



**THE USE OF BRANDS DURING NGUNI HEALING RITUALS: AN EXPLORATORY
STUDY WITHIN SOUTH AFRICA**

by

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Marketing

**in the Faculty of Business and Management Sciences
at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology**

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District Six campus

2026

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Updated February 2026

DECLARATION

I, Vusumzi Vincent Maqalekane (216283728), declare that the contents of this dissertation represent my own unaided work and that the dissertation has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

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ABSTRACT

In today's dynamic consumer landscape, brands must deliver more than just functional products; they must create meaningful value that resonates with their audiences. While traditional marketing emphasises brand-driven engagement, an emerging perspective highlights the role of customers in shaping value through their own rituals and cultural practices. This study explores the intersection of brand value creation and customer rituals, focusing on the Xhosa and Zulu Nguni people of South Africa, who integrate brands into their traditional healing practices.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how brands were embedded within and contributed to the ritualistic experiences of customers, with little to no direct influence from companies. By taking a customer-dominant perspective, this research examined how rituals function as value-creation moments beyond commercial transactions, shaping brand perceptions and deepening consumer connections (Servadio, 2018:21). The study filled a critical gap by moving beyond corporate-driven value propositions to explore how customers independently co-created brand meaning within sacred cultural contexts.

A qualitative research approach was employed, using purposive and snowball sampling techniques to engage knowledgeable traditional healers and ritual participants (Palinkas et al., 2015:534). Data collection involved semi-structured interviews and participant observations, with thematic analysis applied to uncover key patterns. To enhance research credibility, triangulation, member checking, and reflexivity were incorporated throughout the study.

Findings revealed that brands played a significant role in Nguni traditional healing rituals, not merely as modern consumer goods but as deeply integrated elements within cultural and spiritual frameworks. Healers and participants acknowledged the effectiveness of specific brands in rituals, with notable disruptions when certain brands were absent. While some practitioners believed substitutions could be made through ancestral communication, others argued that replacing brands compromised ritual authenticity and efficacy. These findings highlighted a complex negotiation between tradition and contemporary consumer culture.

This research contributes to the growing discourse on value co-creation by demonstrating how customers repurposed brands within deeply personal and communal experiences (Servadio, 2018:21). It challenged conventional branding strategies by illustrating how brands derived meaning outside corporate influence. The study's insights have practical implications for marketers and brand managers, particularly those overseeing products like Commando Brandy, Smirnoff Vodka, and South African Breweries. By understanding the cultural and

ritualistic significance of their brands, companies could develop more nuanced and culturally respectful marketing strategies that aligned with the Xhosa and Zulu Nguni people of South Africa's lived experiences.

Ultimately, this intends to advance knowledge on the interplay between branding and indigenous practices, offering a framework for brands to engage with cultural rituals in ways that are authentic, respectful, and strategically impactful.

Keywords: cultural branding, branding rituals, value creation, healing rituals, branding, brand use, brand management

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My research experience has led to significant intellectual and personal development. My first tribute goes to my late mother, Princess Nonzwakazi Maqalekane, who was a *Sangoma* and whose memory led me to choose this research topic. The unshakeable faith she held about cultural healing and her strong ties to traditional practices motivated me to conduct this research. Through her efforts, she both connected me to important study participants and respected community leaders in KwaZulu-Natal, and taught me to respect indigenous knowledge systems, which formed the core of this research. This dissertation is dedicated to her legacy.

Words cannot express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr P. Steenkamp, and co-supervisor, Dr K.M. Zwakala, for their invaluable patience and feedback.

I also could not have undertaken this journey without my family and friends, who continually provided mental and emotional support and assistance when I needed it the most, especially during the COVID period.

A special thanks to Kholiwe Dlali, Asanda Kapele and Pieter Paul Mbele, who were always there to give academic support and guidance in my time of need.

Additionally, this endeavour would not have been possible without the generous support from Soccer-Laduma (Media24), Spur Corporation and TFG Jewellery, who financed my studies.

Opinions expressed in this dissertation and the conclusions are my own and are not to be attributed to Soccer-Laduma (Media24), TFG Jewellery or Spur Corporation.

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Table 1: Abbreviations/Acronyms

B2B	Business to Business
B2C	Business to Consumer
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
EPASA	Ethnomedicine Practitioners Association of South Africa
NTHR	Nguni Traditional Healing Rituals
IKS	Indigenous Knowledge Literature

GLOSSARY

Clarification of basic terms and concepts

Term	Meaning
Abakhwetha	individuals undergoing the Xhosa initiation process, particularly young males who participate in the rite of passage known as <i>ukwaluka</i> . This term refers to the initiates themselves during the initiation period (Nkotsoe, 2020:58).
Amaxhwele	Xhosa term for traditional healers or herbalists.
AmaXhosa	AmaXhosa refers to a Southern Bantu-speaking ethnic group largely centred in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. They are noted for their deep-rooted cultural practices, such as initiation rites, ancestral worship, and traditional dances. IsiXhosa is one of South Africa's 11 official languages (Mason & Zandile, 2019:134).
Amasiko	Customs: traditional and cultural.
Amadlozi	African ancestral spirits.
Amagqira	<i>Amagqira</i> refers to traditional healers or diviners among the Xhosa people of South Africa, who play a significant role in spiritual healing, providing guidance, and performing rituals. They are considered intermediaries between the physical and spiritual worlds (Cumes, 2004:34).
Brand attributes	Descriptive features that characterise a product or service (Keller, 2013:77).
Brand equity	A set of assets and liabilities, which are linked to a brand's name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a firm's product or service (Aaker, 1996:96).
Brandy identity	Is the unique set of brand associations that represent what a brand stands for and promises to its customers. It encompasses elements such as brand vision, culture, positioning, personality, relationships, and presentations, which collectively aim to cultivate a distinctive image in the minds of consumers (The Brand Identity, 2023).
Brand personality	Refers to the collection of human characteristics associated with a brand (Keller, 2016:6).
Brand positioning	The process of giving a brand a unique identity and image in customers' eyes compared to rival companies (Kotler & Keller, 2016:42).
Brand salience	The degree to which a brand is quickly remembered or identified by customers while making a purchase (Keller, 2020:12).

Ceremony	A formal religious or public occasion, especially one celebrating a specific event, achievement, occasion or anniversary (<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> , 2024:123).
Eastern Cape	It is one of the nine South African provinces. Its capital is Bhisho, but its two largest cities are Port Elizabeth and East London (South Africa Online, 2024).
Ethnography	This refers to the systematic study of people and cultures. It is designed to explore cultural phenomena, where the researcher observes society from the point of view of the study's subject. Ethnography is a means to represent a group's culture graphically and in writing (Lewis, 2021:322).
Imphepho	Africa's sacred herb (<i>Helichrysum petiolare</i>) used in traditional African rituals and medicine, known for its aromatic and healing properties (Van Wyk & Wink, 2018:91).
Inyanga	Concerned mainly with medicines made from plants and animals (Zulu Religion, n.d.).
Isigulani/umuntu ogulayo	A person who is ill or suffering from a health condition in traditional African contexts (Molefe et al., 2021:77).
Isangoma/Izangoma	A person who primarily relies on divination for healing purposes and might also be considered a type of fortune teller (Zulu Religion, n.d.). Traditional healers of South Africa are practitioners of traditional African medicine in South Africa (Peltzer & Mabaso, 2020:56). They fulfil different social and political roles in the community, including divination, healing physical, emotional and spiritual illnesses, directing birth or death rituals, finding lost cattle, protecting warriors, counteracting witches, and narrating the history, cosmology, and myths of their tradition. There are two types of <i>Izangoma</i> : 1. The diviner (<i>Isangoma</i>) and the herbalist (<i>Inyanga</i>) (Zulu Religion, n.d.).
KwaZulu-Natal	KwaZulu-Natal is one of the nine South African provinces created after 1994 when the Zululand Bantustan and Natal provinces were merged (Morris, 2017:22).
Marketing mix	The set of controllable, tactical marketing tools such as product, price, promotion, and place that a firm blends to produce the response it wants in the target market (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006:51).
Marketing strategy	The marketing logic by which a business unit is supposed to achieve its marketing objectives (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006:57).
Nguni people	The Nguni people are a group of Bantu-speaking ethnic communities in Southern Africa, primarily comprising the Zulu, Xhosa, Swazi, and Ndebele. They share linguistic and cultural similarities, including languages (Britannica, 2023).
Population	The population consists of the entire body of units to be investigated/researched (Parasuraman et al., 2007:333).

Value creation	Creating value for customers helps to sell products and services while creating value for shareholders, in the form of stock price increases, ensuring future availability of investment capital for fund operations.
Umuthi	Medications made from plants, animals and minerals imbued with spiritual significance (Mullinder, 2023).
Primary data	Original information that is collected directly from the source for research or analysis (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).
Qualitative research	Techniques involving small numbers of respondents who provide descriptive information about their thoughts and feelings that are not easily projected to the entire population (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).
Ritual	A religious or solemn ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed according to a prescribed order (Steets, 2020:387).
Sample element	The unit at which the data will be sourced (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).
Ukwaluka	This refers to the Xhosa initiation ritual for young males transitioning to adulthood, which includes various rites and ceremonies designed to mark their passage into manhood (Hammond-Tooke, 2018:76).
Umqombothi	Traditional beer made from maize (corn), maize malt, sorghum malt, yeast and water (Mufamadi, 2021:15).
Zulu	The Zulu or AmaZulu are a Bantu ethnic group of Southern Africa and the largest group in South Africa, with an estimated 10-11 million people living mainly in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Smaller numbers also live in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania and Mozambique (Morris, 2017:22).

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, RESEARCH CHALLENGE, OBJECTIVES, AND DISSERTATION OUTLINE

1.1. Introduction

The present corporate environment requires brands to comprehend how to construct consumer value because it stands as an underlying element of brand management and marketing. Modern consumers want to get quality for their money and a memorable brand experience during their purchasing choices. Conversion exhibits why brands must identify who they must be and understand their target audience to forge lasting and tangible relationships. All businesses need to understand the key objectives and cultural frameworks of customers, since buyers today are in an age of sophistication and many options. Rituals showcase unique patterns of value creation that provide a unique lens to view this phenomenon. Rituals create experiences outside of regular interactions, which create deep emotional bonds with individuals and cultures.

In the framework of South Africa, the traditional practices of the Xhosa and Zulu Nguni people present a deep tapestry for investigating in what way rituals influence brand value from a customer-centric viewpoint. The purpose of this research was to connect theoretical constructs of rituals with the application of brands to enhance the understanding of how clients co-create value in culturally relevant contexts. Thus, through an empirical desk and primary inquiry approach this study aimed to clarify the complex link between rituals and value creation. Using existing literature, the desk research recognised research gaps on brand connection in Nguni healing rituals. The principal research focused on how participants are able to attribute meaning and value to brands in sacred ritual settings. Consequently, these techniques partly delivered upon the aim of the study, confirming real-world co-creation practices while also elucidating areas which demand careful scholarly inquiry in regard to this complex, multifaceted phenomenon.

Branding rituals are understood to be intentionally, consciously synchronised with actions or activities that form an affective and fulfilling emotion (Ran & Wan, 2023:89). Not the only example of how brand rituals are important to their brand identity. On brand rituals, the likes of Corona, Oreo and even Gatorade have an idea of brand rituals, while others have inventively constructed brand rituals. At the same time, Corona made 'Corona and Lime', whereby customers were encouraged to take a Corona beer with lime to have a better experience of the product by closing the bottle with the thumb tip, letting the lime rise before tipping the bottle up again (Krumb, 2015). Oreo biscuits represent another distinctive product type whose consumption is identified by specific acts and behaviours through different brands.

Participation in the Oreos consumption is often based upon a prescribed series of steps, aptly codified in the phrase, 'first you dunk it, then you lick it, then you eat it' (Spence, 2021:213). This carefully arranged ritual encapsulates an enticing branding strategy that has become a routine part of the normal behaviour of their customers.

The triumph of these brands has granted them to reach home further than their country of origin, as globalisation has brought cultures closer together, increasing companies' profit margins across the world. It is risky to believe uniformity when organizing a marketing strategy, as cultures continue to preserve distinctive characteristics that must be recognised (Dunn, 2015). According to Torelli et al. (2017:3), customers are more likely to respond positively to brands when these brands have a perceived cultural meaning, which reinforces the consumer's identity. In contrast, customers would react negatively towards brands if they perceived these to be a threat to their local culture.

In marketing, one of the central subjects is value. However, the previous paragraph only covers value as a one-way stream from provider to user. It neglects to acknowledge or consider that customers also generate value and how they perceive that value (Gummerus, 2013:20). Servadio (2018:4) builds on foundational research, proposing that value emerges from the dynamics between providers and customers, acknowledging that service logic is a developing field in grasping customers' viewpoints on value. Grönroos and Voima (2013:136) acknowledge Grönroos and Voima (2013:136) recognise value generation as the integration of two essential sub-processes: the provider's efforts to create possible worth for clients via products, and the client's activities in achieving value by utilising those offerings. Value creation is seen not just from the standpoint of the provider's procedures but also as a client's autonomous action, since value is formed and regularly specified by the customer. However, this ignores the fact that other factors can influence value creation, such as investing in marketing and packaging that provides a high-value sense (Fazio et al., 2020:10-11), like the tradition/culture of waiting in line before a new iPhone is launched. The value of the product is far more than the iPhone itself, and one may argue that it also links to a sense of worthiness and identity (Batra & Ghoshal, 2013:461).

Proceeding with the current investigation, the present study endeavoured to explore the phenomenon of brand ritualisation within the context of Nguni healing rituals in South Africa. Sharma et al. (2017:234) contends that while there is continued growth in people who recognise and understand that there are multiple cultures in the world, there is still little evidence in studies of brand ritualisation in many parts of the world. This study's literature review and preliminary research indicate that South Africa is one of those countries with little, if any, research on the topic, hence the purpose of this study. Essentially, the study aimed to

understand the cultural value some brands have achieved or developed within South Africa, specifically in the practice of Nguni traditional healing rituals, which *Izangoma* (traditional healers) use.

Izangoma specialise in traditional African medicines in South Africa and fulfil different political and social roles in their respective communities, including divination, physical, emotional, and spiritual healing, directing birth and/or death rituals, finding lost cattle, counteracting witches, protecting warriors, and narrating the history, cosmology, and myths of their traditions. There are two types of *Izangoma*, namely diviners (*Isangoma*) and herbalists (*Inyanga*), who both use *muthi* (traditional medicine) to heal. In the 21st century, *Izangoma*'s have come to rely heavily on mainstream brands so that they can successfully carry out some of their traditional healing rituals. Hence, this research study considers brands that *Sangoma*'s and their clients use as part of their healing, and ways to connect with *Amadlozi* (ancestral spirits) as part of their rituals.

1.2. Research problem

While there have been numerous studies on value creation globally, the preliminary research revealed that little evidence exists of South African context studies, particularly traditional healing practices amongst the country's Nguni people. This gap is significant given ongoing debates about decolonising knowledge production in South African academia which challenge the dominance of Eurocentric frameworks and call for epistemic justice (Hlatshwayo, 2023:3; Motala, 2025:410). Decolonisation is not merely a curricular adjustment but a systemic reorientation that seeks to dismantle colonial epistemologies and legitimise indigenous knowledge systems as equal sites of theory and practice (Makokotlela & Gumbo, 2025:5). These discussions, intensified by movements such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall, highlight the importance of studies that centre African worldviews and cultural traditions as authentic foundations of knowledge (Davids, 2024:192).

By positioning value construction within Nguni rituals, this research respond to these calls by supporting indigenous epistemologies and opposing the commodification of indigenous practices via Western organisational practices. The focus on Xhosa and Zulu societies is theoretically vindicated by their demographic distinction and historic patterns of movement and urbanisation, which have situated these groups at the intersection of worldwide consumer culture and profoundly embedded traditions (Arndt, 2023:33; Stats SA, 2018; Stats SA, 2020). This makes them particularly favourable to explore the intersection of global commercial brands with indigenous ritual spaces, in which symbolic value is co-created and contested. Viewed through this same lens, then, conceiving the study problem reveals a crucial strain:

there exists an ongoing conflict, the clash of international brand identity embedded in the managerial practices of the Global West and culturally specific symbolic significances in sacred ritual contexts of the Global South. This conflict dangers misaligned brand approaches and cultural commodification, as brands enter areas where value is not simply transactional but greatly spiritual and communal (Conradie, 2010:70; Honjo, 2020:63; Cleveland, 2022:89). Understanding this dynamic is essential for advancing both marketing theory and culturally sensitive brand practices. This study focuses on customer value creation and different models to aid in investigating customer value creation, as embedded in service, which can be summed up as: Value of something as determined by its specific context, value as the shared beliefs that guide behaviour in society guiding what is seen as important and desirable within the society, and 'value-in-use' referring to the value an asset provides to a specific owner under specific use (Akaka, Vargo & Schau, 2015:212).

The models frequently have areas of intersection. While these models depict service as a process intended to facilitate the creation of customer value, they generally appear to lean towards the idea that the provider is the one who devises the value or the offering. Sjödin et al. (2020:480) argue that for providers to develop services and products that meet customer needs, they should involve customers by managing the co-creation in agile ways, involving customers in the conceptual process of developing the offer, which will progressively benefit the customer as the needs evolve. While service is viewed in terms of the firm's use of its resources to involve the customer in the value-creation process, customer service might be more complex than a co-creation process (Vargo & Lusch, 2014:243) or a company's actions designed to support the process of creating value for the customer. Customer perceptions of service quality may exceed the provider's initial expectations or intentions, illustrating that service providers are not entirely in control of the connection between the client and the service.

This inclination to concentrate on service from a corporation's perspective regularly leads to viewing clients' value as a reactive reaction rather than an active, co-created process. Nevertheless, value creation arises dynamically within the customer's complicated world, outside of direct service provider interpositions. It is modelled around constant contacts where customers actively partake in constructing value and experiences, rather than purely responding to company offerings (IFAC, 2020). Albinsson, Perera, and Shows (2017:6) highlight that value co-creation in service-intensive interactions, such as those between personal trainers and clients, is dyadic and tailored, stressing the co-evolution of goals between parties in dynamic contexts.

Modern researchers have acknowledged the significance of carefully investigating customers' interactions with services to boost their thorough grip of the service concept. This expansion goes beyond the provider's viewpoint and delves into the customer's standpoint. Consequently, two distinct limitations have surfaced. Firstly, how customers utilise the supplier's offering to create worth, making up the procedure, and secondly, the recognition of how and where customers ascertain the value derived from these products, encompassing the outcome (Jaakkola et al., 2015:183). This has caused more scholars to call on a new model that considers value creation from a multifaceted lens perspective, which recognises social practices and individual preferences regarding the two as contributors to value creation (Jaakkola et al., 2015:183). Within the context of a gap, the term 'outcome' pertains to the location of value evaluation, and who determines the value. Earlier scholars viewed customers as beneficiaries of the process, as the customer determines the offer's value (Grönroos & Voima, 2013:136). However, from the perspective of a customer, the value may be a collective that other customers share, while it can also be determined in a social context and well-being that contributes to a thriving collaborative or sharing economy (Rihova et al., 2018:363).

However, even though these theories recognise the value in relation to other influences, they still only view it from a business point of view and hence ignore the extent to which value reaches the end user. As an alternative, other studies suggest that the evaluation of value might arise within customer ecosystems (Akaka, Vargo and Lusch, 2015:209). These writers probe deeper, claiming that brand-related subgroups play a role in forming the framework within which value is assessed, embedded in a cultural framework. This perspective initiates an argument highlighting that the assertion of value is influenced by a broader community of customers, taking place within their distinct settings that extend outside interactions or engagements solely with the service providers (Jaakkola et al., 2015:183).

To establish how rituals create value from a cultural context, the research focused on the Nguni traditional healing practice of divination, which is mainly concerned with discovering causes of afflictions and events through consultation with spiritual entities and ancestors (*Amadlozi*). By utilising processes such as *ukuthwasa* (spiritual calling) and prophecy, which are not conducted by all *Izangoma*, but only those who can achieve a trance state, practitioners are able to discover the root causes of spiritual afflictions and provide traditional medicine (*muthi*) as a remedy (Mbatha, 2020). The process of *ukuthwasa* involves intense training and spiritual mentoring under the guidance of an experienced *Izangoma* (traditional healer) (Magezi, 2019).

1.3. Problem statement

From a preliminary literature review and the author's lived experience, there is evidence that specific branded objects are incorporated into traditional healing rituals conducted by *izangoma/amagqirha* within Xhosa and Zulu Nguni communities. While brands and consumer behaviour have been extensively investigated, little is understood concerning how branded objects develop ritual meaning and symbolic value within these culturally specific practices. In particular, scholarship has not clarified which branded objects are used, why they are deemed ritually appropriate or effective, and how community actors (healers, patients, suppliers) collectively construct and transmit these meanings. The research defines three essential terms, which include branded objects as commercial products with brand identification, that participate in religious rituals and ritual meaning as the shared symbolic value which objects obtain through healing practices and co-creation as the process of social interaction which multiple community members use to create and modify these meanings. This study addresses that gap by examining brand meaning as how people in the community understand the brand and its products, which they associate with symbolic values, moral values and proper use in religious ceremonies. The research defines contextual brand equity as the specific way people in Nguni healing settings view the ritual value, trustworthiness and credibility of a brand, which differs from standard market-based brand equity measurements. The research defines ritual use as the actual ways people use branded items during religious ceremonies, which includes their usage patterns and their roles and purposes. The research examines how community practices and interpretation processes create meaning through their own processes instead of depending on brand-controlled messages or marketing campaigns.

1.4. Primary research objectives

The overarching aim of this study was to investigate the connection between rituals and value generation, taking into account the conventional viewpoint of Nguni healing sovereignty. In particular, the research seeks to:

1. To identify which brands are being used in Nguni traditional healing rituals.
2. To establish the roles that brands play in Nguni traditional healing rituals.
3. To uncover how the brands become assimilated into the Nguni traditional healing rituals.
4. To uncover how important brands are to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals.
5. To establish the consequences, if any, should the specific brands not be present during the Nguni traditional healing rituals.
6. To establish whether or not there are substitute brands that can be used during Nguni traditional healing rituals.

1.5. Significance of the study

This research is important as it tackles a significant gap in the present writings on brand rituals by investigating the incorporation of mainstream brands within the traditional healing rituals of the Xhosa and Zulu Nguni people in South Africa. By studying these culturally deep customs through a customer-focused perspective, the inquiry reinforces new understandings of value co-forming in a distinct context. This is an important area of focus because understanding the genesis of specific brands as intrinsic to native healing rituals adds to broader conversations around how businesses create value for their customers, while making real-world inferences for marketers who wish to engage with and learn from culturally diverse consumer segments. These results can teach brands how important cultural relevance and stated authenticity are for building and maintaining long-term customer connections, and enhancing brand loyalty.

1.6. Preliminary literature review

The progression of marketing and branding has altered its attention to recognizing how customers construct value. The traditional company-centred approach to value creation now expands to include customer-focused perspectives for value creation. The value creation philosophy undergoes a significant transformation when studying rituals because these cultural practices hold deep importance for the Xhosa and Zulu Nguni people of South Africa and affect consumer conduct. This paper reviews theoretical work about value creation and rituals while exploring their modern marketing applications, the Xhosa and Zulu Nguni cultural framework, and the distinct cultural context of the Xhosa and Zulu Nguni communities of South Africa. Subsection 1.6.1 details value creation in marketing; 1.6.2 highlights the impact of rituals on consumer behaviour; 1.6.3 explores the connection between rituals and value creation in marketing; 1.6.4 examines the cultural context surrounding Xhosa and Zulu rituals; and 1.6.5 illustrates brand engagement through cultural rituals.

1.6.1. Value creation in marketing

Historically, the generation of value has been a pivotal line of reasoning in marketing literature. Vargo and Lusch (2016:6-7) introduced the notion of service-dominant (S-D) logic, which shows that value arises jointly between businesses and buyers at the time of exchanges. This transition from an emphasis on commodities to an emphasis on services signals the active involvement of customers in determining such outcomes. Value is not only discovered in particular products or services; rather, it emerges from the consumption and the lived experience of those offerings (Medberg & Grönroos, 2020:508).

Within the domain of branding, this sentiment is further elaborated. Brands are considered dynamic entities that gain value from consumer interaction and engagement (Iglesias, Ind, and Alfaro, 2013:672). Positive feelings and emotion-based relationships develop, which enhance the brand's worth by creating trust in customers and loyalty from such consumers due to successful brands (Dwivedi et al., 2015:157). To create and maintain value, brands need to understand customer needs, desires, and contexts in order to do so (Chandler & Lusch, 2015:6).

1.6.2. The role of rituals in consumer behaviour

Rituals are organised activities containing symbolic meanings and form a part of many aspects of human life, especially consumer behaviour. Rook (2014:16) describes ritual as a systematic pattern of behaviours that individuals regularly and invariably engage in as part of the acts of daily life. These types of rituals might vary from the habitual to grand cultural. These types of behaviours provide a way for consumers to make sense and meaning of their interactions with brands and products in the context of consumer behaviour.

It is in the anthropological roots of ritual studies that we can extract the mechanisms by which ritual works within societies. Turner (2017:45) stresses that rituals help to forge social links and set cultural expectations. Most ritualistic processes include particular acts, symbols, and objects that help in the formation of a shared cultural experience in combination (Bell, 2015:129). This common, relatable experience opens the doors for brands to resonate with customers on a cultural level.

1.6.3. Rituals and value creation in marketing

Rituals and value generation in marketing is a growing and developing area of research. These symbolic expressions present brands with an uncommon opportunity to engage with consumers more authentically and symbolically. Arnould and Thompson (2015:875) highlight the importance of cultural settings through a study of consumer attitudes; they state that rituals are a "vital" part of these contexts. Brands that align their initiatives with locally relevant and culturally significant practices become more relevant and resonate with their customers.

Figure 1.1. illustrates rituals and value creation, emphasising the role of rituals as an important part of the shared value creation process. Recent service research has become increasingly aware of how rituals contribute to the co-creation of value, claiming that service has value generated not only through the delivery of the service itself, but within the wider cultural and social setting that it is delivered for (Edvardsson et al., 2014:293). It is based on our understanding that rituals are co-created by customers and their external environment and co-

produced, not just within their immediate group, but also at the level of the wider context of culture and society (Heinonen & Strandvik, 2015:476). The figure represents these elements visually, illustrating for us that ritual helps create a kind of value with dynamism in a context within which it is deeply embedded socially.

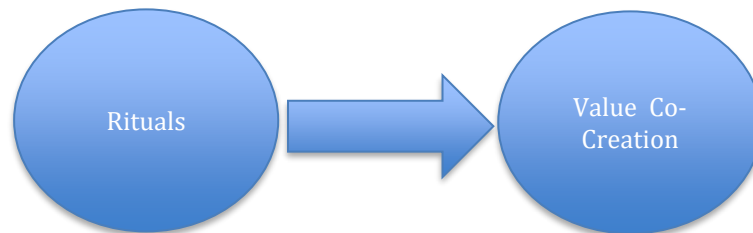


Figure 1.1: Rituals as a path to value co-creation

1.6.4. The cultural context of Xhosa and Zulu Nguni rituals

The Xhosa and Zulu Nguni peoples of South Africa have a rich cultural tradition. These ceremonial customs include multiple attributes of being: birth, marriage, death, and healing. Traditional healing practices are regarded with great significance in both Xhosa and Zulu Nguni cultures. Complex ceremonies executed by traditional healers known as Amagqirha are common Xhosa practices (Ngubane, 2016:23). At such ceremonies, it is believed that people are given information about their ancestral lineage or help in contact with what has been bestowed by heaven, and in their journey to healing, protection, and wisdom. Similarly, Zulu ceremonies carried out in which traditional healers act as Sangomas help to preserve the health and well-being of people and society, which is so integral to Zulu culture (Hammond-Tooke, 2015:35).

1.6.5. Brand engagement through cultural rituals

Brands that succeed in establishing a relationship and aligning themselves with social practices gain valuable insight into themselves and their respective consumers. For example, things used in traditional activities (e.g., clothing, plants, or symbols) can become deeply rooted in the social environment. By being aware of and evaluating the extent of these rituals, brands can position themselves as real and respectful partners in their customers' cultural heritage.

Nevertheless, this incorporation mandates a thoughtful and intentional approach. Brands have to engage with community authorities and communal leaders to guarantee that their involvement is fitting and considerate. Errors in this area might lead to cultural appropriation accusations which would adversely impact the brand's repute (Schroeder & Salzer-Mörling, 2017:142).

1.7. Research questions

The investigation questions in this segment were imperative in steering the study on the role of brands in Nguni traditional healing ceremonies. These questions were established to speak to the focal aims of the investigation by looking at the significance, incorporation, and possible consequences of the brands being absent or being unused in the rituals. Every question was developed to elicit responses that are relevant to the research objectives.

1. Which brands do you know to be important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals?
2. What roles do brands perform within Nguni traditional healing rituals if any?
3. How would you explain how brands become assimilated into Nguni traditional healing?
4. Why is the use of these brands important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals?
5. What would the impact be if these brands were not used in the Nguni traditional healing ritual?
6. Will the Nguni traditional healing rituals still succeed if these brands were not present?
7. Were there substitute brands that can be used to replace these brands for the Nguni traditional healing ritual to still succeed?

1.8. Western Marketing vs. Indigenous Knowledge Frameworks

In this research brand involvement in Nguni healing ceremonies is interpreted by using IKS-based methodology which views *amadlozi* (ancestors) and *izangoma/izinyanga* and *umsamo* (ritual centre) and *ukuhlamba/ukuhlansa* (cleansing) and *imihlatshelo* (sacrifice) and *ukuthwasa* (calling process) as fundamental elements which create value and meaning; thus success depends on spiritual legitimacy within the community rather than market value. This approach responds to decolonial criticisms in South African higher education by establishing local knowledge systems above Western consumer-based interpretations of sacred rituals (Naidoo, 2017:2–3; Keane et al., 2023:84–86). The research on brand meaning in marketing shows how commercial brands interact with customers to create new meanings through their bodies and disputed symbolic values, which helps study their entry into sacred spaces. The

investigation applies these findings as tools, but Ubuntu epistemology together with Nguni cosmology determines what constitutes valid meaning and value during *amasiko* (customary) rituals (Stach, 2019:320; Maris, 2020:316; Agada, 2022:208). However, important to note is that the transition of brands from Global Eurocentric managerial systems to local sacred spaces enables commercial exploitation (Davids, 2024:193; Motala, 2025:415; & Naidoo, 2017:6).

1.9. Theoretical framework

The theory framework for this research is based on multiple key theories, included in the literature review, that explore the concepts of value creation, cultural context, and ritual practices within the domain of marketing and brand management.

1.9.1. Service-dominant logic

Service-dominant logic (S-D logic), proposed by Vargo and Lusch (2016:8), provides a foundational perspective on value creation. It shifts the focus from tangible goods to value co-creation through interactions between providers and customers. This theory is instrumental in understanding how customers derive value not just from the product itself but through its usage and integration into their daily lives and cultural practices.

1.9.2. Customer-dominant logic

S-D logic is developed further by Heinonen and Strandvik (2015:479) who stress the need to understand value from the customer's point of view. Customer-dominant logic states that value is co-created in the context of the customer's life and experiences, and not by the service provider. This perspective is important for this research as it focuses on the incorporation of brands in traditional Nguni healing practices, the cultural context and customer experiences.

1.9.3. Ritual theory

The ritual theory serves as an analytical tool to study the standardised symbolic activities which people perform in groups. The authors Stein et al. (2021:212) show that rituals consist of structured elements with strict rules and repetitive patterns which serve to define and reinforce cultural symbolism. Stein et al. (2021:114) support this concept by stating that rituals function as a group-unifying force which strengthens social cohesion through the reinforcement of core beliefs and values, thus promoting the group's survival. The authors explain that these traditions function as more than symbols because they sustain group continuity across generations while maintaining its social structure. These theories form the basis for analysing

how Xhosa and Zulu Nguni communities incorporate brands into their rituals alongside brand value elevation.

1.9.4. Cultural branding

Holt (2016:67) examines the method through which brands attain iconic prestige by inserting themselves within accepted tales and practices. According to Holt, brands acquire importance once they determine meaningful connections to cultural components and conventions. This principle permits investigators to study the roles of recognisable brands in Nguni traditional healing rituals while investigating their traditional roots in brand value development.

1.9.5. Value-in-cultural-context

The authors Akaka, Vargo and Lusch (2015:241) expand on how value develops via shared practices within a cultural context. The theory shows how cultural environments shape both the way people perceive value and how they create it. The research holds significance because it studies the distinctive cultural settings of Nguni healing rituals and brand value in this setting.

These scholarly contexts concurrently present a systematic foundation for examining how brands are integrated into traditional Nguni healing ceremonies and contribute to value creation from a customer-focused and culturally sensitive viewpoint. Through the application of these concepts, the study aims to provide new viewpoints concerning cultural traditions and brand value interaction to extend customer value creation and brand management research in different cultural environments.

1.10. Research methodology

This investigation utilised a traditional ritual and value creation methodology to study the Xhosa and Zulu Nguni communities of South Africa to appreciate their traditional practices and consumer behaviour. Because the nature of this examination required qualitative methods to discover the complicated practices under inspection, the study is well suited for qualitative analysis. This segment sketches the research structure, data collection methods, data analysis strategies and ethical considerations.

1.10.1. Research design

This investigation study utilized an exploratory research design to study unfamiliar or poorly understood phenomena (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019:174). Exploratory research offers proper flexibility to investigate the complex and dynamic practices of rituals and value creation

(Reiter, 2017:139). The method allows for the gathering of complete, thorough observations that afford a foundation for further research.

1.10.2. Data collection procedures

The data gathering techniques used in this study were thoroughly selected to capture the depth and complexity of the cultural practices under scrutiny. The ensuing sections outline the various methods used, individually selected for their capacity to deliver valuable insights into the rituals and experiences of the participants.

1.10.3. Ethnographic fieldwork

The method of ethnography serves as the fundamental approach for understanding cultural practices and rituals as reflective of the reality of the culture (Pink et al., 2016:25). It offered ethnographic fieldwork data to help understand how the ritual in the Xhosa and Zulu Nguni people unfolds as experiences of the Zulu Nguni culture. Employing qualitative methodologies, the researcher not only has been trained to observe these activities in a close manner but also has had sufficient insight into their cultural and social dimension. Ethnographic research provides a space that also permits a useful mode of looking at community dynamics from the perspective of its own image: by linking with the people and the space directly, the investigator can then uncover the central meanings that the underlying rituals and rituals hold in practice and purpose (O'Reilly, 2016:34).

1.10.4. In-depth interviews

In qualitative research, specifically ethnographic research focusing on cultural and value formation and practice, in-depth interviews are needed. These direct, thorough dialogues with traditional healers and participants in rituals returned immersed and thorough insights into both the individual significance and societal implications of these rituals. As observed by Brinkmann (2018:15), in-depth question and answer sessions are an essential means of figuring out what makes humans' experiences and behaviours problematic; the question-and-answer sessions can provide the first-person accounts that are not limited to artificial reasons or explanations and understanding. Qualitative research was aided by the opening of questions, allowing the investigator to create the proper context for rich, nuanced responses that supported the investigation of what people were meaning and interpreting the rituals from the perspective of the participants.

1.10.5. Document analysis

During the document analysis, the suitable sources used involved historical documents, cultural artefacts, and other previous studies on the Xhosa and Zulu Nguni rituals. This procedure delivers appropriate insights and maintains data triangulation (Bowen, 2017:31). These manuscripts helped the investigator in identifying the patterns and themes that upheld the results from ethnographic observations and interviews.

1.11. Data analysis

The data analysis adopted a thematic analysis methodology suitable for qualitative data analysis with complex data (Clarke & Braun, 2018:6). This technique involved organised coding of the data (1.10.1), the formation of themes derived from recurring patterns (1.10.2), and the analysis of these themes to haul out meaningful insights (1.10.3). The data analysis adopted a thematic analysis methodology suitable for qualitative data analysis with complex data (Clarke & Braun, 2018:6). This technique involved organised coding of the data (1.10.1), the formation of themes derived from recurring patterns (1.10.2), and the analysis of these themes to haul out meaningful insights (1.10.3).

1.11.1. Coding

This inquiry made use of coding as part of the data examination method, which assisted in the systematic grouping of the qualitative data for this study. Data segments that were relevant to the study questions were sorted and labelled, which made it possible for the grouping of the results as well as noting commonalities and patterns. Saldaña's (2016:9) framework was applied in identifying key categories in a large dataset through early coding. Subsequently, further centred coding was performed to identify these categories and to open up the specifics of the brand's position in Nguni traditional healing practices. The use of these coding methods helped this research accomplish a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the data so that it may more adequately explore the meanings and interpretations based on the narratives of the participants.

1.11.2. Theme development

Theme development was an essential component of the process of data examination in this study, because it facilitated a systematic examination of the role of brands in Nguni traditional healing practices. The themes of the study were established through an intentional process of systematising relevant codes and connecting higher-order themes in the data. This process was very thorough (and iterative), mandating that the study moved through the data and the

analysis to ensure that the themes that were emerging were, indeed, representing the experiences and expressions of the participants.

At the start of the theme development, I read through the data, forming a few preliminary codes around branding and ritual-based themes. The codes were subsequently expanded into more specific categories that gave rise to broad themes that encapsulated the content of the data. For example, codes that were weighty to the symbolic usage of brands in healing rituals were organised in a primary theme that engaged the use of commercial products in ritual. This approach guaranteed that the themes did not just emerge from the data but also reflected broader cultural and social trends (Nowell et al., 2017:5).

Utilizing a reasonably recognised but at the same time flexible means of coding, the analysis was in accord with the objectives of the research. As new concepts emerged, this approach enabled themes to emerge and the role of brands in the traditional healing rituals was understood within a structural framework. Additionally, Nowell et al. (2017:5) contend that theme development describes the enormous magnitude of the data essential for any significant analysis and is therefore more than mere description..

1.11.3. Interpretation

The final level of thematic development required that the themes formed from the data be linked with the research questions and theoretical framework. The analysis in the investigative study served as an important tool to relate the results with current literature on rituals and value creation, and to provide new insights into brand integration in Nguni healing traditions.

Thorough data engagement throughout this phase was important for gaining insights into and acknowledging the relationship between the found themes and frameworks more broadly. The investigator studied branded product ceremonial uses to learn about their impacts on cultural adaptation and consumer-brand relationships. The investigation also made well-rooted results because it linked its findings with the literature and to theoretical debate about value co-creation and ritualistic consumption (Vaismoradi et al., 2019:398).

The study procedure required recurring examination, which mandated continual assessments to improve understanding and uphold analytical precision in this research. The themes were not merely descriptive, but contextualised into cultural rituals and branding, enhancing insights into their gravity. This not only strengthened the validity of the findings but also enriched the theoretical conversation regarding the dynamic between tradition and contemporary consumption (Braun & Clarke, 2019:97).

1.12. Ethical reflections

Ethical factors are greatly significant and essential when conducting research that includes human subjects, more so when conducting research studies in cultural contexts. The researcher's sympathy for the cultural differences and ability to conduct the research in a culturally sensitive manner are fundamental in gaining subject participation and retention in the cultural study (Halkoaho et al, 2016:698). The ethical guidelines provided below informed this research:

1.12.1. Informed consent

All participants gave informed consent, confirming that they comprehended the study's aims and methods, and their ability to withdraw at any time without facing any consequences (Wiles, 2016). Consent forms were made available in the participants' native languages to ensure clear understanding.

1.12.2. Confidentiality

Participant information was anonymised, and all research materials were securely stored to maintain confidentiality. Throughout the research, the identities and personal details of the participants were protected and will continue to be protected in any future associated publications (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016:619).

1.12.3. Cultural sensitivity

Cultural sensitivity concerns the values and traditions of the people in the study. In the study, I collaborated with the Nguni Sangoma elders to ensure that the research procedures and dealings used in the study were respectful and appropriate (Creswell & Poth, 2018:54).

The preliminary research methodology described in this section of the study offers a strong guide to investigating the complex interaction of rituals with value creation among the Xhosa and Zulu Nguni communities in South Africa. This research used a mixture of ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis to formulate rich, comprehensive insights into the cultural practices that shape consumer behaviour. Whilst ethical factors mandated the research process to hold respect and integrity for the participants, the thematic analysis approach allowed for a systematic and detailed examination of the data.

1.13. Delimitations of the study

The research embraced a fundamental viewpoint of value and its generation from the perspective of customer rituals. As a result, it considers customers and their experiences to comprehend value creation. Given that service encompasses both a business-to-business (B2B) and a business-to-consumer (B2C) perspective on value generation, this study circuitously involves suppliers and other business entities (like brands, local institutions, and Nguni health specialists) not as the primary focus, but instead as elements of a cultural context analysed to enhance comprehension of market dynamics influencing customer rituals. Nevertheless, this study entirely overlooks a business-to-business viewpoint (B2B).

This research study undertakes an interpretive lens system deeply seated in Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), which selects the symbolic and experiential dimensions of consumption rather than transactional or managerial concerns. This implies that the focus on value and its creation is on its interpretive aspect; therefore, the conversation centres more on what customers indicate and imply, rather than their immediate intentions. Interpretive consumer research looks to find out cultural meanings and value creation as experienced by consumers, setting them as the primary unit of analysis (Susan & Dobscha, 2014:119; Lee & Dobscha, 2014:812). Similarly, CCT highlights the dynamical interchange between consumer actions, marketplace systems, and cultural meanings, rather than inter-firm relationships (Arnould & Thompson, 2018:95, Arnould et al., 2023:2). Subsequently, incorporating a B2B viewpoint would pioneer a managerial logic that contrasts with the interpretivist aim of exploring context and meaning (Lucarelli et al., 2024:420). For these explanations, the investigation intentionally ignored B2B considerations to maintain theoretical coherence with its interpretive focus on consumer rituals. Building on the interpretive foundation, the ritual lens aids the exploration of the symbolic aspects of value and how it is generated. The investigation explores the roles of mainstream brands within traditional Nguni healing rituals, but does not directly touch on or discuss associated health issues. The research primarily investigates the beliefs of those who practice the healing rituals and the significance of the brands for the rituals to succeed.

1.14. Dissertation outline

Chapter 1 introduces the research study, providing background information and outlining the research questions, objectives, and scope. The research foundation which directs the analysis of Chapters 2 and 3 becomes established in this chapter.

Chapter 2 presents the literature review on brand ritualisation and related works relevant to the study. This chapter identifies gaps in the existing literature that the study aims to address.

The research findings about existing gaps will help develop the conceptual framework which appears in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 explores the concepts of brands and rituals, focusing on Nguni (Xhosa/Zulu) traditional healing rituals. The research methods described in Chapter 4 directly result from the established concepts and cultural framework presented in this section.

Chapter 4 details the research methodology, specifically the ethnographic approach, including study design, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, and considerations for reliability and validity. The research methods presented in this section allow the author to generate results which he presents in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 presents the study's findings, organised around a key ethnographic episode: South African traditional Xhosa and Zulu Nguni healing rituals. The results from Chapter 5 serve as proof to create the recommendations which Chapter 6 presents.

Chapter 6 offers recommendations and suggests avenues for future research based on the empirical findings regarding the integration of modern brands in the Nguni traditional healing community studied. The final section of this chapter connects all research results to the initial objectives which Chapter 1 presented.

1.15. Key definitions

1.15.1. Customer

In the realm of selling, "a buyer is described as the 'purchaser of products or services'" (American Marketing Association, 2023). In this dissertation, the concept of the buyer broadens to encompass not just the purchaser of a provider's offerings but also, more importantly, as a consumer of services or goods. This viewpoint closely corresponds with the term 'consumer', as they both highlight the idea of usage. The American Marketing Association describes a customer as the "final user or buyer of products, concepts, and services." This definition focuses on the idea of use, akin to the broader viewpoint of the consumer. Nonetheless, it overlooks the financial connection with providers. The word 'customer' implies a financial exchange, which is overlooked in the definition of 'consumer'. Given that this dissertation is based on service logic, which recognises that usage and exchange are interconnected in value creation, it makes sense to use the term 'customer' to refer to someone who buys and utilises the offerings of a service provider.

1.15.2. Ritual

A ritual possesses various etymologies, each suggesting distinct meanings (for a more in-depth exploration of the source of rituals, kindly see Chapter Two). The Oxford English Dictionary (2023) describes rituals as "a religious or serious ceremony, made up of a sequence of actions that are carried out in a specific order." In marketing, a ritual denotes "actions or behaviours executed by consumers to establish or confirm preferred symbolic cultural meanings" (Kurian, 2013). Both interpretations differ because the initial links rituals to religion, whereas the subsequent pertains to behaviour that suggests consumption. However, these are important symbolic definitions for the behaviours associated with rituals at a social level, or through the lens of religion and cultural expression. Usually, a ritual denotes a series of actions performed to attain significant objectives in life. The following chapter elaborates on this idea.

1.16. Conclusion

Brand rituals hold substantial authority in determining the success of brands; nonetheless, their assessment has primarily focused on the brand's perspective, ignoring the consumer's perspective. This research investigations aims to close the gap by investigating the roles that brands play in rituals by looking beyond the simple day-to-day brand uses, such as the examples of Corona and lime ritual of placing lime at the mouth of the bottle or Oreo's 'first you dunk it' ritual of twisting the Oreo, licking it and then dunking it in milk. As an alternative, this research investigates the importance of brands within the context of South African Nguni traditional healing ritual practises and the brand's impact on the success or failure of the Nguni healing rituals. The study aims to achieve this by exploring this distinct viewpoint. The investigation intends to gain a thoughtful understanding of how brands link with the practices and beliefs of Nguni traditional healing rituals in South Africa, shedding light on the wider dynamics that underpin successful branding in this cultural context.

Chapter 2 will tackle the primary theories of branding, brand value, and value creation. The chapter will explore, in part, an account of the ways in which brand values are constructed and perceived among consumers; the other will touch upon the complex role brands play in both consumer culture and societal rituals. This chapter reviews the approaches followed to brand development, as well as the mechanisms brands use for value. This part will serve as the background information needed to understand the connection between brands and cultural practices. The analysis will then frame the way to further explore how brand rituals enhance consumers' experiences whilst reinforcing the perceived value of brands within specific cultural contexts, such as those observed in Nguni traditional healing.

CHAPTER 2: BRAND, BRANDING, BRAND VALUE, AND VALUE CREATION

2.1. Introduction

Keller (2020:995) contends that customers live in a world where brands are an ever-present reality. The author further states that not all brands have the same importance to customers (Keller, 2020:995). Understanding how customers react to brands and what they think, feel, and do as a result of the brand is a crucial aspect of a brand. According to research conducted by Zia and Sohail (2016:35), customers are prepared to pay a price premium for branded products over similar quality products just because of the brand name. According to Ashraf et al. (2017:620), brands have a significant effect on consumer purchasing selection decisions and customers' willingness to pay a price premium. According to Barney (2014:24), a brand is a promise given by a corporation to its clients; 'delivering on the brand promise' is a phrase that has been used by Punjaisri and Wilson (2017:91). Fournier (1998:358) further found that brands assured the customer of the superiority of the product or service and that some customers might even see a brand as a sworn guarantee that the product will deliver greater satisfaction or experience. However, Fournier (1998:358) also states that the relationship takes place over a series of various interactions that result in the relationship between the consumer and the brand as an outcome of the range of benefits for the participants.

While there has been much research on brands, there is not much documentation of research that has focused on the use of brands in Nguni healing rituals. This study investigates the use of brands during IsiXhosa and Zulu Nguni traditional healing rituals. Therefore, this chapter examines brand, brand identity, branding, the different types of branding as relevant to the study, the evolution of brand management, brand equity, service approach to value creation and brand adaptation or standardisation of brands; and how all these connect in the value creation process by the consumer, with the intention of understanding the brand value in the Nguni healing rituals.

2.2. Brand

The term brand relates to a combination of symbols, designs, names, and signs through which customers are able to identify and distinguish the offerings of a specific company (Beig & Nika, 2019:412). Brand identity is a recognisable aspect of a company, including the colour, its copywriting style and tone, the appearance and structure of all its products, while design and logo constitute a language that speaks to customers independently of verbal content (Foroudi et al., 2014:2271), as well as its social media presence (Yannopoulou et al., 2013:86). It is the way in which an entity, a corporation, or a business presents itself to the public and positions

a business in the minds of its customers. The brand is the heart and soul of a company, and it is instrumental in its success (Tuan & Palaniappan, 2020:40).

Tuan and Palaniappan's (2020) definition, though true, is rather focused on one element and does not tackle the role of brands in creating value for the customer. Pinar et al. (2016:530) suggest that the starting point of any product or service provider is having a concise and relevant consumer promise that management and staff share through internal marketing; it is this promise that drives the service provider or product seller/producers to invest in the quality and innovation in an effort to deliver on the brand promise. The authors caution companies against recklessly overpromising deliverables that the company cannot afford. Okereafor (2023:312) further contends that companies with a consistent, distinct, and relevant brand identity can gain market preference, add value to their offerings, and command premium pricing.

Additionally, according to Kimbarovsky (2021), a brand is the total of all of a company's or organisation's interactions with customers and prospects. Originally, the word 'brand' referred to the act of burning/markings that cattle ranchers placed on their livestock (Kolářík, 2012:12). However, the definition of 'brand' has grown to include more than just a single visual feature (Özkanal, 2019:1130). Dvornechuck (n.d.) is of the opinion that people often confuse the terms 'brand identity', 'brand' and 'branding' as being similar. However, the words play different roles in forming a perception of a business, service, or product. The American Marketing Association (2021) states that 'a brand is a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or services as distinct from those of other sellers. Kotler and Keller (2015:241) differentiate 'brand' from 'branding' by stating that branding is about endowing products and services with the power of a brand. According to Kotler and Keller, branding is the process of creating and shaping a brand in the minds of customers in order to give a meaning to a specific company, product, or service.

By expounding on what a brand offers and what it does not, an organisation can then aid customers to instantly discern and trial their brand. Furthermore, it gives customers a reason to choose the business's products over the competition's by consistently delivering a product that lives up to the brand's promises (Okereafor, 2023:309). The goal is to entice and keep loyal customers and other stakeholders.

Okereafor (2023:309) states that globalisation, increased competition and changes in customer behaviour all form obstacles for modern organisations. For companies to be notable and obtain better results, they need to be distinguished from their competitors and be seen as superior in the eyes of their customers. Firms must differentiate their products and must

manage their brand in order to capture, retain, and build a strong and growing customer base. Those who convey a convincing and consistent brand message in ways that reach their target market will be the ones who succeed (Dwivedi & McDonald, 2018:35).

Branding can be a complex and challenging endeavour, and success is never guaranteed (Williams & Omar, 2014:2). For a brand to be captivating and effective, companies must invest in strategic brand marketing, understand what makes their brand unique, and communicate this uniqueness to customers as clearly as possible (Falck, 2018:1). Burmann et al. (2017:6) emphasise that in the dynamic business landscape of the 21st century, a brand is only effective if its identity provides distinct benefits to both employees and customers. To stand out in the market, a brand must first establish its unique identity and then communicate that identity effectively to its audience (Farhana, 2012:223). In South Africa, particularly among the Nguni people, brands have been integrated into traditional healing rituals. This presents a significant opportunity for brand managers to study these practices and, with thoughtful and culturally respectful consideration, infuse this uniqueness into their brands, helping them to differentiate themselves within the South African market.

2.2.1. Branding frameworks

Kapferer (2008:59) suggests that there are two frameworks in brand development: the brand developed from product development and the brand developed from communication. This means brand development is either based on the product's practical benefits or emotional benefits that are intangible values in the production of goods. The brand system, often conceptualised as the brand triangle (refer to Figure 2.1), serves to delineate the benefits that contribute to brand positioning.

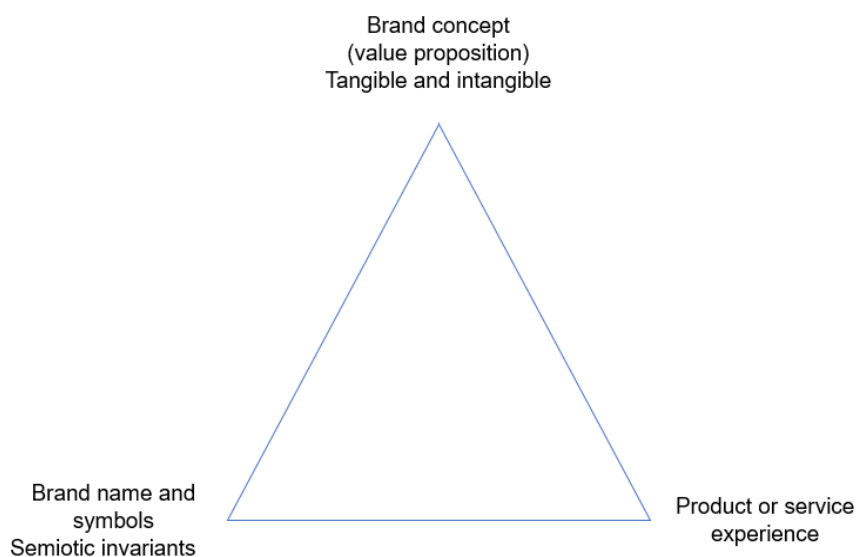


Figure 2.1: The brand system (Kapferer, 2008:12)

The brand system helps organisations determine the balance between tangible and intangible gains of a brand by balancing identity and positioning. Kapferer (2012:10) further argues that the brand system helps determine the following questions for brands:

- Should a brand evolve over time and establish itself across borders?
- How should the brand be expressed through its products, locations, and services?
- How can the service and products be different to its competitors?
- How should it be identified? Where and how? By its logo or its brand name only? What semiotic variations? How often should the symbols be modified? Should the name and brand message remain the same internationally or be adapted for the local market?

The brand system, on the other hand, falls short in that it views customers as bystanders who are swayed by the brand name's power and misses the complex collection of benefits that customers receive. Oosthuizen (2013:10) argues that strong brands have various benefits to customers, whether functional or emotional. According to the author, customers do consider the institution that is the values, the people, systems and programmes that form part of the brand. The author further argues that it is the collective meaning of the brands that defines brands to customers. On the other hand, Ghani and Tuhin (2018:79) posit that customers are part of brand development and are more influential in shaping what the brand means and passing these values on to others. With the World Wide Web and increased social media, word of mouth has become more influential than ever before. It allows people the platform to share their opinions and information with each other, resulting in a shift in power between traditional producers of messages and customers of information.

2.2.2. Brand identity

A strong and well-defined brand identity is essential for shaping how a brand is perceived and establishing meaningful connections with consumers. It represents the brand's unique characteristics, values, and promises, differentiating it from competitors in the marketplace. Aaker and Joachimsthaler's (2000:83) brand identity system provides a structured approach to understanding how brands build and maintain their identity, highlighting the core and extended elements that contribute to a cohesive brand image.

Figure 2.2 visually represents this framework, illustrating the components that constitute a brand's identity and how they interact to create a unified brand perception.

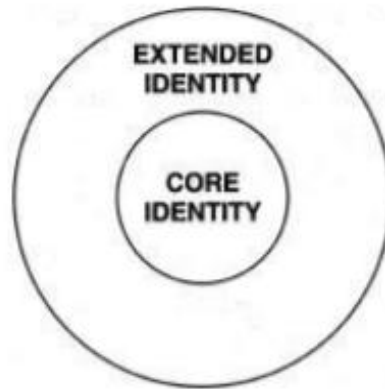


Figure 2.2: Aaker's identity structure (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000:83)

The foundational concept of branding is brand identity, which encompasses the idealised vision of what a brand is and aspires to become. Brand identity serves as a strategic representation that guides all marketing activities within an organisation (Ilanenko et al., 2020:1). Tsai (2021:114) notes that customers are presented with various brand options, necessitating a deeper understanding of what distinguishes one brand from another. In an increasingly competitive landscape, differentiation and brand identity have become vital. Aaker (2013:27) posits that brand identity comprises a specific set of brand associations that management seeks to establish or maintain, representing a commitment from the organisation to its customers regarding the practical, emotional, or self-expressive benefits of the brand, thereby fostering a relationship with them. Brand identity is inherently aspirational, providing purpose, intent, and meaning to the brand (Falck, 2018:11). Aaker further discusses the brand identity system, which includes both core and extended identity, as illustrated in Figure 2.2. According to Aaker (2012:45) the core identity stands for the most important part of the identity and is vital for the success of the brand. After peeling away the layers of an onion or the leaves of an artichoke, it is the centre that is left. Extended identity has a wider scope and offers more options; when it comes to brand implementations, more texture and completeness are essential. Moreover, the extended identity includes features such as brand personality and brand delimitation that are difficult to incorporate in the brand essence or core identity (Appiah & Ozuem, 2018:57).

Falck (2018:17) argues that in order for a brand identity to be complete, the brand requires an expanded identity that can express the brand by making use of the brand personality to fill in the gaps and add information to further define what the brand is all about. Each of the dimensions serves as a driver of the identity of the brand within the extended identity.

According to the author, the extended identity is easier to adapt and change as the markets and customers' needs and demands change.

Kimbarovsky (2020) states that brand identity is the way in which an entity, a corporation or a business presents itself to the public and identifies a business in the minds of its customers. Tarver's (2019) definition of brand identity is that it is taking a subjective and aspirational view – what the marketers would like the brand to be – while stressing the importance of long-term continuity. Tarver's (2019) work does not, however, consider the role played by customers in brand identity. The increasingly competitive environment and the growth of customers as collaborators in the development and growth of brands demand a rethink of this perspective (Da Silveira et al., 2013:28). Proactive customer engagement means including customer contribution in the value-creation exercise wherein customers become active participants (Alves et al., 2016:1626), and these difficulties necessitate a fresh perspective on the theory of brand identity. The purpose of this research is to further the concept of brand identity and brand value by adding to larger definitions of a brand as flowing and derived from customers, with a focus on South Africa's Xhosa and Zulu Nguni traditional healing practitioners and believers.

2.2.3. Brand identity framework

A brand identity can be attained by applying a brand identity framework, which serves as a central point that describes what the company stands for and functions as a guide to ensuring that all points of communication with the market build the brand (Srivastava, 2011:341). The framework should be a concise distillation of the brand promise, personality, attributes and position. Da Silveira et al. (2013:33) postulate that the brand identity framework depicts the management of brand identity (1) as a dynamic mechanism involving brand managers and customers as the main contributors, but not exclusively (Figure 2.3).

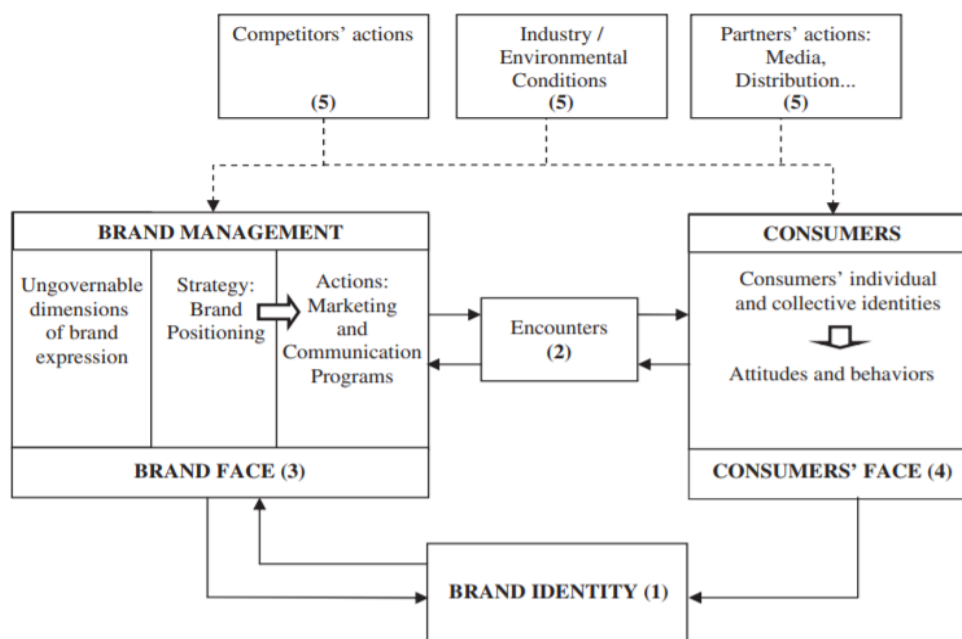


Figure 2.3: Brand identity framework (Da Silveira et al., 2013:33)

Brand Identity (1), Da Silveira et al. (2013:33) argue that brands perform well as a result of the brand managers' promoting and conveying techniques and actions. Shoppers act through establishing their collective and individual identities (Reed II et al., 2012:310). Encounters (2) are overt or indirect face-to-face or mediated interactions between the brand and the customer. Jefferies et al. (2021:74) hold that brand experiences are co-created between customers and an organisation. The experiences can happen either through the activity of the brand administration (for example, promoting), or through the activity of the customer (for example, through a web journal), or at the activity of both (for example, trade shows, consumer's involvement in product design) (da Silveira et al., 2013:33). Within the brand–consumer relationship, follows the brand face (3) at this stage, brand management creates brand identity as a result of interactions with target customers and the brand impressions that management wants them to have. Here, the brand management produces personality as an outcome of engagement with the intended customers. Customers' face (4) shows shoppers and future shoppers as entertainers in the consumer–brand relationship in a positive light. Brand personality ought to be energetic to preserve the comfort of both the brand and shoppers. Brand supervisors ought in this manner to ceaselessly alter brand character in order to protect consistency of both the brand face and the customers' face. Extra measurements (5) require a position within the brand character system as inputs to brand personality. The competition, business, natural environments, and partners' activities help form the brand concept. Brands are both influencers and are influenced by their environments (Gensler et al., 2013:244).

Okerefor (2023:308) asserts that branding plays a vital role in equipping firms with the necessary tools for differentiation in today's dynamic and competitive markets, while also allowing customers to identify and evaluate product performance. This has led to an increasing recognition that brands are among the most valuable intangible assets that firms possess, making branding a top priority for management in recent years. Brands provide customers with a simple way to make choices, ensure a certain level of quality, reduce risk, and build trust (Farhana, 2012:223). Keller (2013:28) argues that a well-defined brand identity maintains consistency for customers, even when new products or competitors enter the market. Conversely, Kapferer (2013:149) cautions that once a product or service expands and varies, customers may believe they are dealing with multiple brands, leading to misconceptions about the brand's identity. Therefore, managing brand perceptions is critical for the brand's long-term viability, survival, and market dominance. This task usually falls to brand managers, who reinforce positive brand perceptions or emphasise what initially distinguished the brand from its competitors (Keller, 2013:5).

However, few brands are aware of how they are regarded, a viewpoint necessary to establish their long-term identity and distinctiveness. To create their desired brand identity, businesses would reinterpret their current or established brand identities. Understanding a brand's genuine identity is therefore a difficult task; it involves examining the essence of the brand as well as its many manifestations. The brand identity prism examines additional factors that contribute to brand identity, whereas durability, cogent indications, and realism are three factors that highlight the importance of brand identity (Zwakala, 2016:51).

2.2.4. Brand identity prism

A brand's identity extends beyond its visual elements to encompass deeper symbolic and relational dimensions that influence consumer perceptions. Jean-Noel Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism provides a structured approach to understanding how a brand conveys its essence through multiple interconnected facets. By examining both the brand's external expressions and internal characteristics, the prism offers a holistic view of brand identity, ensuring that all elements work together cohesively.

Figure 2.4 illustrates the six key dimensions of Kapferer's model, highlighting how a brand is simultaneously shaped by its core attributes and consumer perceptions.

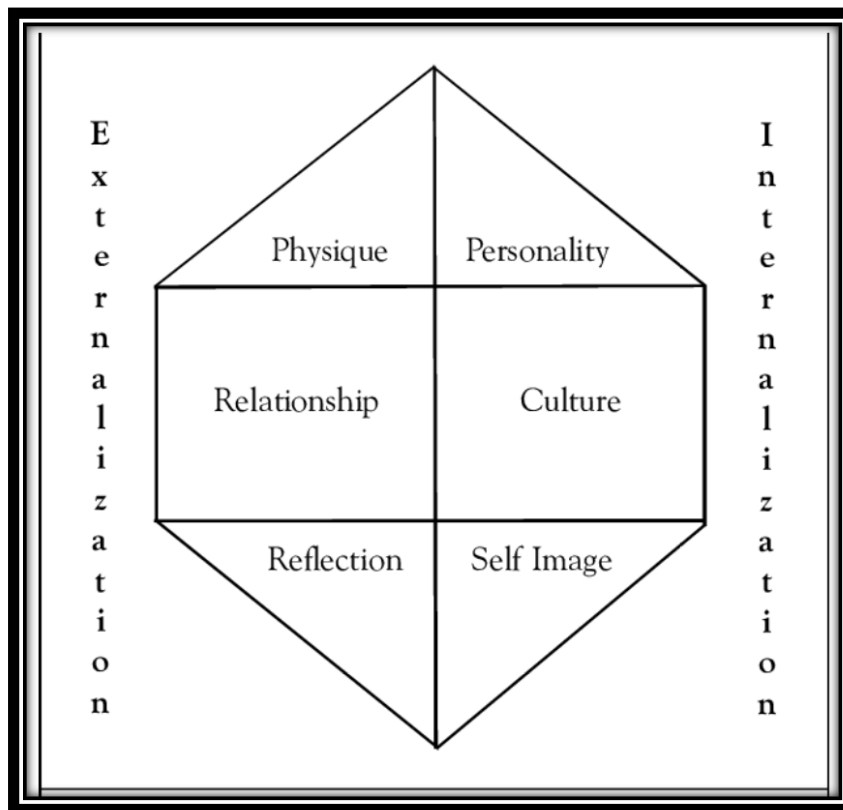


Figure 2.4: Brand identity prism (Ponnam, 2007:64)

Jean-Noel Kapferer's brand identity prism concept labels six qualities of brand identity: (1) physique, (2) personality, (3) culture, (4) relationship, (5) reflection, and (6) self-image as illustrated in Figure 2.4. These six factors are divided into two categories:

1. The constructed source vs. the constructed receiver: a well-presented brand must be seen as both a person (constructed source: physique and personality) and the stereotypical user (constructed receiver: reflection and self-image).
2. Externalisation vs. internalisation: a brand has social aspects that define its external expression (externalisation: physique, relationship, and reflection) as well as aspects that are incorporated within the brand itself (internalisation: personality, culture and self-image).

According to Kapferer, these aspects can only be realised when the brand communicates with the consumer. For Kapferer, powerful brands are competent of incorporating all qualities into a successful complete whole in order to achieve a curt, clear, and appealing brand identity (2009:1-2).

2.2.5. Sources of brand identity

When identifying sources responsible for brand identity development, brand positioning is frequently the primary area of reference. The manner in which a brand is conveyed is critical in developing and defining brand identity. Brands evolve with time, achieving their own individuality and essence. Likewise, customers cannot be depended on to deliver precise and reliable brand identity because their perceptions shift in response to branding trends. As a result, customers can reasonably expect a specific degree of service from specific brands. The only approach to learn what a brand means in general is to understand its specific and distinct characteristics (Zwakala, 2016:53).

Da Silveira et al. (2013:35) contend that the concept of brand identity and its management needs to be rekindled by drawing on multiple lines of research. The authors' research supports the notion that brand identity is a dynamic process that develops over time through mutually influencing inputs from brand managers and other social constituents by drawing on a wide range of literature (for example, sociology, strategy and customers). The dynamic aspect of brand identity entails being adaptable to changing circumstances while maintaining a consistent sense of self. This viewpoint leads to the necessary consistency in identity management and presentations.

2.2.6. Branding

Branding goes beyond name, emblem, logo, and corporate identity (Drori et al., 2013:141). Branding can also increase the human experience – essentially, it is about the promise to deliver a product and service – and by fulfilling this promise, a relationship of trust is built between the consumer and the service provider, which enhances the brand's credibility (Heding et al., 2016:93). The process of branding is the communication of a company's characteristics, values, and certain emotional or personal attributes that we associate with a particular brand (Dvornechuck, 2020). Through branding, a product, service, person, or position can instantly create both a personality and a reputation. Brands are valuable assets that have a big impact on how well a company does. Customers can, in fact, form deep, meaningful relationships with brands, resulting in increased brand purchases, less customer price sensitivity, and lower marketing expenses (Park et al., 2013:180). As such, businesses and individuals can benefit from the different kinds of branding available (Heding et al., 2016:93). Branding is deliberate differentiation, a systematic method used to increase exposure, draw new customers, and raise customer loyalty (Wheeler, 2017:6). Wijaya (2013:55) argues that branding is the marketing action of making a name, symbol, or logo that recognises and separates a service or product from similar services and products. The positioning of an extraordinary brand needs a never-ending drive to be the greatest brand.

Wheeler asserts that brand builders must stick to the basics to be effective and need to continuously improve while maintaining their brand objective and take every opportunity to be the brand of choice. It is the mechanism by which a company or corporation establishes a specific name and identity or any other distinguishing feature that separates one seller's goods or services from those of other sellers (American Marketing Association, 2012).

2.2.7. The evolution of brand management

Brand management has evolved over time as the need to better manage brands has increased (Keller, 2009:39). Over the past decades, brand management has evolved drastically, becoming universally strategic in response to the ever-changing global business climate. Brand management has evolved from transactional tools managed by the organisation to brands as participation properties co-created with others and no longer merely considered as tactical tools that make it possible to sell products (Da Silveira et al., 2013:28).

The modern view is that brands are viewed as entities that provide value for multiple stakeholders; it has become accepted that stakeholders like customers, employees and other contributors not working directly in the brand management team co-create a brand (Zhang et al., 2015:1). Leak et al. (2015:494) contends that the expressions, beliefs and opinions of these stakeholders have a strong impact on the perception and evaluation of a brand, especially with modern interconnected communities where differing views can be easily shared with the rest of the public with limited evidence – particularly on social media (Pino et al., 2015). However, Urde (2016:26) states that research evidence suggests that brand teams already wield the lion's share of power over brand development and brand meaning.

Cova and Paraque (2019:35) contradict these findings and argue that the branding process has been transformed. Some companies have surrendered control and development of brand meaning, realising that brands are co-created with external interested parties and customers. Kristal et al. (2018:334) found this to be true for multiple industries and in some cases, for the development of new products or brand extensions of new products or services that are directly related to the parent brand (Boon et al., 2016:337).

Hughes et al. (2016:357) state that there are numerous market reports that show that even the stories that create brand value are no longer solely being created by corporations, but are instead also created by the customers, who are now more engaged with their brands. Robert and Alpert (2010:198) claim that total customer engagement is where the customer no longer only purchases the organisation's products and services but becomes the advocate who promotes the organisation's services and products at every opportunity. An empirical study

that was conducted by Laroche et al. (2012:1755) found that digital media communities possess a constructive impact on group markets that have shared rituals. These shared rituals can be shared awareness, shared traditions, and societal responsibilities, which have a positive impact on social networking, community participation, impression management, and brand utilisation as value generation strategies.

According to Franze (2017:22), brands prosper when their marketing strategies emphasise a communal attitude of 'us' or 'we', rather than 'you' or 'me'. There is evidence to support the argument that customers develop specific mental connections with brands and positive relations with brands from a young age, which results from interactions with other family members, teachers and peers (Rodhain & Aurier, 2016:85). Customers value these relationships; as a result, they proactively protect and support their relations with the respective brands (Geiger-Oneto et al., 2013:361). Taking into account the involvement of various internal and external stakeholders in the brand's growth and meaning, this proactive support highlights the intricate dynamics between customers and brands (Baxter et al., 2015:143). It is crucial for a company to ensure consistency amongst all the views of all stakeholders in support of the brand comprehensively, so that the brand meaning is multidimensional for the different stakeholders (Biedenbach & Manzhynski, 2016:296). Clatworthy (2012:224) argues that there is still a huge gap between what companies promise and what they deliver, more so in the service industry. The authors further caution that brands that fail to deliver are more likely to suffer tougher consequences more hastily as a result of the interconnectedness of the digital era.

According to Khan and Rahman (2015:2), customers have shifted from simply consuming brands to seeking experiences from companies. The authors further argue that customers today crave both hedonic and practical brand experiences. Studies have found that shoppers are exposed to social experiences, particularly during brand co-creation, though the method of consumption and nature of experience depend on the product or service consumed (Merrilees, 2016:403). Mishra (2016:5984) identifies two paradigms for researching this phenomenon: brand experience and consumption experience, with brand experience categorised as visual, affective, behavioural, and analytical (Trudeau & Shobeiri, 2016:99). It also includes epistemic and embodied perceptions, social value, and consumer satisfaction (Mishra et al., 2014:334). Minkiewicz et al. (2014:35) emphasise that purchasers experience varied social interactions during brand co-creation, depending on the product, service, and context (Merrilees, 2016:408). Schmidt (2020:46) further underscores that brand co-creation is a dynamic, collaborative process where value emerges through ongoing interactions among stakeholders, with the degree of engagement varying across contexts.

The way customers view brands influences how they respond and react to them with technology playing a pivotal role in how brands are experienced, as demonstrated by social media and Internet research (Dessart et al., 2015:28). The necessity to create a personalised brand experience has therefore resulted in the building of an immersive and individualised brand experience which is shared by all stakeholders across all brand touchpoints, acknowledging that not all stakeholders are committed participants.

2.2.8. Brand equity

Brands are among the most important intangible corporate assets (Costa & Evangelista, 2008:68). The authors argue that the brand equity concept compares the valuation of equivalent unbranded goods or services to determine this value, implying that brand equity is the added value a brand provides to a product or service. The definition of brand equity has been researched and analysed in depth over the years from multiple approaches and perspectives, and researchers in the field are continuously developing new ways of exploring the concept (Davcik et al., 2015:6). Brand equity can be defined as the effectiveness of brand-specific marketing, Sallam (2016:99) states that brand equity is frequently generated by products or services that provide value, either directly or indirectly. Brand equity is a collection of brand assets and liabilities associated with a brand, its name, and symbol, which adds to or detracts from the value provided by a product or service to a company and/or its customers. Over the years, the primary research focus has been on brand strength or value from a consumer perspective (Davcik et al., 2015:6). Baalbaki and Guzmán (2016:33) contend that brand equity can be measured indirectly by understanding the customer's mindset and brand relevance, or directly by estimating the various outcomes of marketing a product or service.

Brand valuation evaluates all the long-term benefits that a brand offers to value its economic value and worth (Keller, 2016:2). While there are various brand equity perspectives, consumer-based brand equity has been the main concept used to evaluate a brand's strength or interest in the eyes of customers. The customer-grounded brand equity paradigm emphasises on the relationship between a brand and its customers, as well as the outcomes that result from that interaction (Veloutsou et al., 2013:238); however, the concept has not been tested amongst the Nguni traditional healing people of South Africa, which this research intends to cover and align in an effort to raise interest for further research to the topic.

Various studies have discovered that brand equity has a positive impact on, among other things, future profits and cash flow; share value; customer willingness to pay higher prices; and the outcome of brand marketing activities (Rojas-Lamorena et al., 2022:1067). Brand awareness, which begins with tying the brand – its name, logo, and symbol – to something

tangible, such as a product or service, is the first step, while trademarks and slogans are some of the primary sources of competitive advantage and future earnings (Farhana, 2012:223). Zwakala (2016:39) contends that customers respond in a variety of ways to marketing efforts and that marketing activities lead to purchasers learning about different businesses. Customers' brand preferences, attitudes, and behaviours are all influenced by this information. In essence, the brand's power is based on its customers' imaginations. Delassus and Descotes (2012:118) write that there is a wide body of research on brand equity that has been examined in a variety of industries and environments. According to years of research on consumer perceptions and attitudes, assessed collectively, they have a direct relationship with a brand's market position and financial results. Another important issue is the shared and distinctive qualities of the products in the relevant option set they are confronted with (Lowengart, 2012:7). The intangible value-added feature of a specific product that is otherwise not considered distinctive by its rivals is referred to as brand equity (Davcik et al., 2015:4). The use of a brand name to identify all goods of a certain kind is evidence of high brand equity within a category. For example, the high brand value of Kleenex in the paper tissue group is illustrated by the generic reference to every paper tissue as Kleenex (Maté, 2017). Darwish (2013) states that to build brand value, a company needs to focus on brand identity, personality and psychology.

2.2.9. Measuring brand equity

Historically, measuring brand equity was a neglected and unimportant topic. In contrast, in recent decades, companies have prioritised and developed methods for measuring brand equity (Zwakala, 2016:42); psychological, behavioural, financial, and customer perspectives are among these methods (Keller et al., 2018:129). A thorough marketing, financial and company audit, among other analytical tools, is required for the assessment and analysis of the brand equity state. All available data should be analysed with the main goal of determining the existing state of a brand's equity as well as marketplace trends. Additionally, the audit gives brand managers a comprehensive picture of how marketing communication contributes to the brand's growth and equity. As a result, the marketing communication efforts of the brand in question as well as rivals must be included in this review (Keller et al., 2018:101).

2.2.10. Financial perspective

Branding decisions have grown in importance in recent decades because they have a significant impact on a company's performance; however, they continue to be one of the most difficult challenges for marketers due to the long-term effects and the significant resources involved (Todor, 2014:64). The price premium that a brand has in addition to that of a generic product is one way to assess brand equity. The success of one brand can be used to launch additional brands that are related to it. The advantages related to the expansion of the concept

of brand awareness are that it enables a new product to be launched at a lower advertising cost. It will also boost consumer confidence and encourage favourable consumer attitudes toward the product/service experience. Customers are less likely to be misled by well-known brand names because of trust built from experience (Heding et al., 2016:93). Reputable brands are favoured over competitors, and such a preference results in a steady income stream (Kotler & Keller, 2016:293). The authors further argue that, because of the strong brand, another factor contributing to a company's turnover is a devoted core of clients. Strong brand loyalty, as a result, plays an essential role in brand marketing and a brand's financial contribution to a business.

2.2.11. Behavioural and psychological perspective

There are several theories that deal with consumer purchasing decision-making. Research has shown that a loyal customer buys the same products as a specific group of people in their environment. Sociology investigates how the purchasing habits of a single customer can influence the purchasing habits of other customers. Nadanyiova et al. (2018:5) argue that the factors at play can be defined from a psychological standpoint. Because brand equity is so important in consumer purchasing decisions, brand managers must have a thorough understanding of how equity is built. It is critical to assess the brand's strength and comprehend its nature. In order to develop an effective long-term branding strategy, it is necessary for brand managers to assess the brand's strengths and status.

2.2.12. Consumer perspective

The concept of 'brand awareness' leads to quality perception, defining attributes, and, finally, brand loyalty. There are two major ways to gain a competitive advantage: low cost (combined with acceptable quality) or differentiation. Because only one brand can be the cheapest, and physical attributes are easily copied (imitated), differentiation is the best option for competing in current markets (Todor, 2014:61). A brand can also improve the human experience; essentially, it is about making a promise to deliver a product or service, and by keeping that promise, a trusting relationship can be formed between the consumer and the service provider, which increases the brand's credibility (Heding et al., 2016:93). Customers benefit from brands when they are aware of them, identify with them, and have favourable opinions about them. Customers' purchasing decisions may be influenced by these favourable attitudes, and a brand becomes exceptional when it surpasses their expectations. As a result, brand preference and loyalty are established, and an emotional connection is created between the brand and the customer. By lowering risk and guaranteeing quality and consistency throughout the purchasing process, this consumer viewpoint benefits customers. However, the brand must first be known to consumers in order to be compared to rival brands. As a result, brands can

be recognised before any consideration, especially in the context of a purchase. To put it simply, brand preference starts with brand awareness. As a result, brand awareness is regarded as an asset that contributes to the development of brand equity (Keller & Brexendorf, 2019:48).

2.2.13. Brand value system

The brand value framework includes four main conceptual value dimensions: value-in-social-context, value-in-use, value-in-context, and value-in-cultural-context. The goal is to demonstrate that the ritualistic method of creating worth is still overlooked. It is imperative to understand the aforementioned value models as they play a significant role in explaining the relationship between rituals and value creation (Holt, 2016:24).

Fournier (2014:87) argues that although the relationship representation results from coeval thinking and experience in marketing, there is still a small amount of methodological allocation of work that has been conducted on social occurrences in the consumer products realm, particularly at a brand level. Ghani and Tuhin (2018:1544) examine the relevance of the partnership proposal in the light of consumer-brand relationships, providing scientific evidence for the phenomenological value of consumer-brand bonds and a discussion of the brand's credibility as an engaged relationship partner. The authors provide a framework for characterising and further understanding the different types of relationships that customers have with products, and they introduce the idea of brand relationship consistency as a diagnostic method for conceptualising and evaluating relationship intensity based on the evidence. This agenda is based on three in-depth case studies, with an integrative analysis of the literature on person-to-person interactions guiding their understanding (Ghani & Tuhin, 2018:1544). According to the authors, the insights that are offered are the result of applying inductive principles to two related research realms, namely brand loyalty and brand personality.

Gabriel and Lang (2015:30) argue that customers have a choice and that companies stand to make massive gains if they can accurately forecast consumer choices and use insights and theories to influence those choices. The focus here is on viewing the consumer as a decision maker and the ability to choose one over the other by examining consumer choice from three different perspectives. The first perspective theorises that customers use cognitive and social psychological processes to make decisions or judgments. The second focuses on the social-cultural context within which customers make choices and consumer decisions, and the third debates the centrality of choice for political economy and for the operation of markets. Ahmad (2016:83) argues that brands are objects of choice, presenting customers with a vast range of

dilemmas as they compete for customers' attention, choices that can also be influenced by others depending on the personality traits of the individual making selection decisions.

2.2.14. Brand value meaning

Bradford et al. (2013:158) present the argument that customers use brands to establish meaning, encounters of belonging, and the distribution of social systems. Retailers who act as ritual orchestrators will be able to get more involved in the gift registry ritual by customising the experience for each specific ritual class – gift-giver, groom and bride – as a result of these changes. The authors' study adds an interpretation of how customers negotiate brand meaning inside a temporary gift scheme as they conduct gift-giving rituals in the marketplace and investigates the effects of these rituals on identity building, as well as consumer-to-consumer and consumer-to-brand relationships which provides managers with suggestions and directions for future research.

Brodie et al. (2013:265) argue that customers collectively co-create trust through their buying habits, where producers and customers cooperate in the value creation. The study provides insights into value creation by depicting how individual customers play different roles in the value development process. By reflecting on micro aspects of co-consuming communities, the authors illustrate how individual buyers engage in value-generating processes in the form of brand cultures. The authors also incorporate the ideas of value formation, working customers, and double manipulation to show how customers and societies participate in value co-creation. The authors paid particular attention to value creation in a specific type of co-consuming group: an online football fan community. As reported by Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2016:1498), co-consuming communities are value creation hubs. They argue that where both the brand and the customers influence and shape each other's behaviour or outcomes, it is not inherently a challenge to customers since it can enable them to participate actively in value co-creation and acquire control over brand owners. Through contributing to the current literature on brand culture and the meaning co-creation paradigm, they were able to make a significant contribution to the field in terms of (1) demonstrating how customers played a diverse part in value co-creation; (2) revealing modern consumer-organisational types; and (3) demonstrating how brand cultures are managed by customers working together with brand owners.

2.2.15. Service approach to value creation

Vargo and Lusch (2014:6) argue that there are various major international scholars in the services sector who argue that services and service marketing are viewed as a perspective, not just an activity.

Service value creation focuses on studying and defining value co-creation and value creation, with an emphasis on the customer and firm's roles, and then analysing co-creation as a function of their interaction (Vargo & Lusch, 2016:7), where the domains in which value-in-use arises, and how value creation using this approach can be discovered. In the last decade, the concept of value co-creation has been discussed at a level of abstraction that is too distant from theoretical and practical considerations (Akaka & Vargo, 2015:456). Mickelsson (2014:4) advances that value co-creation is the use of resources based on activities. Grönroos and Voima (2013:133) propose that the interchange connecting suppliers and clients occurs in an engaging way with the producer and consumer roles remaining theoretically ambiguous. The term 'dialogical' represents the process in which the parties involved (a firm and a client) directly participate in a mutual discussion and influence each other through that discussion. The trade process is regarded as dynamic rather than stable. Karpen et al. (2016:517) relate to value in social contexts, emphasising that value creation is shaped by social reality. The authors argue that in context, value illustrates value creation as a process initiated by a company that elicits responses from customers, but neglects to recognise customers as active human beings in control of their own decisions, based on their own internal needs and interests, as well as other factors beyond the business's control. The study examines the three value creation frameworks and considers value creation.

2.2.16. Value in use

Bettencourt et al. (2014:50) define value as that which is produced when materials are used and thus focuses primarily on resource utilisation. This model hypothesises the system of value creation as a long-term goal consisting of three major value areas: provider, customer, and supplier. The authors contend that value-in-use is a consequence of the process, which is recognised to be gained from use over time. The value is completely decided by the person who uses the brand, but it may at times be qualified by other individuals who may not directly benefit from the brand's use, but influence the value perceptions and assessments, nonetheless. As a result, value is determined both individually and collectively.

The theory, however, fails to recognise that the value in use may be spontaneous and predetermined prior to the individual use of the brand or service (Heinonen et al., 2013:292). As is often the case with rituals, people do not learn the value from their own experiences, but rather have it predetermined, and conclude it to be the case based on the collective opinion of the value-in-use.

2.2.17. Value in context

Value-in-context expands on the concept of resource utilisation but also hypothesises that value is related to context (Akaka & Parry, 2019:458). The setting assumes the primary point of the instrument or path for valuing and understanding the worth are based. The framework of value development is expressed in connection with larger systems of linked actors, and the process of value creation is envisioned as a happening at the same time, ongoing trade of assets (Vargo & Lusch, 2016:13).

As a result, value-in-context positions value development as a concept which is not only related to buyers, providers, and resource utilisation (Sahiti, 2020:17). According to the author, many stakeholders trade and mobilise resources across three interconnected measures: macro, meso and micro. Value (as an outcome) is hypothesised to be descriptive in nature, motivated by the beneficiary; that is, whether or not wealth is realised in a particular context is determined by a single actor. Nevertheless, value in context is determined by the relationship formed between both the particular consumer and the context, whereas other studies have discovered that other factors are at work, see following sections.

2.2.18. Value in social context

Value in social context is built on the previous value in situation and primarily incorporates a social construction perspective. The process of worth creation can be briefly described as being formed by communal experience, and in the collected works as a active and adaptive cycle of resource exchange constructed through and inside collective systems (Sheth & Sisodia, 2015:54). The resulting value of this process is expected to be reasonably determined as it may be progressively (or adversely) set on by the individual in relation to a given social context. That is, values can be recognised and ascertained in different ways on a subject-by-subject basis, depending on the norms that groups of people use to understand what is valuable to them and the social conditions that affect their values (Smith, 2018:20).

2.2.19. Value in cultural context

This is a symbolic framework that emphasises experienced culture. In contrast to the earlier value-in-social-context conceptualisation, Alshwayat et al. (2021:203) contend that conceptual frameworks examine value generation from a multiple-tier perspective, as it is anchored in cultural and social systems. Akaka et al. (2015:270) define cultural context as a collection of behaviour patterns, resources, social standards, and meanings that shape the co-creation of value and direct the assessment of an occasion. This concept takes into account not only the

social structure mentioned above, but also the effect of cosmological principles, social rules, and standards, and also personal verdicts and meanings (Alshwayat et al., 2021:291).

Therefore, value generation is understood to be the representation of cultural traditions within subcultures that unite to collaboratively generate value. The recipient ascertains value in a distinct and experiential manner, yet the primary focus here is on the unrelated persistence of value, as it indicates the diverse assessments made by groups of consumers who possess a common comprehension of a product or service. For example, in Amsterdam, riding a bicycle is a social custom; in London, traveling the tube train is frequent, and in Los Angeles driving a car is possibly the most popular mode of transportation (Akaka & Parry, 2019:465), whereas in south Africa travelling by minibus (called a taxi) is the norm, with the taxi industry transporting over 65% of commuters daily in the public sector (Luthuli, 2020:1). Akaka and Parry (2019:465) continue to argue that, while physical and technology features of context influence these practices, it is also crucial to understand that behavioural norms are a significant motivator of human behaviour, because of cultural differences, simply creating something does not guarantee that others will pay for and/or use it.

2.3. Adapting to foreign cultures

Due to the increasingly global marketplace in which brands compete, understanding both the parallels and differences in brand preferences between countries is critical (Godey et al., 2013:230). To further complicate the matter, the meaning of culture and its symbols, language and meaning often differ from country to country. In 2020, even with the world becoming more globally connected, there still existed a big gap between cultural, political, and social norms on multiple scales globally (Kinzig et al., 2013:173). Language is at the forefront of that gap: while the meaning of a word in one part of the world could have a strong positive meaning, it can be lost in translation in another country. Jain (2021:5864) states that the meaning of words and symbols in one culture could have a completely different meaning in a different culture or society. This can have long-lasting negative effects on the brand and may even destroy it. Hence, it is vital for brands to research a new market before expanding their brand to the pristine environment, because what works in one part of the world could be the total opposite in another.

Erdođdu (2013:81) contends that as a result of increasing globalisation and globalisation-induced competition, today, organisations face greater challenges in selecting appropriate product strategies for different countries. In today's global marketing, one of the most challenging decisions brand managers must make is whether to standardise or adapt. Global marketing is more difficult than domestic marketing since a marketer faces two or three sets

of uncontrollable factors originating in various countries (Amine, 2013:49). The international marketer must deal with variations in global markets against the characteristics of the domestic climate. These may involve, for example, differences in wants and needs, consumer preferences, political stability, government policy, laws and regulations, economic and technological levels, market structures, national cultures and ways of doing business (Akgün et al., 2014:610). The authors further argue that any of these factors may render the international marketing strategy of a business ineffective and counterproductive in a foreign market. Such gaps require a deliberate and well-planned approach to entering and expanding international markets.

Gundala and Alam (2013:123) found in their research on product standardisation and adaptation that the decision to standardise or adapt was a matter of degree rather than all or nothing. Multinational corporations must decide how to balance global integration and local responsiveness. Firms must standardise elements of their marketing programmes in order to achieve economies of scale and lower costs, but they must also be adaptable in order to meet the unique needs of local markets (Samiee, 2014:345). This decision is important for multinational companies as it guides the organisations on how to prevent unintentional negative positioning created by disparities in how customers view products. According to Samiee, the guidelines assist brand managers in handling their products globally in order to offer a rich brand sense to customers from various cultural backgrounds and, as a result, achieve their loyalty.

Oreo is an example of brand adaptation and standardisation; marketers at Oreo coined the 'twist, lick, dunk' phrase, but customers were already doing this before the advertisements were aired. In this scenario, there was no need to change the offering or product, but the brand harnessed the power of pre-existing behaviour and ritualised it instead (Lindsay, 2016:352). According to the author, this is a classic example of bridging the gap between the customers' experience and the brand itself, therefore taking advantage of behaviour that already existed whilst keeping it simple and easy to replicate across different regions, cultures and markets.

2.4. Challenges in foreign markets

In recent decades, the rise of developing economies in China, Southeast Asia, and parts of Africa has been a defining feature of the global economic landscape. These economies' rapid expansion has created new opportunities for Western businesses looking to enter these emerging markets (Morrison, 2013:1). Kostova (2022:79) writes that as a result of the expansion of the universal markets, European and American companies have progressively invested in markets which are culturally distinct from their home markets. Hollensen (2016:602)

argues that organisations expanding to global markets in itself is not much of an issue—in the past, a brand would enter a market, establish a local business with a marketing department, and then leave them to market the company's goods in the most appropriate way for the local circumstances.

However, what is different now for many businesses is that global expansion has happened at a time while many businesses are consolidating marketing efforts and concentrating on global branding and communication (Cateora et al., 2020:7). This can result in a conflict between the parent company's desire to centralise marketing activities and the interests of the local marketing team, which is attempting to adjust materials and strategy to a modern, culturally diverse market, where the marketing team has a better understanding of the local market but cannot implement it as they have to be the same across the globe (Johansson, 2020:317).

Taking a deeper look at the main actors that are driving both of these forces, in simple terms, it is a trade-off between scale economies and results, the outcome of standardisation as well as the need to conform to local cultural conditions (Kotler, 2014:614).

The greater the scope for scale economies and message standardisation, the more standardised a product is (Jobber, 2020:418), thus, leading to lower costs and higher efficiency coming from the clear scale economics that arise from longer output series, identical packaging, multilingual orders, and organised messaging (Homburg, 2021:534). Standardisation, on the other hand, has advantages that go beyond basic economies of scale. While the firm can reduce overall costs by using a single marketing strategy and a standardised marketing mix, it also allows the organisation to promote a cohesive global corporate image, leading towards consistent brand names and photos around the world, eliminating confusion for customers who travel to different parts of the world on a regular basis (Kotler & Keller, 2014:498).

Furthermore, standardisation concentrates the organisation's efforts on a common approach, facilitating global brand awareness. Lautiainen (2015:6) states that customers make buying decisions every day, and many are ignorant of the factors that affect their decisions. Cultural, socioeconomic, personal, and psychological factors may affect the characteristics of any purchase. It is a result of these various factors and others that when customers come into touch with the brand during their buying decision, consistency of philosophy, marketing, and policy can well result in an organisation being viewed as a reputable safe zone in which to do business (Czinkota et al., 2014:92). Global brands' status and respect, which are often synonymous with them, can often help them thrive in new launch markets (de Mooij, 2018:212).

Standardisation has advantages, but it also has drawbacks, and the two must be balanced against each other. According to Kolah and Farshid (2013:118), global marketing necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the 4Ps—product modification, pricing concerns, promotion mix techniques, and the appropriate distribution channel to penetrate deeper, in order to adjust to the cultural attitudes, language, and lifestyle patterns of international clients. Finding suitable packaging and creating a brand that will be recognised in a foreign market are additional challenges. All of these necessitate marketing research as the debate whether to standardise or adapt is a reality for any brand going global.

2.5. Brand cultural adaptation

Cultural differences and the need to cater to a global market without offending or harming the brand by inappropriate advertisements are the key arguments for adaptation (Wiedmann et al., 2014:1). Because a marketer faces two or more sets of unpredictable variables originating from different countries, international marketing operations are more challenging than domestic marketing. Marketing managers must gain a deeper understanding of these elements in order to design effective marketing strategies in other countries (Akgün et al., 2014:610). Through research, international marketing efforts have become more organised and disciplined, allowing brands to take advantage of emerging business opportunities, gain reputation and influence, and cut costs. Adaptation enables a marketer to account for market variations and has a marketing plan that appeals to the local market, as well as an approach that is beneficial in terms of increasing revenue and profits (Kotler et al., 2018:19).

Consumer behaviour is primarily influenced by culture, which again is independent of social status and earnings. Solomon (2017:147) argues that culture is the collective mental programming that distinguishes one community or group of people from another. For a global marketer, not all facets of culture are equally important; nevertheless, others are more easily accommodated than others. Those rooted in tradition, faith, beliefs, and traditions are the most important constraints, posing the greatest obstacle to standardisation (Napoli et al., 2014:5). Absolute standardisation is not possible if these are too different from those of the firm's home country and are deliberately kept by the market; adaptation would be required if the firm wishes to compete. According to Keegan and Green (2017:227), the debate in international marketing over standardisation versus adaptation has been going on for decades. While supporters of standardisation argue that it can result in economies of scale, cost savings, and consistent branding across borders, supporters of adaptation emphasise the importance of cultural and market differences in shaping consumer behaviour and demand. Keegan and Green discovered in their research that companies that pursue a standardised approach may face challenges in meeting local needs and preferences, as well as increased competition from

local firms that understand the market better. As a result, for global marketing, a balanced approach that combines elements of standardisation and adaptation may be the most effective.

According to Holt (2016:20), empirical research has challenged the notion of a global middle class with uniform tastes and aspirations, revealing significant differences in consumer behaviour across countries and cultures. While there may be some similarities, such as a preference for convenience and status symbols, these are frequently mediated by local norms, values, and historical contexts. As a result, global marketers must balance universality and specificity in their brand strategies, which may necessitate adaptation to local conditions and constraints. A popular product in one country may not appeal to customers in another due to differences in taste, cultural meanings, or economic conditions.

According to Kotabe (2017:117), one of the often overlooked benefits of adaptation in global marketing is its impact on the motivation and morale of local country marketers. Employees who are hired and promoted based on their ability to handle a national subsidiary's operations can find themselves with less real control. This can lead to a lack of interest in global marketing campaigns, as well as a backlash against them. By reducing tension between headquarters and a country's marketing departments, adaptation can be able to mitigate this retaliation.

As shown above, both standardisation and adaptation have their benefits. Organisations must understand how to balance standardisation and adaptation when delivering a hybrid that combines the best of both worlds with a foreign culture. Sirkeci (2013:1) offers insight into how to proceed by arguing that foreign marketers should aggressively seek out and recognise consumer segments that cut across national boundaries. These market segments enable a business to follow a standardised, global strategy by seeing the global market as a single entity. Organisations must also provide a thorough understanding of local market dynamics to define these segments. The more a company learns about local factors in its international markets, the better able it is to recognise parallels and standardise the marketing strategy in their strategic marketing planning (Hollensen, 2020:246).

It thus follows that flexibility is essential to ensure the effectiveness of multinational marketing concept work. According to Kotabe and Helsen (2014), while standardisation may appear to be an appealing cost-cutting strategy for businesses operating globally, cultures around the world are vastly different, and consumer preferences for products can vary greatly as a result. The required level of standardisation may thus vary significantly, and global marketers must be careful not to overlook important cultural differences that can undermine the success of their marketing efforts. When central marketing is under the impression that it has found a superior marketing idea, the drive to standardise appears to increase (Kotabe & Helsen,

2014:193). According to economics and effectiveness dictators, the policy should be centralised, with different aspects of operations decentralised or centralised. An organisation should strive to meet specific local consumer needs while avoiding compromising the overall global system's performance (Akgün et al., 2014:610). Adaptation is also costly; however, these costs can be balanced by the potential for higher revenue from locally focused campaigns (Freedman, 2015:16).

2.6. Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), communal value, and African healing practices

Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) are locally rooted bodies of knowledge, practices and worldviews transmitted orally across generations and embedded in everyday life (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013:2). In Nguni societies, IKS links spirituality, nature, ancestry and social practice; knowledge is passed through ritual, storytelling and apprenticeship, ensuring cultural continuity (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013:4). The principle of communal value captured by Ubuntu, frames wellbeing as shared rather than solely individual: health is social, spiritual and relational, not only biomedical (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013:2). Traditional healers (*amagqirha*, *izangoma*, *inyanga*) combine divination, ritual and herbal knowledge to restore social and spiritual balance; communal participation in rituals strengthens identity and cohesion. At the same time, healers often operate under difficult socio-economic conditions that marginalise their work despite its centrality to community health (Masoga & Shokane, 2020:315). The emphasis on building relationships and shared responsibility between stakeholders aligns with Service-Dominant Logic because this theory shows that value development occurs through social interactions between different stakeholders who generate value by working together to produce specific results in particular situations. The IKS environment enables patients and their family members, the healers, and all community members to work together through their combined knowledge, social bonds and sacred practices, which they use to create wellness together as described in SDL through resource integration and service-ecosystem principles (Lusch & Vargo, 2014:121). The communal ethic of Ubuntu creates a culturally based version of SDL's value co-creation, demonstrating how health results develop through continuous service interactions instead of one-way service delivery (Chandler & Vargo, 2014:43; Vargo & Lusch, 2016:8). Recognising both the epistemic value of IKS and the material challenges faced by healers supports culturally responsive health policy and respectful collaboration between biomedical and traditional practitioners. The study links these frameworks to view brands as active cultural symbols which gain their significance through ritual practices, ancestral heritage and human social conduct. The integrated theoretical framework shows that current branding research lacks a crucial element, while establishing a single conceptual framework to analyse brand integration with Nguni traditional healing practices.

2.7. Conclusion

While brands consist of tangible elements such as names, emblems and logos that differentiate one offering from another, they also embody an intangible promise to deliver a fulfilling experience to customers about products and services (Heding et al., 2016:93). The brand is the heart and soul of the company, and it is instrumental in its success. However, much of the existing research about this topic accepts its arguments without analysis because it assumes brands have permanent meanings which corporate leaders create while disregarding how consumer interpretations and environmental changes affect brand meanings.

As businesses grow, they have had to expand into foreign markets, which has resulted in brand management evolving drastically, becoming universally strategic in response to the ever-changing global business climate. According to academics, global brands are appealing to firms because they increase economies of scale and scope in manufacturing and research and development activities (Sung & Lee, 2014:421). Yet the company-focused approach fails to recognise the strategic dangers which result from worldwide standardisation because it does not consider how different cultures affect business operations and local market appeal. The current research fails to resolve the economic efficiency versus cultural adaptability conflict which exists between these two elements.

Brands that operate across borders have to be wary of the value attached to their brand by specific market segments; brands must research their different market segments (Godey et al., 2013:230). Cultural differences among countries are critically important – today customers are no longer bystanders, they are more engaged with the products they purchase (Van Bommel, 2014:2). Businesses must adopt a new approach to customer decision-making by implementing constructive customer engagement, which involves bringing customers into the value-creation process as active participants (Alves et al., 2016:1628). Research about co-creation and value formation primarily focuses on commercial and digital environments, yet it does not recognise their potential value for cultural settings which use rituals and non-business contexts. Research has not yet fully understood how communities develop meaning through their traditional practices, which connect consumption to their cultural heritage and social identity.

While there are various studies on the impact of culture on brand consumption (Lee et al., 2017:76), and indigenous knowledge systems (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013:2), little to no literature has surfaced on the influence of brands on traditional/cultural healing ritual practices. Existing research tends to treat brands and culture as interacting yet still separate domains, without interrogating how brands may be absorbed into cultural practices themselves. The goal of this work is to advance the concept of brand, branding, brand identity, brand equity and

value creation by contributing towards the expanded definitions of a brand as fluid and derived from customers by focusing on the Nguni traditional healing practising people of South Africa. This work, therefore, opposes conventional branding theory by demonstrating that brand meaning can be shaped outside commercial objectives and instead be culturally set in community usage.

Chapter 3 examines the influential role that brands play in the traditional healing practices of the South African Xhosa and Zulu Nguni communities. In this context, the value of a brand is shaped by the community itself, particularly among the Nguni traditional healers and patients who incorporate these brands into their cultural rituals. Rather than being dictated by brand managers, this value emerges organically through the interactions and needs of the communities that engage with these brands. This finding disrupts traditional managerial expectations about brand management and emphasises the requirement to reconceptualise brands as active cultural artefacts whose value can be shaped jointly through ritual, symbolism and lived experience. It also presents acute inquiries about the restraints of present branding frameworks when applied to circumstances where brand usage is spiritually and culturally rooted rather than commercially driven. Building on these insights, and to deepen the exploration of how culturally embedded meanings are formed, the next chapter examines in detail the interaction between brands and rituals, by examining what rituals are, their meaning, the etymological interpretation of rituals, the influence of brands on rituals, understanding consumer culture, how divine brands are established, how the sacred is separated from the divine, social regulations that exist, attempts to highlight which brands are used, and the power relations between commercial and ancestral Nguni healing rituals.

CHAPTER 3: BRANDS AND RITUALS

3.1. Introduction

According to Keller (2013:7), the phrase brand refers to a collection of symbols, designs, names, and signals that allow customers to recognise and distinguish a company's offers. Rituals, on the other hand, are contrasted symbols of detachment between both the profane and the sacred, which are diametrically opposed to one another (Turner, 2017:94). Liu et al. (2021:1) contend that the method through which rituals impact customers' responses to brands, particularly when they come into contact with each other, is poorly understood. The authors claim that ritualistic actions improve customers' relationships with brands and their purchase intentions and that the behavioural dimension of rituals is important.

In this chapter, the review of existing literature pertains to the creation of an initial ritual framework, which will serve not only as a theoretical foundation to address the study's objectives but also as a basis for related future investigations. Firstly, the current chapter broadly introduces rituals by reviewing them as they are understood in the different disciplines and helps to establish an initial overall comprehension of the theoretical area of rituals. The second tier of the literature review considers branding rituals as how brands are utilised to reach their customers and to create customer value and usage. The chapter then adopts a narrow approach by identifying the behavioural characteristics of a specific South African cultural group that practices traditional healing rituals, namely the country's Xhosa and Zulu Nguni people.

From the literature gathered for this work, little to no evidence surfaced on research that had been conducted to understand brand value amongst the Nguni healing ritual-practising people of South Africa, which this research aims to explore and, over time, encourage other studies to explore further. This research examines the use of brands during Nguni rituals as part of the consumer–brand relationship. This chapter will provide context to the study by positioning the study within the brand and ritual literature.

3.2. Rituals

Servadio (2018:43) argues that rites, rituals, and ceremonies are all derived from the Latin term *ritus*, which pertains to the notion of tradition (a conventional and widely recognised manner of acting). According to the author, it evolved from civil and religious ceremonies performed in accordance with a set of laws and regulations. In the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2019:329) ritual is defined as 'a religious or solemn ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed according to a prescribed order; relating to or done as a religious or solemn rite'.

According to de Carvalholl (2016:1048), “the noun 'rite' may also refer to the Greek words *artus* and *arthmos*, which mean rules, regulations, or harmonisation. The Sanskrit root of these Greek words '(ar)tus' and '(ar)thmos', 'ar', refers to the common cosmological order that governs the relationships between divinities and humans” (Dimitriadis, 2019:20). Consequently, rituals pertain to the idea of cosmic order, by which relationships are governed and standardised, from an etymological standpoint (Vidal, 2014:114).

3.3. Etymological interpretation of rituals

Another etymological interpretation of rites is as the idea of public services is conveyed through rituals just as the notion of liturgy is expressed. According to Prothero (2018:153), liturgy derives from the Greek words '*leitōs*', 'public', and '*ergon*', 'work', which is why popular devotion positions a stronger focus on the human need for edification. Within the historical Roman Empire, public liturgical ceremonies were offered by the rich to the impoverished, including events like the amphitheatre and circus events. Consequently, another important element in the word's etymological essence was that rituals indicated liturgy, which pertains to collective ceremonies and public festivities. Another construct is the locution ceremony, which refers to feasts and festivities, both religious and profane (Rusu & Kantola, 2016:9). According to Servadio (2018:44), ceremonies moreover refer to the surfeit of ceremony and etiquette, such as when someone ends up being 'too ceremonious' or when someone goes above and beyond in courtesy. The author suggests that ceremonies are perceived as a sequence of actions and procedures lacking intrinsic value due to their repetitive nature over time. This mundane characteristic, associated with behavioural aspects, can also be referred to as routine behaviour. Even though this research does not reveal differing etymologies, it also does not differentiate between these nouns.

It is possible to argue that rituals are a set of regular actions that may be physical or verbal expressions of logical ideas that may occur without any prior thought (Bell, 2018:15). Rituals can be found in organised religions, communities, organisations, homes, and even daily occurrences like how people greet each other (Lumen Learning, n.d.). Ritual meanings are not always explicit, not to the insiders themselves nor outsiders (Grimes, 2014:14). Individuals may strive for social status, maturity, and sexual identity through 'serious' behaviours such as physical depictions of myth systems or even daily routines (Turner, 2017:16). Some customer rituals, such as being elected to an exclusive club, graduation ceremonies, or paying off a bond, can help us feel more in charge (Erisstrategy, n.d.). A series of behaviours, as well as the use of symbolic artefacts, are given significant weight in this study. Rituals are used to reinforce ideas of what is right and wrong, exposing the ways in which the human mind constructs or structures our realities or worlds (Han & Shavitt, 2019:128).

Lan (2018:12) describes rituals as ways of behaviour linked to occasions that people believe to be significant in their lives. These occurrences are often influenced by the individual's culture, religious history, and/or rituals. They are most often repeated when following rites and interchangeable practices and ceremonies, and they also have some unique symbolic significance. Rossano (2014:42) argues that rituals are separation symbols, between the holy and the secular, which are contrasted due to their occurrence in direct opposition to each other. According to the author, rituals serve to transmit and reinforce social norms, which often delineate boundaries between the sacred and the profane, suggesting that such practices are integral to human social structures.

Smith (2019b:45), constructs a tripartite categorization of ceremonies (specifically negative, positive, and unique rituals) that forms the foundation of social existence. Negative rites refer to those that entail a sacrifice, like celibacy, which is frequently seen in religious ceremonies. Abstinence has a negative connotation, implying physical compromise or despair, and it is used to introduce a person to religious life. Positive rites, on the other hand, refer to celebrations or feasts. Positive rites can also be described as regular cults since the rhythm demonstrating religious life is also a mirror that communicates the pattern of social life. These positive rituals are therefore typically associated with pleasure and bliss. The third category of rituals requires atonement, concerning the act of rectifying wrongs or compensating for guilt or offenses, such as physical punishment, and it is linked to bereavement rites where people confront challenging life circumstances. Even though these ceremonies usually start on a negative note, they often conclude positively: the physical suffering faced by an individual is seen as a method of healing illness.

Rossano (2014:42) interprets its social dimensions from the aforementioned classification, which focuses on the religion of rites; rituals embody the sacred elements of society that can be differentiated from the mundane aspects of social existence. Yet, instead of being separate, the sacred and the profane are linked or mutually exclusive in their dependence. The holy cannot exist without the mundane, and the reverse is also true (Kurakin, 2015:8).

Duschinsky (2014:1) states that although Mary Douglas is largely regarded as a staunch admirer of Durkheim, her seminal work *Purity and Risk*, conversely, is more accurately interpreted as stemming from a deep-seated disagreement with Durkheim. The primary contribution is the idea of broadening rituals beyond the religious scope, encompassing all non-religious human behaviours. The ritualisation of daily life, as per Douglas, is a process where people create, evoke, and designate symbols that provide a sense of significance. By providing an example, Douglas contends that a remote friendship does not constitute a social

reality unless there is an exchange of sympathy letters, supportive telegrams, and even postcards. Friendship cannot exist without these friendship rituals, and social bonds cannot be formed without symbolic gestures; therefore, as per Douglas, ritual signifies symbols or indicators that allow human activities to be comprehended beyond their immediate objectives. While not all actions qualify as rituals, every ritual constitutes an action that carries an associated meaning or symbol (Watson-Jones et al., 2016:42).

3.4. Meaning as derived from rituals

Meanings are derived from rituals, and the ceremonies used to produce symbolic meanings are rather formal in nature (Goulding & Beaverstock, 2016:293). This formal process is borne out via a series which links prior experience with current knowledge. By means of ritualisation, the past and present become linked as rituals [the past] provide knowledge [the present] that could otherwise remain undiscovered. The writers argue that a series of ceremonies is conducted based on a complex array of guidelines and standards, suggesting numerous societal and mental functions, as representations possess both the mental ability to evoke meaning and the collective influence to enforce common values (Fischer et al., 2013:116). Rituals can take various forms, including traditional healing ceremonies, branding practices, rituals functioning as liminal spaces, and rituals serving as transitions, among others. It is important to recognise the part that rituals contribute to the everyday lives of individuals and communities as a whole (Turner et al., 2017:97). The following paragraphs look at each of these rituals with the purpose of creating a foundation to understand the relationship between South African traditional healing rituals and the impact brands have on the healing process in order for the healing to be a success. This empowers brand managers to better manage and grow their brands while maintaining the brand values in the communities they are used in, specifically the South African Xhosa and Zulu Nguni traditional healing practising individuals and communities.

3.5. Brand and rituals

Servadio (2018:2) argues that ritualisation is a powerful marketing tool that organisations implement to engage with customers, which, as a result, renders the organisation's products or services more valuable. Studies show that rituals have a positive impact on the actual perceptions of products (Maffeis, 2017:44). Amati and Pestana (2015:234) state that rituals are important to brands; products linked with specific rites are seen as more desirable or more valuable than those that are not. Even more plausible are studies that have shown that people tend to be more willing to pay more for products that have a certain ritual value attached to them (Petisi, 2021:112).

A few brands that have successfully utilised the art of brand ritualisation are Corona and lime, KitKat on the go, Oreos and milk, Pringles, and the Stella Artois 9-step pouring ritual. A piece of lime must be placed in the orifice of the bottle, to completely enjoy a Corona drink, and it must be done in a certain way in the brand's trademark transparent long-necked glass bottle holding its yellow gold lager. Many Corona customers feel that performing this practice improves the beer's flavour. Hence, there is no other way for a Corona consumer to enjoy the beer than through performing this ritual (Amati & Pestana, 2015:239). Other popular brand rituals include breaking a KitKat in half and taking a break, separating an Oreo biscuit before dipping it in milk, popping the cap off a Pringles chips tube, and the Stella Artois 9-step pouring ritual (*Branding Strategy Insider*, 2016). These rituals enhance the consumer experience by creating symbolic gestures that reinforce brand identity and deepen the connection between the consumer and the brand. The ritualised behaviours show how brands function as cultural systems because they turn ordinary shopping activities into ceremonial actions which add cultural values to daily activities, thus connecting branding research to cultural theory studies of meaning creation, social identity development, and collective behavioural patterns.

Tian et al. (2018:234) concur with Amati and Pestana. The authors argue that engaging in rituals enhances self-control, which can subsequently impact consumption choices. Their study highlights that rituals act as non-physical intensifiers, offering a valuable tool for long-term marketing strategies. Similarly, Hobson et al. (2019:78) emphasise that rituals increase the perceived value of products and experiences, further underscoring their relevance in consumer behaviour. These findings suggest that integrating ritualistic elements into marketing strategies not only improves consumer experiences but also extends their application beyond food to diverse product and service categories. The cultural-theoretical approach shows how ritual practices transform shopping activities into performance-based events that follow established social rules to prove that brands serve as cultural objects which people employ to establish their personal identity, social connections, and cultural understanding.

In a Minnesota study, four experiments were used to test the relationship between ritualistic behaviour and the potential to enhance the consumption of chocolate, lemonade, and even carrots. Experiment 1 showed that those who were involved in ritualised conduct evaluated the chocolate as favourable compared to those who had not engaged in the ritual behaviour. Experiment 2 further showed that random gestures did not boost consumption as much as ritualistic gestures did. Experiment 3 found that direct involvement in the ritual was crucial for the benefits of the ritual to emerge. Experiment 4 showed direct evidence that rituals enhanced the enjoyment of consumption (Vohs et al., 2013:1715).

Rituals have traditionally been researched from a broad sociocultural point of view, with little consideration given to the psychological processes at work (Hodson et al., 2018:1). Rituals are so common that people often fail to notice them when they occur, especially when performed by the individual. Rituals can be as simple and straightforward as the process of unpacking a product. Steve Jobs is said to have dedicated an entire team to focus on the packaging of his products: 'I love the process of unpacking something', he said. Designing a ritual of unpacking a product can lead to a sense of the product being special, while the process can create a wonderful experience for the consumer. Apple fans know the experience of opening a well-crafted box and discovering the product snuggled attractively, whether it is an iPhone or a MacBook Pro (Gielens et al., 2021:14). Brands use ritualised micro-performance activities to create experiences; these follow anthropological rituals that enable products to transition from objects into meaningful cultural experiences, thus uniting branding concepts with cultural theories about ritual, symbolic meaning, and body-based understanding. The different viewpoints show that brand rituals function through identical symbolic elements that cultural and spiritual rituals use, including repeated actions and physical expressions, sensory experiences and collective social understanding. The research depends on this synthesis because it shows ritualisation occurs in non-commercial environments to create meaningful experiences which humans share across cultures. The method which global brands use to create symbolic value through ritual practices helps us understand how Nguni healing ceremonies turn branded objects into sacred items which contain ancestral and spiritual power. The research about brand insertion into Nguni traditional healing rituals employs a single analytical method that merges marketing ritual theory with indigenous ritual theory.

3.6. Limits and contradictions in ritualised consumption

While research shows that following ritualistic food preparation methods results in better dining experiences and higher food quality ratings, these findings depend on particular conditions. Vohs et al. (2013:1715) show that people achieve better results through ritual actions which they perform personally; such benefits do not appear when they perform actions without ritual recognition, or when these actions come from outside sources. The process of ritualisation leads to better self-control, and people perceive higher value (Tian et al. 2018:234; Amati & Pestana, 2015:239; Vohs et al., 2019:78), showing that the effect of gestures depends on the presence of genuine cultural content which audiences can understand. The evaluation process of consumers becomes negative when they detect artificial or business-oriented performances which lack authentic cultural value (Amati & Pestana, 2015:239; Vohs et al., 2013:1715). Gielens et al. (2021:14) contend that the special moments of unboxing serve as evidence that both context and user expectations determine how products perform because users experience different levels of specialness from packaging rituals depending on their individual

characteristics. The study suggests that ritualisation works best when people participate voluntarily, when the symbols make sense, and the practice receives official backing from society. The process fails to achieve its goals when these essential factors are absent (Hobson et al., 2019:78; Tian et al., 2018:234).

3.7. The influence of brand ritual

Rituals can have a great impact on brands. Before Gatorade, no one ever saw an energy drink being poured in the Super Bowl, a ritual which continues to this day. As a result of this ritual, the brand presently stands for things like 'teamwork' and 'victory', which are benefits that are far beyond what the actual product gives customers in terms of performance enhancement (Krumb, 2015). According to Bill Schmidt, former Head of Sports Marketing for Gatorade, the 'Gatorade victory shower' is 'the ultimate sort of free publicity'. The Gatorade brand benefits greatly from the connotations with celebration, victory, and the pinnacle of athletic success (Pierpont & Crittenden, 2016:139)

3.8. Power of collective rituals

Rituals function because of three powerful elements, notably habit, community, and trust, which combine to generate self-reinforcing cycles of brand loyalty. Routine fosters a sense of belonging among individuals who participate in the ritual, leading to a sense of community, while the emotional power of the ritual fosters trust between the brand and the consumer, giving the buyer the impression that the brand is trustworthy (Khmyzova & Mozolevska, n.d.:9). The authors further argue that a well-targeted marketing mix, or emotional directed brand may be one of the most effective instruments for manipulating people, such as placing a product in the right location in a store or using a sponsored post to entice customers at the right time for impulse buying motivated by a desire to elevate mood or experience happiness.

Heinonen (2017:1514). highlights an experiment by Norton on lemonade that revealed that watching a ritual is not nearly as effective as completing one. The author argues that rituals appear to function with consumption because they enhance the participants' involvement in the event. Finding a brand ritual is often as simple as following an existing ritual that the company's consumer base practices and supports. In such an instance, the brand observes a ritual that is already performed by those who use the product, recognises the ritual and formalises their actions in marketing and brand positioning campaigns (Cova, 2014:667). Communication through consumption choices entails decoding information about customers by observing their consumption behaviour (Toubia, 2013:2). Oreo is a good example: 'First you twist it, then you lick it, and then you dunk it'. Despite the fact that Oreo has never recognised these three actions as a trademark ritual, it does teach customers to engage in a

series of fixed and sequential behaviours in order to unwittingly swallow the cookie (Wenjing Liu et al., 2018:684). The author suggests that Oreo simply acknowledged and promoted this ritual by observing customers practise the ritual, which is still practised today.

According to Cloverleaf Innovation (2014), not all rituals are born in communities. At times, brands can use innovative ideas to create rituals, where the product is designed so that certain steps are followed when consuming the product. Not all created ceremonies will succeed, but through qualitative and quantitative research, valuable elements of creating the rituals will emerge. According to Han et al. (2016:1349), emphasising the brand with a symbolic picture is crucial for the brand's success. Aaker and Mogilner (2014:98) argue that the image must meet the target audience; be simple and systematic while staying unique; fit the brand's features; and be relevant to the brand's consumption. It is therefore important that the brand does not become a habit, as the ritual should capture the consumer's imagination, focusing on how the ritual can offer an additional benefit or something more for the consumer. The ritual must always be consistent and be able to stimulate consumer interest.

3.9. Significance of brand ritualisation

Anselmsson et al. (2014:90) argue that branding is no longer merely about being chosen over a competitor, but it must be perceived as a solution; thus, for a brand to be successful, the marketer should explore the elements that see it becoming ritualised. The end goal is for the product or service to be incorporated into the lives of customers. Creating a ritual around a brand, be it about the internal or external elements of the product or service, is one of the key components required to build a successful brand (Lumen Learning, n.d.).

Strydom (2019:29) contends that people find comfort in rituals and that rituals help people celebrate important life events by offering a sense of continuity in their lives. It assists the ritual participants in making spiritual realities tangible. Rituals have the ability to connect people to their communities, other people, and even more spiritual portions of themselves. Cowell (n.d.) states that rituals provide familiarity, nostalgia, a sense of belonging and connectivity. They can make things more fun, like a special meal to celebrate a special milestone, blowing out candles on a birthday cake, or the simple act of gift-giving and receiving. The author further considers rituals in the workplace where employees are given special pins as recognition for the number of years that they have served the company. For example, Disney awards its cast staff service pins, depending on how long a particular employee has been with the company. Each year, the pins are unique and are affixed to the employee's name tag. Disney's staff members yearn to own these pins, as they serve as a source of recognition and

acknowledgement of their service to the company, making sure that other employees and the public recognise these pins.

According to Kang (2015:652), it is the marketer's duty to investigate the aspects of a brand that can lead to it being ritualised. The author recognises that customers are able to develop their own ritual values for brands but maintains that the brands, too, must play their roles. The author proposes two questions for marketers, which are:

- How can marketers make their products or services part of their customers' daily lives, if at all possible? and
- How can a marketer who uses brand rituals create greater value by creating a sense of family and team with employees and fuel their passion to support the brand?

The writer further argues that creating a ritual around one's brand, whether it is focused internally or externally, is one of the most effective methods that marketers can use to engage people's emotions and loyalties to build a successful, popular, and fashionable brand. For the author, rituals convey the importance and form part of our daily lives, and for the rituals to succeed, he argues that they should not only target customers but also employees. However, the writer is not noticeably clear on who the employee is, and if the employee term also covers senior management who deals with the owners, or who the owners of the company are. This raises these questions: should the owners and senior management not support or believe in the ritual being passed on to customers and staff? And is it even possible for the ritual to live up to its potential as a marketing tool? This research does not address these questions as they are not the focus of the dissertation; it merely recognises the questions in the literature.

3.10. Understanding consumer psychology

Li et al. (2014:294) contend that humans are illogical and emotional organisms who feel they have control over their decisions. However, Saravana (2017:32) states that neuroscience and behavioural economics research have shown that this is not the case for both marketers and customers. The author claims that the two fields expose something deeper at a subconscious emotional level and that marketers who grasp this and harness the strength of emotions are true brand builders who can discover new prospects for faster growth than their rivals. Brands like Apple and Coca-Cola are just some of the brands that have mastered and fully understand the power of emotions. Apple not only understand feelings, but it has also used the knowledge to direct its strategy and marketing over the years. According to the author, the core emotions that Apple seeks to evoke are delight, surprise, attachment, and love. Apple regularly targets these four emotions to drive sales, whether it is for a new product, consumer experiences, or user interface. Frawley (2014:90) argues that when it comes to decision-making, strong emotional connections to a brand outweigh rationality. Strong emotional connections will result

in higher customer retention because committed customers are less likely to be lured by reduced prices from competitors or other logical arguments. However, the author mentions that a misstep in the emotional connection can have instant negative consequences. As a result, it is critical to listen to customers through surveys and social media and create meaningful experiences that resonate with a wide variety of emotions.

According to Han et al. (2015:248), even though Coca-Cola's competitors have performed better in taste, Coca-Cola has remained a market leader by identifying an emotional gap and filling it. He argues that Coca-Cola's approach to brand building and long-term growth has been a strong focus on one emotion, namely happiness, amongst its customers. The ability for brands to realise and recognise the importance of customers' emotions forms a significant part of these papers, as they pay attention to the consumer's emotional space. Only a few brands realistically succeed in developing new traditions or (even more difficult) being sacred. According to Udding (2022:88), the secret to obtaining these achievements is to establish a strong sentimental bond with the target market – it is not enough to meet a realistic need. Lavoie (2015:81) supports Udding's argument by stating that, though most of us believe we need caffeine to get our day started in the morning, and with hundreds of coffee brands and products to choose from, from instant coffee to caffeine capsules to nitro cold brew, the decision to choose one over the other becomes an emotional one.

3.11. Establishing divine brands

The tools used daily, such as Google and Yahoo, are not merely search engine tools but are almost God-like in their abilities to answer almost all questions (Probst, 2017). The author argues that, beyond using Google as a search engine equivalent to a higher divine being, we often treat the things we consume daily with a level of admiration and respect. The author further claims that some outlets, such as Starbucks, have become shrines, where we will stand in a queue with ten or more people in front of us, even though the coffee shop next door is quiet. According to the author, market experience has been entwined with sacred consumption, and ritual and symbolic consumption are used by forward-thinking marketers to improve brand loyalty and individuality and command a higher price.

Brand rituals have been rarely studied in consumer research, as the field is a fairly recent development, which has not yet been fully explored in marketing or consumer research (Nguyen & Simkin, 2014:946). This does not mean that there is no meaningful research on the topic; according to Kaufman-Scarborough, ritual consumption is described as the consumption of goods and services related to specific rituals. Artefacts are the items that we use in a ritual; for Kaufman-Scarborough, the foundation of brand loyalty is ritual consumption. We use a lot

more of a product when we buy it on a regular basis, and we repurchase it without hesitation. This is why commercials urge us to use our regular cleanser every day, to drink our morning coffee, and to take melatonin before bed. However, simply telling people what they want to do is not enough. In reality, it is likely to repel the Gen Z, Y, and X customers (Tian et al., 2017).

Establishing the product as an artefact that is used as part of current routines is one way to succeed. A store needs to be set up as the place where people go for their morning jolt, for example. Dunkin' Doughnuts has carved out a niche for itself as a coffee and baked goods pit stop that is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to win the top spot in the coffee category. Kaufman-Scarborough also uses people's travel routine as an example; when getting on a plane for a long trip, we could put on some sunglasses, a warm jacket, and even a scarf to stay warm and avoid getting sick. The 13 vitamins, minerals, and herbs are said to have health benefits (why not 12 or 17?). could be challenged because Airborne and Emergen-C did not introduce vitamins. Instead, they positioned their product as a necessary part of people's travel routines, alongside the sweater, scarf, and hand sanitiser that everybody wears.

3.12. Sacred brands

Sacred consumption is distinguished by the presence of items and services that are served with a sense of devotion and respect. Sacred consumption may or may not be linked to religious beliefs (Firat et al., 2013:187). Profane consumption, on the other hand, applies to behaviours that occur on a daily basis and refers to things that are usual and don't have the power to create ecstatic, self-transcending, or remarkable experiences (Belk et al., 1989:6). According to the authors, when we turn objects, places, and people from profane to sacred, we sacralise them, while the loss of religious status is referred to as de-sacralisation.

Probst (2017) argues that the success of Las Vegas stems from its reputation as a tourist location for people from all corners of the globe. Its nightclubs, restaurants and casinos are respected as holy sites where daily ceremonies are held. These rituals continually change when new shows debut and events that are relevant to the participants are added. The author, furthermore, claims that instituting these practices legitimises the practice of spending money and enhances the sanctity of places like Las Vegas. To put it another way, as more people visit Las Vegas, it becomes more normal and fitting for them to spend money there. Moreover, Probst claims that few brands succeed in developing new rituals or (even more difficult) making them sacred, and that the secret to doing so is maintaining a meaningful emotional bond with one's audience. It is not enough to meet a practical need. The majority of people need caffeine to begin their day or at least people believe this to be true. However, people can get a boost from a variety of caffeine products and items, whether it is instant coffee, soft/energy drinks,

or tea. Amos-Tautua and Diepreye (2014:155) contend that this is because caffeine functions as a central nervous system stimulant in humans, therefore it is used both recreationally and therapeutically to minimise physical weariness and restore mental alertness when unexpected weakness or drowsiness arises.

Any brand interaction with Nguni ritual artefacts (such as candles or *imphepho*) needs to follow co-created protocols, which include co-design with custodians and free prior and informed consent, benefit sharing, and representational care. The ethics literature supports evaluating religious practice and traditional knowledge appropriation through methods which protect cultural autonomy (Young & Brunk, 2009:93). Brands that want to interact with sacred consumption need ethical protection systems to prevent cultural appreciation from becoming cultural appropriation. Research on consumer behaviour shows people use self-authorisation methods to handle cultural power differences through four methods, which include reforming, restraining, recontextualising, and rationalising (Cruz, Seo & Scaraboto, 2024:962-968). The academic field of spirituality-in-the-marketplace needs sacred symbols to stay non-commercial unless participating communities explicitly allow their use and create suitable contexts (Rinallo & Alemany Oliver, 2019:3; Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry, 1989:10).

Dunkin' Donuts is an example of a company that has successfully evolved from offering a functional advantage (coffee for on-the-go Americans) to building an intimate bond with its customers. Its most recent campaign, 'Keep On', focuses on providing positive energy to its customers by portraying itself as a friend in people's everyday struggles. Companies should reconsider their brands' functional attributes to begin the journey from product to ceremonial artefact to sacred brand and transform these functional characteristics into emotional benefits (Probst, 2017).

3.13. Separating the sacred from the profane

One of the most prominent illustrations of the distinction between the sacred and the profane is provided by Belk et al. (1989:2). Their work draws heavily on Durkheim's theories, describing consumption as a process through which the sacred is separated from the profane, a process that is presented through ritualisation in certain situations. Specifically, they discovered that sacrosanct expenditure includes six groupings: location, time, physical items, intangible asset, individuals, and events. Ritualisation represents a single method, albeit not the sole method, by which consumers elevate the status of their consumption items and specifically transform a product (i.e., a mundane object) into a unique or de-commoditised item (i.e., a sacred object). In a comparable manner, Kunchambo et al. (2017:127) recognise business suits as a revered item that indicates social standing, mirroring the identity of customers. Additionally, while not

directly mentioning the aforementioned works of Durkheim and Douglas, significant studies like those by Turner et al. (2017:97) and Otnes (2007:753) expand on the family as a revered social gathering, where consumers perform key consumption activities.

Servadio (2018) classifies home-cooked meals as sacred while categorizing pre-packaged market items as profane food. Food and beverages are ingested for reasons beyond mere practicality; they possess symbolic meaning for people and/or social communities (Ratcliffe et al., 2019:3). According to the authors, it can be argued that rituals act as markers that differentiate between what is viewed as sacred and what is regarded as profane. From an intake evaluation, the view of sanctified contrasted with profane has been used to demonstrate that consumers, under particular conditions, frequently assign distinct interpretations or significance to certain products while overlooking others. While ceremonies may be seen as indicators of separation, they are also understood as a means of transition. The next part concentrates on rituals as a means of transition.

3.14. Rituals as a transition

Rituals ought to be regarded as a framework or a guideline through which social life can be comprehended. It is a basic human instinct, just as genuine, pressing, and unfiltered as our requirements for food, shelter, and affection (Henes, 2013). As noted by Lan (2018:1), the focus should be on the archetypal sequences that convey social significance rather than the rites themselves: the transition. Meaning is assigned by individuals in a specific (social) context through the interaction of objects, roles, languages and gestures (van den Ende & van Marrewijk, 2014:2). Servadio (2018:41) references Van Gennep's (1910) research, which suggests a three-phase progression through which people transition from one level to another.

In a ceremony event, one can identify triple stages: separation, transition, and incorporation. A phase of separation that frees the person from the previous location or condition is succeeded by a threshold or transformation stage, where the individual is caught between two realms and/or roles. The passage concludes with the reincorporation phase, during which the individual integrates into the new location or status (Röttger-Rössler, 2020:42). Servadio (2018:46) contends that within marriages, the separation phase signifies the moment when a person leaves behind their single status to adopt a novel status (espoused) combined with establishing a new family. The passage period remains crucial as it signifies a maximum state where people might stay for a considerable duration. It might be a situation of involvement, a state in between, where at times individuals remain for a period. Notwithstanding its metaphorical aspect, these actions signify the attainment of a new status, as previously discussed, like relocating and starting a novel family unit. Van Gennep's ritual framework

significantly aids in comprehending rituals, not merely as symbols or indicators, or for distinguishing between sacred and profane elements, but instead as a procedure grounded in a sequence of cultural scripts. This activity besides its significance cannot be comprehended apart from the context in which a formal ceremony takes place, as the milieu and all spheres of the ceremony remain closely interconnected.

Stillerman (2015:224) writes that consumption is a symbolic process that transfers meanings from products to individual consumers. For example, exchange ceremonies take place on specific special events when one party buys or gifts items to another. Stillerman (2015:224) posits that this act of consumption is perceived as a ritual intended to convey specific meanings inherent in an object to the person who obtains it. According to the author, ownership allows people to symbolically convey the significance embedded in their personal items into their own experiences. Thus, ritualisation can assist customers in transforming items from mass-produced goods into unique, personalised possessions. In the same way, when products are perishable and necessitate cleaning, consumers engage in specific grooming practices to elevate the symbolic meanings of their cherished items. Ultimately, when people relinquish their possessions, divestment ceremonies take place. The writer maintains that a change is necessary to remove the personal significance that was woven into the products. This can occur in two distinct situations, specifically when customers dispose of their dated objects and when customers obtain fresh items. At the outset, removal rites aim to eliminate specific representative associations that originated from the former owner. Following the first scenario, they represent an effort to remove individual significance that they wish to be cleared prior to retailing or donating an item.

Consumption can also serve as a symbolic act that facilitates shifts in consumer identities, with several significant instances illustrating this process through the lens of the rite of passage. River rafting, for example, has been examined as a time of excessive consumption, highlighting two fundamental rites: the rite of initiation and the rite of incorporation (Giesler, 2013:482). In relation to the rite of initiation, the sport of travelling down a river on a raft, follows a three-stage order. The initial stage, departure, sees customers temporarily abandon their everyday routines and identities in order to engage in a distinctive commercial experience. This is followed by the transitional phase, during which participants acquire a temporary identity that is markedly different from their ordinary sense of self. Finally, the reintegration stage marks where the river trip concludes and the rafts are removed from the water, as consumers return home and resume their normal lives and identities, albeit subtly transformed by the experience (Giesler, 2013:482).

3.15. Social regulation

Religious rituals, athletic groups, workplaces, organisations, and family traditions are often perceived as social occasions where individuals connect through common feelings and emotions (Hodson et al., 2018:10). The idea of ritual governing an individual's ability to connect with others has deep roots in anthropology. Ritual is often seen as a vital social mediation tool that, when performed properly, balances conflicting social and interpersonal dynamics. This perspective suggests that ritual is a practice that unites an individual's self-state with the broader social structure, harmonizing one's personal and communal lives. Belk and Costa (1998:218) describe The Mountain Man serves as both a ritual of enhancement and a ceremony of change, aiding the shift between different customers personalities. The authors claim that in The Mountain Man Rendezvous, rituals of strengthening appear through extravagant behaviours like transformative clothing, excessive drinking, and defiance of official power, all of which serve as flamboyant self-expression markedly different from everyday existence. Transformative play, including elements like 'vernacular voice', 'masquerade', and other events typical of Mountain Man gatherings, is utilised to enact transformational rites. Both rituals utilize consumption as a chance to escape daily life, acquire a fleeting identity, and subsequently return feeling revitalized and transformed, while later reengaging with regular identities with a sense of renewal and change. Khan and Khan (2019) examine cosmetic surgery as a significant event and investigate the concept of consumer shifts. Transition involves more than just altering identity; it also signifies shifts in customers' social roles and their consumption patterns. Consequently, the altered identity allows customers to reshape their behaviours regarding products and services like apparel, residences, furniture, vehicles, and other.

3.16. Rituals as liminal space

Illustrating on Van Gennep's (1960) three-stage ritual of passing, the transitional stage referred to as the 'liminal phase' is particularly highlighted by Giuliani (2014:75). This phase is especially intriguing as it centres on marginality, representing the in-between space where individuals transition from separation to re-integration. During this period, individuals exist without a permanent social status, occupying only a temporary and ambiguous position within a neutral zone. Giuliani (2014:75) further explains that 'liminal entities inhabit a realm that isn't fully one location or another; they are trapped in between.' In this sense, liminal individuals are neither fully one identity nor another not entirely black or white but rather suspended between their former social status and the new one they seek through ritual practices.

Turner (1969) expands on this by proposing that the liminal stage often involves intense personal challenges, yet these moments of discomfort ultimately lead to the attainment of a

new social status. In some cases, liminality may give rise to a unique anti-structure, referred to as 'communitas' a temporary social formation with its own set of norms and rules, existing outside formal social structures. Although Turner argues that these transitional social dynamics are gradually fading due to the decline in the importance of religion and sacred, they persist in certain forms. Specifically, liminoid forms, which differ from traditional liminal experiences, represent sub-social structures that reject integration into the dominant social order. These 'threshold individuals' or members of 'liminoid communitas' stand in sharp contrast to established social structures, often embodying alternative cultural values and beliefs exemplified, for instance, by the countercultural movements of the hippie era.

3.17. Rituals as shared values

Rituals play a crucial role in establishing social order and enhancing social connections (Viviers, 2012:2). Schnell and Pali (2013:887) argue that 'ritual meanings are oriented towards transcendental ends'. These ends are fundamental ideals held by every member of the society, and thus are thought to contribute to the maintenance of a stable social order by stabilising contributions to a shared collection of values. Hence, Eser and Ozsu (2015:278) point out that the significance of rituals may go beyond their immediate meanings, because the reason why a group of people engage in these ritualised behaviours relates to the need to comply with an established social system. Belk (2014:1596) views rituals in terms of their purpose (i.e., achieving a 'social unified order'), which serves to maintain community unity around the collection of common principles that generate order.

Steets (2020:387) argues that rituals are deliberate acts that bring about the underlying argument of social order and shared values, though they do not change the world; according to the author, they do change the way we experience the world. The author advances a theoretical framework that helps to understand the role played by rituals from a functional perspective. According to the author, any form of ritual has three roles that define it. To begin with, they help to create a sense of order within society; second, they draw people together by linking them psychologically through a sense of belonging; and third, they assist in the transformation of individuals' roles from one typology to another. Particularly, community and transformation are similar concepts to communitas and rite of passage, as described by Smith (2013:668). According to the author, at any given time, any concrete tribal society is made up of a variety of personae, groups, and categories, each with its own developmental cycle, and many incumbencies of stable positions coexist with many transitions between positions. To put it another way, each person's life consists of alternating exposure to structure and communitas, as well as states and transitions. While the author's perspective on these concepts is more

contextualised in a social system, these concepts are utilised to explain the role that each ritual can play in society.

3.18. Rituals as social order

Consumer culture theory scholars have extensively adopted the above concept of rituals as socially ordered around the shared values of ritual. According to Dwight's seminal work on the consumption of alcohol on college campuses (Heath, 2000:62), heavy consumption amongst learners is socially organised around the spatial (where and how to drink, which bars to frequent) and temporal (when to drink) dimensions. The sharing of ritual values helps students to form communities and roles for example, the non-drinker or carpool driver and consuming people. Further, drinking in a ritualised manner helps students to transform from their actual condition into a sense of escape from the stress of student life, and allows them to feel more like adults; for example, drinking means becoming an adult. Festing et al. (2013:71) refer to the importance of ritual in the formation of relationships and a sense of community. Branding experience and other marketplace rituals help to strengthen social partnerships between service providers and customers, ensuring customer loyalty.

3.19. Rituals as a means of connectedness

According to research on art ritual attendance, these collective consumption practices have effects that go beyond their commercial goals, providing customers with a sense of social connectedness and a strong sense of belonging (Özdemir et al., 2021:198). According to the authors, the communal experience of participating in rituals or art events fosters a sense of shared identity and social cohesion, emphasising the importance of understanding the social and cultural meanings attached to these practices.

Another important contribution comes from the concept of tribes. These are individuals who share close emotional bonds, a culture, passions, and a vision of life. They are said to have a sense of community although with some specific differences (Gloor et al., 2020:1). 'A tribe can be defined as a network of individuals who are linked together by a shared passion or emotion, despite their heterogeneity in terms of demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and income' (Festing et al., 2013:71). As a result, their composition is uncertain, because tribes congregate around a specific brand or collection of goods or services from the 'link more than the thing', because tribes participate in consumption not so much for the use-value of these offerings, but rather for the quality of these offerings that allow a tribe to remain together and thus satisfy its need for collectivism. Tribes somehow intersect with rituals because 'a tribe relies on rituals to pronounce its existence and sustain its membership' (Servadio, 2018:73).

3.20. Xhosa and Zulu Nguni healing rituals

The Xhosa and Zulu people are prominent ethnic groups in South Africa, each with distinctive cultural practices. The Xhosa, primarily located in the Eastern Cape, are recognised for their deep-rooted traditions and complex initiation rituals, which are central to their cultural identity (Ngcobo, 2018:112). Similarly, the Zulu, found mainly in KwaZulu-Natal, have a vibrant cultural heritage marked by elaborate ceremonies and traditional leadership structures (Mkhize, 2020:89). Both groups play a significant role in South Africa's cultural diversity, offering valuable perspectives on traditional practices. A key element of these practices is healing rituals, which can be divided into three main components, the healer, the person being healed, and the healing process. These components highlight how traditional methods address both spiritual and physical needs, demonstrating the deep connection between cultural beliefs and healing practices. This cultural overview sets the stage for examining how these traditions interact with formal governance and health systems, highlighting the need for institutional frameworks that respect and preserve Indigenous practices.

The Traditional Health Practitioners Act 22 of 2007 created the Interim Traditional Health Practitioners Council, defined categories of Traditional Health Practitioners (THPs), and established registration procedures, quality standards, and conduct expectations (Padarath et al., 2016). According to recent research, South African THPs practice medical pluralism and syncretism. For instance, African Initiated Church practitioners often work as sangomas and prophets, merging traditional healing methods with Christian teachings while assisting biomedical doctors in healthcare facilities (Galvin, Chiwaye & Moolla, 2024:907). The diagnostic methods of THPs follow explanatory models of mental illness, which include spiritual elements as well as socio-cultural and psychosocial factors (Shange & Ross, 2022:505). By understanding this legal and collaborative context, we can examine the healer categories that form the backbone of Nguni healing rituals. Nevertheless, in spite of this increasing body of scholarship on syncretic healing practice, diagnostic models, and THP regulation, no studies have studied by what means commercial brands become entrenched within Nguni ritual processes or how their presence impacts ritual efficacy, ancestral legitimacy, or contemporary value-making, revealing a strong scholarly gap that this study addresses.

Nguni traditional healers are divided into three categories: diviners, faith healers, and herbalists (Mthethwa, 2017:2). Diviners (Amagqira, Izangoma) are healers who communicate with higher spirits (ancestors) to diagnose the patient. Relying on transcendent communication, they receive instructions on the processes, rituals, or medications the client must utilize to heal or resolve health issues, whether spiritual or physical. The diviner is a hybrid of a healer, physician, psychologist, priest, and social worker. They are capable of curing a variety of ailments, including infertility, bereavement, social issues, infections, and

other health concerns (Mpono, 2007:28). Furthermore, they can predict problems before they occur and provide guidance on preventative measures through the ancestors. Secondly, there are herbalists (amakhwele, inyanga), who, without using spiritual power to visualize health issues, work similarly to biomedical practitioners. By asking questions, they reach a diagnosis and provide interventions using mixtures of herbs to cure various diseases (Mbongwa, 2018:6). More recently, Nguni tradition has seen the emergence of faith healers (Abathandazeli) as a result of contact between indigenous Nguni healthcare approaches and Christianity. Abathandazeli heal clients by combining indigenous practices with Christian prayer (Mthembu, 2021:133).

The practice of African healing exists as a complete system which operates through social networks and political systems instead of being a collection of independent medical treatments: Janzen proves through his study of ngoma that therapeutic change occurs through cultural meaning creation and identity transformation during ritual performances which combine music and communal participation (Janzen, 1992:108). The therapeutic process of healing functions as a transformative experience which combines symbolic and social elements. The Shona patients studied by Chavunduka (1978:35) demonstrate medical pluralism by using both clinic and shrine services, while healers function as social advisors who unite spiritual and psychological treatment methods, which challenge the traditional modern healthcare system distinction. The professionalisation of African medicine by state and healer associations leads to negotiations about medical standards and public health integration while creating both beneficial and conflicting relationships between cultural traditions and administrative oversight (Last & Chavunduka, 1986:26). The research findings present a unified perspective which supports healing practices that involve multiple participants and diverse approaches, yet they differ in their main focus between ritual transformation (Janzen, 1992) and patient navigation and counselling (Chavunduka, 1978) and institutional power and regulation (Last & Chavunduka, 1986).

3.21. The traditional healer

Adu-Gyamfi et al. (2019:16) found traditional healers to be respected as traditional or community leaders whose primary contribution to the community is the practice of delivering healthcare, bringing well-being to the individual home and community as whole, which the traditional healer achieves by directing systematised practices and ceremonies and adhering to taboos. The traditional healers serve a variety of positions, including but not limited to being custodians of traditional African faith and traditions, culture instructors, teachers, social workers, psychologists and providing the necessary traditional medicines and guidance for various rituals, from weddings, *ukwaluka* (participants in the initiation into manhood (see

glossary)), strengthening of a home, protecting individuals from bad spirits, etc (Mokgobi, 2014:24). Traditional healer training takes two to six years and consists of a mentorship with accomplished renowned traditional healers (Mpono, 2007:4). Recently the training has taken shorter periods with South African celebrities like Mshoza (birth name Nomasonto Maswanganyi) having undergone training for as short a period as just six weeks (Zeeman, 2018). The training focuses on diagnosing skills or extracting input from patients through assessment, evaluations, divination, and dream analysis to conclude the patient's possible healthcare needs or problems (Mpono, 2007:32).

Nguni traditional healers are usually trained to identify various types of problems that affect people, be they physical, emotional, or interpersonal relationship issues (Ross, 2011:46). Learning in health-related skills is offered, including herbal medicine, interpersonal relationships, and group healing or ceremonial rituals, as well as schooling in ill-health prevention and health promotion skills (Mbongwa, 2018:6). Certain skills that the healers are trained in include activism, mobilisation, and custody of the traditional culture of the people.

Traditional healers are widely respected for their expertise and the effectiveness of their methods of action, which has contributed to the generally positive propensity of the people to use traditional healer services (Mpono, 2007:7). Usually, traditional healers bring well-being to the people within their communities. According to Odukoya et al. (2020:12), 'African traditional healing involves the holistic integration of mental and spiritual guidance, plant-based therapies, dietary interventions, and physical techniques, all of which are interconnected with African cosmology'. In the authors' view, this integrated approach to healing recognises the interplay between physical, psychological, and spiritual factors, and is grounded in the cultural traditions and beliefs of African societies. Mpono (2007:7) and Odukoya et al. (2020:12), on the other hand, barely address the actual ritual acts that traditional healers must perform as part of their healing processes.

Lighting candles, burning *imphepho*, and singing specific traditional healing songs are just a few of the rituals that traditional healers engage in to connect with their ancestral spirits and see beyond the human eye in order to help the person or persons in need of the healing.

3.22. Isigulane

Isigulane is someone who visits traditional healers, with psychological, physiological, or emotional problems in the hope of having their problem solved (Mpono, 2007:18). Ndlovu (2016:22) argues that the *isigulane* might have faith in the healer's powers but sometimes they will visit a traditional healer as a measure of last resort, and not necessarily because they

completely believe in the healer's powers. Traditional healers are judged based on their reputation, depending on the perceived results they produce, and they will be referred to other clients in need of their expertise. Because there is no scientific measure of traditional healers' successes, word of mouth from other patients is the most reliable source of information, generally based on the personal experiences of the patients, and arguably based on the beliefs of those relying on the traditional healer's powers. While these individual experiences shape perceptions of traditional healing, global health initiatives increasingly seek to formalise such practices within national systems.

The WHO Traditional Medicine Global Summit (Gujarat, 2023) created a system to merge traditional medicine with national health systems through evidence-based approaches, regulatory frameworks and equitable benefit distribution. The Gujarat Declaration presents a strategic plan which focuses on evidence development, data management, regulatory frameworks, biodiversity conservation and digital health innovation (WHO, 2025; Ikhoyameh et al., 2024). South Africa needs to create its research agenda through these directions which will connect market operations to healthcare results and protect Indigenous knowledge systems and community-led management approaches. Although these policy directions are significant for the future of traditional medicine, the present study focuses on the cultural integration of brands within Nguni healing rituals, which is discussed in the following section.

3.23. From ancestral mandate to market pressures: power relations in Nguni healing rituals

The power system in Nguni healing rituals exists where experts who know and those who enforce rules share authority between them, while biomedical knowledge controls what society accepts as true; yet traditional healers retain power through their ability to connect with ancestors and perform rituals. The current medical education system operates with clinical facilities which maintain traditional healthcare system deficits through their support of biomedical control systems by forcing Indigenous knowledge systems to follow Western medical standards (Lawrence et al., 2021:2). The healing process within ritual settings allows practitioners to establish their own authority through spiritual diagnosis and relationship-based healing, which follows different treatment methods than biomedical science (Shange & Ross, 2022:508). The system contains two opposing elements which form a disputed knowledge domain that requires ongoing dialogue to determine what constitutes valid knowledge.

The commercialisation process establishes new power relationships because market systems modify religious practices through their ability to direct scarce resources and determine prices, and their process of assigning monetary value to religious items. Research indicates that

wildlife-based medicinal trade creates new power dynamics between healers because those who control market access points gain more power while they transform the way people obtain and value their sacred ritual materials (Green et al., 2022:10). The state exercises control through its THP councils, registration systems, and safety protocols, which use bureaucratic power to decide who can practice and when and with which ritual tools, thus taking control from ancestral authority and giving it to institutional management (Audet et al., 2021:4). The different powers which affect Nguni healing rituals function within a complex system which ancestral power maintains through market systems and state control.

The described dynamics provide essential knowledge for branding theory when it functions in cultural settings. The standard branding frameworks depend on organisations to develop brand meaning through their controlled identity, their market positioning and consumer co-creation activities (Heding et al., 2016:93; Keller, 2013:74). The Nguni healing rituals reveal different results than understood by brands, because their brand meaning stems from ancestral power, ritual authenticity and community-based symbolic value, which shares some elements with CCT but opposes brand-managerial approaches. Brands operate as ritual objects because their market value stems from religious teachings and cultural traditions instead of marketing strategies, thus enabling the researcher to study consumer rituals (Amati & Pestana, 2015:234), in order to demonstrate that brand value stems from factors which exceed company narratives and customer experiences. The research on branding shows how brands generate cultural value through their combination of ancestral mandates and market forces, yet it fails to grasp the traditional ritual spaces of Indigenous communities.

3.24. Brands used as part of Xhosa and Zulu Nguni healing rituals

As brands evolve, they have also found their way into the Xhosa and Zulu Nguni traditional rituals and have become fundamental elements to the success of a majority of the Nguni rituals. There is no Nguni ceremony that takes place without the use of *imphepho* (a sacred herb, *Helichrysum petiolare*); *imphepho* and candles are used to bring light to the ceremony, while *imphepho* is meant to connect with *Amadlozi* (ancestors). Because the candles must stay lit for the duration of the ceremony it is important that the correct brand of candles is used. Candlelight going off before their intended purpose is achieved is believed to mean an ancestor or ancestors are unhappy with the ceremony. The means of ignition of choice used is Lion matches as it quickly catches alight. This is important, because if the matches do not light quickly, then it could mean the ceremony is not blessed or welcomed by the ancestors.

Alcohol has always played an important role in African cultural rituals, specifically the production and consumption of *umqombothi* (sorghum beer) brewed using King Korn (Maize

Malt) mixed in water with mealie meal, King Korn (Fine Malt) and wheat malt, which is vital for the success of *amasiko* (rituals) for Xhosa and Zulu people (Came, 2015). According to the author, though there might be some minor differences in the two cultures, in both cultures, the beer remains a product that is brewed by women days before an occasion. A few beer drops are spilled on the floor in the main house where traditional ceremonies take place to share it with *Amadlozi/Izinyanya* (ancestors) as a way of asking for their permission for the ritual to take place, and to plead with them to direct the ceremony or ritual to be a success. In the Zulu tradition, the women who brew the beer must be the first ones to taste it to prove that it is harmless, with the male host being the one who drinks after the women brewers, but before everyone else is served in order of their social status. Often, a few guests bring along one or more branded alcoholic beverages such as brandy or vodka, depending on the occasion, as a sign of appreciation.

Alcohol brands play a vital role on many occasions in the Nguni culture and are consumed to connect with *Amadlozi/Izinyanya*, and not necessarily to become intoxicated (Came, 2015). Specific clothing brands are but some of the brands that have also found their way into the Nguni cultural rituals. In the Xhosa culture when young men return from their traditional initiation schools in the mountain during the months of June and December, they are expected to dress in a certain manner for a period of six months as part of their culture (Bullock, 2015). For this purpose, specific clothing brands have become the household clothing brands of choice that young Xhosa men wear as they begin their journey into Xhosa manhood (Sampson, 2016) from clothing brands such as Dickies, Navada, Pringle, Arno, Grasshopper and Omega for their hat/cap, shirt, pants and shoes, as this is the ritual look of a man returning from the initiation school. Important to note the trends seem to have changed with the newer generation of *abakhwetha* exploring different brands like Uzzi, KG and Fabiani as their choice of brand compared to earlier generations that came back from the initiation schools before 2010.

However, as mentioned in Chapter 1, for the purpose of this study, the research will focus on brands used during the Xhosa and Zulu Nguni traditional healing rituals.

3.25. Brands used during Xhosa and Zulu Nguni healing rituals

When practising Xhosa and Zulu Nguni traditional healing rituals, there are specific items that are required for the ceremony to succeed, from a specific brand of fire lighter (Lion matches), specific candles with specific colours (Newden candles) to white candles (Lighthouse candles), *imphepho* and various other requirements. Amongst these requirements are the specific types of alcohol brands, for example *ugologo obhomvu* (brandy/whiskey) or *iblant emhlophe* (vodka). The study investigated the significance and whether there is truth in that, for example,

Smirnoff vodka, Viceroy and other commercial brandy brands are used and have become assimilated to Xhosa and Zulu Nguni traditional healing rituals for the rituals to succeed. As an explorative study, the study was open to new findings that could arise.

3.26. Conclusion

It is always a challenge to provide a clear-cut categorisation of ritual literature; however, the current literature provides key concepts and recaps the ritual significance of brands to Nguni rituals, as well as related studies in consumption in particular. The first ritual significance refers to the importance of rituals in terms of enabling individuals to organise their social life in relation to the sacred and profane. Consumer culture theory studies adopt this theory to explain why customers tend to attribute more value to some objects compared to others. Yet, despite this correlation, much of the work considers these theoretical insights abstractly, deprived of examining how such value-attribution activities develop in culturally specific or spiritually rooted settings such as Nguni rituals.

The second significance refers to rituals as transitions; the transit of meanings from objects to individuals, and the passage of customers' characteristics after participating in spending. In the beginning, interchange, ownership, preparation, and practise of passing on facilitate value to be transferred from customer possessions to the customers. In the latter case, ceremonies of transition are employed to identify in what manner consumption enables the formation of customers' personalities. Research about meaning transfer has focused on Western consumer areas which use monetary systems to exchange value, but it does not explain how ancestral communication and healing practices shape communal identity through consumption. Standard consumer theory models fail to function properly in multicultural settings because they do not recognise the spiritual and symbolic elements which exist in these environments.

The chapter concludes by breaking down what traditional Nguni healing rituals entail and who the role players are, and briefly touches on the different processes to which the branding teams are oblivious and their significance to brands and their deep role in the Nguni traditional rituals by focusing on Nguni healing rituals/practices. The branding teams and ritual practitioners maintain different perspectives because branding research does not understand that brands create values which surpass market value through their link to cultural heritage and ancestral religious traditions.

Based on the literature on rituals, it is evident that the assimilation of brands into traditional Nguni healing rituals has not been thoroughly investigated. It is not generally known which brands form part of Nguni healing rituals, how important the brands are to the Nguni healing

rituals, why, and how often they are used as part of the Nguni healing rituals. It is these factors that have led to this research. The existing research gap reveals a fundamental concept which the current literature lacks because it only studies brand interactions that take place in consumer-controlled or retail-based settings. The Nguni healing rituals show that brands serve as instruments which let people establish personal identity through cultural heritage preservation even when they do not require their traditional products.

In this research, the aim was to investigate the significance of brands to the success of Xhosa and Zulu Nguni traditional healing rituals. To build on the insights uncovered through this inquiry and to clarify how these findings were systematically generated, the next chapter, Chapter 4, elaborates on the research method used and provides the theoretical frameworks used to construct the questions used in the study. This methodological foundation is essential, as the research investigates these unexplored elements to contribute to enhancing our understanding of branding, which demonstrates that brand meaning develops through market interactions, cultural practices, shared memories and ritual purposes.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I analysed the literature which supported this study, which included brand, branding, brand value, value creation, and the use of brands in Xhosa and Zulu Nguni traditional healing rituals. In Chapter 4, I explain the research process, research philosophy, research approach, types of reasoning, the chosen research method, research tactic, time horizons, research objectives, research questions, interview guide, ethical considerations, interviews, documentation, data analysis methods, research quality and conclusion.

4.2. The research process

In order to ensure that this study is properly guided and well-organised throughout the entire research process, the "research onion" model by Saunders et al. (2016:127) was employed. This model provides a step-by-step procedure to ensure that the entire research process is systematic from the broad conceptual framework to the specific details of the methodology. Figure 4.1 is a visual representation of the research onion and it is depicted in its layers which help to prevent omission and provide coherence throughout the study.

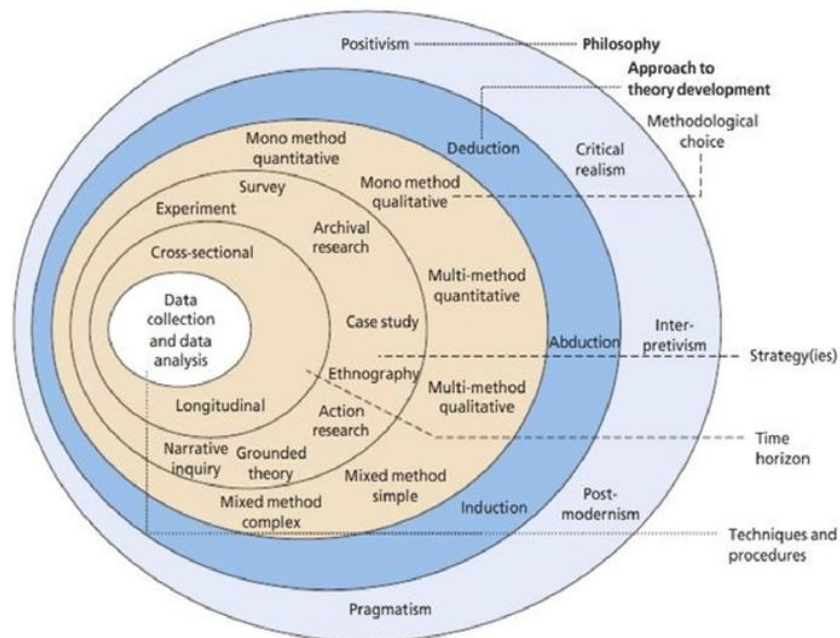


Figure 4.1: The research 'onion' (Adapted from Saunders et al., 2019:108)

As a result, the research onion is quite useful because it can be used in research methodologies and in various fields. It ensures that each choice made is based on the preceding ones, in line with the research objectives and enhancing methodological integrity. This figure serves as the starting point for the ensuing discussion, which explores how each layer of the onion informs the study's design and contributes to the credibility and validity of the research process.

4.3. Research philosophy

According to Cresswell (2014:5), there are multiple research paradigms which researchers can apply to design and organise their research. They are: positivism, realism, interpretivism, and pragmatism. Moreover, the author suggests that the ontology and epistemology assumptions, research questions, and the research methodology need to be placed together, making clear the researcher's philosophical lens. According to Cresswell (2013), ontology is concerned with the researcher's ontological beliefs about the nature of reality, whilst the epistemological approach focuses on and relates to where and how real knowledge is acquired and how individuals know the truth or reality (Lau, 2016:24).

In this research study, my epistemology is interpretive, and my ontology is grounded in a relativist perspective, which assumes that reality is subjective and constructed through social, cultural, and individual experiences (Saunders et al., 2019:145). This view aligns with the focus of my study on Nguni traditional healing rituals, where reality is co-created by participants within the context of their cultural beliefs and practices. Consequently, my epistemology emphasises an understanding of knowledge as derived from the meanings, interpretations, and perceptions of Nguni people of South Africa, viewing truth not as an absolute but as constructed through shared understanding and lived experiences.

The following paragraphs describe each of the paradigms available to the study.

4.3.1. Positivism

This type of sociology is more interested in trends and patterns rather than individuals and focuses on explaining the matter (Van Krieken et al., 2018:18). Quantitative methods, such as sociological surveys, structured questionnaires, and government statistics, are preferred by positivists because they believe the tools are more reliable and representative (Hasan, 2016). When hypotheses are tested against the facts of the world, positivists think that 'social truths' determine human activity and that society shapes individuals. The positivist tradition stresses the importance of conducting quantitative research, such as large-scale surveys, with the belief that the quantitative findings will aid in providing solutions to any research questions by

adopting important methodologies, such as experimental research or survey research and then applying proper samples, equipment, and statistical treatments to data (Creswell, 2014:12, 16).

However, to understand the rituals and beliefs held by the Xhosa and Zulu Nguni people practising Nguni traditional healing rituals, the researcher must assess phenomena such as human intention, attitudes, and thoughts, which are difficult to observe or measure with sensory experience or without evidence, as proposed by the positivist approach (Hammersley, 2013:24). As such, because of the nature of the research challenge and the research objectives, positivism is not appropriate for this research.

4.3.2. Realism

In quantitative research, realism refers to the belief that social phenomena are real and exist independently of our perceptions and measurements of them and that scientific inquiry can help us learn more about them. Sayer (2011) argues for a realist approach to social research in 'life', emphasising the importance of ontology, or the study of what exists in the social world, as well as the importance of using appropriate methods to accurately measure and analyse social phenomena (Maxwell, 2013:18). Realism overlooks the importance of emotions, personal beliefs, imagination, and the roles individuals play, reducing the complex factors that shape human behaviour. This approach conflicts with the purpose of the study, which is why realism was not adopted for this research.

4.3.3. Interpretivism

According to Pahm (2016:3), interpretivists, or anti-positivists explain that people are not just puppets reacting to external social circumstances like positivists believe. According to interpretivists, individuals are complex and diverse, and different people see and perceive the same 'objective reality' in different ways, as well as having their own, often contradictory, reasons for acting in the world; thus, scientific procedures are ineffective (Hammersley, 2013:26). Interpretivist research methods derive from 'social action theory' and interpretivists essentially criticise 'scientific sociology' (positivism) because many of the statistics upon which they rely are themselves socially constructed and can be impacted by the inaccuracy of scientific data collected (Pahm, 2016:25). Interpretivists believe that in order to understand human behaviour, the researcher must first cultivate compassion or perceive the world through the eyes of the characters, and not merely react to the environment, which instigates human behaviour (Pahm, 2016:59). Given the nature of this study, a qualitative approach in the form of semi-structured interviews and participant observation, an interpretivist method of social

research, was best suited to it. This allowed me to engage with the participants in relation to the examined issue (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017:89).

4.3.4. Pragmatism

This approach centres on comprehending phenomena from an individual's viewpoint. In this context, the study delves into the utilisation of brands within Nguni healing rituals among practitioners of the Nguni tradition in South Africa. By doing so, it seeks to acquire insights through the subjective experiences shared by individuals interviewed for the study.

4.4. Research approach

In terms of the research approach, the section describes three different methods of reasoning in research: inductive, deductive, and abductive. The subsequent paragraphs provide concise explanations and examples of each approach and also specify which approach was adopted for the study.

4.4.1. Inductive reasoning

As noted by Boell and Hovorka (2019:4) the interpretive approach is normally inductive; meaning is not produced from prior data; rather, new layers of understanding are discovered. It is a type of reasoning in which general principles are derived from specific observations or evidence. It entails progressing from a series of specific observations to a broad conclusion. The authors share a typical instance of inductive reasoning in that the sun is rising in the morning because it has done so in the past. When researchers make predictions about likely future observations, they use inductive reasoning to generalise their research findings beyond the observations they have made. Another example, according to the authors, is if you notice that every swan you have seen thus far is white, you might infer that all swans are white.

4.4.2. Abductive reasoning

Abductive is a problem solving method which is based on making a guess or hypothesis that is not fully based on sufficient or enough information. This method aims to determine the most probable cause for several events (Boell & Hovorka, 2019:4). This approach was not applied in this study, where hypotheses were being developed for the next scientific investigation within the scientific field, as was not the case in this investigation. This is because abductive reasoning is not always reliable as is the case with inductive reasoning, as it involves making assumptions as opposed to collecting data from the respondents.

4.4.3. Deductive reasoning

Deductive reasoning is the way in which a person seeks out particular conclusions based on the application of specific principles or axioms (Boell & Hovorka, 2019:4). The most prevalent such example is if someone realises that every bird has feathers, and a penguin is a bird: that is to say, an individual can infer that a penguin has feathers too.

However, we are working here in search of new ideas because inductive reasoning facilitates generating generic notions based on particular instances. This qualitative exploratory study utilised inductive reasoning as opposed to deductive reasoning; the findings derived from participants' feedback added to the current understanding in the field. Moreover, this research sought to unveil novel insights, since inductive reasoning helps draw general principles from particular observations. This qualitative exploratory research was also the first to make use of inductive reasoning, not deductive reasoning; the findings of the study were based on participant feedback that added new knowledge rather than reaffirming existing knowledge.

4.5. Chosen research method

This section describes and justifies the choices made. According to Iyamu and Batyashe (2020:123), most researchers employ either quantitative, qualitative or mixed approach in their research.

4.5.1. Quantitative methods

Quantitative research methods involve the generation of numerical data or data that can be transformed into useful statistics to quantify problems. These approaches are concerned with the measurement and analysis of the relationships between variables, and they are most often used to test various hypotheses or theories. Normally, quantitative methods include the use of tools such as surveys, questionnaires, or experiments that are designed to gather numerical data from a large number of respondents. The data collected is then analysed using statistical techniques to identify trends, determine correlations and make recommendations (Harkiolakis, 2017:20).

In a positivist perspective which is the foundation of much of the quantitative research, the goal is to provide an objective measurement and assessment of theories or hypotheses based on measurable and quantifiable data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:5). One of the most common approaches used in quantitative research is the experimental design where the researcher sets one variable (independent variable) and the effect of the other variable (dependent variable) is observed. For instance, a pre- and post-test experimental design compares the

participants' attitudes or behaviours before and after an intervention to determine the effect of the treatment (Queirós et al., 2017:370).

Furthermore, in quantitative research, tools like statistical techniques and software are also employed to conduct data analysis that can be in turn used for testing theory. This is done with the aim of establishing cause and effect relationships or to either prove or disprove certain theories. Due to their objectivity and reproducible nature, according to Bryman (2016:40), quantitative methods are best for studies where the accuracy and control of variables are important. This cautious approach allows results to be used for generalisation and application to other populations.

4.5.2. Qualitative methods

In most cases, qualitative research approaches are based on constructivist approach, where emphasis is put on how people or groups construct and give meaning to social situations. The method aims at analysing individual stories and understanding the life experiences, the cultural contexts, and the ways through which people make sense of the world (Creswell & Poth, 2018:35). Some of the designs that are used in qualitative research include ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, case study, and narrative research.

- Ethnography involves the study of cultures of groups of people in order to discover the repeated behaviours and their meanings across the years. According to Reeves et al. (n.d.), ethnography enables the researchers to get into the lives and environments of participants, to see how collective actions and rituals form.
- Grounded theory is the process of developing or discovering theories that are grounded on the data collected from the participants. Researchers use the data to develop theories from the basic level (Charmaz, 2014:55). This research design is especially useful when there is no existing theoretical framework that can explain a certain phenomenon in sufficient detail.
- Phenomenology is concerned with understanding the essence of experiences from the perspective of the participants. This approach aims to explore the lived experiences of people and their meanings of these experiences in relation to certain phenomenon (Van Manen, 2016:9). One of the main goals is to provide vivid descriptions that convey the essence of these experiences.

- Case study research means a detailed analysis of a single or of multiple cases embedded in real-world contexts (Yin, 2018:17). The objective is to explore the details of particular cases, so as to obtain a detailed understanding and more profound insight into the problem under investigation.
- Narrative research focuses on collecting and analysing stories from individuals. These stories provide insights into how people make sense of their lives and experiences and how they construct their identities over time (Riessman, 2008:8).

In each of these qualitative methods, data collection is through direct engagement with participants using interviews, observations, and participatory methods with the researcher as the primary instrument. The focus on participants' observation in their natural contexts is fundamental to qualitative research, enabling the researcher to gain a nuanced understanding of the social and cultural contexts that shape participants' behaviours (Antwi & Hamza, 2015:221). The contextual aspects of this interaction provide rich insights; therefore, qualitative methods are most beneficial in studies that explore complex social phenomena or cultural practices.

Constructivist worldview, ethnographic design, and observation of behaviour: in this state, the researcher seeks to find the meaning of a phenomenon from the participants' views. Reeves et al. (n.d.) maintain that this entails locating a group of people who share a culture and examining how it evolves shared behavioural patterns over time (i.e., ethnography). Seeing how people behave throughout activities is one of the most important aspects of gathering data in this manner, thus, the researcher is said to be the instrument of data collection (Antwi & Hamza, 2015:221).

4.5.3. Mixed methods

Mixed methods research is a research methodology that includes gathering and analysing both quantitative and qualitative data, adopting a pragmatic worldview that considers the effectiveness of various perspectives in answering research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:5). Almalki (2016:291) notes that the use of mixed methods helps to get a more complete picture of the research problem through the integration of the numerical precision of quantitative methods and the complex and nuanced insights of qualitative methods. This approach is most useful when researchers want to check the results from different methods, or when the research question needs both an overview and detailed understanding. The collection of data through mixed methods research happens sequentially based on time order. A researcher begins with a quantitative survey to obtain general and generalizable information

about a specific population. The information collected during this phase helps develop qualitative interviews or observations which allow researchers to investigate specific themes or anomalies in detail. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data allows researchers to achieve better results because qualitative findings add depth and context to numerical data, and quantitative findings provide objective structure to qualitative results.

This study is basically qualitative as it aims at understanding the perception of Nguni healers and those who come to seek their healing, as well as the use of brands in healing rituals in order to achieve healing, as explained by Creswell (2014:32). The author contends that qualitative research is a way to look into and understand the significance that people or groups place on a social or human issue. The exploration also sought to investigate the healing ritual process by capturing explanations, truths, realities, and events from those who practise these rituals. The qualitative study explored the phenomenon from the participants' viewpoints, taking an exploratory approach as not much was found in the preliminary research, including articles and publications on the topic (Yilmaz, 2013:312). I was interested in exploring the use of brands during Nguni traditional healing practices amongst people within the South African Nguni culture.

4.6. Research tactic

The tactic chosen for this study was a case study. As mentioned by Yin (2018:3), a case study defines a way of conducting research. Conversely, Stahl and Hakkarainen (2021:6) suggest that the unit of enquiry can be an individual, group or even multiple individual units such as teams or communities. Thus, to answer research questions that comprise words such as 'how' or 'why', the ideal strategy is a case study (Yin, 2018:21). The two types of *Izangoma*, namely 'Amakhwele/Isangoma' and 'Amagqirha/Inyanga' were chosen as cases. In this sense, Taherdoost (2022:57-58) ascertains that case studies can be explored in three categories, namely exploratory, descriptive and explanatory.

4.6.1. Descriptive

Descriptive research is a method of empirical inquiry that employs numerical data to objectively and systematically describe phenomena, behaviours, and trends. It is commonly used in social sciences, psychology, and education to gain a comprehensive understanding of a specific phenomenon or population. Important aspects of descriptive quantitative research include the use of standardised instruments, statistical analysis, and large sample sizes. The data is summarised and presented using descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and frequencies. This method provides a systematic and rigorous approach to investigating complex phenomena (Chen, 2021:2). However, it has limitations as it does not explain the

cause of the phenomena being studied. Participants may not be entirely truthful while answering survey questions or may provide socially desirable responses. Furthermore, the phrasing and selection of questions on a questionnaire can influence the descriptive findings. Hence, for the aforementioned reasons, the descriptive method was not used in the study.

4.6.2. Explanatory

An explanatory study is a kind of investigation methodology that seeks to explain the relationship between variables. According to Creswell (2014:66), explanatory research is used to “understand the causal relationships among variables and the processes that lead to those relationships”.

4.6.3. Exploratory

Exploratory research is a type of research methodology that seeks to discover and gain a preliminary comprehension of a phenomenon, matter, or situation, with the goal of formulating hypotheses and research questions for further investigations. According to Neuman (2014:102), exploratory research “is typically used when the researcher knows little about the research problem and needs to gain an understanding of it before developing specific research hypotheses”.

Although there are three possible categories for research case studies, this study adopted the exploratory method as it is tasked to express problems, gain clarifications and insights, and create a dissertation. With this study, I only investigated the research issue at different depths rather than attempting to offer definitive and definitive solutions to the research questions (Reiter, 2017:139). The problem was not clearly defined, and the final result could differ from the anticipated outcome stated at the outset of the research. The goal of this study was to investigate the research topic in order to encourage more research on it. It was an exploratory study seeking to investigate and explore the brands used and the brands' importance to the success of Nguni healing rituals.

4.7. Time horizons

According to Iyamu and Batyashe (2020), there are two time periods a researcher may choose to adopt, namely either longitudinal or cross-sectional. Longitudinal studies can be defined as collecting data from the same source over a long period, while the cross-sectional focus is on collecting data from a specific source at a specific point in time.

Accordingly, this study was cross-sectional as data was collected in July 2020 and September 2021 from Zulu and Xhosa Nguni traditional healing-practising people of South Africa.

4.8. Research objectives

This study's main goal was to investigate the use of brands during Nguni traditional healing practices. The following objectives outline the specific areas of inquiry that were a guide to this research.

1. To identify which brands are being used Nguni traditional healing rituals.
2. To establish the roles that brands play in Nguni traditional healing rituals.
3. To uncover how the brands become assimilated into the Nguni traditional healing rituals.
4. To uncover how important brands are to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals.
5. To establish the consequences, if any, should the specific brands not be present during the Nguni traditional healing rituals.
6. To establish whether or not there are substitute brands that can be used during Nguni traditional healing rituals.

The research objectives bring the following questions into existence and the research will help answer the following key questions:

1) Which brands do you know to be important to the success of Nguni healing rituals?

According to Bettencourt et al. (2014:50), customers cooperate in the value creation of brands. They do this collectively by co-creating trust in brands through their buying and usage habits. Da Silveira et al. (2013:28) argue that the increasingly competitive environment and the growth of customers as collaborators in the development and growth of brands require organisations to rethink the role of customers in proactive brand-customer engagement. This means including customer contributions in the value-creation exercise wherein customers become active participants (Alves et al., 2016:1626). For this reason, this question was included. Sheth and Sisodia (2015:54) further argue that value is developed in a social context, which is built on the value-in-context ideology. The procedure of value development is possibly summarised as being constructed through communal experience and in literature by way of being a dynamic and adaptive practise of resource trade constructed by and within communal systems.

2) What roles do brands perform within Nguni traditional healing rituals, if any?

Akaka and Parry (2019:458) argue that the context in which brands are used is the primary point of reference through which understanding value and its establishment are based. Thus, this question was included in the study.

3) How would you explain how brands become assimilated into Nguni traditional healing rituals?

Goulding and Beaverstock (2016:293) contend that meanings are derived from rituals and that the ceremonies used to produce symbolic meanings are rather formal. Gloor et al. (2020:1) write about the concept of tribes, stating that these are individuals who share close emotional bonds, a shared culture, passions, and a vision of life and are said to have a sense of community. As such, this question was included in the study to establish the social factors contributing to how brands develop meaning and value to the Nguni healing ritual.

4) Why is the use of these brands important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals?

Firat et al. (2013:187) argue that sacred consumption may be linked to religious beliefs. Thus, the question was included.

5) What would the impact be if these brands were not used in the Nguni traditional healing ritual?

Because Firat et al. (2013:187) argue that sacred consumption may be linked to religious beliefs, the question was included.

6) Are there substitute brands that can be used to replace these brands for the Nguni traditional healing ritual to still succeed?

Customers have a choice, and companies stand to gain significantly if they can accurately forecast consumer choices and use insights and theories to influence those choices. For this reason, the question was included in the study.

As part of the study, each question had an objective to meet; each objective was listed and ticked in the table found in Appendix D

4.9. Data collection

Qualitative data collection methods were employed for this study, utilising semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. Responses were captured through face-to-face interview sessions via video and audio recordings, and in some cases, participants completed questionnaires online during virtual interviews conducted via Google Meet and Microsoft Teams. These online sessions were necessitated by the restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.3 are screenshots of the face-to-face video recordings, providing visual evidence of the participant interactions. These images highlight key moments in the data collection process, emphasising the authentic engagement observed during the interviews. By capturing these interactions, the screenshots serve as a valuable supplement to the qualitative analysis, illustrating the nuances of non-verbal communication and contextual dynamics that are central to the study.

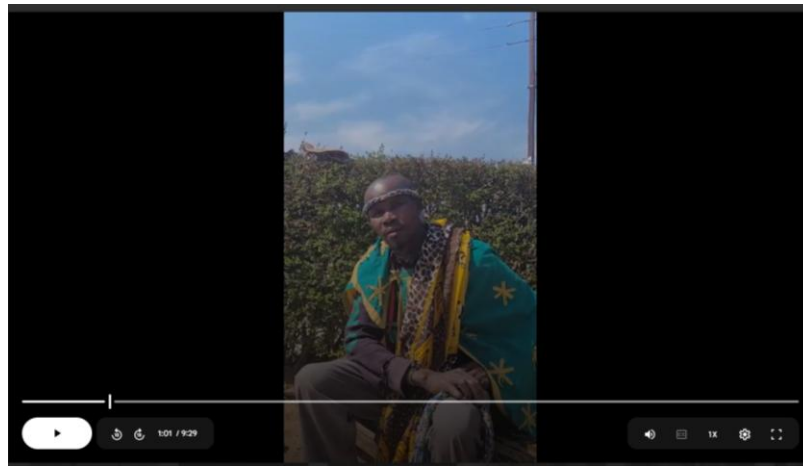


Figure 4.2: Face-to-face interviews with ritual participants in Kokstad, 2022.

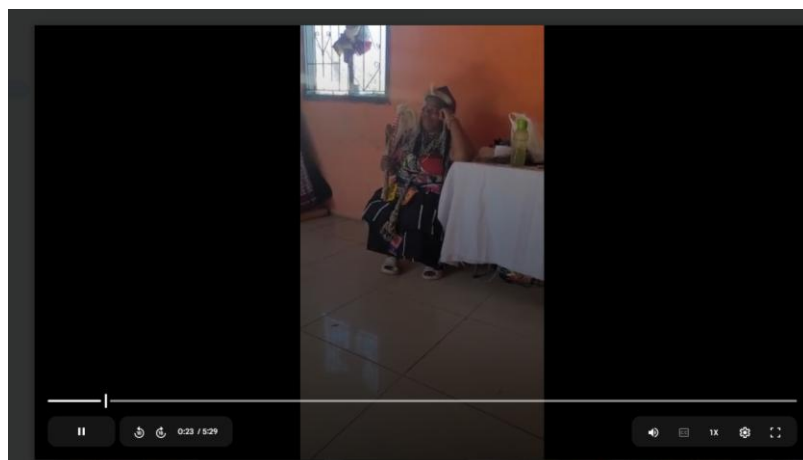


Figure 4.3: Face-to-face interviews with ritual participants in Kokstad, 2022.

4.10. Interview guide

The purpose of the interview guide was to elicit participants' actual sentiments, thoughts, opinions, and understanding of the importance of brands to the effectiveness of Xhosa and Zulu Nguni traditional healing rituals. To achieve the goals of the research, I developed the data-gathering instrument (interview guide). Though the questions were initially planned to be asked in English, the majority of the participants were more comfortable responding in their language. Thus, the majority of the participants were then interviewed in isiZulu or isiXhosa and allowed to respond in either language in order to best capture the participants' true understanding, attitude, assessment, and knowledge of traditional healing practices and the role brands play in the rituals' success. To determine and investigate differences and commonalities in the participants' responses, the same interview guide was used for both the givers and receivers of the traditional Nguni healing rituals. The English version of the interview guide used to gather the information is presented in Appendix A. In order to achieve effective communication between the interviewee and the interviewer, the questions were translated into isiZulu and isiXhosa (Appendix B).

4.11. Ethical considerations

This study adhered to the Southern African Marketing Research Association's code of ethics (SAMRA, n.d.). Before conducting the interviews, communication with the Ethnomedicine Practitioners Association of South Africa (EPASA) was approved by Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) regarding the research and its objectives. The permission to conduct the inquiry with the participants was communicated timeously and it was made clear that it was optional. In accordance with CPUT's ethical code, the participants were provided written assurances and guarantees of anonymity, privacy, and dignity (see Appendix F). Handling sensitive cultural information and confidentiality issues, the freedom to end the interview at any time, and the right to decline to answer any question or questions were all addressed. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, over the phone, and online using Microsoft Teams and Google Meet, as agreed upon with the interviewee. Prior to beginning the interviews, all participants were given a consent letter (see Appendix E).

4.12. Intellectual property rights and traditional knowledge considerations

The research treats Nguni healing knowledge which participants provided as traditional knowledge (TK) which belongs to the community and maintains its position as an active cultural heritage, thus needing special protection methods which support community ownership, access and benefit distribution (WIPO, 2023:4). The researcher maintained strict academic use of ritual procedures, symbols, plant applications and branded product cultural values

because these details will not enter commercial markets (WIPO, 2023:4; Department of Trade and Industry, 2008:14). The research project supports South African policy which protects indigenous knowledge from exploitation while providing equal and ongoing recognition and financial compensation to knowledge owners when necessary (Department of Trade and Industry, 2008:12). The project upholds Nguni communities' shared authority over their traditional knowledge, which needs authorised permission and proper compensation terms for any subsequent usage (Department of Trade and Industry, 2008: 12). The research follows national guidelines which establish community-based permission processes and complete protection of sacred religious information and establishes specific boundaries for data utilization (Department of Trade and Industry, 2008: 1, 14; WIPO, 2023:4).

4.13. Interview process

The interview method employed in this research was designed to meet ethical and practical considerations for a structured approach to research participants' views. The ensuing outlines the key aspects of the interview process:

- Recruitment: sample selection involved purposive and snowball sampling to represent a broad array of traditional healers and participant members (Palinkas et al., 2015:534). Respondents were identified by snowballing to other suitable participants through participants in the Nguni traditional-based healing ceremonies and government-led cultural programs. Using this research method, the researcher had explored individuals that were actively involved in ritual communities, which led to a more reliable and detailed result to the study. The researcher involved additional participants who had gained the understanding of Nguni culture from having lived with Nguni communities for all his life. An insider's perspective helped to lend an element of cultural sensitivity that enabled them to find credible sources of information and to meet both an ethically justified and ethical basis for research methodology.
- Consent: participants were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time. Informed consent was obtained prior to the interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018:155).
- Conducting interviews: interviews were conducted in settings comfortable for participants, often in their homes on Microsoft Teams or Google Meet. They were audio-recorded with participants' permission, and some were even video-recorded and photographed in face-to-face interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015:31).

- Data management: interviews were transcribed word for word, and all identifying information was anonymised to protect participants' privacy (Braun & Clarke, 2019:87).

4.14. Secondary data sources

- In addition to primary data, the study utilised secondary data sources to contextualise the findings and provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. While no previous studies specifically focused on the integration of modern brands into Nguni traditional healing rituals, relevant and meaningful studies on Nguni healing practices were identified. These sources included a literature review. A thorough review of existing literature on Nguni traditional healing practices, as well as theories of cultural adaptation and value creation. This review helped to frame the research questions and inform the analysis (Flick, 2018:130).

4.15. Documentation

During the data gathering practice, the investigator documented important findings and additional observations for future examination. All interviews were properly documented by untrained assistants who recorded video and audio during the actual course of research. These response answers were recorded on the questionnaires that were given to the participants. All participants in the study were selected through a referral process initiated by other participants which assured the accuracy and reliability of the findings. The referral method helped to validate the genuineness of the participants in the study which in turn increased the credibility of the data collected.

4.16. Sample method

To meet the objectives of the study, data was gathered from two different groups of participants. The 17 participants were selected through non-probability judgmental sampling for this study, including traditional healers and their clients. The participants included fourteen healers and three clients who offered essential insights about Nguni healing practices. The study included clients to validate the information provided by healers because they directly received instructions or requests from healers throughout traditional ceremonies and practices.

The participants had to meet two conditions to be eligible for the study: namely, that they had participated in an Nguni traditional healing ceremony in the previous 6–12 months and held some belief in the effectiveness of the traditional healing ritual. The participants' profiles showed diversity in gender, age, and location and encompassed the Eastern Cape, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal regions because these areas were crucial for participant recruitment.

4.17. Sample size justification

Although a sample size of 17 is not intended to imply statistical generalisation, the sample of 17 follows qualitative research tenets that favour depth over breadth. Contemporary methodological advice argues that there is a requirement for sampling adequacy in cultural findings to reveal rich, contextually grounded findings, rather than to set sampling thresholds (Hennink & Kaiser, 2017:594). The multiple provinces and participant roles protected the variety of perspectives, enhancing transferability rather than generalisability.

4.18. Data saturation

The data saturation was observed as an ongoing condition of the interview. Saturation was reached when subsequent interviews generated no new themes or insights relevant to the research objectives. Such an approach is in line with modern-day qualitative precepts that attribute significant thematic redundancy as a sign of saturation rather than arbitrary sample size (Saunders et al., 2019:415). In the current study, by the 15th interview, saturation was reached, and further interviews confirmed the existing patterns and did not produce new ones.

4.19. Study participants

The goal of understanding the incorporation of brands into Nguni healing rituals required 17 participants who took part in structured in-depth interviews. Traditional healers and clients took part in the interviews, which examined the relationships between brands in Nguni rituals.

4.20. Hypothesis development

The research used cultural studies as its basis, but required particular quantitative hypotheses to perform statistical analysis. The proposed hypotheses below responded directly to the research questions and reflect the intersections of brand knowledge, ritual experience, and perceptions of ritual success within Nguni traditional healing practices. Each hypothesis was made to be testable and measurable, and consistent with the experiences communicated by participants.

H1: Brand awareness and ritual participation

Research question: Which brands are known to be important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals?

Hypothesis:

- H₁: Individuals who actively participate in Nguni healing rituals will report higher awareness of the brands commonly used in these rituals than individuals with limited or no participation.
- H₀: There is no difference in brand awareness between participants and non-participants.

Because brand knowledge within healing contexts is often passed down through experience, it is reasonable to expect that those who engage in ritual practice are more familiar with the brands considered essential.

H2: perceived role of brands and ritual effectiveness

Research question: What roles do brands perform within Nguni traditional healing rituals?

Hypothesis:

- H₁: Higher belief in the functional or symbolic role of certain brands will be positively associated with higher perceived ritual effectiveness.
- H₀: Perceptions of brand roles are not associated with perceptions of ritual effectiveness.

People who think certain brands perform actions during the ritual process, whether spiritually, symbolically, or practically, are likely to link this to their assessment of ritual success.

H3: Cultural familiarity and brand assimilation

Research question: How do brands become assimilated into Nguni healing?

Hypothesis:

- H₁: Greater cultural familiarity with Nguni practices predicts stronger belief in the assimilation of commercial brands into ritual processes.
- H₀: Cultural familiarity does not influence belief in brand assimilation.

People absorb brand information through their personal experiences which combines with their cultural background to create brand assimilation. People who live within Nguni culture boundaries possess detailed stories which describe both the process and reasons behind brand entry into sacred ritual areas.

H4: Importance of brands and ritual success

Research question: Why are these brands important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals?

Hypothesis:

- H₁: Participants who assign high spiritual significance to specific brands will report higher perceived success of rituals when these brands are used.
- H₀: Spiritual significance attributed to brands does not influence perceived ritual success.

A brand which people believe possesses power, either through spiritual or symbolic means, will determine expectations of ritual outcomes.

H5: Impact of absence of brands

Research question: What would the impact be if these brands were not used?

Hypothesis:

- H₁: Expected ritual success will be lower when participants imagine the ritual being performed without the usual brands.
- H₀: Expected ritual success will not differ with or without brand use.

People often associate the “correct” brand with “correct” ritual procedure. The process will face difficulties in maintaining customer trust because the brand elimination will occur.

H6: Perceived success in the absence of brands

Research question: Will the ritual still succeed if the brands are not present?

Hypothesis:

- H₁: Participants will report significantly reduced belief in ritual success when key brands are absent.
- H₀: Belief in ritual success remains unchanged regardless of brand presence.

The study participants understand ritual success occurs independently from brand participation yet their perceived likelihood of success may still decrease due to cultural conditioning and learned expectations.

H7: Substitutability of brands

Research question: Can substitute brands replace the primary brands while maintaining ritual success?

Hypothesis:

- H₁: Participants with greater practical experience in rituals are more likely to believe that substitute brands can maintain ritual success.
- H₀: Practical experience does not influence beliefs about substitutability.

People who have seen rituals performed with different methods and materials tend to believe that alternative brands can produce successful outcomes.

4.21. Data analysis methods

Specific data analysis methods were used in this research to thoroughly examine the qualitative data which had been collected. The research followed a qualitative research design, so the primary focus was on qualitative data analysis techniques. The analysis targeted the discovery of patterns and themes to reveal the integration of modern brands into Nguni traditional healing practices.

4.22. Researcher Positionality and Insider Dynamics

The researcher acknowledges their position as an Nguni cultural insider because this knowledge base could affect their data collection methods and interpretation processes. The researcher practised reflexivity by regularly evaluating their personal beliefs and power relations and biases, which followed modern qualitative research guidelines for researcher influence disclosure (Berger, 2018:220). The researcher handled their dual position as someone who understands Nguni culture while keeping a professional distance from the research subjects. The researcher established trust through common cultural knowledge while following local rules and working with cultural authorities to create respectful research relationships. The implemented strategies reduced insider bias risks while making participant stories more genuine and trustworthy (Dwyer & Buckle, 2019:58).

4.23. Qualitative data analysis

The qualitative data analysis for this study involved several key steps:

1. This research involved a thorough data absorption phase when multiple readings of the transcripts were made to make sense of all content meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2019:87).
2. The later steps in the analysis included a sequence of data identification and coding, which necessitated a systematic approach to characterising and organising the data

based on coding methods. The study used deductive coding derived from literature-based themes, and inductive coding as it emerged from the data (Nowell et al., 2017:3).

3. After completing the coding process, the data segments were organised thematically. From the analysis of patterns amongst the codes, basic themes emerged that outlined the essential aspects of the data (Clarke & Braun, 2018:108).
4. The themes were evaluated after editing to check if they truly captured the data. The coherence of themes and consistency throughout the whole data set were investigated in the evaluation phase (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018:808).
5. The researcher assigned individual names and definitions for each of the themes to encapsulate their key meaning. Each theme was thoroughly described, and relevant data quotes were included to identify commonalities (Braun & Clarke, 2019:88).
6. The final stage required expressing the themes through a coherent narrative which addressed the research questions. The final presentation used direct participant quotes as evidence to support the themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018:266).

4.24. Tools and software used for data analysis

ATLAS.ti 8 qualitative data analysis software served as the tool for performing data analysis in this study. The study applied thematic analysis methods to explore patterns that emerged from the data through evaluation and explanation. The research team imported all relevant textual and visual material, including interview transcripts and field notes, into the ATLAS.ti platform. The data received line-by-line coding to capture all important information during the import process. The coding process produced categories which exposed the brand usage in Nguni traditional healing rituals.

After that, the themes that were identified were analysed in relation to each other and the larger picture of Nguni healing practices. Memo writing in ATLAS.ti was also used to record the analytical process and the ideas that emerged during the coding and categorisation process. The software query tools allowed for more detailed analysis of the data, which helped to reveal the co-occurrence of certain phenomena and relationships that were not immediately apparent. This rigorous analysis process facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and social dimensions of Nguni healing rituals, contributing to the broader research objectives of the study.

Figure 4.4 illustrates the relationship between the themes and codes, visually mapping the connections that emerged during the analysis. The diagram visualises how participants bring their personal experiences and cultural understanding to the different themes, which include brand symbolism, brand integration and brand role in rituals and cultural adaptation. The network shows both causal and associative relationships between concepts, which show how ancestor offerings and drinking beverages create ancestral bonds, and how brand changes affect ritual practices. The diagram shows how these themes appear together in the data because brands function as symbols which affect religious rituals, while brands modify their approach to match present-day cultural standards in Nguni healing traditions.

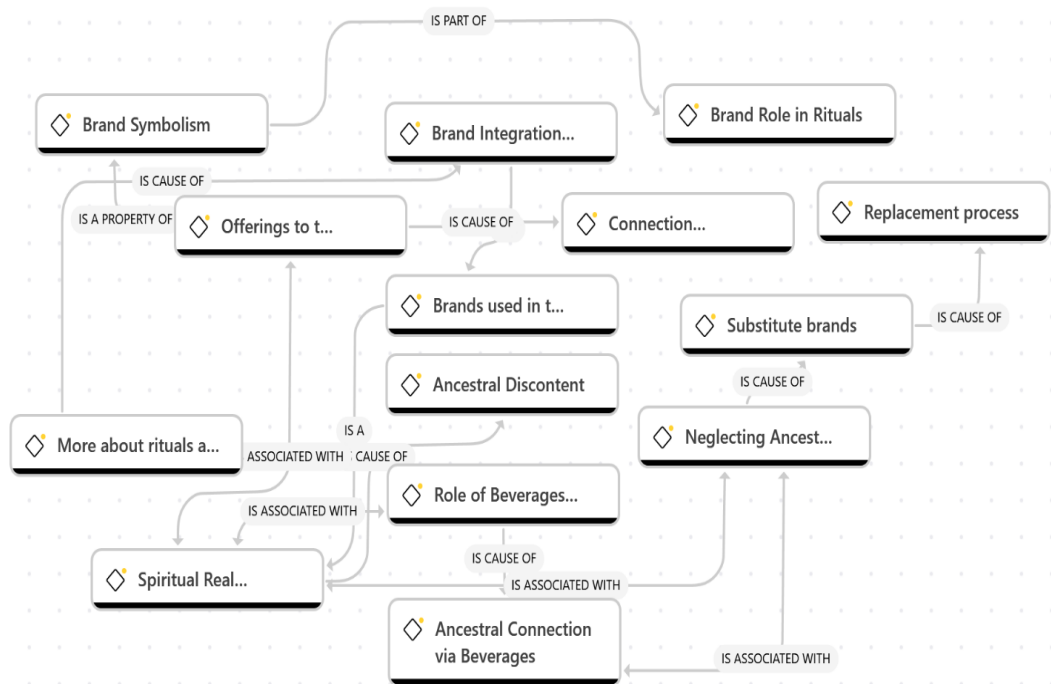


Figure 4.4: Thematic network of brand use in Nguni rituals

4.25. Reliability and credibility

In this study, trustworthiness and credibility were addressed by clearly outlining the procedures that led to and supported the conclusions drawn from the research.

4.25.1. Reliability

The research established reliability through its detailed description of experimental methods, which validated all findings from the investigation. The investigator required reliable and valid data analysis procedures to establish the study's credibility; accordingly, the investigator documented all process steps from data generation through analysis to maintain consistency.

The methods applied were reliable, which supports the study's findings regarding Nguni healing practices, although the findings may not generalise to all contexts.

For process integrity, the research adopted the following steps: using standardised interview methods, processing all further evidence using established procedures, and applying a unified method to code and analyse the data. A regular peer and advisor discussion verified the analysis externally, ensured the analytical consistency of the analysis and improved the overall analysis.

4.25.2. Credibility

Credibility refers to the accuracy and truthfulness of the results, but even though this study does not claim to generalise its results to Nguni traditional healers and their participants in all contexts, it provides helpful information about what limited knowledge is actually known as Nguni healing. As discussed in Chapter 1, this research looks to explain the role of brands in these healing practices, giving a deeper understanding of their significance to the success of these practices.

Although the findings may not be generalisable across all settings, it is anticipated that they will benefit society and businesses by offering insights into the experiences and cultural practices observed in the study. This can assist brands in understanding their integration into cultural rituals. The research required reliable and valid data analysis methods to establish study credibility.

Several strategies were implemented to reach this goal:

1. Triangulation: interviews and secondary data sources and associated findings were employed in the study in order to confirm evidence and enhance the consistency of analysis (Flick, 2018:133).
2. Member checking: the researcher requested participants to review first findings to help ensure the authenticity of opinions is captured (Birt et al., 2016:803).
3. Reflexivity: I continuously undertook self-reflective analysis of my own biases that influenced my bias towards data analysis on the basis of data from the study. This approach avoided bias and ensured that the data were used in a balanced analysis of the data without bias in the data (Berger, 2015:220).

4. **Peer debriefing:** Consistent meetings with colleagues and advisors about analysis and theme construction. Through discussions the analysis was also brought into an external viewpoint which influenced its refinements (Creswell and Poth, 2018:261).

The applied approaches formed the foundation for a rigorous and valid data analysis to further develop an understanding of brand roles in the Nguni traditional healing rituals.

4.26. Research quality

I followed the four principles of Guba and Lincoln (1981:3) as recommended by Yilmaz (2013:320) to analyse results and ensure the reliability of the qualitative study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility refers to the level of accuracy and precision of the results obtained in the study. To achieve credibility, the following were then adopted:

1. **Triangulation:** to cross-check information and to ensure that all aspects of the research questions were explored (Flick, 2018:112), the use of multiple data sources and methods (interviews and participant observations) was crucial.
2. **Member checking:** the preliminary findings were presented to the participants to ensure that the interpretations were correct and that their voices were heard (Creswell & Poth, 2018:260).
3. **Prolonged engagement:** the interactions with participants were conducted over a period (as long as was necessary) in order to gain the participants' confidence and to gain a better understanding of their experiences and viewpoints (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:301).

Transferability refers to the extent to which findings can be applied to other contexts.

Transferability was enhanced via:

1. **Dense description:** descriptions of the research context and participants were provided in detail to assist the reader in determining the applicability of the findings to other contexts (Geertz, 2017:16).
2. **Contextual information:** included comprehensive background information about the Nguni traditional healing practices and branding integration to elucidate the context of the study (Mason, 2018:83).

Dependability shows the strength of research findings when monitored over a variety of study situations and time frames. Several factors help ensure dependability:

1. The audit trail that can independently ascertain the dependability of the study that presents a comprehensive view of data collection methods as well as analysis methods (Yegidis et al., 2018:134).
2. A peer review of the research method and findings was conducted to enhance objectivity, lessening potential biases (Sandelowski, 2015:7).

Confirmability: the extent to which findings are drawn from participant data rather than researcher prejudice defines confirmability. Confirmability gets strengthened by the following factors:

1. **Reflexivity:** research participants can practice reflection in order for them to catch and challenge individual biases that might affect the study (Finlay, 2014:80).
2. **Confirmation of findings:** multiple research methods and data sources were used to validate the findings and ensure that findings align with the participants' viewpoints (Braun & Clarke, 2019:92).

4.27. Limitations of the study

This research provides significant findings; however, several necessary limitations must be identified to properly evaluate results and their implications. The research contains multiple significant limitations which must be acknowledged when evaluating the obtained results.

4.27.1. Potential limitation in research design and methodology

1. **Sampling bias:** the use of purposive and snowball sampling may lead to selection bias because the sample might not adequately represent the Nguni community (Palinkas et al., 2015:536).
2. **Subjectivity:** the research method demands that data be interpreted by oneself, which makes it difficult to use evidence as a guide for the quality of the conclusions reached (Flick, 2018:130).
3. **Access and participation:** limited access to traditional healers or participant members can weaken the quality of obtained data (Creswell & Poth, 2018:262).

4.27.2. Impact of limitations on findings

1. **Generalisability:** the study findings lack transferability to other Nguni areas or cultural contexts because the sample characteristics and settings differ from those studied.
2. **Interpretative bias:** the analytic process may introduce bias into the results which could lead to decreased reliability and accuracy of the findings.
3. **Data gaps:** The limited access to participants might lead to incomplete data points which would limit the understanding of branding in traditional healing practices.

4.27.3. Strategies to mitigate limitations

1. **Enhanced sampling techniques:** a diverse and representative sample can be obtained by combining purposive and snowball sampling methods, which should be implemented to increase participant numbers (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981:145).
2. **Triangulation:** Flick (2018:112) suggests that researchers should execute various data collection methods which support findings while decreasing subjectivity levels.
3. **Member checking:** the validation process of study findings with participants aims to verify research accuracy while minimising potential misinterpretations or biases (Creswell & Poth, 2018:260).
4. **Detailed documentation:** A description of the process was maintained to maximise transparency and to develop an audit trail (Yegidis et al., 2018:134).

4.28. Ethical limitations: cultural sensitivity, mitigation, and reciprocity

While a conscious effort to remain aware and respectful, the strategies employed to minimize cultural harm were not exhaustive. Certain spiritual customs associated with Nguni traditional healing system are considered sacred or linked to specific environments, restricting the reach of such study questions. Interpretation and translation may also lose their symbolic and culture-bound content (despite an insider's perspective on these practices) as well. Finally, how power is figured out between the people being studied and studying them might also shape how honestly and specifically the explanations were that were given. Fear that someone would be represented wrongly or that culture would be disrespected could have also played a role. In order to uphold the ethical reciprocity within all these limitations, the results were communicated orally to the participants in an accessible manner, and cases were reported to the participants in order to provide cultural competence and representation. With this approach, the participation were not exploitative but mutually helpful. The above limitations demonstrate why better ethical frameworks are important to develop; listening more to communities and sharing what researchers do with them is key. When planning new research,

these steps should be prioritized so that trust and respect are not discussed but are actually built.

4.29. Conclusion

This chapter explained the qualitative research approach used to study brand functions in Nguni traditional healing practices. The study aimed to explore the acceptance of modern branding approaches within Nguni traditional healing processes. This study's participants were selected from traditional healers and community members who participated in branding rituals.

The data was collected using semi-structured interviews and participant observation and thematically analysed to identify themes and patterns. It used triangulation in addition to member checking and reflexivity to guarantee validity and reliability of the study. Weaknesses were identified, such as sampling bias and interpretive subjectivity, and adequate sampling techniques and extensive documentation were put in place to mitigate these weaknesses. While many different views were expressed about traditional cultural practice using modern branding frameworks, different opinions were also received about research procedures. Participants and traditional healers also provided an invaluable perspective in understanding brand perceptions that integrate into their rituals for the researchers. A qualitative research design was crucial to investigate cultural complexities and narratives and provide insights into the exploration of the research topic.

The research process revealed two key problems: the limited data access and the subjective nature of qualitative data interpretation. Reflexivity alongside adaptability were essential to use in overcoming inquiry challenges by facilitating the participants' ability to assess the study while allowing methodological rigour. The collaborative and iterative qualitative inquiry method used for investigation made this process both productive and provided meaningful insights on the convergence between tradition and modernity.

Findings from qualitative data analysis are discussed in the next chapter. It describes the key themes and patterns that came about from the data analysis, which included using modern brands within Nguni traditional healing practices and their effect on cultural customs. The next part of this discussion leverages applied methodological insights to analyse the findings with respect to cultural adaptation and value generation.

CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the study's findings are presented, derived from the various processes and procedures outlined in Chapter Four. Qualitative analysis methods (such as ATLAS.ti 8) were employed during fieldwork to generate and collect essential data. The data collected through these means is central to the core objectives of the study. This study focused on the use of brands in Nguni traditional healing rituals among the Nguni people of South Africa, as mentioned in Chapter One and Chapter Four. This study aimed to address the following six objectives:

1. To identify which brands are being used in Nguni traditional healing rituals.
2. To establish the roles that brands play in Nguni traditional healing rituals.
3. To uncover how the brands become assimilated into the Nguni traditional healing rituals.
4. To uncover how important brands are to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals.
5. To establish the consequences, if any, should the specific brands not be present during the Nguni traditional healing rituals.
6. To establish whether or not there are substitute brands that can be used during Nguni traditional healing rituals.

This chapter presents the research findings as well as an analysis of the interviews conducted with study participants. The goal of this study was to investigate and comprehend the ideas, realities, and convictions of South African Nguni healers and patients, as well as their knowledge, understanding, and convictions about the role and importance of brands to the success of traditional healing rituals.

To achieve the research objectives, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with Nguni healers and the people who were either recipients or patients of Nguni traditional healing at a traditional healing event when data was collected and or were recipients with prior experience in traditional Nguni healing rituals. Fundamentally, the data gathered was used to investigate the value of brands to traditional Nguni healing rituals among those who practice and have experience with the value system. In this regard, the interview guide design was influenced by the study's objectives.

5.2. Interview guide design

As stated earlier in the chapter, primary data was collected from two groups of participants to meet the study's objectives, namely healers and participants in Nguni traditional ceremonies and healing rituals (*lintlombe*). The interview guide that was utilised to collect primary data is explained below; each question posed is linked to at least one brand construct that it tested to achieve the study objectives. The following questions were posed in either isiZulu or isiXhosa and for interpretation and analysis purposes, the questions were subsequently translated into English.

Q.C1. Which brands do you know to be important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals? (*Uma ungachaza ungathi amaphi amabrand owaziyo abalulekile ukuze uphumelele umsebezni wokuphilisa/kwelapha umntu ngezindlela zesiZulu/isiXhosa?*).

The concept of 'brand communities' is crucial to understanding the role of brands in rituals. Muniz and O'Guinn (2018:344) describe these communities as groups of customers united by social ties rather than geography, centred around a particular brand. This engagement underscores the importance of brands in the act of performing rituals, in which they play a central role in social fabric and collective identity of groups. As a result, their perceived authenticity and effectiveness may be linked closely with their potential to connect with tradition, and then fit into a modern logic of efficacy. Neumeier (2015:45) suggests that brands can establish connections through rituals that reflect consumers' culturally specific backgrounds. This fusion of conventional beliefs and the trust afforded by the modern brand has resulted in a hybridisation of healing rituals such that brand status becomes symbolic and instrumental (Mpofu, 2016:214). Additionally, Hobson et al. (2018:26) stress the fact that rituals are also key mechanisms in how brands establish and maintain meaning among consumers. Brands that are able to create a symbiotic relationship with consumers and easily integrate into their rituals are seen as more meaningful, which is more important for the long-run success and survival of the brand. Therefore, this question was proposed to pinpoint which brands are integrated in Nguni traditional healing rituals thus answering Objective 1 of the study.

Q.C2. What roles do brands perform within Nguni traditional healing rituals, if any? (*Ungathi ibrand idlala yiphi indima ukuze iphumelele imisebenzi yokulapha ngesintu?*)

Tian et al. (2018:870) found that rituals can boost self-control, leading to more frequent selection of healthy choices over unhealthy ones. Moreover, rituals are particularly pertinent to the current project and influence the meaningfulness of products. They have the capacity not only to preserve or enhance the existing significance of products or brands but also to

imbue them with new meaning. This question was incorporated to address Objective 2, Establish the roles that brands play in Nguni traditional healing rituals.

Q.C3. How would you explain how brands become assimilated into Nguni traditional healing rituals? (*Ngolwakho ulwazi lama'brands owachaze kumbuzo ongaphezulu, kwenzeka kanjani/kuqale kuphi ukuthi abaluleke emisebnzini yesintu?*)

To establish the social factors contributing to how brands develop meaning and value within the Nguni healing ritual, this question was included in the study. When customers focus on a product and the rituals connected to it, they start to see the brand as part of themselves, which helps build a strong connection to the brand (Vohs et al., 2022:2) In order to uncover how brands become integrated into the Nguni traditional healing rituals, it was important to pose this question thus answering Objective 3.

Q.C4. Why is the use of these brands important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals? (*Ngolwakho ulwazi ungathi kungani ibrand zibalulekile emisebenzini yokulapha ngesintu?*)

The inclusion of this question was prompted by the argument that sacred consumption may be linked to religious beliefs (Firat et al., 2013:187). Sharma et al. (2017:30) describe the strategic use of rituals to position brands in international markets. The authors note that brands which can embed themselves into cultural rituals tend to have stronger connections with their customers. This is because these rituals enhance the perceived value and emotional attachment to the brand. This question was included to answer Objective 4, uncovering the extent to which brands are important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals.

Q.C5. What would the impact be if these brands were not used in the Nguni traditional healing ritual? (*Ingaba njani imiphumela yokungabikho ko/kwe brand imesibenzini yokulapha ngesintu?*)

This question was included to determine whether the absence of brands from Nguni traditional healing rituals would potentially diminish the efficacy of the Nguni traditional healing rituals and weaken the consumer-brand relationships fostered through them. Rituals serve not only to strengthen bonds among community members but also play a pivotal role in shaping collective traditions and consumer experiences within brand communities (Wang et al., 2021:335). This question sought to answer Objective 5, that is to establish the consequences, if any, should the specific brands understood to be fundamental to the success of *lintlombe* not be used during *lintlombe*.

Q.C6. Will the Nguni traditional healing rituals still succeed if these brands are not present? (*Usengaphumulela umsebenzi wokulapha ngesintu lama/le'brand ingekho?*)

According to Pongsakorn-Rungsilp and Schroeder (2016:304), “customers cooperate in the value creation of brands; they do this collectively by co-creating trust of brands through their buying and usage habits”. For this reason, this question was included. Chandler and Vargo (2014:35) further argue that value is developed in a social context, which is built on the previous value-in-context and primarily adds a social construction approach. This question also aimed to address Objective 5, which seeks to determine whether any consequences arise if the specific brands, considered essential to the success of *lintlombe*, are not used during the rituals.

Q.C7. Are there substitute brands that can be used to replace these brands for the Nguni traditional healing ritual to still succeed? (*Ingaba ikhona enye intlobo engasentshensiswa uma i..... ingekho ukuze uqhubeke uphumulele umsebenzi?*).

Rituals can be adapted to incorporate substitute brands if these new brands align with the symbolic and functional aspects of the original, as explained by McGraw and Warren (2018:535). For new brands to integrate seamlessly into existing rituals without compromising their efficacy, it is essential to maintain the core elements of the ritual and ensure that the substitute brand aligns with the values and characteristics of the original brand. Schmitt and Zarantonello (2018:285) expand on how customers relate to brands in rituals and explore how to incorporate substitute brands into these rituals. According to their research, the success of a substitute brand depends on the way that customers perceive the substitutes to be augmenting or upholding the meaning and significance of the original ritual. The current study answers this inquiry using the insights given by McGraw and Warren (2018) and Schmitt and Zarantonello (2018). This question was introduced in the context of Objective 6, which is to establish if there are substitute brands that can be used during Nguni traditional healing rituals.

Q.C8. Is there more that you can share about the role of brands to the success of the Nguni traditional healing rituals? - If yes, please elaborate. If no, skip to Q.C8. (*Ingaba kukhona yini okunye ongasichazela khona ngemisebenzi yokulapha ngesintu nendima ethi idlalwe i.... khona uzophumelela umsebenzi?*).

This question was incorporated to investigate the broader significance of brands within Nguni healing rituals, enabling healers and participants to express in their own words the role of brands in the expressed effectiveness of Nguni traditional healing rituals in greater detail.

5.3. Data analysis

The research interprets participants' narratives through Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) and cultural branding. The study examines how the brands operate as identity resources and ritual props within broader socio-historic and market logics (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Holt, 2004). The study analysis focuses on three dimensions: (a) marketplace cultures and tribal formations, where social ties and shared rituals create value; (b) ideological negotiations of expressed authenticity and sacredness; and (c) sociohistorical forces, postcolonial and neoliberal, that shape brand ritual convergence (Cova & Cova, 2002; Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989).

Applying this lens, the analysis of the data collected from the qualitative research on Xhosa and Zulu Nguni traditional healing rituals reveals several key themes that help to explain the relationship of brands to the Xhosa and Zulu Nguni traditional healing practices. The data is analysed and presented through the following five themes: Integration of brands into rituals (5.4), Roles of brands in Nguni healing practices (5.5), Cultural adaptation (5.6), Brands' cultural significance in Nguni healing (5.7) and Brand substitution in Nguni healing (5.8). Each theme is discussed in detail and supported by direct quotes from participants to illustrate the nuances and complexities of the integration of brands into Nguni traditional healing rituals.

5.4. Integration of brands into rituals

The first theme, Integration of brands into rituals, explores how modern brands are incorporated into traditional healing rituals. It examines the specific ways in which traditional healers and clients use these brands within the context of the Nguni cultural healing practices. The following questions and quotations illustrate the integration of brands within Nguni traditional healing rituals, offering insight into the understanding and perspectives of the healers and clients interviewed for this study. These narratives reveal the complex interplay between contemporary consumer culture and traditional healing practices, highlighting how brands are perceived, utilised, and imbued with significance in the context of Nguni spiritual and cultural paradigms. The quotations below are drawn from both healers and clients involved in Nguni healing rituals, comprising quotations from healers and clients who are clients or people with prior experience of the Nguni traditional healing practices.

From the interview guide, Q.C1 examined both the healers' and clients' knowledge of brands deemed essential to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals. Q.C2 explored the specific roles that brands play within these rituals. Section 5.4.1. presents the perspectives of the healers in response to Q.C1, while Section 5.4.2 captures the clients' narratives on the same topic. Similarly, Section 5.4.3. provides the healers' insights into Q.C2 and Section 5.4.4. reflects the clients' views of Q.C2.

Q.C1 Which brands do you know to be important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals?

Building on the theoretical frames for the question, the perspectives of the healers and clients offer a more nuanced understanding of how specific brands are perceived and utilised within Nguni traditional healing rituals. The following sections present direct quotations from both the healers and clients, capturing their narratives on the importance of brands in ensuring the success of these rituals, first in English and then in the original vernacular to preserve their authentic voices.

5.4.1. Healers' narrative

When I am going to do a traditional ceremony on a home, I purchase umthombo here I will brew Zulu alcohol. I purchase whiskey or brandy, beers. (Interviewer: Which brandy and beers do you buy?) – I buy commando that is red, then its eee Smirnoff for the white alcohol/spirit - English (P7:10:100).

Xa ndiyokwenza umsebenzi ekhayeni, ndithenga umthombo, ndizowenza utshwala besiZulu njalo. Ndithenge, iwhiskey, okanye ibran ibrandi, amabhiya. Ndiye ndithenge iCommando ered, kube yiSmirnof emhlophe. Vernacular (P7:10:100).

Arghmm, ooo we at home, or stand, or phehlo, when we use alcohol, we use Old Buck, 4th Street eeeemmmm and beer, Black Label beer, Yes and Coke, eee should I list all things we use in our ceremony? We use fire, candles, Lion Matches, for candles my goodness but the ones in a white plastic, yes Newden Candles. English (P8:7:100).

Arghmmm, ooo thina ekhaya, siye, okanye siphelhla, sisebenzisa utshwala, sisebenzisa iOld Buck, 4th Street, eeemmmm namabhiya,, Black Label, Yes ne'Coke, eee ndizibale zonke izinto esisisebenzisayo xa senza umsebenzi? Sisebenzisa Umlilo, amakhandlela, Lion matches, ama'khandlela thixo wami kodwa lana akuplastic emhlophe, yay a iNewden Candles. Vernacular (P8:7:100).

Ok let me start at the very beginning, I must get eee candles, all colours except for a black candle. Number 2. I use Boxer Tobacco, snuff, then when it comes to African beer, I use aaaa a case of Black Label beer and a case of Castle Lite. And then I go on to purchase Smirnoff because it is a white spirit, white Smirnoff and take it and get Klipdrift to represent red hard/spirit alcohol and then go on to balances

the white and red. And as we go on using umqombothi, I also do umqombothi but I also have to have a white chicken. Mostly and most times I use a white and red chicken. English (P3:9:99).

Ok ithi ndiqale ekuqaleni, kuye kufuneke ndifumane eee ama'khandela, yonke imibala ngaphandle kweli elimnyama. Number 2. Ndisebenzisa iBoxer Tobacco, snuff, mese makuza kumgqombothi, ndisebenzise aaa icase leBlack Label Beer, icase leCastle Lite. Ndibe sendithenga iSmirnoff ngoba sona butywala obumhlophe. Utywala obumhlophe iSmirnoff ndithathe nebotile yeKlipdrift ezothi imele utywala obubomvu, ndibe sendibalansa obu obumhlophe n'obu'mbomvu. Mase siqhubeka sizebenzise umqombothi, ngiye ngenze nomqombothi, kodwa kuye kufuneke ndihlale ndinayo inkukhu emhlophe. Iskhathi esiningi ndiye ndisebenzise inkukhu emhlophe noma ebomvu. Vernacular (P3:9:99).

5.4.2. Clients' perspective

There must be white spirits. Smirnoff, its white spirits those one, then there is the brown spirits, those as well have to be there as part of the ceremony, Gordons [gin], Commando [brandy] and the alcohol from back in the day. English (P13:21:106)

Kumele kubekhona utwala obumhlophe, Smirnoff, butywala obumhlophe obo, kubekhona utywala obubomvu, nazo ezo funeka zibekhona kulomsebenzi wabaphansi, Gordons, Commando notywala basexhesheni eladlulayo, emaxhesheni akudala. Vernacular (P13:21:106).

Ummm, let's start here, there must be ubulawu obumhlophe there must be imphepho and then we go on to brew umqombothi. Umqombothi is the most important, King Korn and maize. Let's start there. And then it depends where are you from Lesotho, South Africa, but there is ingqoloba at the end its boils off all that African beer. Then there must be the white spirit and brand, Smirnoff and Commando, Commando the one that has horse on the branding. English (P14:7:104).

Ummm masiqale kanje, kufuneka kubekhona ubulawu obumhlophe, kube sokubakhona imphepho, kube sekuqala kwezowenziwa umqombothi. Umqombothi into efunekayo esikakhulu yiKing Korn, umgubo obomvu masiqale lapho ke. Kuphinde kuxhomekeke ukuthi ke ukuthi usuka eLeSotho usuka eSouth Africa eyaxhomekeka lento kuba khona ingqoloba ekugcineni isibiliso sayo yonke la African breweries yakhona. Interview digs deep to ask if there any other brands used. Zibakhona, kuye kubekhona emhlophe nembomvu, iSmirnoff neCommando. Lena enehashi emgqolo. Vernacular English (P14:7:104).

Ok I use Smirnoff, use iiiiiiCommando and Kluf I don't know its exact name nhe, what is its name nha, but it's expensive. Rather we focus on Smirnoff and Commando. When it comes to beers its Castle and Black Label beer, and then there are those that ask for wine. There are those that need wine. Candles are Newden and Matches Lion Matches. English (P11:12:104).

Ok ndisebenzisa iSmirnoff, sebenzisa iiiiiiCommando neKluf andiyazi its exact nhe, ithini igama layo nha, kodwa iyadura. Endaweni yoko sigxile kwiSmirnoff kunye neCommando. Xa kuthethwa ngebeer zayo iCastle ne and Castle neBlack Label beer, kubekho naba bacela iwayini. Kukho ezo zidinga iwayini. Amakhandela yiNewden kunye neMatshisi yeeMatshi Lion Matches. Vernacular (P11:12:104).

Q.C2 What roles do brands perform within Nguni traditional healing rituals, if any?

To explore the roles brands perform in Nguni traditional healing rituals, the following sections present the direct narratives of both healers and clients. These first-hand accounts provide deeper insights into how brands are perceived and utilised within these sacred practices, with quotations presented in English and the original vernacular to preserve the participants' authentic voices.

5.4.3. Healers' perspective

It's this thing, iiii Brandy they represent the ancestors because that is what they liked back in the day, and when it comes to candles we use yellow, white, blue, green and red. English (P11:13:106).

ilento. iiiiBranti zimele abantu abadala, ababezithanda kudala, kuzothe ke emkhandleleni sisebenzise uYellow, noWhite, noBlue, noGreen, and noRed. Vernacular (P11:13:106).

They play a big role, because it can happen that maybe the grandfather/forefather of the family used to drink and when say when you want him to enter the home using traditional porridge and umqombothi only. And he says I said I loved red spirits. Do you hear that, and it can happen that now those red spirits must now also be brought out. Because we can never know exactly, maybe he also used to drink red spirits and maybe he also used to drink the white spirits, and maybe he had a wife who used to drink with him the white spirits, if we intend to fetch them at the gates during the family ceremony then we must bring both these spirits and not go fetch them with just one make of spirits instead of the two. English (P10:10:104).

Ziyaydlala kakhulu, ngoba kuyenzeka ukuthi mhlawumbe umkhulu waye kade ephuza, athi mhlawumbe uma uzomngenisa ngomdokwe nomgqombothi kuphela abe sesithi ndithe mna, ngangithanda ugologo obomvu. Uyayiva lento engiyishoyo. Kube ukuthi hlawumu sekufunakala ukuthi maziphume nabo bowuthu ngoba ngeze sazi ukuthi kahle, mhlawumbe wayewuphuza nalo'ombomvu hlambe wayewu[phuza nalo omhlophe mhlambe kuno nkosikazi wakhe babe phuza bobabili nogogo, If mangebe sibalanda bobabili eghethini sekufuneka siphume nabo bobabili labo'gologo singaphumi nogologo owodwa. Vernacular (P10:10:104).

They play a role, play a role because the people/ancestors I am doing the ceremony for, there are those that used to use brandy that's red and there are those that used a white one. So, they play a role in that way, these are ancestors that I am speaking off here. English (P7:11:102).

Zidlala indima, zidlala indima cause kaloku ababantu ndibenzelayo kukhona ababesebenzisa ibrandi embomvu bakhona ababesebenzisa emhlophe. So ziyaydlala indima ngalo'ndlela. Ngabantu abadala abangasekho aba endithetha ngabo apha. Vernacular (P7:11:102).

5.4.4. Clients' perspective

We include all these things because the ancestors love/used these things when they were alive, and now we are asking them to bless the healing ceremony by having these things and making sure we have these items. And then meals that's cooked and when you do it must be isgwampa when you make they must be there and amahewu – we use the yellow mealies. English (P22:14:108).

Siye sifake zonke ezizinto ngoba okhokho babezithanda bezisebenzisa ezizinto besaphila, kanti ke ngoku siyabacela ukuthi abwuvumele umsebenzi uphumelele. Ngokuthi zibekhona ezizinto nokuthi siqiniseke ukuthi zikhona zonke. Kuthi xakuphekwa kubekhona nesigwampa kunye namahewu, siyesebenzise umbona eyellow. Vernacular (P22:14:108).

The elders/ancestors of this family for an example someone coming from the mines. You know who they used to come back with a white spirit. What they called 'Hamba Idlani' it's like that young man. The white spirit its dependent on the Sangomas and the people that are around working with the Zangomas. English (P14:8:106).

Amakhehle alana ekhaya, like umzekelo wakhona, amavela goli, ivela Goli uyalazi ukuthi lalibuya liphethe ibranti emhlophe lenta ekuthiwa ihambidlani injalo ke ndoda. Kulena ke emhlophe kulapho sekuxhomekeke nakuZangoma nabantu aba abakhona abasebenza nezangoma behleli. Vernacular English (P14:8:106).

Because the alcohol is used so to connect with the people that are no more/ancestors. Some of them passed having begun living an English/modern lifestyle, while some were still living the Bantu ways. So, the idea is to gather them all so to reach them, so that even if he/she likes white alcohol stuff if they liked brown alcohol, they get that alcohol. And traditional alcohol used to be there and is used to unite all the ancestors because they all drank it. English (P13:12:108).

Kuba kulungiselwa into yokubana kwaba bantu bonke abangasekhoyo, abasithi ziancestores abanye besebephila impilo yesilungu, abanye besaphila isintu. So Kuzanywa ukudinyaniswa bona bonke ukuthi bafikeleleke. Kuthi nobethanda utywala obumhlophe afumane nobe Thanda utywala obumdaka abufumane. Notywala besintu bebubakhona ke, ukuthi bubadibanise bonke ngoba bebuselwa ngumntu wonke bona. Vernacular English (P13:12:108).

Based on the responses from traditional healers, it is evident that brands are indeed utilised and hold significance in Nguni traditional healing rituals. Specifically, brands such as Commando, Smirnoff Vodka, Black Label (beer), Old Buck (gin), 4th Street wine, Coca-Cola, Lion Matches, and Newden Candles as these specific brands were directly mentioned by the healers. This was further corroborated by clients, who identified Smirnoff Vodka, Gordon's Gin, and Commando as essential to the success of *lintlombe* (Nguni healing ritual), thereby fulfilling the first objective of the study.

Both the healers and the clients' feedback from Q.C2 data provide clear evidence that brands are highly important to Nguni healing, thus achieving objective 2 of the study. These brands

facilitate a connection between the healer, the client, and their ancestors, which is fundamental to the perceived effectiveness of the healing ceremony. The findings, supported by the research and personal observations, reveal that specific brands have become integral to Nguni traditional healing practices. These brands have moved beyond commercial products, into something far more profound and symbolic: a matter of cultural and symbolic weight. As seen in the network below, they are regarded as integral elements that unite the living and their ancestral and spiritual realm.

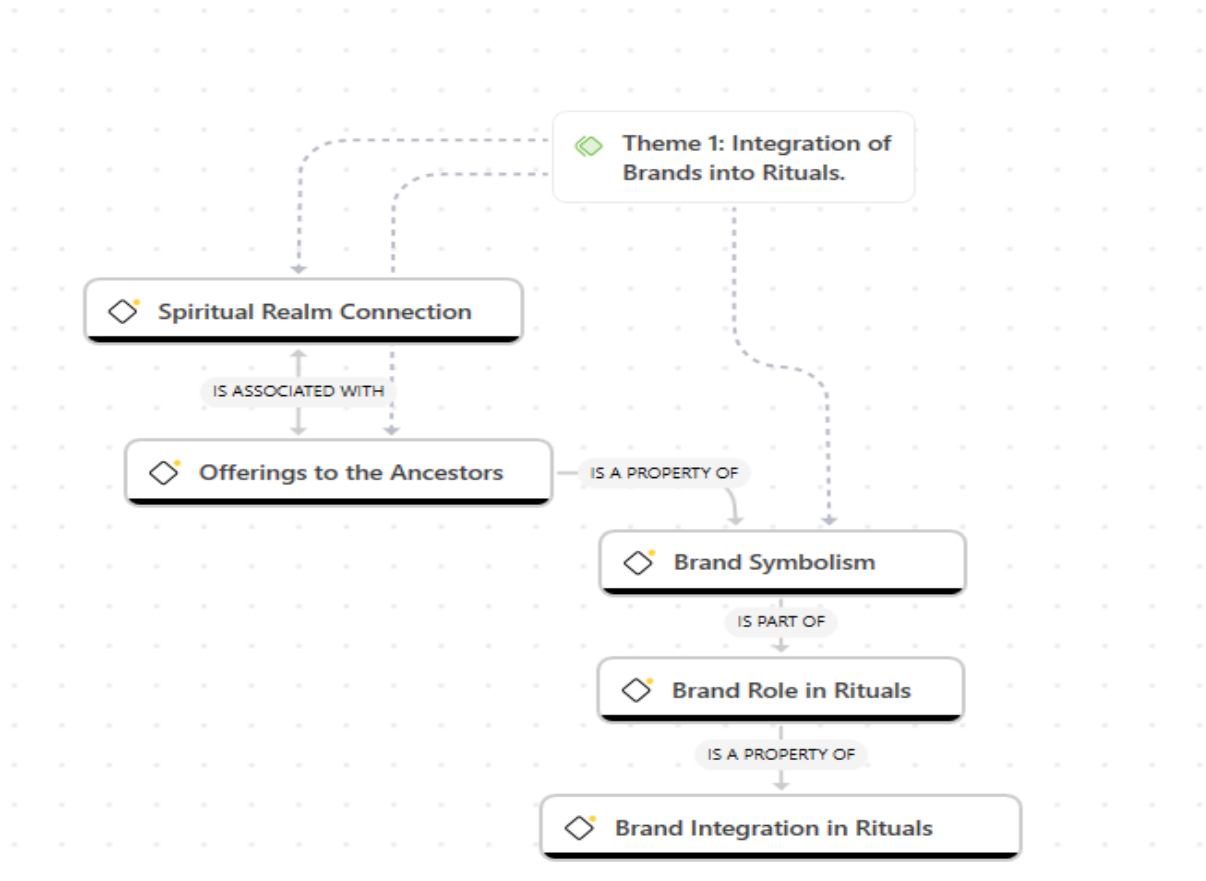


Figure 5.1: Brand integration network in Nguni ritual practices

Hobson et al. (2018:26) suggest that brands that become entrenched in consumers' rituals tend to be considered more meaningful and significant by consumers. This point is evident in the incorporation of certain brands into the Nguni traditional healing rituals. Not only do these brands enrich the ritual itself, but they are culturally and spiritually significant for the community.

The diagram in Figure 5.1 shows how spiritual components link with brand functions which exist within Nguni religious practices. The spiritual elements are located in the first of these two components, Spiritual Realm Connection and Offerings to the Ancestors. While the elements tie in with Brand Symbolism and Brand Role in Rituals, this is because these

elements show how brands build on their spiritual and cultural value which goes beyond what they functionally hold. Brand integration is another key feature of ritual structures that the diagram illustrates as integrating practices and that helps their function as cultural expression and collective identity-making. The visual shows how brands who partake in the rituals become more significant, since they are intertwined with elements that are tied to the traditional and spiritual values.

The image in Figure 5.2, illustrates a Nguni healing ritual by one of the clients I interviewed, further stressing this connection. Not only did the client describe the use of these brands, but I also had the opportunity to observe firsthand the brands being used in the rituals. This visually highlights how these specific brands have become deeply embedded in traditional practices, reinforcing their essential role in both cultural expression and community identity.

Table 2: Brands mentioned by Nguni traditional healers and clients

Brands mentioned as used in Nguni Healing rituals	
Healing rituals	Clients
Smirnoff Vodka	Smirnoff Vodka
Commando	Gordons Gin
Black Label Beer	Commando Brandy
Old Buck Gin	
4th Street Wine	
Coca-Cola	
Lion Matches	
Newden Candles	



Figure 5.2: Brands used in Nguni healing rituals

5.5. Roles of brands in Nguni healing practices

To strengthen validity, interviews were triangulated with field observations (gestures, sequencing and the processing of branded items), photographic proof, and traces of artefacts (packaging/signage) (see Figure 5.2). These observed micro-practices map onto value-generating brand community activities like sharing expertise, documenting rituals, and celebrating brand heritage, which reinforces the credibility of the findings (Schau, Muñiz & Arnould, 2009; Fusch, Fusch & Ness, 2018:21).

The second theme of Nguni healing reflects on the roles of brands within Nguni traditional healing practices and how the contemporary brand brings about differences of effectiveness in their healing ritual. Through the lens of healers and participants alike, this theme illustrates how the presence of brands can influence individuals' perception of a successful practice (Nguni traditional healing practices). Below are some quotes selected from interviews with healers and participants discussing how attitudes towards brands differ when it comes to Nguni

healing. These narratives elucidate the context for brand inclusion in a Nguni spiritual context, illustrating the nuanced interplay of consumer society today and traditional healing efficacy.

The answers to each question are first presented in English and the original vernacular to ensure the accuracy of the participants' voices/views from their perspectives, so that the true perceptions of the respondents are heard and recorded in the study. Question 5.5.1 tested consumers and healers on familiarity with brands perceived as important determinants of the effectiveness of Nguni traditional healing practice. More precisely, the roles brands occupy within these rituals were analysed in Question 5.5.2.

Responses of the healers to Question Q.C4 are given in Section 5.5.1, and narratives from the clients regarding the same are contained within Section 5.5.2. Similarly, Section 5.5.3. offers the healers' perspectives on Question Q.C2. Section 5.5.4. presents the clients' opinions and offers more in-depth client-narrated accounts regarding the function of brands in Nguni traditional healing practices.

Q.C4 Why is the use of these brands important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals?

To explore why the use of specific brands is considered vital to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals, the following sections present direct narratives from healers and clients.

5.5.1. Healers' perspective

We use the brands to commence the ceremony to reach the ancestors. English (P8:9:16).

Siyazisebenzisa ukuze siqale umsebenzi wokuxhumana naba'phansi. Vernacular (P8:9:16).

They are important because the ceremony can't happen without these things, it's very important that they are there for the ceremony in all honesty. They work in connecting you with the ancestors because when I am working there emsamo, they are placed here and are being used to pour them each of the bottle. I must spill so the ancestors can have a drink. English (P7:12:104).

Zibalulekile kuba akukwazeki ukuthi uqhubeke zingekho ezizinto, Ziyadingeka nje ngempela ukuthi mazibe khona ewe. Ziyasebenza nje, ngoba kaloku xa ngabe ndisenza phana emsama, let's say, sezibekwe apha zonke, seziyasebenza ngoku nhe. Funeka ndizithele phansi, ewe ibhotile ngalinye funeka ndithele apha phansi. Ewe ukuze bakwazi ukuncamla. Vernacular (P7:12:104).

it's very impactful for connecting with the ancestors. In fact Smirnof is very important for any ceremony that speaks with the ancestors. English (P6:17:102).

kunomthelela omkhulu ekuxhumaneni namadlozi. I-Infect Smirnof ibaluleke kakhulu kunoma yimuphi umcimbi okhuluma namadlozi. Vernacular (P6:17:102).

5.5.2. Clients' perspective

It's important in that regard because what is important here is to bring together the ancestors and those that are still living. Even when cleansing, the cleansing is for those that are still alive so that they are relived in all that they wish for and be blocked by the ancestors because there are things, they aren't happy about. English (P11:15:110).

Kubalekile ngalonto, ngoba eyona nto esiyenzayo apha ngalomsebenzi kukudibanisa abantu abaleleyo nabantu aphilayo. Xa thiwa kuyahlanjwa kuhlanjwa aba abaphilayo ukuze bakhululeke imisebenzi yabo yonke bangaphazamiswa ngaba abaleleyo Kubekhona izinto abazikhalazelayo kkulowo ohlanjwayo. Vernacular (P11:15:110).

Because the alcohol is used so to connect with the people that are no more/ancestors. Some of them passed having begun living an English/modern lifestyle, while some were still living the bantu ways. So, the idea is to gather them all so to reach them, so that even if he/she likes white alcohol stuff if they liked brown alcohol, they get that alcohol. And traditional alcohol used to be there and is used to unite all the ancestors because they all drank it. English (P13:12:108).

Kuba kulungiselwa into yokubana kwaba bantu bonke abangasekhoyo, abasithi ziáncestores abanye besebephila impilo yesilungu, abanye besaphila isintu. So Kuzanywa ukudinyaniswa bona bonke ukuthi bafikeleleke. Kuthi nobethanda utywala obumhlophe afumane nobe Thanda utywala obumdaka abufumane. Notywala besintu bebubakhona ke, ukuthi bubadibanise bonke ngoba bebuselwa ngumntu wonke bona. Vernacular (P13:12:108).

Connects with ancestors, the elders/ancestors of this family, for example, someone coming from the mines. You must understand that they used to come back with a white spirit what they called 'Hamba Idlani' it's like that young man. The white spirit is dependent on the Sangomas and the children that are around working with the family. English (P14:8:106).

Amakhehle alana ekhaya, like umzekelo wakhona, amavela goli, ivela Goli uyalazi ukuthi lalibuya liphethe ibranti emhlophe lenta ekuthiwa ihambidlani injalo ke ndoda. Kulena ke emhlophe kulapho sekuxhomekeke nakuZangoma nabantu aba abakhona abasebenza nezangoma behleli. Vernacular (P14:8:106).

Q.C2 What roles do brands perform within Nguni traditional healing rituals if any?

To gain deeper insights into the roles brands perform within Nguni traditional healing rituals, the following sections provide direct quotations from healers and clients. These accounts, shared in both English and the original vernacular, provide direct insights into the role of brands within the ritual setting and explain why they are regarded as integral to the practice.

5.5.3. Healers' perspective

They connect us with the ancestors and forefathers that are now *our ancestors*. English (P1:15:102).
Zisixhumanisa namadlozi, amakhehla asengamadlozi ngoku. Vernacular (P1:15:102).

It's very impactful for connecting with the ancestors, in fact Smirrnof is very important for any ceremony that speaks with the ancestors. English (P12:12:106)

Isizathu ingoba ikwazi ukusixhumanisa nezinyanya, futhi iSmirrnoff sibalulekile kuyo yonke imisebenzi edibene nabaphansi. Vernacular (P12:12:106).

The white spirits connect me with the ancestors with the ones that are living in need of healing so that the patient can regain health and that is why we also add the other things so they can all work including umgqombothi and amahewu. English (P5:15:108).

Utywala obumhlophe ndibusebenzisa ukuze ndixhumanise abangasekho naba abasaphila, abafuna ukwelatshwa khona ukuze ikwazi impilo ibuye. Ingakho ke siye sifake nezinye izinto khona zizodibana zonke nawo umgqombothi nama'hewu. Vernacular (P5:15:108).

5.5.4. Clients' perspective

The ceremony would not succeed because all these people we are saying we are bringing together. Some will not be happy. English (P11:12:104).

Umsebenzi ngeke uphumelele ngoba bonke Labantu siyabahlanganisa, abanye babo ngeke bajabuliseke. Vernacular (P11:12:104).

Connect with ancestors, the elders/ancestors of this family. English (P14:8:106).

Zisixhumanisa namakhehle alana ekhaya. Vernacular (P14:8:106).

Because the alcohol is used so to connect with the people that are no more/ancestors. Some of them passed having begun living an English/modern lifestyle, while some were still living the bantu ways. So, the idea is to gather them all so to reach them, so that even if he/she likes white alcohol stuff if they liked brown alcohol, they get that alcohol. And traditional alcohol used to be there and is used to unite all the ancestors because they all drank it. English (P13:12:108).

Kuba kulungiselwa into yokubana kwaba bantu bonke abangasekhoyo, abasithi zi'ancestores abanye besebephila impilo yesilungu, abanye besaphila isintu. So Kuzanywa ukudinyaniswa bona bonke ukuthi bafikeleleke. Kuthi nobethanda utywala obumhlophe afumane nobe Thanda utywala obumdaka abufumane. Notywala besintu bebubakhona ke, ukuthi bubadibanise bonke ngoba bebuselwa ngumntu wonke bona. Vernacular (P13:12:108).

The feedback gathered indicates that brands hold a significant role in Nguni healing practices, with both healers and participants highlighting their importance in connecting the living with their ancestors. Healers particularly emphasised that the absence of specific

brands could compromise the success of ceremonies, underscoring the centrality of these products in the healing process.

This consistency across responses of healers and participants is consistent and implies that brands are perceived as integral components for the successful implementation of healing rituals by both practising Nguni healers and patients alike. Another visual illustration of the theme would be provided by Figure 5.2 network around the influence of brands in Nguni healing activities. The network illustrates the brand, ritual, and cultural context interconnectedness, underscoring how these products are critically necessary to secure the purported success, continuity, and spiritual integrity of healing ceremonies.

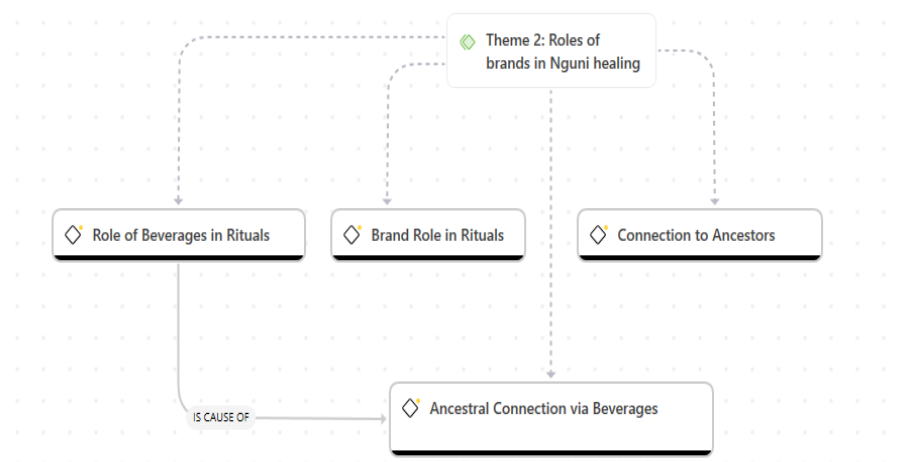


Figure 5.3: Thematic network of the role of brands in Nguni healing practices

This finding aligns the purpose of the study identified when it comes to identifying the positions brands hold in Nguni traditional healing rituals, exemplifying how both new modalities find a place in the traditional practices (Smith, 2019a:45). The cultural significance attributed to these brands has its origins in the blending of modern Nguni healing rituals (Flick, 2018:140) where products acquired to meet commercial needs gain spiritual power, as they can influence traditional outcomes. Beyond their functional presence, brands serve as a foundation for their role as symbolic elements which function as anchors in Nguni healing rituals. People base their beliefs about product effectiveness on cultural connections they have with these items instead of actual product characteristics. Brands function as modern manifestations of ancient ritual items because they represent official status, maintain cultural traditions and honour ancestral heritage. The selection of specific branded products shows how healers transform contemporary consumer practices into their religious rituals through these items, which help them defend their spiritual authority. The current theories about brand meaning expand through research, which shows how brands create sacred value in culturally rooted contexts.

5.6. Cultural adaptation

Research results show that Nguni healing rituals branding practices exist at various points on a scale which measures cultural exchange and appropriation levels. The four-type framework of exchange, dominance, exploitation, and transculturation helps us identify how some practices show cultural adaptation, yet others threaten to turn cultural elements into marketable products (Rogers, 2006:503). Research conducted in recent times confirms this understanding because cultural appropriation develops through negotiations between powerful groups and consumers who want unique cultural experiences (Cruz, Seo, & Scaraboto, 2023:965). The combination of appropriation with marginalisation leads participants to worry about exploitation, so researchers suggest three protection measures, which include cultural source recognition, community advantage agreements, and consent management systems (Matthes, 2019:1005).

Building on these significant studies, this third theme, Cultural adaptation, explores the adaptation and assimilation of brands into Nguni traditional healing rituals, focusing on how brands are incorporated within the context of Nguni cultural practices. It studies how brands are embedded in traditional rituals, reflecting shifts in cultural practices and the negotiation between contemporary consumerism and longstanding spiritual traditions. The following questions and quotations, collected from healers and participants in Nguni healing rituals, depict the integration of brands into these practices and the significance this holds within the cultural framework. These insights reveal the dynamic interaction between traditional Nguni beliefs and modern brand influences, highlighting the evolving nature of cultural assimilation and adaptation.

For each question, responses are presented in English, with the original vernacular included thereafter, ensuring that the participants' voices remain intact and authentic while preserving the cultural nuances embedded in their expressions. Question 5.6.1 investigated healers' and clients' explanations of how brands become or have become assimilated into Nguni traditional healing rituals. Question 5.6.2 examined the reasons why the use of these brands is considered important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals.

Section 5.6.1. presents the perspectives of the healers in response to Question Q.C3, while Section 5.6.2. captures the clients' narratives on the same topic. Similarly, Section 5.6.3. provides the healers' insights into Question Q.C4 and Section 5.6.4. reflects the clients' views on why the use of brands is crucial for the success of Nguni traditional healing, with more detailed accounts as narrated by the clients.

Q.C3 How would you explain how brands become assimilated into Nguni traditional healing rituals?

To better understand how brands become assimilated into Nguni traditional healing rituals, the following sections present the voices of healers and clients. These firsthand accounts uncover the rationale behind choosing specific brands and illustrate how these brands have become intertwined into the Nguni cultural healing practices. The quotes are presented in both English and the original vernacular to preserve the authenticity of participants' voices.

5.6.1. Healers' perspective

OK these brands are important, we in our belief the people that live within us, the people we refer to as ancestors. They passed on, using different kinds of alcohol more especially alcohol spirits, some passed on using white spirits some red (brandy) and so on. Some passed on using even a cold drink, so usually we try by all means to accommodate everyone to avoid one coming back and saying 'I didn't get my snuff, iBoxer, I didn't get, yes things of that nature. English (P1:16:104).

Ok uyabona ezi'brands zibalulekile kuthi, thina kwinkolo yethu, sikholwa ukthi abantu abaphila nathi aba esiye sithi zizinyanya. Badlula kweli, besibenzisa intobi ngentlobo zotywala ikakhulu'kazi ugologo, abanye badlula besebenzisa ugologo omhlophe abanye besebenzisa obumbomvu njalo. Banye badlula besebenzisa idrink yasevenkileni, so siye sizame ngayo yonke indlela ukubanelisa bonke ukuze kungabikh okhalazayo ukuthi andiyifumananga into yami, ibohxer mhlawumbe into ezinjalo nje. Vernacular (P1:16:104).

Ok, I'm grateful for your question, let us remember that there are people that are or were part of our family, that are our great forefathers that used to drink. This thing is similar to now because there are people that say, I can't drink white spirits they don't treat me well, and that is because before, there were people that drank white spirits only and didn't like the red spirits who said the red/brand didn't treat them well and then there are those who say they prefer/enjoy brandy. We then take both and mix them up with candles so that when we begin the ceremony and call upon the ancestors bo'Bhele, boKhubone, boNtanda Phakanyiswe, even that one that drinks this type of alcohol must rise and shine to show their support for the ceremony. English (P2:10:101).

Ok, ndiyabulela lombuzo. kubalulekile ukukhumbula ukuthi kukhona abantu ababengabomndeni abangabomkhulu nokhokho ababesela utywala. Lento ifana nangoku ngoba kukhona abantu abathi, andibuseli utywala obumhlophe abundiphathi kahle, leyonto iyefana ke nakudala kunabantu ababesela utywala obumhlophe kuphela ababengabuthandi utywala obubomvu, ababethi nabo utywala obubomvu abubaphathi kakuhle kueb sekubakhona aba abathi bakhetha bathanda ibrandi. Siyeke sithathe zombini sizidibanise ngama'khandlela khona uma siqala umsebenzi sibabize abangasekho bo'Bhele, boKhubone, boNtanda Phakanyiswe, naye nalowo owayethi asele lentlobo yotywala makasukume azibonakalise abekhona ekhaya awufezekese umsebenzi nescello somndeni. Vernacular (P2:10:101).

Because it can happen that umkhulu may be used to drink, and he says when you trying to get umkhulu enter the home with umdokwe and umqobothi only and say ' I said I love red stuff'. Which then means we must now bring both because we won't know if also drank the red alcohol and white spirits and maybe he has a wifey or they used to drink together with ugogo when they were alive. If we fetching the both of them at the gates we must bring both white and the red alcohol. English (P10:10:104).

Ngoba kungenzeka ukuthi umkhulu ayesela utywala, nithi xa nizama ukumfaka egheyithini apha ekhayeni nimfaka ngomdokwe nomqombothi kuphela athi 'ndithe ndithanda ugologo obomvu'. Okuthi ke kusho ukuthi kumele ke manje sizilethe zombili, ngoba ngeke sazi ukuthi mhlawumbe wayebuphuza lalobu obubomvu noma nalobu obumbhlophe, futhi mhlape unomfazi naye babephuza bobabili no'gogo besaphila kweli. If sibalanda bobabili egeythini kuyaphoqa size nazo zombili lobu obumbhlophe nalobu obumbomvu utshwala. Vernacular (P10:10:104).

5.6.2. Clients' narrative

Because alcohol is used to communicate with ancestors. Some of them passed away having started to live an English/modern life, while others were still living in the ways of the people. Therefore, the aim is for them to gather all of them to reach them, so that even if he/she likes white alcohol spirits stuff or if they like brown alcohol they get that alcohol. And traditional alcohol used to be there and is used to unite all the ancestors because they all drank it. English (P13:12:108)

Ngoba utshwala busetshenziswa kanjalo ukuxhumana nabantu abangasekho/amadlozi. Abanye babo badlula sebeqalile ukuphila impilo yesiNgisi/yesimanje, kanti abanye bebesaphila ngezindlela zabantu. Ngakho-ke inhloso wukuba baqoqe bonke ukuze bafinyelele kubo, ukuze kuthi noma ethanda abasebenzi bemimoya yotshwala abamhlophe noma ethanda utshwala obunsundu bathole lobo tshwala. Notshwala besintu babukhona futhi busetshenziswa ukuhlanganisa wonke amadlozi ngoba abuphuzile wonke. Vernacular (P13:12:108).

We grow with them in existence, it's a norm. There is tradition and then there is a norm the two are different from one another. English (P14:10:108).

Sikhule zikhona, sisithethe. Kukhona isiko nesthethethe zahlukene. Vernacular (P14:10:108).

We include all these things because the ancestors love/used these things when they were alive, and now we are asking them to bless the healing ceremony by having these things and making sure we have these items. English (P11:20:108).

Zonke lezi zinto sizifaka ngoba zithandwa amadlozi/babekade bezisebenzisa besaphila, manje sesicela ukuthi babusise umcimbi wokwelapha ngokuba nalezi zinto futhi siqinisekise ukuthi sinalezi zinto. Vernacular (P11:20:108).

Q.C4 Why is the use of these brand important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals?

The perspectives of healers and clients offer rich insights into why the use of specific brands is considered critical to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals. The following sections

present their narratives, preserving the authenticity of their voices in both English and the original vernacular.

5.6.3. Healers' perspective

They are important because the ceremony can't happen without these things, it's very important that they are there for the ceremony in all honesty. They work in connecting you with the ancestors because when I am working there emsamo, they are placed here and are being used to pour them each of the bottle I must spill so the ancestors can have a drink. English (P7:12:104).

zibalulekile kuba akukwazeki ukuthi uqhubeke zingekho ezizinto, Ziyadingeka nje ngempela ukuthi mazibe khona ewe. Ziyasebenza nje, ngoba kaloku xa ngabe ndisenza phana emsama, let's say, sezibekwe apha zonke, seziyasebenza ngoku nhe. Funeka ndizithele phansi, ewe ibhotile ngalinye funeka ndithele apha phansi. Ewe ukuze bakwazi ukuncamla. Vernacular (P7:12:104).

The white spirits connect me with the ancestors with the ones that are living in need of healing so that the patient can regain health and that is why we also add the other things so they can all work including umgqombothi and amaheru. English (P5:16:110).

Utwyala obumhlophe ndibusebenzisa ukuze ndixhumanise abangasekho naba abasaphila, abafuna ukwelatshwa khona ukuze ikwazi impilo ibuye. Ingakho ke siye sifake nezinye izinto khona zizodibana zonke nawo umgqombothi nama'hewu Vernacular (P5:16:110).

5.6.4. Clients' perspective

It's important in that essential what we doing here with this ceremony is to bring together the ancestors and those that are still living. Say we are cleansing, the cleansing is for those that are living so that they are released/blessed in all that they wish for and not be blocked by the ancestors because there are things they aren't happy about. English (P11:15:110).

Kubalekile ngalonto, ngoba eyona nto esiyenzayo apha ngalomsebenzi kukudibanisa abantu abaleleyo nabantu aphilayo. Xa thiwa kuyahlanjwa kuhlanjwa aba abaphilayo ukuze bakhululeke imisebenzi yabo yonke bangaphazamiswa ngaba abaleleyo Kubekhona izinto abazikhalazelayo kkulowo ohlanjwayo. Vernacular (P11:15:110).

They connect us with the ancestors of this family. English (P14:8:106).

Ngoba zixhumanisa nabantu abadala balomndeni. Vernacular (P14:8:106).

It's important in that regard because what is important here is to bring together the ancestors and those that are still living. Even when cleansing, the cleansing is for those that are still live so that they are relieved in all that they wish for and be blocked by the ancestors because there are things they aren't happy about. English (P13:12:108)

Zibalulekile kuba okubalulekileyo apha kukuhlanganisa izinyanya kunye naba baphilayo. Naxa kuhlanjululwa, ukuhlanjululwa kwenzelwe abo basaphila ukuze bakhululeke kuyo yonke into

abayifunayo kwaye bathintelwe zizinyanya kuba kukho izinto ezingonwabanga ngazo. Vernacular (P13:12:108).

The study reveals that Nguni cultural adaptation and the assimilation of brands into Nguni healing rituals is an established practice. Both healers and participants provided compelling evidence of this integration. Healers noted that ancestors are honoured with items they preferred or used while alive. For instance, it was observed that ancestors used various types of alcohol, including specific brands, as well as other items like white (Smirnoff Vodka) and red spirits (Commando Brandy) or even cold drinks. This practice ensures that all ancestors are properly acknowledged, avoiding dissatisfaction that might arise if certain items are omitted.

Patients similarly noted that brands are included in rituals as a means of respecting what their ancestors valued in their lifetimes, by incorporating items that were beloved by the deceased, both healers and patients emphasised the evolving relationship between brands and rituals.

In this study, it is revealed that certain branded items are used in healing Nguni rituals, but it also provides insight into a cultural practice that repurposes commercial brands into sacred religious objects. These products are then transformed from commercial material into ritual technologies, the spiritual link between the living beings of these worlds and their ancestors who have passed. The object changes (reconstituting itself), illustrating how consumer market items acquire a spiritual value in religious ceremonies. The development of the "meaning" system illustrates that Nguni cultural systems can redefine the very limits that detach their spiritual tradition from contemporary consumer practices.

The healers ask patients to buy from brands that they favour because such brands have become so integral to identifying their ancestors. These branded items act as a memory trigger; they help people keep ancestral spirits alive across ritual areas. Brands endure in a cultural pattern because they acknowledge their ancestral roots and retain their symbolic components and relations. Brand assimilation allows people to retain cultural practices and beliefs when they move to new physical locations.

Scholars can study cultural tradition exchange between different communities through research data, which helps them determine when cultural practices transform into appropriative actions. The Nguni case demonstrates that brand adaptation through ritual practices follows Rogers' (2006) four-type framework, which enables transculturation instead of one-way appropriation. The cultural agents of this group actively transmute outside products through their own meaning and interpretation, in order that their spiritual leadership might be sustained. The community can be exploited because corporations use their power to extract

money from cultural practices that hold profound symbolic value for its members. The participants showed their anxiety about how their work could become distorted through misuse because, as Matthes (2019) shows, cultural appropriation reaches its highest point when commercial businesses use cultural elements without getting permission from affected minority groups.

The Nguni communities show their ability to adapt to change through their practice of adding modern brands to their traditional rituals, enabling them to preserve their cultural heritage. The research participants showed how cultural preservation occurs through their practice of transforming modern consumer goods into sacred objects that preserve their original cosmic design. The research of Cruz and his colleagues (2023) shows that cultural adaptation develops through continuous dialogue between community identity, consumer culture and existing power systems. Brands achieve cultural importance through community members who transform them into spiritual tools which they use to create new sacred practices with modern objects.

5.7. Brands' cultural significance in Nguni healing

Research shows that Nguni healing ritual brands possess multiple cultural values because healers and participants maintain control over market participants. The different levels of economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital between healers, the suppliers, the retailers and brands determine their ability to control ritual goods. Bourdieu (1986, as cited in Denny and Östberg, 2025:912) argues that brands that possess substantial symbolic capital tend to improve people's beliefs about ritual validity, but traditional leaders maintain control over market access and cultural authenticity. Recent research underscores that brands develop cultural value through multiple stages of legitimacy establishment and identity development which depend on symbolic capital for maintaining cultural connection (Fournier & Alvarez, 2019:523).

This section investigates the fourth theme, the significance of brands within Nguni traditional healing rituals, offering insights into how brands are valued and interpreted in the context of these practices. It examines the meanings attributed to brands by healers and participants and how these meanings influence their role in the healing process. The following quotations, sourced from interviews with both healers and participants, illustrate the various ways in which brands are imbued with significance and the impact this has on traditional healing practices. These narratives reveal the interplay between modern branding and traditional spiritual values, highlighting the evolving role of brands within Nguni rituals.

Question Q.C5 delved into both healers' and clients' views on the potential impact if specific brands were absent from Nguni traditional healing rituals. Question Q.C6 explored whether the Nguni healing rituals could still succeed in the absence of such brands.

Section 5.7.1. presents the healers' perspectives in response to Question Q.C5, while Section 5.7.2 captures the clients' reflections on the same matter. Similarly, Section 5.7.3. provides the healers' insights into Question Q.C6 and Section 5.7.4. reflects the clients' opinions on whether Nguni traditional healing rituals can succeed without the presence of these brands, offering more detailed personal accounts from the clients.

Q.C5 What would the impact be if these brands were absent in the Nguni traditional healing ritual?

To explore the potential consequences of brand absence in greater detail, the following sections present the narratives of healers and clients. Their reflections shed light on how the lack of certain brands may influence the outcomes and perceived success of Nguni traditional healing rituals, with quotations offered in both English and the original vernacular.

5.7.1. Healers' narrative

It's impossible for the ceremony to happen without these things, it's very important that they are there for the ceremony in all honesty. They work in connecting you with the ancestors because when I am working there emsamo, let's say the products are all placed they are placed here and are being used, I will pour them emsamu, each of the bottle I must spill so the ancestors can have a drink. English (P7:12:14).

akukwazeki ukuthi uqhubeke umsebenzi zingekho ezizinto, Ziyadingeka nje ngempela ukuthi mazibe khona ewe. Ziyasebenza nje, ngoba kaloku xa ngabe ndisenza phana emsama, let's say, sezibekwe apha zonke, seziyasebenza ngoku nhe. Funeka ndizithele phansi, ewe ibhotile ngalinye funeka ndithele apha phansi. Ewe ukuze bakwazi ukuncamla. Vernacular (P7:12:14).

you must purchase that particular type of alcohol that they used to consume, because you will buy them something, something that they never used to consume. Then it's as though you didn't do the ceremony at all, so you must purchase that which they used to consume in that home. What did the grandmother like, she liked sweets. English (P16:21:110).

kufanele uthenge lolo hlobo lotshwala ababeluphuza, ngoba uzobathengela okuthile, into ababengakaze bakudle. Bese kuba sengathi awuwenzanga nhlobo umcimbi, ngakho kufanele uthenge lokho abebekudla kulelo khaya. Wayethandani ugogo, wayethanda oswid. Vernacular (P16:21:110).

You will find yourself having to redo the ceremony because you didn't have all the things you suppose to have had in the ritual. English (15:33:102).

Uzozithola sekufanele wenze kabusha umcimbi ngoba ubungenazo zonke izinto ocabanga ukuthi ubenazo kulo mkhuba. Vernacular (15:33:102).

5.7.2. Clients' narrative

The ceremony would not succeed because all these people we are saying we are bringing together. There are those that will not be happy with the ceremony that is being carried out and turn their back on the home because they were not included in the ceremony when they didn't get the things they needed. English (P11:16:116).

Umcimbi ubungeke uphumelele ngoba bonke laba bantu sithi siyabahlanganisa. Kukhona abangeke bajabule ngomcimbi owenziwayo bafulathele ikhaya ngoba abafakwanga emcimbini ngesikhathi bengazitholanga izinto abazidingayo. Vernacular (P11:16:116).

Ha ana, there is no ceremony without these brands. English (P14:08:106)

Ha ana, awukho umsebenzi ngaphandle kwezizinto. Vernacular (P14:08:106)

Q.C6 Will the Nguni traditional healing rituals still succeed if these brands are not present?

To delve further into whether Nguni traditional healing rituals could succeed without these brands, the following sections present perspectives from healers and clients. Their insights provide a nuanced understanding of how brand absence might affect the ritual's success, both practically and spiritually.

5.7.3. Healers' perspective

The ceremony would never be a success because you can do the ceremony, but it will come back, and the ancestors will come to you in your dreams in your visions and ask why didn't you cater for my needs, that's how it is. English (P1:19:108)

Umsebenzi awungeke uphumelele, wena ongawenza nje umsebenzi, kodwa uzobuya, abaphansi/izinyanya zizobuya kuwe emaphupheni nakwimi'bono zikubuze kuthe ungazange uzinake izidingo zethu. Injalo ke. Vernacular ((P1:19:108).

Yes, the ceremony can happen without the Smirnoff Vodka. English (12:22:114)

Ewe ungaqhubeka umsebenzi ngaphandle kweSmirnoff Vodka. Vernacular (12:22:114).

Yes, you can continue to do the ceremony if there will be another white alcohol and buy another brand of red alcohol and then have a chicken you will use to ask for forgiveness and state I didn't get the white alcohol, whatever you will be asking for forgiveness for in emsamo there must be something that is a chicken because you can't just apologise without bringing or offering anything. English (P10:19:110).

Ewe Yebo umsebenzi ungaqhubeka if kuzobakhona utywala obumhlophe and then uthenge enye ibrand yotywala obubomvu, mese ubanekukhu ozysebeznisa ukucela uxolo uchaze ukuthi awubutholanga utywala obumhlophe, noma yini oyixoliselayo imsamo kumele kubekhona inkukhu ngoba awukwazi ukuvele uxolise nje ngaphandle kuhlaba. Vernacular (P10:19:110).

5.7.4. Clients' perspective

The ceremony would not succeed, because all these people we are saying we are bringing together. There are those that will not be happy, with the ceremony that is being carried out and turn their back on the home because they were not included in the ceremony when they didn't get the things they needed. English (P13:14:114).

Ungangaphumeleli ngoba kaloku ababantu bonke ngoba sisithi sibadibanisa bonke, bakhona abangazokonwaba kulomsebenzi owenziwayo apha. Bazoliflathela ikhaya, ngoba bona khange bagqokwe kulomsebenzi. Vernacular (P13:14:114).

Ha aaa.... there is no ceremony without these brands. English (P14:11:114)

Ha aaa,.... Awukho umsebenzi ngaphandle kwalezi'zinto. Vernacular (P14:11:114)

Yes, it can be a success but very difficult because those are the things they need when we work, we gather all those things when we do the ceremony we have to do it fully and gather them all and make sure that way the ceremony is beautiful (success). English (P11:17:114).

Ewe ungaphumela ndzima kodwa ngoba kaloku, ezizinto, zizo abazifunayo xa sisebenza. Siye siziqoqe zonke xa senza umsebenzi, funeka siwenze ngokuphelele zisilande zonke ziphelele ukuze umsebenzi ubemhle. Vernacular (P11:17:114).

The research aimed to assess the importance of brands in the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals and to explore the potential consequences of their absence. While both healers and participants generally emphasised the significance of specific brands, contradictions emerged between the two groups. Some healers and clients expressed that certain ancestors might feel excluded from the ceremony if specific brands or items they valued were missing, leading to potential discontent and a withdrawal of ancestral support. This group maintained that the absence of these brands would render the ceremony incomplete.

Conversely, an equally significant number of healers and clients believed that brands could be substituted without compromising the ritual's expressed effectiveness. These differing perspectives highlight the nuanced and sometimes conflicting views on the role of brands in Nguni healing rituals, providing valuable insights into the study's objective of understanding their importance and the implications of their absence. An example of this is when a chicken is presented as an offering to seek forgiveness and to request the ancestors' permission to use a substitute brand.

While brands enhance the perceived efficacy of these rituals, Nguni traditional healing ceremonies theoretically remain grounded in spiritual practices, ancestral invocations, and healer-client interactions – elements that precede the inclusion of commercial brands (Mpofu, 2016:243). The use of brands is a relatively modern adaptation and does not define the ritual's core essence (Hammond-Tooke, 2014:103).

However, the absence of specific brands may reduce confidence among both healers and clients, as these items have come to symbolise spiritual potency and reliability. Without them, participants might perceive the ritual as lacking an essential element, which could affect the emotional and psychological investment in its success (Flick, 2018:162). Although the ritual may still achieve its intended spiritual outcomes, the absence of familiar brands may lead to uncertainty or diminished expectations, as consumer behaviour often shifts under uncertain conditions (Faraji-Rad, Ng & Batra, 2021:5).

5.8. Substitute brands

The research uncovers that Nguni healing rituals facilitate substitution branding through cultural branding and practice theory concepts. Identity myths and symbolic values and symbolic forms of the world of rituals, which are controlled by the means of alternate materials, colours and origin stories that are substituted for them through materials. This collective meaning can only remain in the collective memory. When market substitutions destroy the link between myth and market, the understanding of ritual effectiveness becomes contested. As highlighted by Honjo (2020:63) in his research on cultural branding, brands are valued based upon the ability of brands to speak for cultural myths, their cultural myths and culture. In the context of branding practices, scholars of sacred consumption spaces reveal that symbolic attributes matter more than the functional similarities of products, leading to people turning away from such substitute brands even when the materials of the brands are interchangeable (Chea, 2024:1152).

The fifth and final theme explores the use of substitute brands within Nguni traditional healing rituals, focusing on how alternative brands are employed when traditional or preferred brands are unavailable. This research examines the extent to which these alternative substitutes affect the claimed efficacy of, and the perceived credibility of, a healing process. Key quotes based on dialogue with both healers and participants, these quotations reflect on the understanding of how substitute brands are viewed and whether and what function substitute brands have to play in either maintaining or reversing the effectiveness of traditional healing. Such stories

provide insight into how the replacement of one brand with another affects the ritual, the integrity of the ritual and the beliefs of participants.

Question Q.C7 investigated whether there are substitute brands that could be used in place of those brands traditionally employed, while still ensuring the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals. Question Q.C8 sought further insights into the role of brands in contributing to the success of these rituals.

Section 5.8.1. presents the healers' perspectives on the possibility of substituting brands in response to Question Q.C7, while Section 5.8.2. reflects the clients' viewpoints on the same issue. Similarly, Section 5.8.3. offers healers' additional insights into Question Q.C8 and Section 5.8.4. captures the clients' thoughts, providing further reflections on the importance of brands to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals.

Q.C7 Are there substitute brands that can be used to replace these brands for the Nguni traditional healing ritual to still succeed?

The perspectives of healers and clients provide valuable insights into the use of substitute brands in Nguni traditional healing rituals. The following sections offer direct quotations, capturing the participants' views on how these substitutes maintain the ritual's success.

5.8.1. Healers' perspective

You mean like the brandies? Ewe, I can use other brands, but I don't use Nsu, I use Tamboti or Inyoni I don't use iNsu because my ancestors don't know it. English (P4:19:111).

Usho nje ngebranti? Ewe zikhona ezinye endingazisebenzisa, kodwa andiyisebenzisi iNsu, ndisebenzisa uTamboti or Inyoni, Andiyisebenzisi iNsu ngoba abasekhaya abangasekho abayazi. Vernacular (P4:19:111).

No, the ceremony won't be a success. You can do the ceremony but that will be a party and guests will eat. Whoever arrives after another Sangoma who arrives will ask if the ceremony was done, and you will answer yes I did do the ceremony, and the other Sangoma will tell say no we don't see that ceremony anywhere. English (P16:21:110).

Cha, umsebenzi ngeke uphumelele. Ungawenza nje wona kodwa loko kuyofana nokuthi uzenzela iparty nabakhona bazodla nje. Uzothi arike ngemuva kwaleso sangoma uzobuza ukuthi ubusuwenziwe yini umsebenzi, wena uzophendula uthi yebo ngiwenzile umsebenzi, mese lesi esinye iSangoma sikutshela ukuthi ay cha asiwuboni lowo'msebenzi ndawo. English (P16:21:110).

No, their ceremony will not succeed. The ceremony will not be a success because the ancestors used these items. These exact items are required, not any other brand. English (P7:16:110).

Cha umcimbi wabo ngeke uphumelele. Umcimbi ngeke ube yimpumelelo ngoba amadlozi asebenzisa lezi zinto. Lezi zinto ezidingekayo ziyadingeka, hhayi ezinye izinhlobo. English (P7:16:110).

5.8.2. Clients' narrative

It's just that it's a must for Umqombothi to be present, that one is the most important. But should it not be present because [we] are trying to appease the ancestors, we try to make sure that they are happy by making sure we have all the types of alcohol important. However, in the event we can't get a Smirnoff, but as long as there is white alcohol and the brown alcohol. If there is not Commando the man in the family buy the alcohol. But these are the ones that I can recall Commando, Smirnoff, but men in the know which replacements to buy because they consume the alcohol during the rituals. English (P13:15:118).

Ukuthi kunyanzelekisa ukuthi umqombothi mawube khona uwona onyanzeleke kakhulu, kodwa xa kuthe wangabikho, kuba suke sizama ukubancenga nabo ke siyesifune zibekhona zonke ezinhlobo kodwa xa ithe ynagabisiso iSmirnoff, kodwa as long as kuzobakhona utywala obumhlophe nobu obubrowni futhi mabubekhona. Xa ithe yangabikho iCommando, andinguye umuntu ke oye athenge kakhulu ixesha elininzi kuye kuthenge abantu abango'tata. Kodwa zezi endizikhumbulayo iCommando ne neSmirnoff. Kodwa bona abantu abango'tata bayazazi ngoba suke kubutywala babo. Vernacular (P13:15:118).

Yes, there are brands that can be used as substitutes, let me give you an example, which brand can I name, Viceroy. Participant 5 steps in: That is another favourite of the elderly/ancestors, its labelled Viceroy [Brandy] its name. Participant 4: It was used by the grandfathers from the olden days, Including Gordons as well, it was there, the elderly used to drink it. It's like that young man. Forget the fact that I will use the words vodka but white brandy and red brandy mostly, it was merely a matter of who the elderly men in your family drank in the family you were raised in, that is what is used/done and be placed there as part of the ceremony. English (P14:12:116).

Zikhona, zokwenzela umzekelo, eyphi ibranti...iViceroy. Partici 5 steps in, Yha henye yamakhehla, iViceroy ibhaliwe Viceroy igama layo. Participant 4: Ibikade isenyeziswa amakhehla kudala, nayo iGordons lena ibikade ikhona kaloku amakhehla ebekade eyisebenzisa, injalo ke ndoda. Ushiye ukuthi ndizokhipha igama leVodka kodwa manjena ibranti emhlophe nebranti embomvu nje, kushiyana otatomkhulu bethu nendlela okhule ngayo, kwenziwa lento zibekwe laphana. Vernacular (P14:12:116).

Yes, there are brands that can be used as substitutes, let me give you an example, which brand can I name, Viceroy. (P14:12:116).

Yebo akhona amanyé ama'brands angasetshenziswa, ithi ngikunikeze umzekelo, eyphi ibrand engingayisho, Viceroy. Vernacular ((P14:12:116).

Q.C8 Is there more that you can share about the role of brands to the success of the Nguni traditional healing rituals?

To further explore the role of brands in the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals, the following sections provide direct insights from healers and clients. These narratives offer a

deeper understanding of how brands contribute to both the functional and symbolic dimensions of the healing process.

5.8.3. Healers' perspective

All these products and brands are significant, they have a role in the ceremony because you can't have the ceremony without using matches, you can't have the ceremony without a candle. English (P6:15:115).

Zonke ezizint nezibrands zibalulekile zinedima eziydlalayo kulomsebenzi, ngoba awungeke ukwazi ukuba nawo lomsebenzi ngaphandle kwazo ezizinto, awunakukwazi ukuthi ubanomsebenzi lingekho ikhandlela. Vernacular (P6:15:115).

Yes, like when I use brandy I also have sweets, apples, cake for the kids that have passed on at a young age. Then there is bread for the grandfathers and then there is bambamo for the elderly (ancestors) a white one and have a Xhosa one. Those are the things I use, then these other traditional foods that the ancestors used when they were still living. So by using them you reach out to the ancestors. And then eMsamo it's not just anyone that must kneel eMsamo [place of communicating with the ancestors] from the family, it must be someone from the family if that person isn't present because we sometimes come across family with family members that are Christians. You will find that the one that is a Christian must not come close to uMsamo because there eMsamo you will find they don't get along with the ancestors because they see them as demons, so they can be present but only consume food and drinks that were not mentioned in the rituals because the side effect might be the ancestors might unleash their anger or hurt or frustration on the one that has chosen to be saved. If the person isn't present we want them to come, while they aren't present physical they are present spiritually. But if you don't go and speak to your ancestors the ancestors also sit and watch you but you must also be thankful for what has been given to you by the ancestors and not go and ask for more things without being thankful. English (P4:20:114).

Kufana naxa ndisebenzisa ibrandi, ndibanazo nesweets, ama'apile, amakhekhe for inagane ezingasekho ingane ezishone zisencane. Mese kubakhona isinkwa sama'khehla mese kuba'khona imbambamo for abantu abadala izinyanya emhlophe neyesiXhosa. Ezo izinto endizisebenzisayo, kube sekubakhona ukudla kwesintu, ukudla okwakudliwa ngabaphansi besaphila. Ngokwenze njalo uye ke ube usuxhumana nabaphansi abangasekho. Mese emuva kwaloko akuyena noma ubani ozogoba eMsamo lana emdenini. Kumele kube umuntu walana emndenini, uma engekho owalana emndenini ngoba kuyenzeka kwesinye isikhathi sihlangani nemindeni engenayo imindeni, mhlambe umndeni wakho ama'kholwa. Uzothola ukuthi lona okholwayo akumele asondele eMsamo ngoba uzothola ukuthi eMsamo abazwani nabaphansi ngoba bababona nje ngama'demons. Lapho ke bangabakhona kodwa badle ukudla baphuze neziphuzo ebezingabikwanga eMsamo emasikweni, ngoba imiphumela ingase ibe mibi kakhulu, abaphansi bangasi bakhipele ulaka lwabo noma ukudinwa bekukhiphela kulona usekhethe ukusindiswa yena. Noxa ilungu lomndeni lingekho ngokwenyama, sifuna babekhona ngoko'moya. Kodwa uma ungayi uyokhuluma nabo abaphansi nabo bayahlala bakubuke, so kufuneka nawe uyobonga for izinto abakuphe zona abaphansi ungasuki uyofuna ezinye izinto. Vernacular (P4:20:114).

I place these items eMsamu and pour them on iNqayi, umqombothi on the smaller nqayi and then the bottle in between the two nqayi one for umqombothi and the other for amaheru. And then there must be beers on the sides and candles the beer must be Black Label. Because it connects with the ancestors, I also use Castle Milk Stout, I use the stout because there are patients that arrive, I then ask them if they don't have any specific medication they are taking. Then when I learn that they are taking a specific treatment, they must continue with their treatment, then now the stout helps to bring down the impact of umuthi so that the muthi doesn't impact the patient's illness with the illness they are here to see me for. From the treatment they are using so the stout helps with that. An example people high blood pressure, HIV the stout is so that it doesn't disturb the treatment you are on, the stout is there to make sure that your health remains on the level you are on your treatment. You must not quit your treatment, you must continue to use the treatment prescribed to you by the doctor then also use the one given to you here. So that your life can continue. English (P5:19:119).

Ndiyendibe ezizinto eMsamu, ndizithele kwi'nqayi, ndithele umqombothi enqayini encinci ndibeke ibhotile Phakathi kwazo zombili inqayi ezi, lena enye yomqombothi nalena enye endixhuma naba'phansi, ndiye ndisebenzise neCastler Milk Stout, ndiye ndisebenzise iStout ngoba kukhona nkukhona abantu abafika, mese ngiyababuza ukuthi abanazo yini izigulo ezifuna bathathe imedication ethile. Kuthi ke uma ngithola ukuthi kukhona imedication eqondene nabo abaythathayo, ngiye ngithi abaqhubeka nayo itreatment yabo, kuthi ke manje istout siyasiza ukwehlisa imiphumela yemuthi, khona umuthi uphazamise izigulo zomuntu lezi abaze lana ukuzongibonela zona. Kule treatment abaythathayo istout siyasiza ngaloko. Isibonelo abantu abane'high blood pressure, abane'HIV istout sense ukuthi imithi angaphazamisani netreatment yabo. IStout lesi sikhona ukuzi sibe isiqiniseko ukuthi impilo yakho ayiphazamiseki uyaqhubeka uhlale ukule'level okuyona kutreatment yakho. Akumele uyiyeke itreatment, kumele uqhubeka uyisebenzise itreatment oyinikiwe ngabo dokotela, mese usebenzise naloku okunikiwe lana. Khona impilo yakho izoqhubeka. Vernacular (P5:19:119).

5.8.4. Clients' perspective

forget the fact that I'm going to use the word vodka but listen, white spirit and brand it all depends on our elderly men and the way we were raised. This is how it's done, they are placed there. Participant client 5 steps in: To add to what my brother has said, it's true what has been said because If you are to do a traditional ceremony you can't do it without umqombothi, without having took umthobo nomhlanti and mix and drain. Umqombothi takes 5 days to brew, it's not a drink you make to drink tomorrow, No. it takes 5 days being brewed, You obviously must have a brandy Commando and Smirnoff. If you have the means or those that have the means also slaughter a sheep or something small what they call a small mpahla or slaughters a white chicken (Ndubane) and those with more means would slaughter something bigger. English (P12:15:118).

Ushiye ukuthi ndizokhipha igama leVodka kodwa manjena ibranti emhlophe nebranti embomvu nje, kushiyana otatomkhulu bethu nendlela okhule ngayo, kwenziwa lento zibekwe laphana. Participant client 5 steps in: Uku eda kulento kamfowethu, iyiyi lento ekaykhulumayo ngoba umsebenzi wakho oma uwenza ngoketho lwesintu, uma ungenamqombothi ungenzanga iKIng Korn, ungaythathanga

imithombo neminanti uyihlanganise uwuhluze uthatha 5 days, umgqombothi, akuwona umake to drink 2 days, ha aaa, uthatha 5 days, uyabiliswa, wenziwe unensipho zakhona uthathwe ubekwe eceleni umgqombothi zakhathsharara, besekuthiwani, bese uthathwa ubekwe lapha efatshini usuhluziwe, ngoku ngifuna uthi uzodliwa, obvious funeka ubenalo ibhodlela elibomvu eli esilitshoyo esi liCommando ubenaso iSmirnoff. Xangaba awunwo Amandla kubantu abnawo amandla bebehlinza amagusha esintu into encane ekuthiwa impahla encane okanye uhlinze inkukhu. Participant client 4 steps in: Abantu abanganawo Amandla bebenhlinza inkukhu abanwo Amandla bahlinze igusha. Participant client 5 continues: emhlophe untombane, inkukhu emhlophe untombane. Vernacular (P12:15:118).

One of the study's objectives was to examine whether substitute brands could be integrated into Nguni traditional healing rituals. This inquiry was conducted under the theme of brand substitution within Nguni healing rituals, uncovering consistent responses among both healers and patients, albeit with divergent perspectives on the role of brands in these sacred practices. Some healers noted that brands could be replaced if *Ukuyphahlela* (the formal process of seeking ancestral approval) was done. By contrast, other healers considered that substituting brands could undermine the perceived authenticity of the ritual. As per the present study, healers have differing beliefs about rituals because either they recommend proper substitution techniques for rituals, or they see certain brands as having to be utilised in order for rituals to succeed.

Some of the patients interviewed agreed with the perspective of brands, and said substitutes may be acceptable if they are brands that the patient's ancestors used when they were alive. Patient accounts felt authentic because they were tied to ancestral heritage and historical memories that they referred to as "what our elders used". According to the healer narratives, these accounts, their main claims were based on their rendering of *Ukuyphahlela* rituals and their ritual authority. The line has to be drawn where individuals in separate roles are considered to deserve different standards of acceptance because patients want to keep their people's culture, while healers are required to follow the teachings of the religion and protect the sacred beliefs.

These findings highlight the complexity involved in balancing traditional practices with substitute brands, reflecting theories of ritual adaptation, which propose that the inclusion of new elements may either preserve or challenge the core integrity of traditional practices (Harrison, 2018:94). The dataset shows three main findings about the research: (a) substitution occurs based on specific conditions instead of being a fixed requirement; (b) people feel more danger when they perform rituals which have high sacred value (such as initiation and *ukubuyisa*) than when they perform rituals with low sacred value or routine protective practices; and (c) physical characteristics of substitutes including colour, smell, touch and cleanliness serve as indicators which help people accept certain alternatives better than others. The

research participants established that brands should never be replaced when a brand maintains its ancestral heritage or when it represents a family tradition of medicinal formulas.

5.9. Conclusion

Through these findings, this study provides valuable insight into the complex role play of brands in Nguni traditional healing rituals. Brands are clearly far from merely new additions to existing modern techniques of Nguni healing rites — they are now embedded in the fabric of the Nguni people's cultural and spiritual psyche. Such brand adaptation and assimilation into traditional healing rituals has emerged in response to the changing dynamics of consumerism, linking contemporary consumers in the modern context to a well-established religion and spirituality practice (Smith, 2019a:45). Both healers and participants acknowledge the strong effect that brands play in shaping the experienced efficacy of rituals (with severe implications when these brands are absent (Williams, 2020:112)

The study also highlighted the divergent views on the substitution of brands within these rituals. While some practitioners believe that brands can be substituted through specific processes of ancestral communication, others argue that such substitutions weaken the experienced authenticity and efficacy of the rituals (Harrison, 2018:94). This conflict highlights the nuanced comprehension of how brands are perceived and utilised within Nguni healing practices.

The research findings were connected to Consumer Culture Theory's four domains which include (i) consumer identities that brands function as ritual identity resources; (ii) marketplace cultures that manifest through healer–client communities and tribal connections; (iii) sociohistorical patterning that results from postcolonial and commercial influences; and (iv) ideological shaping that appears through stated authenticity and sacredness storytelling. The research demonstrates how Nguni healing practices use brands to create spiritual and communal frameworks which expand CCT beyond Western markets (Arnould & Thompson, 2018:20).

The Nguni contexts demonstrate brand community markers through shared consciousness, rituals and moral responsibility, yet these elements follow local cosmological patterns, which contradict previous research about universal branding principles. The research confirms that cultural branding strategies maintain their importance for identity myth development, yet our results demonstrate that identity myths emerge from healer and elder leadership instead of marketer control, thus brands function as cultural meaning carriers (Salazar et al., 2025:210). The research supports new branding theories which demonstrate that branding functions as a

collective effort between brand users and brand owners instead of being a single marketing initiative (Chea, 2024:1150).

In Chapter 6, the focus will shift to providing academic recommendations based on these findings. This next chapter will offer practical and theoretical suggestions for further research, policy implications, and potential strategies for integrating brand considerations into traditional practices while respecting cultural integrity.

CHAPTER 6: ACADEMIC RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Introduction

Given the results found in this research study, various theoretical suggestions can be put forward to help improve the understanding and incorporation of brands into Nguni traditional healing rituals. These suggestions are put forward so to assist in ongoing brand value creation research, to assist in policy development, and offer practical approaches for practitioners.

6.1.1. Broader theoretical implications for marketing

The research findings expand current marketing knowledge by showing how Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) and cultural branding frameworks work in non-Western ritual-based settings. The research shows that Nguni healing practice brands serve as both market symbols and spiritual identity resources, which contradicts the belief that branding stems from marketer control. The research shows that cultural custodians, including healers and elders, now share responsibility for brand meaning creation, which transforms single-brand storytelling into collaborative legitimacy development (Arnould, Crockett, & Eckhardt, 2021:3; Arnould & Thompson, 2018:40; Rokka, 2021:118)

The research results demonstrate that brand community theory requires expansion to include sacred consumption areas, which function differently from digital and lifestyle domains because they use cultural protocols to establish moral responsibility and expressed authenticity. The research extends brand community theory by adding indigenous cultural spaces to its analysis, which enables a deeper understanding of marketplace cultures (Rokka, 2021:118).

The research demonstrates service-dominant logic through its analysis of cultural ritual value co-creation, which depends on symbolic and spiritual elements instead of functional or experiential resources. Marketing theory needs to develop value creation models which include perceived, stated, and experienced expressivity and ethical reflexivity as fundamental elements which can lead to respectful marketing strategies by adopting culturally embedded branding practices (Arnould et al., 2019; Tillotson et al., 2019; Chea, 2024:1150).

6.2. Further research

More studies could be undertaken to investigate in more detail the cultural significance of brands in Nguni healing practices. Obtaining more information on the symbolic importance linked to particular brands can strengthen our understanding of roles and value of brands in

Nguni healing practices. Research could use ethnographic research processes, including wider participant observation techniques and interviews with a larger variety of participants (Smith, 2019a:47).

6.2.1. Explore the impact of modern consumer culture

The effect of modern customer traditions on traditional ones is an emerging topic that asks for further research. Current research should explore the impact of the incorporation of new brands on the authenticity and efficacy of therapeutic elements (Williams, 2020:115). Comparative assessments between various cultural groups could also afford a broader understanding of this issue (Miller, 2015:62).

6.2.2. Assess the long-term effects of brand substitution

Research should examine the long-lasting consequences of replacing established brands with new and improved ones. This involves studying changes in ritual performance and participant satisfaction and general customary consequences of the practices, rather than solely assessing the short-term outcomes. Long-term studies are able to provide valuable insights as to the way such substitutions evolve and their implications for cultural retention (Anderson, 2017:88; Harrison, 2018:96).

6.3. Policy implications

There is scope for policymakers to start to make efforts to create frameworks for the responsible relationship construction of the framework to facilitate respectful engagement with businesses, associations, government, scholars, academics, or institutions within cultural communities. These structures should emerge from discussions with cultural experts, community partners and academics to ensure a dialogue within your culture with its own values and customs. These mechanisms can aid in keeping the proclaimed authenticity of long-established customs while accommodating essential changes (Smith, 2019a:49).

6.3.1. Support cultural education and awareness

Programmes of an educational nature that foster awareness of the cultural importance of brands in traditional healing ceremonies can be valuable. Such initiatives should be aimed at an audience not only the layperson but also the practitioner in order to increase the reverence for these practices. Collaboration and partnering with schools may help to include these topics in curricula appropriate for students (Williams, 2020:118; Brown, 2016:75).

6.4. Practical strategies for practitioners

Healers and providers need to constantly discuss with their communities whether bringing brands to the rituals meets with their communities' views. These conversations will give them a window into community experiences and help ensure that all the pieces of knowledge become better integrated. By using such cooperative methods, both tradition and contemporary influences can be met along the evolution of practices. A culturally sensitive approach helps in choosing brands and using community feedback (Harrison, 2018:99).

6.4.1. Document and share best practices

In this study, healers expressed concerns regarding potential exploitation by organisations and the government. To mitigate these fears, sharing of effective practices among healers and practitioners to cultivate a common framework for respectful collaboration with organisational research, organisations, scientists, and business can help to relieve some of the concerns. This can be done through workshops, conferences, and digital media, offering professionals a platform for sharing their expertise and technique to each other. The documentation of those successful processes can, secondly, be of use for training new healers and researchers, as well as other organisations that have an interest in these sacred traditions (Taylor, 2018:102; Smith, 2019a:52).

6.5. Value to brands, marketers, and managers

Understanding how brands operate in and contribute to Nguni traditional healing practices, therefore, can inform culturally relevant marketing strategies and how these brands can be integrated into Nguni traditional rituals and practices. The results from this research hold substantial potential outcomes for marketers and product managers of brands like Commando Brandy, Smirnoff Vodka, South African Breweries, and other comparable brands.

6.5.1. Enhancing cultural relevance

The study proposes that there are constructive outcomes for brands that link their products to the values and customs of Nguni healing practices as they intensify the cultural meaning of the specific brands to the Nguni traditional healing practising communities. This could be achieved by brands, marketers and product managers developing marketing strategies that feature the historic and cultural meaning of their products and brands to people practising the Nguni traditions, thus fostering a stronger connection with the intended audience (Miller, 2015:65).

6.5.2. Community engagement and support

The results from the investigation can help guide brands, marketers and product managers to better connect with their target audience by intentionally investing in the targeted communities. Companies can explore opportunities like financing cultural events, offering educational materials, or assisting community initiatives tied to traditional healing methods, collaboration with traditional healing societies, and establishing an enabling communication channel for positive traditional activities. Not only will it enhance brand reputation, but it will signal a focus on preserving culture and, consequently, increase brand loyalty and trust. (Williams, 2020:120).

6.5.3. Product adaptation and innovation

When brands have an improved understanding of how their brands have transformed and integrated into rituals, how they are utilised within the Nguni communities, what value they hold, and the penalties when they are absent, that can inform modifications and inventions in products. For example, organizations might develop limited editions or packaging that display traditional rituals or launch additional items that fit cultural rituals. This method can aid brands to stand out and connect better with the targeted market in a crowded marketplace (Brown, 2016:77).

6.5.4. Ethical marketing practices

It is highly important for the marketers, product managers and brands to champion responsible marketing tactics that not only recognise but also celebrate traditional and cultural practices. This means brands, marketers and product managers bearing in mind the latent outcomes of their strategies, avoiding cultural appropriation and making certain that the marketing communications are correspondingly, genuine and sensitive to the cultures they represent. Working together with elders, cultural leaders, community leaders, cultural experts, and practitioners could potentially guarantee that the marketing tactics used are both effective and respectful (Anderson, 2017:90)

6.6. Conclusion

The prime objective of this research was to help businesses have a healthier comprehension of the role of brands in Nguni traditional healing rituals and to guide future research on brand integration in Nguni healing rituals. The study achieved its primary objectives of identifying the brands used in Nguni healing rituals, understanding their observed implication, and documenting the requirements through which these brands influence the success of the healing ritual. According to the research, including brands in traditional Nguni healing rituals

offers both potential and obstacles. However, some of the primary objectives were only partly met, in particular those concerning the deeper symbolic interpretations ascribed to unique brands and the ways ritual participants negotiate meaning and value. These areas require further exploration with alternative methods such as comprehensive ethnography, multi-sited fieldwork, or long-term observation of rituals in a longitudinal study.

Future studies should investigate these behaviours, while creating laws designed to facilitate them should be put into place, establishing proper plans to preserve cultural expressed authenticity by making the mandatory changes. In an inherently dynamic world, the recommendations made in Chapter 6 seek to protect the importance and practical effectiveness of Nguni healing practices. The results of this study also provide managers, marketers, and brands looking to engage with rich and culturally diverse markets with valuable information to help direct them in the next steps in their exploration. By emphasising respectful and analytical consideration, we find within the research the possible approach to cultural integration. It makes possible the formulation of marketing strategies honouring cultural practices instead of exploiting them.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Original Interview Guide - Nguni Xhosa and Zulu Healing Rituals

The purpose of the study is to explore the brands used and participants' perspectives, experience and understanding of the value of brands to Nguni Traditional Healing rituals.

The interview guide is divided into three sections, namely Section A: screening interview questions; Section B: participants' demographics; and Section C: the use of brands during Nguni (Xhosa and Zulu) healing rituals.

Section A: screening interview questions:

Q.A1 Have you attended a Nguni traditional healing ritual in the last 6-12 months?

- Yes: continue to Q.A2
- No: thank you for the time, can you refer me to someone you know who has attended a Nguni traditional healing ritual in the last 6-12 months?

Q.A2 Do you believe Nguni traditional healing rituals work?

- Yes: continue to Q.A3
- No: thank you for your time, can you refer me to someone you know who has attended a Nguni traditional healing ritual in the last 6-12 months?

Q.A3 To your knowledge are there any brands that are important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals?

- Yes: continue to Section B.
- No: thank you for your time, can you refer me to someone you know who has attended or participated in a Nguni traditional healing ritual in the last 6-12 months?

Section B: participants' demographics

As an exploratory study seeking to analyse and explore the brands used and the brand value to the success of Nguni healing rituals amongst Xhosa and Zulu Nguni healing practising people of South Africa, the demographic information below was captured to establish whether or not differences exist in the beliefs and understanding of the role of brands in Nguni healing rituals based on the participants' demographics.

Note: Introduce self. My name is Go through the informed consent form with the participant, which concludes with obtaining permission from the participant to conduct the interview.

Let's begin the interview.

Q.B1 How would you like to be addressed, Mr, Mrs, Miss, Dr, Prof or other?

--

Q.B2 Would you identify as (gender)?

Male	
Female	
Other	
Prefer not to say	

Q.B3 Regarding your age, are you?

<18	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	65 or older

Q.B4 How do you classify your ethnicity?

Black	White	Coloured	Indian	Prefer not to say

Q.B5 In which province do you stay?

Eastern Cape	
Free State	
Gauteng	
KwaZulu-Natal	
Limpopo	

Mpumalanga	
Northern Cape	
North West	
Western Cape	

Q.B6 Is your area of residence

Urban?	
Township?	
Rural?	

Q.B7 What is your level of education?

12th grade/matric or less.	
Completed College or University – obtained a certificate	
University – obtained a degree	

Regarding your occupation, are you? (Multiple answer options)

A student	
A full-time employee	
A part-time employee	
Self-employed	
Unemployed	
Retired	

Section C: the use of brands during Nguni (Xhosa and Zulu) healing rituals

Q.C1 Which brands do you know to be important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals?

--

List all the brands mentioned, clarify brand names and probe for additional brands.

Q.C2 What roles do brands perform within Nguni traditional healing rituals, if any?

Probe the role(s) of all the brands mentioned in Q.C2.

Q.C3 How would you explain how brands become assimilated into Nguni traditional healing rituals?

Q.C4 Why is the use of these brands important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals?

(mention all the brands mentioned in Q.C2/you observe by name)

Q.C5 What would the impact be if these brands were not used in the Nguni traditional healing ritual?

(mention all the brands mentioned in Q.c2/you observe by name)

Q.C6 Will the Nguni traditional healing rituals still succeed if these brands are not present?

(mention all the brands mentioned in Q.C2/you observed/stated by name)

Q.C7 I Are there substitute brands that can be used to replace these brands for the Nguni traditional healing ritual to still succeed?

If **Yes**; please elaborate. If No skip to Q.C8.

(mention all the brands mentioned in Q.C2/you observed/stated by name)

Q.C8 Is there more that you can share about the role of brands to the success of the Nguni traditional healing rituals??

If **Yes**; please elaborate. If No skip to Q.C8.

(mention all the brands mentioned in Q.C2/you observed/stated by name)

Q.C9 Thank you for participating in the study. If I have any further questions or a need for clarification, would you mind if I contact you? Kindly note that your information will be protected and not shared with anyone, as per the CPUT rules of conduct and ethics of conducts here attached.

- Yes (proceed to Q.C10)
- No (end the interview and thank the participant)

Q.C10 What are your contact details?

Thank you!

Appendix B: Interview Guide – Translated to isiZulu and IsiXhosa

In order to achieve effective communication between the participant and the interviewer and to capture the participant's true feedback without losing the meaning during translation, the questions were translated to isiXhosa and isiZulu. Since isiXhosa and isiZulu are quite similar languages, the same translated interview guide was used for both Zulu and Xhosa participants of the study.

Note: Introduce self. Igama u....., ngiyabulela ngelelithuba, ngoba besengichazile lencwaningo eyesikole. Yonke into isizoyikhuluma ngayo izosentshenziselwa ezemfundo kuphela.

Section A: Pre-screening Interview Questions:

Q.A1 **Usuke waya/wabakhona emsebenzini yokulapha ngesintu/ngokwamasiko?** (Have you attended a Nguni traditional healing ritual in the last 6-12 months?)

- Yes: continue to Q.2
- No: Thank you for the time, can you refer me to someone you know who has attended a Nguni traditional healing ritual in the last 6-12 months?

Q.A2 **Uyakholelwa kumasiko nendlela zokulapha ngesintu?** Do you believe Nguni traditional healing rituals work?

- Yes: continue to Q.3
- No: Thank you for your time, can you refer me to someone you know who has attended a Nguni traditional healing ritual in the last 6-12 months?

Q.A3 **Ngolwazi lwakho akhona ama'brand afunekayo/adingekayo ukuthi abekhona ukuze uphumelele umsebenzi woko'lapha umuntu ngesiZulu/Xhosa?** (To your knowledge are there any brands that are important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals?)

- Yes: continue to Section B.
- No: Thank you for your time, can you refer me to someone you know who has attended a Nguni traditional healing ritual in the last 6-12 months?

Section B: Participants Demographics

Q.2 **Ungathanda ukubhekiswa kanjani, UMnu, UNKk, Udokotela, USolwazi, okanye ngenye indlela?** (How would you like to be addressed, Mr, Mrs, Miss, Dr, Prof or other?)

--

Q.3 Ubunini? (Gender)

Wesilisa/Indoda	
Wesimame, umtu'wesifazane	
Prefer not to say/Khetha ukungasho	
N/A	

Q.4 Iminyaka yobudala (Age)

0-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	55-64	75 or more

Q.5 Inhlanga (Ethnicity/)?

Muntu omyama (Black)	Muntu omhlophe (White)	umutu webala (Coloured)	Indian	Enye intlobo (Other)

Q.6 Isifundazwe (Current Province)

Eastern Cape	
Free State	
Gauteng	
KwaZulu-Natal	
Limpopo	
Mpumalanga	
Northern Cape	

North West	
Western Cape	

Q.7 Indawo yokuhlala (Residence)

Urban	
Township	
Rural	

Q.8 Inqanaba/lzinga lemfundo (Education level)

12th grade or less	
Completed College or University	
Graduate School	

Q.9 Umsebenzi (Occupation)

Student	
Employee	
Part time employee	
Self employed	
No occupation	
Retired	

Section C: The use of brands during Nguni (Xhosa and Zulu) healing rituals

Q.1 Uma ungachaza ungathi amaphi amabrand owaziyo abalulekile ukuze uphumelele umsebezni wokuphilisa/kwelapha umntu ngezindlela zesiZulu/zesiXhosa? Which brands do you know to be important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals?

Q.2 Ungathi ibrand idlala yiphi indima ukuze iphumelele u/imisebenzi yokulapha ngesintu? (What roles do brands perform within Nguni traditional healing rituals if any?)

Q.3 Ngolwakho ulwazi lama'brands owachaze kumbuzo ongaphezulu, kwenzeke kanjani/kuqale kuphi ukuthi abaluleke emisebnzini yesintu?) (How would you explain how brands become/became assimilated into Nguni traditional healing rituals?)

Q.C4 Ngolwakho ulwazi ungathi kungani ibrand zibalulekile emisebenzini yokulapha ngesintu? (Why is the use of these brands important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals?)

Q.C5 Ingaba njani imiphumela yokungabikho kwale/kwezi'brand imesibenzini yokulapha ngesintu? (What is the impact of being absent in the NTHR?)

What would happen if ... was not there

Q.C6 Usengaphumulela umsebenzi wokulapha ngesintu lama/le'brand ingekho? (Will the Nguni traditional healing rituals still succeed if these brands are not present?)

Q.C7 Ingaba ikhona enye intlobo engasentshenziswa uma le/ezibrand zi/ingekho ukuze uqhubeke uphumulele umsebenzi? (Are there substitute brands that can be used to replace these brands for the Nguni traditional healing ritual to still succeed?)

Q.C8 Ingaba kukhona yini okunye ongasichazela khona ngemisebenzi yokulapha ngesintu nendima ethi idlalwe i..... khona uzophumelela umsebenzi? (Is there more that you can share about the role of to the success of the NTHR? - If **Yes/No**; Please elaborate, If No skip to Q.C9.)

- **Yebo - Ngisacela uchaze kabanzi.** (Yes -Please share your contact details)
- **Cha - Ngiyabonga unbenosuku olukahle.** (No - End the interview and thank the participant)

Q.C9 Ngiyabonga/Ndiyabulele ngokuthatha inxaxheba kuloluphando lwesikole. Uma kukhona okunye engikukhohliwe ungathanda/ngingakwazi yini ukuthi ngikuthinte? Yonke iminingwane yakho izovikeleka and only your feedback will be used in the study. Thank you for participating in the study. If I have any further questions or a need for clarification, would you mind if I contact you?

- **Yebo - Ngicela ungiphe iminingwane yakho engingakuthinta kuyona.** (Yes -Please share your contact details)
- **Cha - Ngiyabonga unbenosuku olukahle.** (No - End the interview and thank the participant)

Q.C10 Yebo - Ngicela ungiphe imininwane yakho engingakuthinta kuyona. Yes (Please share your contact details):

Ngiyabonga, ngesikhathi'sakho

Appendix C: Original Interview Guide - Nguni Zulu and Xhosa Healing Rituals

Interviewer: 1

Participant: Respondent 4

Q.A1 **Usuke waya/wabakhona emsebenzini yokulapha ngesintu/ngokwamasiko?** (Have you attended a Nguni traditional healing ritual in the last 6-12 months?)

- Yes: continue to Q.2 -

Participant answered: **Yes.**

Q.A2 **Uyakholelwa kumasiko nendlela zokulapha ngesintu?** Do you believe Nguni traditional healing rituals work?

- Yes: continue to Q.3

Participant answered: **Yes.**

Q.A3 **Ngolwazi lwakho akhona ama'brand afunekayo/adingekayo ukuthi abekhona ukuze uphumelele umsebenzi woko'lapha umuntu ngesiZulu/ngesiXhosa?** (To your knowledge are there any brands that are important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals?)?

- Yes: continue to Section B.
- Participant answered: **Yes.**

Section B: Participants Demographics

Q.2 **Ungathanda ukubhekiswa kanjani, UMnu, UNKk, Udokotela, USolwazi, okanye ngenye indlela?** (How would you like to be addressed, Mr, Mrs, Miss, Dr, Prof or other?)

Participant: Mrs

Q.3 **Ubunini?** (Gender)

Wesilisa/Indoda	
Wesimame, umtu'wesifazane	Yes
Prefer not to say/Khetha ukungasho	
N/A	

Q.4 **Iminyaka yobudala** (Age)

0-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	55-64	75 or more

Q.5 **Inhlanga** (Ethnicity/)?

Muntu omyama (Black)	Muntu omhlophe (White)	umutu webala (Coloured)	Indian	Enye intlobo (Other)
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X				
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Q.6 Isifundazwe (Current Province)

Eastern Cape	
Free State	
Gauteng	
KwaZulu-Natal	X
Limpopo	
Mpumalanga	
Northern Cape	
North West	
Western Cape	

Q.7 Indawo yokuhlala (Residence)

Urban	
Township	X
Rural	

Q.8 Inqanaba/lzinga lemfundo (Education level)

12th grade or less	
Completed College or University	
Graduate School	

Q.9 Umsebenzi (Occupation)

Student	
Employee	
Part time employee	
Self employed	
No occupation	
Retired	

Section C: The use of brands during Nguni (Xhosa and Zulu) healing rituals

Q.1 Uma ungachaza ungathi amaphi amabrand owaziyo abalulekile ukuze uphumelele umsebenzi wokuphilisa/kwelapha umntu ngezindlela zesiZulu/zesiXhosa? Which brands do you know to be important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals?

Participant response: *Eee I use Commando, use Smirnoff and use eee that brandy from back in the day it has Impala but I've forgotten it, but it has a drawing of Impala on the outside then*

I also use candles. I then use cleansing water before I get inside the yard of the person in need of traditional healing.

Q.C2 Ungathi i.... idlala yiphi indima ukuze iphumelele u/imisebenzi yokulapha ngesintu? (What roles do brands perform within Nguni traditional healing rituals, if any?)

Participant response: *These spirits I usually take them with to use them emsamu and the candles I use at emsamo to inform the ancestors that I am here to do a ritual. Before I do the ritual and use the products, I must go myself and inform them (ancestors) that I will be coming to do the healing ritual.*

Q.C3 Ngolwakho ulwazi lama'brands owachaze kumbuzo ongaphezulu, kwenzeka kanjani/kuqale kuphi ukuthi abaluleke emisebenzini yesintu? (How would you explain how brands become/became assimilated into Nguni traditional healing rituals?)

Participant response: *During the times of our forefathers and grandmothers, these are the types of alcohol they used.*

Q.C4 Ngolwakho ulwazi ungathi kungani i..... ibalulekile emisebenzini yokulapha ngesintu? (Why is the use of important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals?)

Participant response: *The reason is it's important to have the brands that were used those days. Not the ones from now that are now available, as those are the brands the forefathers used.*

Q.C5 Ingaba njani imiphumela yokungabikho ko/kwe.... imisebenzini yokulapha ngesintu? What would the impact be if is/were absent in the Nguni traditional healing ritual?

Participant: *The ceremony would never be a success if the brands weren't present.*

Q.C6 Usengaphumulela umsebenzi wokulapha ngesintu ingekho (Will the Nguni traditional healing rituals still succeed if are not present?)

Participant response: No.

Q.C7 Ingaba ikhona enye intlobo engasentshenziswa uma i..... ingekho ukuze uqhubeke uphumulele umsebenzi? (Are there substitute brands that can be used to replace ... for the Nguni traditional healing ritual to still succeed?)

Participant response: *You mean like the brandies? Ewe, I can use other brands, but I don't use Nsu, I use Tamboti or Inyoni I don't use iNsu because my ancestors don't know it.*

Q.C8 Ingaba kukhona yini okunye ongasichazela khona ngemisebenzi yokulapha ngesintu nendima ethi idlalwe i.... khona uzophumelela umsebenzi? (Is there more that you can share about the role of to the success of the Nguni traditional healing rituals? - If Yes/No; Please elaborate If No skip to Q.C8.)

- **Yebo - Ngisacela uchaze kabanzi.** (Yes, please share your contact details)

Participant response: *Yes, like when I use brandy, I also have sweets, apples, and cake for the kids that have passed on at a young age. Then there is bread for the grandfathers and*

then there is bambamo for the elderly (ancestors) a white one and have a Xhosa one. Those are the things I use, then there's other traditional foods that the ancestors used when they were still living. So, by using them you reach out to the ancestors. And then eMsamo it's not just anyone that must kneel emsamo from the family, it must be someone from the family if that person isn't present because we sometimes come across a family with family members that are Christians. You will find that the one that is a Christian must not come close to uMsamo because there eMsamo you will find they don't get along with the ancestors because they see them as demons, so they can be present but only consume food and drinks that were not mentioned in the rituals because the side effect might be the ancestors might unleash their anger or hurt or frustration on the one that has chosen to be saved. If the person isn't present, we want them to come, while they aren't present physical, they are present spiritually. But if you don't go and speak to your ancestors, the ancestors also sit and watch you, but you must also be thankful for what has been given to you by the ancestors and not go and find other things without waiting....

Q.C9 Ngiyabonga/Ndiyabulele ngokuthatha inxaxheba kuloluphando lwesikole. Uma kukhona okunye engikukhohliwe ungathanda/ngingakwazi yini ukuthi ngikuthinte? Yonke iminingwane yakho izovikeleka and only your feedback will be used in the study.

Thank you for participating in the study. If I have any further questions or a need for clarification, would you mind if I contact you?

- **Yebo - Ngicela ungiphe iminingwane yakho engingakuthinta kuyona.** (Yes -Please share your contact details)

Participant response: *Yes you can communicate with Thokoza.*

Ngiyabonga, ngesikhathi'sakho

Appendix D: Table with questions and their objectives:

Research questions	Objectives of the study					
	1. To identify which brands are being used Nguni traditional healing rituals.	2. Establish the roles that brands play in Nguni traditional healing rituals.	3. Uncover how the brands become assimilated into the Nguni traditional healing	4. Uncover the level to which brands are important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals.	5. Establish the consequences, if any, should the specific brands not be present during the Nguni traditional healing rituals.	6. Establish whether or not there are substitute brands that can be used during Nguni traditional healing rituals and to accomplish this, South African Nguni traditional healing practitioners and participants were interviewed.
Q.C1. Which brands do you know to be important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals?	X					X
Q.C2. What roles do brands perform within Nguni traditional healing rituals if any?	X	X		X	X	
Q.C3. How would you explain how brands become assimilated into Nguni traditional healing rituals?			X			
Q.C4. Why is the use of these brands important to the success of Nguni traditional healing rituals?		X		X	X	
Q.C5. What would the impact be if these brands were not used in the Nguni traditional healing ritual?				X	X	X
Q.C6. Will the Nguni traditional healing rituals still succeed if these brands are not present?		X		X	X	X
Q.C7. Are there substitute brands that can be used to replace these brands for the Nguni traditional healing ritual to still succeed?	X		X	X	X	X
Q.C8. Is there more that you can share about the role of brands to the success of the Nguni traditional healing rituals?	X		X			X

Appendix E: Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT TO CONDUCT AN EMPIRICAL RESEARCH STUDY

Dear Participant

The attached questionnaire represents a survey of 30 participants. The study intends to investigate the use of brands during Nguni (IXhosa and Zulu) healing rituals within South Africa. The outcome can assist us to understand the role played by brands to the success of traditional Nguni healing rituals. The survey is part of a research project towards the completion of a Master's degree which will be submitted to the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Your agreement to participate in the questionnaire is voluntary. You are hereby assured that all information will be treated confidentially and participation is voluntary. Should you wish to withdraw for any reason at any time during the study, you are welcome to do so without any objection to your decision. All findings will be dealt with anonymously. You are also allowed to omit any questions you don't feel comfortable answering.

Instructions are provided on each page of the questionnaire and should take between 10 and 15 minutes to complete.

Your cooperation which is crucial to the study and its success will be appreciated. Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours faithfully

[Researcher's name] (Researcher) Mobile: [Researcher]

Email: [Researcher]

Participant Name/Signature: _____ Date: ____/____/____

Appendix F: Consent Form

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our research study on Nguni traditional healing rituals. I wish to assure you that your privacy and anonymity are of utmost importance to us.

In this study, your identity will be kept confidential. Any information provided will be anonymised and used solely for academic purposes. Personal identifiers will be removed from the data, and all findings will be reported in aggregate to ensure that individual participants cannot be identified.

Your participation is highly valued and contributes significantly to the understanding of Nguni traditional healing practices. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for your contribution to this important research.

Sincerely,

Vusumzi Vincent Maqalekane

Cape Peninsula University of Technology

Cell: 061 400 9546

e-mail address: Maqaleks@gmail.com