Exploring the Impact of Language on Consumer-Brand Relationships across Digital Media

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Submitted in fulfilment towards the completion of a Masters of Business Science Degree
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Date of submission: 31 August 2020

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ABSTRACT

Within the marketing management sphere, consumer-brand relationship theory has attracted interest and academic research since its inception. One area that has been relatively unexplored, however, is the interplay between vernacular languages and consumer-brand relationships in a multilingual South Africa. Celebrated for its multicultural and multilingual identity, South Africa recognises eleven official languages with English predominantly used across marketing activities. Despite a variety of research projects aimed at exploring consumer-brand relationship theory, there remains a gap in the knowledge regarding how languages impact the relationships that consumers form with brands. Previous research has been centred on the Western and Asian markets and has failed to address the challenges of the diverse South African market. Consumers experience an emotional link and a sense of attachment to their home language. This paper postulates that this connection extends to consumer-brand relationships and that language choice can, therefore, impact the formation and development of brand relationships. This paper sought to explore this theory, using qualitative research methods. In-depth interviews were conducted in order to collect information about consumers' experiences and feelings regarding this topic. Fourteen participants from various language groups were asked a series of open-ended questions and their responses recorded. Results demonstrated that the use of first languages can influence how consumers respond to brands and can affect a number of elements identified in the brand-relationship quality model. The analysis found a link between language use and brand relationship theory, finding that the use of consumers' mother tongues can lead to consumers developing relationship qualities including love and passion, self-connection and commitment. This demonstrates that language can play a significant role in impacting consumer-brand relationships. We, therefore, infer that language can potentially impact consumer-brand relationships, and that language choice has the power to impact how consumers build relationships with brands.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my wonderful supervisor, Nqobile Bundwini, thank you for your compassion, guidance and fantastic feedback. This project would not have been possible without you.

To my friends and family who have cheered me on and offered advice, thank you for your enthusiasm and encouragment.

Thank you to my incredible parents- everything I've achieved is because of you. I owe you both my endless gratitude for your unwavering support and love.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The South African consumer market comprises of consumers from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, representing a diverse range of needs and desires. Communicating with these consumers is essential for marketers, and finding ways to do so while building strong bonds with these consumers - bonds which can be referred to as consumer-brand relationships - is an important concern for brands. Communication forms a vital part of modern marketing methods and connecting with consumers, and is often facilitated through digital media such as social media platforms, websites or blogs.

Brands are relevant to consumers as they enable producers and consumers to differentiate and identify products and services (Castaño & Perez, 2014). Brands have been described as products which have earned a place in the life of the consumer through perceptual experience, beliefs and feelings, to the extent that a relationship of consequence has originated (Lamb, Hair, McDaniel, Boshoff, Terblanche, Elliot & Klopper, 2015). This thinking is in line with Aaker's Brand Equity theory, which states that brands may project marked personality qualities that consumers perceive and respond to by developing relationships with them, thereby making them a part of their lives (Castaño & Perez, 2014).

South Africa represents a diverse consumer base, ranging across cultures and language groups. English is commonly accepted as the *lingua franca,* while a total of eleven national languages are recognised (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2010). The country has seen various social and economic changes over the course of the past few decades, which has precipitated a change in marketing needs. These changes are not always reflected in the marketing strategies of today, and it would be beneficial for contemporary marketers to reflect on factors such as cultural backgrounds, languages spoken, varied education levels and access to technology (Petzer & De Meyer, 2013).

Consumer-brand relationships can be described as mutually beneficial, symbiotic relationships between consumers and brands which, when done well, benefit both parties (Louriero, 2012). Consumer-brand relationships offer practical significance to

marketing practitioners and can be used as part of marketing strategies (Ghani & Tuhin, 2016).

Previous studies that have sought to explore the relationship between consumer-brand relationships and language have been largely focused on Europe, Asia and North America (Chang & Chieng, 2006; Maclean, 2006; Salciuviene, et al., 2010; Zhang, et al., 2003). Some of these studies were also aimed at understanding the role of languages on consumer experiences in the context of the service sector, not digital marketing (Bell & Puzakova, 2017; Touchstone, et al., 2017). These studies, while insightful and valuable, do not necessarily accurately represent South African realities or the digital media sphere. While research regarding consumer-brand relationships is growing, knowledge and theories of consumer-brand relationship management are still underdeveloped or, as described in some researchers, is still in its infancy stage (Fetscherin & Heinrich, 2015) A gap has, therefore, been identified in the context of South African-specific research and in the context of understanding consumer-brand relationships through digital media.

In order to investigate and understand consumer-brand relationships in the context of the digital sphere, one should perhaps first understand what constitutes an online relationship. Relationship here refers to ongoing, non-accidental interactions between a customer and the seller, which moves beyond transactional exchanges (Steinhoff, et al., 2018).

In the context of this study, the term ‘language’ will be used to refer to the system of communication used, ie. English/isiXhosa/German, which is traditionally associated with certain regions or communities.

1.2 BACKGROUND

The average consumer is exposed to hundreds of marketing messages daily, all vying for their attention (Forbes, 2017). For modern marketing firms looking to establish strong bonds with consumers, it is worthwhile to explore consumer-brand relationships and how this construct is influenced by language. In the search to understand and

explore how language influences consumer-brand relationships, there are certain theories and constructs which need to be explored.

1.2.1 Consumer-brand relationships

Consumer-brand relationships can be defined as the connection between the brand and the consumer (Ghani & Tuhin, 2016). In the contemporary marketing environment, the competition for consumers is fierce, leading to brands becoming increasingly invested in the processes behind consumer decisions and the factors that influence these processes, including the formation of consumer-brand relationships. Marketing has become increasingly complex and more reliant on data, while also reaching more customers (O'Conner, 2015).

Previous studies have found strong ties between consumer decisions and consumers' expressions of self, and how brands reflect these self-concepts (Black & Veloutsou, 2017; Ningrum & Ayem, 2019) . Consumer decisions can often be linked to concepts of identity and experiences of identity. Studies have found that purchases made by consumers are directly influenced by the self-image consumers have of themselves (Ilaw, 2014). Renowned marketing firm Saatchi & Saatchi first coined the name 'lovemarks' to describe brands that inspire passionate consumer-brand relationship bonds. According to Saatchi & Saatchi, lovemarks inspire loyalty and create emotional bonds that consumers cannot live without (Saatchi & Saatchi, n.d.).

1.2.2 Marketing in the face of the South African consumer market

The South African market can be described as unique, owing to the political history of the country and its identity as a multilingual and multicultural nation with a diverse range of consumers (Petzer & De Meyer, 2013). South Africa recognises eleven official languages and is composed of multiple distinct cultural groups. South African consumers comprise various ethnic groups and speak a multitude of languages, with most consumers possessing the ability to converse in more than one language fluently (South African Government, 2019). As a heterogenous consumer market, South Africa represents a varied and wide marketplace.

South Africa's marketing and production industries were in an uncommon situation with the advent of democracy in the 1990s. Emerging from the period of isolation during the apartheid era, South Africa quickly became part of the world economy, with rapid changes enacted on the ways that services and goods were being marketed (Petzer & De Meyer, 2013). South Africa's economic landscape has changed dramatically over the past three decades, leading to a change in the economic realities of its citizens. These consumers are often underrepresented in a consumer market that has been dominated by Westernised marketing approaches (Petzer & De Meyer, 2013)

1.2.3 Languages in South Africa

Multilingualism is deeply entrenched in South African culture and has been described as the very marker of this society (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2010). This status is supported by educational language policies as well as in the constitutional declarations about the official languages of the nation (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2010).

Research has shown that English is the language that is most widely understood by the majority (76%) of the population, yet it is not the most frequently spoken first language – that title goes to isiZulu (Lamb, et al., 2015). More than 25% of the South African population identify isiZulu as their first language, followed by isiXhosa (14,8%) and Afrikaans (12,2%) (Stats SA, 2019). A 2018 survey demonstrated that South Africans tend to speak different languages inside the home than outside (Stats SA, 2019). Only 1.6% of black South Africans spoke English at home, yet 8.6% spoke it outside of the home. The survey showed that 36.3% of white South Africans spoke English at home but 61% spoke English in public and only 20% of coloured South Africans spoke English at home, yet 28% spoke English outside of their homes (Stats SA, 2019).

English has been identified as the second-most spoken language in public settings despite not being in the top five most popular languages spoken at home (Stats SA, 2019). With eleven official languages and a number of unofficial languages used,

South Africa represents a veritable assemblage of linguistic identities. The variety of languages spoken and understood represents both challenges and opportunities for marketers, as consumers come from different linguistic backgrounds and experience languages in different ways.

1.2.4 The use of language in marketing efforts

In the international sphere, the increasing globalisation of the world has increased the value of linguistic-based studies, and marketers can no longer assume that the languages used in marketing processes are the native languages of respondents (Weijters, et al., 2017). Brands, therefore, need to re-examine their language policies and the accessibility of their written and spoken communications.

Language forms an integral part of branding, and consumers experience a brand through language. The language used to present the brand comes to inform the meaning that consumers draw from brands and affect consumer attitudes, memories, perceptions of and behaviour towards brands (Carnevale, et al., 2017).

Research has established that consumers' level of language identification and language understanding influences brand perceptions (Puntoni, et al., 2009). For many bilingual or multilingual speakers, it may seem obvious that one's native language possesses emotional qualities that secondary or tertiary languages do not (Puntoni, et al., 2009).

Language can also be linked to identity and has been found to have an important effect on the creation of the sense of self, societal role and identification; and sociolinguistic research has deduced that the languages acquired in childhood play a critical role in shaping identity (Danesi, 2014). Identity is an important consideration for marketers when establishing marketing strategies, and consumer identity has been found to play a part in consumer decision making. Consumer decisions can often be linked to concepts of identity (Ilaw, 2014).

1.2.5 Digital Marketing in South Africa

Digital technologies have changed marketing, enabling marketers to customise products, services and promotional messages and making it quicker to build and maintain relationships with customers (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). South Africa has adapted to mobile and internet technologies in a remarkably short time, quickly taken on as a part of everyday life for most consumers. Mobile phones have swiftly become a commonplace item all around the world and are one of the most widely used media for communication (Sooryamoorthy, 2017).

The technology itself has advanced quickly, gaining new functionality and uses. Cell phone usage is one of the few areas where the divide between the developed and developing world is narrow (Sooryamoorthy, 2017). Technology has ensured that consumers and marketers now have vast amounts of data and information readily available (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

The penetration rate of smartphones is high in South Africa, with a documented 22 million users in 2019 and a projected rate of 26.3 million users of smartphone users the year 2023 (Statista, 2019). Smartphone users, therefore, represent a large segment of consumers.

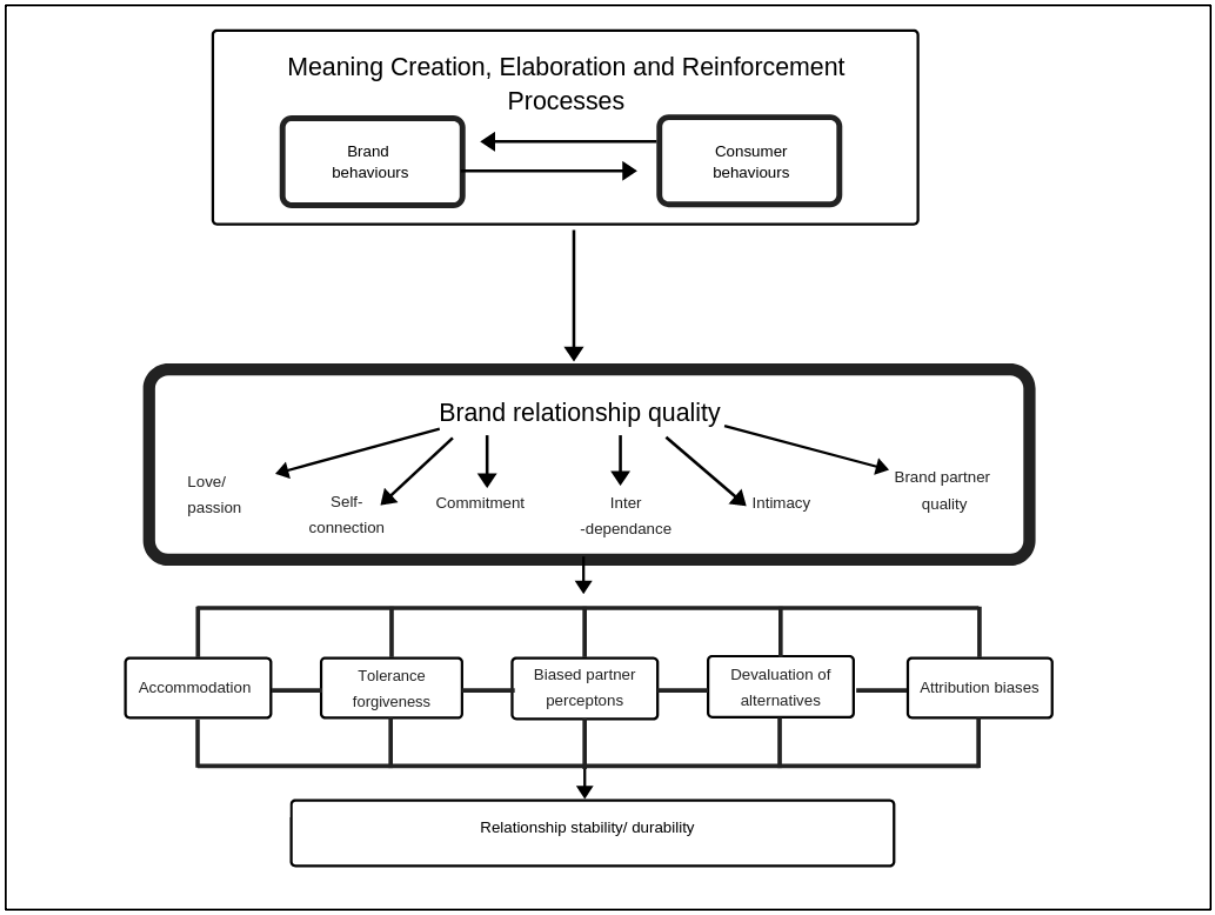
Previous research has demonstrated that social media interactions have a positive effect on brand relationship quality and marketing outcomes. One study found that social customers who engaged with their favourite brands on social media were more likely to have stronger relationships with those brands, compared to consumers who did not interact with their favourite brands via social media (Hudson, et al., 2016). Another study found that a brand's social network website is an effective way of attracting consumers and making them emotionally attached to the brand and that once consumers have established a relationship with a brand through social platforms, they are more likely to spread positive messages about the brand (and its social network) to others (Park & Youn-Kyung, 2014).

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory of consumer-brand relationships is relatively young, first emerging in the late 1980s with the works of Shimp and Madden, and Blackston (Shimp & Madden, 1988; Blackston, 1993). It was in their 1988 article that Shimp and Madden first postulated that consumers and brands could engage in relationships not dissimilar to personal human relationships (Shimp and Madden; cited in Ghani & Tuhin, 2016).

It was Susan Fournier's seminal article in 1998, however, that established the theoretical framework for consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, cited in Fetscherin & Heinrich, 2015). Fournier published the most widely accepted paper on consumer-brand relationship theory in 1998, exploring how brands can become active relationship partners for consumers and provide meaning in a psycho-socio-cultural context. (Ghani & Tuhin, 2016, p. 951). Fournier posited that brand relationship quality has an effect on relationship stability or durability.

Figure 1: Fournier's model of brand relationship quality and its effects on relationship stability



(Source: Fournier, 1998)

This model illustrates that brand relationship quality influences consumers' attitudes and experiences of brands, ultimately affecting the relationship stability and durability (Fournier, 1998).

Fournier's work went on to inform modern theories of consumer-brand relationships and established many of the values by which consumer-brand relationships are measured today (Louriero, 2012). Consumer-brand relationships are beneficial for both consumers and businesses, by enabling consumers to derive satisfaction through greater attachment to brands while the brands benefit from a greater understanding of and improved response to customer needs, ultimately generating brand loyalty and profitability. (Hudson, et al., 2016)

Fournier's research identified six distinct facets of the brand-relationship construct, basing these constructs on theories developed by marketing theorists and those identified in the field of sociolinguistics. The six aspects are:

- love and passion
- self-connection
- commitment
- interdependence
- intimacy
- brand partner quality

Other important constructs to consider within consumer-brand relationships are brand loyalty, brand satisfaction, brand commitment, self-connection, brand community, consumer behaviour and brand love (Louriero, 2012). These topics have incited studies from a number of researchers in order to better understand consumer-brand relationships (Louriero, 2012).

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Communication is a central element of marketing processes, influencing how consumers gain exposure to, develop relationships with and interact with brands. Language is a fundamental part of this communication (Orriss, 2014). Consumer-brand relationship theory posits that brands serve as purveyors of meaning and extensions of self-concepts (Fournier, 1998). This also connects with concepts of language and identity, as researchers have found that language plays a critical role in shaping individual identity and constructing self-identity (Khokgar, et al., 2016). Consumer decisions, and how and when they purchase, display and use products or brands serves as a communication tool for sharing symbolic meaning to themselves and others (Ilaw, 2014).

In a multilingual society, like that of South Africa where eleven official languages are recognised but many more are spoken, it may be valuable to investigate whether the language used in marketing communication changes consumers' behaviours towards and relationships with brands. Despite South Africa's use of English as the *lingua*

franca, citizens are often more comfortable speaking or reading other languages, and it would be valuable to consider how this impacts consumer-brand relationships.

The marketing literature currently supports the notion that the quality of consumer-brand relationships is linked to brand loyalty, and that relationship marketing tactics ultimately encourage consumers to continue the relationship with the company in question (Park & Youn-Kyung, 2014). The challenge of consumer-brand relationships can be summed up in the words of William J. McEwen, a global practice leader at the Gallup Organisation: “Brand relationship management isn’t just a marketing challenge, nor is it a challenge that can be met solely through operation, product-development, or information technology enhancements. Successful marriage management can be achieved only by company-wide commitment and aligned, integrated efforts.” (McEwen, 2005). This study will attempt to ensure a deeper understanding of some of the intricacies of this management, and how this can be used by marketers.

This study is relevant as the marketing environment is relatively unexplored in South Africa compared to other countries, and the nature of the South African consumer market has changed and developed dramatically over the past few decades. Business and marketing activities have changed radically in the years after the end of Apartheid and new consumer categories, needs and regions have materialised in the aftermath (Petzer & De Meyer, 2013).

The research strategies will attempt to establish a holistic view of consumer-brand relationships, and will, therefore, consider consumer-brand relationships in the context of all six of Fournier’s brand relationship quality constructs. A holistic view was selected as consumer-brand relationships is a complex and multi-layered construct (Fetscherin & Heinrich, 2015). This study aims to fill a gap left by existing marketing research, where few published studies have undertaken the task of exploring the link between language and consumer-brand relationships in the South African consumer market.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVES

1.5.1 Research question

Based on the knowledge gap identified, namely a gap in the South African driven understanding of the relationship between language and consumer-brand relationships, as well as the existing theoretical constructs of consumer-brand relationships, the following research question has been identified:

Can language choice inspire and influence positive links with the quality of consumer-brand relationships, particularly in the environment of South Africa's multicultural and multilingual society?

1.5.2 Objectives

This study has set objectives. This study aims to identify whether:

- South African consumers are more likely to seek and establish strong consumer-brand relationships with brands that are able and willing to communicate in their mother tongue, particularly in the sphere of digital marketing.
- Consumers develop positive associations with brands that are able and willing to communicate in their mother tongue, particularly in the sphere of digital marketing.

The study will be using the six tenets of consumer-brand relationships identified by Fournier in order to assess this construct, namely: love and passion, self-connection, commitment, interdependence, intimacy and brand partner quality (Fournier, 1998).

The study proposes that consumers are more likely to respond favourably to brands and establish positive relationships with those brands if the brand communicates or demonstrates a willingness to communicate in the mother tongue/ linguistic group that the consumer identifies as their own. This inference is informed by the works of previous researchers (Chang & Chieng, 2006; Zhang, et al., 2003)

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study was qualitative and exploratory in nature. As part of the data collection, 14 in-depth interviews were conducted with participants from South Africa. Participants were selected by means of purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Interviews took place over the phone, with the facilitator using a predetermined list of open-ended questions to guide the discussion. The interviews were recorded, with the permission of the participants, and manually transcribed.

The data was analysed by way of thematic analysis through manual coding. The themes identified through the coding process were categorised and discussed according to Fournier's model of brand-relationship quality.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

South Africa is a multicultural and multilingual environment, where eleven official languages coexist and individuals live, work and make purchases in any number of these languages. Despite the diversity of languages used by South Africans, marketing across most platforms has largely remained English-focused (Seeco, 2010). Digital marketing has quickly grown as an important and valuable component of modern marketing, presented as a tool for building links with consumers, creating brand awareness, increasing knowledge and extending relationships (Tiago & José, 2014). As a marketing tool, digital marketing has the potential to influence consumer-brand relationships, in turn impacting factors such as purchasing intentions, consumers' acceptance of brand extensions and market share (Yan & Chang, 2019). A gap in the research has been identified, as previous research relating to languages and consumer-brand relationships has been focused on Western and Asian markets, and has not addressed the South African market. This study seeks to explore how a brands' language choice in digital media communications can impact consumer-brand relationships in the context of a multilingual South Africa.

1.8 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter serves as an introduction to the study and research question, providing a background to the research as well as identifying the problem statement, theoretical framework and research objectives.

Chapter 2: Consumer-brand relationships and languages in South Africa

This chapter provides a review of the literature regarding consumer-brand relationship and addresses some of the relevant marketing factors in South Africa, including language.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

The third chapter serves to provide an overview of the methodology and research design used in the process of this study. Topics discussed include the sampling methodology used, data collection and introduction into the data analysis.

Chapter 4: Research findings

Chapter four reports the findings of the study. This chapter lays out the major themes identified. Participants' thoughts and feelings regarding the topic are addressed and described in detail.

Chapter 5: Discussion, managerial implications and conclusions

This chapter explores the results of the previous chapter, providing relevant managerial implications as well as suggestions for further research.

1.9 CONCLUSION

This research study aims to address how the socio-cultural construct of language plays into the quality of consumer-brand relationships along with the very tenets that make up consumer-brand relationships. This study sought to understand whether consumers respond more favourably to brands that communicate in their mother tongue, compared to brands that do not.

This research study was built upon the works of Fournier, Shrimp & Madden, as well as other marketing theorists who have investigated consumer-brand relationships.

CHAPTER 2: CONSUMER-BRAND RELATIONSHIPS AND LANGUAGES IN SOUTH AFRICA

The development of consumer-brand relationship theory is relatively young, only emerging at the end of the previous century (Fournier, 1998; Blackston, 2000; Louriero, 2012) Consumer-brand relationships and the theory behind them matter to marketing practitioners and researchers alike, due to the host of advantages to be gained from strong consumer-brand relationships. Potential benefits include reduced marketing costs, customer retention, acquisition of new customers, ease of access, increased profits and brand equity (Blackston, 2000; Smit, Bronner & Tolboom, 2007; Lamb, et al. 2015).

Modern marketing theory describes the concepts of consumer loyalty and relationship building as one of the most recent developments in marketing theory. This new focus developed as a result of the realisation that long-term marketing success was dependant on long-term relationships with consumers (Lamb, et al., 2015).

Organisations are increasingly interested in ascertaining the factors that impact how and why consumers relate to brands, why consumers select certain brands and why some brands are preferred to others (Louriero, 2012). Across the globe, marketing managers and brands have been investigating ways in which to improve their marketing strategies and keep up with the digital transformation (Biswas, 2017). In the South African context, however, marketers need to contend with a range of challenges and opportunities not commonly found together in other countries, including issues of language and diversity (Petzer & De Meyer, 2013; Media Update, 2017).

Brands across the world are continually looking for ways to increase profits, reduce costs and increase brand awareness. Consumer-brand relationships can potentially offer brands a way to achieve these goals in a manner that is congruent with their existing strategies.

2.1 CONSUMER-BRAND RELATIONSHIP THEORY

Interest and research into consumer-brand relationships have increased exponentially over the last few years, demonstrating the interest and popularity of this research (Kim, Park & Kim, 2014; Gómez-Suárez, Martínez-Ruiz & Martínez-Caraballo, 2017; Jain, et al., 2018; Lee & Jin, 2019). Consumer-brand relationships can be described as the result of the accumulation of consumer experiences, increasing and strengthening with positive sensory experiences (Chang & Chieng, 2006). Consumer-brand relationship benefits go beyond benefits for the brand, however, as this construct represents a sort of symbiotic relationship- which, when conducted properly, is beneficial to both parties and both relationship partners are pleased with the outcome. Consumer-brand relationships allow businesses and brands to better understand and respond to customers, which drives brand loyalty and increases profitability while consumers derive higher levels of satisfaction from their increased attachment to brands (Louriero, 2012; Hudson, et al., 2016).

The notion of consumer-brand relationships has become an important research topic and practice for modern marketing application, influencing, as it does, the long-term success of brands. Studies have demonstrated that consumers differentiate brands based on their relationships with those brands and that consumer-brand relationship management is a useful tool for long-term marketing strategy (Giovanis & Athanasopolou, 2018). Relationship quality has also been investigated in order to manage its effectiveness in relation to consumer-brand relationships (Papista & Dimitriadis, 2012). Many initial constructs relating to consumer-brand relationships were based on the seminal works of researchers Susan Fournier, Max Blackston and David Aaker (Louriero, 2012; Fetscherin & Heinrich, 2015; Ghani & Tuhin, 2016)

Fournier's study, published in 1998, identified a gap in the theory relating to consumer-brand relationships and how consumers relate to brands and sought to address this gap. Aptly combining the works of marketing theorists who had come before with theory relating to socio-psychology, Fournier published a thesis on consumer-brand relationships and identified six facets of the brand-relationship quality construct. These facets are; love and passion, self-connection, commitment, interdependence, intimacy and brand partner quality. Fournier's findings were based on in-depth

personal interviews that explored how and why consumers selected the products and brands they purchased, and which factors influenced these decisions (Fournier, 1998).

The quality of love and passion refers to a strong foundation reminiscent of interpersonal love. Self-connection is the degree to which a brand delivers on important identity concerns, themes or tasks. Interdependence is linked to frequent brand interactions, increased scope of diversity of brand-related activities and heightened intensity of interactions, as experienced by consumers. Commitment is used to refer to the intention to behave in a way that is supportive of the relationship longevity. Intimacy develops through the belief that the brand in question is superior, with layers of meaning reflecting deeper levels of intimacy. The final element, brand partner quality, is linked to overall relationship satisfaction and strength and refers to the consumer's evaluation of the brand's performance of the partnership role (Fournier, 1998). These facets can be used to analyse and investigate how consumer-brand relationships are formed, and the strength of these bonds.

Fournier's theories and findings hinged on 3 hypotheses, namely: 1. That brands can and do serve as relationship partners, 2. That consumer-brand relationships are valid at the level of lived experience, and 3. That consumer-brand relationships could be described in many ways with a varied vocabulary. These three notions would go on to serve as the basis for the nature of consumer-brand relationship theory for marketing theorists to come. Fournier laid bare the practice of anthropomorphising brands, as a tool with which to legitimise this brand as a potential partner. This anthropomorphising could extend onto representatives of the brand, enabling them to become extensions of the brand itself (Fournier, 1998).

Theory by Fritz, Lorenz and Kempe established nine dimensions of consumer-brand relationships, based on social psychological approaches to interpersonal dimensions. Fritz et al. identified 1. interdependence, 2. relationship duration, 3. satisfaction, 4. brand commitment, 5. actual behaviour, 6. equity, 7. brand trust, 8. passion and 9. intimacy as elements as dimensions of consumer-brand relationships (Fritz, et al., 2014; Tuhin, 2016). Of these elements, brand commitment is one which has studied and questioned extensively. Brand commitment has been identified as having two central components, namely cognitive and affective. Affective commitment refers to

the emotional ties that influence attachment and links back to psychological studies. Researchers found that attachment “requires a psychological appropriation that goes beyond the physical possession of the material object” and that attachment to the material object served as a part of the self-extension process (Belaid & Behi, 2011, p. 38).

Fournier’s thesis also touched on how consumer-brand relationships could influence the development and understanding of one’s concept of self, impacting how consumers viewed themselves and found their identity - demonstrating that brands could go beyond simple possession and use (Fournier, 1998). This concept of identity and identity formation can be linked to socio-psychological concepts of language and identity, which identify language and language acquisition as part of the identification process (Hogg & Vaughan, 2014). Marketing theorists have proposed that consumers are more likely to select brands that embody a self-image congruence, demonstrating that identification is significant in the brand adoption process (Papista & Dimitriadis, 2012). This theory was supported by research that demonstrated that consumers’ self-concept influenced consumer behaviour, particularly brand preferences. Brands are seen as emblems of identity and serve as a means for consumers to explore self-identification (Ilaw, 2014).

As consumer-brand relationship theory has reached greater marketing consciousness, researchers have sought to understand the factors that influence the existence of, and strength of these relationships. Researchers from around the world have conducted studies exploring facets of consumer-brand relationship theory, investigating how these relationships are formed, how transgressions by brands impact consumer-brand relationships and how brands can better manage these relationships.

2.1.1 Evaluating consumer-brand relationship quality

In order to understand consumer-brand relationships, one must understand how this construct is assessed and measured. Brand-relationship quality describes several key

consumer relationship dimensions which are used to measure the strength of a two-way person-brand relationship (Wilson, 2011).

The central research paradigm of brand relationships has rested on a cross-disciplinary perspective which posits that brand relationships are to be viewed as interpersonal relationships (Zhou, 2006). In researcher Susan Fournier's noteworthy contributions to consumer-brand relationship theory, she included constructs related to the measurement of brand relationship quality. Fournier's six-figure model, which she fleshed out in order to explain the establishment and development of consumer brands, rests on the following six elements; love and passion, self-connection, commitment, inter-dependence, intimacy and brand-partner quality (Fournier, 1998). Papista and Dimitriadis, in turn, identified five components of brand-relationship quality, namely; trust, satisfaction, commitment, love and intimacy (Papista & Dimitriadis, 2012). Fournier's concept is commonly accepted as the first published reference to brand-relationship quality (BRQ) and is still used as a basis for modern BRQ theory by many (Fetscherin & Heinrich, 2015; Ghani & Tuhin, 2016).

Brand-relationship quality has sprouted out of marketing literature as a means with which to describe the strength of consumer-brand relationships and can be described as an evaluation of the total strength of a relationship consisting of several dimensions (Papista & Dimitriadis, 2012). Within the context of human relationships, relationship quality has commonly been used as a way to predict consequences within the relationship context (Fournier, 1998).

Consumer-brand relationship literature has presented various theories with which to assess and measure brand relationship quality, ranging from Fournier's six-construct model to other structures that feature between two and eight indicators of relationship quality (Zhou, 2006).

Overall, international research has conducted investigations into various concepts relating to consumer-brand relationship quality. Kim et al. (2014) sought to understand how consumer-brand relationship quality affected brand extensions, ultimately deducing that consumers with strong brand relationship quality were more favourable towards brand extensions and that BRQ affects judgements about brand extensions

(Kim, et al., 2014). Other researchers found that strong brand relationship quality impacted how consumers responded to transgressions by the brand (Ghani & Tuhin, 2016). Consumer-brand relationships can ultimately affect businesses' bottom line. Strong consumer-brand relationships can positively affect consumer repurchase intentions and more (Huber, et al., 2010).

2.1.2 Consumer-brand relationships and consumer emotions

Despite their presence in marketing, the value of emotions in marketing processes is not always well understood (Hudson, et al., 2015). Purchasing decisions are not always driven only by rational or economic thinking; instead, consumers are often driven by emotions such as fear, love, hope or fantasy and emotional purchasing decisions can often form part of a subconscious process (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010).

Emotions can be a powerful driving force for marketers, as they are "both powerful and profitable. Whether a company is marketing hamburgers or microprocessors, there's a demonstrable financial return that results from emotionally engaging customers." (McEwen, 2015, p. 11).

Consumers seem to display a penchant for transferring brands into their sense of self, and are more likely to build strong relationship bonds with brands that exhibit qualities and traits that they believe to be in line with their own (Castaño & Perez, 2014). When brands are more congruent with consumers' sense of self, consumers are more likely to bond with them emotionally. Brands relevant to concepts of the self are more likely to create strong and positive emotions, which can ultimately drive consumer-brand relationships (Whan Park & MacInnis, 2018) .

2.2 LANGUAGE, IDENTITY AND THE EMOTIONALITY OF LANGUAGE

Language itself has long been linked to constructs of identity, presented as a means of self-identity and marker of belonging (Harwood, 2015). Danesi, in his study "Forging a Linguistic Identity in the age of the Internet", succinctly describes the link between language and identity; "Language is no longer a tool for understanding one's world,

but a means (and even a social weapon) for acting upon that world." (Danesi, 2014, p. 231).

Existing theories relating to the mediating effects of language and culture on consumer-brand relationships have largely focused on culture's effect on consumer-brand relationships, and how cultural differences play into experiences of marketing communications. The work of Chang and Chieng (2006) sought to establish a comparative study that investigated the effects of consumer-brand relationships with a cross-cultural study assessing the factors that impacted consumer-brand relationships for consumers patronising coffee shops across Asia. The age of the study, and its limitations due to having been centred on one industry, poses certain restrictions for the extrapolation of the findings. However, it is still valuable to note how the research was conducted and what the researchers discovered. The research took place in China and Taiwan, where real consumers were requested to fill in questionnaires. The study recognised that individual and shared experiences impacted consumer-brand relationships and proposed that brand association and brand personality significantly affected brand image and brand attitude, though the findings varied across the two cultural groups. What is particularly noteworthy of the findings, was that the researchers found that there was a difference in consumer-brand relationship formation and experience across the two cultural groups (Chang & Chieng, 2006).

A portion of South African research has sought to understand how language plays into social identity within the context of advertising in South Africa, (Ngwenya, 2011; Simpson & Lappeman, 2017; Bornman, Álvarez-Mosquera & Seti, 2018). Ngwenya's study found that advertising texts in South Africa were increasingly making use of indigenous South African languages, but recommended that multilingual advertising in South Africa has many facets that it can improve upon (Ngwenya, 2011). Within intergroup and interpersonal settings language and communication serve as strategic tools with which individuals construct identity and negotiate social distance (Bornman, et al., 2018).

Language has a well-researched effect on emotions and emotionality. Multilinguals have reported that changing languages can make them feel different and that they

generally perceive their native tongue as being the most emotional language. (Perovuo, 2018). Language has the power to communicate identities and sway loyalty, and customers show a marked emotional attachment to their native language, even if they are fluent in a second language. The emotional value of mother tongue languages suggests that consumers demonstrate a preference for companies that are willing to serve them in their native language rather than companies that are not prepared to do so (Holmqvist & Grönroos, 2012).

Recent research has demonstrated that consumers show a preference for being served in their first language in the context of a services environment and that the use of language can have emotional connotations beyond those communicated by the message being shared (Touchstone, et al., 2017). For many bilingual or multilingual speakers, it may seem obvious that one's native language possesses emotional qualities that secondary or tertiary languages do not (Puntoni, de Lange & Van Osselaer, 2009; Guvercin, 2010). To date, it seems that the majority of marketing literature has not focused on a multilingual environment like that of South Africa, where a wide host of official languages are recognised and used daily but has rather sought to investigate situations where two languages are the norm, where English is usually the second language (Viswanathan, et al., 2010; Glassman & Glassman, 2017; Nacchia & Massaro, 2017).

2.3 LANGUAGE IN MARKETING ACTIVITIES AND BRANDING

Language forms an important part of branding, and consumers experience a brand through language- the language used to present the brand comes to inform the meaning that consumers draw from brands. This can affect consumer attitudes, memories, perceptions of and behaviour towards brands (Carnevale, Luna & Lerman, 2017).

Brand linguistics (or brand language) is a relatively young field which has merited modern-day research, unlocking theories as to how languages emote different identities, influence brand associations and impact consumer decisions. In one research report, written by Carnevale et al, the authors identify that strategic branding

requires that brands consider language from various perspectives and disciplines, questioning the language proficiency, cultural perceptions and emotional ties of the potential consumers. This study proposed that the structural properties of language influence how people think and categorise objects (Carnevale, et al., 2017). Studies have effectively demonstrated that language shifts can lead to shifts in consumers' identities, as language influences the formation of mental frames through which higher mental functions are developed. Language is often seen as a marker of cultural identity, denoting ancestral history and ethnic belonging (Carnevale, et al., 2017).

Researchers have found that consumers' level of language identification and language-understanding affects processing and even brand perceptions. Language differences and language fluency may influence how consumers process information (Luna & Peracchio, 2001; de Run, Yee & Kalique, 2012). Psycholinguistic studies have demonstrated that in the case of bilinguals, there is a marked difference between processing in an individual's first language (L1), or mother tongue, versus their second language (L2). Semantic ad conceptual processing is stronger when messages are communicated in L1, and memory for messages communicated in L2 will be weaker than those communicated in L1 (Luna & Peracchio, 2001). The emotional impact differs when using and responding to one's first language compared to using a second language. Native languages offer an emotional advantage, and can even affect decision-making. There are, however, some mediating factors that can influence emotionality impact, including language proficiency and language learning methods (Caldwell-Harris, 2014).

Language choice has been shown to impact purchase intentions, and even tipping behaviour. Language can impact the decision making of bilingual consumers or customers and consumers have demonstrated a marked preference for communicating in their first language during service encounters. Consumers are more likely to show an unwillingness to tip waiters and service staff if they are served in their second language. Companies making efforts to receive and serve customers in their first language are more likely to receive favourable behaviour from the consumers themselves (Van Vaerenbergh & Holmqvist, 2013).

2.4 SOUTH AFRICAN CONSUMERS AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN MARKET

South Africa represents a unique economy and consumer basis, different from any other across the world. With a diverse population encompassing various cultural and racial groups, a large informal trading sector, economic challenges and more, there are many factors that set South Africa apart (Petzer & De Meyer, 2013; Simpson & Lappeman, 2017).

South Africa is a multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-cultural country, representing eleven official languages and widespread use of unofficial languages. The “Rainbow Nation” as it is known, represents consumers across a wide range of economic and social backgrounds and has seen dramatic political, economic and social changes across the last three decades (Petzer & De Meyer, 2013; Simpson & Lappeman, 2017). Despite promises of upward mobility and economic empowerment, South Africa continues to experience a colossal gap between wealthy and impoverished South Africans, with citizens experiencing varying levels of access to technology, schooling and resources (Petzer & De Meyer, 2013).

The South African market, and the consumer markets of Africa as a whole, has largely been underexplored when it comes to matters of marketing research, especially in the field of consumer-brand relationships, leading to a gap in researcher knowledge. The South African market sphere has been recognised as one which does not always recognise the value of a customer-service focused orientation, with many firms disregarding modern theories relating to marketing activities (Lamb, et al., 2015).

The population of South Africa, and Africa as well, has been described as a “young” population. As of 2017, 48% of the South African population was under the age of 24 (Simpson & Lappeman, 2017). Africa is the only region where the population of young people is increasing (Sow, 2018). The population of Africa is the youngest in the world, with 60% of the population under the age of 25 (Adegoke, 2017).

One noteworthy element of the South African consumer market is the strongly rooted loyalty consumers demonstrate towards locally produced or designed products (Petzer & De Meyer, 2013). Since 2001, the government initiative “Proudly South

African" has sought to highlight and champion South African products and businesses (Proudly South African, 2020). The adage, "Local is lekker" (loosely translatable as "local is nice") is widely used across business sectors in South Africa. In 2016, the Nielsen Global Brand-Origin report stated that the title of 'locally-made' products held important value for South African consumers and that overall, brands' country of origin plays a role in purchasing decisions. This same report, however, indicated that South African consumers demonstrated a preference for global or multinational brands when purchasing items from certain categories, including electronic goods and cosmetics (Bizcommunity, 2016; The Nielsen Company, 2016)

In South Africa, as in the rest of the world, consumers are affected by digital technology. Modern consumers have largely embraced the rise of modern advancements and new technologies, changing the way we all work, connect and buy (Liner, 2019). Smarter technology, increased connectivity and new capabilities have changed how consumers relate to, interact with, evaluate brands and ultimately decide which brands to purchase. Experts believe that traditional offline marketing and the new wave of digital marketing can and must exist together to allow brands to succeed in this coming age (Kotler, Hermawan & Ivan, 2017). To illustrate how brands can potentially employ vernacular languages, Addendum A showcases examples of some of the few South African brands that have employed vernacular languages online.

2.5 DIGITAL MARKETING

The technological age has brought with it many opportunities and challenges, connecting the world on an intimate scale and enabling brands to communicate with audiences all over the world with ease. The past few decades have seen a sharp increase in the number of brands that have established profiles across various web-based platforms. As communication methods have changed and adapted, brands have sought to stay abreast of trends and have focused on engaging through platforms like social media. The increased interest in digital platforms and social media activity is impacting how brands and their consumers communicate, and enables consumers to interact with brands across various platforms - including blog posts, Facebook, Twitter and more. (Hamilton, Kaltcheva & Rohn, 2016)

As a result of social media, marketing campaigns are no longer limited to certain geographic areas or countries but can be shared all around the world- with or without the participation of the brand itself. The ubiquitous nature of social media and digital platforms has ensured that its value and risks have increased for those in the marketing and communication sphere (Tombleson & Wolf, 2017).

2.5.1 The growth of digital marketing

The fast-paced growth of information and communication technologies has led to changes within society; changing consumer behaviour from what it once was and altering numerous aspects including brand relationship establishment and formation (Gómez-Suárez, et al., 2017). Contemporary marketing is more complex and data-driven than in years past, necessitating that brands use marketing strategies that are relevant and on-trend. Digital marketing is a pivotal part thereof, and when used correctly can create customer value and win sales (O'Conner, 2015). Increasing numbers of consumers are joining and using social networks, and with consumers engaging with social media, businesses need to engage with social media as well (Tiago & José, 2014).

In South Africa in 2019, around 54% of the population, or around 31 million people, have access to and use the internet while 40% of the population makes use of social media. This 40% represents 23 million people- a jump of 5 million people compared to the 2018 statistics (Kemp, 2020).

Technology, digital platforms, and social media usage and updates of these platforms have changed, leading to changes in consumer expectations of brands. Advances in technology have enabled marketers to meet new challenges and manage interactions whilst preserving human resources. Intelligent software has enabled brands to deliver automated content and respond to messaging intelligently and automatically, meeting customers' expectations for communication quickly and efficiently (Labrecque, 2014).

The advances across information technology and digital platforms have led to a modification of consumers' expectations of branded communications, with consumers increasingly having expectations that brands will be willing to communicate via platforms where the consumer seeks out or can control the conversation (Killian & McManus, 2015). Despite this, digital technologies have created new marketing opportunities for brands; enabling marketers to benefit from greater customisation and making it easier for marketers to adapt the elements of the marketing mix to suit the needs of specific consumers. This, in turn, has allowed brands to build and maintain relationships with customers more quickly and efficiently than ever before (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). Managers are increasingly relying on digital marketing in order to build their brands and communicate their brand messaging (Tiago & José, 2014).

Researchers have been increasingly focused on the growth of digital marketing and the value of digital marketing for brands, conducting research across continents and industries. Theorists have explored questions around the value of digital marketing, and risks and opportunities presented by modern technology like digital marketing but the majority of research has been focused on Western consumer markets (Tiago & José, 2014; Killian & McManus, 2015; Gómez-Suárez, et al., 2017; Morzhyna, Oliinichenko & Postykina, 2019).

One digital marketing type that has achieved widespread popularity is that of social media, quickly emerging as a highly popular tool with which consumers use to share photos, anecdotes and experiences (Kotler, et al., 2017). These platforms are commonly used to connect with social connections but have also become a means for consumers to gain and share information about, or even directly interact with, brands (Hudson, et al., 2016).

Digital marketing and tools such as social media have enabled consumers to make their own decisions regarding the marketing messages that they are exposed to, and it is evident that they are doing so. Consumers now have more influence in terms of where and how they receive marketing communications, and they are able to communicate with brands on their own terms and more directly than ever before (Ashley & Leonard, 2009). In the realm of online marketing, relationships have been defined as "ongoing, intentional, non-accidental interactions (e.g. purchases,

communications) between the customer and the seller, moving beyond discrete transactional exchanges." (Steinhoff, et al., 2018, p. 2).

Digital technologies and social media have created means by which consumers can not only communicate with friends, family and colleagues, but where they can seek out information about brands and products, potentially opting to interact with brands on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube or Twitter. Social media tools and resources present brands and marketing managers a unique means with which they can build and maintain relationships with consumers – whether these consumers are customers of the business or not (Killian & McManus, 2015).

Researchers have also sought to understand the link between social media and consumer-brand relationship building. In a study done by Hudson et al. (2016), the researchers found that interactions between consumers and brands via social media could foster emotional attachments and intimacy, and are similar to relationships between individuals. This same study found that when consumers frequently interacted with brands through social networking sites, brand relationships could be enhanced (Hudson, et al., 2016). Social networks offer brands the opportunity to leverage off of brand communities, and ultimately drive customer relationships. Companies can implement strategies to improve consumers' shopping and browsing experience and brand engagement by posting messages, keeping consumers informed and providing entertaining content (Park & Youn-Kyung, 2014).

2.6 CONCLUSION

Consumer-brand relationship theory is a relatively young field of marketing theory which has produced several notable theorists and models over the past few decades. Previous literature has sought to explore consumer-brand relationships and understand how it is developed, experienced and measured, and has explored the effects of different factors. One potential impacting factor, language, has been explored in certain marketing environments, but not exhaustively within the sphere of consumer-brand relationships, nor within the context of a multilingual society like that

of South Africa. Likewise, digital marketing research has gaps in regards to South African environments and within the context of consumer-brand relationship theory. The majority of previous research relating to this subject matter has been conducted in Western environments, with little focus on the African or South African marketing environments, thereby creating a gap in the knowledge base.

CHAPTER 3 : RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter sets out and describes the methodology used, the data collection tool and the data analysis method used during this study.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As this specific field of consumer-brand relationship research is relatively unexplored, exploratory analysis has been identified as the most suitable research method. Exploratory research is flexible, which will enable the study to adapt to research findings as the study is conducted (Burns & Bush, 2014).

This structure will enable the researcher to gain the necessary background information to create relevant questions and establish practical research parameters. This study comprised of primary data analysis and experience surveys. Qualitative methods were used in order to conduct survey research

3.2 EXPLORATORY RESEARCH METHODS

Exploratory methods are the most appropriate for this study as the research topic has little published research, particularly in the context of the South African consumer market. Exploratory research methods are best suited to studies that require background information about the nature of the research problem (Burns & Bush, 2014)

3.3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research is a research method that involves collecting, analysing and interpreting data through observing what people do or say. This form of data collection requires open-ended questions or observations, and observations and statements are not standardised (Burns & Bush, 2014).

Qualitative research is well-suited to addressing issues and questions that have not been well researched in the past and can offer rich insights into consumer behaviour and thoughts (Burns & Bush, 2014)

3.4 SAMPLING

Only 8,1% of South Africans speak English at home, meaning that more than 90% of South Africans speak a language other than English as their home language (Stats SA, 2019). Despite this, more than 76% of the South African population can speak or understand English (Lamb, et al., 2015).

The target population of this study is South Africans, who are bilingual or multilingual, and who possess the ability to read and converse in English. Participants will identify a language other than English as their home language. English has been selected as a common denominator between participants, in order to ensure that the researcher can effectively communicate with all participants.

Purposive sampling and snowball sampling were identified as an effective way to gain participants for the study. Snowball sampling is a nonprobability sampling method and is therefore not representative of the greater population (Naderifar, et al., 2017).

3.4.1 Sampling description

Fourteen participants were interviewed during June and July of 2020. These interviews took place via phone calls or WhatsApp calls. The table below presents the age, gender, race, province and home language of all participants. Names have been omitted in order to protect the privacy of participants, and participants were identified using an alphabet letter.

Table 1: Sample description

Identifier	Home Language	Age	Province	Race	Gender
A	Tswana	30	Gauteng	Black	Female
B	Sepedi	32	Gauteng	Black	Female
C	Afrikaans	22	Limpopo	White	Female
D	Afrikaans	26	Gauteng	White	Male
E	IsiXhosa	23	Western-Cape	Black	Female
F	isiZulu	32	Gauteng	Black	Female
G	SePitori	30	Western-Cape	Black	Female
H	Venda	30	Gauteng/Limpopo	Black	Female
I	IsiZulu	23	Western-Cape	Black	Female
J	Sepedi	23	Gauteng	Black	Female
K	isiZulu	35	Gauteng	Black	Male
L	IsiXhosa	29	Western-Cape	Black	Male
M	Sepedi	28	Gauteng	Black	Male
N	Afrikaans	25	Western-Cape	Coloured	Male

Of the sample, 64% were female and 36% male. With regards to race categories, 78,5% of participants were black, 14,2% were white and 7,1% were coloured. The median age was 28. All participants could speak at least two languages, with six participants indicating that they could speak five or more languages, three indicated that they could speak four, and three indicating that they could speak three languages. Only two participants could speak only two languages, namely their home language and English.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

3.5.1 In-depth interviews

Data was collected through the use of in-depth interviews, wherein a series of open-ended questions were asked. Originally, the researcher had identified focus groups as

the chosen data collection method, however, due to the 2020 outbreak of Covid-19 and subsequent lockdown in South Africa, this plan was amended and changed to in-depth interviews in order to protect both the participants and the researcher.

In-depth interviews refer to a set of probing questions posed to a subject in order to gain an idea of what the subject thinks or feels regarding a certain topic. The objective of in-depth interviews is to gain unrestricted comments or opinions, asking questions that will enable the researcher to better understand the various dimensions of these opinions and the motivations for these opinions (Burns & Bush, 2014).

The in-depth interviews were conducted via telephone, a technique also known as tele-depth interviews.

Data saturation was reached once respondent's responses did not reveal new information or insights, but repeated information similar to that shared by previous respondents.

3.5.1.1 The advantages of telephonic in-depth interviews

In-depth interviews offer certain advantages:

- Provide insightful information. In-depth interviews enable researchers to probe by asking additional questions based on the subject's responses. Interviewers can easily ask follow-up questions, probe for additional information. This, in turn, can generate rich, deep responses.
- In-depth interviews have the potential to be so insightful that they enable researchers to identify highly valuable findings quickly.
- Interviewers can pick up and monitor changes in tone and word choice in order to gain a greater understanding of participant responses.
- Researchers require fewer participants to gain relevant and useable insights, compared to other methods.
- In comparison to focus groups, there are fewer distractions or group dynamics that can affect responses. (Steber, 2017)
- Telephonic in-depth interviews offer wider geographical access.

- Telephonic in-depth interviews can be less expensive and time-consuming than face-to-face in-depth interviews (Opdenakker, 2006).

3.5.1.2 The disadvantages of telephonic in-depth interviews

In-depth interviews also have a small number of disadvantages:

- In-depth interviews can be time-consuming, as the process requires that interviews must be transcribed, organised, analysed and reported (Steber, 2017).
- Telephonic in-depth interviews reduce social cues. Researchers cannot use cues such as body language to extract further information.
- Due to the asynchronous communication of place, the researcher cannot view the environment in which the interviewee is placed and therefore has fewer opportunities to create a good interview ambience (Opdenakker, 2006).

3.5.2 Interview Schedule

A flexible interview schedule was adopted in order to elicit opinions and anecdotes focused on certain key areas:

- Understanding consumer-brand relationships.
- The hurdles that consumers face when interacting with brands via digital platforms and through digital marketing.
- What consumers perceive as important during interactions with brands.
- Language references when interacting with brands.
- Experiences of previous interactions with brands over digital platforms, particularly regarding languages.

Participants were interviewed during the course of a phone call. Appropriate call times were determined prior to the interview and participants were briefed prior to the interviews with a participant information sheet.

3.6 ETHICS AND CONSENT

When conducting research with human subjects, it is vital that the process and procedures align with academic guidelines and ethical standards.

3.6.1 Ethical considerations

The purpose and research steps of the study were communicated to all participants, and participant consent was obtained prior to commencing with any research processes. Participants were informed of the proceedings of the interview beforehand and were asked to give consent before taking part in the study. Participants received a participant information sheet when they were asked to take part in the study, detailing the format of the interview and providing background to the research.

The research questions were formulated in a way calculated to avoid providing participants with emotional distress. Participants were not subjected to any physical harm or emotional stress and were made aware that they could end the interview at any point should they wish to do so. Participants' names and identifying information will be kept confidential.

3.6.2 Consent

Participants were asked to consent to take part in the research study prior to the start of the telephonic interview. This consent was given via WhatsApp or other messaging services. During the interview, the researcher gave a description of the interview process and participants were again asked to give consent to take part in the interview.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

In order to analyse the information gleaned during the in-depth interviews, a report was compiled. This report serves as a summary of all information gleaned from participants, with a transcription of all discussions. Transcribing the interviews served

as the first step of analysis. All of the interviews were recorded, with the permission of participants, to ensure a faithful report.

The recordings and transcriptions were studied, and thematic patterns identified. Inductive content analysis was used to analyse the findings. During the inductive content analysis process, the raw data was examined in order to identify themes. These themes were consequently discussed in accordance with the theoretical framework, namely Susan Fournier's six elements of brand-relationship quality.

3.8 CONCLUSION

During the research process, certain research methods and data collection procedures were chosen due to the choice of research topic, the amount of existing data and the target population. The research was exploratory in nature and qualitative methods were identified as appropriate for this study, ultimately taking place in the form of in-depth interviews, conducted via telephone calls. The study did experience some changes to the data collection processes due to the 2020 outbreak of Covid-19 and nationwide lockdown in South Africa, with the data collection method adjusted from in-person focus groups to in-depth interviews via telephone in order to accommodate the lockdown and social distancing measures. 14 participants from various linguistic backgrounds took part in the research process, and their answers to an open-ended list of questions recorded and ultimately transcribed. The interview data was analysed according to emerging thematic patterns and inductive content analysis methods were used for data analysis, in conjunction with existing consumer-brand relationship theories.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the findings of the data collection will be presented and discussed. The data was collected via the data-collection methods presented in the previous chapter. The analysis of the data captured will reference the previous literature and theories described, particularly Fournier's six-faceted brand relationship quality construct, as described in the model "Model of Brand Relationship Quality and its effects on relationship stability". The six facets identified by Fournier are: love and passion, self-connection, commitment, intimacy, interdependence and brand-partner quality (Fournier, 1998).

The data was analysed across themes identified throughout the process.

4.2 SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

Fourteen participants took part in this study. These participants represented home language speakers from seven distinct language groups, namely: Setswana, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Afrikaans, Tshivenda, Sepedi, and Sepitori, a non-official South African language. The spread of participants across the various language groups was as follows:

Table 2: Language groups of interview participants

Language	Number of participants
Setswana	1
isiZulu	3
isiXhosa	2
Afrikaans	3
Tshivenda	1
Sepedi	3

Other	1
Total number of participants	14

All of the participants interviewed had previously viewed or engaged with brands on some form of online platform, with previous experiences conducted across platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, company websites or blogs. All interviewees personally owned or had regular access to a smartphone. All participants spoke at least two languages, with one being English. The majority of participants spoke three or more languages.

4.3 ANALYSING THE DATA

The measurement instrument used in this study was semi-structured interviews. The aim of these interviews was to ascertain consumers' experiences of brands using their home languages, and how this could affect the relationships consumers formed with brands. The following sections set out the codes identified during data analysis, and offer a description of each of these nodes.

4.3.1 Data coding

Analysis of the in-depth interviews revealed the following set of nodes:

- *Experiencing love and passion through language*
- *Self-connection*
- *Encouraging and experiencing commitment to a brand*
- *The positive value of inclusivity*
- *Perceptions relating to the use of English and South Africa's other official languages*
- *Increased attention to the brand*
- *Verbal versus written communication*

Once these nodes were identified, they were used as the themes of the findings.

- ***Experiencing love and passion through language:*** As identified by Fournier (1998), love and passion is a pivotal part of brand-relationship quality, and the researcher sought to understand how language impacted this quality.
- ***Self-connection:*** Self-connection was the second BRQ element proposed by Fournier. This theme seeks to understand the positioning of identity and self-connection in relation to home language use.
- ***Encouraging and experiencing commitment to a brand:*** Commitment reflects consumers' intentions to support the brand and the longevity of the relationship.
- ***The positive value of inclusivity:*** Participants demonstrated that they viewed inclusivity as an important quality for the brands that they used.
- ***Perceptions relating to the use of English and South Africa's other official languages*****:** The researcher aimed to understand the utilitarian consequences of using different languages, how participants experienced their home languages and how that influenced their reactions towards brands using their home languages versus English.
- ***Increased attention to the brand:*** Participants indicated that their interest in a brand could be affected by the languages they used.
- ***Verbal versus written communication:*** Participants made distinctions between verbal and written communication, and the researcher sought to understand how communication was experienced differently within the context of these two forms.

The themes are discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

4.3.2 Experiencing love and passion associated with language

As a multidimensional construct, love has many qualities and elements. The concept of love has been described as referring both to a social relationship and an emotional state. This means that love can either be the loving relationship between two individuals, or it can refer to the emotion of love. The brand love scale includes elements such as pride, closeness, and enthusiasm as properties of brand love (Heinrich, et al., 2012).

This theme was reflected in statements and opinions shared by several participants in the study and reflected a number of the properties associated with brand love. Participant C reflected on the pride she feels when a brand uses Afrikaans, her home language, in their marketing efforts.

> *Well, usually the companies that use Afrikaans they are really driven for the Afrikaans people and I enjoy it because it makes me proud that people are still proud of their language and using it. I think there's still a big community of Afrikaans-speaking people so I think it's definitely still effective.*

Participant E shared that she regarded her mother tongue, isiXhosa, as a "Language of love" whilst reflecting on the emotional impact of isiXhosa.

> *Emotional impact to me, yes. Because it is my home language, my primary language, so the emotional part of it is family orientated and community – the foundations of my life were in Xhosa. It brings back these lovely memories. It is part of my brain that is warm and emotionally charged.*

This was partly echoed by Participant D, who stated that he linked his interpersonal relationships and feelings of love with his home language.

> *Because most of the people that I care about are Afrikaans it has that emotional connection of it's my off-time language so it may not be the most popular language but it's your native tongue, it's how you grew up. So, I think that's also why it will have an easier connection because when someone speaks to me in that language when selling me a product, they're going to be able to play the friend card a lot easier.*

Participant L demonstrated that he believed that brands cared more if they were willing to communicate to him in his mother tongue, as the language of his choosing. Responding to the question "Let's say a brand is willing to accommodate you in terms of language, and they want to communicate to you in isiXhosa (his mother tongue). What would that mean to you?". Participant L responded with:

That shows the brand cares. The brand is willing to go an extra mile to ensure that everyone feels special and they feel like they are catered for.

This sentiment was echoed by a similar statement from Participant E, wherein she stated that to her, a brand communicating in her mother tongue would demonstrate caring and effort.

It would mean that they care, that they are intentional about going one step above, just you know, we have this marketing campaign but now we're gonna have it but also we're going to make it more personal. It would mean that, it would mean an intentionality that I really appreciate. Effort.

In general, a large portion of participants said that they would experience positive feelings towards a brand if that brand had used, or demonstrated a willingness to use, their mother tongue across their digital marketing. In the words of Participant H:

It's wonderful! They're communicating in a language that I completely understand. I don't have to translate it in my head first or try to understand what they're trying to say to me.

These thoughts regarding positive feelings were echoed by Participant F, who shared that she would be proud and pleased if a brand were to communicate using a language or languages other than English.

I'd feel sort of proud of them, that they're trying, or thinking about this person that doesn't know [English]… I'd feel like a sense of pride that this brand is trying their best to deliver the message in any way possible. They're using a different language. It feels good.

Participant M mentioned feeling "special" if a brand were to communicate using his home language, Sepedi.

I'd feel special, they're choosing to speak to me in my language. One does feel a bit more targeted, not targeted but it would make it feel a bit more special. The moment would come across as probably more noteworthy than when you get called generally. When they speak to you like everyone else, you don't feel as if you are a customer that they prefer or they want, but if they decide to do that it might come across as someone where you are more convinced that you might be the right person or this might be the right relationship, commercial relationship that you are looking for.

Many participants verbalised that they associated their mother tongue with their families and communities, and shared that they experienced a strong connection between the two.

Participant E made a connection between community and language, and demonstrated this with the following statement:

Because it is my home language, my primary language, so the emotional part of it is family orientated and community – the foundations of my life were in Xhosa. It brings back these lovely memories. It is part of my brain that is warm and emotionally charged.

This sentiment was echoed by Participant J, who shared that he experienced emotions more strongly in his home language.

That's the language that my parents first spoke to me in. So when I was learning anger and sadness and all of that in Sepedi and I learnt English in School. So I think my more visceral emotions are definitely in my mother tongue.

Participant B said she associated the language with her grandparents.

It's my mother tongue, it's the language of my grandparents.

Participant C linked brands using Afrikaans with the cultural community of Afrikaans speakers and shared the pride that she feels in regards to the language.

Well, usually the companies that use Afrikaans they are really driven for the Afrikaans people and I enjoy it because it makes me proud that people are still proud of their language and using it. I think there's still a big community of Afrikaans-speaking people so I think it's definitely still effective.

Participants also shared that they experienced more interest in a brand if it was associated with their community and that they wished to support businesses based in their communities. Participant G:

If I think the company is a Pretoria-owned or a black-owned company and they're using the language and the people have their roots in Pretoria or have some kind of link to that area, then yes.

Participants stated that they valued brands using their home languages to communicate, and associated this act with a number of qualities associated with love and passion across brand-relationship quality theory and interpersonal relationship theory. These qualities included elements such as pride, feeling valued, caring and more. The participants also revealed that there were other factors that could mediate or affect the impact of first language use, including the message being communicated and the practices of the company, as well as the product or service offering. Participants showed that they experienced a strong link between the use of their home languages, and community or family-centric values.

4.3.3 Self-connection

Connection was a common topic that many participants could identify with and associate with the use of their mother tongue. The topic of connection, otherwise referred to as attachment, link or bond, cropped up repeatedly throughout the interviews. For the majority of participants, using their mother tongue served as an indication of a connection – whether that connection was between themselves and a brand or between two individuals.

Participant B demonstrated these sentiments when she shared her belief that her mother tongue was a connection between herself and other individuals.

> *It's different… for example, if I'm in a meeting and there's a mixture of black and white people and I greet the black people in person in my mother tongue. It creates some sort of connection, like; "Oh, this is one of us."*

Discussing whether his mother tongue carried more of an emotional connection, Participant L shared that he felt little connection with English, but that he experienced an emotional bond with his home language.

> *It does to me because, for instance, when you use English everything feels so simple, it does not really connect emotionally with me but when you use isiXhosa there are certain words you can use that really build a relationship and make an emotional connection with me as a Xhosa-speaking individual.*

Participant N felt that an Afrikaans-speaking brand represented not only a connection to himself, but also a sense of relatability. He was easily able to relate to the product and feel a link to his community. Participant N referred to a Cape Town brand that marketed in Afrikaans in order to support his opinion:

> *For instance, the brand 'Vannie Kaap' they sell merchandise such as T-shirts and cups, everything like that. I can buy a T-shirt anywhere else, it's not a very high-end product, I can buy a T-shirt somewhere else but because it's in my language, it's in my colloquial language I would much rather support them because I feel a connection, because I can relate to the brand, I can relate to the product and the people in my community can also relate to my product that I purchased.*

A subset of self-connection, self-expression, received mixed responses. Beyond their functional attributes, brands also serve as purveyors of meaning, embedding meaning that enriches the consumer's desired life narratives (Huang, 2012). Consumers can experience brands as contributing to their self-verification, offering consumers a verification of their sense of self through the brand experience (Van der Westhuizen,

2018). Some participants felt that they could more easily express themselves fully in their home language, whilst other participants felt that it was easier to communicate and express themselves in English. This is what Participant G had to say:

> *I think any vernacular language carries more of an emotional impact than English, including Sepitori. I think certain words are said in a certain way, and if there's an emotion charged behind – it's like me, even now if I'm like very frustrated expressing myself in English I feel like you don't get the emotional nuances so then I would tend to go to a vernacular language….For me sometimes English doesn't carry that emotion.*

Participants reported that they experienced brands accommodating consumers' language preferences as a sign that they understood the consumer. Participant H shared her thoughts on this experience:

> *If you're communicating to me in Venda, that says to me you know something about who I am and what I'd probably like. You know a bit about me, so it speaks to understanding your customers or knowing your customers.*

Participant D shared his experiences of a Pretoria-based brand sending him marketing messages in Afrikaans:

> *They market in Afrikaans, not overall, but all their SMS's and stuff. And I must say when you receive their SMS's because they usually just send you SMS's with specials, it does feel like a personalised touch. Because I think they base their communication, in that aspect, on what you ticked as your home language on the application form for their membership cards. And it does sort of make you feel, "Okay, nice job, you care about who I am." It adds an extra layer of connection, I think.*

Participant H also spoke of how this related to her identity, saying that she could connect in terms of her identity if a brand used Venda.

> *Because you speaking Venda speaks to my identity, so I can relate to that.*

Participant K reported feeling an increased sense of connection to a brand using isiXhosa, his home language.

> *I'd kind of see it a bit more. It gives you that personal feeling and you get a bit more connection and attachment to it.*

Participant E described how brands using her mother tongue would impact her feelings towards the brand.

> *In my head I'm just thinking of the Dodge ad with the Dog in the back of the car, and they were like; "That Dodge!". It was lovely with animals and you know all the nice things in life. But then I feel like if that man would have come home to his wife and be like "Molo" [isiXhosa for "hello"] or something it would really have given it like a kind of familiarity with the brand. To kind of like, be a very personalised storyline. I don't know it would have made me buy a Dodge car, but definitely would have made me look at Dodge like that brand is actually for me. I'm included in this narrative.*

> *If you think of Nedbank, that's a big one. They do a lot of vernac adverts, like Zulu and Xhosa and stuff and in my head, it's like Nedbank is for me. In their branding they are thinking of me. So that appeals to me. I don't use Nedbank but I definitely have those feelings towards their bank.*

A subtheme of self-connection, nostalgia, also appeared in some participants' responses. Brand-self connections are not only important for existing identities but span a temporal space as well, including aspects of consumers' past identities and nostalgic memories (Fournier, 1998). Participant E shared that she experienced the use of Xhosa as bringing back fond memories:

> *It brings back these lovely memories.*

Participant M also remarked on how he experienced a sense of nostalgia arising from the use of his home language:

It obviously holds a special place in my heart just for being the language that one learns while growing up, it's how you communicate. The memories one has of family upbringing is always in that specific language, and how we share our emotions with each other, so it does have a special place.

For many participants, the use of the home language served to establish an emotional connection to a brand, far above the connection established when a brand used English. Participants also shared that they felt that brands understood them and were actively targeting them, if they were to communicate in the participants home language.

Consumer-brand relationship theory has posited that self-image and self-image congruence between consumers and brands is more likely to lead to consumers engaging with the brand in question. Research has shown that the adoption of a brand is significantly impacted by consumers' sense of identity, and that identification is a valuable part of the brand adaptation process (Papista & Dimitriadis, 2012). This theme of identity can be linked back to participants experiences of their home language forming part of their identity.

One can therefore posit that the very use of a consumer's home language can establish strong ties to feelings of connection, identity and nostalgia.

4.3.4 Encouraging and experiencing commitment to a brand

Commitment, another element from Fournier's model of brand-relationship quality, was also touched on by participants during the interview process. Participants shared how brands using languages other than English could impact their commitment to the brand. One participant, Participant I, shared that language use could potentially influence her loyalty towards a brand, but that the product or service type always remained a critical consideration.

If I relate to that product, then yeah, I would basically be quite loyal to you. Only because my frame of mind would always remain: "Ag, this brand said something along these lines in my language." But other than that, if the product to me doesn't make sense or the service doesn't make sense, I never really sway to it, regardless of the language.

Participant K agreed with this sentiment:

I think it would just mean that they're making that extra effort to communicate their message, it's an added advantage that would probably increase my loyalty towards that brand.

Participant F added to this concept, sharing an intention to develop a long-term relationship based on the brand using her mother tongue. Participant F also briefly touched on consumers making their own choices regarding language preferences:

Thank you very much. I appreciate it - should I want them to speak isiZulu. It would be like thank you so much, I appreciate it. I'm not going to the other brands, I'm sticking with you. That would be my response.

Participant F's response also highlighted that she valued the option to choose the language used. Her positive reaction seemed hinged on the importance of choice, and that she would appreciate the opportunity to make decisions regarding language choice.

4.3.5 The positive value of inclusivity

Inclusivity was a theme that appeared throughout the data set. This value was presented by almost all participants as a positive and sought-after quality in a brand, even when opinions differed on how this manifested. Participants demonstrated that they valued feeling included and recognised by a brand, and also appreciated when a brand demonstrated that they valued inclusivity.

During the data analysis, two opinions regarding inclusivity emerged. Some participants felt that using English was the most inclusive option, as so many people in South Africa can understand and use the language. For others, a brand using their mother tongue represented inclusivity. Since the dawn of a democratic South Africa, many companies and institutions have sought to advance inclusivity in South Africa, whether in the sphere of education or the workplace (In SA, 2020).

According to Participant A, brands should consider all of their customers:

> *It would be okay for me, but for me another thing is I would think about how it relates to the next person. So is it fair for, let's say, a Zulu speaking person who has zero comprehension of Tswana to come into this? But for me I don't have an issue, but I think we need to be fair and cater to everybody. Not everybody understands Tswana, it's understandable. My preferred language is English because most people can actually put two and two together.*

In contrast, Participant H stated that;

> *Even if you're not Venda but you are including it, then that shows me you're more inclusive in your approach. You don't just use a blanket approach. Everybody understands English, and that makes it different because it speaks to how you treat your customers and how you view them, the diversity element.*

Participant J suggested that by using different languages, brands were demonstrating both trustworthiness and inclusivity.

> *I think it will be more trustworthy if they're willing to communicate in different languages because it means that they are catering for everyone, they're an inclusive brand.*

This same participant also stated that she believed that;

> *A brand has credibility if they make an effort to be inclusive.*

As a brand partner, brands need to demonstrate a willingness to offer benefits to the consumer as relationships are marked by the benefits that they give to their participants (Fournier, 1998). Some participants felt that by offering language options and being inclusive, brands were showing that they were willing to go to great lengths to accommodate their consumers.

Participant N described the use of Afrikaans and other national languages as a “win for inclusivity”

> *It would be a win for inclusivity in an online space. Let’s say for instance you are a brand like Makro, a household brand… or Takealot. Takealot says subscribe to our newsletter and they give me a drop-down box that says choose my language, I would be much more inclined, it makes me feel comfortable knowing that they took my needs into consideration.*

Participant B believed that using languages other than English demonstrated inclusivity and promoted mutual engagement.

> *It's effort on their part, it's being inclusive. It's engaging me. It's talking with me and not at me.*

Participant B also said that:

> *It would create a connection with me to the brand, I would definitely prefer it because it appeals to me in terms of being accommodating, it saves me the time of having to - another thing, as a person who speaks in an African language, I still speak in that language- it would save me the time of having to translate, like how do I say this in English.*

4.3.6 Perceptions relating to the use of English and South Africa’s other official languages

A potential barrier to consumer-brand relationships was the existence of linguistic difficulties, including problems relating to language skill levels and perceptions of languages. The dataset revealed that many participants experienced English and other South African languages as belonging to certain categories, and also demonstrated participants' frustrations with using English or their mother tongue languages in certain contexts or capacities.

English was generally described as a formal or business language, which allowed communication with South Africans across various cultural and linguistic groups. Many participants shared that they associated English with business or functional activities. This finding supports previous research that indicated that many young South Africans regard English as a pragmatic languuge, used for business, education and instruction (Bornman, et al., 2018). Participant G shared that she experienced English as being more formal.

> *I think in a business context I would use English, cause it's more formal.*

Participant E believed that English carried more utilitarian and formal associations, especially when compared to her mother tongue, isiXhosa.

> *Contrasting it to learning English at school. That is quite academic and we learned English to communicate, we learned English to buy stuff at the store and whatever, as opposed to like this language of love. Because of that social aspect of it.*

The ability to read and write in home languages was also a common element across the data. For many participants, they were unable to, or uncomfortable with reading or writing their home languages or they experienced that they lacked vocabulary in their mother tongues for certain aspects. This was echoed in the data showing that very few participants actively read or wrote in their home language, and is showcased in Appendix C. Participant B reported experiencing a disconnect between reading and writing, versus speaking in her home language.

> *It's actually a very difficult language to read and to write. For me it would be nicer if I were able to talk to them in my language.*

Regarding reading text-based marketing and the option of an isiXhosa online store, Participant L had the following to say:

> *I will never take that option because everything is written in English, if it's advertisement where people have to talk the language, it's way better than when you have to read the language. If it's an advertisement where people communicate in isiXhosa, that's more interesting. You'll be able to engage with people but if you want people to read an advertisement in isiXhosa, that's a different story.*

Participant A echoed some of these sentiments:

> *To be honest I'd go for the English-inclined one because it would be quicker to catch. I'd definitely go for the English – not that there's anything against the Tswana one but it would be easier in English.*

Participant G, in turn, shared that she was unsure of certain vocabulary in her mother tongue, making it difficult to communicate regarding certain topics.

> *I would default back to English, also because I don't think certain words exist in Sepitori. I don't think it's a pretty comprehensive language itself. I wouldn't even know, things like nitrogen, I wouldn't even know what nitrogen is in Sepitori.*

This lack of vocabulary does represent a potential problem for brands using vernacular languages, as consumers' lack of proficiency may serve as a barrier for communication and purchase intentions.

Participants also reported a link between politeness/exhibiting manners and the use of their home languages. Three participants shared that they felt that their home languages were more respectful or polite than English, or that it was easier to communicate politely when speaking in their mother tongue. Participant J had the following to say about responding to brands in her mother tongue:

I feel that honorifics are different in your mother tongue than English, so sometimes I feel like when people communicate in English it could come across as more rude or more stiff to someone who speaks another language, where if it's your mother tongue you know the correct honorifics to refer to someone of a different age, things like that.

This sentiment was echoed by Participant M.

I think in our language, English is not sometimes the most polite… you try to be polite but the way that our language is delivered, you'd generally find that you are a bit politer to people in general, so if it was chatting to telemarketers, it might be easier to let them down or just to communicate with them in my language, versus English.

Although the predominant feeling seemed neutral, certain participants seemed to showcase that language choice could lead to negative emotions. These participants seemed to display a sense of animosity towards one South African language in particular, namely Afrikaans.

For example, if I can - and this is still a problem for me, this happens a lot in Pretoria where you call a place and you're asking for something and the only greeting they give you is "Goeiemôre" [Afrikaans for "Good morning"]. I'm automatically turned off.

This sentiment was partly echoed by Participant G, who shared her feelings regarding a perceived preference for English and isiZulu.

No, not really with isiZulu I might sometimes struggle with what's being said but because I know a bit of it I can string it together, string the content or the message together. I think the only time something gets to me is when it's written in Afrikaans, otherwise I'm like cool with English.

This demonstrates that languages can be linked to both negative and positive connotations, and this can reflect on the brand communicating their marketing

message. The topic of language has long been fraught within the context of South African society. Prior to 1994, the apartheid government instituted a system that separated communities on the grounds of race and language (Seeco, 2010). These systems promoted Afrikaans and English, particularly within the sphere of education, and suppressed all other South African languages. Discontent over this division and language policies, particularly the promotion of Afrikaans in schools, ultimately led to uprisings resulting in the deaths of more than a hundred black South Africans. Post-1994, language issues have persisted despite ambitious plans to promote language equity and promote indigenous languages (Beukes, 2009). This complex and difficult history likely remains an important influence on the experiences of South Africans when it comes to language experiences.

4.3.7 Increased attention to the brand

During the interviews, one of the topics that appeared was the theme of participants paying more attention to brands if they communicated using their first language. Participants seemed to feel that they were more likely to devote more time to a brand if the brand was using their first language in their marketing efforts. This is demonstrated by the words of participant E:

> *I want to seek more into this brand than I would be had it just been English, just because that is what I see all the time anyway like it's miss-able. But this would actually make me stop. And I'd want to engage more.*

Participant K shared a similar sentiment:

> *I'd kind of see it a bit more.*

Participant F described the experience of seeing her language used in marketing communication as something that would cause her to pause and pay greater attention to the brand in question.

It would really catch my attention online, so if I were scrolling and I would see it I would stop and be like, "Okay, yeah."

Participant H seemed to agree, and demonstrated that even if the brand itself did not identify with Venda, their using it could change how she feels about and responds to the brand.

Even if you're not Venda and you are a brand elsewhere and you use Venda in your digital platforms, I'd start looking at you in a different way.

Participants have therefore clearly demonstrated that the mere act of using vernacular languages could alter how they reacted to brands and could increase the amount of time they spent evaluating brands.

4.3.8 Verbal versus written communication

One of the themes that emerged during data analysis, was the difference between perceptions or experiences of written language versus spoken/heard language. Many participants were more welcoming to the idea of brands using their home languages in an oral form as opposed to written. Many participants demonstrated that they preferred hearing their mother tongue and some expressed the belief that this experience would be preferable to reading written communication. Reflecting on whether her response to a brand would change if they used isiXhosa online, Participant E had the following to say:

A call basis, on a conversational basis, not typing, that maybe might make a difference but on chatrooms and Facebook messenger and stuff, not so much.

Participant D stated that he believed that oral communication would be more effective than online written communication at establishing an emotional connection to a brand.

I don't think a website would create a connection, it would be more the face-to-face or the verbal communication.

Participant L shared that he believed that oral communication in his mother tongue would be “easy” and brands using his home language for oral communication, such as video advertisements, would be of greater interest to him than written marketing.

> *If it’s advertisement where people have to talk the language, it’s way better than when you have to read the language. If it’s an advertisement where people communicate in isiXhosa, that’s more interesting. You’ll be able to engage with people but if you want people to read an advertisement in isiXhosa, that’s a different story.*

Written communication in first languages was depicted as generally undesirable by participants, largely due to reading barriers, often precipitated by a lack of formal education of the language in question. Participants expressed that they were more accustomed to reading and writing in English and that these activities were largely unfamiliar to them in their first languages.

Despite this, one participant noted that even though it would be more difficult to read messages in their home language, that they were likely to do so because they felt included and appreciated the novelty and inclusion of their language. According to Participant F:

> *I’d feel like a sense of pride that this brand is trying their best to deliver the message in any way possible. They’re using a different language. It feels good. It would be hard to read it, I’d take probably ten minutes to read a one-minute thing, but my feeling would actually be; “I see you. You’re doing something good.*

The aversion to written communication in their mother tongue was not shared by all participants, and Participant C said that she would enjoy written marketing in her home language.

> *I would actually enjoy reading either advertisements in Afrikaans ‘cause sometimes it would feel like my language isn’t dying off, and there’s still a lot of people that are using my language.*

In contrast to written communication, oral communication in first languages was widely welcomed and seemed to elicit feelings of appreciation and inclusion. Participant B shared her thoughts:

> *It's actually a very difficult language to read and to write. For me it would be nicer if I were able to talk to them in my language.*

Participant D shared that they thought oral communication was more important and would create more of a connection with a brand than written content.

> *I don't think a website would create a connection, it would be more the face-to-face or the verbal communication.*

These findings clearly demonstrate that participants observe a marked difference between the experiences of written communication in their first languages, versus verbal communication in the same language. Oral communication is seen as preferable and is seen as being simpler and easier to understand than any written text.

4.4 CONCLUSION

The findings analysed and interpreted in this chapter show that consumer-brand relationships can be influenced by the language choices that brands make, and that consumers' experiences of languages can contribute to elements of the brand-relationship quality construct. These findings support previous studies' claims that language choice can influence consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards brands, ultimately impacting consumer-brand relationships. The present findings confirm that the language used across digital marketing activities can have a marked impact on the formation of consumer-brand relationships and the quality of these relationships.

The findings will be further discussed in the context of practical and managerial implications in the next chapter. Recommendations for marketing practitioners, as well as for future research, will also be discussed.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, insights drawn from the findings and their associated managerial implications will be discussed, as well as the recommendations for marketing practitioners and researchers. This chapter serves as the ultimate chapter in this dissertation, and the conclusion of this research study.

5.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

Prior to the data being collected, the following research question and research objectives were identified. The main question that the research sought to explore was whether language choice could inspire and influence positive links with the quality of consumer-brand relationships, particularly in the environment of South Africa's multicultural and multilingual society.

In order to facilitate the research process and answer this question, two main objectives were identified.

- Identify whether South African consumers are more likely to seek and establish strong consumer-brand relationships with brands that are able and willing to communicate in their mother tongue, particularly in the sphere of digital marketing.
- Identify whether consumers develop positive associations with brands that are able and willing to communicate in their mother tongue, particularly in the sphere of digital marketing.

5.3 INSIGHTS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

During the scope of the data analysis, a number of managerial implications were identified. Further analysis of the findings allowed for the identification of insights. These insights, along with their managerial implications, are discussed in the sections below.

5.3.1 Evoking emotions associated with love and passion

As one of identified elements of Fournier's six elements of brand-relationship quality, the love and passion concept contributes to how and why consumers develop strong relationships with brands. The data showed that participants did, in fact, experience emotions linked to love and passion with regards to the use of language, and the use of home languages by brands. The participants revealed that brands' use of their home languages created feelings including pride, emotional value, love and caring. Participants shared their experiences of brands using their home languages.

Overall, participants revealed that they valued the use of their home languages and that brands using their home languages to communicate embodied qualities of love and passion. As the brand love scale includes elements such as pride, closeness, and enthusiasm as properties of brand love, these elements are associated with this element (Heinrich, et al., 2012).

The managerial insights and value of these findings are considerable. These findings demonstrate that marketing practitioners can make use of language to evoke feelings of love, as well as emotions like pride, closeness and enthusiasm. By employing vernacular languages, marketing practitioners can create marketing communication that draws on consumer's emotional experiences and can inspire consumers to feel emotions like pride when using or purchasing a brand product or service. If marketing practitioners wish to evoke a feeling of closeness or intimacy between a consumer and a brand, vernacular language can serve as an effective tool with which to drive this emotion.

5.3.2 Building connections with consumers

Participants demonstrated a high sense of connection with their home language, identifying the use of language as important for connection across environments including social, business and academic. Within the context of connection, self-connection must also be addressed. Self-connection can be described as the degree

to which a brand delivers on important identity concerns, themes or tasks. Participants revealed that by using their home language they were able to establish or maintain connections between themselves, and other entities- whether these were other people or brands.

This presents a number of managerial implications for marketing practitioners. For brands looking to establish connections with consumers, or looking to establish personal ties with consumers, these findings should represent important information. Marketers can use the choice of language as a managerial tool with which to foster connections with their target market.

5.3.3 Communication can be hampered by language barriers- even with the use of consumers' languages

During data collection, a number of participants referred to the language barriers experienced during written communication. Participants referenced problems experienced with English language communication as well as home language communication. One sub-aspect of consumer-brand relationship quality, namely self-expression, received mixed responses from participants. Some participants felt that their home language allowed a higher level of expression, whilst others felt that they were restrained due to lack of vocabulary of a lack of knowledge regarding the written expression of their home language. This could serve as a potential barrier to any relationship-building potential, if consumers were to feel that they were not fully comfortable with written usage of their home language. Marketing practitioners should be considerate of this fact and evaluate whether the language used to communicate can hinder effective communication.

5.3.4 Consumers experience language as an indication of brand effort

One of the insights **104830111**
discovered during is that consumers experience language choice as indicative of the level of effort brands invest in their consumers, and invest in reaching out to their consumers. Some of the participants interviewed indicated that they associated

brands using their home language, or vernacular languages in general, with high levels of effort. In contrast, using only English was associated with low or negative levels of effort. The mere fact that brands were willing to look beyond English, and undertake the work required to produce marketing in a language other than English, demonstrated to participants that brands had made concerted efforts to communicate to them and target their communication to them. Participants seemed to be appreciative of increased amounts of effort and valued this quality highly. Marketing practitioners should be cognisant of this fact and make decisions accordingly.

5.3.5 Home language use can encourage loyalty towards a brand

Commitment was measured across the concepts of participants' experiences of commitment to brands, and the loyalty they felt towards brands. The data revealed relatively little regarding consumers' feelings of commitment, however a small portion of participants indicated that they would be more loyal towards a brand if they communicated using their home language. Some participants did share that they were more likely to consider using a brand if the brand made use of their home language or vernacular language, demonstrating that language use could potentially influence the decision to commit or not to commit to a brand and their offering. This is a valuable insight for marketing practitioners, and marketing practitioners should closely investigate their language choices when making marketing decisions and establishing marketing activities, especially if they seek to encourage high rates of brand loyalty.

5.3.6 Consumers value inclusivity

During the course of the data collection, one of the concepts that repeatedly appeared was the importance of inclusivity. This concept was praised by the majority of participants, and many indicated that this was a quality that they preferred when selecting brands and making purchasing decisions; the managerial implication being that inclusivity could affect whether or not a consumer will seek to establish a relationship with a brand. It would seem that many participants conflated inclusivity with diversity, identifying brands' use of vernacular languages as proof that they valued or promoted inclusivity. Though these terms are often confused with one another and

are strongly related to one another, they denote separate concepts. Inclusivity can be described as “the quality of trying to include many different types of people and treat them all fairly and equally.” In contrast, diversity can be defined as “the fact of many different types of things or people being included in something; a range of different things or people.” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). Despite the slight difference, the data has shown that these concepts are qualities that are valued by consumers and that these qualities can be promoted through the use of vernacular languages.

Another interesting finding was that participants linked inclusivity with trustworthiness. They created associations between the concept of brands valuing inclusivity, and using language to express that inclusivity, with the brand in question being more trustworthy. In cases where marketing practitioners are seeking to assure consumers of the trustworthiness and reliability of their brand, product or service, this can be a useful insight. Overall, participants praised and welcomed what they generally termed inclusivity, describing it as a quality they sought out in a brand. Participants shared that they not only wanted to feel included in brands themselves, they also wanted to see other individuals included as well. If consumers value inclusivity and diversity, marketing practitioners would do well to demonstrate to consumers that this is a quality that they also value, and take steps to encourage inclusion. This finding is particularly relevant within the context of South Africa, “the rainbow nation”, a country celebrated for its diverse population.

5.3.7 Consumers experience English and vernacular languages as having different functions and values

In order to assess the overall importance of different languages, it was also necessary to understand how South African consumers experienced South Africa’s languages, and how they related to them. As the study was focused on the experiences of non-English home language speakers, one could explore how consumers felt about the use of their home language especially in contrast to the accepted *lingua franca* in South Africa, English. Participants reported that they felt that English seemed to be more of a functional language than vernacular languages. In contrast, participants associated vernacular languages with emotions and feeling-based decisions.

Participants experienced English as being more associated with business or utilitarian activities, and linked that perception to their experiences of learning English in a formal academic setting. In contrast, vernacular languages were associated with the informal scenes and settings of home and family, and participants feel that vernacular languages link them to their families. For marketing practitioners, this means that certain languages may be better suited to certain types of products and services. As English is commonly associated with pragmatic or functional activities, it would be advisable to use English when marketing products or services in this sphere- suggestions include banking services or academic programmes. For more emotionally charged purchasing decisions, the use of vernacular languages would be a more suitable choice for many target markets.

5.3.8 Negative attitudes towards Afrikaans

One finding showcased that consumers' reactions towards a specific language could also be negative. A small portion of participants indicated that a brand's language choice could lead to negative perceptions of a brand, and potentially affect their intentions to engage with the brand. The language in question, Afrikaans, has a long and complex history within South Africa. During the years of apartheid, Afrikaans enjoyed a position of power and status as the official language that was forced upon citizens by the Apartheid government (Willlemse, 2017).

One can posit that Afrikaans' history and associations with oppressive systems have left many South Africans with negative perceptions and attitudes towards the language. Marketing practitioners would be wise to take this into account, and take steps to ensure that their use of language does not dissuade consumers from engaging with their brand or purchasing their products or services. Companies wishing to use Afrikaans in their marketing communication, should be aware of the potential negative associations, and take steps to avoid alienating potential customers. This can potentially be achieved through the use of other positively-charged messaging or elements within the digital communication plan, or potentially by emphasising the use of other languages alongside Afrikaans.

5.3.9 Consumers pay more attention to vernacular languages

The sample demonstrated that the use of their home languages and vernacular languages in general, lead to higher levels of interest in a brand and their activities. Consumers are drawn in by the novelty of vernacular language use across digital platforms, and the use of their home language is enough to ensure that they pay more attention to the brand and their messaging. Marketing practitioners can use this to their advantage as consumers seem willing to exert more effort to take in communication in their home language, and would even share brand messaging and digital marketing purely due to the fact that the brand in question had used the consumer's home language. This increased level of attention could potentially lead to more frequent brand interactions or longer brand interactions. The novelty factor showcases that the use of vernacular languages is still seen as a rarity, and participants indicated that this was something that would catch their attention due to how unusual it is to see vernacular languages represented across mainstream marketing communication across digital marketing.

5.3.10 Communication can be hindered by consumers' lack of vocabulary

Concerns relating to language comprehension and expression also cropped up in the findings. Participants shared that they experienced vocabulary gaps within both their home languages and English. The majority of the vocabulary gaps seemed to exist within the range of home-language communication, and consumers shared that they lacked knowledge of technical, academic or work-related terms in their own languages. This lack of vocabulary and vocabulary-related confidence can serve as a hindrance to effective communication, as consumers can potentially misunderstand or not fully comprehend marketing communication, even when written in their first language. Marketing practitioners must ensure that any communication in home languages, particularly written communication, is written at a level that is understandable for their target audience.

5.3.11 Consumers experience written and spoken communication differently

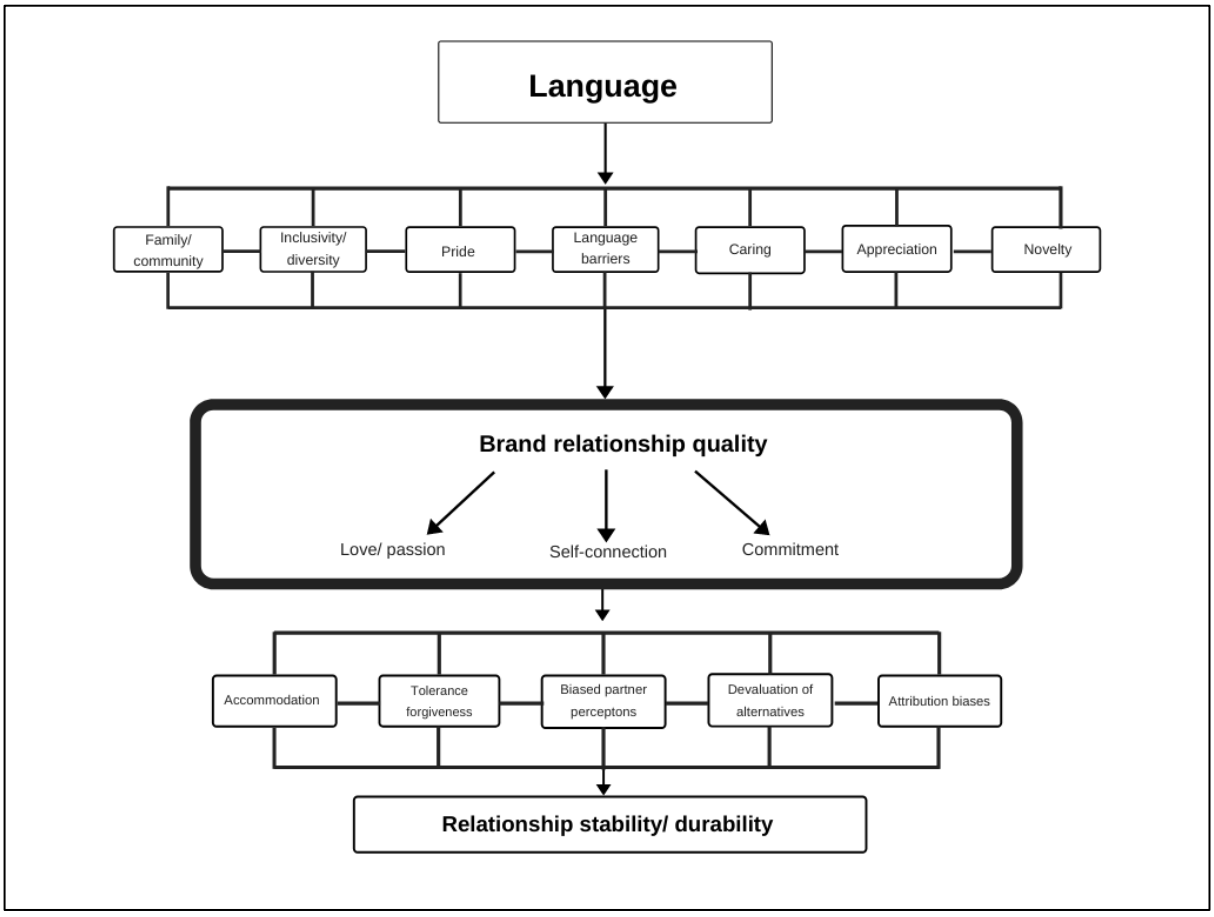
Participants shared that they experience communication differently across its written and verbal forms. Consumers seem more positive towards the oral use of their home language by brands, and believed that oral usage of vernacular languages would be easier to take in than communication that was written. The data analysed presented a few important findings relating to written vs verbal communication, problems relating to language use and the ease with which participants communicated across languages. In general, participants preferred to use their first language, especially when it came to oral or spoken communication. However, when it came to written communication, participants were more split. Some participants shared that they did not feel comfortable writing or reading in their first language. A lack of academic training in their mother tongues and uncertainty regarding certain jargon and terms ensured that some participants felt that English was an easier language to use when reading or writing. This can partly be ascribed to South Africa's educational history and the realities of the educational system, which has only relatively recently embraced schooling of- and in vernacular languages. Prior to 1994, schools in South Africa did not offer education in languages except English and Afrikaans, leading to the marginalisation of South Africa's indigenous languages. Despite efforts to amend this, problems including a lack of teachers and resources have contributed to citizens lack of education in their home languages (Mtshali, 2013). Currently, vernacular languages remain underrepresented within all sectors of the South African education sphere, due to the exclusion of vernacular language use within the education environment and the mainstream domain. This has persisted despite the creation of a human-rights inspired language policy implemented by the ruling party during the early days of democracy, which sought to recognise and provide equal functional and institutional statuses to all eleven official languages (Ndhlovu, 2015). Marketing practitioners would do well to take this into account, and to remain mindful that consumers experience written and oral language in different ways.

5.4 AN ADAPTED MODEL OF CONSUMER-BRAND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

Taking the findings of this study into account, the researcher has created an adapted version of Fournier's model of brand relationship quality. The adapted model builds on Fournier's previous model and draws on qualities identified within this research project to set out elements of the model.

Language has been shown to significantly impact three of the six elements identified in Fournier's model of brand relationship quality, namely those of love/passion, self-connection and commitment. Other factors have also emerged during the course of this study, namely that of inclusivity, consumers' perceptions of languages, increased attention to brands and experiences of verbal versus written language.

Figure 2: The impact of language in digital marketing on brand relationship quality



(Adapted from Fournier's 1998 model of relationship quality.)

5.5 LIMITATIONS

The small sample size of this study, and the nature of qualitative research sample sizes, means that the results are not entirely representative of the population as a whole. As this study made use of qualitative methods and purposive sampling, a form of non-probability sampling, the participants of this study do not accurately represent the whole of the South African population. Not all language groups within South Arica were represented, with participants hailing from six of South Africa's eleven official language groups, namely Setswana, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Afrikaans, Tshivenda, and Sepedi, and one participant representing an unofficial South African language, Sepitori. This means that the interviews did not include participants that identified either Southern Sotho, Xitsonga, SiSwati or Ndebele as their primary home language. The sample sought to deliberately exclude English home language speakers, as this is the language that generally dominates mainstream marketing activities across South Africa.

Fournier's model of brand-relationship quality, while well-known within the sphere of consumer-brand relationship research, is not the only existing model of this field. Within the field, other researchers have presented differing models and theories to explain consumer-brand relationship theory and it is, therefore, possible that the findings presented in this chapter do not fully contain all of the elements within this specific area of research.

In-depth interviews, as a qualitative method of study, are limited as they are not representative of the larger population, which means that the findings cannot be fully extrapolated to be relevant to the larger population. As this study is mainly aimed at gaining a broader understanding of the issue at hand, this will however not be an insurmountable hindrance.

Geographic limitations should also be noted. This study did not exhaustively include participants from every region in South Africa, and also included a higher percentage of participants from urban areas compared to rural areas. It is possible that language

preferences could vary from region to region, and that certain regions' experiences of the research question could differ from the findings.

Language barriers were also a potential barrier to honest and accurate feedback from participants. Due to the prohibitively high costs of translation and transcribing services, all interviews were conducted in English, which was not the first language of any of the participants.

During the interview process, participants were asked questions relating to their experiences of brands using their home language across digital platforms, as well as questions aimed at uncovering their reactions in potential situations where brands could potentially employ their home languages. Questions regarding consumers' experiences of vernacular language use on digital media platforms could be limiting, as many participants had never experienced this themselves, and therefore had to answer according to how they imagined they would react and feel.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study focused on investigating the impact of language use on consumer-brand relationship quality and focused on the sphere of digital marketing in particular. Future research can therefore explore other marketing channels and focus on other areas of marketing communication.

This study could be replicated to include other language groups or to focus on other areas in South Africa in order to support the research of this topic within a South African context. In an international context, future research can seek to further explore this topic within the realms of other countries and socio-linguistic environments.

Additional models of consumer-brand relationship theory offer other alternatives for further study on this topic, and Fournier's model is not the exhaustive authority on the subject. Further studies may make use of alternative models and theories to explore this topic.

The size of the selected sample was appropriate for the scope of this study, and allowed for the extraction of valuable insights. However, the sample size was relatively small. Future research could expand on this study by making use of a larger sample size as well as other data collection methods. This study originally proposed to use focus group interviews as the main source of data collection, and this method could be useful for providing new insights into this topic.

5.7 CONCLUSION

Consumer-brand relationships are a multifaceted concept. One of the variables that can potentially affect both the formation and maintenance of relationships between consumers and brands is that of language. The importance of consumers' home language and language preference is evidently something that brands will need to account for when they seek to establish and grow consumer-brand relationships.

This study aimed to examine the link between consumer-brand relationship formation and the use of home languages, seeking to explore how language impacts the consumer-brand relationships that consumers would develop with brands. Ultimately, it was found that the use of consumers' home language could influence three of the qualities of brand-relationship quality, and that the use of vernacular languages did impact how and why consumers established relationships with brands.

It would be beneficial for marketers to select the language of communication with care, ensuring that it is a good fit with the target market and that it allows the relationship to develop. Marketers must account for the diversity of South African consumers' linguistic backgrounds and the value of their home languages when aiming to improve consumer-brand relationships. Language is not merely a tool for communication, it serves as a means of identification, influencing emotions, building connections and impacting commitment.

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APPENDIX A

Appendix A. Participant information sheet

Research: Participant information sheet

Purpose of this study

The aim of this study is to explore the link between languages and consumer-brand relationships, within the context of digital marketing in South Africa.

Why have you been selected?

We are looking for South African participants who identify a language other than English as their mother tongue, and who have been exposed to brands and brand communication on digital media platforms.

What we would like you to do?

If you are willing to take part in this study, you will be asked to take part in an in-depth interview conducted during the course of a phone call. This conversation will be an open conversation about your experiences – we are interested about learning about your emotions and encounters relating to this topic and we want to hear your thoughts.

The phone call will take place in the form of a traditional phone call or a WhatsApp call. The call time will be pre-arranged to take place at a time suitable for you.

Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part. We will explain the format of your participation, and answer any questions you may have in order for you to make an informed decision. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to give consent. In order to do so you will be asked to reply to a text-based from the research team to confirm that you are willing to take part. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you are free to refuse to take part or to withdraw from the study at any time.

Confidentiality

Any information collected during the course of the study will be maintained on a confidential basis and will be stored according to guidelines set by the University of Cape Town. With your permission, the telephone interviews with the researcher will be recorded and typed up as a written document or transcript. The transcripts will then be examined to ensure that all of the important information has been captured. The transcripts will not contain your name or any information about you that would allow you to be identified. Some of your comments may be included in a report on the study, but these will be completely anonymous.

Concerns or questions about the research

If you have any concerns or questions about any part of this study, you should ask to speak to Caroline Greyling on 083 604 4033. You can also choose to contact the research supervisor, Nqobile Bundwini, on 071 159 7776 .

APPENDIX B

Appendix B: Questions asked during in-depth interviews

Questions for In-depth interviews

Hi, and thanks for agreeing to talk to me for this interview! My name is Caroline and I am a master's student at the University of Cape Town.

Today I would like to have a conversation with you about languages in digital marketing. This session has been set up in order to gain insights into consumer experiences of digital marketing and how language plays into this experience. This conversation will help inform the findings of a research study for my master's project.

This session is meant be an open conversation, and there are no right or wrong answers. This is intended as an open conversation about your experiences- I am interested in learning about your emotions and encounters relating to this topic and I want to hear your thoughts. I will need to record today's call, purely to ensure that we capture all of your opinions, and so that I don't miss anything. Are you fine with me recording this call?

During this interview I will be asking questions about digital marketing and digital media. These terms simply refer to communication and information from companies that is found online. This includes things like online videos, Facebook, Instagram posts and tweets from companies.

Participation in this interview is entirely voluntary, and you are allowed to end the interview at any point if you wish to do so. Do you consent to taking part in this interview?

If you are unsure about any of the questions, please feel free to ask me to repeat or explain the question.

So, here in South Africa we have eleven official languages. What I'm interested in today, is your experiences of the languages companies use across digital platforms –

platforms like websites, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, blogs and more- and how that impacts the relationships that you have with brands.

Questions:

1. Interviewer: What is your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT :

2. I: How often do you speak your mother tongue? How often do you write or read in your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT:

On a scale from 1 to 10, 10 being the highest; how would you rate your proficiency in [LANGUAGE)?

PARTICIPANT:

3. I: Have you ever looked up or connected with a brand on digital platforms? This can be anything from going onto a brand's website, blog or social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc.

PARTICIPANT:

4. I: If yes, can you recall which language or languages the brand used to communicate on the platforms?

PARTICIPANT:

5. I: Do brands often use your mother tongue to communicate across digital platforms? How have your experiences been? [NOTE: substitute "mother tongue" for the respondents mother tongue language"]

PARTICIPANT:

6. I: Do you think that brands show a preference for using any specific South African languages?

PARTICIPANT:

6b. (If yes) How do you feel about [LANGUAGE] being preferred?

PARTICIPANT:

6c. Do you feel that this preference affects you in any way?

PARTICIPANT:

7. I: Are you aware of any brands that communicate in [Your mother tongue]

PARTICIPANT:

8. If a brand communicates using [your mother tongue], how does that make you feel?

PARTICIPANT:

8b. I: Would this potentially change whether you will purchase from this company?

PARTICIPANT:

9. I: If there are two brands with similar products, where one is willing to communicate in your mother tongue and one is not, would this impact which brand you choose?

PARTICIPANT:

10. I: Do you think that you would find it easier to identify with a brand if they were to communicate in [mother tongue]:

PARTICIPANT:

11. I: Do you feel that your mother tongue carries more of an emotional impact than other languages do? In what way?

PARTICIPANT:

12. I: (If yes) Does this emotional connection extend to using this language in all contexts, like in business, social environments, making purchases?

PARTICIPANT:

13. I: Let's say you're browsing an online store, or visiting the Facebook page of a South African business, and the company communicates in [Mother tongue]. How would that experience be for you?

PARTICIPANT:

Do you think that this would create an emotional response?

PARTICIPANT:

14. Do you think that communication in [Mother tongue] would make it easier to communicate with that brand?

PARTICIPANT**:**

15. I: If you're viewing online marketing efforts and communication from companies online, do you think you should be given a choice of which language you want to receive communication in?

PARTICIPANT:

16. I: If you were able to talk to a brand representative in your mother tongue, across platforms like chatrooms, Facebook messenger, comments on posts etc., do you think that this could affect how you respond to the brand?

PARTICIPANT:

17. Let's say you're trying to contact a South African company, you want to send them a message online or give them a call. Do you feel that spaces like online messaging services and contact forms should allow you to choose which language to speak?

PARTICIPANT:

18. I: Would you feel that a brand is trustworthy if they were willing to communicate in your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT:

Why do you feel this way?

PARTICIPANT:

19. I: Do you think that if a brand communicates in your mother tongue, you would feel more connected to that brand?

PARTICIPANT:

Why/why not?

PARTICIPANT:

20. I: Let’s say a brand is willing to accommodate you in terms of language, and they want to communicate to you in [Mother tongue]. What would that mean to you?

PARTICIPANT:

Do you think that this is something that you would appreciate?

PARTICIPANT:

21. I: Would you like to be able to choose which South African language in which to explore online brand resources like websites, messenger systems and newsletters?

PARTICIPANT:

I: What South African language would you prefer to use and read across digital platforms?

PARTICIPANT:

I: Does this change for different types of products/services?

PARTICIPANT:

22. I: Are there any brands that you’ve interacted with online, that you have a bad relationship with?

PARTICIPANT:

I: Why?

PARTICIPANT:

I: Do you think that if this brand was willing to communicate in [language] this could help lessen or even improve your negative feelings towards them?

PARTICIPANT:

To finish off, I just need to ask you some of the demographic questions for our stats:

What is your age?:

In which province do you reside?:

What is your occupation?:

How many languages do you speak?:

Which racial group do you form part of?:

Which social media platforms use? (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube, Tumblr, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Snapchat, TikTok):

Do you own or have access to a smartphone?:

APPENDIX C

Appendix C: Participants responses to questions related to reading and writing in their home language.

Participant A

I: How often do you speak your mother tongue? How often do you write or read in your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT A: Very often. A day doesn't go by.

I: How often do you read or write in Tswana?

PARTICIPANT A: Hardly. Mostly I read in English, so hardly. I see some things, maybe something written on social media, but myself, literally reading when I come across it but I wouldn't say, "Oh, today I'm gonna write in my mother tongue."

Participant B

I: How often do you speak your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT B: At home, I speak Sepedi at home with my family.

I: Would you say that's every day?

PARTICIPANT B: Yes, every day.

I: How often do you write or read in Sepedi?

PARTICIPANT B: Not often it would be communication with my sisters or a few friends who also speak the language.

Participant C

I: How often do you speak your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT C: Daily, I speak Afrikaans daily.

I: How often do you write or read in your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT C: Most of the time it would be on WhatsApp, communicating with friends or my parents or people that are Afrikaans, but when it comes to reading books written in Afrikaans it's not that often and event writing is not that often since I'm studying in English.

Participant D

I: How often do you speak your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT D: Fulltime. Socially, I would probably say I mostly speak Afrikaans but then from 9 till 5 at work I usually speak English. I'd say half of the day would be English and half of the day would be Afrikaans.

I: How often do you write or read in your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT D: That's difficult. Reading and writing, not a lot. I'd probably say I write Afrikaans only when texting people, but I never really write anything of substance and reading it, minimal. Maybe 10% of my reading would be Afrikaans reading.

Participant E

I: How often do you speak your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT E: Probably 30% of my life, every day.

I: How often do you write or read in your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT E: Almost never, the odd text messages every now and then.

Participant F

I: How often do you speak your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT F: I'd say maybe like 40% of the time, mostly it's all English.

I. How often do you write or read in isiZulu?

PARTICIPANT F: Never. It's very rare that I read or write.

Participant G

I : How often do you speak your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT G: Not often, because currently I live in Cape Town and my friends or the people who I hang out with here don't know the language so the common language that we have is English. So I'll speak it if I'm calling family, so that's when I use it. Or if I have friend from Gauteng and understands the language, but it isn't often.

I: How often do you write or read in your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT G:I don't read or write in it. I mean I'll use it in a conversation, in a WhatsApp conversation but in very small bites, also cause I'm also not great at spelling vernac.

Participant H

I: How often do you speak Venda?

PARTICIPANT H: Pretty often, every day.

I: How often do you write or read in Venda?

PARTICIPANT H: Not too often.

Participant I

I : How often do you speak your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT I: To be honest, only when I'm home or when I'm talking to my parents, which is like twice a year.

I: How often do you write or read in your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT I: Very seldom, like 10% of my life.

Participant J

I: How often do you speak your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT J: Most of the time, because my family is also Sepedi and I'm with my family now.

I: How often do you write or read in your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT J: Not often, unless I'm texting my mom or my dad to get me something from the shop or something.

Participant K

I : How often do you speak your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT K: It depends on what context, obviously at work I speak English more and it depends on who I interact with more. For example, in my own household, we tend to speak English mixed with Zulu and I go home and we tend to speak Tswana. With my friends, it depends on who's there and which languages… so it's very interchangeable.

I: How often do you write or read in your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT K: Very minimal, except for what's on social media and stuff.

Participant L

I: How often do you speak your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT L: Every day, even at my workplace.

I: How often do you write or read in your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT L: I hardly read in isiXhosa, I write in isiXhosa on WhatsApp every day

Participant M

I: How often do you speak your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT M: Probably on a daily basis, I'll speak the language at home with my family or on the phone. It's a daily thing.

I: How often do you write or read in your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT M: I read a bit more than I write, so in family WhatsApp groups you might find occasionally someone might type in their home language and you'd have to read in that language, but I generally wouldn't type in Sepedi, or not very often.

Participant N

I: How often do you speak your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT N: I speak Afrikaans 50%, and then 50% of the time I speak English when I'm at work. And then the other 50 is when I'm at home.

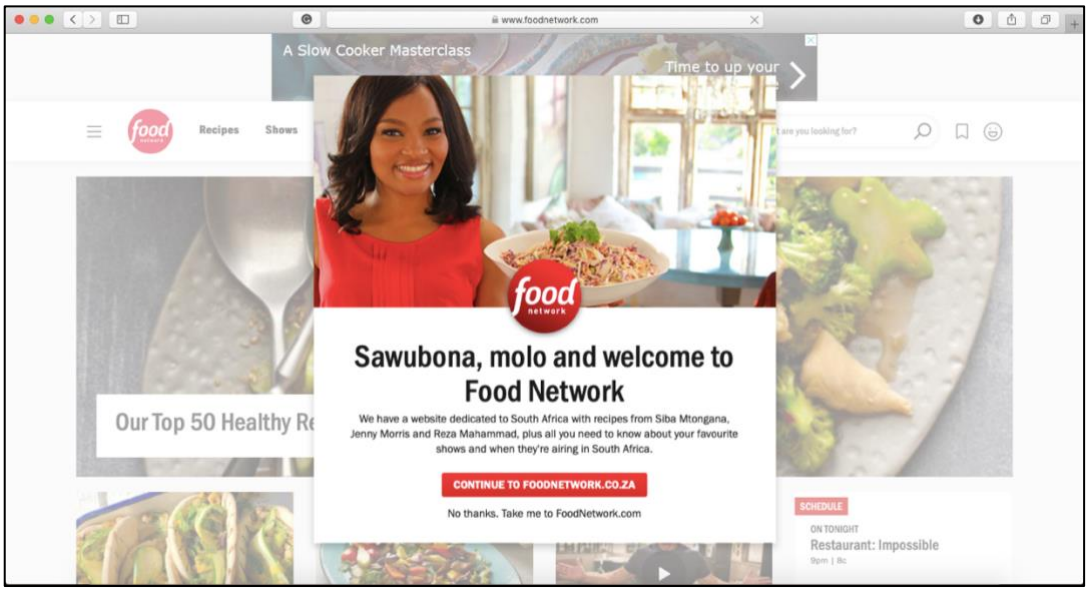
I: How often do you write or read in your mother tongue?

PARTICIPANT N: I read Afrikaans once a week when I buy the newspaper Rapport, and I also write once a week about a 200-300 word opinion piece for religious purposes, but it will normally be every two weeks. So all in all, I read one newspaper a week and I write a opinion piece once every two weeks.

ADDENDUM A

ADDENDUM A: EXAMPLES OF BRANDS USING VERNACULAR IN THEIR MARKETING MESSAGING

Example A: The Food Network website

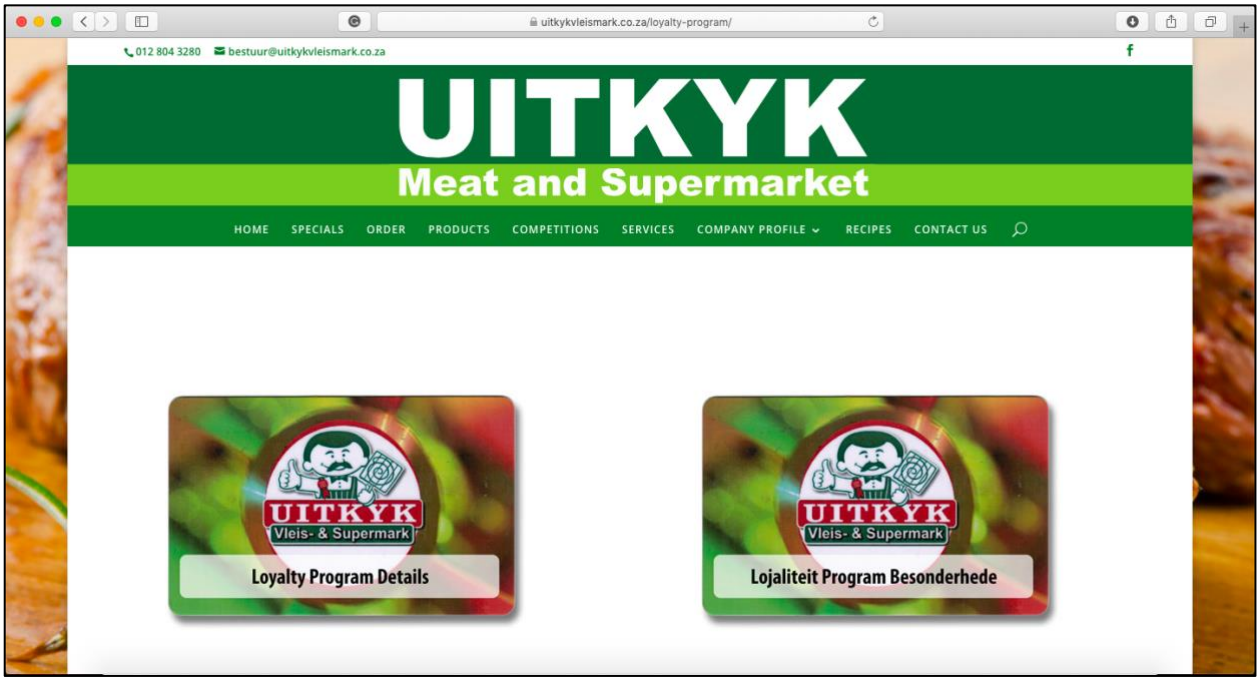


The text offers two South African vernacular greetings, “molo” is an isiXhosa greeting meaning hello, while “sawubona” is isiZulu for the same meaning.
(Source: https://www.foodnetwork.com)

Example B: Tweet from Nando’s South Africa

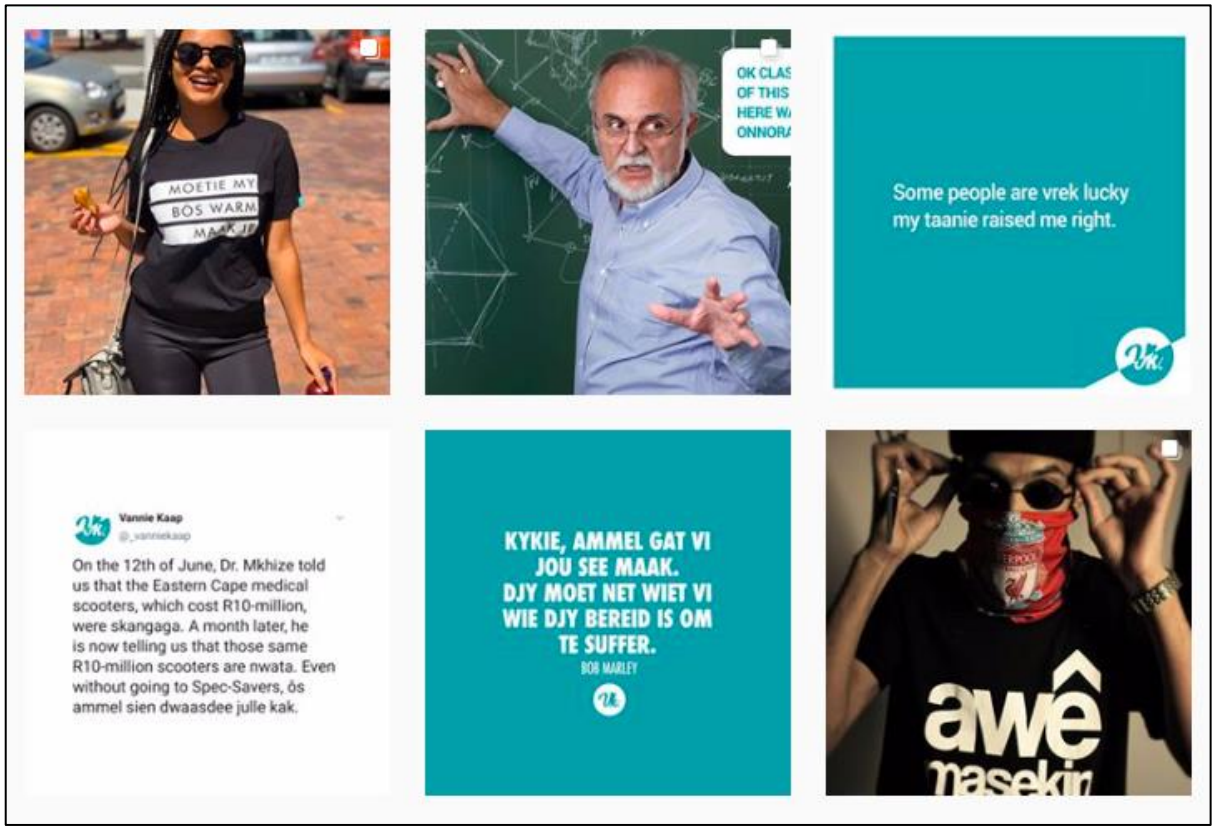
The text on the visual makes use of English and isiZulu. The isiZulu by-line can be translated as “when we are full, we are full.” Several participants referenced Nando’s marketing when discussing the use of vernacular languages in marketing communication.
(Source: https://twitter.com/nandossa)

Example D: Loyalty program information page from Uitkyk Slaghuis website



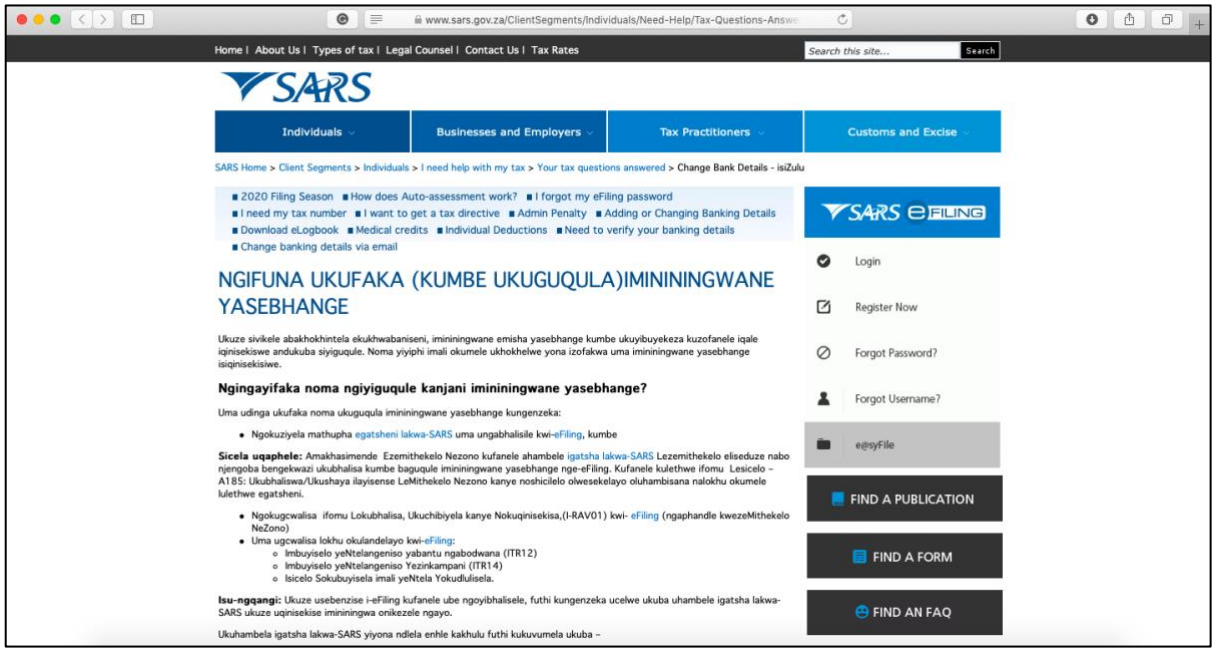
This website offers dual language marketing, whereby they are offering information about their loyalty program in both English and Afrikaans. Participant D made reference to this brand and their use of Afrikaans in their messaging.
(Source: https://uitkykvleismark.co.za)

Example E: Posts from the Vannie Kaap Instagram page



Many of their posts make use of a combination of English and Afrikaans. Participant N specifically references this brand when discussing the use of vernacular languages in digital marketing.
(Source: https://instagram.com/vannie.kaap)

Example F: Resources on the SARS website



This page offers an isiZulu language version of one of their popular pages, describing how to change your banking details.
(Source: https://www.sars.gov.za)