



The Perception of Iziko South African National Gallery as a Democratic Brand: A Semiotic Analysis

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1. Proposed Title

The Perception of Iziko National Gallery as a Democratic Brand: A Semiotic Analysis

1.1 Abstract

Brand democratisation is a growing trend worldwide as technology is increasing engagement and dialogue between brands and their stakeholders. Brand co-creation, open source branding and democratic brands are increasingly challenging hierarchy and total brand control, affording stakeholders a sense of brand-co ownership. The paper assumes that public brands should be democratic, and that the Iziko national gallery may not yet be perceived as democratic by scholars. In alignment with this study's qualitative nature, a focus group of six representative South African BA branding and art scholars studying in Cape Town between the ages 19-26 years will be carried out and a semiotic analysis of 4 gallery signs will be conducted by participants. These signs include the facade of the gallery, the logo, the intended route through the gallery and the behaviour of gallery goers. This paper found that three of the four signs selected were perceived as predominantly democratic by participants as they embodied a sense of stakeholder agency and opinion. Despite this finding, participants also identified multiple signs that were undemocratic as they embodied a sense of authoritarian power. These were found to be problematic as they played a large role in hindering stakeholder engagement with the brand. In light of the above, this paper hopes to provide insight into the necessary democratic status of the Iziko gallery brand by highlighting which signs maximise a sense of stakeholder engagement

Key Words: brand democracy, democratic brands, commercial semiotics, Iziko national gallery, brand co-creation, brand co-ownership, open source brands, public space

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2. Introduction

2.1 Contextualisation

Brand democratisation is a growing trend worldwide as technology is increasing access and dialogue between brands and their stakeholders (Neisser 2008). Management and brand owners are relinquishing control and stakeholders are increasingly afforded a greater say, shifting focus to a stakeholder-centric model of brand management. Within the context of brand co-creation, user-design, brand co-ownership and stakeholder participation, this paper assumes that Iziko gallery as a public brand should be democratic. This study therefore attempts to see whether the gallery is indeed perceived as a democratic brand by Art and BA students between the ages 19-26 years studying in the Western Cape, South Africa.

2.2 Rationale

As mentioned above, the relevance of this study lies in its preoccupation with democratic, co-owned brands which are enjoying increasing success in contemporary society because they are more meaningful to their stakeholders. Brand co-creation is "a new brand logic" (Hatch and Schultz 2010:591) and aligns itself with the notion that meaningful brands in the 21st century are stakeholder centric (Neisser 2008). As public brands are run by government in service of a country, it is relevant to explore their status as examples of representative and democratic brands that invite stakeholder participation, co-creation and co-ownership. This study looks specifically at The South African National gallery as a public brand that provides insight into aesthetic production in South Africa and Africa.

2.3 Problem Statement

A democratic brand is one that invites stakeholder participation and brand co-ownership (Paharia & Swaminathan 2014:197), and has connotations with "customer-made" (Neisser, 2008), user-design, open source brands and brand co-creation. Although the notion of a democratic brand has many different facets and definitions which will be elaborated on in this paper, at its core lies a sense of stakeholder engagement and representation.

It seems that despite its attempt to break from its a highly controversial past of national exclusion, Iziko gallery mired in controversy regarding its definition as a democratic, public brand.

Iziko gallery received critique on the "exceptionally problematic nature" of the exhibition in 2016, *Our Lady* (Davis 2017, *The Daily Maverick.co.za*). This was due to the fact that although press material on the exhibition claimed that it "celebrate[d] empowered female capacity", 75% of the work on display was by male artists and only three black women were represented (Davis, 2017). The dialogue that subsequently emerged between the gallery, involved artists and activists resulted in the gallery releasing a statement that appeared in the exhibition:

This public dialogue brought into collective consciousness a very real, current social issue. The pain, hurt and anger expressed must be acknowledged," it reads. "Museums cannot be static monoliths seated on the periphery of society. Museums have an important role to play and need to constantly engage and reflect the society we serve. (Davis 2017, *Daily Maverick.co.za*)

With regards to the above statement it is evident that the gallery admits to its perceived lack of brand democracy and representation. Activists and protesting artists commented that the male dominated artwork should "have been supplemented by a broader selection of works which, in juxtaposition with these historical works by men, might have challenged the visual language of patriarchy and given voice to alternative narratives" (Davis, 2017). Davis concluded by saying that "the gaps on the museum's walls told their own story of dissent"(2017).

The gallery also received extensive critique in response to Dean Hutton's artwork *fuckwhitepeople* (2016) which was received as racially offensive by some South Africans.

In addition to critique on artwork exhibited in the gallery Proud highlights the gallery's fractured identity as that as a "national gallery" there has been an "absence of a commonly-held coherent sense of 'nation' at least until 1994" (2001:38), as the gallery was built to emulate a British model that didn't acknowledge indigenous South African visual traditions (Proud 2001)

Furthermore, Proud speaks of the undemocratic nature of the architecture of the gallery, stating that "[t]he enframing architecture of the [Iziko national gallery] has become a straight-

jacket in which many contesting artistic traditions and diverse forms are now awkwardly contained and constrained". The architecture may not be seen as democratic as it embodies a colonial history and may inhibit potential access by South Africans because it may be seen as culturally incongruous or offensive in a post-apartheid society. With regards to the definition of a democratic brand as one that invites stakeholder participation and engagement, Iziko gallery as a public and national brand should invite engagement of all stakeholders, which is essentially all South Africans.

After having briefly discussed a few critiques against the gallery, the South African National Gallery (IZIKO) does not yet seem to be democratic and therefore needs to be put to the test, hence this study.

2.4 Purpose of the Study

Regarding the problem statement, the purpose of this study is to investigate the necessary democratic nature of the Iziko gallery brand and in doing so to gain insight into the relationship between public/national brands and brand democracy.

2.5 Research Question

To what extent is the South African National Gallery (IZIKO) regarded as a necessary democratic brand?

2.6 Assumptions:

1. Iziko gallery is generally not seen as a democratic brand by the South African public
2. Public/national brands should have a necessary democratic status

3. Literature Review

3.1 Academic Problem Setting

Neisser highlights "the tidal wave of brand democratisation" as "consumers around the world are taking charge, transforming their relationships with brands from buyer to reviewer, inventor, designer, ad creator, champion or critic (Neisser, 2008). A relatively new phenomenon, Brand Democracy suggests consumer participation and a sense of brand co-ownership (Paharia & Swaminathan 2014:197). With this new brand phenomenon in mind this paper aims to explore the necessary democratic status of the Iziko gallery brand

In the context of contemporary South Africa it may be important to explore the nature of public gallery brands in Cape Town as democratic because public art galleries should be accessible to all South Africans as they should be viewed as community-based institutions (Kelly 2012). When considering what the role of public art galleries should be Kelly highlights that

It is imperative to make museums inclusive to all members of society and it is essential that a sense of liberty, choice, and relevance is instilled into the contemporary museum-going public. Museums must re-evaluate their social roles and reposition themselves in relation to their audience (as cited in Kelly 2012)

Furthermore, public space in the post-apartheid city of Cape Town cannot yet be considered completely inclusive and democratic due to past segregationist politics (Proud 2001). Within this context, it is pertinent to investigate whether South African public galleries, successfully position themselves as accessible and whether they classify themselves as democratic and invite consumer participation.

Secondary questions in this study wish to explore the assumptions embedded in the notion of a public brand and democratic brand, and the relationship between the two. Furthermore this study wishes to investigate whether a public brand is positioned in the minds of consumers as being necessarily democratic and inclusive. This will be explored specifically in connection with Iziko gallery.

In the following literature review key themes will be investigated and clarified in the existing literature and paradigm and theoretical framework will be discussed.

3.2 Paradigm

This research paper will operate within an anti-positivist paradigm exploring through the interpretivist people as products of societal and cultural values and norms. Because such a nominalist paradigm views humans as a product of their environment and public brands, this study employs a qualitative approach as the main purpose will be to interpret and gain insight into the necessary democratic nature of the Iziko gallery brand.

3.3 Theoretical foundation

3.3.1 Meaningful brands: the new brand paradigm

As it has been difficult to source extensive theoretical work on the notion of brand democracy, it may be considered more a contemporary phenomenon than a theory. Albeit, the new branding paradigm discussed by Enslin and Klopper (2011) points to the importance of brands that embody a total stakeholder orientation, and this recognises a central theme in brand democracy- a focus on the consumer as highly valuable among other stakeholders. Democratic brands recognise consumer value, advocating a collaborative relationship and allowing consumers to "co-own" the brand (Businesswire.com 2006). This will further be discussed in the Case study on converse's brand democracy campaign. Thereafter, the notion of a democratic brand will be clarified thematically below.

In her article "Return on meaning" article, Kauffman highlights that "top meaningful brands enjoy 46% higher share of wallet than low performers" according to Havas Media Group's meaningful brands study (2015). The Havas group uses Meaningful brands as a metric of brand strength and "is the first global study to show how our quality of life and wellbeing connects with brands at both a human and business level" (Kauffman 2015). It is evident that a new branding paradigm has emerged, one that is changing from being merely profit driven, to an avocation of meaning (Kay, 2014).

Kay emphasises that "To be fit for purpose in today's world, advertising needs to change – from a model based on introspection and disruption to one based on empathy and increasing invisibility" (2014). He emphasises modern brand thinking as empowering in contrast to the

controlling stance of classic brand thinking (Kay 2014). The latter can be viewed in light of the notion of open source brands which relinquish control and empower consumers (Fournier & Avery 2011:193). Furthermore Kay suggests that classic brand thinking operates by "trust through authority" while modern brand thinking operates by "trust through transparency" (2014). Another characteristic of modern brand thinking is that it is focussed on creating a community rather than a transactional relationship (Kay 2014). The creation of a community is evident in the Converse brand democracy campaign discussed in the section on democratic brands as the aim of the campaign was for consumers to "showcase their work and inspire others to join the Converse community" (Businesswire.com 2006). This emphasises that consumer input creates the foundation for consumers feeling part of the community and therefore a sense of "co-ownership" (Businesswire.com, 2006). Furthermore Kay suggests that the new advertising model should be in the service of people (2014). He emphasises that brands need to be humble, empathetic and interested in people's lives (Kay 2014). In addition, he highlights that great brands understand what people are interested in and work back from there (Kay 2014). Democratic brands welcome consumer participation and therefore increase the consumer's "stake" in the brand because their own work is being integrated.

3.3.2 Commercial Semiotic Analysis

Semiotics is another key framework that needs to be discussed. Brand semiotics will therefore briefly be touched on. This paper supports the notion that commercial semiotics can be valuable to studies of brands as they are context bound (Added-value.com, 2008). It must be highlighted that

Commercial semiotics can help brands unlock consumer and cultural insights that delve far deeper into how we construct meaning and engage with our world. Not only does semiotics give brands a cultural translation tool for their communication strategies, it can also help to generate fresh and emergent innovation territories by looking at how culture is changing. (Added-value.com, 2008)

After having considered the above and the value of semiotics for brands, it is necessary to inform the reader of the general definition of semiotics as "the study of how meanings can be produced and communicated through different signs and symbols as part of our social life" (as cited in Kucuk 2015: 244). It is important to note that anything can be a sign as long as it can be interpreted as signifying/referring to something other than itself (as cited in Kucuk

2015). This paper focuses more on a Peircean branch of semiotics which is less structural than Saussurean semiotics, adopting a broader look at semiotics by investigating the way signs are situated within a social and cultural context (Kucuk 2015). Peircian semiotics may examine the placement of a brand logo in an advertisement as signifying meaning, or examine the relationship between brand identity, brand slogan and other possible code systems that can have an effect on communication with consumers (Kucuk 2015). Therefore, brands can be seen as inextricable semiotic entities in a consumption environment. Kucuk emphasises that "'branding semiotics' are the building blocks of a central meaning system where the brand symbols work as the letters or words of a consumption language" (Kucuk 2015:245).

Semiotic analysis will be used as a method or tool in this study in order to reveal the relationships between the literal meaning of signs, logos and symbols and their cultural references that provide insight into the overall meaning system of the Iziko brand. Therefore this study aims to link the gallery signs/symbols with broader consumer discourse in order to gain insight into the status of the brand as democratic.

This paper also supports Conejo and Wooliscroft's definition of brands as semiotic marketing systems:

Brands are re-defined as complex multidimensional constructs with varying degrees of meaning, independence, co-creation and scope. Brands are semiotic marketing systems that generate value for direct and indirect participants, society, and the broader environment, through the exchange of co-created meaning. (Conejo and Wooliscroft 2014:297)

The above definition emphasises a systems approach to brands as well as views them as multidimensional constructs. This is relevant to this paper as the Conejo and Wooliscroft recognise that brands are products of their cultural, physical and social environments.

3.4 Existing literature on research theme

3.4.1 Iziko South African National Gallery (ISANG)

It is important to examine the relationship between museums and representing national identity in South Africa (Crampton 2003). It is pertinent to highlight that

In South Africa, museum displays have historically supported colonial and apartheid ideologies, but with the transition to a post-apartheid society museums have reassessed their divisive roles and repositioned themselves within South Africa's contemporary nation-building project, organized around building unity from diversity. (Crampton 2003:218)

For the purpose of this paper Iziko's history will briefly be touched on. Crampton emphasises that although the gallery was established as the South African National gallery, early collection policies were focussed on acquiring and exhibiting predominantly British art (2003). It was evident that most galleries in South Africa were "modelled on art galleries abroad and, intent on bringing cultural enlightenment to Africa and emphasized the acquisition of European and particularly British art" (as cited in Crampton 2003: 222). Although annual exhibitions of South African art were held, they received scathing reviews as the works were seen as an humiliation and the "poverty of achievement" was evident according to critics (Crampton 2003: 222).

Crampton further highlights that the ownership of European art by the National Gallery was a source of civic pride and gave South Africa a place among the "civilised nations", allowing colonial culture to claim superiority and difference from the indigenous cultures (Crampton 2003: 223). Crampton suggests that the National Gallery was therefore a project of nation building across colonial communities (2003: 223). He also highlights that:

The neoclassical architecture of the gallery and its location on Government Avenue in the heart of Cape Town testified to its importance as a national shrine, and it fulfilled a nation-building function as a sign of nationhood, national pride and a benevolent state. (2003:223)

The above touches on the fact that the gallery architecture was predominantly a shrine to colonial prosperity. It would be superfluous to continue with an historical overview of the gallery. The latter should suffice in emphasising the gallery's primary colonial purpose, the effects of which excluded South Africans, especially black, almost until intense revision started in the mid 1980s, focussing on the divisive roles of museums in the past, and attempts at articulating a relevant and necessary role in post-apartheid South Africa (Crampton 2003:225).

The Iziko gallery suggests that they have grown to a gallery of international stature encompassing holdings of South African, African and Western European art (Iziko museums of South Africa, 2017). It is evident that ISANG is under constant revision in order to address past divisive museum politics;

The extraordinary vitality and significance of the art that began to emerge in South Africa in the 1980s, brought about a shift in acquisition policy, which now concentrates on contemporary South African art. Serious attempts are made to fill the gaps in the collection resulting from the apartheid past. Since 1990 one of the major tasks has been to establish a collection that acknowledges and celebrates the expressive cultures of the African continent, particularly its southern regions. (Iziko museums of South Africa, 2017)

With the latter history as a starting point, this paper aims to investigate whether certain gallery signs/symbols hinder the status of the brand and whether it can or should be seen as democratic.

3.4.2 Defining a democratic brand

It is pertinent to address and define the central notion of a democratic brand in the existing literature. This paper importantly views the notion of a democratic brand as an umbrella term that has connotations with a proliferation of practices that embody a stakeholder centric approach. This is an orientation in branding that views the brand as a product of all its stakeholders impressions (Enslin & Klopper 2011). Neisser defines brand democratisation not just as a fad but as a worldwide phenomenon synonymous with the notion of "customer made" (2008). He describes it as customers having increased control and a wave that marketers and branders will have to ride (Neisser, 2008). Neisser highlights that this new phenomenon has arisen due to the convergence of the internet, new digital technologies and reality TV, all contributing to a sense of customer power (2008).

Neisser suggests that;

Savvy marketers have responded by enlisting the consumer to create their own entertainment (MySpace, Current TV), products (Peugeot, Lego), packaging (Jones Soda) and, of course, advertising (MasterCard, L'Oreal, Chevy, Converse, Firefox and Sony Pictures, to name a few). (2008)

Neisser suggests that in order to ride the wave of brand democratisation branders and marketers need to focus on customer satisfaction, brand authenticity and transparency, rewarding content generators and delivering a brand experience (2008). This all links into the meaningful brand paradigm.

3.4.3 Brand co-ownership

The brand Converse successfully executed a brand democracy campaign and it is relevant to explore this campaign in order to expand further on the notion of a brand democracy and an important characteristic of it: brand co-ownership. Converse's brand democracy marketing campaign in 2006 earned then one of the most prestigious awards in the advertising industry (Businesswire.com, 2006). The strategy behind the campaign was to "create a collaborative relationship between customers and Converse, allowing them to "co-own" the brand" (Businesswire.com, 2006). The campaign tapped into consumer generated content that was used for advertising (Businesswire.com, 2006). Short films and artwork were used as core components of the campaign adverts including print and television (Businesswire.com, 2006). The purpose of the campaign was for consumers to showcase their work and inspire others to join the Converse community (Businesswire.com, 2006). The Businesswire article emphasised that the campaign was designed to give consumers a sense of ownership of the brand and it was clear that the campaign was successful as over 1,600 short films and original art pieces were received from enthusiastic participants (Businesswire.com, 2006). This literature review has included this information on Converse's brand democracy campaign because it contributes to the definition of, and an investigation into the notion of a democratic brand.

It is also relevant to mention consumer engagement in product design as it embodies the democratic sense of "inviting the amateurs into the studio" to engage in a sense of co-ownership (Moreau 2011:409). Moreau highlights that "the growth in online toolkits and DIY retail stores" consumers are given the sense that they can create products that embody their individual tastes (Moreau 2011:409). Therefore the terms "self-design" and "user-design" have emerged in marketing literature to "describe the voluntary shift in design responsibility from the producer to the consumer" (Moreau 2011:409).

In their introductory definition of a democratic brand they reference brands such as Wikipedia and Firefox as "open source" brands (Paharia & Swaminathan 2014:197) Open source brands are defined as "brands that are almost entirely manufactured, consumed and distributed by consumers" (Paharia & Swaminathan 2014:197). Wikipedia is referred to as the pinnacle of an open source brand as it is "an online encyclopaedia written collectively by anonymous internet volunteers who write without pay" (Paharia & Swaminathan 2014:197). It is explained that "dabbling in democracy" refers to consumers having greater power in

product design, "hacking" their own products, and offering feedback to the brand through social networking sites" (Paharia & Swaminathan 2014:197). Although the notion of open source brands and democratic brands are similar, it is important to note that they have subtle differences which will be briefly touched on in defining an open source brand. Paharia and Swaminathan have used the notion of an open source brand to aid their delimitation of a democratic brand. As there are many overlaps between the two concepts, it is relevant for this study to explore the interchangeable use of the latter.

Paharia and Swaminathan highlight the growing importance of brands that allow consumer participation and ones that are "dabbling in brand democracy" (Paharia & Swaminathan 2014:197), but they also raise that despite this, there has been little research done on the topic. They highlight Fournier and Avery (2011) as an exception as they articulate the notion of "open source brands", but who also emphasise the need for further research on the topic.

3.4.4 Open source brands

It is important to note that open source brands are not synonymous with democratic brands but have many overlaps. Fournier and Avery suggest that:

Open source branding takes place when a brand is embedded in a cultural conversation such that consumers gain an equal, if not greater, say than marketers in what the brand looks like and how it behaves. Open source branding implicates participatory, collaborative, and socially-linked behaviours whereby consumers serve as creators and disseminators of branded content. (2011:194)

It is evident that a new branding landscape has developed in the context of novel technologies such as "blogging, video sharing, social bookmarking, social networking and community platforms" (Fournier and Avery 2011:194). These platforms enable open source branding by allowing consumers to personalise and create their own experiences as well as provide venues where content can be shared with like-minded friends (Fournier and Avery 2011:194).

The notion of an open source brand speaks more to the emerging cultural landscape and to the phenomenon where consumers "own" the brand via technology and the platforms it provides (Fournier and Avery 2011:194). While a democratic brand has a stronger focus on consumer participation, a collaborative relationship between the brand and its consumers as well as a sense of co-ownership.

After detailed investigation into multiple brands' status as open source and democratic, Fournier and Avery emphasise that brands that "recognise that the support of the collective is garnered only when management acknowledges consumers rightful ownership and relinquishes brand control" (2011:195).

3.4.5 Brand co-creation

Hatch and Schultz regard brand co-creation as the new brand logic (2010), emphasising that it implies a new brand governance as brand co-creation suggests that organizations share control over their brands with their stakeholders as they become brand co-creators (Hatch and Schultz 2010). Thus, co-creation in branding is situated within the view that "brand meaning and value(s) emerge from stakeholder engagement with a company (Hatch and Schultz 2010:591). It is therefore important to note that this paper supports the view that stakeholder engagement and participation contributes meaning and value to the Iziko brand.

Hatch and Schultz suggest that brand communities can be contexts for brand co-creation as brand value is "co-created through network relationships and social interactions among the ecosystem of all stakeholders" (Hatch and Schultz 2010:592). This emphasises that brands that are meaningful to their stakeholders adopt total value chain and stakeholder orientations, recognising that the brand's value is situated within the perceptions of their stakeholders, and that it is a product of the total value chain (Enslin and Klopper 2011). This idea is reinforced by Berthon and his colleagues who highlight that the "the meaning of brands is most often defined in plural among a multiplicity of stakeholders, who produce and reproduce an ever shifting [...] variety of brand interpretations" (as cited in Hatch and Schultz 2010: 593). Democratic brands are therefore valuable to their stakeholders because they invite consumer participation and engagement. Hatch and Schultz suggest that brand co-creation emerges from access and dialogue for brand community stakeholders (2010).

3.4.6 Public Space

A public space can be defined as "an area or place that is open and accessible to all peoples, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, age or socio-economic level" (Unesco.org, 2017). Low

and Smith highlight that "public spaces are simultaneously an expression of social power and a force themselves that help shape social relations" (2013: vii).

There is a value in recognising the museum landscape as an object to be curated and an amenity to be commoditised or perhaps as a membrane between museum and community that extends beyond physical space and of course crucial to all of this is the question of who decides. (MuseumNext, n.d.)

The above highlights that "museum grounds [can be seen] as permeable membrane[s] between [...] institution[s] and [their] publics (MuseumNext, n.d.). In addition, it also recognises that the grounds around public museums play an integral role in how the gallery is engaged with and perceived by publics.

Penfold emphasises that South African cities still "bear witness to the condition of "geopathology... [t]he problem of place- and place as problem" that has blocked the transformation of urban form into urbane environment" (Penfold 2011:995). Due to an engagement in this paper with the facade of the gallery and its situation in the company gardens, the importance of culturally produced space must be emphasised. In light of the latter, this paper suggests that access to Iziko gallery by all South Africans, plays a role in the democratic nature of a brand.

3.4.7 Public brand and nation branding

Also referred to as government branding, Somma raises the common conception that government branding is contentious as you can't brand something that doesn't have a competitive model attached to it or consumer choice involved (2015). Despite this, Somma emphasises that brand strategy is still valuable and necessary in gaining stakeholders' trust of government entities. It may therefore be useful to mobilise public/government brands as trustmarks rather than as brands (Somma, 2015). Because this study is approaching Iziko National gallery as a government or public brand, secondary research questions aim to investigate the status of a public brand, or rather a "trustmark" as democratic, as well as the notions embedded in what/who a public brand should service.

After having reviewed the relevant literature, this paper assumes that democratic brands (ones that invite consumer participation) are more meaningful than undemocratic brands (ones that maintain control) for stakeholders. Furthermore this paper also assumes that democratic

brands are more consumer-centric than undemocratic brands. People connect with a brand when their input is valued democratic brands welcome consumer input and approach it as valuable.

3.4.8 Necessity for further research

After having explored brand democracy and the connotations surrounding open source brands, brand co-creation and the like, it is evident that there has been little theoretical foundation for the notion of a democratic brand or brand democracy. Because brand democracy is a relatively new phenomenon, most information regarding it is related to case studies and brands that have "dabbled in democracy". There is therefore a gap for possible research into democratic brands in South Africa and their possible role and value considering South Africa's struggle for democracy. Furthermore, there may be a gap to investigate if democratic brands matter in a country like South Africa and how many, if there are, are operating successfully within the democratic paradigm.

Due to Cape Town's history as a city characterised by segregationist politics (Proud 2001), rebranding and repositioning public space as more inclusive and democratic is a relevant concern for government and city organisers. Morris highlights that a building can communicate social and spacial violence in South Africa (2017). Perhaps public brands in public spaces should be at the centre of eradicating social violence of past spatial practices. Exploring how public space and public brands such as Iziko art gallery are positioned in the minds of customers and city goers is relevant to contemporary South African society as it may provide insight into the contemporary role of public brands. Although a public brand such as Iziko, situated in a public space of the company gardens has an air of democracy about it, it may be interesting to explore if there are prevailing factors which position it differently in the minds of consumers/stakeholders.

It is also interesting to raise the notion of "democratic illusion" (Kemming and Humborg 2010:195) and that there is a gap in the literature with regards to addressing this. Kemming and Humborg emphasise that the disillusion with the state of democracy around the world has been growing (2010). They highlight that "while the forms of democracy remain fully in place-and today are actually strengthened-politics and government are increasingly slipping

back into the control of privileged elites (as cited in Kemming and Humborg 2010:195). It may therefore be highlighted that "there is a danger that the branding world copies and captures some democratic illusion" (Kemming and Humborg 2010:195). Further research can then be conducted with regards to political marketing management (Kemming and Humborg 2010:195).

Having explored the mobilisation of democratic brands, open source brands, public brands and public space in the existing literature, this study attempts to situate these themes within the theoretical framework of meaningful brands and semiotic analysis. As the research conducted in this paper is predominantly qualitative, the latter will further be situated within an anti-positivist paradigm as the main goal of this study is to gain insight into what extent the South African National Gallery (ISIKO) is regarded as a necessary democratic brand.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This research paper will operate within an anti-positivist paradigm as it views people as products of social and public space. Because this nominalist paradigm views humans as a product of their environment and public brands, this study employs a qualitative approach as the main purpose will be to interpret and understand the brand democracy within the context of Iziko gallery. The methodological approach will be idiographic as the purpose of the study is to investigate and gain an understanding rather than to establish laws (Maree 2016). The research design will be predominantly exploratory due to the above reasons. The research can be termed as a case study as topic exploration will be predominantly be done by focus group participants. Research design will also be trans- disciplinary as it will use semiotics as a tool for analysis along with brand and marketing theory.

4.2 Research Plan

4.2.1 Sampling

This study intends to use purposive sampling due to the qualitative nature of the study, thus, focus group participants will be chosen with a purpose in relation to a key criterion such as race, culture or location (Nieuwenhuis 2016:85). Tertiary level Bachelor of arts scholars and BA branding scholars between the ages 19-26 will be selected from institutions in Cape Town. The participants will be racially, culturally and sexually varied in order to provide a representative conversation. The participants will be selected via a snowball sampling method. The reason for choosing bachelor of arts scholars is that they may have more knowledge on how to analyse signs and what they signify, and this is a crucial aspect of the study. One focus group of six participants will be conducted within the vicinity of the South African National gallery in order for the participants to have access to the gallery. The focus group will be kept relatively small so that participants feel more comfortable in voicing their opinions.

4.2.2 Data collection

As mentioned above, the data collection method was a focus group of six participants as it is a successful way of collecting participants' subjective views, feelings and stories. This data collection tool is aligned with the exploratory nature of the research as the purpose is not to gain conclusive data but rather to gain insight into the nature and status of the gallery brand through the lens of brand democracy and the exploration of the gallery's status as democratic.

As the study will be adopting a qualitative method, focus groups will be used in order to get a better understanding of how the Iziko gallery signs/symbols are positioned in the minds of focus group participants within the cultural context of the gallery. Semiotics will therefore be used as a tool for analysis.

A focus group of six BA branding and fine art students was conducted. It lasted for a duration of two hours and was carried out on Wednesday 4th October 2017 while the following exhibitions were on display: 'Alternative Press' - Work of Derek Bauer, The African Choir 1891 Re-Imagined and Assessing Abstraction. The focus group was held in the Company gardens where participants could view the gallery. An introduction to semiotics, the notion of brand democracy and the four signs that were to be analysed was given for 15 minutes. The participants were told that each sign would be analysed separately in terms of connotations and denotations, and then a general conversation about the signs and brand democracy would ensue. There was a focus placed on what they signs "suggested" rather than merely what the "meant". An exercise was done in the introduction to demonstrate the focus on culturally created meaning. Conversations about the signs followed after each sign was analysed by the participants. A table of the characteristics of democratic brands was handed to each participant, phrased as questions about the signs. For example, "does the sign embody a total stakeholder orientation?". These characteristics were explained in the beginning and the sheet included further description of the branding terms. The participants were firstly asked to engage with the facade for ten minutes. They were asked to walk up to the entrance, through it, around the gallery, and to observe it from the gardens. They were also asked to read the architecture as if it were a text. Secondly, the participants were asked to analyse an A4 coloured print of the Iziko logo as well as observe it on the building. Thirdly, the participants were given 20 minutes to walk through the gallery and observe other people's behaviour and the intended route through the gallery. After analysis of the individual signs, the participants

were asked to consider the characteristics of democratic brands on the sheet and analyse whether the signs suggested a sense of brand democracy or not.

4.2.3 Data analysis

As the study will be conducted within an interpretative paradigm, inductive data analysis will be used in order to assist the researcher in identifying multiple and varied realities in the data (Maree 2016:39). This will enable themes to emerge from the data itself (Maree 2016:39), therefore making the data analysis process inductive. The primary method of data analysis will be thematic and semiotics will be used as a tool to explore whether Iziko gallery is regarded as a necessary public brand.

The strategy of crystallisation will be used in order as several sources will be used to compare the findings with one another (Maree 2016). Maree suggests that in order to facilitate crystallisation the researcher need to consider "*multiple and conflicting voices, differing and interacting interpretations*" (as cited in Maree 2016:42). This study aims to do the latter.

4.2.4 Validity and reliability

The latter methods should accurately and reliably answer the research question as the data will be collected and analysed in a qualitative way due to the qualitative nature of the primary research question. The study will triangulate people's behaviour in the space and perception of the signs with semiotic analysis and focus groups in order to address validity.

4.2.5 Anticipated Contribution

This Study situates itself within Aaker and Joachimsthaler's new brand leadership paradigm that is focussed on brand identity as the driver of strategy, and the creation of meaningful brands that embody total value chain and total stakeholder orientations (Klopper 2016). Within this framework, focus is placed on public brands and their status as nationally representative, democratic and allowing stakeholder involvement and co-creation. As the national South African art gallery, this study assumes the position that art represented at a national level should address the identity and politics of the country, and therefore as a public

brand it should allow stakeholder participation and co-creation. Furthermore, as the gallery could potentially undergo renovation as Iziko museums are currently in this process, this paper could contribute some preliminary insights into why participants found some gallery signs to be more democratic than others.

This paper's anticipated contribution concerns itself with providing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of brand democratisation/ democratic brands in relation to the public status of Iziko gallery brand. Aligned with the purpose of the study this paper aims to contribute to insight into what extent the Iziko gallery is regarded as a necessary democratic brand. In addition, this paper contributes to the exploration of practices such as open source branding, brand democracy, brand co-creation, consumer centric branding and their value to students 21st century climate.

4.2.6 Ethical considerations and Limitations

It is important that this study executes research within the boundaries of ethical guidelines. The researcher should inform study participants that the study is purely for academic use in order to protect their privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. Furthermore it is important that care is taken that participants are not physically or emotionally harmed in the study. The researcher will therefore ensure that interviews and focus group sessions are respectful and unobtrusive. The research participants will be made to feel comfortable and focus group tactics will be used in order to create a relaxed and open atmosphere. It is also important that the researcher upholds the ethical guidelines by not distorting or misusing the information generated by the study.

Possible limitations of the study could include gaining sufficient access to participants who may be difficult to pin down. Another limitation could possibly be the gallery restricting access, analysis and observation. In order to deal with the above the researcher will firstly ask permission to do the study and inform gallery staff.

The Research proposal presented above aims to facilitate a smooth and fruitful research path. After selecting a focus and defining the boundaries and framework of the study, critical questions were identified. The literature review facilitated contextualisation and understanding in order to identify possible research gaps as well as created a theoretical

groundwork for the study. Concept clarification of open-source brands, co-branding and brand democracy aided this. A research plan and design was presented in order to map out the process and identify ethical considerations. Data analysis, interpretation of findings and conclusions will be discussed in the following chapters.

5. Data Analysis

The following analysis will interpret narratives generated in the research. Narrative strings and threads will be analysed from the transcribed focus group material in order to identify commonalities running through the conversation as well as major emerging themes (Maree 2016).

There will be a focus on non-indexical material which refers to statements that express values and judgements (Maree 2016). The latter statements can either be descriptive, in other words they describe feelings and experiences, or argumentative, for example the participants may argue for why they have made a certain statement.

The non-indexical statements will be analysed as "knowledge analysis" because focus will be placed on opinions, concepts and general theories. This sheds light on the self understanding of the participants (Maree 2016). The narrative threads or major themes will then be clustered and compared. Finally the analysis will attempt to synthesise the data in order to recognise collective themes.

5.1 Facade

The first sign that was analysed was the facade. The participants were asked to spend ten minutes engaging with the facade of the building, for example walking through the entrance, and up to the building from the gardens. Two major themes arose from the conversation, Power and incongruous nature of the facade. These will be discussed below.

5.1.1 Power

The theme of power has been identified as one that emerged in the facade discussion. It was explicitly stated six times by various participants and connotations such as "authority" and "dominance" also explicitly arose.

It was evident that from the offset the facade was considered "dominantly colonialist" and "western" by the participants. One participant labelled the architectural style as neo-classicist defining it as "a revival of [the] classical idea that "everything that [was] perfect and beautiful came from them" came from the Greeks and the Romans. At the start of the focus group a few participants enquired what Iziko meant, and one explained that the translation meant

hearth in isiXhosa, meaning the floor of a fire place. This refers to the central meeting place in an African homestead. After having discussed the meaning of Iziko, a participant, said that the facade didn't imbue a sense of community. She highlighted that she didn't feel it was a space that welcomed or was representative of a diverse country. Another agreed that it didn't convey a sense of welcoming. One of the participants described the facade as "this power that was in front of him and not a warmth of community". When asked what it was in the facade that suggested a sense of power, another participant said the white colour of the building suggested the latter. Another echoed the notion of "a big white building" as something that is not South African, and "something that we tried to lose". The building was also described as "grand". It was identified by the participants that the building was not at eye level, and that when standing at the entrance to it, one described that "[one] physically looks down on everyone". Another participant reiterated the notion of power by saying that the raised nature of the building above the gardens made it seem that "the peasants are down here and the Greek gods are up there".

When asked to describe how he felt coming up to the entrance of the gallery, a participant mentioned that he felt a definite sense of power and that the hand rail in the centre of the stairs was "dividing". There was also a sense that the facade suggested a colonial power over an African power, as one participant described it as powers that were "not level with each other" in an historical sense as "they have always been fighting each other and having power over each other". He explained this by referring to Dutch and South African history.

The facade was also described as "canon of western knowledge" and as a "shrine of empirical knowledge that cannot be disputed". The participant described the facade as "dominant" over the contents of the gallery, reiterating the theme of power.

The stature of the gallery was described as "authoritative" and a participant emphasised that she felt that the facade made her feel as if she didn't have an opinion, feeling rather that the facade suggested "this is the opinion".

When discussing the gallery's situation in the company gardens, one participant said that the location already "X'ed" a large amount of people. The gardens were described as beautiful but westernised, and existing outside of the hustle and bustle of the city. A participant added that the gallery and the Company gardens were not "truly South African" and another added that it wasn't a true representation of South African culture or community.

One participant highlighted that despite the gallery being the "central point of South African art and culture", she found that it underwhelmed her expectations. Another argued that it was not underwhelming but "bold".

A participant described that the fact that the gallery was positioned at the end of the garden, its height and its border around it, over signified the gallery and gave a false sense of importance to a building that doesn't portray South African culture very well.

It was emphasised that the gallery wasn't well signposted, one participant referring this back to "power and architecture" suggesting that a courtyard setting close to reception would have been more welcoming. He also attributed a sense of power to the height of the building.

It was concluded that the facade spoke to a sense of power rather than gave stakeholders a sense of power. A participant said that a South African "wouldn't feel like they had much of a connection or any sense of participation in changing it or even being a part of it. And it was suggested that stakeholders would have to understand how to access the gallery before coming to visit it, as the facade may block enquiring stakeholders.

5.1.2 Incongruity

Another narrative thread that arose in the facade conversation was that it was "bold but confusing" as participants repeatedly identified Greek and Roman styles with small touches of African. Many participants described the architecture as Roman and Greek and as a "miss match" of styles. The Xhosa patterns on the windows were described as small, faded and out of place. In addition the faded nature of the banners and windows were described as unappealing. The facade was described as a "cover up", a "copy paste" and an "attempt" at being South African. One participant also highlighted that it didn't have a date and therefore seemed even more out of place and lacking historical significance. Another participant described it through a branding eye, saying that it didn't make sense in terms of what it represented.

There was not a clear constant message that people found and a participant questioned its authenticity. One participant described the facade as a "slapstick project", saying that the architecture is a bit mixed up, that "billboards" have just been "stuck" on either side and that the windows looked hand-painted with "Zulu paintings". It was emphasised that the facade lacked "consistency" throughout its imagery. One participant felt that "the medium [the

gallery was] using was different to its message". He emphasised that diversity was evident but that there was no constant thread. Another participant described the facade as lacking a sense of harmoniousness.

Most participants identified the slogan on the banner "see things differently" and felt that it was incongruously placed, too small and that it had little meaning for the gallery.

Another theme that was raised was the lack of a "story leading up to the gallery" that could signify what was inside it. Art pieces leading up to the gallery was suggested. Many people agreed that if you didn't know about the gallery there was little to show you where it was. It was suggested that the facade told "30 different stories" and that one constant message was needed.

5.2 Logo

When looking at an A4 colour printed picture of the logo, a participant described the three shapes as battle shields, but a modern, simplified take on them. She explained that the forms embodied the notion of modern art rather than historical art. She assumed that they represented Xhosa or Zulu battles shields.

The logo was also described as being recognisably South African with no foreign elements. Many participants weren't sure what the three colours of the "shields" represented but were interested to know and thought that they were visually appealing. One participant described the red "shield" as centred and aggressive, linking it to a defensive warrior.

It was agreed that the logo was an appealing design but that it seemed out of place on the banner which was on either side of the entrance. Many noticed that the logo was in white on the banner and lacked the colours of the printed logo, making it less relevant.

All the participants agreed that the logo spoke more to a sense of engagement with stakeholders than the facade did. One described it as a simple design that was a bit more "warm and welcoming" than the facade.

One participant argued that the logo was boring and un-engaging as it didn't tell her anything about the brand. The fact that "iziko" was in lower case was purely described as a design element rather than a suggestion of brand democracy by participants.

5.3 Analysis of behaviour and intended route

Participants discussed the behaviour of others in the gallery and the intended route in a highly interlinked way, and therefore the analysis of the above two signs will be discussed in a synthesised way.

It was evident that the participants felt that inside the gallery there was a "calm" atmosphere and that it didn't demand a "library intensity" which may be attributed to most art galleries. Participants felt welcome and felt like they could engage with the artwork without feeling scared to go closer or to "touch it". The interiors were described as spacious and not cramped. One participant emphasised that the fact that most participants were comfortable inside and had a sense of agency was notable as many people often feel overwhelmed and intimidated by artworks, often feeling that because they don't understand them, they don't belong in the gallery. In addition, most participants felt that they could move on if they didn't engage or understand the artwork. Similarly, another participant highlighted that she felt a sense of agency because she felt she had the power to choose which rooms/artwork she wanted to spend time in.

Another theme that emerged was that participants felt that different rooms invited different behaviour. Two participants felt that "Zapiro's room" ('Alternative Press' - Work of Derek Bauer) with the newspaper cuttings and cartoons invited them to really "read" the texts and almost "touch the artwork" in comparison to the "old oil paintings" where they felt that had to take time to decide where to start. Another participant felt like the political satire section allowed a freedom of speech and a sense of agency and opinion, and that the artwork "didn't shout at him". He described "Zapiro's room" as less overwhelming and that he had space to judge and engage with the artwork. Contrastingly, he described the butcher boys room with the oil paintings as emanating a sense of strength and power. One participant also highlighted that he found it engaging when an artist's process work was displayed as one could "see the whole design/thinking process".

It was agreed that the comment books placed in each room invited engagement from stakeholders as they were allowed to share their experiences, and brought out a certain kind of behaviour. One participant highlighted that it suggested a sense of brand democracy as people were allowed to give input. Another suggested that even if the comments in the books weren't read, the fact that they allowed one to engage and "put [one's] mark on [them]"

already made one "feel part of the place". A participant also highlighted that even just reading other people's comments made it more engaging for individuals.

Participants also highlighted that after the first room there was an option to either take the left or right routes. They felt that it gave them a sense of agency and that there was a feeling of being "lost" in the gallery which a few participants enjoyed. Another participant highlighted that his choice of route effected the way he engaged and felt about the art. He highlighted that the fact that he felt lost in the gallery conveyed a sense of democracy as there was no one telling him which was to go. Another participant emphasised that he felt that the facade represented one power, but inside the gallery there were "multiple powers" that were not overwhelming but conveyed a sense of democracy. Participants didn't feel like they had to keep quiet inside the gallery and that it allowed free movement as there was no "strict direction" of where to walk.

Many participants were confused about what the first room signified and that many of the artists were unknown which made it more difficult for the participants to engage and relate to the art. Contrastingly, in a different room another a participant liked the fact that he could identify an artist by his face because there was a video of him speaking. One participant studying curatorship described the first room as lacking a narrative, despite the fact that it was trying to convey the prevalence of "abstraction in art" across various cultures.

It was also evident that participants felt that the Xhosa cape placed in a raised glass box as one walks into the first room signified that it was old and fragile and that you couldn't touch it or take a photo of it. Another participant highlighted that when one "puts something in a box it creates a barrier between [one] and the medium". The cape was also considered as highly important because it was in a glass box.

The majority of the participants emphasised that they found the African choir room to be the most impactful, emotive and engaging. They attributed this to the multimedia nature of the room as it had sound and photographs. The fact that all the photographs were portraits of the choir and that when standing in the middle of the room "the faces" seemed to be looking at you, was repeatedly mentioned by the group. In addition, the participants enjoyed the fact that the room had dimmed lighting and that the portraits were high contrast.

The majority of the participants agreed that the gallery route allowed a sense of participation and behaviour and that there was a disjunction between the facade and the inside of the

gallery. Someone emphasised that how she felt entering the gallery compared to how she felt inside the gallery was completely different. She highlighted that she felt nervous entering the gallery but comfortable inside it.

5.3.1 Co-ownership of the brand

When asked whether he felt that as a South African he could "co-own" the Iziko gallery brand, one of the participants attributed his disagreement to the facade's sense of hierarchy as it looked like a "parliamental building" with the high ceilings and big walls. He explained that if all the art had to be taken out of the gallery he felt that it was a boardroom and that he didn't really belong there. He added that if there was a courtyard or a coffee shop in the gallery where he could engage with the gallery and gallery goers he would feel more of a co-owner of the brand.

When asked about whether or not he felt that he could co-own the brand, a participant responded saying that he felt similarly towards the South African government and the gallery, that he had a vote but a very small one in terms of co-ownership of the Iziko gallery brand.

Responding to the same question, one participant felt that there was a "strong sense of inactivity" and lack of dynamism in the gallery. She didn't feel like she could approach or discuss what she saw with anyone. She highlighted the A4 gallery in comparison, which she described as having an open library next door that anyone could access and someone at the front desk who was engaging. She added that there was a place that one could write one's opinion of A4 and stick it up. She suggested that the above encouraged engagement, interaction, opinion and commentary. She was also able to sign up for a newsletter and there was someone that was approachable.

She emphasised that she felt that in Iziko you *can* sign up for a newsletter but that there is nothing encouraging involvement or informing stakeholders about the next exhibition. She highlighted that Iziko's artist's talks and forums are not advertised and that you would need to get a notification from someone who had gone before. She stressed that these talks were not accessible and highly exclusive despite the fact that they provided a platform where stakeholders could interact with artists and the community. It was evident that she felt that the comment books that one could write in seemed ineffectual as they merely invited a "thank you" comment and that their purpose was not to help stakeholders really engage with the artwork.

On the subject of co-ownership of the Iziko brand as South Africans, many participants felt that the gallery had a sense of authority as one had to ask to be involved instead of feeling they were being invited to be involved. Another participant felt that the donation boxes were as far as it got in terms of stakeholder involvement. In addition, most of the group was unsure where these donations went to and therefore distrusted them.

Towards the end of the conversation a participant highlighted in the gallery's defence that Iziko was in the process of renovating their museums and that the gallery would probably be next. The fact that the gallery was government owned and that it didn't get much funding was also discussed by the group.

In conclusion, participants felt that the comment books were the most democratic sign as well as the behaviour of themselves and others. Everyone agreed that the facade of the gallery was the least democratic sign as it hindered a sense of stakeholder engagement.

6. Findings and interpretation of findings

While the previous chapter focussed on breaking the data into smaller sections of meaning and themes, this chapter will focus on synthesis. The findings will be logically ordered so that the essence of the phenomenon being studied can be revealed (Maree 2016).

In addition, focus will be placed on revealing *why* themes have emerged. The analysed data will therefore be brought into context with existing theory in the literature review in order to reveal if it corroborates with theories of brand democracy or brings new understanding to this body of knowledge (Maree 2016). The following interpretation of analysed data will search for "emerging patterns, associations, concepts and explanations" (Maree 2016:120).

It is important to note that in this paper a stakeholder can be defined as anyone who has an interest or concern with the gallery, for example suppliers, consumers, partners, employees and the broader community (Enslin & Klopper 2011). It must be noted that as this analysis and interpretation is based on a focus group of students, the notion of stakeholder predominantly refers to the "consumer" and broader community.

6.1.1 Stakeholder Power

Brand democracy is innately about stakeholders having increased control and having a greater sense of power when it comes to brands (Neisser 2008). The term user-design can be used to "describe the voluntary shift in design responsibility from the producer to the consumer" (Moreau 2011:409). Similarly, the notion of open source brands refer to "consumers having greater power in product design" (Paharia & Swaminathan 2014:197). Fournier and Avery emphasise that brands that "recognise that the support of the collective is garnered only when management acknowledges consumers rightful ownership and relinquishes brand control" (2011:195). Brand democracy therefore occurs when brand managers or designers relinquish control and give stakeholders increased power. This is the embodiment of a stakeholder centric approach as the brand recognises that it is a product of its stakeholder's impressions, hence relinquishing a rightful sense of control (Enslin & Klopper 2011). It is therefore democratic brands that invite consumer participation rather than maintain control. The following interpretation of findings will therefore take note of instances of stakeholder power and agency versus the gallery's sense of authority and control.

Brands relinquish control when they invite stakeholders to engage, participate and collaborate with the brand to the extent where there is a sense of co-ownership as stakeholders have a greater say in what the brand says and how it behaves (source).

Taking the latter democratic relinquishment of control into consideration, it is pertinent to discuss that in the participants analysis of the facade the term "power" was explicitly stated various times and notions of dominance and authority also explicitly arose. This power was openly characterised by the participants as a colonial power that dominated an African one. It was evident that not only did the gallery's raised nature above the gardens physically make the participants feel less powerful, but that the architecture signified a sense of undisputed empirical knowledge. The latter made participants feel like they had been stripped of their opinion, as the facade already presented an undisputed opinion. It was also identified that because the facade spoke to a sense of power, it negated a sense of community and therefore was not welcoming. The participants identified this disjuncture by highlighting that the facade didn't embody the gallery's title of hearth. It is relevant to note that

'Iziko' is an isiXhosa word, meaning "a hearth". Since the hearth of a typical African homestead usually occupies the central space, Iziko symbolises both a hub of cultural activity, and a central place for gathering together South Africa's diverse heritage. (Iziko museums of South Africa 2017)

Relating to the meaning of Iziko, the fact that participants didn't get a sense of welcoming, warmth or community from the facade is a notable first impression. The facade embodied a sense of power rather than relinquished a sense of power to stakeholders. It was evident that this sense of authority over stakeholders prevented them from feeling like that could connect, participate, involve themselves, or be part of the brand as a South African. The facade of the gallery was therefore characterised as the least democratic sign that was analysed and it was concluded that there was a notable disjuncture between how participants felt entering the gallery and how they felt inside it.

On the other hand, participants felt that the intended route and the behaviour of others inside the gallery spoke to a sense of agency and brand democracy. Participants felt that they could engage with the artwork without feeling intimidated. Furthermore, felt that they had space to judge and felt that the inside of the gallery made them feel welcome and comfortable. In addition to this participants felt that they had a sense of agency as they could move on from artworks or rooms that they didn't understand or engage with. It was suggested by a curatorship participant that that often if visitors don't understand the artwork they feel

overwhelmed and therefore that they don't belong in the gallery space. She remarked that it was notable that participants felt they had the "power" to choose their musings. The facade was described as "one power" by a participant while inside the gallery he identified "multiple powers that were not overwhelming" and conveyed a sense of brand democracy

In addition to a sense of agency when engaging with the art, participants also felt that the route allowed them a sense of agency. As they could choose the left or right routes after the first room, participants enjoyed feeling "lost" in the gallery and that there was no "strict direction of where to walk" or "someone telling them where to go". The fact that participants felt a sense of agency and power inside the gallery speaks to the brand's relinquishment of control.

It was also telling that two participants who were not art students repeatedly highlighted that the "political satire room with newspaper clipping" ('Alternative Press' - Work of Derek Bauer) invited a different behaviour from them. They stressed that the latter medium invited a more informal engagement where they felt they could laugh, closely read and almost touch the art on display. In addition, just as the political art embodied a freedom of speech and opinion, so the two participants felt that their own opinion was valid as the artworks didn't "shout at [them]". There was a clear sense that there was space to judge and engage, and therefore the room allowed stakeholder power as their opinion was made valid.

6.1.2 Democratic authenticity and transparency

Neisser suggests that in order to ride the wave of brand democratisation branders and marketers need to focus on customer satisfaction, brand authenticity and transparency, rewarding content generators and delivering a brand experience (2008).

The fact that the facade was described as "an attempt" at being South African, due to the small windows painted in African patterns, questions its authenticity, and therefore the Iziko gallery brand authenticity. In addition, because the facade lacked cohesion and suggested a "miss match" of styles, this further questioned authenticity. Transparency was also questioned as the facade lacked a constant message, presenting an incongruous slogan "see things differently" on its banners. It was evident that authenticity and transparency were in question as the facade's medium didn't signify its message, as highlighted by participants. Contributing to this notion there was the lack of a one coherent story leading up to the gallery and stakeholders struggled to engage with the facade's "30 different stories". The gallery's

logo also lacked translation from its online appearance to the banner as it was presented in white. The banner and windows' faded nature further questioned the gallery's position as the South African national gallery.

In addition, the fact that the participants described that the gallery wasn't well signposted, and that one would have to know how to access it before you one got there may further question the gallery's transparency. Furthermore, the facade's lack of date undermined its historical significance and the donation boxes were distrusted as participants identified a lack of transparency as to what they were funding.

In contrast to the facade, the logo was perceived by participants as being authentically South African predominantly because coloured shapes were suggested to be "African battle shields". Participants also described these shapes as modern which seemed to invite more engagement as they were more relatable than "historical shields". It was evident that it invited more engagement than the facade as it was described as "warm and welcoming" and visually appealing. It can therefore be concluded that the logo did suggest a sense of brand democracy as it invited a sense of engagement.

Similarly, one of the above participants engaged with being able to see the artists' faces on video as well as being able to see their process work. Another participant felt that the artworks that had an unknown artist hindered engagement with the displays. It was evident that participants connected with a narrative, whether it was a narrative of the artist's life or work, the gallery's narrative or the thematic narratives in the various gallery rooms. Participants engaged with one consistent and coherent message. One participant attributed the lack of coherence in the first room to its lack of narrative. Another participant highlighted that he looked for stories in every room and that every room "had their own story". It was also evident that when participants felt that they couldn't "touch" or come up close to the artworks, for example artworks displayed in glass boxes, they felt that there was a barrier between themselves and the medium. Perhaps because they described the artworks in glass boxes having connotations of high importance and fragility, engagement was hampered. This therefore was seen as decreasing brand democracy because it hindered involvement.

In addition to the political satire medium, participants engaged in a highly meaningful way with the multimedia African choir room. They enjoyed listening to the voices of the choir, seeing the high contrast portraits of the choirs faces and being able to read their names.

Perhaps because the room created an experience or a more fleshed out narrative, the majority of the participants found the room to be highly engaging.

6.1.3 Brand co-ownership, co-creation and open source brands

Creating a collaborative relationship between stakeholders and the Iziko gallery brand will enable a sense of co-ownership (Businesswire.com, 2006). It is therefore about creating a stakeholder community surrounding the brand (Businesswire.com, 2006). Consumer engagement in designing or participating in the brand's actions embodies the democratic sense of "inviting the amateurs into the studio", allowing them a sense of co-ownership (Moreau 2011:409).

When asked if he felt that he could co-own the Iziko gallery brand as a South African, a participant said that he had a similar response to the South African government, that he had a vote, but a very small one in term of co-ownership. Somma emphasises that brand strategy is valuable and necessary in gaining stakeholders' trust of government entities (2015). The Iziko National Gallery as a government entity therefore plays a pivotal role in reiterating a sense of brand democracy as a public brand.

Another participant attributed the fact that he felt that he wasn't able to co-own the brand due to the hierarchical nature of the facade and that the white walls and ceilings inside the gallery made it seem like a parliament building in which he didn't belong. He added that if there was a communal area such as a courtyard or coffee shop where people could engage, he would feel more inclined to co-own the brand as a South African. A coffee shop may facilitate a co-creation of a gallery space by both parties, stakeholders and the gallery. It is therefore relevant that co-creation in branding is situated within the view that "brand meaning and value(s) emerge from stakeholder engagement with a company (Hatch and Schultz 2010:591). A coffee shop allows stakeholders to engage with each other and the gallery in an informal setting.

Another participant felt that the gallery's strong sense of inactivity and lack of dynamism hampered her potential co-ownership of the brand. This was due to the fact that she felt she couldn't discuss what she saw with anyone and that she had to ask for information rather than the gallery inviting an interaction. She highlighted that there was a lack of approachable informants who were able to distribute information regarding future exhibitions or artists' forums, characterising the latter as exclusive as one would have to rely on contacts who are

"in the know" to attend these talks. The above suggests a lack of brand democracy as because participants weren't given a platform to engage, co-ownership of the brand was hampered.

It is pertinent to raise that an open source brand, which can be seen as falling under the notion of a democratic brand, is embedded in a cultural conversation where stakeholders gain an equal say in what the brand look like and how it behaves (Fournier and Avery 2011:194). The fact that artists forums, where stakeholders can engage with the community and artists about their artwork, are not made more accessible to stakeholders, hampers the brand's sense of brand democracy. Although Iziko isn't an open source brand, it is relevant to consider the notion of open source brands as they implicate "participatory, collaborative, and socially-linked behaviours whereby consumers serve as creators and disseminators of branded content (Fournier and Avery 2011:194). The inaccessible nature of gallery information hinders participatory and collaborative behaviours from stakeholders which is necessary in the creation of a gallery community and conversation.

It is also essential to raise the importance of brand communities as found in the artists' forums, as they can be contexts for brand co-creation as brand value is "co-created through network relationships and social interactions among the ecosystem of all stakeholders" (Hatch and Schultz 2010:592). In addition, democratic brands are valuable to their stakeholders because they invite consumer participation and engagement. Hatch and Schultz suggest that brand co-creation emerges from access and dialogue for brand community stakeholders (2010).

Stakeholders produce and reproduce brand interpretations (as cited in Hatch and Schultz 2010) and it is therefore valuable that brand's note that they exist as stakeholder's impressions of them. Making forums more accessible will increase the notion that the Iziko brand values its stakeholder's perception of it.

The comment books in every room of the gallery were identified by most of the participants as a sign that invited the most stakeholder engagement. Participants felt that the books allowed them to "make their mark" and therefore made them feel part of the gallery community, reiterating a sense of co-ownership and co-creation. The comment books may perhaps have given participants a sense of shared control as they could become brand co-creators (Hatch and Schultz 2010).

Despite the comment books being a popular choice for having the strongest sense of brand democracy, a participant stressed that she found the comment books to be ineffectual as she didn't believe they were instrumental in changing anything in the gallery, or that they assisted an engagement with the artwork or artist.

Revisiting the notion of power and authority, many participants felt that they couldn't co-own the brand as there was an obvious presence of authority. They attributed this to the fact that they felt that they had to ask to be involved rather than feeling a sense of invitation.

6.1.4 Public Space

It is relevant to have discussed Iziko's position in the Company Gardens and spaces are culturally produced and "public spaces are simultaneously an expression of social power and a force themselves that help shape social relations" (2013: vii Low and Smith). The accessibility of the gallery through the gardens therefore plays a role in the democratic nature of a brand.

It was interesting that the gallery's situation in the company gardens made participants feel as if it was removed from the city, existing outside of it or beyond it, despite its location in the CBD of Cape Town. This was perhaps highlighted as participants felt that from the gardens they could predominantly see signal hill rather than buildings in the city. The fact that they suggested this may emphasise that the gallery and beautiful gardens are almost viewed as free from the city's crimes, dirt and urbanity, existing separate from urban culture. Although green spaces such as the gardens are fundamental parts of the well being of a city, the latter also may suggest an exclusive element to the gardens as its status as a westernised and prestigious allows it to almost exist above urban culture. In addition the borders of the garden were also mentioned by the participants in creating an exclusive space. Another participant mentioned that the Company Gardens already "X'ed" or excluded people from the gallery as due to its position in the city. Many participants also highlighted the lack of signposting or gallery signifiers, saying that one would have to know how to access it before entering the gardens.

It is therefore prevalent to consider the space that the gallery is situated in as it is in constant conversation with the gallery and therefore plays a role in suggesting a sense of brand democracy. It is important to note that

Museums cannot be static monoliths seated on the periphery of society. Museums have an important role to play and need to constantly engage and reflect the society we serve. (Davis 2017, Daily Maverick.co.za)

This is relevant for the Iziko gallery brand as it's space in the Company Gardens plays a role in it's perceived brand democracy. If museums are perceived to exist "on the periphery of society", it minimises brand democracy as it decreases engagement.

Themes that have arisen from the interpretation of findings include that the signs that suggested a sense of power were perceived to be the least democratic, inviting the least engagement from participants. On the other hand, the signs that suggested a sense of agency and opinion were perceived as the most democratic and made participants feel like they were co-owners of the brand

6.2 Insights

The following insights are merely preliminary findings as more focus groups would have to be carried out over a period of various gallery exhibitions. Therefore the following have been included to predominantly serve as thought provokers. The themes below were identified in the data as allowing more participant engagement and therefore increasing a sense of brand democracy in gallery.

6.2.1 A Narrative

There was great emphasis placed on the notion of a story throughout discussions of the four signs. The facade was described as telling "30 different stories" and participants lacked the sense of a coherent and consistent message. In addition, it was suggested that there should be a story told leading up to the gallery, beginning in the Company Gardens and acting as a signifier of what was inside the gallery. More signposting and awareness of the gallery was also highlighted to aid a certain signifying narrative. Participants were also looking for certain narratives in the rooms of the art, one participant saying that the entrance room lacked a "narrative". Another participant highlighted that each room had its story despite the fact that there was no continuous narrative running through the gallery, which wasn't suggested as a negative. It is perhaps the sense that a narrative allows a heightened sense of involvement as

it not only speaks to brand authenticity and transparency, but a sense that stakeholders are able to be involved because they can follow a "sense-making" process. More research will have to be done on the value of a narrative for brands and brand democracy. But it can be preliminarily said that different elements are provided in a narrative, allowing stakeholders to analyze each one and therefore feel more involved in the sign as a "final product".

6.2.2 Transparency

Similar to the notion of a narrative, it was also raised that being able to see an artist speaking on video, or an artist's process work, also suggests a story behind an end goal and therefore a sense of transparency. Because the latter as well as the notion of a narrative invites stakeholders to walk together along a "path" with the artist or gallery, there is a sense that co-ownership is a greater possibility.

The donation boxes, lack of signposting and the miss matched architecture of the facade hindered brand transparency for participants as they lacked a signifying "narrative".

6.2.3 Medium invites specific behaviour

Participants responded favourably to the 'Alternative Press' - Work of Derek Bauer room (Iziko National Gallery.co.za) where they felt that they could laugh, read closely and almost "touch" the art. They felt that the medium encouraged a sense of individual opinion and agency. The fact that the political or newspaper medium was characterised as engaging suggests a sense of brand democracy as the medium invited participation and involvement. It was also evident that the multimedia nature of "The African Choir 1891 Re-Imagined"(Iziko National Gallery.co.za) exhibition was highly impactful and engaging for participants. The video playing of Lionel Davis was also highlighted as engaging. As stressed before this insight is highly preliminary, but it does provoke thought on the "brand experience" multimedia creates.

6.2.4 Co-creating gallery space

It was emphasised that a communal space such as a coffee shop or a courtyard would aid participant's sense of co-ownership of the brand. The latter would allow a co-creation of gallery space as it would be an informal meeting place for all gallery stakeholders, and therefore be an invitation for conversation between them. Participants highlighted that the

gallery lacked approachable informants that they could speak to about the art and that they had to ask to be informed instead of being invited to know more. The co-creation of a gallery space would allow the Iziko brand to be embedded in a cultural conversation as well as create the sense of a stakeholder community. An informal pace invites the sharing of information and could therefore inform stakeholders about artist's forums which were characterised by one curatorship student as highly valuable. It was felt that a co-created space would invite more engagement than the comment books as many participants were not sure if they were effectual despite the fact that there were predominantly seen in a positive and democratic light. Perhaps a suggestion box rather than a comment book would be perceived as more democratic.

6.3 Validity and Reliability

The findings above can be considered credible as research methods, design and theoretical underpinnings are aligned with the research question and method (Maree 2016). The data collection method of a focus group was aligned with the qualitative nature of the study as it allowed participants to engage in conversation with each other and provide lengthy analysis.

This study allows transferability as it "invites readers of research to make connections between elements of the study and their own experience or research" (Maree 2016: 124). As Iziko is frequented by South African art and BA students as a form of education, they can be seen as typically involved in the phenomenon of Iziko's perceived brand democracy (Maree 2016). The research is also dependable as data collection and analysis processes are transparent and therefore readers will be able to follow the reasoning present (Maree 2016). In addition, the research can be seen as confirmable as the researcher tried to eliminate researcher bias by allowing participants to guide the conversation rather than promoting self interest (Maree 2016).

The key to validation lies in the open and transparent nature of research procedures (Maree 2016). All research processes and decisions are included in the document as well as in the appendices in order for readers to assess the interpretative decisions made (Maree 2016). The research has therefore been validated transparently.

7. Conclusion

The following conclusions are based on findings from the data analysis and triangulated with theoretical frameworks and the literature review (Maree 2016). It is important to note that these conclusions cannot be generalised to a broader audience as they are specific to the participant's contexts (Maree 2016). Due to the exploratory nature of the study, the following can be termed a bounded conclusion as the aim of the study was to explore and investigate the phenomenon of brand democracy in the Iziko gallery rather than to provide finite conclusions.

7.1 Answering the research question and evaluating the study's success

This study proposes to what extent the South African National Gallery (IZIKO) is perceived as a necessary democratic brand by BA and Art students between the ages 19-26 in Cape Town.

Three of the four signs that were specifically analysed were deemed predominantly democratic by participants in accordance with a set of criteria. Namely, the logo, the intended route and the behaviour of gallery goers inside the gallery. It was suggested that the logo's modern but warm design welcomed engagement. The route and behaviour were perceived as democratic as they suggested a sense of individual agency in the gallery and freedom of opinion. In contrast, the facade and the gallery's situation in the Company Gardens was perceived to suggest very little brand democracy. This was due to the facade being perceived as authoritative and an overwhelming power. In addition, the participants perceived little transparency in signposting of the gallery.

In addition to this, participants highlighted that the gallery lacked a co-created space for stakeholders, approachable informants and a sense of invitation and access to artist's forums and exhibitions. Although the comment books were highlighted as allowing engagement, participants felt that they were ineffectual in helping them engage with the art, artist or stakeholder community.

Based on the signs analysed, It can be concluded that the gallery predominantly suggests a sense of brand democracy, but that there is a notable disjuncture between the facade and the experience inside. This can be seen as problematic as the facade presents stakeholders with

the initial impression of the gallery, and facilitates an initial engagement. The fact that it is perceived as hindering engagement and individual opinion due to its sense of power and incongruity may be an important aspect for the gallery to consider if wanting to be perceived as a democratic brand.

7.2 Implications of findings for future practices

Due to the fact that Iziko museums is in the process of renovating their various sites, the gallery could potentially undergo some renovation changes. As a public South African brand and a government "trustmark", this study assumes that the gallery would want to be perceived as being a democratic brand; one that invites participation, collaboration, engagement and allows all stakeholders a sense of co-ownership . Therefore, the preliminary findings highlighted in this paper may act as thought provokers for gallery managers in light of potential changes or maintenance of the gallery. This paper therefore assumes that the Iziko gallery would want to maximise stakeholder engagement as a public South African brand.

7.3 Possible future research

As suggested in limitations, future research in this field could conduct several more diverse focus groups across several time periods for the gallery. This will allow researchers to better understand how and why participants read signs as inviting engagement and agency or not. This could result in various variables being discovered that either increase or decrease brand democracy in art museums. The study could also have had a higher validity if the participants were asked to take photographs of the signs they felt maximised engagement and therefore suggested a sense of brand democracy. This would have facilitated an inside-out approach and would have guided a more precise, effective conversation.

Brands that are democratic are often seen as more meaningful to stakeholders as they invite participation rather than maintain control. Neisser defines brand democratisation not just as a fad but as a worldwide phenomenon synonymous with the notion of "customer made" (2008). It is suggested that brand democratization is a wave that marketers and branders will have to ride (Neisser, 2008) in order to stay afloat in a world where consumers have increased control.

Due to the fact that the study was able to provide preliminary insights into which signs the student participants perceived as inviting engagement, it can be concluded that the study may provide some value within its conducted context.

7.4 Ethical implications

Participants were informed about the study and were asked for consent by the researcher. A relaxed environment was created in the company gardens as participants were asked to respect each other's opinions as well as voice their views despite not having specific art or curatorship knowledge. It was emphasised before the focus group was conducted that no one needed prior art knowledge. An introduction was also given in order to make sure participants were comfortable and had an understanding of the study and certain terms. The participants' anonymity and confidentiality were also protected as no names were provided in the final document.

7.5 Limitations of the study

The primary limitation of the study was that it was difficult to recruit a diverse range of student participants. Therefore future studies would have to have a more diverse range of cultures and backgrounds participating in focus groups in order to provide a more representative analysis of the signs by South Africans. Another limitation was that participants were easily confused by the notion of "brand democracy", often interpreting it as having a political connection. Although there are many overlaps between the political notion of democracy and brand democracy, the distinction should have been more clearly explained to the focus group in some instances.

In addition to the above limitations, the participants only had 20 minutes to walk through the gallery due to time constraints, this could have effected how they engaged and perceived the artwork.

Lastly, due to the scope and size of this study, only one focus group was carried out. In order to increase trustworthiness of the study several diverse focus groups should be carried out over a number of exhibitions. This will create a more well rounded view of the gallery's brand democracy as curators and exhibitions could change participants' perception of various

signs. As the group was only made up of students, future research could be conducted with various groups of participants.

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