down just in case I decide to coin a new word and we get paid for it. P It's an interesting thing because I think when...I imagine you're putting some sort of thesis together and you go, cool, well, there's intergenerational, then there's also genderrational [sic] where you talk around how older people are interacting with people of different sexual orientations. So, how someone who's quite old, let's say an older father, who has a child who identifies a certain way or a younger father who has a child who identifies a certain way, how would those different generational people interact with each other? It's an interesting topic. You could probably get...if you're looking for a word count you have hit, I'm sure you could make up quite a few there. P My supervisor will be very proud of me when I bring this up, actually. The last questions that I actually wanted	
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		to ask in this particular section really looks at the role then that queer people play in sharing their voices, sharing their experiences in the creation of the advertisements. You touched on it with XXX, which I think is really phenomenal and I've seen some work that they're doing on Instagram as well, working with non-gender-binary people, but how does it work for everything else? I Just ask me that question, the beginning part without the XXX reference. Sorry, I lost you, kind of. P Sure. So, within the context of queer identity, what role do queer people play in giving their feedback or sharing their lived experiences to influence the advertisements that finally go out? I Again, in this advertising thing, it's so grey, particularly in the creative department, in terms of how things work and concepts. So, unless there's someone specific of that orientation who is working on the work itself, that would be the most direct way that it would be manifested. I'm a person, this is my experience, and I'm actually using that experience as an insight to this piece of communication that I'm gonna make. So, there's that. That's the purest form. <u>And how often that happens comes down to how many people. I guess. of that orientation are working in</u>	NB NB: Creating spaces where practitioners who aren't queer identifying and learn and teach themselves more about the community but there must also be a willingness to take this on.
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		advertising. And generally it's quite a small percentage in the broader population and, as you go out into niches, obviously those percentages stay quite small as well. So, in the advertising industry, it's very small and therefore probably very few people are influencing that directly in terms of the actual conceptualisation of it. However, once an idea is conceptualised, what I think people are very good at doing in the industry is making sure that the work is brought to life by people who are sensitive to the subject matter. And that comes down to influencers are you using? What models are you using? Which photographers and directors are you using who understand the subject matter, who is maybe that person and they bring their own lens to it? So, that's where it gets very good. So, I think from the conceptualisation phase of an idea, I think the role of people is quite small, just based on the percentage of people actually conceptualising the actual piece. But once it gets into the actual execution, the good creatives are opening that up to partner and collaborate with the right people and bring it to life in the right way. And then I think that funnel opens right up [INDISTINCT – VOICE CLARITY – 00:37:50] in terms of the influence and making sure the work is correct.	
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	I Sure. The second – P That's the way I work [INDISTINCT – VOICE CLARITY]. I can't speak for everyone but that's definitely how my studio works. I Sure. And it sounds just about right actually. The second-last part of this interview really just seeks to look at your experience around whether certain brands or categories are prone to think about issues of gender, sexuality, identity, more than others. P Ja. Look, I think it's obviously for me that that is the case. I think certain brands will...I guess, again, is there's degrees of it. So, when you look at a brand, like a fashion brand...and I guess the way people dress and present themselves, particularly with regard to sexuality, is such an important thing, so fashion brands have to stay relevant and inclusive because everyone wants to express themselves in a way that makes them feel comfortable. So, they have to do it. Then when you move away from fashion and you start moving into sort of more lifestyle-based things and you go cars. Cars are like, well, everyone kinda needs one and they're a little bit more conservative because they're a bigger corporate. So, they might show a group of people as opposed to a single	NB: The power of socialisation and influencing/shaping our thinking from a young age and now fining ourselves having to unlearn and learn new ways of being! Literature review touches on this as well.
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		person and then hopefully by association with the group everyone kind of feels they can kind of fit in somewhere this car brand and that's the car brand for them. So, they dilute it down a little bit. And then when you go into more serious things like banking and maybe technology, very corporate, <u>very...it becomes much more of a [sic] ideological discussion around hopes and dreams and what you can achieve as a nation and we're all better together and things like that and therefore the role of the individual is almost removed a little bit further.</u> So, those are kind of the three sort of, I guess, ways you will see it, depending on the type of brand that it is, but they definitely all have different views. <u>The other thing they have to be aware of as well is that you've gotta go...if a fashion brand does an ad around sexual orientation, it makes total sense for them to be speaking about that and it's like, oh, that's fashion, people wanna dress the way they wanna dress, they don't wanna be judged for the way they wanna be dressed, it makes sense for that person to be in that ad, totally relevant. If a bank does an ad around a non-binary entrepreneur who's very, very rich and he chooses to bank with X bank, it might be seen as contrived, like why are you telling the story? Are you trying to jump onto a</u>	
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		<u>trend? What are you doing? Why are you doing this? It's not necessarily for you to use this subject matter to promote yourself.</u> So, they might go I actually don't have a role to play in this conversation, so I'm not going to. That's another consideration. Is it genuine? Is it authentic for them to be talking around this or not? And they might stay away from it. I I was actually jotting down that word, authenticity, to link back to the example that you are making. But, also, I think issues around opportunity. Do you think there is an opportunity for these categories to be able to consider that or is it necessarily just something that sticks to one particular category because it's obvious? So, from a fashion perspective it would be easier. P No, I think they can. I think, absolutely, it can go anyway you want. It's just gotta be...like the bank example, why are you doing this? Why are you having this conversation about me and my people? It's got nothing to do with you. Are you trying to sit with us? Why are you doing this? It doesn't make sense. Get out of here. We're not using that bank. So, there's absolutely scope for them to chop and change and go through different	
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segments and...sorry, for the brands to talk around the subjects, absolutely, but it would be suicide for them to do it for the wrong reasons.

I And it's actually...I think it's Marty Neumeier who speaks specifically about this thing of why, why are you doing it and does it actually have resonance? I think it's Aaker and Keller who speak about resonance and brand extensions. Does it actually really make sense? Because, like you're saying, audiences either will accept/reject whatever it is you're putting out and will you be able to actually deal with that?

P I remember this ad when I first in advertising, and my partner at the time and I...we still joke about it. It was an ad for ABSA and it was a guy sitting at his desk and he was in a nice suit, at a desk, in a corporate job, and he had an eyebrow ring, and the headline was something it's better...and this was mid-nineties or late-nineties when raves were in their first wave of raves, not the second wave that we're in now, whatever, or third or fourth wave, I'm not sure what wave we're in. But they were like ravers don't...they don't disappear in the day, they go to work, or something like that. It was like what are you doing here? You're tryna be so rad and your ad is terrible. By trying to

		attach themselves to this very cool culture movement at the time and bring their brand into it, it wasn't authentic in any way, shape, or form, and therefore the ad had the opposite effect of what they wanted. These cool people that they were trying to bring into their community were now totally isolated because they thought this is just ridiculous. You guys are...you really are fronting here and it's stupid what you're doing. Forget about it. We're going to FNB. So, that's the danger. If people are gonna cross over and use and involve themselves in community, it has to be for the right reasons. I Sure. Well, we've reached the last part of the interview, which will probably take us about ten minutes or so, and I just really want us to delve deep into the role that you think practitioners play in raising awareness around issues of queerness and identity. You spoke about representation as well. So, what is the role that we play? P You're gonna have to...I'm a simple man, I work in the crayons department at the agency, so what do you mean by practitioners? I So, practitioners, in this case I would say creative directives, play in raising awareness.	
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		P Look, I think you've gotta make sure that the agency environment is accepting. You don't want people to not feel like they can join an agency because the vibe is off. I think a culture of...and one of the sort of things we have at the agency is diversity of thought, it's one of our sort of pillars of the agency culture, and to only get to good work and to get to good ideas and to get to fresh thinking, you've gotta have lots of people in the room with lots of different points of view. And that's my view of what practitioners should be doing. I'm a practitioner now. It sounds like a doctor of sorts. I'm gonna tell my mother that later when I speak to her. A practitioner. To get good work, you've gotta have the most diverse group of people that you're working with and that doesn't mean that I'm gonna have a whole studio of queers. It's not what I'm gonna do because then I only get one type of work. I've gotta have a queer element, a gay element, a straight element, a black element, a white element. There's probably a couple of Afrikaans guys lurking around there as well. It's like you've gotta have the whole mix. And I think the job of the practitioner is to make sure	
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		that everyone, regardless, has a safe space to come and work and express themselves. I Sure. I think [CROSSTALK – 00:46:38] – P You’ve gotta have that sort of freedom of thought otherwise... You don’t want someone sitting in a room and having a great idea and a great solve for this big problem that you’re tryna solve but they don’t feel comfortable enough to speak. Literally. And you have that. I Sure. And in terms of the role advertisements play in educating and raising awareness, how big of a job do advertisements have? P Look, I think the role is...and, again, it’s a percentage role. So, you go, out of ten ads you make, one of them might be addressing this subject matter in some way, shape, or form. So, ten percent of the time you’re talking about it, and that’s probably a high percentage. Even if I think about it, it might five percent of the time it’s being indexed by people who are watching. But, that being said, you’ve got a whole bunch of people doing that amount of work, collectively it actually adds up to quite a big share of voice around the world. So, I think there is definitely a responsibility to make sure that what you’re doing is correct and it’s putting the right message out there. And	
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		there are lots of examples of where things have been adopted by advertising and they've actually become quite, I guess, normalised in a sense. So, if you look...and it's a very rudimentary example but in the early days when people were trying to do environmental-based advertising to get people to start thinking about the planet, they would show a picture of a barren landscape and say is this the moon or is this Earth? And, if you're not careful, this is Earth and it will look like the moon and you'll have to leave, or something like that. And you go, well, that's great, I'm scared now, what do I do? And then later on the advertising style around that thing went to...and Axe did quite well. They had an idea called shower-pooling and encouraging people to shower together because showering used less water and showering together means you save even more water. Now all of a sudden I'm not turning the Earth into a desert and I know what to do and I'm not terrified by the message. And they've done a very good thing. They've armed you with some information that's very usable and they've inspired you to carry on in a way that's an example of good behaviour. And all of a sudden showing verse [sic] bathing, everyone knows it saves water somehow. But you can't remember where	
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		you saw that message for the first time but you just know it. And I think that's the power of advertising in terms of the responsibility. It's like every time we put a message out, if it's the right message, treated in the right way, in a responsible way, that makes things seem normal and everyone must get their heads around this is the world and it's actually perfect like that, it will become normal. It will become normalised because the message has been reinforced. So, I think that's the role we can play. At a base level, we can continue to reinforce the right message and then I think we've got a role to play that can be useful. I Awesome. The last question really just wants to find out is there <u>anything else you would like to share on this topic and just broadly speaking. before we close it?</u> P I think right now in the world...and this comes back to what I said in the beginning around my own personal insecurity around the subject. It's like how do we create an environment where learning about the subject doesn't feel scary? Because it's very...[the cancel] culture is so hectic. I remember with Black Lives Matter, I got called out for putting the wrong hashtag on my Black	
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		Lives Matter square. Someone like, hey, bro, it's the wrong movement and this hashtag and now you're clogging their feed with this stuff. I'm like, sjoe, man, I was just tryna do what I thought was the right thing to do. Now I've been outted and I feel weird. So, with regard to the subjects, when I said to you what's the definition of queer verse [sic] that, this is a safe space and I can chat to you but everywhere else it's terrifying to broach any subject actually. <u>So, I think what I would like to share is I think we need to find a way, everyone, to I guess safely speak around the subject without a fear of in your learning you're gonna be called out for being ignorant in trying to learn, in your process of trying to learn. It's a horrible thing that. You watch people on the call, again, he or she and then everyone's like, aw, God, I didn't mean to say that, I'm so sorry, and then it's like this whole apologetic weird thing and there's a fear around learning, which makes it hard to learn because people are scared to ask.</u> So, I guess how do we make it okay to ask and learn? How do we take the fear out of that? I That's so true.	
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		P That would be something I would like to share, I guess, as a thought to, I guess, the queer community and the straight community. I think you've gotta find a way to share the information that allows us to be better with each other. I Sure. And I think it all just boils down to the intent. If that intent comes through, and that is you want to learn, you want to know more, it becomes a lot more [sic] easier for me, even as a queer person, to share my experiences and my lived [CROSSTALK – 00:52:37] experiences versus someone who's coming in already charged and I'm going to be feeling judged or feeling like a judgement has already been made. Then it really creates a very hostile environment. But, for me, even with this, I really wanted to create a safe space for people to just share their views and opinions. Neither is right or wrong because we're all learning in this process and I'm hoping that this study contributes actually to the closure of that gap, seemingly, that is so wide, from an African-continent perspective. A lot is happening in the U-S, in the U-K, but not so much of it is actually happening in South Africa. And I definitely think there is a leaf that we can take from what is happening in as much as...though it's not happening a lot because literature shows only three percent of ads	
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		globally actually focus on queer people, which is shocking. So, we – P I wasn't far off with my five percent. I So, we definitely do need to have these kind of conversations, have this kind of body of work being circulated, so that somewhere somehow a change happens. P Ja. I think another thing that's worth mentioning, and maybe it's an interesting point for your piece...I'm creative directing your project here for you. I No, I'm really appreciative. P <u>I think there's another point that's worth it. I've grown up in a pretty liberal family. I had quite a religious Catholic dad who didn't force me to go to church. he wanted me to find my own way. So. I've got a...I guess. for myself. I've...and I had a mom who was in fashion. So. I got exposed to this kind of world from an early age and quite used to it and comfortable with it. But even for me the rate at which change is being expected of people in terms of belief systems and belief structures is terrifyingly fast at the moment. So. if you had to go from me going. okay. cool. growing up black and white. Now all of a sudden black and</u>	
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white is the same. it's okay. it's cool. we're all cool. Okay. gay and straight. Okay. cool. Okay. we're cool. Okay. gay and straight. we're also cool. Black. white. gay. straight. we're cool. Non-binary. Oh. my God. now what is this one? It's another thing now. And there's no prejudice to it but you've still got to understand it. make your sense of it. and be okay with it. And the speed at which you're having to do that right now is very hectic. Now. if you take people in the world who are absolutely set and conservative. can you imagine for them what this is like. Their minds must be being blown on a daily basis.

I Absolutely. And that just showcases the power of socialisation and how deep it actually goes because now you're finding yourself having to unlearn and learn new things and when you think you've actually got it there's something new that's coming into the mix and you have to literally be on the ball, which is probably why even this term that we've come up with, intergenderrational [sic], will be relevant. Because in order for that to happen at the pace at which it needs to happen, these conversations need to be happening amongst all of us. It can't just be the conservatives having that conversation or just the queer

		people just having that conversation because we're preaching to the converted, isn't it? P You're absolutely right. If you look at just a racial one, which I think is particularly important in South Africa, is that I guess most white people thinking that...particularly younger people who, I guess, born post ninety-four, white kids who were born outside of apartheid, have very little sort of relevance on that, particularly when they start to get to teenage years. They think, no, I've gone to school with my black friends, everything's fine, we're all integrated. And then all of a sudden white privilege drops and you've gotta go, woah, what is this now? So, now you've gotta learn about that then when you thought actually you had adjusted fine. You grew up in a democracy where everything was fine. You didn't even realise that was a thing. Now, that's dropping on you and it's also dropping on your seventy-year-old grandfather who's now had to deal with...he probably voted for an apartheid government maybe, who knows, then went through the democratic process. He's like, okay, cool, things are settling down, we're alright, and then this other thing drops and he's like, oh, shit, another thing now? And it's just constant. So, just when you think you've got over	
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		something, then there's a new iteration of the same thing that keeps going, and I think it's a lot. And, like you say, it's how do we bring everyone else on board with that journey? Not just the choirs that are talking to each other the whole time or singing to each other. I Correct. Well, XXX, that you so much for your time. I really appreciate it. It's been such a wholesome conversation. P It's a pleasure. [INDISTINCT – VOICE CLARITY – 00:58:03]. It's good to have chats like this. I Thank you so much. And have yourself a good day. I'll let you know when the study is done. And I'll potentially be presenting to the people that I've interviewed, so look out for that. P Okay, cool. I saw that you declined the need for my clients but having gone through the interview there is a girl whose name is xxx and she's my client at XXX, a stylist and sort of been a very...in terms of a lot of things we've spoken about, like how are people represented in media? What role do they play? How does she collaborate? And things like that. If you do want to chat to her, she might be someone worth getting in touch with, if you're still looking for clients to talk to.	
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		I Sure. So, what's going to happen with this is...because obviously I've had to consult quite a number of people with regards to the focus of this study and the consensus was we just need to focus on creative directors as well as brand communication planners because it's so focussed and an exploratory study. But the recommendation that I'm making is that, for PhD or for the next study or researchers, the area that needs to be focussed on specifically looks at brand managers and it needs to be across categories. So, it will be more of a [CROSSTALK – 00:59:22] – P Ja. You must push in there. I think you'll find you'll have some very, very uncomfortable conversations, which will be awesome. To be a fly on the wall... I So, it will probably be a good mix of qualitative as well as quantitative because I need to look at a broad range of brands as well as categories to then be able to make conclusions and at least recommendations that will somewhat shift the needle. P Awesome. Well, keep teaching us. You're doing good work here. It's very important. I Thank you, XXX. I really appreciate it.	
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		P It's a pleasure and sorry...it's taken us a while to get here but I'm glad we've done it eventually. I Me too. Have a good one. P Okay, cheers. I Cheers, cheers. Bye. --- END OF AUDIO ---	
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ANNEXURE F: LANGUAGE AND ACADEMIC EDITING CERTIFICATE

Language and Academic Editing Certificate

For

KHANGELANI DZIBA

For the study

**Queer Marginality and Planning for Brand Resonance: A Qualitative
Critique of the South African Advertising Industry.**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree:

Master of Arts in Creative Brand Leadership

At

**The Independent Institute of Education:
Vega**

This is to certify that

Dr EM Solomon edited the above thesis



Dr E.M. Solomon

14th October 2021