

**Generating ‘happiness’: A semiotic and thematic analysis on experiences of consumption  
and media marketing strategies for Inanda parents**

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## **DECLARATION**

Submitted to the Durban University of Technology in fulfilment of the requirements of the Master of Journalism degree. The work contained herein is the product of my independent work and I confirm that it is not the result of plagiarism.

**Signed.....**

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**Date.....**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my supervisor Tarryn Frankish, most times I thought her faith in my capabilities was far beyond what I could bring to the table. She and co-supervisor, Dr Philippa Kethro, drove this project to the very end. Thank you.

My son, Kungumusa, I know by the time you are able to read this project so much would have changed; the world, parenting style, culture, life and everything else in between. I hope that you, just like me, choose your own path in life and always see through what you have started. I believe in you *nsizwa yami*.

My family, thank you for putting up with me even when I was at my worst and when I felt the project wasn't good enough – your support was unwavering.

Thank you kindly to everyone who was part of this dissertation, this includes the community of Inanda who opened their doors and welcomed me into their homes.

Have a dream? Go for it!

## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation explored ways that parents in Inanda perceive and manage media messages and consumer choices within the generational demands to keep their children happy. Using the interpretive approach, the study looked at semiotic and general thematic analyses to understand the messages that parents respond to when raising young people in this township. The researcher also addressed the dynamic relationships that exist between consumer actions and how parenting takes place in the 21st Century. The study also pursued the main research problem of how the media plays a role in shaping consumer patterns among parents and it also explored the driving force behind Inanda parents' consumption patterns in trying to create a 'better' world for their children by means of buying them material things. To address this, the researcher applied Arnould and Thompson's (2005) consumer culture theory that looks at a form of material culture that is often driven by the market for consumers to attain a certain lifestyle. The secondary theory is McLuhan's (1964) communication theory which upholds that the audience is a vital part of the communication process. The two theories are used to better understand how signs and symbols are communicated to consumers via the media, resulting in consumption culture.

Using purposive sampling, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews which were semi-structured around the main research questions, with questions that are open-ended for probing purposes (See Appendix C) to critically analyse the effects and influence media marketing strategies have on how consumers receive and perceive these messages. Additionally, photographs of children (with permission from their parents) were used (with children's faces blurred out) as part of data collection. The messages that are passed on to potential consumers through the media are usually in a form of signs and symbols and to better comprehend the main objective of this dissertation the use of semiotic and general thematic analyses put the researcher in a favourable position to decode, analyse, interpret, organise and define data in line with the view that semiotics is the study of signs and symbols in works of art (Ferreira 2007), while general thematic can be used to make sense of collective or mutual meanings and experiences by concentrating on context through present data (Braun and Clarke 2012).

This project moved towards an understanding that media has the power to persuade young people into believing that happiness comes at a price and that their lives will only be perfect if they buy the latest products on the market (Klein 2000).

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## GLOSSARY of TERMS

Word	Definition
Socio-historical	Pertaining to, including, or having to do with social history or a combination of social and historical influences
Consumption	In economics, this refers to the use of goods and services by families
Perceive	Interpretation of someone or something in a certain way
Semiotic	The analysis of symbols and signs, as well as how they are used and interpreted
Consumer culture	Consumption, or the act of purchasing products or services, is a cultural activity instilled with meaning and motivated by more than just practical or financial factors.
Exploration	The act of venturing into an unfamiliar territory
Identity	The fact of a person or object being who or what they are, their state of being.
Mass-media	Technology that aims to attract a large number of people. It is the most popular mode of contact for reaching the vast majority of the general population.
Interpretive	Providing or relating to an interpretation
Consumer	An individual who buys goods and services for his or her own use.
Apartheid	In a South African context it was a system of segregation or discrimination on the basis of race.
Colonial	Is a term that refers to a country that is a colony of another country. It is a tradition or policy of control by one person or power over other people or territories, usually through the establishment of colonies and with the aim of gaining economic dominance.
Modernism	A campaign aimed at changing traditional beliefs to conform to new ideas
Industrialisation	A large-scale growth of industries in a nation or area
Globalisation	The method by which a company gains international influence or begins to operate on a global scale
Corporations	A company or association of companies that have been granted the authority to function as a joint entity.
*The terms ‘children’, ‘youth’ and ‘young people’ to be used interchangeably in this study	

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study sought to analyse the effects and influence that media marketing strategies have on how consumers receive and interpret these campaigns in Inanda. In this chapter, leading ideas in this thesis' title will be discussed in detail, focusing on the role of the media in how marketing campaigns are produced, carried out and how they are introduced to the target market. To address the culture of consumption in Inanda, township life in South Africa and local youth perspectives will be explored. The aim of the study, its objectives, research questions and methodology used will also be presented briefly in this chapter. Lastly, an overview of all the chapters of this thesis will be outlined.

## 1.1 Background

A World Bank (2014) report revealed that about half of this country's urban population lives in townships and informal settlements; accounting for 38% of the working-class citizens and nearly 60% of its unemployed. Under apartheid, black people were forced to live in the dormitory-style townships that were built as far away as possible from economic centres. Post-apartheid development policies led to the construction of townships filled with government housing and limited access to some social services.

As these 'new' townships were also built far from the economic hubs, this resulted in the mushrooming of informal settlements which further took the government's efforts of better lives for its people backwards (Ngceshu and Ncwane 1998). The arrangement of black people being forced to live in townships dates back to the colonial era of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when the British colonial government resettled racial groups. Abbott and Durkheim (1998) argue that the effects of people moving closer to the cities because of industrialisation saw culture slowly eroding and changes in society became evident. Industrialisation saw the rise of mass societies, and with it came some notable problems: people could no longer rely on each other for help. While mass society came with a great deal of opportunities and offered others the escape from traditional society; it also came with great uncertainty in people's lives because of modernism that led to a decline of close-knit communities.

When people moved to towns and cities to look for work and to be closer to their workplaces, industrialisation brought with it the death of societies built on organic solidarity, arriving at a conclusion that a modern individual was created by industrialisation. Societies were ultimately held together by culture, background and moral order. "One of the problems of the transition to industrial society was that shared values were thrown into doubt in a period of rapid change" (Abbott and Durkheim 1998:21). This move led to a number of break downs in culture, societies and the values of life. This gave birth to what we know as townships in South Africa and these places share the same

characteristics: joblessness, uneven access to basic public services and high levels of crime and violence.

Findley and Ogbu's (2011) work in Soweto revealed how township spaces remain segregated from other communities along socio-economic, geo-physical and cultural lines that existed under apartheid. The current government is using different projects to correct the legacy of apartheid in the townships with the hope of improving basic living conditions for the poorest citizens but the physical gaps between the former white spaces and the former black townships remain too evident as the legacy of apartheid still endures in these spaces and what was once a racial divide has now been stratified along lines of race as well as class divide.

## **1.2 Township life in South Africa**

Township life in South Africa continues to be the site of struggle and resilience and as the world changes, we witness more people trying to work their way out of a system that has been part of their lives for the longest time. These changes often come about when people are looking for greener pastures and affordability, welcoming them in spaces that were exclusively preserved for white people during apartheid, highlights the lingering impacts of apartheid-era housing policies and life in general for black people in the country (Harrisberg 2020). More people in townships are fighting the socio-economic and political challenges while trying to seize the opportunities of the present day with the hope of building a vision for their future.

Even though South Africa has the second-largest economy in Africa and accounts for almost a quarter of the continent's GDP, the country still continues to grapple with social ills, corruption, high unemployment rate and inequality. Although South Africa is under 'upper-middle income economy' on the World Bank rankings, nearly half of the country's urban population lives in poverty (Saxena 2017). The township population grew in the late 19th century owing to urbanisation, and people moved closer to places of work to support the lifestyle that came with urbanisation. As much as the media only focuses on portraying a negative image of the township life in South Africa that involves unrest, crime, shabby run-down buildings and streets and angry people: there is another side that the media seldom talks about and in this the mention goes to the spirit of resilience and creativity that is the bloodline of many townships (Sibiya 2012).

This was evident when Axness (2014:1) touched on the notion of townships being the hub of creativity and the arts and because "when the apartheid ended people of the township constructed the idea to build centres to help move their people forward and pull them out of poverty" by attaining skills to help put food on the table. As much as there is progress that has been made to give people a better life,

“signs warning of criminality were displayed in many places in Soweto even at motorway junctions, revealing the powerlessness of the South African government, instead of effective crime prevention, stickers are distributed” which does little, if at all, to fight the scourge of crime (Hermann 2014:1).

The above notion is true for many townships in South Africa as social and political ills still persist in these places and its people continue to live in dire situations hoping that one day they will get to experience a better life for them and their families. They never stop dreaming, hoping and staying positive and that is the spirit of resilience.

### **1.3 Inanda at a glance**

This research focuses on Inanda, a township about 30 kilometres north of Durban. Not much is pleasant about Inanda, a name which means ‘pleasant place’ is isiZulu because in spite of the rich history that the area has, it has emerged as one of the areas with the most violent crimes in Durban ranging from murder cases, attempted murder, armed robbery and sexual offences (Da Costa, 2011). The latest crime statistics released by the South African Police Service for the financial year (2021/22) still places Inanda as the murder capital of KwaZulu-Natal.

This is the place where the first president of the ANC John Langalibalele Dube was born and where the late Nelson Mandela, who was the first democratically-elected president, cast his first vote in the first democratic elections in 1994. If you dig deeper into the history of this place “you will uncover lots of other fascinating people, events and locations that have played an important role in the history of this country and the development of its people” (Dahms 2018:1).

With that, Inanda has very little, if any, to show for the great role it played in the emancipation of the people of South Africa. Being the township with the highest township population in the province of KwaZulu-Natal; and it being “unique from other townships because of its complex mix of urban pull and rural push factors which were contained in the apartheid policy, the major bonding factor for the people of Inanda is poverty” (Ngceshu and Ncwane 1998:2). As much as there is no standard definition of poverty, most people in this township lack means of basic survival. Poverty, underdevelopment, lack of basic resources and a scourge of violence are some of the words that are seldom left out when talking about Inanda and this can be related to inadequate policing in townships, family breakdown due to diseases and other factors that contribute to the culture of violence and poverty. To this day, this township still begs to be counted among townships with improved infrastructure and service delivery (Harrisberg 2020).

According to the INK Nodal Economic Development Profile (2011), Inanda, which was established in the 1800s, comprises predominantly of informal settlements and has a substantial formal housing backlog. Its unemployment rate stands at around 40% and this has led to the high dependency of social grants and the vast residents which are employed fall under the elementary occupation category which

includes domestic workers, street traders, office cleaners and the likes. The profile also points out that a staggering 33% of the township's population is economically inactive. The situation is so dire that some 75% households earn below R9 600 per annum and the incidence of poverty is directly related to the high rate of unemployment, according to the census data conducted in 2011.

A study on sanitation in Inanda carried out by Maharaj (2012) highlighted policy implementation and realities of people living in this community. The focus was on governance, sanitation and service delivery. The study focused on debates relating to governance as an analytical lens, using Foucault's theory of governmentality to examine how government manages and distributes public resources as a service to the people in an internal and external environment. Coming to a conclusion that sanitation delivery in Inanda is plagued with developmental issues. Increased population, unplanned settlements, weak institutional response to operations and maintenance, limited financial resources, inadequate integrated and spatial planning, and moving targets are all challenges facing the eThekweni Municipality's Water and Sanitation Unit, which is responsible for providing sanitation to the communities of Inanda and this still remains a challenge.

This provides us with a glimpse of the reality of many townships in South Africa with the focus on Inanda, which is the base for this study.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the study**

There is no definite measure for happiness and what makes one person happy may not be the case for the next person. Everyone creates their own happiness. "Happiness is not only hard to measure but it is also difficult to singularly define. You can't define happiness without using a synonym for happiness, and you can't interpret it to everyone's satisfaction" (Thompson 2015)<sup>1</sup>.

As Aydogan and Akbulutgiller (2016: 241) explain that "advertising is a form of communication that typically attempts to persuade potential customers to purchase or to consume more of a particular brand of product or service".

Using the consumer culture theory according to Arnould and Thompson (2005) and Askegaard (2015) and the communication theory (McLuhan 1964), the researcher will explore the link that exists between parents' consumption patterns and the methods they use to keep their children happy. This is mainly because companies use the youth as the seed, to water the adult plant; simply put, parents' buying decisions are largely decided on by their children (Sefton-Green 1998). To explore the generational dynamics within consumer culture and how media driven consumption operates within families in pursuit of 'happiness', the project will take a qualitative approach.

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<sup>1</sup> No page number, this is an online article

Qualitative research can be described as a broad approach that looks at social factors using natural conditions that “draw multiple methods of enquiry that are interactive and humanistic in nature” and this type of research takes place in the natural world (Rossman and Marshall 2006:53).

The problem identified in this study is that marketing companies are in the business of fulfilling their own interests; which is making money. They are not thinking about the effects that their strategies may have on communities. Companies use popular culture with the pure aim of generating profit, as opposed to making people’s lives better and thus poor families who can’t even make ends meet find it difficult to stay away from messages communicated through the media (Fiske 1989). The study focuses on the profit-driven impacts of consumerism and the ways that people are integrating these stories in alternative ways and how some who were once bitten by consumerism are now trying to escape it.

These representations of consumer culture imply the notion that material possessions are a way to happiness; that contentment in life is not found through religious reflection, social contact, or a simple existence, but rather through possession and engagement with material things. Such a mindset is consistent with Belk's definition of materialism, which is "the propensity to view material possessions as significant sources of life satisfaction." (Belk and Pollay 1985: 394). Many researchers contend that modern materialism is being fueled by advertising. For instance, Christopher Lasch (1978) asserts that advertising encourages consumers to find meaning in the things they buy.

The impact of a globalised culture has made media a crucial component of children's socialisation. This altered culture has also been influenced by societal changes that have altered the nuclear family structure from the joint family and the parental media socialisation of children. Our lives are greatly influenced by the media, from our taste in clothing and food to our religious convictions. Marketers have viewed this as a means of spreading the word about their goods through advertisements (Lenka 2013). Because they are unable to comprehend the reality behind the commercials, children take the message of advertisers to be true. They consequently begin associating their enjoyment with the offered product, which is an indication of materialism (Chan 2006).

The core objective of companies is to change the way people live their lives, making them (society) see the world through their (companies) eyes. This can easily lead to society not managing their finances properly, leading to spending money recklessly to keep up with marketing strategies in the pursuit of ‘happiness’. This may result in families spending money they do not have in trying to obtain the unobtainable; in this instance – happiness. Because as people, we yearn for the feeling of being respected and accepted by those around us and how we are constantly trying to chase the unobtainable (Klein 2000). These things are being realised in very unique ways in this project and that is why the

researcher saw it fit to work around how parents in Inanda perceive these marketing strategies by asking these questions.

#### **1.4.1 Aim**

The study sought to explore how the media influences ways in which parents respond to marketing strategies used by companies to lure consumers in trying to keep their children happy.

#### **1.4.2 Objective**

To explore the ways Inanda parents perceive and manage media messages and material consumer choices related to generational demands of keeping children happy.

#### **1.4.3 Sub objectives**

- To explore the ways that consumer messages are communicated to parents through the media
- To understand the ways that Inanda parents respond to, perceive and manage consumer messages
- To unpack the ways in which Inanda parents attempt to generate happiness among their children

### **1.5 Research questions**

In order to fully address and investigate a connection between advertising, the power of media, and consumption behaviour, these are the four research questions that guided this project:

Main question:

- How do parents in Inanda perceive and manage media messages and consumer choices related to generational demands of keeping children happy?

Sub-questions:

- What consumer messages are communicated to parents through the media?
- How do parents in Inanda respond to, perceive and manage consumer messages?
- In what ways do parents attempt to 'generate happiness' among their children?

The researcher sought to explore ways Inanda parents perceive and manage media messages and consumer choices within the generational demands to keep their children happy. Also, with the changing world, parents tend to depend on their children to make buying decisions since the younger generation is more informed on the latest trends (Klein 2000; Oyewole, Peng and Choudhury 2010). But how far are parents willing to stretch their budgets to keep their children happy considering their financial wellbeing? Happiness is taken as something sacred because more studies show that modern

living is depressing with the cost of living increasing while the financial burden continues to haunt people; the more reason for parents to want to give their children the ‘world of happiness’ (Thompson 2015).

By modern life being depressing means that people are exhausted to have to live their lives in societies where asking for help is considered failure. This means people would rather suffer in silence than seek help. Furthermore, the demographic shifts toward people living more independently leading to less family-oriented lives thus tilting the scale up in unhappiness. It is emotionally taxing to live in a society where we are under pressure to prove our happiness and portray living our best lives through social media, not realising that we are making ourselves vulnerable. The pressure of the American dream to be better and have more, is not a true reflection of real life and that usually leads to disappointments (Edelstein, 2016). This picture is made clearer on a survey done by Statistics South Africa (2011) that revealed that African-headed households spend 26,5% of their earnings on housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels, while 3% is spent on clothing and footwear. This shows that most South African household are spending far more than they should to survive, which means that this fact is also true for Inanda parents who may be spending more than they have to keep their children happy.

Nicolson (2015) talks at length about the different kinds of poverty that exist in South Africa. There are people who don’t make enough money to buy food; those who don’t have enough money to buy adequate food and non-food items so they sacrifice food for things like transport and airtime and there are those that can afford to buy adequate food and non-food items but still live in poverty. Simply put, 21,7% of South Africans live in extreme poverty and KwaZulu-Natal had the highest poverty line, according to the 2011 census data. These characteristics are representative of many other townships and informal settlements in the country where injustices of the past have left its footprints (Ngceshu and Ncwane 2002).

From the data collected and analysed, there is an individualistic approach in support of the cultural perspective that is quite Western, materialistic and consumption based. What came out strong is that participants see identity as more important and as something that needs attention and is goal-worthy while culture is just something that happens to them, something they have no control over but to embrace. Participants in this study conceded that there is not much that can be done to protect children from media marketing strategies as children are always on their gadgets consuming brands, copying behaviour and looking for the latest trends as a form of influence or to be part of a popular movement at that given time.



## **1.6 Research methods**

This thesis took an interpretive qualitative approach which can be described as a broad approach that looks at social factors using natural conditions that creates a variety of enquiry methods that are interactive and humanistic and this type of research takes place in the natural world (Rossman and Marshall 2006). The researcher used purposive sampling to identify potential participants in the community of Inanda during a community meeting which is held on the last Sunday of every month. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 8 parents from this township to explore how the media influences ways in which parents respond to marketing strategies used by companies to lure consumers. Data analysis took the form of semiotic analysis for examining photos of children obtained from parents who were part of this study, and also general thematic analysis which is discussed under identified themes. The research reached saturation at eight participants.

## **1.7 Dissertation overview**

The thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 offers a brief summary of the dissertation, introducing the research problem and highlighting the need for carrying out this project, relevant research questions pertaining to the project and the findings.

Chapter 2 critically reviews related previous studies in order to identify a gap in the literature, with keen interest and reference to the South African context of how parents respond to media marketing strategies as presented to them via different types of media. It looks at how globalisation impacts on consumer choices and the role the media plays in consumption behaviour and how global media represents race and class while forming a certain culture and perpetuating stereotypes in the process. This chapter also touches on theories impacting upon the consumption of goods.

Chapter 3 presents a detailed theoretical framework for the thesis, acting as a basis for the study by providing relevant theoretical models relating to media, marketing and consumption, discussing in detail consumer culture and communication theories together with their components to arrive at this paper's assumption that media plays a huge role in consumption levels among parents in Inanda township.

Chapter 4 reflects on the methods used for investigating the problem. These were explored focusing on research design, study participants, sample techniques, data collection and analysis processes, rigour, ethical considerations and research limitations.

Chapter 5 focuses on the main findings and the interpretation of data. This chapter is divided into two sections and two approaches of data analysis namely; semiotic and general thematic analyses, were used. The first section is a semiotic analysis of photos of children while adhering to research ethics on the protection of minors, taking into account the issue of different marketing strategies used by companies in luring young people into a new dimension of culture. The second section examines data collected through face-to-face interviews with Inanda parents and findings that emerged from identified themes.

Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation, presenting a summary of the main findings, detailing relevant conclusions in the study, highlighting limitations and offering recommendations for future research areas. A handful of parents interviewed in this study admitted that they have gone above and beyond in the quest to keep their children happy. There is no definite measure for happiness and what makes one person happy may not be the case for the next person. Everyone creates their own happiness. These parents say there is no running away from the fact that the way their children carry themselves is definitely influenced by pop culture, through the media, which generally leads to consumer culture (Abbot 1998).

The following section introduces the project and covers the literature review and theories used by other researchers in trying to understand the role the media plays in marketing campaigns.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The media has the potential to influence the youth into believing that happiness comes at a price and the idea that their lives would be perfect only if they purchase the new products on the market. This leads to individuals being controlled by the society they are part of; whether positive or negative. This project takes its lead from works that align themselves with the social perspective on individual

thinking and agency. In a nutshell, this project looks at the impact of the media from a social constructionist perspective.

The impetus for this study is Klein's (2000) book and the literature review examines current literature on the ideas stemming from 'No Logo' where she takes us from an 'ordinary' world to a world of 'no space, no choice and no jobs' due to advertising and marketing strategies, making an example of how branding is no longer about quality and longevity but about brand consumption. Companies now sell branding as part of a lifestyle, a look and culture. Brands are in the business of representing certain ideas (Klein 2000).

A study done by Sheth and Mittal (2004) suggests that marketers around the world understand that understanding consumer behaviour is one of the fundamental components in ensuring success. As consumers are now shifting from traditional media to new media platforms like social media, they have been known to be difficult to please, value their time, are all about information that is available on their fingertips and they are highly individualistic. This demanding and changing form of consumer preferences have given rise to notable changes in consumer purchasing patterns and how decisions are made as social media acts as a facilitator for purchase transactions, information and decision making (Raaij 1998) cited in (Ivanauskas 2009).

This project will expand on the media by looking at economic globalisation, consumption behaviour, race and class, parenting as well as youth and local perspectives relevant to the research. In trying to make sense of how each of these relate to the study, each section delves deeper into the effects each one plays on how consumers receive and perceive media messages presented before them. Klein (2000) investigated this using social marketing theory and economy theory to better understand the world she is referring to; hence the first sub-section looks at how globalisation is linked to economy in understanding the role of the media in relation to consumption culture.

## **2.2 Economic globalisation and consumer choices**

This section talks about the effects of economic globalisation and how it is linked to ways in which Inanda parents view and navigate social signals and consumer choices in terms of cultural pressures in order to keep their children happy. The purpose of this chapter is to shed light on what is meant by the term globalisation, and explore what has occurred within the international economy and its impact on South Africa. Economic globalisation touches on consumption influence, cross-border transfers of goods and services, foreign capital flows, tariff and trade barrier elimination, immigration, and the spread of technology and information across borders, among other things. It, like every other source of great influence, has sparked much debate and dispute (Samimi and Jenatabadi 2014).

Globalisation, in its broadest sense, refers to the strengthening of global ties, the organisation of social life on a global scale, and the creation of a global consciousness, both of which contribute to the making of a world society. It can be described as the expansion of economic activities across national political boundaries. In the global economy, it is a process of economic integration and interdependence among nations. It is linked not only to increased cross-border movement of goods, services, money, technology, information, and people, but also to the organisation of cross-national economic activities (Gaventa and Cornwall 2001). Globalisation can also imply a significant shift toward private knowledge and a market-oriented environment, with the government's position in the economy reduced significantly. It is a phenomenon that took place in the twentieth century and saw the capitalist system spread across the world (Shahzad, Chaudhry and Hasan 2006).

The modern world system, according to world system theory, began in the 15th century, when Europe developed economic relations with other countries through technological developments, market expansion, growth, and exchange. Globalisation is a stage in the development of the capitalist world system that has distinct geographic, class, and gender characteristics. This means that growth effects of globalisation are dependent on the economic structure of countries during the globalisation process. A collection of complementary policies, such as improvements in human capital and the financial system, may alter the effect of globalisation on countries' economic development. Given the divergent theoretical viewpoints, empirical studies on the effect of globalisation on economic growth in developed and developing countries have been conducted (Moghadam and Joshi 2021).

Several studies show that globalisation boosts economic growth. Dollar (1992) and Edwards (1998) were among the first to investigate the effects of trade openness on economic growth using various indexes. The results of these studies suggested that openness is linked to faster development. In their study, Samimi and Jenatabadi (2014) agree with this statement as their work revealed that economic globalisation has an impact on development, but whether this effect is beneficial depends on the countries' income levels.

History has shown us that globalisation benefits high and middle income countries, but it does not favour low-income countries. Globalisation is often blamed for Africa's economic woes because of 'forced freedom' and other lending conditions that were imposed on these countries failed to deliver promised growth. As a result, globalisation has worsened living conditions for the poor as the government fails to deliver services, leading to instability (Rahim, Abidin, Ping, Alias and Muhamad 2014). Globalisation is inherently unstable for developing countries since their economic structures and economies are uneven, this includes countries like South Africa. As a result, the poor are disproportionately affected by globalisation's threats. Low-income countries' export structures are highly reliant on primary commodities and natural resources, making them vulnerable to global shocks.

In terms of economic growth and development, African countries have gained less from the positive effects of globalisation compared to other parts of the world. Following largely an inward-oriented development strategy in the early post-independence decades, the majority of African countries failed to capitalise on the opportunities provided by the dynamic growth impetus associated with globalisation in the 1970s and 1980s. They were largely marginalised and experienced slow growth rather than becoming more integrated into the global economy and as a result, the region's poverty has risen. They argue that overall, there is little reason to believe that Africa will soon reap the benefits of the globalisation process unless it increases its efforts on a number of fronts, including adopting a more pro-poor growth pattern and increasing the provision of public services in the social sector (Nissanke and Thorbecke 2015).

Furthermore, the level of income inequality in Africa has risen dramatically over the past twenty years. Even after decades of political independence, dependence on high primary-commodity still features greatly in how African countries trade with the world. If these economies fail to diversify and change how they operate then benefits of technology advancements through globalisation had done very little for Africa and has essentially come at a cost. This is because the poor seldom benefit from when change takes place; be it economically, socially and otherwise.

With the advancement of technology, digital communication has opened doors for corporations to reach a greater audience with increased frequency (Du Plessis 2010). Modern technology provides us with the belief that we can live the life we see on our screens by making each film, advert and music video relate as much as they can to our everyday experiences so much so that we see ourselves in every character on the small screen. We yearn to be like them, dress like them and consume the stuff they do because we feel they represent our 'culture' or what we hope to become. Culture can be defined as the characteristics and knowledge of a specific group of people, and these attributes include language, religion, social habits, music and arts. Culture is shared behaviour patterns and how people relate to each other and these are learned by means of socialisation (Pappas and McKelvie 2014). To further understand how media influences society, Abbinnett (2003) argues that the evolution of technologically reproducible images (printing, photography and cinema) demands to be recognised as a possible extension of people's realities.

*In contemporary consumer culture people strategically construct their identities across time and space in a constant state of becoming. Often identity projects are added and even enabled by the market, offering a set of props and practices that can be deployed separately or in combination to self-present, or perform identity. (Arnould and Thompson 2018:21)*

For example, an athlete will need a proper set of training gear (shoes, clothes, food and drink) to carry out their duties and this is where the market comes in, where this role is made to manifest through the marketplace where objects and symbols are used to support identity performance. If taken together, identity projects and self-representation breed relatively cohesive and holistic identities. In this way, identity is constructed through the process of imagination, meaning people have the capacity to understand themselves and their surroundings and can pass this to one another. This means that people are free to be and to escape reality by means of imagination which introduces them to other identities (Barton and Hamilton 2005). Imagination shapes human experience and more people have grown into liking reality TV, like the most popular one, *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, because often society likes emulating what is in front of them by using their imagination and believing that they are part of something simply by watching it on TV. They see these celebrities or actors as a symbol of wealth, social success and the American dream, thus imagination transforms sensation into knowledge; meaning that everything that occupies our thoughts is the work of imagination. “Imagination is central to the construction and expression of identities and realities” (Arnould and Thompson 2018:22). This is because companies know that brands are more valuable when consumed as a collective. It is through globalisation and the advancement of technology that we have adopted the same culture for almost everything – it doesn’t matter where you are in the world. Thus globalisation and technological advancements have allowed people to interact with others in real time without having to travel (Sundaram 2005).

The catalyst for this is the internet and social media and as it has become evident that most young people are computer literate and are the ones who usually have access to social media platforms. This increases their potential as customers for the advertised products, in turn influencing their parents’ consumption behaviours (Bevan-Dye, Garnett and De Klerk 2011). The study explores how social media platforms have become a ‘global village’ that individuals use to share views, opinions, experiences, perspectives with one another and how this has given marketers an opportunity to communicate and connect with their potential customers and influence their purchasing decisions from the comfort of their own homes (Ramnarain and Govender 2013).

The next section casts the spotlight on the media’s role in building a global experience by educating people and their organisations of developments that they can easily communicate. Social media has drastically changed the way marketers carry out business, as potential customers usually rely on feedback and ratings to make purchases and in this way social media has been seen as the most reliable platform for advertising.

### **2.3 Media and consumption**

This section unpacks how communication, which occurs through the media shapes thinking and identities of those who access it by using language, shapes and sounds to evoke desire in consumers who in turn spend money on the advertised product (Baniyassen 2017).

The media refers to various forms of communication such as the internet, television, and radio, among others. It's an essential part of communication. As digital technology advances, globalisation has been at the forefront of transforming the media. Companies benefit from globalisation because it helps them to collaborate and work more efficiently while still expanding their customer base. It makes processes easier and is a must for technological advancements. Companies intentionally bring emotions to their branding by associating the commodities and services they sell with the "profound subjectivities of everyday life, too. They believe that consumers develop relationships with products based more on emotional involvement than any other rational comparison" (Lull 2000:170-171).

This works for marketers since recent research has shown that visual content has a potential to influence or inspire purchasing decisions for more than 75% of consumers, particularly on platforms like Pinterest where companies advertise their products with the hope of building strong consumer-company relationships (Chamberlain; Böttger Rudolph, Evanschitzky and Pfrang 2017). This form of advertising is used to persuade middle-class consumers into hoping for a 'better life' that comes with those commodities (Du Plessis 2010) and it also appears in Klein's (2000) analysis of branding in communities, where she points out that companies have resorted to creating brands instead of products. This analogy suggests that it is true that people automatically associate a certain brand with good quality and it being 'deserving' of the amount on the price tag without even giving themselves time to make means on quality assurance (Büttner, Florack and Serfas 2014).

Big brands are often the preferred choice compared to up-and-coming brands or those considered below certain standards (Lehmann, Liedtke, Rothschild and Trevino 2020). To further argue this point will be to make an example of how people will gladly pay R1000 for a pair of Nike sneakers, but would feel that a local entrepreneur does not deserve that kind of money for the same product. This is because it has been instilled in us that the Nike brand is quality and 'it never goes out of style' and whoever associates themselves with it fits into a certain societal class, bringing us to the suggestion that companies may manufacture products, but what people buy are brands (Klein 2000).

There is a distinctive difference between branding and advertising. "Branding is the core meaning of modern corporation and advertising is the vehicle used to convey meaning to the world ... also advertising helps corporations find their soul" Klein (2000:5-6). Something that has a "name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination intended to identify goods or services and to differentiate

them from those of competitors. A brand has association – it is not simply a name (Du Plessis 2010:19). A name becomes a brand when people link it to or associate it with other things. A brand has a reputation and can shape perception. The core objective of companies is to change the way people live their lives, make society see the world through their (companies) eyes. Companies always try to make changes to their products to entice consumers (Klein 2000) while customers associate and identify with brands. This often makes it difficult for consumers to change their ‘old’ habits as they often stick with options that have been around them for a while and the way they are presented to them play a major role in how they consume them (Pettinger 2012).

The concept of brand communication is a way in which companies introduce themselves to their target market to define who they are and how they differ from their competitors. A common example would be how Nike’s communication, with the line ‘just do it’, is associated with success, while Adidas’ ‘impossible is nothing’ presents endless possibilities for consumers. This shows that marketers use brands as a core and let the consumer use it to filter everything else they do (Van Heerden 2010). The following quote talks in-depth about media strategies and influence in driving certain ideologies across:

*“The media are the strategy of power, which finds in them the means of mystifying the masses and imposing its own truth. Or else they are the strategic territory of the ruse of the masses, who exercise in them their concrete power of the refusal of truth, of the denial of reality. Now the media are nothing else than a marvellous instrument for destabilising the real and the true, all historical or political truth (there is thus no possible political strategy of the media: it is a contradiction in terms). And the addiction that we have for the media, the impossibility of doing without them, is a deep result of this phenomenon: it is not a result of a desire for culture, communication, and information, but of this perversion of the truth and falsehood, of this destruction of meaning in the operation of the medium; the desire for show, the desire for simulation, which is at the same time a desire for dissimulation. This is vital reaction and political spontaneous, total resistance to the ultimatum of historical and political reason”* (Baudrillard 1994:118).

A symbol is usually made up of a word and a mental image, and it is linked to a referent, or something in the physical world. Normally, a sign is composed of a word and a mental image and is associated with a referent, a thing in the real world. When people share signs, they become symbolic; their context floats ambiguously between them, as it must because of their relationship with each other. The advertisement applies a signifier, a term that has no conventional connection to the object being advertised. The advertisement represents a shift in linguistic and context truth thus constituting a new linguistic and communication reality. That is why communication plays a vital role in advertising as a



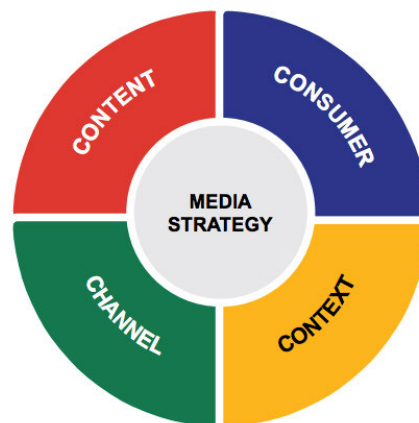
way of making sure that corporations stir emotions from consumers in a way they advertise their products (Poster 1994).

To achieve this, companies hire marketers and experts and spend a fortune in advertising to lure as many consumers as they can by using advance media strategies. An example of this is explained in detail by (Muller 2020) on the subject of South Africa's media landscape, painting a picture of how marketers plan their advert reach around a certain target market.

For this to be achieved, the concept of four Cs (content, context, consumer and channel) of media strategy kicks in to make the message being delivered to appear more enhancing. This is done through marketers being able to identify the right channel (medium) to get their message across to consumers. This is shown in a sketch on the following page how the four Cs intersect with media strategy.

The four Cs is a framework designed to maximise the effectiveness of any commercial communication by integrating the advertising **content** (the message), the **channel** (the medium) and the **context** through which that content is delivered to **consumers**, as depicted in Figure 7.2.

Figure 7.2: The four Cs of media strategy



**Figure 1.1 The four Cs of media strategy (Muller 2020).**

Corporations ponder on a certain point of interest and capitalise on it with the hope of getting reaction (desire) from consumers (Valkenburg and Piotrowski 2017). When companies like Vodacom, Absa or Sanlam have new products out, they make it a point that they constantly communicate them to their target market and defines this process by saying products or services cannot sell without “effective communication and there are many forms of marketing communication, and variety of methods exist for this purpose, and they include advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, publicity, direct marketing and digital communication”. All these are designed to influence attitudes and behaviours of potential and existing consumers (Du Plessis 2010:3).

Poster's (1994) research reveals that floating signifiers are always made to appear more appealing to the consumer and usually uses a universal language that will be understood by the masses, a sign

system. In TV ads, where the new mode of signification is most clearly seen, floating signifiers are attached to commodities only in the virtuoso communication of the advert (Anjali and Anju 2009). The ability of language to signify, to present meaning is not simply acknowledged by recognition of its conventionality; it becomes the subject and structure of the communication. It is through these adverts, the unreal is made real and what is meaningless always appears to have a deeper meaning and objects on adverts are always fulfilling, desirable, magical and exciting. Advertising is the portrayal of our thoughts and dreams being shown to the world, especially the intended target market (Bhasin 2021). The dream is sold until it is believed; using the power of persuasion, portraying the image of who we aspire to be or have and “after the product has been bought, the market must be continually reminded of it and informed of new uses for it, and potential new customers must be persuaded to try it” (Du Plessis 2010:2). This is to say that people are known to want only the best for themselves, so if the company promises improvement or change through their products, support is guaranteed.

The binding factor between corporations and consumers when it comes to getting the message across, is the media. It is vital that the researcher looks at the culture of consumerism as a growing influence on social media. Looking at the South Africa Social Media Landscape Report 2021, it projected that by January 2021 an estimated 4,66 billion people will have access to the internet. These statistics grew by 316 million. The report also showed that currently there are 4,2 billion social media users in the country, and this number grew by 490 million users (13%) compared to the previous year. The report also mentions that within the same timeframe, people who use the internet in South Africa increased by 1,7 million, placing the total to 38,2 million users (4,5% increase). During the past year, the report reveals that the number of people who use social media in this country stands at 25 million. Around 98% of people who use social media, access this platform via their mobile phones (Lethole 2021).

With an increasing number of social media users, companies have used this as an opportunity to reach more audience through rigorous advertising in the form of pop-up messages, links and pictures on social media platforms. The introduction of new media has brought about change in the media landscape and this is because youth and adults now watch television for different purposes than they did ten years back (Gyrd-Jones and Kornum 2013; Valkenburg and Piotrowski 2017). Social media has become a platform for media users to interact with each other and for companies to advertise their products and also relay messages, acting as a sought after marketing and communication tool (Ramnarain and Govender 2013).

Social media has become a word-of-mouth space (Kimmel and Kitchen 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski 2016) and it is now seen as a platform that affects consumers' perceptions of brands. This approach sees consumers becoming ambassadors for the products advertised, thus creating brand value in the process. Companies usually use people with influence when it comes to the creation of brand

reputation, giving rise to the term ‘influencers’. These ‘somebodies’ influence traditional target audiences, and help communication professionals establish effective outreach strategies (Booth and Matic 2011; Groeger and Buttle 2014). The most noticeable form of brand ambassadorship is one where a celebrity aligns him or herself with a certain brand in exchange for money, reputation or association (Kapferer 2012). In South Africa, most high-profile social media influencers and brand ambassadors conduct this work through active Instagram, Twitter and Facebook accounts reaching hundreds and thousands of followers. In these platforms they showcase their glamorous lives while also marketing other brands and commodities (Iqani 2019).

This brings the researcher to the suggestion that social media is allowing people to see themselves differently in relation to race and class, issues of representation, marketing strategies and possibilities for different kinds of advert offerings. But with all the advancements made through race and class and new media, there are things that are still fundamentally linked to old forms of white supremacy and beauty ideals.

The following section aims to tie down how media invokes desire in consumers through advertising while examining how race and class are represented in the media, although the way things are done has changed but it remains true that global corporations’ mandate is to dictate to consumers ‘what to dream’ (Ewen 2008).

## **2.4 Race and class**

This section looks at how global media represents race and class while forming a certain culture and perpetuating stereotypes in the process. Media representation on race and class is central to what ultimately come to represent our social realities (Brooks and Hebert 2006). This means that how we are represented in the media means a great deal in our everyday lives that is why it is vital that this is done in a manner that represents our realities.

Reports show that in 2015, an average person in America spends 15,5 hours of their day watching television. The high rate of television viewing in America has an impact on how people view the world because racial imagery that is perpetuated by the media has an impacts on culture. It was found that spending a lot of time in front of the television may cause black children to have low self-esteem, while the opposite happens for white boys, according to researchers. This inequality is largely related to matters around ethnicity and gender are addressed in Hollywood, which has always been seen to advocate for white men as heroes while making other races to be reduced to sidekicks and sexual objects (Yuen 2019).

This is because beauty standards are formed and normalised by Western countries and African countries adopt and reproduce the “logic that African beauty is monolithic and hinges on imitating a narrow Western feminine beauty ideal. In other words, African beauty is represented as inferior and in need of correction” (Akinro and Mbunyuza-Memani 2019:310). Their findings stated that the definition of whiteness is based on the advantages that people with white skin have. Whiteness and its features are regarded as attractive and morally upright. Worldwide homogenisation of beauty stretches back to the nineteenth century in historical analysis of globalisation and beauty. The world saw a spread of beauty standards from the Western world being used as a global standard (Jones 2013).

The population of people who ran things in the advertising, reporting and entertainment back then when broadcasting took off were mainly white. That is why traces of their perceptions and values were reflected in what they produced for the masses (Yuen 2019). This meant that the views of those working in the industry influenced how media material was created, curated and delivered, that is why advertisements for goods sold to the general public in the United States will continue to represent Caucasians, leaving only advertisements for products marketed to Black Americans to depict people of colour. Cultural differences and identities continue to be influenced by Western ideology, making it impossible for young people to identify and defend their own identities (Wilson, Gutierrez and Chao 2013; Gray 1995). This is a space that needs to gradually transform in order for it to produce products that represent our realities.

In the next section we look at how media companies target the youth through advertising because they are the most impressionable and because it is easy to sell their merchandise through convincing young people that if they wear what companies manufacture they will be ‘cool’. Cool in this context refers to someone who is always up-to-date with fashion and entertainment. Generally, young people are referred to as cool and advertisers thrive on this because they know that children have always been the centre of attraction in any family irrespective of country and culture and they have been involved in all activities of the family (Klein 2000 and Arul 2016) and more readings reveal that children have the most influence in families when it comes to consumption and this influence is usually passed on to parents as they are the ones who come with financial relief (Young 2010).

It has been well documented that people of colour are under-represented in the media landscape, especially women. For a country like South Africa which underwent Apartheid, black women had to take the blunt for being misrepresented (Iqani 2012). Those who did not have the ‘correct’ skin tone and hair rarely made it socially and economically. The ‘pencil test’ that was done by authorities to classify people racially, those with hair that resembles ‘whiteness’ were more favoured than those with

‘coily/kinky’ hair (Iqani and Pilane 2015). This kind of exclusion led to an erasure of diversity when it comes to skin tones, body types or what’s considered lovable, valuable and acceptable (Hunter 2013). These colonial legacies still persist in the post-apartheid South Africa even though the media has been more democratised (Ajani 2011)

Although the west frequently sees Africa as a region that has to be saved, aided or developed, in recent years, Africa is coming to be seen as a continent with a wealth of consumer desires. According to recent assessments from international consulting firms, the new frontier for luxury consumer markets is Africa (Iqani, 2019). Of fact, South Africa cannot be viewed as a representative of the continent. However, South Africa has many of the same issues that plague many other African nations, including high rates of unemployment and poverty, a sizable informal sector, and rising income disparity.

The following section looks at the concept of parenting, its relevance to the study and how parenting takes place. It also briefly details challenges that parents face while raising children in South Africa.

## **2.5 Parenting**

It would rather not be satisfactory to discuss the issue of consumption through parents without looking at what parenting is and what it entails as well as its contribution to the topic. The section below addresses the concept of parenting, parenting styles that exist and how other researchers have understood this subject.

Parenting, known as the other oldest profession in the world has attracted vast research attention from various scientific disciplines. Many theories around parenting state that parenting is vital for a child’s development, resulting in studies around the impact of parenting on child development (Kuppens and Ceulamans 2019). There are three parenting dimensions namely: support, psychological control and behavioural control (Barber, Stolz, Olsen, Collins, and Burchinal 2005).

When it comes to the topic of parenting, writers often focus on multiple methods that include parenting practices or parenting styles. Parenting practices can be distinguished in that they deal with how parents use observable behaviours for their kids to allow them to socialise while making sure that they behave in a way that is socially acceptable (Darling and Steinberg 1993). The three different styles of parenting are authoritarian, authoritative and permissive. These usually reflect what values parents use while raising their children, with a clear balance of responsiveness and demandingness thus displaying results in children. The common factor in all these parenting styles is warmth and control. When it comes to understanding these parenting styles and how they affect children, these researchers found that authoritarian parents are low on warmth and high on control as they try to shape, control and monitor children’s behaviour and attitudes according to their standards (Maccoby and Martin 1983).

Studies pertaining to parenting in South Africa are relatively new as not much research focusing on this dimension has been done, reflecting that research of this nature has only been limited to parenting styles, parental behaviour and the effects these have on child outcomes. Noting that research on parenting style is still new in this country. Literature shows that there is a significant difference between ethnic groups and the concept of parenting, especially in a country as diverse as ours which has a history of Apartheid which resulted in separation and segregation. These researchers noted that there are distinct differences in how children are raised across ethnic groups (Roman, Lancate and Makwakwa 2016).

It becomes a challenge to raise children in a country where a majority of the population continues to live in poverty, with a high rate of unemployment, substance abuse and crime (Peltzer, Ramlagan, Johnson and Phaswana-Mafuya 2011; South African Human Rights Commission). These findings are supported by a number of studies conducted in South Africa on parental behaviour and its consequences on child outcomes, which show that parental behavioural control, monitoring, and limit setting resulted in a significant rise in adolescent substance abuse (Amoateng, Barber and Erickson 2006); also fathers who were overprotective made it difficult for their children to open up to them, while mothers' care proved to yield conflict resolution, communication and independence in adult relationships. On the other hand, mothers' overprotection resulted in less independence (Lowe 2005).

Previous research on parenting in South Africa reveals that mothers have a strong relationship with their children when compared to fathers (De Jager 2011). It also emerged that not only are parenting styles different across ethnic groups, but these can be spotted within a family where different relationships exist and interactions happen based on the child's gender and that of the parent (Bohanek, Fivush, Zaman, Lpore, Marchant and Duke 2009). Differences between how a mother interacts with their son; and how the same mother interacts with their daughter were noted (Lipps, Lowe, Gibson, Halliday, Morris and Clarke 2012). This type of setting is mostly popular amongst African families where children are given chores according to their gender and the mother is always seen as the keeper of the house while the father is the bread winner (Amos 2012).

It is through these settings that gender roles and generational differences become prominent. Some are introduced by the fact that most parents learn parenting from their own parents, but they don't necessarily use all those parental practices on their children. Take for an example, in an African system raising a child to be a responsible adult can take many forms which includes cultural values. These values are not imparted by the child's parent only, sometimes they may come from extended family – a known set up for most African households (Amos and Cherry 2012).

Currently, a shift in parenting has been noted where the style of parenting as we know it is gradually changing because of work and other commitments which sometimes cause parents to be overstretched and tired thus making it difficult for them to give their children their undivided attention, introducing the extended family dimension - where relatives may be introduced in aiding with raising the child. As opposed to a nuclear family, an extended family is made up of both parents, children, uncles, aunts, grandparents and cousins. It is important to note this type of a family setting because most participants in this study come from such families (Gyekye, 1996). The majority of people in this country, which is black people, who have a history of struggle, violence, being socially, politically and economically marginalised have shown a shift in how they are raising their children under new child protection laws and family policy (Roman, Makwakwa and Lacante 2016).

Another paper by Shangase (2018) explored views on parenting in the African context for Inanda as well as the extent to which Inanda's youth commit crimes. The study also provided an analysis of Inanda parents, youth, and community leaders' perceptions of African parenting styles and their effects on youth behaviour, coming to a conclusion that Inanda's perceptions regarding African context of parenting revealed that this style of parenting was associated with respect, discipline and corporal punishment as parents try to keep their children on the straight and narrow while trying to quieten noises from the side-lines.

From reviewed literature it is argued that parenting and child behaviour outcomes in South Africa are not in line with international studies on the subjects of parenting styles, gender and ethnicity. What is evident though is that these parenting styles differ due to certain factors that may include culture, personality, parental background, educational level, socio-economic status, family size and religion. As the world changes, the culture of family seems to stay the same even though some rules and restrictions seem to have been eased up to accommodate change. This is to say that the power of influence from children to parents remains the same for every family – no matter the setting – because children will always want the next toy or gadget and it is most parents' dream to give their children the life they never had (Cherry 2012).

In fulfilling this, parents usually go overboard and sometimes bend over backwards to keep their children happy or to avoid them getting mixed up in the wrong crowds trying to obtain a lifestyle their parents couldn't afford. This is especially during the time where the country went into hard lockdown due to the outbreak of Covid-19, resulting in loss of jobs and income for most households in South Africa. Latest reports reveal that South Africans had no emergency reserves, which is why many people struggled to make ends meet when the Covid-19 pandemic hit and had to make do with reduced or no income for a few months (Okonjo-Iweala and Coulibay 2019).

As it stands, South Africans have insufficient, if any, emergency savings, according to FNB research among its middle-income customers earning between R15,000 and R42,000 per month. The research also found that more than 80% of middle-income consumers have little or minimal savings that they can access within seven days should an emergency arise. It also came to light that about 27% of people have no emergency savings and 56% have savings of less than one week's take-home pay. The study looked at all of the funds that consumers had in their accounts, including transaction and deposit accounts, as well as prepayments on credit cards and home loans that they can use within seven days (BusinessTech 2021).

The following section addresses local perspectives on media representation and the culture of material consumption among the youth.

## **2.6 Local youth perspectives**

This last section on literature review ties down how globalisation, economics, race and class and parenting play an important role in the chain of influence that often leads to consumption. The youth is at the forefront of digital usage and they are at a stage where everything looks stylish to them thus for those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds may be tempted to involve themselves in the life of crime while trying to feed their new-found consumption behaviours.

With globalisation and technology making the world smaller, this translates to communication of ideas, meanings, and values around the world in order to broaden and deepen social ties.

Companies use the youth as the seed, to water the adult plant and new technology is seen to offer the promise of changing society into a better one, just as how adults speculate that their children's lives will be somehow 'better' than their own (Sefton-Green 1998). However, there is a relationship that exists between income and children's influence in family decision-making. In today's world, children are no longer just bystanders; they now play an important role in families and have a significant influence on parental purchasing decisions. Children have become the centre of attention in any household, regardless of country or culture. Children's influence is greater in high-income or financially secure households (Jenkins 1979 and Atkin 1978) cited in Ali and Batra (2011).

They are part of the family's activities and "products which are directly used by children are mostly decided by children themselves" (Arul 2016:2).

There have been recent suggestions that 'new' media like the internet, as well as more 'traditional' media like TV and radio, impact children's experience and knowledge of brands (Kenway and Bullen 2001) as cited in (Nairin, Griffin and Wicks 2008). On a more fundamental level, new media could influence how youngsters think and learn. 'New' media is everywhere around us, in the gadgets and devices we



use to keep our lives organised and also to communicate with our friends and acquaintances (Hansen 2010).

This is why advertisers target teenagers to ramp up their revenues, and in the end teenagers fall prey to the idea of commercialisation of happiness (Twitchell 1996). This concept was largely evident in the documentary *How the Kids Took Over*, where it was shown how the kids are now in the driver seat because of the advancements of technology; meaning that the kids now have more choices because the companies sell dreams that often invoke desire in children. In the documentary *Blow Up or Cave* (2020) for the first time in South African popular culture hip-hop is explained as one of the dominant genres which has produced household artists such as Cassper Nyovest, AKA and Nasty C. This genre has grown in heaps and bounds and has become dominant in the mainstream industry, raking in millions of rands while spreading the culture.

In light of all the points of agreement raised by authors and researchers; it is safe to assume that children are at the forefront of family-buying decisions and that it has been like that for a very long time. This could be because parents believe in giving their children the life they never had, and for them that is giving the children all the things they never had while growing up (Arul 2016). For example, apartheid in South Africa meant that there were spaces that people of colour were not allowed into. The above examples are evident that the media can influence the youth positively and negatively; clearly stating that it is up to an individual how they receive and gradually use the information before them.

Since happiness and economics go hand-in-hand, this study probed how parents are constantly finding new ways to keep their children happy. For a long time, happiness and profitability have had a cosy relationship, with social psychologists, advertisers and corporate executives constantly collaborating to reconcile quality of life with the financial status. New smart phones now track our buying patterns and can be programmed with software that helps us monitor and improve our mindfulness. New technology can now provide companies and the industry with workplace and consumer-oriented data required to handle happier employees and in turn targeting happy customers (Davies 2015).

Institutional economists are mainly concerned with determining and demonstrating how particular classes with collective behaviours are rooted in and reinforced by specific social structures. They look at the processes of technological reforms as part of these common habits and at how other routines, as well as cultural and social factors, affect creativity (Sparviero 2010; Hodgson 1998).

Because as people we yearn for the feeling of being respected and accepted by those around us, we are constantly trying to chase the unobtainable. The youth sometimes resorts to violent crimes in order to feel accepted in their circles. In a study carried out in Ngangelizwe township, it was found that “young men spoke explicitly about the importance of their sexual relationships in enabling them to access ‘position’ and respect among their male peers” (Bruce 2007:72). This illustrates how everyone wants to feel important and of high status among those around them, and many don’t care how they achieve this; the only thing that matters is being able to afford a certain lifestyle. In the quest to feed their habits, poor youths may get into a life of crime or transactional sex as a means of feeding into their new-found lives.

Young women exploiting their desirability in an effort to attract men who can support their new-found luxurious lifestyle that goes hand-in-hand with materialistic things like “jewellery, smart phones, trendy clothes, and chances to be featured as passengers in luxury cars” (Leclerc-Madlala 2004:2). This seemingly has little to do with poverty-related survival strategies but such practices are more about satisfying ‘wants’ as opposed to meeting ‘needs’. It doesn’t end there, as some youth ‘persuade’ their parents to feed their new ‘addictions’. The study revealed the common misconception that all modes of sexual exchange are directed toward survival rather than consumption. Women in this research revealed that they used sexual exchange to follow images and ideas primarily shaped by the media and globalisation. Many women tolerate men’s multiple partners and place themselves at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS because transactional sex is viewed as ‘normal’ (despite having knowledge of the pandemic). This highlights how women are objectifying themselves in order to manipulate sexual relationships in the service of new ‘needs’ – commodities.

These are common sights in the townships in South Africa and Inanda is no different. A study conducted by Bhana and Pattmann (2011) around townships in KwaZulu-Natal, argues that young women’s love is tied to their aspirations towards middle-class consumerism. This means that they can’t separate love from a man who provides, in this way feeding their love for money, fashion and prestige. Challenges and struggles faced by the youth of South Africa is well documented in Mthembu’s (2019) study and highlights the dire situation these young people residing in townships are in, in relation to securing their livelihoods. “Inequality between the previously and still disadvantaged black African community and still advantaged is predominantly due to racism, patriarchy, gender and age (Asante 2007:16). Poor people often go for the suffer-manage syndrome as a means of escaping their reality by finding ways to survive. This study asserts that life is essentially very challenging for young people who grew up poor due to limited economic opportunities (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013).

Since this is a media project, it is vital for the researcher to table challenges faced by the media ever since advertising has largely become international and there is mounting pressure for newsmakers and television producers to be in bed with corporates, thus driving the same narrative. This creates a space in which certain kinds of advertising and media is being produced, which seldom reflect our realities. All these practices can be understood through the following media theories because this is essentially the realm in which parents are engaging with the media - a space where media has been corporatised.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

Approaching this project from a media perspective begs the use of theories that examine consumer behaviour and the ways used to invoke desire out of potential consumers. To better understand this, the study used consumer culture theory and communication theory in trying to establish a connection between advertising, the power of media, representation and consumption behaviour.

Using consumer culture and communication theories the researcher was trying to show the assimilation of culture through globalisation, especially among the youth. As a result of growing technological advancements, consumer culture is becoming more globalised and the youth is thus easily influenced. This process usually happens through local culture where individuals share meanings, opinions and ideas which end up being on the global stage, leading to culture and identity assimilation. This dissertation also looks at the role consumption plays in how the youth construct their identities and this is usually evident in the type of products they consume.

The following section covers the two theories that guided this research, as well as its contribution in the investigation of how parents in Inanda respond to the advertisement of material goods.

## **CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Communication theory is an underappreciated structural foundation for strategic communication, but it is a continuous method of sense creation in modern strategy theory (Van Ruler 2018). This project wants to give this theory the appreciation it deserves in relation to applications within the context. It has been argued that even though much has been written about communication theory, but the experts seldom dig deeper. The literature review indicates how this approach is used to come to a conclusion that communication is an inclusive and participatory mechanism at all stages in advertising. In communication theory the audience is a vital part of the communication process while consumer culture looks at ways in which companies are able to study the way consumers behave and this is influenced by marketing communication (Van Heerden 2010).

The researcher resorted to using two theories to better understand the media influence on family buying decisions which are brought about mainly by the youth. This allowed for the breakdown of how these messages are communicated through the media. Tokuhama (2011:33) studied previous research in trying to make a connection between self-identity definition and consumer goods and suggested that “clothes make a man”. This leans towards this study’s suggestion that in today’s society people are judged by their consumption patterns and it’s no wonder that clothing, cars, houses, and even cell phones have more than one purpose. The material things can also be used to signal ranking, group membership, personality, or personal taste. Sometimes without us saying anything, objects do the talking for us – they send out signals on how people should treat us.

This leads in to a chapter that looks at the way culture and choices around consumption are linked to identity. Since this is a framing for the study that allows us to make the connection between culture, consumption and identity for Inanda youth and parents, it’s vital that this is examined through consumer culture theory. The idea of ‘clothes makes a man’ speaks to issues of consumption, materialism and identity in the ways that people are imagining themselves and leads us to a conversation about consumer culture theory.

### **3.2 Consumer culture theory**

In this section consumer culture theory is discussed in detail together with its components to arrive at this thesis’ assumption that media plays a huge role in consumption levels among parents in Inanda township. Using consumer culture theory (CCT), the researcher breaks down the patterns that exist between consumer culture, media influence and parenting for Inanda parents. The central question for

this project is wanting to understand the role parents play in mediating these messages from brands and how they themselves are navigating consumption choices.

Consumer culture theory refers to “a stream of research focusing on consumption patterns as a social and cultural practice” (Askegaard 2015:1). It is a theory that “explores the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and the multiplicity of overlapping cultural groupings” (Arnould and Thompson 2005:869) that are part of a larger socio-historical context of globalisation and market capitalism. The dynamic links between consumer activities, the marketplace, and cultural meanings are also addressed in this approach (West and Turner 2013).

Consumer culture theory is “a field of inquiry that seeks to unravel the complexities of consumer culture” (Arnould and Thompson 2018:4), it investigates the how meaning spreads and the different cultures that exist within different cultural groups, rather than seeing culture as a reasonably homogeneous set of socially shared meanings, modes of life, and unifying ideals shared by a member of a community. Consumer culture is something that consumers do and believe rather than an attribute of character. It is something that has to do with markets, consumption and cultural grouping.

Consumer culture theory research has over time delved into consumer experiences and their practices in identity construction using marketplace resources. There is an assumption that consumers’ decisions in the market are influenced by increasing globalisation thus changing the cultural perspective of things. Companies hire celebrities so that they appeal to certain groups, prompting those groups to consume certain products simply because every group has someone they consider an opinion leader who they trust when it comes to decision making on which products to buy or which services to use (Afzal, Shao and Sajid 2019).

Consumers are analysed through concepts like demographics, their purchasing or usage habits, their expectations, their knowledge and image perception, their attitude towards competitive products and specific needs for the target audience (Van Heerden 2010). Consumer behaviour and the way in which people spend money coincides with issues like the state of the economy and as the economy climate changes, consumers’ money flows to different business sectors and this gives sector analysts a clue about what to expect next. As much as consumers are cautious with their money, especially during recession and tend to withdraw from unnecessary spending. However, this doesn’t last long because the next phase after recession is recovery and consumers go back to the notion of feeling like they have extra money to spend again. It is at this point that businesses ramp up their marketing strategies and production in order to take advantage of the present mindset of consumers (Duff 2018).

Another common strategy companies use is the conversion process, where marketers “take a consumer from the unknown and convert them into brand advocates or loyalists” (Van Heerden 2010:46). This is done by identifying which consumers are interested in their products and the way their messages are communicated, and more importantly the way these play a role in consumers’ lives. The next step is to make sure that companies tantalise consumers into engaging with the brand and gradually building up from their initial perception of the brand making sure that they can build the consumers’ trust, thus creating a relationship with them over time. Conversion allows for consumers to be familiar with brands and this is important because it is most unlikely that consumers buy a brand they have never heard of because of brand association, that is why it is important that the company puts its brand out there for awareness with the hope that consumers will develop a relationship with it.

Consumption is a key feature of late modernity, Veblen (1953) used conspicuous consumption theory in unpacking cultural life and class through consumption. Stating that people’s way of spending differs according to the societies they belong to and these are always classified under need, use and waste. The issue of consumption is always linked to the idea of need and state that the “content of culture may not directly meet individual basic needs but none the less provides the social conditions necessary for those basic needs to be met” (Dant 2000:28). This also affirms the theory’s stance that a set of distinctions and differentiations enable society to operate in a certain way, thus leading to modern societies defining people’s needs and their relative behaviour. In simple terms, culture can be defined as society’s way of life and that society often has a way of doing things, shared norms (shared rules about behaviour) and values that often bind the society together (Zepf 2010).

A more specific definition of culture “comes from interpretive theories, which see it as comprising of shared meanings and symbols which people use to convey meaning” (Abbott 1998:8). This culture is formed through unconscious processes over time. The most obvious way in which members of society share meanings is through using the same language. This can be evident in the different slang and jargon that certain groups use to identify themselves or ‘one of their own’ which helps enforce a sense of identity. To achieve this, a society may also develop its own symbols, badges, types of clothing, tattoos which give particular coded messages to other members of the culture (Belk 1985; Hall 1994).

The word culture refers to something that is passed down from generation to generation, something that is learned and comes natural to its people; it may be beliefs, religion, food, etc., it is something that we are not born with. Those who know about a code for a certain society know how to act in specific situations, implying that they comprehend the meaning of the code, whether represented in words or by some other symbol. Cultural codes involve a system of opposing signs and are one-sided in how a certain society views certain behaviours and tends to be hostile to those outside the culture. The media

informs who we are by informing the culture around us, thus essentially shaping who we are (Lock, Wonneberger, Verhoeven and Hellsten 2020).

Culture acts as a form of control by creating order and uniformity on the basis of a shared cultural code, shared customs and habits in any society are what form its cultural system. Objects and resources that culture produces are often used by people in their daily lives; such as vehicles, books and clothing, are central to this understanding of culture. These items are often referred to as ‘material culture’ and they may be used to convey information about one’s status or to make cultural or social statements. Buying expensive jewellery, a t-shirt with a slogan or by choosing to buy a particular car can lead to other people making their own assumptions about who you are, thus the objects we use in everyday life form part of a symbolic meaning (Gill 2013).

We learn the culture of our society through the process of socialisation which can be defined as a way in which we absorb rules of behaviour which are common in our society. Learning norms and values is a key part of the process of socialisation into a culture. Norms and values equip us to take up roles in society (Vagra and Tully 2016). These norms and values are enforced on a society through the system of sanctions which may be rewards or punishments and it is easy for society to apply these as a way for us to follow its rules. And it is in this way that socialisation is conducted and controlled: through social institutions such as the church, school, family and mass media. These institutions play a vital role in teaching and sanctioning desired norms and values (Bauman n.d.) cited in (Abbot 1998).

Culture leads to identification which can be defined as something that is “constructed on the back of recognition of some common origin, shared characteristics with another person or group or with an idea” (Hall 1994:3). With identification comes a natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. Identity is a way certain groups use the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being. This speaks to the questions of whom these groups are and where they come from, how they have been represented and how they might represent themselves going forward “identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation” (Hall 1994:91; Gill 2006).

Although it is accepted that with identification comes identity, it is also important to note that identity can mean different things to different people at any given moment, hence identities can never be unified. Identities are also created through, not outside, which simply means groups find satisfaction in standing out. Every identity has its margin and the unity and internal homogeneity is not natural, but it is a constructed form of closure. Some groups create ‘unities’ to proclaim power and exclusion. Identities are the positions which the subjects are obliged to take up while always knowing that they are representations (Hall 1995:6).

Structures within a society are created by people's actions, but they then in turn influence the behaviour of others and this brings the researcher to the conclusion that "society is best understood as the result of both structure and action" (Abbot 1998:12).

People express themselves as part of a certain society through the way they live with and use objects and material culture which ties them "to others in our society providing a means of sharing values, activities and styles of life in a more concrete and enduring way than language use or direct interaction" (Dant 2000:2). Material culture is an important part of the social world we live in, and it has a significant impact on our beliefs, attitudes, and way of life. Objects are social agents that spread human behaviour and trigger meaning between people, and the majority of these objects come with function and style. This kind of material culture is in line with this study's presumption that leans into the understanding that young people within today's consumer culture are always looking at ways to be more stylish than the next person and to have the latest gadget on the market in order to feel like they fit into a certain society or to feel they are part of a global culture.

This is how young people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are defining their identities in relations to global culture and it's important to note the shift from modernism to postmodernism in the hope of better highlighting the ever-changing times of the world that we live in. The worldview known as postmodernism was a reaction to the modernism of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Modernism during this period was marked by industrialisation, market-oriented economic societies and ideals of technological progress (Heywood 2012) cited in (Elaati 2016).

The modernist theory states that There isn't a single dominant or shared culture in every society. There is a contrast in postmodern societies; a complex and diverse variety of cultural norms and values coexisting, but not always peacefully. In such societies, cultural norms and values are largely derived from the mass media. Individuals in these societies usually adopt norms and values of any particular group they aspire to and they usually turn to the mass media for this since "all they have to do is watch TV, decide which lifestyle they like, and then buy the relevant cultural symbols, such as clothes, car, music and books" (Abbott 1998:12).

Postmodernism theories promote individuality where people can choose from a wide range of cultures on offer, without confining people into constrained structures such as gender, ethnicity, class and religion. With postmodernism came another dimension of culture known as pop culture. This term can be used when referring to cultural activities which developed with the rise of industrial capitalism and it is often regarded as shallow and meaningless. Popular culture or mass culture, as some will refer to it, simply refers to cultural activities or products which are popular at that given time" (Kidd 2014:32).



In contemporary consumer culture “people strategically construct their identities across time and space in a constant state of becoming” (Arnould and Thompson 2018:21). Sometimes, the industry adds and also enables identification campaigns by including a collection of tools and activities that can be used individually or in conjunction to self-present or achieve identity. In this way, identity is constructed through what people encounter in their societies together with the process of imagination, meaning people have the capacity to understand themselves based on their surroundings and can pass this to one another while some use imagination to escape their realities or to create new identities (Anderson 2020). The introduction of the Internet gave rise to global imagined communities cantering on commercial brands. “In these brand-based collectives, brand enthusiasts collaborate to create value by enhancing brand-oriented experiences through creating and performing practices related to the brand and to the collective brand-related engagement” (Klein 2000:84) stating that brands are more valuable when done or consumed as a collective (Thibault 2014).

The consumer culture theory examines consumption patterns that are mostly influenced by culture and identity. This project looks at how these intersect with consumption with the media’s help. This begs for the following question then: what does this mean for parents in Inanda who are trying to manage homes where children are trying to negotiate identities and are still in the early stages of development? This project is raising this as a question and it leaves us with the gap of understanding ways that parents are able to navigate homes in relation to consumption messages that are so formative for their kids. It is inevitable to talk about issues of culture and shy away from how questions of identity are often brought up alongside representation, reflexivity and symbolic construction. This is to say that people often base their identities on historical milestones, language and culture (Bottero 2010).

The following section looks at communication theory and its tenets in attempting to understand how messages of influence are communicated to Inanda parents, who in turn respond to them through consumption.

### **3.3 Communication theory**

The secondary theory for this project is the communication theory. This theory provides us with a glimpse of some parts of the project that we need to look at. Since theories provide us with a bigger lens to view the world, it is important to understand communication in its theoretical sense. It is also vital for the researcher to detail what marketing communication and communication is for the reader to grasp the reasoning behind using the consumer culture theory and the communication theory.

Communication can be defined as something that happens within time and place “that serves to define a place for its inhabitants and establish an identity. It connects places, reducing the distance that separates individuals, countries and cultures”. Communication is key in advertising because it ensures that businesses elicit emotional responses from customers when they sell their goods. Communication is something that happens within time and place “that serves to define a place for its inhabitants and establish an identity. It connects places, reducing the distance that separates individuals, countries and cultures” (McQuail 2010:1).

This speaks to issues of cultural assimilation aligned with consumer culture theory and how young people in far flung places like Inanda, which are outside of centres like London and New York, get to hear about brands at the same time. This is because communication allows us to reduce the distance between cultures through globalisation (Du Plessis 2010). With the help of the media, advancements in technology and the effects of globalisation, the world has become a global village where people from all over the world meet and share ideas. This has led to particularly young people creating or adopting other cultural identities and behaviours leading to modern day imaginings for them. This means that people are no longer clones who are influenced easily, but they have the agency to make their own choices by means of escaping reality through imagination. Communication theory is international in as sense that it gives us space to view this project in a global perspective on how influence is communicated through the media (Pappas and McKelvie 2014).

Communication is viewed differently in common sense understandings because it differs in relation to understanding the role of language or the symbols and codes or deeper processes that are embedded in communication. Communication is characterised as a mechanism by which people communicate, maintain, and manage each other (Ruler 2018). Face negotiation theory, for example, explores how people interact with one another. Different cultures’ conflict outcomes are shaped by cultural distinctions (Benazir 2019).

This theory is one example of thinking about how humans share meaning through the ways they communicate. Media acts as an extension of man in the way they understand the world and communication as “the relational process of creating and interpreting messages that elicit a response” (Griffin 2009:6). Communication involves talking and listening, writing and reading, performing and witnessing and communication always involves messages (McLuhan 1964) cited in (McQuail 1994). McLuhan’s famous phrase ‘the medium is the message’ is explained by Stenberg (1991:21) as follows; “the medium is usually defined as the technical or physical means whereby messages are transmitted in the communication process. The medium thus provides the necessary link between communicator and recipient”.

When companies like Vodacom, Absa or Sanlam have new products out, they make it a point that they constantly communicate them to their target market because “products or services cannot sell without effective communication messages and there are many forms of marketing communication, and variety of methods exist for this purpose”, and they include advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, publicity, direct marketing and digital communication (Du Plessis 2010:3).

This type of communication is a dimension called marketing communication, it deals with the ways in which a message is created, delivered and managed and how targeted consumers perceive it. Media such as television, radio, magazines, outdoor signage and digital media is needed for these messages to be transferred to and from targeted consumers and the techniques used need to be changed constantly to reflect the present world and mood while reaching a large target market (Griffin 2009). It is unusual to mention consumption culture and communication and leave out marketing communication because it is through this concept that consumers learn of new products in the marketing, and how these products are advertised in the media has an effect on potential customers. It is for this very reason that the researcher resorted to using consumer culture and communication theories.

Looking at theories impacting on the consumption of goods, the researcher is trying to assert how the advertising space has changed and also the way that politics and the media are defining what counts as good journalism, thus changing the narrative of how consumers receive information and ultimately make choices.

### **3.4 Theories impacting upon the consumption of goods**

The media landscape in South Africa is separated into three tiers: public media, commercial media, and community media, which acknowledges that the media serves a large, diverse, and socioeconomically unequal population. The public and community media act as crucial counterweights to commercial media (Wasserman 2020). As diversity makes South Africa’s media landscape so unique, media strategists plan for demographics, age, location, income, and even psychographic elements such as race, culture, beliefs, and language (De Bruyn 2021).

The following section highlights how marketers thrive on this when sending out and planning media marketing strategies to maximise turnover and how some of these theories are used to understand the media space in different studies.

#### **3.4.1 Socialisation theory**

Studies based on children’s consumer behaviour have produced interesting findings. Rose (1999) used the socialisation theory to investigate the influence children have on family decision-making in countries like the United States and Japan. He came to a conclusion that consumer socialisation is something that should occur early on in life. Cooper (1999) supports Liebeck’s (1994) findings,

revealing that when mothers shop with their children they spend 30% more than the initial amount budgeted, while fathers spend 70% more.

### **3.4.2 Globalisation theory**

In trying to understand the effects of globalisation in the world economy, Lindert and Williamson (2001) and Vanham (2019) used the world systems perspective, defining globalisation as a multifaceted concept that encompasses not only economics but also politics and sociology, among other fields of research. Trade, investment, development, finance, innovation, and demand are all economic aspects of globalisation. Globalisation, according to some accounts, began more than 200 years ago and part of economic globalisation has to do with trade, investment, manufacturing, demand and competition (Simpson 2007).

### **3.4.3 Consumer behaviour theory**

Consumer behaviour theory speaks to the models involved when it comes to decision making for consumers. Early economists, led by Nicholas Bernoulli, John von Neumann, and Oskar Morgenstern, began to investigate the foundations of consumer decision-making about 300 years ago (Richarme 2007). Using the theory of consumer behaviour, Pettinger (2012) draws the reader to the conclusion that sometimes consumers will spend on certain products for the simple fact that they feel some kind of connection to those products and that they somehow identify with them.

Samson (2014) tries to clarify this when he talks about behavioural economics and says “think about the last time you had to purchase a customisable product. Perhaps it was a laptop computer. You may have decided to simplify your decision making by opting for a popular brand or the one you have owned in the past”<sup>2</sup>, coming to a conclusion that the brand itself influences the first choice a consumer makes about a certain product. This study used a humanistic approach in examining the stages of decision-making that ultimately leads to consumption (Potts 2014).

### **3.4.4 Media theory**

Following McLuhan’s (1964) dictum that ‘the medium is the message’, media theory sees the media as essentially disruptive. Many media articles that pay attention to geography take a more empirically based approach, distancing themselves from the notion that media messages are over determined by the medium. Potter’s (2004) theory of media literacy proposes that determining people’s level of media literacy requires knowledge of media content, markets, and consequences. He argues, in fact, that those who understand how media outlets function will be more media literate than those that do not. The

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<sup>2</sup> No page number, this is an online article.

advancements of technology, especially the introduction of mobile phones in Africa, meant the reception of global ideas, culture, heritage and behaviour. These are often filtered down to the continent translating to consumption of these concepts as a way of being part of the bigger world (Heaven and Turbridy 2003).

### **3.4.5 Media representation theory**

Media representation theory came out strong in the above section in trying to highlight the role the media plays when it comes to representation and stereotype. The most common interpretation of this word has to do with whether a representation of something is true or distorted (Kieff and Casbergue 2000). In comparison, Hall (1997) proposes a new perspective in which the principle of representation plays a far more active and creative role in how people think of the world and their position within it. Hall's (1997) sentiments on representation recognises that communication is tightly linked to power, and that those in positions of power in a culture have a say in what is portrayed in the media, in the same way the media influences other cultures that are seen as a minority (Luther, Ringer and Clark 2012; Wilson, Gutierrez and Chao 2013; Gray 1995). This draws back to the point made above on the section on race and class about the fact that what is portrayed in the media is usually the opposite of our realities because lack of representation in the boardrooms where decisions such as this are made, which may result in a distorted picture getting portrayed.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

The main questions of the study in relation to how parents in Inanda keep their children happy and the question of media-influenced consumption are therefore approached through the overall theoretical framework of consumer culture and communication. One would ask why and how do these two theories work together? The fact that communication or language and the messages conveyed in language allow for consumer culture to be spread; that is why these two theories are discussed alongside one another in the above section to fully investigate the research problem by looking at media and branding, media and consumption, and media and marketing through shared meaning that is being distributed through various channels targeting the young of Inanda who in turn influence their parents into spending habits.

The following chapter will discuss the methods used to explore how the media influences ways in which parents respond to marketing strategies used by companies to lure consumers in trying to keep their children happy. The study used general thematic and semiotic analyses to understand the messages that parents respond to when raising young people in this township. The methods are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter contains the dissertation's research methods, as mentioned in the title: *Generating 'happiness': A semiotic and general thematic analysis on experiences of consumption and media marketing strategies for Inanda parents*. In this section, the researcher will look at the research design, participants, sample selection, data collection processes, form of data analysis, rigour, ethical considerations and research limitations pertaining to this thesis.

### 4.2 Qualitative design

For this project the researcher used the interpretive approach, using semiotic and general thematic methods of data analysis. Qualitative research can be described as a broad approach that looks at social factors using natural conditions that creates a variety of enquiry methods that are interactive and humanistic and this type of research takes place in the natural world (Rossman and Marshall 2006). Qualitative research employs a variety of methods and takes an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject. Qualitative research must be "systematically and rigorously and strategically conducted yet flexible and contextual" (Kvale 1996 and Mason 1996: 5). This implies qualitative researchers look at occurrences in their natural surroundings, attempting to comprehend or view things through the lenses of the meanings individuals assign to them. Natural environment in this context refers to open outdoor spaces that allowed participants to be surrounded by familiar spaces for their ease. Case studies, personal experience, introspective life stories, interviews, and observations are all examples of qualitative research methodologies that must be carefully examined and chosen (Denzin and Lincoln 2005).

The researcher chose to use this paradigm because its central concern is understanding the subjective world of human experience (Guba and Lincoln 1989), when compared to constructivism or social constructivism that states that reality is socially constructed. Unlike positivists who firmly believe in a single truth and reality, constructivism points out that there is no single reality. According to constructivists, reality is a subjective creation and as humans, we all create our own worldviews (Punch 2005).

The interpretivist paradigm seeks to get into the mind of the subject being studied, so to speak, to understand and interpret what the subject is thinking or the meaning they give to the context. It focuses on understanding individuals and how they interpret the world around them. Thus, the main tenet of the interpretivist paradigm is that reality is socially constructed (Bogdan and Biklen 1998). The interpretivist under discussion is more sensitive to individual meanings and contributions, rather than

compromised by positivist research philosophies which defines a research worldview based on what is known in research methods as the scientific method of inquiry. Comte (1856) postulated that empirical experimentation, observation, and reasoning should be the basis for understanding human behaviour and are therefore the only legitimate means of expanding knowledge and human understanding. On the other hand, positivism seeks to interpret observations in terms of facts or measurable entities (Fadhel 2002), relying on the philosophical attitudes of scientists to treat observable realities within society, leading to the production of generalisations.

The researcher noted that when using procedures like informal interviews and participant observation, an interpretivist approach to social research becomes more qualitative. It has been argued that people are merely puppets who respond to external social forces while interpretivists contend that people are not just puppets. Interpretivists believe that people are complex and diverse, and that various people view and assess the same objective reality in very different ways, as well as having their own, often quite different motives for acting in the universe. Interpretivists think that in order to understand human behaviour, we need to develop empathy - that is, we need to perceive the world through the eyes of the participants (Thompson 2015). Qualitative work expands on positivist studies that looks at quantifiable information that is useful in getting a sense of a generalised experience, which was what the project was targeting, understanding that qualitative research deepens that understanding which looks at things like context and meaning attributed to various experiences.

At this point it is important to introduce the main research questions that were drafted for the sole purpose of resolving the research problem to identify relevant areas of research within the same subject. These are the four questions that guided this project:

Main question:

1. How do parents in Inanda perceive and manage media messages and consumer choices related to generational demands of keeping children happy?

Sub-questions:

1. What consumer messages are communicated to parents through the media?
2. How do parents in Inanda respond to, perceive and manage consumer messages?
3. In what ways do parents attempt to 'generate happiness' among their children?

This section is important because research questions influence the rest of the research process, such as formulating a theory and determining the requisite sample design, as well as the study population, variables, and statistical methods (Patino and Ferreira 2016).

### 4.3 Participants

For the purpose of this study, participants were eight parents from Inanda township, all employed and they are from both poor and middle-class backgrounds which is the set-up of this township. They are between aged 32 and 42 years old. Their kids' ages ranged from two to 17 years and on average each participant had two children. They were interviewed in their natural environment.

The table below illustrates the participants that were part of this study, their ages and what they do for a living. The researcher resorted to using pseudonyms as part of the ethics outline to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants. The participants comprised of four males and four females as the researcher was trying to get a balanced perspective on parenting for mothers and fathers to arrive at more believable suggestions of this project.

**Table 1.1 Breakdown of study participants**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Number of children</b>	<b>Children's ages</b>
Thula	36	Artisan	Male	1	12
Thami	38	General worker	Male	4	4,12,15,17
Khuli	33	Nurse	Female	1	10
Zola	35	Cameraman	Male	2	4, 11
Nhla	32	Teacher	Female	1	5
Zipho	34	Statistician	Female	2	2,16
Mnikazi	32	Entrepreneur	Female	3	5,7,9
Shaka	42	Entrepreneur	Male	3	9,13,15

Using descriptive statistics and also adding qualitative analysis in any study to better understand participants allows for readers to get an idea of the extent to which “study findings can be generalised to their own local situation” (Pickering 2017). It is for this purpose that the researcher saw it necessary to present the participants' demographics in table form.

\*Pseudonyms were used for this study.

### 4.4 Sampling and access

A sample of the population refers to the part of the population that is being studied. In this context, a sample is a smaller group taken from an accessible population using a specific procedure (Etikan, Musa



and Alkassim 2016). The sample of participants that were chosen for this study had a special connection to the research problem because they are residents of Inanda township with children. For the objectives of this study, the researcher used purposive sampling to identify potential participants in the community of Inanda during a community meeting which is held on the last Sunday of every month. There are two types of sampling methods: probability and non-probability sampling. All subjects in the target population have an equal chance of being chosen for the sample with probability sampling procedures. Non-probability sampling procedures are those in which not all members of the target population have the same chance of being chosen (Elfil and Negida 2017). For this project the researcher used purposive sampling in identifying potential participants. Purposive sampling is a research method in which researchers collect market research data from a specific group of respondents who are both easily accessible and relevant to the study. Because it is very efficient, easy, and cost-effective, it is the most extensively used sampling technique. Members are always available to participate in the study in a variety of ways. Purposive sampling is the name given to a procedure in which the researcher selects sample elements depending on their accessibility and proximity (Forzano 2012). The researcher used purposive sampling because this technique is often used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich potential participants for effective results, using limited resources (Patton 2002). This involves identifying and selecting an individual or group of individuals with particular knowledge or experience of the phenomenon of interest (Cresswell and Plano-Clark 2011). In their respective studies, Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979) noted that the importance of availability and willingness to participate and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in a clear, expressive and thoughtful way go hand-in-hand. For these reasons, the researcher chose purposive sampling because unlike probabilistic and random sampling that minimise the potential for selection bias and controls for potential effects known and unknown, purposive sampling is precise and information rich.

The first meeting with potential participants was held after they availed themselves to be part of the project during June 2019 to discuss what the study pertains and what the researcher will need from potential participants. Potential participants were identified at a community meeting which took place every last Sunday of the month. Permission was obtained from the ward councillor (See Appendix D) to conduct these interviews since the project's focus was on a certain community group, honouring ethics in research. Interested parties were asked to leave their names and numbers and would be called by the researcher at a later stage for the next phase of the study. The participants were informed about the outline of the study, and that they have a right to anonymity and confidentiality and that they can withdraw from the study at any stage without any repercussions.

To paint a clear picture of how the recruitment of participants was done; this would be displayed in the timeline below:

- 18 February 2019 - The researcher met with the ward councillor, Mr Mabanga, to brief him about this project and that the researcher is looking for potential participants of the study within his community. The researcher was then invited by the councillor to join a community meeting that was set for March 31, 2019.
- 31 March 2019 – The researcher attended the first community meeting, after the meeting was adjourned, the researcher was given the platform to brief the community about the project and who the potential participants should be (parents residing in Inanda). A general verbal invitation was extended to potential participants. Those who were interested in being part of the study were asked to remain behind after the meeting. The target for the study was 10 parents but we had 12 potential participants coming forward. This meeting happened before the IREC clearance.
- 26 May 2019 – The researcher attended the second community meeting and after adjournment, potential participants who showed interest following the announcement in meeting one were gathered for further briefing. The researcher then discussed what was expected from them and given a timeline on when the interviews will commence and to also work on a schedule that was suitable for both the researcher and the potential participants.
- June 2019 – The researcher organised a meeting with potential participants, which was held at the community centre and went into detail about what the study pertains, and at this point one participant decided to remove herself from the project stating personal reasons. This meeting took place after IREC clearance and approval for data collection to go ahead.
- August to November 2019 – the researcher conducted the first phase of the interviews and two participants participated. Again, one potential participant opted out of the study due to to schedule meeting times clashing.
- April 2020 – The researcher halted the interview process following the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus and its restrictions. After the Covid-19 pandemic two potential participants passed away.
- December 2020 to January 2021 – After collecting data for phase 2 of the interview process with the remaining 6 participants and it was decided that the researcher stops at 8 participants as the data was already saturated.

#### **4.5 Data collection**

In this project we did 8 interviews and collected 15 photos from parents in Inanda, a selection criteria was used to identify photos that best answered the project's research questions. The researcher chose the method of interviews because it has been proven to acquire the desired outcomes. An interview

should be seen as a conversation between two people who have a mutual interest on a certain issue. A conversation comes naturally to human beings because that is what they do on a daily basis – they interact through it and in the process getting to know how the other person is feeling about the world they live in (Kvale 1999). He defines an interview as a structured and purposeful dialogue that goes beyond the casual exchange of ideas and becomes a rigorous questioning and listening technique with the goal of getting thoroughly proven knowledge. According to Kvale (1999), the researcher must be the ‘driver’ in any interview and should always define and control the situation by posing questions that are followed by probing questions from the participant’s answers.

It is important to note that after the first meeting, potential participants voiced their willingness to participate in the study. The first phase of the interview process started around August 2019 and the use of a cell phone voice-recording feature was made to ensure precise data collection and also to help the researcher keep recordings to help analyse data. During the first phase, only two participants were interviewed. The second phase (December 2020 to January 2021) saw 6 participants being interviewed. There were 8 interviews that were between 40 minutes to an hour. Before the interviews commenced the researcher made it a point that each participant was reminded of the study’s objectives and ethics pertaining to the project were also introduced. Subsequently, the researcher asked the participants to introduce themselves by furnishing their names, where they come from and sign the consent form (See Appendix A).

In terms of data collection methods, the researcher conducted the study using a semi-structured questionnaire that acted as an interview guide. Some questions were prepared ahead of time to assist the interviewer in guiding the conversation toward the research objectives, but many questions arose during the interviews (See Appendix C).

The individual interviews were conducted in an undisturbed, quiet public space where the participants felt comfortable and relaxed for the easy-flow of the conversation. During these interviews refreshments were provided and these acted as an ice-breaker and to develop rapport. This allowed the participants to not feel like they were pouring their hearts out to a total stranger whose only intention was to benefit from their lived experiences. This is at the heart of some qualitative concerns around power and co-construction in the interview space.

Conducting these interviews was done to allow the researcher to get into the world of the participants and to get richer and deeper answers and also because qualitative research is person-dependent, it only makes sense that the researcher conducted interviews to honour this view. Qualitative interviews may “add an additional dimension, or may help you to approach your questions from a different angle or greater depth” (Mason 1996:42). This method of interviewing helps the interviewer to get a more accurate and complete picture of the interviewee’s viewpoint.

The researcher opted for this method because interviews are known to offer interviewers a lot of flexibility. The interview receives a higher response rate than e-mailed questions, and people who are unable to read or write can also participate in the study. The interviewer also gets an opportunity to assess the respondent's nonverbal conduct. In this type of setup, the importance of social cues is determined by the information the interviewer seeks from the interviewee. Unlike interviews conducted by e-mail, which may have a negative impact on the interviewer, the interviewer can choose a private and quiet location for the interview. Also, face-to-face interviews don't have a space or a delayed response compared to emailed interview questions, for instance. The interviewer, like a questionnaire, has control over the order of the questions and can rate the respondent's spontaneity (Raymond 2006).

Some of the disadvantages of conducting face-to-face interviews include technology issues that are most likely to stem from issues with the recording system and unwanted noise but in this project we were fortunate to find quiet spaces in which to conduct the interviews. In discussions of qualitative interviews, interviewer protection is often ignored, but it can be of special significance depending on the interview questions asked. As several scholars have pointed out, in a face-to-face interview, the interviewer's protection could be jeopardised (Kazmer and Xie 2008; Wilson 2012) but the researcher was able to mitigate these factors by attending the meeting with the ward councillor present and also accessing the community during the day. This was done as a precautionary measure to ensure the researcher was not in any kind of danger of getting mugged and their possessions stolen.

As mentioned above, the second method of data collection was derived from photos of children in their natural setting to identify and speak to issues of influence that are evident in these photos using semiotic analysis which can be described as a study of signs and symbols. In his readings Baudrillard (1994) emphasises Klein's (2000) views that consumers no longer consume products, but signs through advertisements and television and that the objects of consumption themselves have value for us as signs and our identities are constructed through sign-value.

The concept of signs and symbols in relation to semiotics is that while this belonging can only be simulated the object has the ability to say something about its owner, such as the user's lifestyle and the social classes to which the user belongs. The item shows something of the user's personality and beliefs. Designers must be aware of the hidden language that exists between the user, the used object, and the people around them and at times, the object can 'speak' for itself (Bürdek 2006; Figueiredo and Coelho 2010).

It is through this theory that the researcher is using photos to further gain more insight and understanding into the lives these children live and also to look for clues of consumption influence and behaviour. The photos were obtained from parents of children who were part of the study and these

were sent to the researcher through the social media application called WhatsApp. The photos were collected and before they were used, all identifying information was removed and the children's faces were blurred out in accordance with standard ethics in research regarding the protection of minors.

#### 4.5.1 Instruments

Interviews were conducted with 8 parents that the researcher identified through purposive sampling in the community of Inanda township, which houses people from different Living Standard Measures backgrounds – but where most live below the poverty line. The interview process followed a semi-structured approach to examine four specific research questions in relations to media marketing strategies companies use to get the attention of parents and influence them into spending money on their children.

Using the interviews as an instrument for data collection was because the researcher wanted to get a clear perspective on issues of consumption through the participant's eyes, and what better way to do this than to converse with them in their natural setting?

*“If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them? In an interview conversation, the researcher listens to what people themselves tell about their lived world, hears them express their views and opinions in their own words, learns about their views on their own situation and family life, their dreams and hopes. The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations”* (Kvale 1996:1).

Using the interview questions guide, the point of interest is ways parents manage to keep their children happy and what happiness means to each one of them and from there the researcher followed up with probing questions by following the conversations carefully and letting the answers the participants were giving be the guide for possible areas of interest.

The questions were feasible and open-ended to allow the participants to answer to the best of their ability. All the interviews were recorded for accurate and concise transcription for data analysis. Kvale (1996) explains that recording a conversation during an interview gives the researcher permanent form of the way the interviewee reacted to each question, thus the researcher can always go back to the recordings again and again to verify data. The interview schedule comes as an attachment (See Appendix C).

Data analysis for this study followed two methods namely; general thematic and semiotic analyses. These two analyses allowed the project to unpack the two data collection processes: interviews and photos.

Semiotics explains how meanings are created and communicated and these are perceived in various ways in daily life and these meanings are passed on through individual understanding and representational processes (Weber and Glynn 2006). Semiotics deals with signs and the overall organisation of sign systems in communication and understanding (Chandler 2002).

The second type of analysis is general theme, which employs the five basic ways of categorisation of meaning, condensation of meaning, narrative-based structure of meaning, interpretation of meaning, and ad-hoc methods for generating meaning (Kvale 1996).

Thematic analysis has long been recognised as a distinct and important tool in its own right, alongside more developed qualitative methods such as grounded theory, narrative analysis, and discourse analysis. Thematic analysis is a straightforward, versatile, and commonly used method for analysing qualitative data. It provides a qualitative researcher with a firm foundation in the core abilities required to participate in various qualitative data analysis methodologies after learning how to conduct it (Braun and Clarke 2012).

In communication some codes are instilled from a young age within a society or culture and in this way they tend to appear natural and the way we make meaning of these codes is called encoding and decoding. The meaning is sometimes so simple that it doesn't feel like it's being decoded, thus making it easy for communication to flow with fewer mistakes of misinterpretation (Hall 1994). This is how it goes for every-day conversations and interactions. In instances where communication is more complicated and what is being communicated can be interpreted in different ways or can have multiple meanings and that is where connotation and denotation comes in.

Denotation in communication refers to the literal meaning while connotation is associative. Hall (1973) argues that denotation and connotation helps us analyse communication better, stating that nothing in the world only signifies the literal (denotation), that there is often meaning associated to it (connotation). That is why it is important for advertisers to make sure that they get the point across to their target audience by ensuring that they drive the point across. This is done because society usually attaches meaning to objects making them represent something much deeper within a culture. In this project both denotation and connotation methods were used to construct obvious and hidden meanings through the study of signs and symbols by analysing the photos that were obtained from Inanda parents who were part of this study.

The table below shows us the differences between the two forms of analyses used for this project. General thematic analysis allows for textual analysis where else semiotics is primarily focused on the visual components, but both allowing us to interrogate language and the meaning that has been communicated in relation to consumption practices.

**Table 1.2 Semiotics vs General thematic analysis**

<b>Semiotic analysis</b>	<b>General thematic analysis</b>
- Semiotics is the science of signs and how meaning is made through culture	- The systematic technique for studying message content and handling as well as analysing narrative materials of life stories.
- In its approach, the study of signs and sign processes, as well as indication, designation, likeness, comparison, allegory, synonymy, metaphor, symbolism, signification, and communication, are all covered by semiotics.	- Different methods can be used to examine data, e.g. a thematic map. This is a graphic representation of themes, codes, and their interactions that includes a full account and description of each topic, as well as criteria, exemplars and counter examples, and other comparable data.
- Creates decryption mechanisms of complex dynamics; subjective in nature	- Constructionist and factual perspective
- Interpretation and description of meaning through text/images, focusing obvious and hidden messages	- Description and interpretation, both inductive and deductive, emphasising context

These approaches combined offer sound interpretation since semiotics and general thematic analyses are both well-established approaches for analysing advertising messages and textual elements, with semiotics originating in the fields of linguistics, literary and cultural studies, and thematic content analysis originating in the social sciences (Pierce 1958).

In this context, thematic analysis helps to contextualise semiotic interpretations.

#### 4.6.1 Semiotics

Data analysis took the form of semiotic analysis, which can be explained as a study of sign systems and how meaning is made within a culture, and general thematic analysis. “Semiotics is the study of how meanings can be produced and communicated through different signs and symbols as part of our social life” (Eco 1979 and Saussure 1983) cited in (Kucuk 2014:95).

Semiotics is “something that can be applied to anything which can be seen as signifying something within a culture” (Chandler 2017)<sup>3</sup> and can be used to simplify or interpret images and texts. The chosen theories will work best with this form of analysis since semiotics is the study of signs in culture (Hall, Evans and Nixon 2013) as this dissertation deals with ways in which young people associate with brands/signs to convey meaning to their lives by creating a form of ‘culture’. In this project the researcher is seeking to decode texts and images and the hidden message they convey to their target market and identify what reality these images and texts construct.

The purpose of semiotic analysis is to “establish and absorb a full-spectrum cognitive grasp and understanding of something” (Rankin 2017)<sup>4</sup>. This form of analysis has become powerful in research for decoding beliefs, brand imagery and advertising. For data analysis the researcher will use visuals of everyday lives of children, without exposing the minors’ faces and only looking at the types of clothes they wear, the lives they lead and the sort of entertainment they are exposed to, to explore parenting in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

To further understand semiotics, Copley and Jansz (1999) believe that the concept of sign systems being of great importance is simple enough to grasp; yet, the acknowledgment of the need to research sign systems is a relatively recent phenomenon. They emphasise the distinctions between natural (occurring naturally) and conventional (made specifically for the purpose of communication) signals and they agree that “signs are ubiquitous and embedded in society” (Peirce 1958:1).

Bezemer and Jewitt (2009:1) argue that social semiotics are “concerned with meaning makers and meaning making”. They go on to state that this type of system investigates how people utilise and construct media delivery modes of communication to express their view of the world and to shape social relations with others. Semiotic analysis seeks to represent the system of categories, relations, and different levels of meanings by identifying underlying norms, similarities, and differences. Semiotics is made up of two main components: signified and signifier. The signified is the “object or the idea to which the signifier makes a reference and the signifier is the form taken by the sign in a way that it can be seen, heard or touched” (Chandler 2002:5).

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<sup>3</sup>No page number, this is an online article.

<sup>4</sup>No page number, this is an online article.



A semiotic method can be used to construct decryption mechanisms for complex dynamics as well as to analyse signs (Kress and Leeuwen 2006). Usually in movies actors are presented with messages and how these messages are decoded or interpreted in various ways depending on context. This is done to influence ways people view a particular message and how they respond to it, leading to modification and recreation of existing meaning structures (Sabahat and Anwar 2017).

The main idea of “encoding and decoding is that the communication process incorporates production, circulation, application and reproduction of messages in a non-linear way in contrast to the linear approach of communication flow between sender and receiver” (Peirce 1958:24). The message is influenced by the discursive way it is being communicated. This triggers the potential bias between the sender’s aim and how the message is received by the target audience. Encoding refers to the process of creating a message, while decoding refers to how the message is received and understood by the recipients, as well as how the message can be reproduced.

Businesses use the encoding and decoding processes in information sharing, negotiations and inter-organisational collaborations (Hall 1973:11). This is evident in Eco’s (1976) definition of semiotics as a combination of the theory of sign production and the theory of codes.

The fact that there are many parallels between the creation of pictorial images and the creation of written language; semiotics is the study of the nature of these parallels and the individual components of pictorial and written language (Ferreira 2007).

Many researchers define semiotics as an analysis that aims to expose the fundamental social and cultural processes that produce texts (interpreted broadly to include all cultural artefacts) by looking behind or under their outward appearance. The more obvious the text is, the more difficult it will be to penetrate it and discover its hidden features. As a result, semiotics focuses on the mode of representation rather than the substance of the document, as well as the influence of the representation on both the creation and perception of the content (Ferreira 2007; Mingers and Willcock 2017).

The main reason for the researcher to use two methods of analysis, semiotic and general thematic analyses, was to gain a more comprehensive, deeper contextual understanding of messages through the decoding of children’s photos that were supplied by their parents and also the data from the interviews that were conducted. These types of analyses usually work best with most types of qualitative research methods, including content analysis.

Honouring this type of analysis, at the end of each interview, the researcher asked parents to send her pictures of their children’s activities or interests for the researcher to decode in line with semiotics discipline. These pictures were sent through the social networking app known as WhatsApp.

The second form of analysis is the general thematic analysis. In the following section this method of analysis will be unpacked in greater detail on how it works, its components and its usefulness in this project.

#### **4.6.2 General thematic analysis**

For the purpose of this study and as far as data collection was concerned, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with parents of Inanda to investigate their standing in ways companies advertise with the aim of influence on their children.

To decode recorded interviews, the researcher followed general thematic analysis which can be explained as a natural interaction between people, it is not something that can be faked (Kvale 1996 and Potter 2012). According to Kvale (1996), this method takes the following five main approaches:

1. categorisation of meaning
2. condensation of meaning
3. structuring of meaning through narratives
4. interpretation of meaning
5. ad-hoc methods for generating meaning

Dey (1993) makes an example of how you can never make an omelette without breaking the eggs and you still have to beat those eggs together for the end product. This is the very same way that one goes about when analysing qualitative data.

Honouring the first step of general thematic analysis which is the categorisation of meaning, the researcher broke down the data that was collected while working with transcripts. The first step was listening to all the transcripts to identify possible themes. Following this careful exercise, the researcher then started the process of transcribing the interviews and proceeded with printing the transcripts out in order to start the data analysis procedure. To navigate through the transcripts with ease and to make sure that no data goes unaccounted for; the researcher colour-coded each transcript before printing it out. This was done so that when the process of grouping data into themes came, the exercise was much easier to work around.

The main aim of printing out the transcripts was for the researcher to be able to work with data in looking for themes or subjects of discussion for the purpose of easy organisation. These themes were colour-coded and grouped together to start comprehensive data analysis.

The second step was validated through sorting out data in terms of likeness, by putting it into different 'folders' and comparing whatever is at hand. This was done for the sole purpose of making sense of the data collected and also to identify possible methods of how it can be presented through findings. To

arrive at these themes the researcher was led by the interview questions that were structured according to themes.

This was derived from the literature that was reviewed for the study. This means that as part of step one, the researcher coded the data based on the interview questions which already had established areas being inquired into. These themes parenting, happiness, culture and identity as well as local youth perspectives. Probing questions were posed during the course of the interviews and in this way additional themes were introduced.

Based on this, the researcher also created themes to speak to the new ideas through thorough interrogation of transcripts. The researcher then settled on the new themes based on what was evident when working with the established codes and the new areas that informed the study and came to a conclusion of working with the following themes: opposite worlds; choices, freedom and voice; culture; consumption culture and youth/pop culture; saving and spending habits and 'happiness'. Some ideas were overlapping that is why the researcher resorted to taking those ideas and putting them together to establish joint themes thereafter.

Honouring the third step the researcher began narrating the themes and had to make sure not to miss anything that happened during the interviews; that included observing participants' body language when they were giving answers because what comes before and what comes after is relevant for any type of research (Dey 1993). The aim of this was to make sense of themes by interpreting them. While at the stages of sorting out data it is important to take into account the protection and privacy laws. These states that transcripts, written and recorded content should be kept in a safe and secure place (Mason 1996). These steps were followed more than once in making sure that the correct grouping of themes was made and then the data was ready to be interpreted and given meaning. Also, at this stage photographs of children were roped in as part of semiotics analysis, subsequently honouring the forth step of general thematic analysis.

The ad-hoc generation of meaning is vital for data analysis "to describe the objects or events to which our data refers and we want to do more than describe ... to interpret, to explain, to understand and perhaps to predict" (Dey 1993:30). This meant that the researcher had to have the skills to see beyond the data before her and move on to the next stage of interpreting and understanding that how participants say things also counts as data and that can be used to construct and add meaning to the project and how data is presented. It is through following correct methods of data analysis that we can obtain a fresh view of our data.

In this section it is important to mention the use of semiotics by analysing photographs of children in conjunction with data from the interviews to honour the last section of a successful general thematic

analysis. The researcher searched for connotations and denotations and also probing obvious ideas presented by the photographs in trying to understand consumption behaviours, brand consumption, marketing strategies and what generates 'happiness' for each child.

#### **4.7 Ethics**

In the context of this project, abiding by the obligatory ethics code, the participants were informed that they have a right to anonymity and confidentiality (see Appendix A) and they were given knowledge of what the project is about. They were assured that the transcripts will not be heard by anyone other than the researcher, the participants and the supervisors.

Data will be stored under lock and key and electrons will be password protected. Data will be retained by the main supervisor in the department for a period of five years. In addition to this, the participants were given informed consent (see Appendix A) that "entails informing research subjects about overall purpose of the project and how it will be carried out" (Kvale 1996:112).

The participants signed these forms before the interviews to show that they were in accordance with being part of this project. Participants were also informed that they have a right to withdraw at any time without any consequences and that they were protected from emotional and physical harm during the cause of the project and this can be done by making sure that the participants are relaxed so that they can open up to the researcher about issues that were bothering them (Mason 1996).

The theory of critical ethics states that the willingness of a researcher to think past obvious answers inspires research and makes a commitment to social change. This journey necessitates ongoing involvement and understanding of the situation and the importance of the research method as well as results and that is how critical theory comes into play. This method allows scholars to move beyond theorising and interrogate data points in order to engage in political discourses, advocate for the common good, and promote a more socially fair democratic society (Roof, Polush and Boltz 2017).

Critical ethics has been described as the study of those structures that are the ethical tenets meant to direct the lives of humans as a branch of philosophy. These ethics are founded on a self-consistent, qualitatively-described, and careful understanding of humanity and the world that makes it up, rooted in a way of knowing things in which experience is the source of all facts, and reasoning is merely there to express what can be taken from experience (Hadfield, Rainsford and Woods 1998).

As the researcher it was vital to achieve an objective that relies on an accurate interpretation about how people do things, how the environment works, or what makes people feel or react in a certain way but this is impossible to attain if we have false ideas of how certain things work. The pragmatic part of critical ethics is having an accurate view of facts such that your actions provide the desired outcomes (Norris 1999).

In the event of sensitive issues that came up during the interviews; participants were advised that they will be offered counselling that will be free of charge. Lastly, the participants were enlightened that should they need to read the project findings, they will be given access.

It is also important to note that for the purpose of this study; interviewing friends, family, colleagues and people funding the project was prohibited. Revealing information was removed and pseudonyms were used to conceal revealing information that might identify participants. The researcher strived to minimise harm and risks by upholding human dignity and privacy throughout this project.

Since this study focused on a group of people within a community setup, it was vital for the researcher to honour ethics and request a gatekeeper letter which was obtained from the ward councilor of Ward 107 (see Appendix D) granting the researcher permission to talk to potential participants for the purpose of research. Ethical clearance was also obtained from the Durban University of Technology's IREC in May 2019 and the final letter confirming clearance for the data collection to commence is attached (See Appendix B).

#### **4.8 Positionality**

The nature of qualitative research, within the domain of so-called soft-science literature, places positionality as a fundamental element of the research process. It is vital to state that positionality doesn't look down on the truth of such research, instead it sets the boundaries within which the research was produced (Jafar 2018).

The nature of qualitative research sets the researcher as the data collection instrument and for a successful research project, researchers and the community need to work alongside each other (Koster, Baccar and Harvey 2012). This is true for this dissertation as the process of investigating it has provided the researcher with the chance to take a closer look at the place she has called home for the past 29 years, as well as its people. The starting point for the researcher was to identify if how she perceived parents in this township, coupled with the researcher's own experiences, was a true reflection of how parenting takes place in Inanda. The researcher entered into this project with the hope of detailing experiences of parents raising young people in this township.

Research is a process that goes beyond data collection and dissemination of findings, it continues as we interpret and reflect on the data before us. Research also represents a shared space between participants and the researcher and both have the potential to impact on the process (England 1994).

It is crucial to note that identities can lead to perceptions during research and our biases have the ability to shame the research process, while gaining insight onto how to approach a research setting.

Throughout this project; from coming up with the title to the formulation of the research questions, the

researcher's positionality as a parent residing in Inanda never left her mind (Chiseri-Stater 1996 and Pillow 2003).

During the course of this project the researcher learnt that she may have been a bystander in her own community for all these years because some of the issues the participants raised (off-record) were somewhat new to her yet she has been residing in the same space as them. But what was striking was that these parents have new ways of doing things, of raising their children and leading their lives while learning in the process (Gaventa and Cornwall 2001).

Having had preconceived ideas about this township and its people, the researcher conducted this project mindful of this fact. To avoid influencing the data in any way, the interview guide was reviewed by the supervisors before the interview process was carried out. The researcher was instructed by her main supervisor to submit the first two interview recordings to identify if these were suitable for the project going forward. The researcher was careful that her biases, interpretations, observations and subjectivity don't have an impact on the participants and how they responded to questions during the interview process.

For any qualitative research, the core is to provide an understanding of a problem through other people's lived experiences and particulars provide a means to avoid losing experiences in abstraction (Eisner 1998), and serve as a means to generate themes from data.

The researcher noticed that interactions were mostly shaped by the recording process and this meant that the participants were somewhat careful of what to tell the researcher. It was as if they were cautious not to give out any wrong answers, even though at the start of the interview process they were assured that there is no right or wrong answer. At some instances the researcher had to pause or move on to a question that can be considered 'light' until the participant in question was back to their relaxed self.

It is vital to note that during the data analysis Kvale's (1996) approach was followed, guided by theoretical framework, disciplinary and common knowledge of the researcher to arrive at the findings presented by this thesis.

The researcher being a black young person, a parent and also a resident of Inanda placed her at a position of privilege while conducting this project but was cautious not to contaminate data with her own experiences during interpretation and analysis.

#### **4.10 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the methodological approach and the procedure that was used in this dissertation. Using qualitative methods of data collection, the study followed two analytic processes: general thematic and semiotics to look at ways Inanda parents navigate parenting and consumption culture among the youth. This chapter also outlined how data was collected and analysed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and data was collected by means of general thematic analysis (interviews) and semiotic analysis (photos). The methods facilitated a different kind of engagement with the data sets and the researcher was able to engage in an in-depth qualitative manner with experiences of these parents in the community.

The following chapter is a thorough review of the evidence gathered during the interviews in order to better understand how Inanda parents interpret and handle television messaging campaigns and issues of influence while still attempting to keep their children happy

## CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

### 5.1 Introduction

In this section we look at findings and discuss them in detail. The researcher employed two approaches of data analysis, as described earlier in this project; semiotic and general thematic analyses. The first section is a semiotic analysis of photos of children, taking into account the issue of different marketing strategies used by companies in luring young people into a new dimension of culture. The second section will examine data collected through face-to-face interviews. This information will be introduced under different themes namely:

- Parenting
- Culture and identity
- Consumption culture and youth culture
- Choices, freedom and voice
- Spending and saving habits
- Happiness

Findings in this study indicate that there is evidence that children's consumption behaviour is directly linked to their media consumption. Although the above is true, the data collected and analysed shows that parents in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are excited about raising their children and this study gave them the opportunity to connect into the idea of consumption based on their own childhoods and freedom. This study revealed that Inanda parents are embracing new modes of parenting that result from and extend to ideas of childhood and identity after Apartheid. The findings are very much linked to the issues of parenting, childhood and identity. There is evidence that children are now free to be children and that they are growing up in a different world compared to the one their parents experienced. This specifically means that messages of consumption speak to rather than against cultural norms and values for these parents. What we see in these findings is that the messages of consumption that parents receive are aligning with how they view life in general.

Participants in this study conceded that there is no protecting their children from media marketing strategies as children are always on their gadgets consuming brands, copying behaviour and looking for the latest trends as a form of influence or to be part of a popular movement at that given time (Klein 2000). This is because communication may be a means of mind control; the one who has the ability to talk loudly and with the proper tone of voice can exert dominance on others in a certain manner by elevating the particular argument above all others. It is quite evident that consumers of visual arts have evolved into increasingly advanced readers of signs and messages, interpreting art work creations



subconsciously. Signs, sentences, pictures, and our visual language shape and influence everything about us as human beings today, including our own identities (Ferreira 2007).

The same thing happens when artworks with a symbolic significance are shown and stimulate the minds of others. Regardless of the message's substance, various media convey messages differently and that is why it is possible for the same message to mean different things to different people. The way the subject is portrayed and the context in which it occurs in each type of media discusses these meanings (Vagra and Tully 2016).

## **5.2 Semiotic analysis**

For the purpose of thorough analysis, the researcher followed the principles of semiotic analysis in trying to understand obvious and hidden messages shared through the media in trying to understand the messages that parents respond to when raising young people in Inanda.

The patterns of consumption behaviour have been widely linked to how companies advertise their products to the public and there is indication that marketing companies are in the business of fulfilling their own interests; and that is making money. These companies don't always have the consumers' interests at heart, hence missing an opportunity to think about the effects that their strategies may have on families and at a later stage, communities. In driving this, companies use popular culture with the pure aim of generating profit, as opposed to making people's lives better and that is why sometimes there are families who are struggling financially but still find it difficult to stay away from messages of consumption (Davis 2016).

The parents in Inanda raised it in the interviews that they were not technology savvy, and admitted that most of the influence when it comes to products they consume comes from their children. To support this, there have been recent claims that 'new' media, such as the internet, as well as more 'traditional' media, such as television and radio, have an impact on children's brand experience and knowledge (Valkenburg and Piotrowski 2017). This is evident in how young children are often seen playing games with their parents' smartphones and how the gender divide gap has narrowed since girls are also catered for in the virtual world of gaming – which has been dominated by boys. This kind of exposure allows for children to be primary receivers of messages of consumption and in turn pass the influence on to their parents. These patterns of influence have an outward ripple effect: from a single family, to a group of friends, to a classroom and later the larger community, thus forming a culture (Anderson 2020).

This creates an urge in children to want to live their lives according to what they see on the small screen because the environment around them is conditioned for children to see the world through a

particular view and it doesn't help that post-modern cultural forms refuse to differentiate between the art and life, what is cultural and what is real. In this way the audience is usually "sensitised to the reception of such cultural objects because of a 'semiotics of everyday life' in which the boundary between the cultural and life, between the image and the real, is more than ever transgressed" (Lash and Urry 1994:134).

This is to say that the power of semiotics is evident in our everyday lives; and can be seen in advertisements, billboards, pop music, videos, computers and so on. These are things that are already represented in the media and eventually introduced to our spaces and, on a more fundamental level, they have the capacity to shape the way in which children think and learn (Kenway and Bullen 2001) as cited by (Nairin, Griffin and Wicks 2008).

Examining the photographs of children in their natural environment, playing or carrying out everyday activities, the researcher looked for connotation and denotation meanings, the relationship that exists between play and the commercialisation of happiness and how the media has the power to make the unreal to be real and what is meaningless to appear to have a deeper meaning. Attention is given on how objects on adverts are always fulfilling, desirable, magical and exciting and how this has an effect on consumption behaviour.

For the purpose of semiotic analysis, the photos of children are presented and analysed (labelled below: First Look being the first two images we will look at collectively, all the way to Fifth Look which is the last image examined) employing the process of denotation and connotation in communication in the construction of meaning. Why semiotics? Semiotics is known for its ability to decode visual images (Shadiqi 2014). To help understand and predict social trends and learning how to satisfy consumers and also moving with the times, companies are constantly working on strategies about how brands and consumers communicate meaning and understand each other in different parts of the world. The introduction of social media and the introduction of the internet has made it easier for brands that need to reach multiple markets to do so while also helping local brands widen their reach (Wilson, Gutierrez, and Chao 2013).

It is important to note that all images used below were sourced from parents who were part of this study and they were sent via the social media platform called WhatsApp to the researcher to only be used for the purpose of this thesis. The two images below introduce us to the First Look.

### 5.2.1 First Look

The two images below show icons of cars, kiddies' cartoons made into machines and an array of bright colours which instantly tells the viewer that the children are at a kids' amusement centre playing different kinds of games.



**Figure 1.2 and Figure 1.3 Children playing at an amusement centre.**

While the kids' faces are blocked due to honouring ethics, in unedited images there is lots of excitement on the kids' faces marked by smiles and this could emanate from recognising their favourite TV cartoons being integrated into their real-world playing experience. This can also mean that children are now free to enter spaces their parents were not allowed into because of the Apartheid regime in this country. To some it may look like kids just having fun, but another person might see this as a passageway to the unknown for black parents as they enter unfamiliar spaces in the hope of giving their children the life they never had. This is evident in the data collected when parents say they want to give their children the best of everything.

Fink (1957:14) states that play is “a portraying symbol-activity of human existence in which the latter interprets itself” and that symbolic representation of magical games generates aspects that are not found in the circuit of simple reality, but it also generates imagination. The children in the photographs above display freedom and being in familiar spaces simply because they can identify with most of what is around them. They get to be surrounded by cartoons they usually see on TV, as at the amusement centre they get the real-life experience of taking a ride with their favourite cartoons. The vibrant

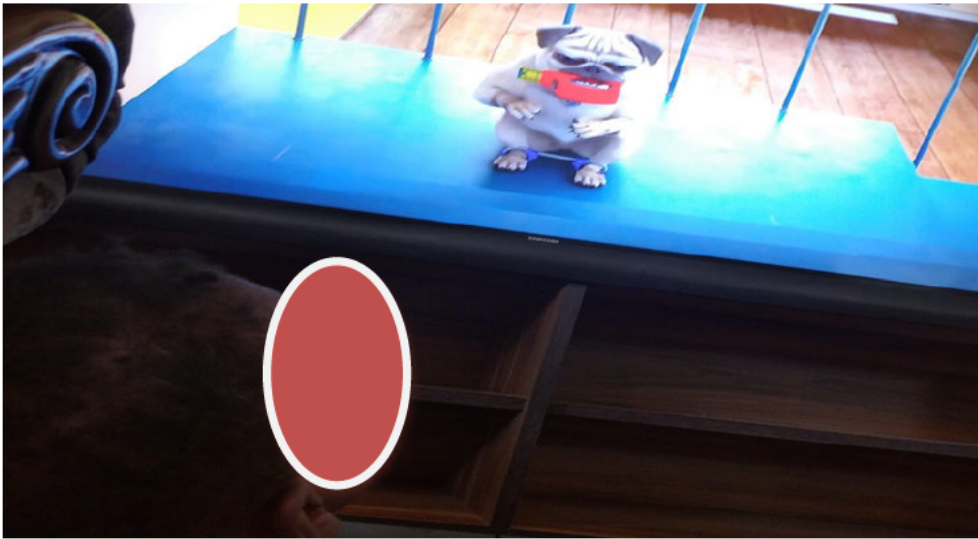
colours and lighting instantly tells a child's mind that it's time to play. Kress and Leeuwen (2006) attribute this to the interactive meanings of visuals that are passed on as messages through the media and for kids these form part of their representation; either through music, dance and motion. They highlight that this is done because companies know that kids' attention span is minimal and to keep them interested they need to introduce colour, sound and dance and thus the learning of the new terms by musical rhythm was imprinted on the minds of the children after watching these in action form on moving visuals" (Sabahat and Anwar 2017:9). This is evident in how children would sing along to every jingle and dance to music while watching their favourite shows.

That is why it's difficult for children not to feel some kind of connection to these things because even the way toys are made, the material used and the manner in which they are played all have vital meanings to children (Kieff and Casbergue 2000). The material from which a toy is made has an ability to evoke certain emotions in children and they end up having deeper relationships with toys than they do with anything around them (Thibault 2014).

It is this feeling of sentiment that companies use when they present their products to the public. This is because they know that advertising represents a manufactured idea that exerts a powerful influence on society and this greatly influences value of judgement, ideologies and culture dichotomies as it is evident in this study's findings (Tokuhamma 2011). He cited Twitchell (1996:36) who argues that advertising constructs ways in which societies view certain products by integrating them in our everyday lives without us noticing.

### **5.2.2 Second Look**

The picture below is showing a child watching their favourite cartoon on television. Though the photo might be a bit confusing at first glance, the dog is a cartoon character on TV and the child's head (with the face blocked) appears on the bottom-left corner of the frame. The TV is on a stand with empty shelves.



**Figure 1.4 A girl watching a cartoon on TV.**

What's striking for any viewer is that the TV predominates the picture and the child's face is only but a fraction shown. What we see here is the television set taking centre stage and the image telling us of its importance in this home. The positioning of the TV - above her - gives the sense that nothing should matter anymore to the child except what's in front of her. For any parent, that is their dream – peace and quiet. Parents who were part of this study expressed that children get exposed to dangers of consuming content out of their age range because they are usually watch TV, are on their phones or on their laptops without supervision.

This is never a good idea as it may later in life hinder good social skills for children as they would rather be glued on the small screen than go out and do other activities (Valkenburg and Piotrowski 2017). Some parents though raised that they let their children watch TV for longer periods of time because that way they can get some stuff done while the children are glued to their favourite cartoons. One parent said this is the perfect opportunity for marketers who use the ad break slots to advertise their products and brands to entice their potential consumers.

Companies may manufacture products, but what people buy are brands (Klein 2000). From observing the above image, it came to light that what the child is watching is not a local cartoon and it is not in their first language yet the child feels some sort of connection to it. She is watching this cartoon on a 24-hour channel dedicated to kids' content on DSTV. What one parent in this study argued is that children are moving further away from traditions and culture and in the process adopting other cultures and this may be an example of kids mimicking parents' behaviour in a sense that parents seldom watch shows with local content and that are presented in indigenous languages. It is in this way that communication or language and the messages conveyed in language allow for consumer culture to be spread. By watching Western TV, kids copy behaviour and their reasoning is easily swayed and this is

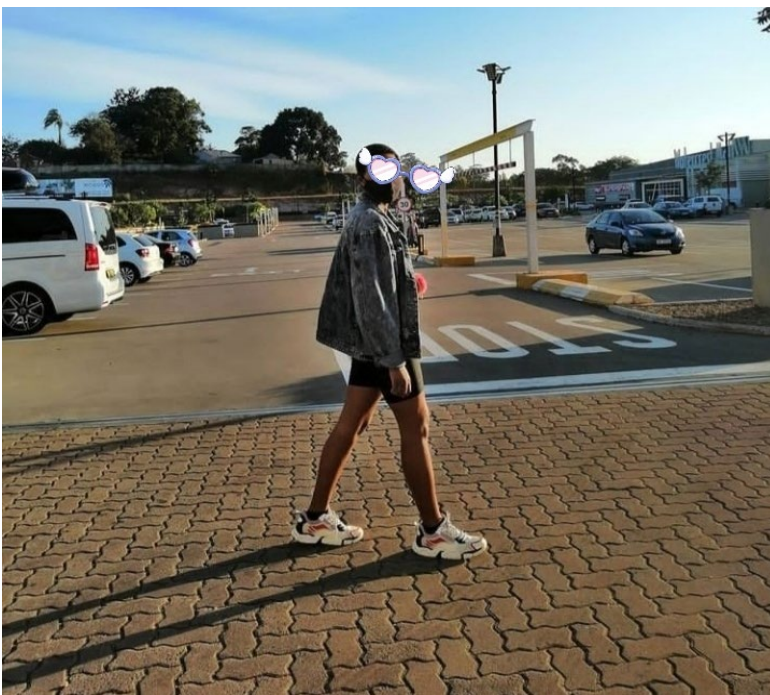


seen in how children who are not of school-going age can hold a conversation in English, simply by watching cartoons. As parents we seldom encourage our children to learn their mother tongue so as to bring them closer to their roots, English is still seen as being an ‘accepted’ medium of instruction even in our homes where most use their mother tongue when communicating. This doesn’t come as a surprise seeing that we have always been made to believe that that is what everyone should be working towards, and that it is how the world ought to be (Du Plessis 2003).

This brings the researcher to the conclusion that as Africans we believe so much in the ‘American dream’ that we will do anything possible to feel we are getting closer to it; be it spending hard-earned cash on brands from abroad; behaving the ‘American way’ or having the same ideologies as those of that part of the world.

### 5.2.3 Third look

The picture below shows a teenage girl and it is evident that the child is making specific lifestyle choices that represent fashion trends which are mostly identified in young people.



**Figure 1.5 A teenage girl in her favourite outfit.**

The picture above shows a teenage girl at what looks like a parking lot at an upmarket shopping mall. What’s striking in this picture is the way the teenager exudes confidence and the researcher’s interpretation is that this could be brought about by what she is wearing or the kind of activity she is about to embark on or it could be her state of mind that brings out the way she feels about herself or

what is to unfold throughout the course of this outing. Also, one can't overlook how stylish she looks and how that radiates through that extra bounce in her step.

Apart from the kind of cars parked behind her (which could roughly give us this place's demographic) it is difficult for the eye not to notice the super stylish sneakers the teenager is wearing. Children often imitate the lifestyle of their idols, that includes their fashion sense. This is done through the process of communication and globalisation which breed consumption culture. Teenagers are unlikely to escape advertising material as they practically live their lives on social media and growing up in a digital era has a lot to do with the way children are exposed to so much at a tender age. This is owing to globalisation which has since made the world a village, where everyone knows one another, speak the same language (literally and figuratively) and follow the same culture.

One can't help but wonder how parents are able to meet all their kids' demands in these tough economic times as the 2017 Momentum/Unisa household Financial Index argued that only 26,5% of household in South Africa are financially well, meaning that 73,5% of households were not in good financial standing. While South Africa is expected to recover slowly from the Covid-19 economic effects, the region of eastern and southern Africa is expected to grow at a rate of 2,7%.

This as recent reports show that the national lockdown revealed that few South Africans had any money saved for rainy days, which explains why many people found it difficult to stay afloat when the Covid-19 pandemic hit and some had to make do with reduced or no income for a few months (Okonjo-Iweala and Coulibay 2019). Further reports indicate that South Africans don't have enough savings for emergencies, according to FNB research among its middle-income customers earning between R15 000 and R42 000 per month. It was also found that above 80% of middle-income consumers have little or minimal savings that they can access within seven days should an emergency arise. It also came to light that about 27% of people have no emergency savings and 56% have savings of less than one week's take-home pay. The study looked at all of the funds that consumers had in their accounts, including transaction and deposit accounts, as well as prepayments on credit cards and home loans that they can use within seven days (BusinessTech 2021).

Consumer-oriented culture has come to shape the lives of the modern youth through the structure of marketing, branding and advertising, stating that youth are individuals who are "searching for a sense of belonging on how to construct their self-identities and common social world through products and the shared meaning that those goods embody" (Touhama 2011:34).

Inanda, and most of other South African townships, falls under the financially unwell bracket but it's in these places where we witness the most culture of consumption of expensive brands among the youth that are simply 'keeping up with the township culture', as evident in the image above. When it comes to consumption, township culture is all about following trends and looking stylish. Companies

capitalise on this as they often act as a compass that the youth desperately needs to navigate through life as a stylish teenager or child by advertising their brands and products as a catalyst to speed up feelings of ‘coolness’ and belonging, as these are the two most sought after statuses by the youth (Arul 2016).

#### 5.2.4 Fourth Look

This picture again is of a Western setting of a themed birthday celebration and at first glance it’s obvious the party is for a little girl. Western in this context refers to a culture that is often equated to Western lifestyle or European civilisation.



**Figure 1.6 A little girl at her birthday party.**

This image introduces a feeling of softness, all-things-cute, happiness and that things are going according to plan. The giveaway that this is a party is the appearance of the cake, the number 5 on top of the cake, the colour pink which is usually associated with girls and a tiara which is a symbol often tied to a princess and was widely adopted through one of the oldest bedtime stories: *Cinderella*. The little girl appears content and that is exactly how every parent wants their child to feel. We are a generation of parents that don’t want our children to want for anything because we don’t want them living the life we lived or to go through the struggles that we endured. One can easily say new-age parents shield their children from disappointment by overcompensating Coelho (2016).

Again in this image, the notion that happiness comes at a price is evident just by looking at the cake, which doesn’t come cheap, the new dress and the party set-up. In simple terms, this means that companies are in the business of selling ‘happiness’ to the willing buyer by enticing their buying



decisions through brand association, signs and symbols and media marketing strategies (Klein 2000). It is usually tricky to talk about semiotics and not mention colour and she gives examples of how colour is viewed and used in semiotics as is the case with the colour pink in the above image which points us to the understanding that this party is for a little girl without thinking twice about it. The most common colours have a standard social precept in which specific colours might stand for a general mood or idea. These meanings do not often transcend the boundary of the society that has constructed the meaning (Near 2011).

This is evident in the image below as the cartoon's producers used bright, catchy colours to drive a point through to children by ensuring that they never forget the image of any character they come across and that they can identify them even in their sleep because the images are often engraved in their minds. As soon as they see the colours associated with a certain cartoon, they instantly feel the connection and by this, the advertisers have done their job.

### 5.2.5 Fifth Look

In the image below we are introduced to another home, which shows the television set being the focal point and the cupboard is just there as a means of support as nothing is displayed on it, making sure that the attention is on the TV the whole time. This picture also shows how close the child is to the TV. The child being cropped out of the picture could be a way this parent was making sure that the child's identity is protected and that could be how parents understood the task when the researcher asked for photos of children for analysis purposes.



**Figure 1.7 A girl enjoying a show on TV.**

The cartoon characters are made to fit the whole TV frame so as to leave little room for imagination for the children. Thibault (2014)<sup>5</sup> sums it up when he says in their “inter-textual nature these toys/cartoons

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<sup>5</sup> No page number, this is an online article

are made to be particularly meaningful, as they carry with them roles, figures, relations, background narrations and values". This increased meaningfulness, however, is parallel to a decreasing versatility of the toy, that will always be prone to re-interpretations. He makes examples of how toys often resemble a TV cartoon and vice versa, and explains that these always involve role-playing, singing, carnival-like activities which involves stuff like masks, costumes and replica of objects and this always breeds an introduction to another make-believe world for children. Communication is key when it comes to advertising and the packaging of toys in order to get ahead in this competitive industry where making choices can prove overwhelming, thus companies focus on making these decisions easier for consumers.

In this context the packaged toys come in a form of a cartoon that's shown on TV which is presented to the young viewer who is usually attracted by colour, movement and music. The producers also always ensure eye contact is maintained throughout to keep the viewer captivated and in the process left feeling important because they felt the character was focusing solely on them. Coles (2014) says this is done deliberately to foster a relationship between actors and viewers.

The second theory in this project, communication theory, tells us this is done through careful communication strategies as this plays a vital role in advertising as a way of making sure corporations stir emotions from consumers in the way they advertise their products (Klein 2000). McLuhan (1964) explains this with his famous quote 'media acts as an extension of man' in that people are likely to copy everything they see in the media and they tend to adopt and advocate for the media's narrative as the correct way of doing things.

What is evident from examining the photos is that consumers in this new-age market are characterised as being "optimistic, self-confident, education-directed and highly ambitious individuals ... as well as upwardly mobile younger individuals" who are embracing the new dimension of parenting and redefining consumption behaviour (Bevan-Dye, Garnett and De Klerk 2011).

The researcher chose to use encoding and decoding to show how these processes are used in communication to construct meaning. They were chosen for the pure purpose of displaying that an event seen from one point of view gives one impression but when it's presented from another point of view, a different impression emerges. It's only when one looks at the whole picture that they are able to grasp what is going on (Hall 1993). Encoding and decoding in qualitative research is vital since this type of study deals with looking at things like interviews and focus groups where questioning and answering can change on the spot, demanding for quick encoding and decoding to take place. Since companies use branding to engage consumers through signs and symbols, the researcher chose to use

this method to investigate ways Inanda parents perceive and manage media messages and material consumer choices related to generational demands of keeping children happy.

The following section will be an analysis of face-to-face interviews under the topic of this dissertation to try and trace consumption behaviours and the messages parents and children respond to to remain 'happy'. The themes enforce a lot of ideas that emerged out of the images, with evidence that the primary ones are in relation to culture and identity.

### **5.3 General thematic analysis**

This section presents the reader with in-depth views and findings on the data that was collected and analysed through general thematic analysis. The data was from face-to-face interviews which were transcribed before the analysis process began.

In trying to understand the dynamics that exist between media marketing strategies and the influence of consumption, the researcher conducted interviews with parents of Inanda township to obtain a better view on the subject. The data was analysed using the five steps honouring general thematic analysis as listed in Chapter 4, and six themes were introduced to better understand and analyse data and to also ensure that all the research questions were answered.

In this section parents talk of a gradual shift in the style of parenting answering the first interview question (see Appendix C) that seeks to better understand the change in parenting style and raising children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **5.4 Themes overview**

The discussion will be presented in detail with the focus on different themes that were derived from participants' responses during the interviews. These are presented and evidence is shown around each theme. There are six themes in total and the first three: Parenting; Culture and Identity and Consumption Culture and Youth Culture speak to the dynamics of generational demands and how culture and identity are impacting consumption choices for the youth. These themes respond to the main research question on how parents in Inanda perceive and manage media messages and consumer choices related to generational demands of keeping children happy. Under the the last three themes: Choices, Freedom and Voice; Spending and Saving Habits; and 'Happiness' parents address how globalisation and the media has led to children being exposed to a bigger world and how the commercialisation of happiness takes place. These themes speak to this thesis' assumption that media plays a huge role in consumption levels among parents in Inanda township.

### 5.4.1 Theme 1: Parenting

The first theme to be discussed is Parenting, this theme was derived from examining data and identifying the issue of the generational gap and how parents and their children seem to be living in opposite worlds while under one roof. The aim of the researcher in this section was to establish if a link exists between the way participants were raised and in turn look at how they are raising their children. This is the first time the researcher had a discussion with parents on the idea of parenting and what their behaviour is and also how they understand childhood.

This was done to address the generational pivot in generation because the young people who are parents today are the first generation after Apartheid parents. What came to light is that today's parents are doing things differently compared to how they were raised and they are trying to navigate a space where both parenting and childhood has evolved. There is a clear shift in the way these participants are raising their own children. Some talk of a childhood that involved parents making all the decisions for the household and their duty as children was to be just that – children. The truth is that what we think of childhood as, has changed.

That is why it is important to note that the influence from the media is not only directed to the children, but parents are victims of this, too. This is due to the fact that new media has become more international in its influence (Okonjo-Iweala and Coulibaly 2019). Today's media is a significant source of influence for anybody, regardless of their social level. This could be due to a desire to emulate all that is portrayed in the media. As a result, youth have been more influenced by worldwide media in terms of lifestyle patterns (Böttger, Rudolph, Evanschitzky and Pfrang; Chamberlain 2017).

It's also possible that globalised media has influenced teenage consumer culture for things like eating habits, fashion sense, and living patterns, which have been communicated via various forms of information and entertainment technologies such as TV and films (Anjali and Anju 2009).

Most of the parents feel a lot has changed when it comes to the way parents and children live with each other in the present day.

They say while they were growing up, not much information was shared between parents and children because many adults took most things as taboo and there was nothing much in the media as well.

Fundamentally, this new form of parenting or the new form of childhood shows another dynamic to how these parents are involved in their children's lives. These parents are more liberal in their thinking and are more welcoming to change. Take for example the issue of dating and introducing your partner to your parents – it was something that was frowned upon but nowadays parents believe that they have the right to know who their child is involved with, which can be tied to parents trying to protect their children considering the high rate of rape, crime and other social ills that have engulfed our country.

*I would personally want to know who my child is out there with should they say they are going out with friends or boyfriends. The world has gone cruel so I can't be comfortable sending my child out there to the unknown. Yes, I can't protect my children forever but I made a promise that I will do everything in my power and within the course of the law to keep them safe from harm (Thami; male; 38, father of 4)*

This displays a picture of parents who are very active in their children's lives, they're not just buying their children stuff mindlessly but they do it as a way of participating in their children's lives. They reveal that they don't want their children to have the upbringing that they had and that is why they are set on doing things differently. They do admit though that they might not know what that means because that's not how they were parented but they are willing to give it a try. Most of the parents relived the struggles of not having much while growing up and the issue of poverty and being part of big families which meant they lacked. One parent in addition revealed that growing up he was part of a big family and is now making decisions to have a smaller family so that he can be more active in his children's lives.

There is no clear standing on the standard definition of poverty and most people in Inanda come from a place of lacking means of basic survival. Poverty, under-development, lack of basic resources and a scourge of violence are some of the words that are never left out when describing this township and this can be attributed to inadequate policing in townships, family breakdown due to diseases and other factors that contribute to the culture of violence and poverty (Shangase 2018).

Inanda is one of the oldest black settlements in the metropolitan region and it is one of the most populated townships in KwaZulu-Natal, describing it as the most representative place in terms of cultural and tribal diversities of the country and even some groups from the neighbouring countries like Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland and the place even where people who went to look for work in Durban settled (Ngceshu and Ncwane, 2002). Some of the findings are in line with a paper by Shangase (2018) that explored views on parenting in the African context for Inanda. The observation was that Inanda parents, youth, and community leaders' perceptions of African parenting styles and their effects on youth behaviour and revealed that this style of parenting was associated with respect and discipline.

The overall impression of parenting in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that parents are doing things differently and they are embracing new modes of parenting using their own experiences as reference on how to improve as parents. They speak of growing up in a place where the economic effects of Apartheid are still evident. Growing up, Khuli says her family didn't have much but what she remembers is that she

grew up in a home where children's opinions mattered and independence was encouraged and that taught her to be responsible for herself, always.

*I do not come from a well-to-do family but I do come from a home where we all had opinions as children and we were always encouraged to make our own decisions and to do things ourselves. We did not afford a lot and many times we went without even the basic of things but the little we did have, we definitely had a say in it. You see, my parents encouraged independency from a very young age and by the time I left home at 17, I could do just about everything myself because I had basically been raising myself.* (Khuli; female; 33; mother of 1)

This highlights what most South African people experience while growing up in townships; the glaring poverty, unemployment and lacking basic needs (Maharaj 2012). This participant talks from a place of fond memories while growing up, saying that at that time, it was refreshing to have parents who were open-minded and took their children's opinions into consideration. She says this helped her a lot in her adult life as it taught her to always stand up for herself and being confidence while doing so.

The opposite was true for Thula when it came to his recollections of his upbringing, he maintains that he had no choice on what was bought for him when he was growing up and whenever he did get an opportunity to make a choice, those choices were hugely influenced by group dynamics and majority always ruled in his family. He went on to state that as the last born at home he always felt like he was not important as he was only good for being sent around. He said the only time his parents ever listened to him was when he was sick; otherwise everyone would get the same thing or nothing at all. This means the group was always more important than the individual and the individual was never to benefit by themselves, otherwise they all forego the benefit.

Khuli agreed with Thula on this one when she said that the way she was raised was very different and bemoans how some children nowadays go around feeling they are entitled to everything which becomes a challenge since some carry that behaviour into the adult world. The shift in parenting style sees new-age parents letting their children get away with doing stuff they were never permitted to do. It is also vital to note that some new-age parents rely on their own parents when it comes to raising their children because the economic set-up in most cases doesn't allow for children to be raised by both parents as they might be working outside of town, in another province or even abroad, thus moving the responsibility of parenting to grandparents – who are famous for spoiling their grandchildren. This sometimes becomes a challenge as the child is growing up under different households which translate to different rules and ways of doing things, resulting in conflicting set-ups for children. An extended family is made up of both parents, children, uncles, aunties, grandparents and cousins. It is important to

note this type of a family setting because most participants in this study come from such families (Gyekye, 1996).

Khuli raised that it is never a good idea to be ‘besties’ with your child as this blurs some lines when it comes to parent or child relationship. As someone who never forgets to mention that they never had it easy while growing up, some traces of that childhood trauma can be heard from the statements she makes on parenting in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*The way I was raised is different in the sense that almost every parent you meet now is trying to be ‘best friends forever’ with their children. Again, this is great in the sense that we are ending generational trauma and curses that so many of us carry and unfortunately sparing the rod almost always spoils the child and that is clearly evident in how spoiled most of the children are ... When I was growing up, none of our parents were trying to be our friends and neither of us children wanted to be friends with our parents. (Khuli; female; 33; mother of 1)*

But in the same breath she also commended how far we have come as a country when it comes to parenting. She said she is always impressed about how far we have come as the human race in recognising children’s rights even though this was still a challenge in some parts of the world.

Highlighting the struggles of how some households are child-headed in developing countries such as ours, and the fact that there are still people who go to bed hungry means that there is still much to be done and sadly inequality is one thing globalisation and the media haven’t been able to eradicate (Nissanke and Thorbecke 2015).

Zipho argued that there is no moving away from the fact that parenting in the 21<sup>st</sup> century involves considering a child’s feelings, which is something she said her parents never spent much time on. She went on to say that her parents did what they thought was right for her without ever finding out what her take was on the matter and as much as she takes decisions for her child, she tries and involves her in the decision making and she is always considerate of her child’s feelings, which is something Khuli’s parents (although old-school) had mastered a long time ago. Zipho acknowledges that she wished her parents involved her more in the decision making and maybe in that way they would have low-key found out what she liked and disliked. Owning up to embracing the ever-changing world, she says it’s important to always involve children when making choices on what to consume as they are exposed to a much bigger world because globalisation and technological advancements have allowed people to interact with others in real time without having to travel (Sundaram 2005).

*Our kids are free compared to us. They have a voice and they always demand to be heard. They are very bold when it comes to speaking up their minds. They talk up, hell yeah talk back and they are not afraid to tell you how they feel. I always say they came into the world at the right*

*time. They have it way easier than we ever had to endure. The era they are growing up in allows them to flourish and be whatever they want to be in life (Zipho; female; 34; mother of 2).*

Shaka agreed that their style of parenting as parents in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is completely different to how he was raised as he made note of the gap that exists in terms of continuity and using the same methods as our parents. He felt nowadays parents are somewhat clueless, for lack of a better word, on a number of things because there is too much ‘newness’ that they need to adjust to. He said this is because most of what is consumed by children and all the things they use on a daily basis are foreign concepts. He said buy this he means that most of the influence on children comes from outside, stating that the messages of influence come from an outside source that invades homes to pass the messages to children and this leads to the role of a parent being reduced to being a facilitator and not a regulator of what goes and what doesn’t (Ramnarain and Govender 2013).

His recollections about his childhood involve him and his peers being outside playing while in today’s world the playground has migrated to the inside of the house and lives large in our living rooms. He said this contributes to a large extent the type of activities our children engage in as they are exposed to excessive amounts of unregulated information. He added that the use of gadgets like TV and internet-based mediums makes it difficult for parents to spend time with their children, let alone to lead them as parents and this can be attributed to the fact that in the past year alone, the number of social media users in South Africa has increased to 25 million which represented an increase of 3 million users (14% increase). A total of 98.5% of social media users access platforms using their mobile phones in South Africa and the majority are the youth (Lethole 2021). This is how the youth is introduced to messages of consumption and in turn influence their parents.

The section below focuses on the concept of culture in relation to identity and how parents navigate through these concepts as a collective as well as individually, taking into account the emergence of new cultures or movements and the change that comes with these dynamics when raising young people in Inanda.

#### **5.4.2 Theme 2: Culture and Identity**

In this section definitions of culture and pop culture are discussed and also how these are impacting on choices made by children in this township, who in turn influence their parents into buying these material goods for them. These choices often lead to increased consumption behaviour as the youth is at a stage where they are trying to find their identity in life through the present culture at that given time. Culture can be defined as comprising of “shared meanings and symbols which people use to convey meaning” (Abbott 1998:8). The word culture refers to something that is passed down from



generation to generation, something that is learned and comes natural to its people; it may be beliefs, religion, food, etc. Culture also acts as a form of control by creating order and uniformity on the basis of a shared cultural code, shared customs and habits in any society are what form its cultural system. Objects and resources that culture produces are often used by people in their daily lives; such as vehicles, books and clothing, are central to this understanding of culture in this context (Gill 2013). This is one participant's response when she was asked to explain what she understands about the term 'culture':

*Culture is identity, who you are, where you are from, the people that came before you. It's the things you believe in, how you live your life. (Zipho; female; 34; mother of 2)*

There's vast evidence from the data collected that culture has an impact on mental models and their accompanying reasoning systems. This has been especially evident when it comes to regional cultures. The role of culture in shaping common tastes is often regarded as a feature of culture (Gill 2009). Participants in this study had a clear understanding of what culture is; what it means to them and their wishes for their children's upbringing in line with this concept.

A handful of participants noted that with time culture changes and as a society the best thing for us to do is to adapt this change. They also realise how consumption has become a culture on its own, and this is usually driven by pop culture which goes hand-in-hand with representation (Hall and Du Gay 1997).

With representation comes a natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. Although these authors accept that with representation comes identity, it's emphasised that identity can mean different things to different people at any given time owing to the fact that identities can never be unified. This is exactly what Zipho refers to when she says to her, culture is identity and it's tightly linked to how one does things. Pointing out that identity is a way for certain groups to use the resources of history, such as language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being (Hall 1995). Some of the prominent definitions of culture given by parents are that culture is a way of life that controls how people behave and do things but they also stressed that culture changes with time and Zola made an example of how in the olden days *lobola* (bride price) was live cows but nowadays people have resorted to using cash because with the changing world some see live cows as something that is no longer relevant. He said with movement people are bound to enter spaces that don't accommodate their culture and as a result culture can lose some of its traits along the way.

*I know that culture evolves. The way I was taught how to do things is very much different to how I live my life today. The theory of change took people from the rural areas, where they had land, to modernised spaces, so culture automatically changes because of your surroundings and*

*what I can say is that culture changes with time and holding on to past cultures can clash with the way things are now. Past culture will always clash with the modern style of living (Zola; male; 35; father of 2).*

Zola's stance corresponds with Abbott (1998) who notes that postmodernism theory states that not all societies are characterised by one dominant or shared culture. That some societies display complex contrast due to diversity in terms of cultural norms and values. This specifically talks to the point of cultural clash that is being felt by participants as they try to make decisions about everyday life, who they are, parenting and issues of consumption.

For Thula culture is a way of life; it is history, lineage, food, language, and environment. It is how people carry themselves and what makes them who they are. It is their preferences and interests. It is how they view the world and respond to life. He describes culture as something very sacred to him as it addresses who he is and where he comes from. He once again brings us to Zipho's definition of culture and echoed the same sentiments that with culture comes identity and that culture is part of who we are and the fact that he stresses this by saying it twice in a space of seconds means that he truly resonates with his stance and cannot be easily swayed.

*Culture is important because it is a compass that guides our identities at the basic level of our existence. It influences the core of our very existence. It is learned but there are certain aspects that are innate. They seem to be in the very code of our genes. To me, culture is identity. When I think about myself or when I am trying to explain to people who I am, culture forms a substantial part of the picture. My culture is the driver behind my identity. (Thula; male; 36; father of 1)*

For Thula identity is ultimately what is being driven by culture, like the cars people drive, the houses they live in and the clothes they wear. Culture is driving all these choices and choosing the destination of where identity is going for him.

Khuli also understands culture to be 'a way of life' and how meaning and culture are shared within a group (Gill 2013) – a phrase that every parent has used to define what culture means to them. She said for her personally culture simply means a way of life for a particular individual or group of people and as an African woman it means a lot to her especially now that she is raising another African woman. She noted how as she grows older culture suddenly means much more to her. She said she has gone from not being bothered about ancestors, rituals and customs in her teens to being a sponge, literally absorbing as much information as she possibly can so she can better understand herself as an individual and also be able to pass that on to the young woman she is raising. She related that she wouldn't exactly say she wanted her child to be raised according to her culture but she does want her daughter to

be raised as an African - in just the broader sense of the word. In that Khuli wants her child to know exactly who she is and whose she is but also be mindful that change is constant and that people can only become better versions of themselves as the years go by.

*Take for instance the practice of ukuthwala used to be a huge part of my supposed 'culture' back in the day where it was okay for a man to kidnap a girl he claimed he loved even if she didn't love him back and make her his wife with or without her consent. As much as those days were wonderful they were also not so great for us African girl children. I want my children to know the spirit of Ubuntu and to live it. I want them to know that we really are nothing without each other. That's the African way of living. That's what I want for my daughter, to be a better individual (Khuli; female; 33; mother of 1).*

Like the majority of parents, Nhla also understands culture to be structure and routine. She said for her culture is compromise and it is selfless, a way of life that extends beyond self. It can be culture that exists between a couple, later within a larger family structure; and within various societal groups. Culture, she said, helps her define relationships and to set and respect boundaries and it often works best when these things are not formalised, at least at initial stages.

*For as long as we grow, as long as times change, culture must remain flexible; so as to accommodate the ever-changing world we live in, and accommodate us ever-changing beings. Times change and so does the way of life and how we carry ourselves – simply put; culture is bound to change over time and there is little to none we can do about that. We have to move with the times while not forgetting where we come from, what grounds us and what makes us who we are. (Nhla; female; 32; mother of 1).*

The participants believe that with time comes change, that is why they have embraced the shift in parenting, childhood and culture. Most parents in the study believe that for life to go on we must embrace change and welcome diversity because the way they see it culture is unified by identity. This is because an introduction of the Internet gave rise to global communities which meant that the way we do things (culture) is gradually changing, thus creating space for influence (Anjali and Anju 2009). Shaka defined culture as an adopted activity by the masses that is unified by identity. He said at first glance culture looks like something precious and treasured, but if you closely observe it you can see it transforming and crushing some of its fundamental rules and laws and that is where one begins to understand that it is only a state of comfort that seeks to bring balance within a uniform society where people will behave in a similar way and this system is easy to be regulated by those in power. For him culture is only good when it favours the people who are part of it and it is not mainly used as a

controlling tool. He said he doesn't dispute that culture evolves but said this invites attention to loopholes and in this way culture gets exposed to criticism. He said as it stands, diversity is the only culture our children know.

*Our children will grow to behave differently because we have mixed them with other races and diversity is the new uncontrollable culture that will dominate, penetrate and dilute our long preserved cultures. I've already lost most of my cultural foundations through diversity. I think I have seen what I can enforce on my kids and what I will leave out. So for me it's not so much about culture but it's about raising individuals with a purpose and a sense of belonging who know who they are, where they come from and where they are going. Mine is to ensure that their future is secured and that they lead a better life than I did (Shaka; male;42; father of 3).*

For the purpose of this study the researcher thought it was vital to get each participant's views on culture because as parents they are faced with the responsibility of raising children that are growing up in a different era than them and this translates to children understanding the world differently compared to their parents because they are exposed to a different culture altogether.

The definition of culture from the data analysed touches on culture being the way of life (Gill 2009), our identity, and behaviour traits and how we relate to the world. In this context culture can be viewed as a way children associate their lives with what they see in the media.

Companies often target consumers that are between play age and adolescence when advertising their products because they are the most reactive when it comes to any type of media.

"The colours, shapes, sounds, texture and figures in general are more perceived by consumers in these stages. Therefore, the consumerism attitude where the youth is raised is perceived as a normal response to all the media actions to promote buying as a safe reaction" (Doe 2012:1). This gave rise to a new wave of culture termed popular culture or pop culture. Pop culture is used when referring to cultural activities which developed with the rise of industrial capitalism, sometimes pop culture is regarded as shallow and meaningless. Pop culture or mass culture, as some will refer to it, simply refers to cultural activities or products which are popular at that given time (Bottero 2010).

This shows how young people in the 21st century are defining their identities in relations to global culture, stating that for them culture is secondary to identity. Participants are clear about this stance but it begs a question of how globalisation, technological advancements and the introduction of the internet have diluted culture as we know it, giving way for other cultures to permeate, thus allowing for consumer culture to be dominant (Heywood 2012) cited in (Elaati 2016).

The next sub-section looks at the point where pop culture and the culture of consumption intersect and how parents have allowed children to make buying decisions in most families because in most cases they are the most knowledgeable when it comes to electronic gadgets and the migration to the online world.

### 5.4.3 Theme 3: Consumption Culture

In this section a discussion on parents' comments indicate that the way their children carry themselves is definitely influenced by pop culture through the media, which generally leads to consumer culture (Abbot 1998). Kids are given buying powers in families and they are the centre of attraction in any family irrespective of country and culture. "They have been involved in all activities of the family. Products which are directly used by children are mostly decided by children themselves" (Arul 2016:2). This brings the researcher to suggesting that the main aim of these companies is to sell happiness all around, have young people believing that purchasing and wearing their clothing will mean they are stylish or that consuming their products will make them happier by exploration of the socio-historical patterning of consumption, consumption and consumer identity programmes, marketplace cultures, societies, tribes, mass-mediated philosophies and interpretive techniques of consumers (West and Turner 2013).

This sort of advertizing, the parents said, puts them under a lot of pressure as they can't keep up with the requests and demands from their children. This comes with enormous stress for parents in this township notorious for its high crime rate, people living in poverty and most of them are unemployed. More people in townships are fighting the socio-economic and political challenges while trying to seize the opportunities of the present with the hope of building a vision for their future, so it comes as a blow for media companies to target children in this manner while feeding children the culture of consumption for a community that is regarded as disadvantaged.

*It's these fights we are constantly holding at home with our little ones because of these marketing strategies (Nhla; female; 32; mother of 1).*

Nhla says it's not easy having to always be the 'bad cop' by saying no to her child's demands because these messages of influence are everywhere around us. She says this creates unnecessary pressure for them as it's difficult to keep up. She says coming from a disadvantaged background doesn't help matters and like most townships which are characterised by a high rate of unemployment, underdevelopment, lack of basic resources and a scourge of violence, Inanda is no different. These social ills may be due to inadequate policing in townships, family breakdown due to diseases and other factors that contribute to the culture of violence and poverty (Sibiya 2019). As much as the above is true, parents will still bend over backwards to try and keep up with their children's consumption habits

and Khuli said this is a problem for many households where kids are constantly on their phones or watching TV. Marketers use this opportunity to advertise their products which are usually seen by the kids who would then relay the messages of requests to their parents to try and get their way (Bhasin 2021). She said kids are very patient and they have tricks on how to get their way; so as parents they often give in to their children's demands. Zipho agreed with Khuli and said:

*They know how to twist our arms to get what they want and the media companies know this, which is why a lot of things they advertise are for kids because they know that parents find it hard to say no to their kids. Children are what in most cases drive parents to be better versions of themselves and children know that our lives revolve around them. Kids are smart; we can never take that away from them, because we fall for their tricks every single time (Zipho; female; 34; mother of 2).*

But in the same breath Zipho was quick to say that she is very careful about her spending habits as she has made it her mission in life to never buy anything she cannot afford. She said she tries to teach her child about savings and priorities so that she knows how things are done around the household. She likened kids to sponges that absorb behaviour and filter out what parents say, and opt for how parents behave. She said it's easy for children to conform, assimilate and adopt the behaviours that they see around them which is why companies always target them with their advertising strategies.

*I fear debt ... I remember how mad I used to get when I'd ask my parents for something and their response would be there's no money for it, I know my daughter gets mad too but she won't die (Zipho; female; 34; mother of 2).*

Consumption can be used to define an individual's attention to their identity and thus choosing their ideal consumption construct. Simply put, consumption is used to define both individual and social identities through "pursuing imaginary ideal consumer objects. But these objects never satisfy the postmodern anxiety ridden, empty and greedy subject and more products must be purchased to fill the void of the decentred subject" (Zepf 2010:2). This leads to people creating identity through consumerism and it is becoming increasingly difficult to separate the two (Belk 1985). Consumption always leads to representation and the children in townships are often enticed and influenced by hip-hop and this is mostly evident in the way they dress, speak and carry themselves. Taking into context the influence hip-hop music has on the youth can be highlighted as one of the examples of representation, identity and popular culture among the South African youth.

In the documentary *Blow Up or Cave* (2020) for the first time in South African popular culture hip-hop is explained as one of the dominant genres which has produced household artists such as Cassper

Nyovest, AKA and Nasty C. These artists not only dominate the music charts on radio and TV but they are also filling up different arenas all over South Africa as well as abroad.

In this documentary, this genre is described as something that started as a passion-driven activity for a small group of ‘hip-hop heads’ in the early 1990s and it has grown into a dominant mainstream industry generating millions of rands and like most movements, there is a new wave of hip-hop that is brewing.

Advancements in technology have led to a rise in a new generation of artists with a DIY-mentality and these are popularly known as the ‘new wave’. As much as music is said to be the universal language but when it comes to hip-hop there is a deeper culture – a connection that goes deeper than sound. The documentary stated that hip-hop is the only place where an individual is allowed to feel exactly how they feel. As the following for this genre increases, there has been a spike in terms of influence and teenagers wanting to look like the next rapper they see on TV and some youth are willing to go above and beyond, even going as far as doing the unthinkable, to attain this lifestyle.

Zola mentioned music and said for him it serves as a background soundtrack of this movie called life. He said music has the capacity to take him back and place him at a certain moment in time. For him music is more than just instruments and harmonies but about the way of life and the culture he has gotten to know over the years. He spoke of music fondly and said music reminds him of the good times he has shared over the years with his loved ones. He also doesn’t take away the fact that music has the power to teach, especially if the consumer relates to the artist, but for him it has proven difficult to be shaped by music.

*You take what you want from music and leave out what doesn’t speak to you. In all honesty, it’s up to you as a person on the life you want to lead, how curious you are because your curiosity is what shapes you at the end of the day but, I wouldn’t say music can shape a person (Zola; male; 35; father of 2).*

What the research has earlier addressed as imagination and the process of creating our own realities could be what Zola was referring to here when he touched on the point of curiosity. It shows that participants are exploring and thinking about possibilities through access to the media, giving the children a chance to play and to imagine new versions of themselves. Hip-hop artists come with influence and this power of influence is shared through different types of media. While the internet is defining the ‘new wave’ for the new kids on the block, it is also giving them a platform that they don’t have to fight for as the internet space is hardly overcrowded. This is why you find that most ‘new wave’ artists attribute their success to the internet because they say that almost everyone has a phone that has internet so in that way it is easier for their music to reach a large number of people and they deem this kind of exposure as powerful and a ‘saving grace’ because when the music is on the internet

it's easier for mainstream media to catch on. The more artists make music that people can relate to; there is no denying their success (*Blow Up or Cave* 2020). The same applies to influence implications and companies often use any gap to advertise their products to reach greater consumers and this is usually done in the form of sponsoring artists and their events.

Communication theory tells us what Van Heerden (2010) is trying to highlight when he says that it is important for companies to be able to study the way consumers behave and this is influenced by marketing communication. He said consumers are analysed through concepts like demographics, purchasing or usage habits. Arnould and Thompson (2018) argue that if taken together, identity projects and self-representation breed relatively cohesive and holistic identities.

In this way, identity is constructed through the process of imagination, meaning people have the capacity to understand themselves and their surroundings and can pass this to one another. In line with these observations, Zola said:

*The community we come from judges you according to the way you dress, the way you speak and the way you carry yourself. There are many factors that can make people judge your character and knowing how they should treat you, just by the way you are dressed, the way you tie your hair, the way you comb your hair...whatever your appearance is, people can easily judge you based on it because for me character also comes with the way you dress, the way you talk so you need to teach your child those things (Zola; male; 35; father of 2)*

He added that buying a child clothes or toys that are not in fashion signifies that they will never fit in, and he said that some children will form cliques because of the way they dress and that is why it's important for parents to make sure that their children don't feel like outcasts when they are with their friends. He also talked about the importance of teaching children about limits and boundaries, arguing that as much as the internet wasn't there when he was growing up for him to follow trends like kids do in the present day on social media, he was still able to pick up trends from people around him and the places he visited.

*Well with the trends somehow I was the one who brought trends because my older brother was into fashion so he always knew what was trending and at that time he was already in high school so there were other boys who were older than him, some from different townships, some came from rich families and that is how trends were passed around. High school is different from primary school where you can get away with wearing Batman and Spiderman. I learnt a lot about fashion from my brother in that sense, he exposed me to different music and because he was our big brother I looked up to him when it came to trends (Zola; male; 35; father of 2)*



Zipho said this is the case with her and her daughter who she said had an input on their brand choice consumption. She asserted that it's impossible not to fall into the trap that is perpetuated by mainstream media to drive a certain point across. She said this culture can influence an individual's attitude towards certain topics.

*If I'm buying something for my daughter, I usually lean towards what brand she likes and that can be challenging at times because trends change every season and knowing my daughter is into fashion can be quite a challenge. She would sometimes let me know if she needs a specific item and if the price tag isn't ridiculous then we reach a compromise. But generally, we shop together to guide and learn from one another. Children often want to wear what they can associate with; be it something popular in their circles or a popular culture at that time (Zipho; female; 34; mother of 2).*

Thula concurred with Zipho's views on consumption culture and said he understands that social media is now the driving force of most purchasing decisions and a lot of influences are brand placements on social media instead of traditional media adverts. He continued and said that he usually buys his daughter what she wants as long as it is age appropriate and does not clash with any of his beliefs and cultural views. He is clear about not buying his child something that he feels will corrode her blackness and 'childness'.

*I generally buy her what she wants as long as it is age-appropriate and does not clash with any of my beliefs and cultural views. I don't buy her what I feel will erode her of her blackness and 'childness' (Thula; male; 36; father of 1).*

This shows that as much as parents have the challenges of blocking off the noise of influence, there are things that they are not willing to change when it comes to parenting. It's important for this parent that as much as he is trying to keep his child happy, her core being of being a child and being black should never be clouded by consumerism and the commercialisation of happiness. The influence social media and other forms of media have on children is linked to generational consciousness which provides the basis of demand in a new market where the culture sector served as a supplier, producing clothing, accessories, and leisure activities tailored to the contemporary youth experience (Heaven and Turbidity 2003).

Thula accepted that children are exposed to a much bigger world and social media has made sure of this. He said all the social media applications are exposing children to things he couldn't even imagine when he was his daughter's age. He argued that his daughter is an online consumer and understands

that the internet is a market to buy from and that has had an impact on her taste and choices. He said the opposite was true for him while growing up:

*While growing up my world was as big as my immediate environment, school and four TV channels. She has 60 channels and apps to interact with. This has exposed her to new things. It has made her want things that she wouldn't normally want if those platforms were not available. She now wants to go visit places she sees on social media. She wants hairstyles trending on social media and she wants to lead a life that is heavily influenced by the people she constantly follows on socials (Thula; male; 36; father of 1).*

This is proof that the way products are advertised in the media has an impact on potential buyers through strategies that require the elements of communication theory. This is because this theory questions how people construct meaning mentally, socially and culturally, how signals are interpreted intellectually, and how uncertainty occurs and is overcome (Van Ruler 2018).

The data analysed is in line with the definition of consumer culture theory as a field of inquiry that seeks to “unravel the complexities of consumer culture. Rather viewing culture as a fairly homogenous system of collectively shared meanings, ways of life and unifying values shared by a member of a society” (Arnould and Thompson 2018:2). The above discussion lets us in on how globalisation, media marketing strategies and the internet have influenced our consumption choices by introducing pop culture which meant the world became a village where everyone ‘knows’ and interacts with everyone on a more personal level as the youth try to navigate through life and as part of that finding their identities. This can be seen in how the youth consumes music and the way they create certain trends around a popular song at that time, in a way creating a safe space [culture] for music ‘heads’ to be able to carve their own identities without outside interference (*Blow Up or Cave* 2020).

The following section will discuss views on parenting and the participants’ views on how the children today are growing up in an environment that allows them to have more choices and freedom of expression. This can be attributed to the change in parenting style, exposure to new cultures and the effects of globalisation through the media.

#### **5.3.4 Theme 4: Choices, Freedom and Voice**

For the purpose of this research, this section looks at how the emergence of a ‘new’ culture has led to children living in a larger world than ours has ever been. Globalisation has also facilitated knowledge transfer, helping African countries to ‘leapfrog’ to new technology and therefore improving their living

standards, leading to children having more choices, freedom and a voice (Okonjo-Iweala and Coulibaly 2019).

Modern technology provides us with the belief that we can live the life we see on our screens by making each film, advert and music video relate as much as they can to our everyday experiences so much so that we see ourselves in every character on the small screen. We yearn to be like them, dress like them and consume the stuff they do because we feel they represent our 'culture' or what we hope to become (Abbinnett 2003).

Thula agreed with this statement and said that he can never ignore the fact that his daughter is exposed to more than he was at her age and that came with her developing a voice and as a new-age parent he understands that times change and so does culture. He said he would never have dared told his parents what to buy for him because according to him they 'had important things to worry about'.

*I bought my daughter a back pack and she told me that it is ugly and she will not use it. She hasn't touched it since. This is not to say that she is unappreciative and spoilt, she is not because I have instilled the same disciplines as my parents have taught me, she just has a voice. Her lane is much wider than ours used to be. Children these days have a voice (Thula; male; 36; father of 1)*

The quote above speaks to identity and the fact that there is an expanded idea of who people can be after Apartheid and participants seem to be embracing this approach. Because brands are aware that there are new identities being formed they thrive to fill that gap by perpetuating the culture of consumption via the media. Thula maintained that as much as he allows his daughter to be, there are limitations in place. He said they still buy essentials and it so happens that some come in colours and shapes that his daughter prefers and said that's really never an issue. Like when she needs winter clothes and she spots a Disney tracksuit, she can gladly have it and in that way they are both happy.

*I as a parent will be glad she will be warm while she on the other hand she will be feeling much closer to her favourite cartoon on TV, so it's a win-win for the both of us (Thula; male; 36; father of 1).*

Thami agreed with Thula and Zola and noted that parents have to accept that a lot has changed and it is high time parents caught on. He related that his family life was all the life he knew back then since he wasn't exposed to much compared to his children. He said when he was growing up his only concern was being a child and for his parents to provide for him, everything else he saw as a bonus.

*I definitely know that I want to do more for my children now that I'm a parent. I want them to have it all, anything that's within my capabilities I will give it to them. I work hard for them because I want to give them the things I never had – things I never knew I needed. Parenting is all about sacrifices and I have learnt that when it comes from the heart, being there for your children doesn't feel like a duty. (Thami; male; 38; father of 4)*

He painted a picture of how he wanted to change his parenting style and said his children have changed him as he was reborn when they were born. He said they gave him hope that better days were coming and have become his moral compass ever since. He said the most satisfying thing about being a parent is the ability to pass down knowledge and the positive teachings parents and the community instilled in children while growing up was a way of preparing them for the adult life. He stated that seeing his children emulating good things he has taught them gives him hope as a parent that his children will be good citizens when they grow up. He said the sad part about raising children in modern-day society is the exposure they have to all the negative elements in life.

*Those people are my life. I have done a lot of bad stuff in the past but what I can tell you is that I was reborn when my kids were born. They came and changed the whole game and made me a wiser person. Them coming early on in life doesn't change the way I feel about them. They have shown me the light and have been my moral compass for as long as I can remember. Kids have a way of making everything alright with just one tiny squeeze, hug or smile. Yeah, we live for those things. Those things make us wake up in the morning with the hope of starting over. Kids can do that to you (Thami; male; 38; father of 4).*

Thula lights up whenever he talks about his daughter and said what he loves most about parenting is that he gets to be responsible for someone else's life and health and being loved unconditionally in return is a bonus for him. He went on to mention the challenges that also come with raising a girl child as a father and that sometimes gender stands between the two of them and he understands now that as the child grows older there are boundaries that now exist. He said this has led to him being limited on some things he'd like to do for his daughter like giving her a bath when he feels she hasn't done a great job.

*I love that someone loves me unconditionally and thinks I know everything in the world. I love the confidence she has in me. I love growing something that grows beautiful each day. It is a wonderful experience that cannot be matched. It is not an easy thing because it is a full time job. It is very challenging raising a different gender because there comes a certain stage when*

*gender stands between the two of us. I need to respect her boundaries even when I don't agree with them* (Thula; male; 36; father of 1).

This becomes tricky especially in the African setting when it comes to parenting because there are certain aspects of life that you can't share with a male figure, that is what society has instilled. Views on parenting in the African context for Inanda shows that African parents raise their children in different manner than their counterparts, in terms of what a child is and how they should behave. Most African parents still believe in corporal punishment in this township (Shangase 2018). But parents in this particular study believe in the new-age style of parenting which involves reasoning and considering children's feeling, sparing the rod.

Nhla attested to Thula's views on challenges of raising a child of a different gender; saying that she is trying her best and she learnt a lot from her mother when it comes to parenting. She said when all else fails her son's father usually steps in but also her brothers are there when she needs a male perspective. She went on to say that for her not much has changed when she thinks about parenting in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and comparing it to how she was raised. She said the comparison is somewhat difficult to make, however, there are methods of how she was raised that she wishes to implement in raising her child. The main one being monitored freedom. She believes children need to be exposed to the realities of life, gradually, as they grow. This is how, she said, we prepare, protect and teach them. Pretending as though some realities are not out there makes our wish to protect our children close to impossible. She narrated that for her parenting in this day and age is 'scary'. She said as much as she wants to protect her child but she is always careful not to become an overbearing parent and tries by all means to let her son be a child; for him to live.

*It is scary. I am not sure if things have really changed that much, or if it is that roles have changed and one is more aware and more conscious. Scary as it is to be raising a child in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I am sceptical of being the overly protective parent, running the risk of depriving my child of the freedom to be exactly that; a child* (Nhla; female; 32; mother of 1).

Nhla recalled that as much as there are similarities in the way she was raised and how she is raising her son; the only difference for her was that she accepted what she received, as and when she received it. It was always a struggle to ask for things that were not necessary and she said being a naturally particular person, she was specific with types and brands, when it came to necessities. She said she made sure that her specifics did not change much, and so she did not have to ask all the time. Even as an adult, she still struggles to ask anyone for anything and lives by her mother's principle that it's okay to work with what you have and forget about what you don't have for that particular day.

Mnikazi raised that generally, children are communicative beings, and ought to be treated as such. He said it is surprising how much children can absorb and comprehend, when we communicate to them at their level and that is why he intended to make polite and honest verbal communication the anchor of his parenting style. This is in accordance with the difference styles of parenting that exist across ethnic groups, which can be spotted within a family where different relationships exist and interactions happen based on the child's gender and that of the parent (Bohanek, Fivush, Zaman, Lpore, Marchant and Duke 2009).

Shaka also added that being a parent is somewhat interesting these days because their children are very different from them. He said he grew up in a generation that knew how to entertain itself without any guidance and assistance from parents, and though most games were dangerous, they never had many accidents. He likened how he was raised to being trained in the army where one learns survival skills in the jungle.

*We used to leave home early in the morning to herd the cattle and only return back home in the afternoons and this meant that we spent the whole day figuring out what to eat and what games to play while keeping an eye on the animals we were sent to look after (Shaka; male; 42; father of 3).*

In here we learn of children being forced to grow up fast and help around the house with the chores before leaving for school each morning. This takes away what being a child is all about for these children as Doe (2012) argues that the ideal childhood must keep time moving at a normal pace. The child must travel through all of the sensations without being interrupted so that he or she can understand why he or she is feeling something at that particular moment. If the time factor is not kept as it should be, the child will have experiences that they do not understand; the piece will not fit into their jigsaw, and the child will need to fill out all the spaces before that experience so they can figure out where the new one will fit.

Most parents from the data analysed believe that when it comes to parenting the statement 'the days are long but the years are short' sums up what having children really feels like. Nhla attested to this and said:

*Absolutely! With my son, I don't know where the time went, just yesterday he was a baby and depended on me for everything but now he has grown into this young independent man who has a voice, makes decisions and is trying to navigate through life on his own terms (Nhla; female; 32; mother of 1).*

Zola conceded that kids of today are more open-minded; they are smart and are tech-savvy unlike when he was growing up it was difficult to even pick up a camera to take a photo, but kids nowadays can basically do everything. They are technology savvy, they are outspoken and they are nothing like their parents (Hansen 2010). He said when he was growing up there were certain things he couldn't speak to his parents about. But kids of today ask questions, they want to know, they are not reserved like the participants were and Zipho agreed with this and said she thinks children are exposed to too much these days and this is mostly evident in shows on television. She said sometimes it's hard to distinguish between an adult and a children's show because of the content.

*It's a mission trying to control content your children are exposed to and as the world has moved to 'digital life' we are fighting a losing battle as parents on what type of content my child can consume. Pop culture has an effect on how teenagers think and see themselves and how they associate with others. Teenagers are simply influenced by images they see from the popular culture at that time while they are going through a period of self-definition ((Zipho; female; 34; mother of 2).*

Zola, Mnikazi and Khuli said that if they could change anything about the way they were raised it would have to be that as much as they felt loved; but their parents were never emotionally available for them and as a result Zola said he was bullied a lot as a child but his parents were never aware of that. He said parents back then hardly ever spoke to their children or found the time to ask them about school, life, challenges or if they were being bullied. He said they didn't have that close relationship with their parents. For their parents it was enough that the children were fed, had clothes on their backs, went to school and were well taken care of.

Children being exposed to a wider world and having more choices means parents often have to dig deeper into their pockets in trying to keep their children happy and companies capitalise on this. It then becomes a challenge for a person raising a child in Inanda to always have to give in to the child's demands if these messages of influence keep coming. Companies know that in most households children are at the forefront of family-buying decisions and that it has been like that for a very long time, so if companies get the children's attention their job is done. Media adverts are usually presented in a way that will be appealing to the target market, in this case children. This could be because usually parents believe in giving their children the life they never had, and for them that is giving the children all the things they never had while growing up (Arul 2016).

For example, apartheid in South Africa meant that there were spaces that people of colour were not allowed into. These examples are evidence that the media has the power to influence the way people make decisions, especially the youth who are the primary receivers of these marketing

messages. Social media has become a word-of-mouth space and it is now seen as a platform that affects consumers' perceptions of brands (Kimmel and Kitchen 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski 2016).

The following section examines spending and saving habits for Inanda parents against the culture of consumption and how the media plays a role in pushing this narrative. To address this, issues of the South African economy, the impact of Covid-19 and consumption behaviour are discussed further. This as the latest reports reveal that South Africans had no emergency reserves, which is why many people struggled to make ends meet when the Covid-19 pandemic hit and had to make do with reduced or no income for a few months (Okonjo-Iweala and Coulibay 2019). It's an interesting point of interest to find out how Inanda parents stay financially fit while trying to keep their children happy in these hard times.

#### **5.4.5 Theme 5: Spending and saving habits**

This section briefly looks at the South African economy, spending and saving habits for parents who are trying to keep their children happy. The economy of South Africa is no different to other African countries in terms of economic growth and it has presented a number of challenges. The government, like many others, tabled an emergency budget in mid-2020, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. The debt forecasts for the next five years reflected the pandemic's spending needs, including financing for continuity support of programmes for households and businesses, as well as other economic recovery plans. After the devastating effects of Covid-19, South Africa's economy is projected to recover in 2021 and 2022. As it stands, South Africans have insufficient, if any, emergency savings, according to FNB research among its middle-income customers earning between R15,000 and R42,000 per month. The research also found that more than 80% of middle-income consumers have little or minimal savings that they can access within seven days should an emergency arise (BusinessTech 2021). This paints a grim picture in terms of the country's economic standing following a deadly pandemic and yet companies haven't shown their desire to tone it down a notch with their advertising, thus pushing indebted parents into even bigger debt.

The overall impression on spending and saving was that parents have made an effort of opening savings accounts for rainy days and this they say has saved them many times from the jaws of debt in a quest to try and keep their children happy. Thula admitted that he has in the past bought her daughter things knowing very well that he couldn't afford them and he said this always messed up his budget because he would take money meant for something else and use it for another, which he said is never wise. He didn't hesitate to say that given the chance to do this again, he will happily oblige because his child's happiness comes first. He pointed out that with the outbreak of Covid-19 he is struggling to



make ends meet as he lost his job due to the economy taking a knock and it is even more difficult to save any money at present.

*It is something that I think I will do again because buying her what she wants makes her happy and seeing her happy is everything. I can try and manage my finances better next time but if push comes to shove I would not hesitate doing it again (Thula; male; 36; father of 1).*

Mnikazi shared the same sentiments as Thula and Zola when it comes to going all out for his children and maintained that he has gone out of budget many times trying to give his children what he didn't have growing up. He explained that having children changes a person completely, but this he said, depends on what your perspective as a parent is. He said for him parenting comes with a lot of responsibilities and changes in behaviour because when you become someone's father and you are a reflection of your child. He said in his world going binge drinking is unheard of now that he is a parent as he can't be a known drunkard in the community because his family will become a laughing stock due to how he carries himself and this may have a negative long-lasting effect on the child.

*Being a parent comes with responsibilities and being able to take someone else's feelings into consideration (Mnikazi; male; 32; father of 3).*

Looking at the dimension of where the money to satisfy these consumption demands come from, it is vital to mention that Inanda, like most South African townships, share the same characteristics of joblessness, uneven access to basic public services and high levels of crime and violence and even after apartheid, special segregation remains. To this day, townships remain the profound symbol of social, cultural, economic and physical divisions of Apartheid (Findley and Ogbu 2011). Some parents have learnt from their past and are now trying to do things differently, even though it's difficult to entirely break free from those constant reminders of what life used to be.

This is evident in Khuli's response when she talks about herself she doesn't forget to mention the disadvantaged background she comes from. Coming from the history of having nothing, she says she is always careful about her spending and saving habits. To her not having it all was the norm and she has carried this with her all her life. She said she would rather cut back on her needs for a month or two until her daughter is sorted. But from her response you can sense that she fears going back to the place of lack therefore she avoids it by means of cutting back and also saving a little extra very month.

*What actually helps is budgeting and saving. You have to know where your money is going so you can always find ways to save even more (Khuli; female; 33; mother of 1).*

Thami also highlighted that coming from a poor background with only one parent who was employed, he understood the importance of planning and budgeting. He said he doesn't want his children to face the same challenges he did, like when he reached tertiary level there was no money for him to further his studies and this he said has been the driving force behind him making sure that all his children have educational plans. He said this will create a cushion when the eldest leaves school and wants to go to university, as she will have enough money to register and pay tuition fees for the duration of her studies.

*I am also planning on investing for those that come after her so that there will be enough for all by the time they complete matric. I encourage all those around me that have a monthly income to save for the future of their children. No matter how little they save; in the long run it is a lot when the child reaches university level (Thami; male; 38; father of 4).*

This shows that growing up poor for these parents has been their motivation to become better parents to their children and also giving them everything they never had. Even though the experiences the parents went through as children were not favourable, that did not deter them in aspiring to be better parents. There is also evidence of parents who are more in control of their finances and the choices they make; maybe seeing their own parents struggle to put them through school has opened their eyes and they are determined not to make the same mistakes again. Also, it could be that nowadays parents have better resources at their disposal to make sound money judgments in a world of materialism. The last theme for this chapter looks at the concept of 'happiness', what it means for each parent and how far parents are willing to go to keep their children 'happy', focusing on how corporations drive the narrative of being happy at all costs through material consumption.

#### **5.4.6 Theme 6: 'Happiness'**

This study is centred around the theme of commercialisation of happiness and how companies dwell on bringing happiness to their consumers, instead of quality. Throughout the course of this research it has proven difficult to come across material that defines what 'happiness' truly is. What is evident though is that happiness means different things to different people. In this section the researcher examines data around the questions; 'In your own words, please define happiness' and 'How do you define a happy child'? that were asked during face-to-face interviews.

Evidence shows that youth are constantly bombarded with advertisements, programmes and other media that invite them to seek happiness through the accumulation of wealth and commodities. This means that consumer culture lures the privileged youth to partake in consumption patterns while the youth from developing countries are enticed by the life some would never be part of (Heaven and Turbidity

2003). The youth of the developing world are attracted, lured or forced into the new lifestyle by many factors and this leads to them being alienated from their communities trying to be part of another culture and this could lead to a life of crime while trying to attain these standards that are being portrayed by the media (Sibiya 2018).

For these parents, having to grow up in the township and rural areas and witnessing all the suffering that comes with being poor; they vowed to give their children the life they never had. These parents all agreed that buying their children material goods is part of how trying to keep them off the streets from a life that has a potential to lure them into a life of crime as they seek to feed a certain culture of consumption ((Leclerc-Madlala 2004). The media is not helping the situation by constantly passing messages of influence and making the youth believe that happiness comes at a price, status and lifestyle choices (Klein 2000).

This theme focuses on lengths parents are prepared to go to, to keep their children happy. It also looks to hear how each parent defines happiness and according to their understanding what a happy child is. The majority of parents interviewed admitted that they have gone above and beyond in the quest to try and be better parents to their children. One parent went as far as mentioning that she hopes her son is aware of all the sacrifices she takes to keep him happy.

Thula said that children get joy from the simplest things but it's the parents who usually plant seeds that end up negatively affecting children. He said this happens when parents promise their children stuff but never keep their end of the bargain and he expressed that it's the parents' duty to safeguard their children's happiness without over-extending themselves beyond their means to a point where their comfortability with life is compromised. He went on to admit that it's not rare for parents to want the best for their children and to always make sure that they have all the things that they need to navigate through life.

*... Children get joy from the simplest of things. It is the precedent that we as parents set that corrupt the child. I'm saying those expectations and standards are perpetuated overtime and the problem begins when you cannot meet them. A child should understand when you cannot afford something and should accept the situation without holding you against it (Thula; male; 36; father of 1).*

Thula appeared to be speaking from a place of experience as he made it clear that he wanted his child to express her emotions, which is something he never got to enjoy while growing up. He mentioned somewhere in the interview that his only memory as a child was being sent for errands and that he had no say in most of the decisions his parents made for him. He seemed determined though to change all

that for his daughter as he encourages an open pathway for communication. Like all new-age parents, he appeared determined to introduce a shift in the style of parenting his parents used on him. Just like Thula, Nhla said a happy child is the one who is liberated and is allowed to be a child.

She said her son has taught her patience and she is always amazed at how far she has come as a mother. He has also taught her to be patient with herself and trust the process. She tied this to her experience as a first-time mother and how she has always been anxious of raising another human being since patience is not one of her strongest points.

*For me, happiness is the freedom to be and I believe we are at our happiest when we are free to be our authentic selves (Nhla; female; 32; mother of 1).*

She went on to say that we are all individuals, and that even identical twins have separate personalities. That is why it's never a good idea to impose our opinions or beliefs on others on how they should live their lives. She concluded by saying that things are different now, and our kids have endless opportunities within reach. For Khuli happiness can be defined as the ability to practise mindfulness and says for her the happiest people are those who face life head on, people who are present and who are able to experience life fully in the moment. So that even when they are sad or things don't go their way, they are able to process that and carry on being.

*For me the question isn't to be or not to be, the question has always been how do you prolong being. Growing up poor will do that to you (Khuli; female; 33; mother of 1).*

She draws from her life experience of growing up poor, which is something she does a lot, and it shows that the trauma of that part of her life is still very much fresh in her memory. As much as she struggled and is now in a position to give her daughter all that she never had, she sometimes holds back because she believes that children need to know that life is not smooth sailing.

It is evident when she speaks and even says that it is still a struggle for her to splurge on things as being poor has left her in a position of constantly looking at ways to save for rainy days – even when they seem a distant dream. She said she understands that a happy child needs happy parents and she is trying everything in her power to make sure that her daughter feels loved and that she is happy but also being mindful not to put herself in a compromising position and that is why it is important that she also looks after herself.

For Zipho being happy comes with an extra layer of freedom. She described happiness as a feel-good feeling that comes when one is feeling positive about something, an emotional state of wellbeing and living in the truest version of self; who you really are and doing exactly what you should be without

hesitation. Happiness is following your heart, doing things that you love, being content with what you have, loving what you do, doing what you love, she narrated.

*As parents we often tend to put our children's happiness before our own but the truth is to ensure a child is fully happy, I too as a parent need to first experience that happiness for me to be able to pass it on to my kids (Zipho; female; 34; mother of 2).*

She said that she knows that everyone defines happiness differently and she concurs with Khuli's statement that keeping children happy comes naturally for parents because it is something that fulfils them. A happy parent translates into a happy child, vice versa. She defined a happy child as one that is joyful, always has a positive outlook on life. Emotions are contagious, so automatically when a parent is happy it will rub off on children. She pointed out that when parents are happy they tend to excel at parenting because they are much more compassionate and warm towards their children.

Zola said the notion of happiness is tricky when it comes to raising children because as a parent you can do a hundred things right for a child but once you fail to do just one thing; that's what stands out for them. Having said that, he believes a happy child is the one who is free, one who can be able to communicate with you about everything. Growing up he said he couldn't have a random conversation with his father, but with his children he knows they are happy because they are free around him.

Most parents in this study raised that they are more open to the idea of stretching their budgets to keep their children happy and happiness is taken as something sacred because more studies show that modern living is depressing; the more reason for parents to want to give their children the 'world of happiness' (Thompson 2015). Zola said the fact that he would do anything for his children stands true but is quick to point out that he has taught his children the meaning of boundaries early on in life and encourages transparency.

*I would do a lot for my children but not if it's way beyond my budget. If I have to budget for what they want, then I tell them exactly that or I set a time frame for me to be able to budget ... I would be happy to buy them whatever it is that they ask for but if it's beyond me I tell them that well this is not for us, let's look for something else, so they know that there are boundaries. (Zola; male; 35; father of 2).*

Mnikazi said he is careful not to spoil his children in trying to give them the life he never had and he said he is wary not to buy his children stuff all the time because that becomes a habit and when as a

parent you can't keep up, your child will resent you and accuse you of not loving them the same way anymore.

There was a pattern that came out strongly in almost all the participants where they expressed that while growing up their parents never had time to sit them down and ask them about their feelings or their day at school. Nonetheless, the feeling is that they have never doubted that their parents loved them although they were never the affectionate type. This setup is true for everyone who grew up in an African home; parents show their children love by fulfilling their needs and by making sure they are attending school, have a roof over their heads and clothes on their backs (Sibiya 2018). It is things like conversations between elders and children were never encouraged and this was done to keep that level of respect, also when a visitor comes to your house you are required to change rooms and give the elders space to talk, the list is endless. There was always that gap in activities between generations.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This thesis' findings are in line with the view that in contemporary consumer culture people "strategically construct their identities across time and space in a constant state of becoming" (Arnould and Thompson 2018:21), which seems to be the reality for these young people in Inanda.

From the findings we learn that at the heart of consumption for these participants, is how they are navigating identity and how they are embracing it in some parts, while some data reveal conflict. Parents in this study feel that external factors are driving who they are and this is done through the media. This means that if culture is so dependent on the media then the media is in the forefront of how identities are formed for the youth of Inanda. From the data collected and analysed, there is an individualistic approach in support of the cultural perspective that is quite Western, materialistic and consumption based. What came out strong is that participants put identity before culture and they view identity as something that needs attention and is goal-worthy while they see culture as something that just happens to them, something they have no control over.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Introduction

This study sought to explore the ways Inanda parents perceive and manage media messages and material consumer choices related to generational demands of keeping children happy. It also tackled ways that consumer messages are communicated to parents through the media and to better understand how these parents respond to, perceive and manage consumer messages in an attempt to generate happiness among their children. This study is qualitative in nature, using an interpretive approach. Data analysis took the form of semiotic analysis, which can be explained as a study of sign systems and how meaning is made within a culture. The second method of analysis is general thematic. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 8 parents that the researcher identified through purposive sampling in the community of Inanda township.

Happiness means different things to different people; to some, it could be their parents getting them their favourite toy or how one feels when their father, uncle or someone they love carries them on their shoulders for them to see the world in a different view; or their first memory of their mom taking them for their first haircut. Also, parents use different gestures to show their children love – which usually translates to happiness. As a result, many parents described happiness as being free, liberated to just be and from the data collected there was a holistic feeling of optimism because every parent believes and hopes for a better future for their children without taking into account that ‘life happens’ and that they have no control over what tomorrow might bring.

What the researcher takes away from this project is that these parents have shifted from conventional to new-age parenting styles and the latter is breeding confident and liberated young children. What is interesting to note from the data collected is that parents see these media marketing messages as an opportunity for expansion of identities, freedom for children to be children and a necessary part of their parenting routine in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Another vital point was that as much as parents want the best for their children, they still believe in laying ground rules. This sometimes becomes difficult for some parents as they rely on their parents for help in raising their children. This often leads to conflict in terms of what principles and values the child follows since they are raised under two households.

The parents that were part of this study are post-Apartheid parents which means they are a different generation altogether compared to those who have parented under Apartheid. The access to new forms of media has changed and they are in a position to see childhood consumption differently. These parents believe that their children will turn out to be better people if they never let go of the culture of love, respect and honesty.

What is important for these parents is that even though their children are exposed to a lot at their age, they still know the difference between right and wrong and that respect is standard for old people and it is not earned. There was also the notion that parents want their children to understand that there is an order to the world which needs to be observed. One parent mentioned that children will grow to behave differently when compared to their parents because urbanisation has mixed them with other races and diversity is the new uncontrollable culture that will dominate, penetrate and dilute what we refer to as our long preserved cultures. As it stands, he said, we have already lost most of our cultural foundations through diversity.

The findings suggest that children's influence on parent's consumption behaviour is not surprising, as they grow up in environments already conditioned for them to see the world from a certain perspective.

As the project's findings may sometimes appear to lean on parenting, it is important to emphasise that this is a media project trying to shed light on how children are exposed to patterns of consumption by companies who make them believe that their material goods are what the children need to improve their lives and for them to fit into a certain circles; thus unlocking unimagined possibilities for them.

Two theories (communication theory and consumer culture theory) that guided this research tell us that from the early days of globalisation to the digital era, no matter which angle you look at it from, the media is always at the centre when it comes to consumption and advertising.

The semiotic analysis included a visual component that goes beyond the usual text analysis; emphasising what text alone can't. Consumer culture theory tells us how consumers make consumption choices and that their decisions are usually based largely on how companies have adopted the strategy of using what people identify with (it could be language, culture) when developing their adverts and this is done to provoke desire that usually leads to consumption.

What this study sought to highlight is that the media is critical in the transfer of cultural meaning from the culturally formed world to consumer goods, and subsequently from these things to the individual consumer. Advertising, the fashion system, and other consumption rituals are all part of this movement, thus the researcher's choice of theories (communication and consumer culture) as well as using semiotics and general thematic analyses is justified. This is largely because consumption overlaps with the social construct of life and the role of mass media in everyday life.

To respond to the research questions, parents believe that advertising and branding has taken up a large amount of room in their children's lives and that the space around them is narrowing as it's being taken up by advertisements and most parents welcome and embrace the change and concede that it is part of life to evolve.



Even though the above claim is true, what parents upheld were the possibilities that these forms of media are giving to their children, rather than economically taking away from them. For these parents, this kind of exposure positively adds a different layer of culture and identity for their children

## **6.2 Reflexivity**

In qualitative analysis, rigor refers to the procedure and its reliability. To support the analytic imagination required for comprehension and theory formulation, it is critical for the researcher to immerse themselves in data, to investigate all conceivable nuances and interactions, to evaluate data from a range of angles, and to shift from micro to macro view. Multi-modality kinds of data interaction are used to supplement this type of study and this takes time, with moments of intense effort mixed with periods of calm reflection.

To ensure that a rigorous data analysis process was followed, the researcher made use of Kvale's five methods of approach. This process was followed to the last instruction to ensure data is not altered as it aided the researcher in working with the data at hand with the aim of trying to look for similar, new and existing ideas to create a more coherent understanding between different categories. At the time of carrying out the data analysis process the researcher also relied on interpretations, observations of participant and other clues to try and make meaning of the data that was collected for this study. Diagrams and other wording were recorded on a number of A4 loose pages; from brainstorming about identifying possible themes before drawing up the interview guide to examples of some themes grouped together according to their categories, as well as transcripts being colour-coded before printing to ensure precision when handling data.

After following the necessary approaches a few times through the analysis process, both general thematic analysis and semiotic analysis were trialled before finally setting on a combined approach that can be viewed in Chapter 6 of this project, thus further supporting prolonged interaction with data in any qualitative research.

Working with the data collected brought the researcher closer to the project and as a mother, the researcher is guilty of letting her child have his way and just like all the participants, the researcher always wants the best for him – with limitations of course. There is no escaping the media's influence on what to buy our children while also greatly relying on the opinions of other moms, as a first-time mother.

Previous research shows that generally South African parents are not always thinking about themselves, but their children. This supported the view of parents who were still adamant that they want their children to be rooted in culture and to never forget who they are. Participants raised that

children are now more open-minded and they have a voice because they have embraced other cultures' practices of questioning things, and in this way children learn other cultures and fuse it with what they are taught at home, giving birth to a 'new' culture. Their way of life is a fusion of Western and African cultures, and so is their influence.

### **6.3 Limitations**

What was also interesting to note were the ages of the participants – the youngest was 32 and the eldest was 42 – and this is where the researcher concludes that the age had a factor in the type of answers received. The researcher believes that the answers to the research questions would have been different if the age bracket was wider. This may have been due to the method used for selecting participants; purposive sampling. Some researchers deduce that this method may be limiting in that the individuals selected by the researcher may not be applicable to the research problem. Even though this was not the case with this project, the researcher still feels this study would have arrived at a different conclusion had people above the mentioned ages had come forward and volunteered to be part of the study. The researcher though takes nothing away from the data collected and the information received because on its own it has presented us with another dimension to parenting that we were not exposed to.

### **6.4 Recommendations**

The researcher recommends that future research in the area consider a larger population involving other townships in Durban or KwaZulu-Natal, using other methods of data collection and analysis in trying to understand the dynamics that exist for different townships because what the researcher has noticed through literature review is that where people come from has a lot of influence on their consumption behaviours. Another recommendation would be to base the study on the youth of Inanda and in this way giving them the platform to narrate their own stories and investigate matters of brand consumption, peer pressure and the effects of how companies communicate these messages with the youth since they are the most targeted in terms of technological advancements.

### **6.5 Concluding remarks**

This chapter has discussed the major findings of this study's research questions and objectives. Participants in this study argued that there is no protecting their children from media marketing strategies as the youth are the ones that are exposed to, use and own most of the gadgets in homes. In doing this they are consuming brands, copying behaviour and looking for the latest trends as a form of influence which brings the researcher to this study's suggestion that children's consumption behaviour is directly linked to their media consumption. Another interesting finding is that for these participants

parenting decisions and identity building is fundamentally coming from the media. This study's contribution to media studies is that going forward, the power of the media must be carefully considered in homes because it has great influence on how people construct their identities and live their lives.

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# LIST OF APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A – Letter of information



### LETTER OF INFORMATION

#### **Title of the Research Study:**

Generating 'happiness': A semiotic analysis on experiences of consumption and media marketing strategies for Inanda parents.

#### **Principal Investigator/s/researcher:**

Sindisiwe Mbili, BTech: Journalism

#### **Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s:**

Supervisor: Tarryn Frankish, M.Soc.Sc (Psychology), Summa Cum Laude

Co-supervisor: Dr Philippa Kethro, PhD: Education

This study seeks to explore the ways Inanda parents perceive and manage media messages and consumption choices within the generational demand to keep their children happy. The study used general thematic and semiotic analyses to understand the messages that parents respond to when raising young people in this township. Being part of the study involves engaging in a one-one-one interview with the researcher to answer questions around the role of the media when it comes to consumption choices for parents. Interviews will be conducted with 8 parents from Inanda. The interviews will be between 45 minutes to an hour and a follow-up interview with you might be requested by the researcher at a time convenient for the both of us. The transcripts and recordings will be kept under lock and key and electrons will be password protected and any identifying information will be concealed.

There will be no risk or discomfort for being part of this study and you have a right to withdraw at any point without adverse consequences. You will be protected from emotional and physical harm during the cause of the project.

There is no direct benefit to you, but the findings from this study will be useful to communication researchers studying how the media works as a communication tool. There will be no monetary reward to you as a result of participating in this research. There will be no costs to you as a result of taking part in this research study.

In an event of any problems or queries, please contact the researcher on 081 587 8694, my supervisor (031 373 6619) or the Institutional Research Ethics Administrator on 031 373 2375. Complaints can be reported to the Director: Research and Postgraduate Support Dr L Linganiso on 031 373 2577 or [researchdirector@dut.ac.za](mailto:researchdirector@dut.ac.za).





## CONSENT

**Full Title of the Study:**

**Names of Researcher/s:**

**Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:**

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, \_\_\_\_\_ (name of researcher), about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance  
Number: \_\_\_\_\_,
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.
- I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may  
relate to my participation will be made available to me.

_____	_____	_____	_____
<b>Full Name of Participant Thumbprint</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Signature / Right</b>

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (name of researcher) herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully

informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

_____	_____	_____
<b>Full Name of Researcher</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>
_____	_____	_____
<b>Full Name of Witness (If applicable)</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>
_____	_____	_____
<b>Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable)</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>

## APPENDIX B – Ethical clearance letter



**Institutional Research Ethics Committee**  
Research and Postgraduate Support Directorate  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Berwyn Court  
Gate 1, Steve Biko Campus  
Durban University of Technology  
P O Box 1334, Durban, South Africa, 4001  
Tel: 031 373 2375  
Email: lavishad@dut.ac.za  
[http://www.dut.ac.za/research/institutional\\_research\\_ethics](http://www.dut.ac.za/research/institutional_research_ethics)  
[www.dut.ac.za](http://www.dut.ac.za)

30 May 2019

Ms S S Mbili  
646 Ntshantsha Road  
Inanda  
4310

Dear Ms Mbili

**Generating 'happiness': A semiotic analysis on experiences of consumption and media marketing strategies for Inanda parents**  
**Ethical Clearance Number IREC 035/19**

The Institutional Research Ethics Committee acknowledges receipt of your gatekeeper permission letter.

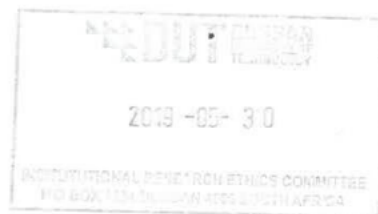
Please note that FULL APPROVAL is granted to your research proposal. You may proceed with data collection.

Any adverse events [serious or minor] which occur in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration must be reported to the IREC according to the IREC Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's).

Please note that any deviations from the approved proposal require the approval of the IREC as outlined in the IREC SOP's.

Yours Sincerely

\_\_\_\_\_  
Professor J K Adam  
Chairperson: IREC



## **APPENDIX C - Interview schedule**

My name is Sindisiwe Mbili, a Masters student in the department of Journalism. I am conducting a study on the ways that consumer messages are communicated to Inanda parents through the media and to find out how parents respond to, perceive and manage these consumer messages in an attempt to generate happiness among their children.

### **Step 1**

The researcher will introduce the ethics pertaining to the project and ask the participants to introduce themselves by furnishing their names, where they come from and sign the consent form (See Appendix A). Participants will be offered refreshments before the interviews commence.

### **Step 2**

At this stage the participants will be presented with the main research questions that will be driving this study. researcher will follow up with probing questions for further investigation should a point of interest arise. The main questions that will guide this project are as follows:

1. What comes to mind when you think about parenting in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How is it different from how you were raised?
2. Does the way products are advertised in the media play a role when you are making decisions on what to buy for your children?
3. Have you ever felt the urge to buy something for your child knowing very well that you can't afford it?
4. Where do most of these messages come from and how are they communicated?
5. What impact do your children have on your brand choice for most of the products you buy?
6. How do you define a happy child? How far are you willing to go to keep your children happy?

## APPENDIX D – Gatekeeper Letter

16 August 2018

Cllr. T.N. Mabanga  
Ward No. 107 (Inanda)  
eThekweni Municipality

### **Request for Permission to Conduct Research**

Dear Mr T. N. Mabanga

My name is Sindisiwe Mbili, a Masters in Journalism student at the Durban University of Technology. The research I wish to conduct is for my Masters dissertation titled **Generating ‘happiness’: A semiotic and thematic analysis on experiences of consumption and media marketing strategies for Inanda parents.**

I am hereby seeking your consent to interview people in the community of Inanda that is under your ward.

I have provided you with a copy of my proposal which includes copies of data collection tools and consent and/or assent forms to be used in the research process, as well as a copy of the provisional approval letter which I have received from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC).

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me on 081 587 8694 or [sindisiwem@gmail.com](mailto:sindisiwem@gmail.com)

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely,  
Sindisiwe Mbili  
Durban University of Technology