

**The strategic value of authentic narrative  
in branded entertainment**

**Marthinus van Loggerenberg**



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**Principal supervisor: Dr Carla Enslin**

**Co-supervisor: Prof Marlize Terblanche-Smit**

## **DECLARATION**

By submitting this dissertation electronically, I, Marthinus Johannes Coetzee van Loggerenberg, declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Marthinus J.C. van Loggerenberg

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment. Authentic narrative gives form to narrative that is original, communicates the brand's identity and purpose, and aligns with the target audience's value system in a meaningful way, with the potential to achieve customer-brand resonance – therefore, its strategic value.

The discipline of branded entertainment is imbedded in alternative brand contact planning. The term branded entertainment seemingly holds varied meanings among industry professionals and academics. This is of concern as the discipline is growing in importance as a means to disrupt conventional brand communication practice and to break through commercial clutter. One can compare this problem to an industry that for argument's sake does not understand or agree on the fundamental principles of advertising or public relations, resulting in ineffective communication efforts.

In many instances, branded entertainment is employed with an overt sales orientation as opposed to a brand orientation that engages an authentic brand identity-based narrative. The brand communication effort thus comes across as insincere, in particular where Millennials are concerned. This generation responds to brand communication that they can make a genuine emotional connection with and they expect of brands to provide entertaining content in their brand communication

campaigns. They furthermore engage with brands on their own terms, something that branded entertainment enables and encourages.

The lack of a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment erodes its core value, that is to break through clutter and connect with audiences through authentic narrative and thus, the potential for branded entertainment to achieve resonance is depleted.

Using a qualitative interpretivist approach with a judgement sampling design, this exploratory study was conducted to engage the perceptions of globally recognised brand communication decision makers, i.e. advertising agency-side strategists and creatives, and client-side marketers on the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment. Interviews were conducted across six continents with these planners and creators, all who have received the highest international recognition of excellence in the form of multiple Grand Prix and Gold wins at the world's most respected advertising award shows, for branded entertainment campaigns that they were directly responsible for. Depth of thought and opinion was gained through the exploration of the potential of authentic narrative to achieve brand resonance.

The qualitative exploratory research that was conducted delivers a proposed definition: Branded entertainment is a communication effort that employs a compelling authentic narrative to achieve brand resonance, being the primary contribution of the study. This definition is of significance as it provides a common understanding of the

branded entertainment construct towards brand resonance and guides the application thereof. Key findings were employed during this study to deliver a conceptual framework for the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment, being the secondary contribution of the study. The findings can advise brand communication decision makers on sound branded entertainment practice that engages authentic narrative for strategic brand-building success.

It is envisaged that those agencies and clients that are responsive to the explorative and experiential nature of authentic narrative employment in branded entertainment planning will find the proposed conceptual framework to be of immediate strategic value. Companies and agencies in need of empirical evidence can apply the key findings of this study in the development of hypotheses for future research.

## **KEY WORDS**

Authentic narrative; branded entertainment; brand narrative; brand resonance; content marketing; customer-based brand equity; digital marketing; Millennials.

## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to my parents,

**Dr Johan and Mrs Annette van Loggerenberg**

You are my guiding light, always

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AFP</b>	advertiser-funded programming
<b>CCBE Model</b>	Customer-based Brand Equity Model (or Pyramid)
<b>CEO</b>	chief executive officer
<b>Industry</b>	advertising, media-, brand- and marketing communication industry
<b>LIA</b>	London International Awards
<b>NASCAR</b>	National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing
<b>NZ</b>	New Zealand
<b>PhD</b>	Doctor of Philosophy
<b>PR</b>	public relations
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>USB</b>	University of Stellenbosch Business School
<b>WOMMA</b>	Word of Mouth Marketing Association



## CLARIFICATION OF KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

This section includes the most important terms and concepts used in this study.

### **Advertainment**

Advertainment is a neologism that combines advertising and entertainment, referring to promotional practices that integrate brand communications within the content of entertainment products (Russell, 2007: 3).

### **Advertiser Funded Programming (AFP's)**

BBC's Channel 4 explains advertiser-funded programming or AFP as follows: "Advertiser Funded Programming or Branded Content as it is often referred to describe programmes that are created with direct input of a client. The client's contribution could be financial, creative or by allowing producers access to talent or events with which the client has an existing relationship" (Channel 4 Sales, 2013).

### **Advertising**

Advertising is any paid form of communication about a good, service, an organisation or an idea by an identified sponsor (Kerin, Hartley, Berkowitz & Rudelius, 2006: 496).

### **Alternative brand contact planning**

Alternative brand contact planning presents a planning philosophy that is committed to the development of unconventional and unexpected brand contact strategies that break through commercial clutter barriers to achieve branded impact and communicates or reinforces the single-minded positioning of the brand (Enslin, 2003: 116, 320).

### **Attitudinal attachment to a brand**

A strong personal attachment goes beyond customers simply having a positive attitude to view the brand as being something special in a broader context. Customers with a great deal of

attitudinal attachment may state that they “love” the brand, describe the brand as one of their favourite possessions, or view it as a “little pleasure” that they look forward to (Keller, 2001: 15).

### **Authentic narrative**

The study aims to contextualise authentic narrative in context of branded entertainment. Authentic narrative is introduced by the study to give form to narrative that is original, communicates the brand’s identity and purpose and aligns with the target audience’s value system in a meaningful way, with the potential to achieve brand resonance.

### **Authenticity**

Authenticity is a complex term with different interpretations applied to different fields or disciplines. The simplest explanation is by The Oxford Dictionary (2013): authentic refers to late Latin word *authenticus*, from the Greek *authentikos* meaning ‘original, principal, genuine’, a neologism of *autos*, referring to the “self” and *hentes*, referring to “being”. Crew and Sims (1991: 163) said that authenticity is not about factuality or reality, but authority of the person who created an object as seen through the eyes of its audience. It could even be seen as a “social contract” (Crew & Sims, 1991: 163) between the object (in this study the branded entertainment property, for example a film or game or music video, for argument’s sake, as produced by the brand, i.e. the author) and the audience: a “socially agreed-upon reality” (Crew & Sims, 1991: 163-164) that only exists for as long as the audience has confidence in the content creator.

### **Brand**

Kapferer (2012: 19) defines brand as “a focal point for all the positive and negative impressions created by the buyer over time as they come into contact with the brand’s products, distribution channel, personnel and communication”. Brand occupies space in the perception of the consumer, and is what results from the totality of what the consumer takes into consideration before making a purchase decision (Pickton & Broderick 2005: 242). A brand is therefore a construct that establishes and communicates a particular and unique meaning in order to add value and connect with people (Cook, Erwin, Carmody & Enslin, 2010: 12).

**Brand awareness**

A customer's ability to recognise and recall a brand that involves linking the brand, its name, logo, symbol, and so forth, to certain associations in memory (Keller, 2001: 8).

**Brand building**

Brand building is about business building through the generation of higher revenues and profits, which in turn will lead to greater shareholder value and a stronger brand. Brands are built on the basis of a clear business strategy and due to rigorous implementation of the 5Ps – product, price, place, promotion (or communication) and people (Laforet, 2009: 67).

**Brand communication**

Brand communication programmes make part of the marketing communication strategy of the organisation; marketing communication is an important tool by which organisations inform, teach, persuade and remind consumers about their products and brands that they sell (Baeva, 2011: 51). The objective of brand communication is to expose the audience to a brand, whereby the effect can be maximised in terms of increased awareness and higher recall, so that the customer will buy the brand which has the highest recall; and to satisfy the customer to the optimum level. Further to that, any exposure to the brand communication affects consumer response, which can be measured by analysing variables like brand awareness in terms of recall and recognition, favourability, strength and uniqueness of the brand associations in the consumer memory (Zehir, Sahin, Kitapçı & Özüahin, 2011: 1219).

**Brand communication decision makers**

Brand communication decision makers are those that stand in the field of brand communication and that have the authority to make strategic decisions for creating a brand communication campaign (in the context of this study). They include the following three stakeholders: client-side marketers, advertising agency-side strategists and advertising agency-side creatives. "Client-side marketers" mostly comprise brand managers, marketing managers or communication managers. "Advertising agency-side strategists" refers to strategic planners in an advertising agency. "Advertising agency-side creatives" generally refer to creative directors and executive creative directors (and in some instances art director-copy writer teams or designers under supervision of creative or executive creative directors).

### **Brand community**

“Brand community” is the term social scientists use to describe like-minded consumers who identify with a particular brand and share significant traits, which researchers Thomas C. O’Guinn and Albert Muniz described as “shared consciousness, rituals, traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility” (Kalman, 2009: 1).

### **Brand contact points**

Brand contact points, also referred to as “brand connections” or “touch points” (Hofmeyr & Rice, 2000: 29 cited in Enslin, 2003: 40), represent all situations in which consumers or stakeholders in general, engage with or are exposed to a brand, whether the point of contact is initiated or uninitiated. The premise is that all points of brand contact work together to cohesively establish “moments of brand truth” i.e. moments in which the brand promise is made, delivered and ideally upheld; a term first popularised by Jan Carlson, former chairman of Scandinavian Airlines Systems (SAS) (Enslin, 2017: 40).

### **Brand engagement**

The willingness of a target audience to invest time, energy, money or other resources into the brand beyond those expended during purchase or consumption of a brand (or exposure to a branded entertainment communication effort the study may argue), that could include exchanging correspondence with the brand, to visit the website of brand, or for instance to join a club centred on a brand (Keller, 2001: 15-16).

### **Brand identity**

Brand identity is everything that makes the brand meaningful and unique (Janonis & Virvilaitė, 2007). It includes brand values, aims and moral image, which together constitute the essence of individuality that differentiates the brand (De Chernatony & Harris, 2001 cited by Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012: 2).

### **Brand image**

Brand image is the consumer’s perception of a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in the consumer’s memory (Keller, 1993 cited by Lindeberg *et al.*, 2012: 2).

## **Brand loyalty**

Brand loyalty can be defined as the extent of consumer faithfulness towards a specific brand and this faithfulness is expressed through repeat purchases and other positive behaviours such as word of mouth advocacy, irrespective of the marketing pressures generated by the other competing brands (Kotler & Keller, 2006: 165).

The concept of behavioural loyalty also deserves brief attention as per Kevin Lane Keller's school of thought that delivered the Customer-Based Brand Equity Pyramid or otherwise known as Keller's Resonance Model. Keller is a seminal author referenced in this study and his model is used in the conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) of this study. Keller explains behavioural brand loyalty in context of the behaviour that it provokes; characterised by repeat purchases, and the amount, or share, of category volume attributed to the brand. He further stated that for bottom-line profit results, the brand must generate sufficient frequencies and volumes (Keller, 2001: 15).

## **Brand narrative**

Brand narrative is the story of the ideas, experiences and values that represent the tangible, authentic depth and integrity of the brand's relationship with its consumer (Campbell & Simpson-Bint, 2010). Brand narrative is the summation of the past, present and future expectations of a brand and a platform for creating, involving and sustaining customer engagement (Dahlén, Lange & Smith, 2010: 6).

## **Brand resonance**

Brand resonance is a concept strongly underpinned by Kevin Lane Keller as expressed in his Customer-Based Brand Equity Model (Keller, 2001: 15), being "... the nature of the relationship that consumers have with the brand and the extent to which they feel that they are *in synch* with the brand". A consumer feeling completely in sync with the brand was described by Keller as the ultimate goal of brand building (Keller, 2010: 15). Keller reasoned that brand resonance is characterised by the intensity or depth of the psychological bond that consumers have with the brand, combined with the level of activity engendered by this loyalty (Keller, 2001: 15).

**Brand salience**

Brand salience is the degree to which your brand is thought about or noticed when a customer is in a buying situation (Daye, 2010; Romaniuk & Sharp, 2004: 328). Brand salience represents the “size of the brand in consumers’ mindscape” (Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy & Pervan, 2011: 196 citing Ehrenberg, Barnard and Scriven, 1997).

**Brand strategy**

A brand strategy is a long-term plan for the development of a successful brand in order to achieve specific goals, and a well-defined and executed strategy affects all aspects of a business and is directly connected to consumers’ needs, emotions and competitive environments (Gunelius, 2013). Brand strategy defines what the brand stands for and the promise the brand makes, and should align with the brand’s identity, positioning and business strategy (Yohn, 2010).

**Brandcasting**

Brandcasting, explained as “the inclusion of products – branded and/ or unbranded – in an entertainment program” which could take two distinct forms: advertainment or product placement (Scott & Craig-Lees, 2006: 367).

**Branded content**

Branded content refers to the content generated by and around a brand; this content can be informative, educational and entertaining. Branded content encompasses content marketing and branded entertainment (Pulizzi, 2016; Duncan, 2013, Rahim & Clemens, 2012 and Lopresti, 2013 cited by De Aguilera-Moyano, Baños-González & Ramírez-Perdiguero, 2015: 523).

**Branded entertainment**

Branded entertainment is a communication effort that employs a compelling authentic narrative to achieve brand resonance. The study aims to define branded entertainment for strategically significant brand communication planning. This is the study-delivered definition.

**Branded entertainment campaign**

In context of the study, a branded entertainment campaign is defined as an effort to communicate the branded entertainment property or piece (for example a film, game or music video) by means of paid or earned media, usually with support of other promotional tools, such as public relations (PR) or advertising to drive awareness around the branded entertainment effort or simply to drive people to engage with the branded entertainment property or piece.

**Branded entertainment initiative**

In this study, it refers to a branded entertainment property (see the following term) or campaign set into motion.

**Branded entertainment property**

In this study, it refers to the actual entertainment entity, for example a film, game or music video, among other.

**Content marketing**

Content marketing, according to the USA-based Content Marketing Institute, is a “strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action” (Content Marketing Institute, 2013).

**Customer-based brand equity**

Customer-based brand equity is defined as the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand (Keller, 1993: 1). A brand is said to have positive or negative customer-based brand equity if consumers react more or less favourably to the “product, price, promotion, or distribution of the brand than they do to the same marketing mix element when it is attributed to a fictitiously named or unnamed version of the product or service”, according to Keller (1993: 8).

## **Generation Y**

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2010: 98), Generation Y consists of individuals born between 1978 and 2000, also referred to as the Millennial Generation (Freeze, 2013). They are one of the largest generations in history moving into their prime spending years (Goldman Sachs Global, 2016), generally distrust traditional advertising (Aquino, 2012), want to be entertained by brands, seeking out such entertainment (Philips, 2010 in Pardee, 2010; Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2011: 22; McDevitt, 2013) and in particular favour entertainment narrative that comes from brands deemed to be authentic (Brenner, 2015 & Papachristos, 2016).

## **Industry**

In this study, industry refers to the advertising, media-, brand- and marketing communication industry.

## **Infomercials**

Infomercials are defined as feature-programme length commercials (between 15 and 30 minutes in duration) presented more as a talk show as a promotion (like an advertorial is for print) aiming to build awareness of a product or service by demonstrating its use and benefits, usually including an attractive direct-response offer (Business Dictionary, date unknown). Thomas (2009: 2) alludes to the fact that infomercials, as a form of advertising, would not be similar to an AFP as advertisers "... are buying into the editorial integrity of the programme and reaching consumers by association with the programme's values".

## **Millennials**

See Generation Y.

## **Narrative**

Narrative is often taken "to connote the threading together of a set of events or experiences in a temporal sequence in order to make sense of them" (Lai, 2010: 72 citing Dean, 1998). This refers to a process in which stories are made - even referring to the cognitive structure of



a story or the result of the process (stories, tales or histories) (Lai, 2010: 72 citing Polkinghorne, 1998).

### **Product or brand integration**

Product (or brand) integration is explained by Vogt (2012) as being similar to product placement, except that brand or product integration involves the actual integration of the brand or product into the script of the entertainment property, i.e. to write the brand or product in as part of the entertainment property's story line.

### **Product or brand placement**

Product (or brand) placement, as explained by Kaijansinkko (2003: 5, 20-22), is when a product or brand is used, featured, mentioned or seen in a movie or similar context (entertainment property) in a manner that provides the product with a positive image and role in the entertainment property. Lehu and Bressoud (2008: 1083-4) described product placement as a "crossbreed technique" by which different communication techniques are combined into one, taking place in an entertainment and/or cultural environment.

### **Overarching brand narrative**

See description of *Brand narrative*. Dahlén *et al.* (2010: 6) alternatively refer to brand narrative as the brand's overarching narrative. The term "overarching" brand narrative is mostly used in this study, is explicitly used in this form of expression in the Enriched Conceptual Framework of the Strategic Value of Authentic Narrative in Branded Entertainment (see Figure 6.1), and is not to be confused with the narrative employed in a branded entertainment property (see Branded entertainment property).

### **Sponsorship**

Sponsorship is the "full or partial financing by an advertiser of a programme, feature or event in exchange for brand or corporate awareness or association with or within that programme or event" (Muller, 1999: 414).

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION, RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This research study focused on the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment. The study of literature suggests that authentic narrative gives form to branded entertainment that is original, communicates the brand's identity and aligns with the target audience's value system in a meaningful way. The result is branded entertainment that achieves consumer-brand resonance that is strategic in brand building and that consequently builds brand equity, according to a seminal author referenced in this study: Kevin Lane Keller.

Page xvii provides a list that clarifies all key terms and concepts used in the study. However, terms and concepts are duly explained as the study progresses. O'Guinn, Allen and Semenik (2009: 612-613) defined branded entertainment as "The development and support of any entertainment property (e.g. TV shows, theme park, short film, movie, or video game) where a primary objective is to feature one's brand or brands in an effort to impress and connect with consumers in a unique and compelling way". This definition is one of the first definitions for branded entertainment with many more attempts that followed. However, vagueness and disparity exist around the perceived nature of branded entertainment among practitioners which impacts its strategic value. Branded entertainment's strategic potential is brand resonance, which refers to the relationship between a customer and a brand.

Resonance can only be achieved by employing authentic narrative as proposed and explored in this qualitative study. Branded entertainment's nature is often viewed as an integration attempt into a third party's entertainment property or as entertainment sponsored by a brand. This marginalises the brand's ability to resonate with a target audience because it only allows limited deployment of brand identity-based communication with potential to establish an emotional connection between the target audience and the brand, to evoke engagement, create a sense of community or even loyalty, all being dimensions of brand resonance. The

problem is that brand communication decision makers are not utilising the full potential of branded entertainment when creating branded entertainment in this way.

Despite this, some recent thought leaders (Valero, 2014; De Aguilera-Moyano et al., 2015: 533; Selvey, 2015; Wiese, 2015; Ryan, 2016; Canter, 2016: 9) suggest branded entertainment to be a brand-initiated and owned contact point that allows brand identity-based narrative in order to achieve one or more brand resonance dimensions. Nonetheless, authentic narrative in branded entertainment has not sufficiently surfaced in literature.

Because authentic narrative is overwhelmingly not recognised as being inherent to the very nature of branded entertainment, and because of branded entertainment being relatively new in contemporary brand communication practice, the most significant challenge is prevalent: seemingly poor quality, strategically insignificant content that fails to break through commercial clutter to arrest attention, and more so, to deliver content that has the ability to resonate with intended target audiences. This is often due to brand communication decision makers, and often client-side marketers (brand managers, marketing managers or communication managers, for instance), approaching branded entertainment with a more familiar message-driven or overt sales-orientated mindset, often seen in traditional advertising, instead of a brand-orientated mindset that provides utility and meaning. The result of the aforementioned approach seemingly suppresses the creative potential of advertising agency-side strategists and creatives (meaning creative directors and executive creative directors and their copy writer-art director teams or designer teams, for instance) and often muddles agency-client relationships that lead to insufficient and insignificant work as result.

Poor or strategically misaligned content is also seemingly due to advertising agency-side content creators that are mostly familiar with traditional advertising practice and who have not yet mastered the art of entertainment in brand communication (Graser, 2010; Thielman, 2014; Maconick, 2016). It is completely understandable that most are probably not familiar with creating disruptive campaigns in a branded entertainment space or most importantly, do not recognise and understand the strategic value of authentic narrative. It was ultimately brought to surface that many agencies and clients are unfamiliar with branded entertainment, the possibilities it has to offer and basically understanding of how to approach it for strategic success.

Advertising award shows that usually aim to define a discipline and some industry leaders alike express concern about the lack of category-defining, strategically significant stand-out content. Some made it evident that branded entertainment is experiencing orientation problems and as a discipline has not had the ability to establish itself because of perceived difference in meaning and subsequently approach (Gilbar, 2010; Karbasfrooshan, 2011; Wiese, 2013; Meyers, 2014; Pytlik, 2014; Martí-Parreño, Ruiz-Mafé & Scribner, 2015; Pereira, 2016). Relatively few highly successful case studies have managed to lead the way. Many brand communication decision makers want to minimise risk and therefore feel comfortable to copy well-published, successful branded entertainment campaigns. This is problematic because it does not employ authentic narrative and therefore the potential for brand resonance is compromised.

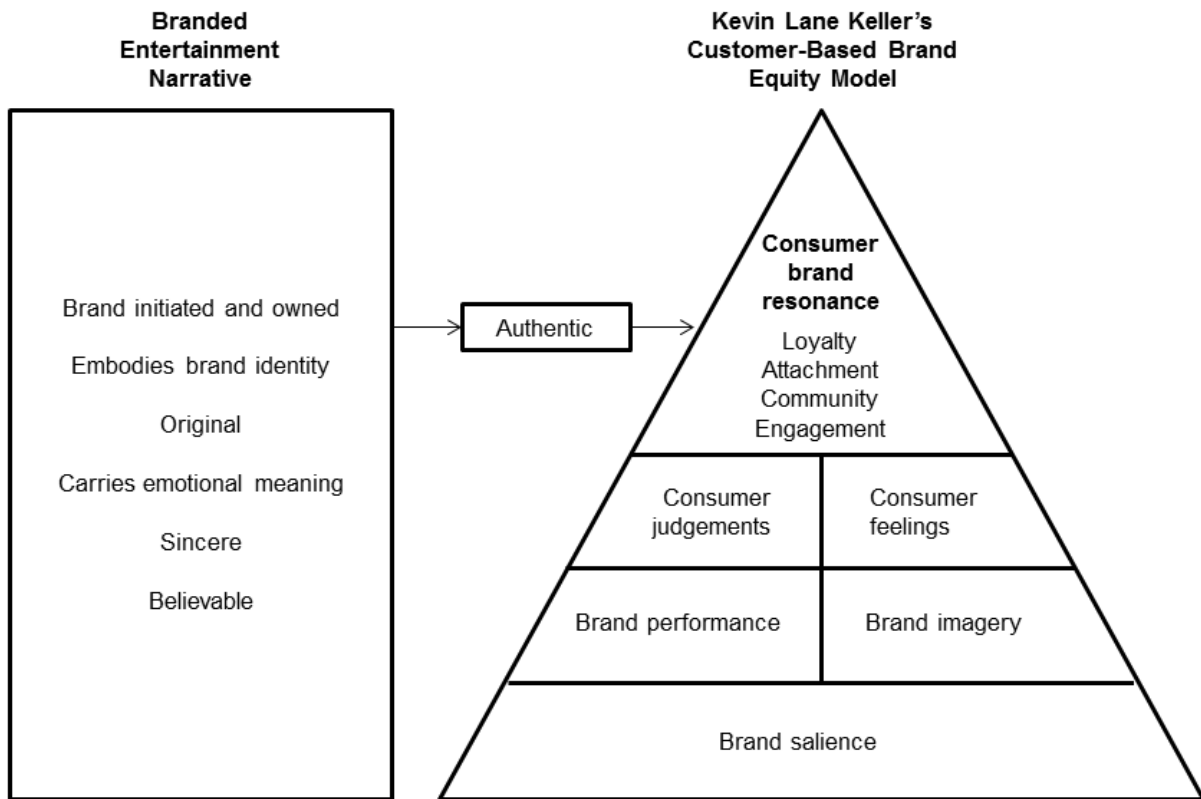
The definition of branded entertainment is evidently vague as explored in literature. Many industry practitioners also, for instance, use branded entertainment and branded content interchangeably. This muddles suitable approaches to content as branded entertainment ought to be categorised as a particular type of content with its own approach compared to other types of content. One can compare the problem of vague and sporadically dissimilated definitions and problematic subsequent applications to an industry that for argument's sake does not understand or agree on the fundamental principles of advertising or public relations, with diluted or ineffective communication efforts as result.

The growth of branded entertainment is the result of a rapidly evolving digital media landscape that offers a myriad of content platforms and enables share-ability among users (Van Dijk, Minocha & Laing, 2008: 554). In addition, the scale and depth of the research problem is exemplified by the pressure experienced by brand communication decision makers to meet the expectations of consumers, in particular Generation Y or Millennials (individuals born between 1978 and 2000 according to Kotler and Armstrong, 2010: 98) who are of significant value to brands as they are moving into their prime spending years, preferring entertainment to traditional advertising. This generation in particular engages with brands on their terms being something that digital media allows. The tension that brand communication decision makers are experiencing stems from failure to comprehensively understand branded entertainment and consequently to consider a viable approach to branded entertainment, in order to achieve campaign objectives.

To address the challenges that branded entertainment is currently facing, the primary research of this study engaged the perspectives of global brand communication decision makers that are recognised for strategic excellence in branded entertainment to provide insight on authentic narrative and its direct influence on branded entertainment practice, inadvertently addressing all of the mentioned concerns. Fifteen multi-international advertising award winners were interviewed across six continents as part of this qualitative exploratory study in the interpretivist paradigm to make sense of the potential integrity that authentic narrative instils in branded entertainment and how authentic narrative can leverage the potential of branded entertainment campaigns to achieve brand resonance.

The primary objective of the study was to explore the value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment in order to suggest a definition for branded entertainment that guides strategically significant branded entertainment practice.

The study of literature enabled the researcher to produce a conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) of constructs that aim to clarify characteristics and relationships between characteristics in a non-determinist way in order to encourage theory development that is useful in practice (Jabareen, 2009: 51, 57 and Nalzar, 2012: 6, 9-10). The framework takes an interpretivist approach to understand the dynamics between authentic narrative that consists of proposed characteristics overlaying authenticity and narrative and brand resonance as per Kevin Lane Keller's Brand Resonance Model (2001: 7-8). This model, which follows, can be deemed theoretical but in the context of this study it serves as a guide to understand the phenomenon and potential strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment.



**Figure 1.1: Conceptual framework to guide the central research proposition**

The **central research proposition** argues that authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve consumer brand resonance, as literature could not provide sufficient evidence to constitute or support such a proposition. The central research proposition is supported by **two integral propositions**. The first (1) is a proposed definition of branded entertainment: **Branded entertainment is an unconventional brand-initiated and owned contact point with potential to achieve brand resonance through authentic narrative**, and the second (2) is a set of narrative characteristics in branded entertainment that provides the branded entertainment with the ability to potentially achieve brand resonance. A brief reflection on the integral propositions and how they relate to the central research proposition (and each other) to form the conceptual framework follows.

(1) The definition is integral to the central research proposition as authentic narrative, the point of gravitas in the definition, is central to provide a unique leverage point to not only create a definition that guides branded entertainment practice but also to give meaning to the use of the instrument. The working definition addresses the research problem and guides the

conceptual framework. The conceptual framework is essentially a manifestation of the literature study-proposed branded entertainment working definition.

(2) The set of authentic narrative characteristics is also integral to the research proposition as these characteristics together suggest a requisite to inform a strategically sound branded entertainment definition and more so branded entertainment design with the potential to achieve brand resonance. The proposed set of authentic narrative characteristics, presented in Section 1.6, could be employed in the conceptual framework to understand its potential that is proposed to be brand resonance.

The conceptual framework (Figure 1.1.) is a translation of the central research proposition: authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve brand resonance. This framework inherently presents a set of proposed branded entertainment narrative characteristics, in no particular prioritised order, as requisite to the narrative experienced or regarded as authentic. This authentic narrative is then proposed to have the potential to achieve brand resonance. Kevin Lane Keller's customer-based brand equity or resonance model (2001: 11) was included to guide the primary research to understand in what way brand resonance as potential outcome of authentic narrative is contextualised in the findings.

The framework quite simply shows that if branded entertainment narrative in a particular branded entertainment property, for instance a film or game or music video, adheres to the six suggested characteristics it could be regarded as authentic. If the narrative is authentic, it could potentially constitute resonance, consisting of the ability to evoke attitudinal attachment, provoke engagement, and lead to a sense of community or even loyalty.

This explorative study did not aim to indicate any relationship between one or more authentic narrative characteristics and one or more resonance dimensions, or to establish interdependent relationships between resonance dimensions due to authentic narrative or a combination of authentic narrative characteristics. The study has aimed to establish whether the research propositions could be deemed suitable to guide further research on the phenomenon of authentic narrative and branded entertainment and the potential to achieve brand resonance.

The primary research could indeed enrich a literature study definition of branded entertainment in order to deliver the following definition as the key output of the study: Branded entertainment is a communication effort that employs a compelling authentic narrative to achieve brand resonance. The literature review and primary research suggest that narrative is a requisite to branded entertainment i.e. that branded entertainment can only be branded entertainment if it employs narrative.

However, in context of branded entertainment's potential, i.e. resonance, it is further suggested that branded entertainment that refrains from employing authentic narrative actively marginalises its strategic potential. This means that product placement, product or brand integration in an existing entertainment property or entertainment that is sponsored cannot qualify as branded entertainment because it does not employ authentic narrative. It also means that branded entertainment and branded content cannot be used interchangeably because branded entertainment employs authentic narrative where branded content could include or exclude entertainment in the form of authentic narrative. Branded entertainment is a particular offshoot of branded content that primarily employs authentic narrative. Without authentic narrative as guideline, a branded entertainment attempt as a stand-alone discipline would ostensibly not achieve its fullest strategic potential, being brand resonance.

Another objective of conducting the research study was to deliver a proposed set of narrative characteristics inherent to authenticity to increase branded entertainment's potential to achieve brand resonance. This can be used to guide the creation process of branded entertainment initiatives and to assess whether the branded entertainment narrative could be considered authentic. The primary research enriched the literature study set of narrative characteristics in order to deliver the following set of seven narrative characteristics to fulfil this objective: for the narrative in branded entertainment to be brand generated, to embody the brand's identity, to be original, to carry emotional meaning, to be sincere in its effort to entertain, to imbue a sense of consideration to the craft of the narrative, and ultimately to come across as being believable.

Finally, the study aimed to employ the perspectives of the interviewed industry professionals to deliver general guidance on strategically sound branded entertainment practice that includes client-agency dynamic and guidance to the mindset in which branded entertainment



should be approached, among other. An enriched conceptual framework that informs the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment, as mentioned, is also delivered. It is envisaged that industry practitioners will find the framework, which stands integral to the definition and authentic narrative characteristics, of immediate value as they can use the framework as guideline to create strategically significant branded entertainment.

This chapter introduces the key elements of the study and offers structure to the dissertation. A background to the study is firstly provided, followed by the research problem, research question and the study's objectives. The study is delineated; assumptions are clarified and a list of the most important terms is provided. The importance of the study is identified, followed by an overview of the research design and methods with a sampling and participant selection that follows. The chapter concludes with an outline of each chapter presented in the dissertation.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND**

Branded entertainment has its origin with the “soap opera”; first 1930s’ radio shows and later 1950s’ television shows sponsored and tied back to a specific brand, typically sponsored by soap manufacturers (Allen, 1985: 96). However, these shows became less popular as advertisers started using short commercials between shows (Jefferson, 2014). Branded entertainment regained popularity post the “golden age of classic advertising” (Russell, 2007), or the prime years of traditional advertising before digital became so prevalent, for two main reasons.

The first reason relates to branded entertainment’s ability to provide targeted content that engages consumer attention in a challenging technologically advanced market place where consumers can self-determine their interaction with brands (Teixeira, 2014 and Hittner, 2016). Secondly, branded entertainment provides the opportunity for advertisers to establish a deeper emotional connection with target audiences (Jaggi, 2009: 8; Duopoly, 2014: 4; Musson, 2014: 63) and provide content that is more personally relevant (Blanchard, 2015). It is evident that branded entertainment holds significant potential to achieve a comprehensive set of possible communication objectives. Achieving such communication objectives may be out of reach for many brand communication decision makers without a cohesive

understanding and application of branded entertainment that is inherent to achieve such potential.

Branded entertainment is imbedded in alternative brand contact planning (Bachman, 2010). Alternative brand contact planning presents a planning philosophy that is committed to the development of unconventional and unexpected brand contact strategies that break through commercial clutter barriers to achieve branded impact and communicates or reinforces the single-minded positioning of the brand (Enslin, 2003: 116, 320). Branded entertainment, as a relatively new communication discipline within contemporary brand-building practice against a fast-evolving digital communication mediascape, is still seen as an alternative or novel way to make brand contact where the “brand can tell its story” (Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015: xiv). Branded entertainment’s core value lies in its ability to break through commercial clutter to arrest the attention of a target audience in a meaningful way (Meyers, 2014 and Ryan, 2016). The lack of a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment erodes its core value, which is to break through commercial clutter and maximise its potential as an alternative form of brand contact in order to connect with audiences through authentic narrative.

The Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity, the most coveted brand communication award show in the world (Davies, 2012 and Suggett, 2013), only recognised branded entertainment in 2012 (Wentz, 2012). Since then branded entertainment has become frequently debated subject matter in a time where it is trying to orientate and prove itself in the brand communication sphere (Meyers, 2014; Borum, 2016; MacCuish, 2017) In lieu of this orientation, many definitions and application suggestions for branded entertainment seemingly exist with many initiatives failing to achieve its strategic potential i.e. brand resonance, evident from the study of literature. It could be argued that it is this sense of dissonance in opinion that directly contributes to branded entertainment’s orientation problems.

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The fundamental problem lies in the absence of a clear definition of branded entertainment and consequently, a set of challenges that erode the strategic potential of branded entertainment. The term branded entertainment seemingly holds varied meanings among

industry professionals and academics (De Aguilera-Moyano, Baños-González & Ramírez-Perdiguero, 2015: 523).

One of the more evident interpretations is that branded entertainment is a sophisticated form of product placement, product or brand integration, or sponsorship (Lehu & Bressoud, 2008; Monaco, 2009; Lehu, 2009; Wiese, 2011; Bhargava, 2011; Árpád & Gergo, 2016: 4). Literature questioned these forms of brand communication's ability to resonate because they are not generated by the brand and therefore they do not allow the brand to take ownership by employing a brand identity-based narrative in order to meaningfully connect with a target audience. Therefore, the potential for brand resonance is marginalised (Daugherty & Gangadhatbatla, 2005: 16; Monaco, 2009: 1; Hudson, 2010; Bhargava, 2011; De Aguilera-Moyano *et al.*, 2016: 45-48). Furthermore, the levels of brand employment in these existing disciplines are unclear; without an understanding and clearly guided application references that brands can work towards further contribute to the orientation problems that branded entertainment is experiencing, and more so, brand communication decision makers are experiencing with many efforts not achieving their set communication objectives.

The difference between branded entertainment and branded content is also not clear (Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015) and these terms are used interchangeably (Pulizzi, 2016). The problem lies herein: branded content consists of various forms of content creation that include branded entertainment (Asmussen, Canter, Butler & Michels, 2013: 97). Other forms of content creation may include educational content or informational content, for instance (Canadian Media Association, 2013 and Anastas, 2015), or even native advertising, advertiser funded programming, viral videos, among others, and therefore content creation means different things to different people, leading to misunderstandings and confusion (Asmussen *et al.*, 2013: 97).

These forms of content are not necessarily entertaining and do not necessarily have the same communication objectives as branded entertainment or could not necessarily achieve the potential for brand resonance, as in the case of branded entertainment because of its entertainment narrative. The approaches to branded entertainment and other forms of content differ (Kirby, 2014). Brand communication decision makers ought to be specific in their

understanding and approach of branded entertainment and other forms of content, depending on the type of content.

Branded content is brand generated so it has the ability to employ an identity-based narrative (Selvey, 2015). However, other forms of content do not necessarily employ narrative as a requisite, for instance mere informative content. In a time of orientation and aiming to prove itself as a communication effort that has the ability to break through the clutter, branded entertainment should claim its own ground and be seen as a “particular offshoot” of content marketing with the main aim to entertain (Rose, 2013).

In all instances mentioned where there are different classifications and interpretations for where branded entertainment positions itself and more so, how it defines itself and subsequently applies itself: One can compare this problem to an industry that for argument's sake does not understand or agree on the fundamental principles of advertising or public relations, with diluted or ineffective communication efforts as result.

iMedia Connection, a leading USA-based advertising industry publication for senior digital marketers in 2012 completed a study on branded entertainment amongst 72 advertising leaders. The study identified a “lack of quality programming” and “brand marketers (or client-side marketers) not willing to take chances with branded entertainment” as two highly significant challenges facing branded entertainment. Despite client-side marketers not willing to take a chance on branded entertainment because it could still be deemed as unfamiliar territory compared to traditional advertising, the iMedia research further shows that “the lack of quality programming” is due to client-side marketers' unwillingness to explore branded entertainment.

Whether brand communication decision makers may rely on or fall back on familiar advertising practice, in many instances branded entertainment is unfortunately employed with an overt sales orientation as opposed to a brand orientation that engages an authentic brand identity-based narrative (Hitch & Worple, 2010; Bhargava, 2014; Musson, 2014; Wiese, 2015). The brand communication effort thus comes across as insincere (Swart, 2007; Mescall, 2013; Pytlik, 2014), in particular where Millennials are concerned.

The significance of the problem lies in that this generation responds to brand communication with which they can make a genuine emotional connection and they expect of brands to provide entertaining content or stories in their brand communication campaigns (Calvert, 2010 and Brenner, 2015). They furthermore engage with brands on their own terms, something that branded entertainment enables and encourages (Pardee, 2010 and Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2011: 42). Not achieving the full potential to connect with Millennials becomes a problem in itself as they are one of the largest generations in history moving into their prime spending years (Goldman Sachs Global, 2016).

These challenges are of concern as the branded entertainment discipline is growing in importance as a means to disrupt conventional brand communication practice and break through commercial clutter (Meyers, 2014). Whether the problem is attributable to client-side marketers only is questionable.

Cannes did not award any Grand Prix in the category of Branded Content and Entertainment in 2014 and 2015 due to lack of outstanding, category-defining content that is original, compelling and of strategic significance (Weiss, 2014 and Morrison, 2015). However, on 25 June 2016, a Grand Prix was again awarded in the Visual Storytelling and Branded Entertainment category (Bizcommunity, 2016). Despite better work becoming more evident, PJ Pereira, Chief Creative Officer at Pereira & O'Dell (San Francisco), Chair of the Branded Content & Branded Entertainment jury for the 2016 Clio Awards, said about branded entertainment: "We're still testing the waters and seeing what can be done, or can't" (Adweek, 2016). The Clio Awards is reckoned by international advertising industry experts to be among the top ten international advertising award ceremonies (Davies, 2012 and Suggett, 2013). Although branded entertainment is gaining ground at Cannes as a communication practice striving for strategically-driven creative excellence it seems, according to Pereira, branded entertainment is still orientating itself in contemporary brand communication practice.

For a relatively new brand communication discipline still aiming to orientate itself in a fast-evolving mediascape, to not firmly define itself and establish its core value and strategic potential, could lead to a sense of disorientated application. This means that if brand communication decision makers are unsure of what branded entertainment is and what it is not, one cannot blame them for:

- feeling reluctant to explore and invest in it;
- being unsure on how to approach it strategically;
- approaching it with preconceived notions or methods already known to them or stepping into an overt sales-orientated approach because it is safe and familiar.

The problem statement for this study thus is:

The lack of a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment erodes its core value, that is to break through clutter and connect with audiences through authentic narrative and thus, the potential for branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance is depleted.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION**

The primary research question formulated to address the problem statement is:

What is the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment?

#### **1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

To answer the research question, primary and secondary research objectives were developed.

The **primary research objective** was to explore and potentially enrich the central research proposition. The central research proposition is: Authentic narrative in branded entertainment has potential to achieve brand resonance, meaning that this study proposes that the value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment is strategic, i.e. it provides branded entertainment with the potential to achieve brand resonance; and as reasoned – brand resonance builds a brand strategically. The central research proposition for this study exists because literature provided some but not extensive insight to constitute or support such a proposition, hence the need for primary research.

Subsequently, **three secondary research objectives** emerged:

- (1) To explore and refine a branded entertainment working definition in order to present a proposed definition as one of the key outputs of the study;
- (2) To explore and enrich a proposed set of narrative characteristics in branded entertainment that could constitute authentic narrative; and
- (3) To obtain an understanding of best practice principles to guide brand communication decision makers in creating branded entertainment with potential for brand resonance. This objective stands integral to goals one and two. The experts interviewed in this study uncovered best industry practice principles in context of the authentic narrative proposition. It could be beneficial to brand communication decision makers to take these insights into consideration when approaching a branded entertainment campaign. This is especially of significance in addressing the orientation problems experienced by industry at present on the branded entertainment discipline in the field of brand communication.

The study ultimately aimed to deliver the following three key outputs:

1. A proposed definition of branded entertainment given the findings of this study on the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment.
2. An Enriched Conceptual Framework of the Strategic Value of Authentic Narrative in Branded Entertainment (that stands integral to the proposed branded entertainment definition and includes the authentic narrative characteristics with the potential to achieve brand resonance).
3. Insights for brand communication decision makers on strategically sound branded entertainment practice.

It must be reiterated that to date no academic research has been done to explore the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment. Therefore, with this being an exploratory study, the findings of this study can be used for further research on the topic.

## **1.6 DELINEATION, ASSUMPTIONS AND DEFINITION OF TERMS**

### **1.6.1 Delineation**

This research study focused on the following:

- Branded entertainment as per the working definition delivered by the study of literature: Branded entertainment is an unconventional brand-initiated and owned contact point with potential to achieve brand resonance through authentic narrative.
- The opinions of brand communication decision makers (also referred to as the branded entertainment experts for the purpose of this study), being advertising agency-side strategists and creatives, and client-side marketers in the global advertising, media-, brand- and marketing communication industry.
- The strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment and not the creative value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment as the study's focus is on the field discipline of brand strategy in context of brand communication.
- Whilst seeking for appropriate participants willing to participate in the study, the researcher managed to find participants that were spread over six continents; the study had no intention to overtly investigate parallels or indicate distinct differences between branded entertainment practices on different continents.
- Due to the fast evolving nature of the branded entertainment communication discipline, the author only took literature published on branded entertainment prior to 1 May 2017 into consideration due to the final submission and timeline of the study.

### **1.6.2 Assumptions**

The trustworthiness of the results is ultimately dependent on the assumption that the participants provided honest and reliable feedback.

### **1.6.3 Definition of terms**

The most important terms in the dissertation have been defined after the table of contents (part of the preliminary pages of the dissertation). The literature review will contextualise all terms directly related to the research propositions.



## 1.7 LITERATURE REVIEW

The present research resides in the general field of study or academic discipline of business management, and more specifically, marketing and the subject of brand building and strategy. Kotler (2012) defined marketing as “the science and art of exploring, creating, and delivering value to satisfy the needs of a target market at a profit”. The study explored the concepts of authenticity, narrative and brand resonance in order to put forward two constructs. The first is a proposed definition for branded entertainment that imbues the three mentioned concepts and the second is an authentic narrative construct that comprises a set of narrative characteristics recommended to be present for branded entertainment to be regarded as authentic and therefore to achieve brand resonance.

A concept is a general idea or understanding that stands for something, whereas a construct is a concept or an idea that has added meaning in that it has been creatively, deliberately and consciously invented or adopted for a scientific purpose and is based on hypothetical knowledge, according to Kwan and Wolf (2002) citing Kerlinger (1973). Branded entertainment and authentic narrative in context of branded entertainment have been conceptualised and are suggested by this study for a specific research purpose i.e. to suggest the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment; it is therefore seen as constructs that were conceptualised by exploring the concepts of authenticity, narrative and resonance.

### 1.7.1 Introduction

Although branded entertainment has been in existence since the late 1900's (Newell, Salmon & Chang, 2006 cited by Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015: 4), the digital media revolution resurfaced its ability to create meaningful connections with consumers, through brand storytelling. (iMedia, 2013). The digital media revolution fragmented audiences due to the proliferation of channels and provided brands with the opportunity to move beyond traditional advertising and impress and connect with target audiences by means of media-rich content and entertainment that side-steps ad blocking or pay-per-view, for instance, to offer choice of engagement (Tuomi, 2010: 1; Puopolo & Izdebski, 2013: 1; Teixeira, 2014; Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015: 2; Hittner, 2016).

Traditional advertising seems to be losing its ability to connect with consumers in a meaningful way (DeMers, 2016). Overtly sales-orientated messages evident in many traditional

advertising efforts may come across as desperate, contrived and invasive (Appleyard, 2010: 18 and Roper, 2011: 11), even reaching a general state of mistrust by Generation Y (born between 1978-2000 according to Kotler & Armstrong, 2010: 98), also known as Millennials (Freeze, 2013).

The increasing practice of brands to create entertaining “non-salesy” content that adds value to their lives, according to Jonny Rose (2013), Head of Content at IDEO, a multi-award winning content marketing agency based in London and New York, can draw in consumers to engage with brands on their own terms. Millennials favour brands that focus on authenticity and value instead of a sale (Mescall, 2013 and Tyson, 2016). Millennials (or Generation Y) also seem to think more positively about brands that provide them with relevant content (Rayess, 2015), and respond to content that resonates with them rather than traditional advertising messages, even trusting those brands more as result (Gotter, 2016).

Millennials, as digital natives, were born into an advanced digital mediascape and experience technology as a way of life (Tipton, 2011). They inadvertently consume brands in an information-rich digital environment, “always looking for the next cool thing” (Simoneaux & Stroud, 2010: 69). Millennials expect engagement-rich experiences and highly relevant or personalised information and entertainment (Pardee, 2010 and McCrea, 2011: 35). In response, Millennials reward brands that make their lives better by means of positive brand interaction and look past trendiness to brands that are authentic and stand “for something real” (Hitch & Worple, 2010; Bhargava, 2014; Musson, 2014; Wiese, 2015; Martí-Parreño et al., 2015;).

Effective brand communication with Millennials becomes crucial for brands as they are one of the largest generations in history moving into their prime spending years (Goldman Sachs Global, 2016). Millennials put pressure on brands to entertain more so than to advertise to them in a traditional way (Philips, 2010 in Pardee, 2010; Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2011: 22; McDevitt, 2013) provided depth and scope to the research problem: The lack of a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment erodes its core value, that is to break through clutter and connect with audiences through authentic narrative and thus, the potential for branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance is depleted. Again, brand resonance is the nature of the relationship between consumers and brands, referring to the extent to

which consumers are “in synch” with the brand, characterised in terms of the intensity or the depth of the psychological bond that customers have with the brand in context of brand communication (Keller, 2001: 15).

Content creation and especially branded entertainment as a form of content creation has the potential to establish a strong emotional connection with a target audience (Rose, 2013; Valero, 2014: 9; Brenner, 2015). However, varied opinion on branded entertainment may as well erode this potential as “the definition of branded entertainment is still vague at best” (Arhio & Raunio, 2015, supported by King, 2011; Ross, 2013; Pytlik, 2014). It seems that some academics and industry professionals are moving away from understanding branded entertainment to be sophisticated product placement, product or brand integration or sponsorship that would not necessarily harbour this potential (Hudson, 2010), to involve a brand’s self-created entertainment content that communicates the brand’s identity (Monaco, 2009; Gilbar, 2010; Czarnecki, 2012; Pytlik, 2014; Musson, 2014; Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015:40-41). Branded entertainment in this way can convey brand authenticity, openness, and sincerity that create a climate of trust, making it more likely that consumers will purchase the brand’s products (Mathieu, 2012).

The significance of brand storytelling in branded entertainment initiated and content-owned by the brand imbuing this sense of authenticity seems to hold remarkable potential to make an emotional connection with a target audience (Wiese, 2011 and Ryan, 2016). It also seems that branded entertainment holds potential for evoking engagement with a target audience (Ogilvy, 2009; Dahlén, Lange & Smith, 2010: 504; Duopoly, 2014: 7; Valero, 2014: 176). An emotional connection or attitudinal attachment and engagement are two of the four dimensions of consumer brand resonance, the other two being a sense of community and loyalty (Keller, 2001: 8). The study has aimed to uncover the full strategic potential of branded entertainment by exploring all the dimensions of brand resonance in order to establish if it can achieve more than an emotional connection or engagement by employing authentic narrative.

Brand resonance builds a brand strategically (Keller, 2001 and Richter, 2004). The study of literature followed this train of thought and aimed to explore and enrich knowledge on the identified phenomenon of authentic narrative in branded entertainment; its construction and its strategic value.

The concepts of authenticity, narrative and brand resonance were briefly explored in order to construct an authentic narrative concept in branded entertainment that supports the branded entertainment definition that the study aimed to deliver with potential to achieve brand resonance.

### **1.7.2 Authenticity and branded entertainment**

Authenticity, based on the schools of thought of Heidegger as seminal author, and others like Descartes, Rousseau, Herder and Grimmitt, encompasses an identity argument and a moral argument. The identity argument draws on the concept of originality with the ability to communicate a sense of the author's identity and world view (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998: 178; Beverland, Lindgreen & Vink, 2008: 8; Carroll & Wheaton, 2009: 1), i.e. the brand's identity in context of brand communication.

The moral argument draws on a value system that should align that of the author's and the audience's, rooted in a "conscious, collective understanding" (Marra citing Grimmet & Neufield, 1994: 208, supported by Boyle, 2003: 17-21). The implication is that the target audience must experience the brand's value system as constituted by the communication as their own (Tampon, 2013). The collective understanding is furthermore proposed in context of "sincerity" (Cliff, 2011: 8), i.e. for a brand to approach branded entertainment with the intent to add value through entertainment more so than to conceal a "sell" in context of branded entertainment that can be experienced by a target audience as inauthentic (Kiriakakis, 2014 & Ryan, 2016).

### **1.7.3 Narrative and branded entertainment**

The art of narrative in brand communication is desired in an attention economy because neuroscience has taught us that human brains are stimulated by storytelling, more so than remembering data or facts (Cooke, 2014). Millennials in particular appreciate storytelling in the form of entertainment more so than traditional promotional efforts that deliver sales-orientated messages (All, 2013). It is noteworthy to mention that a human-orientated approach is inherent to narrative (Brooks, 2005: 33), whereas branded entertainment that employs narrative using a sales-orientated approach compromises the potential for brand resonance (Anderson, 2015).

Narrative is “to connote the threading together of a set of events or experiences in a temporal sequence in order to make sense of them” (Lai, 2010: 72 citing Dean, 1998). The process in which stories are made refers to the cognitive structure of a story or the result of the process (stories, tales or histories) (Lai, 2010: 72 citing Polkinghorne, 1998). This study focused on narrative and not storytelling. Narrative is a representation or manifestation of a specific story, rather than the story itself, i.e. more than just the story line; the way the story gets told (Mills, 2015). A story is a structured narrative and if not connected to a broader narrative is mere entertainment (Jennings, 2016).

Entertainment in context of a brand’s overarching narrative; its image and summation of all the interactions stated as “tangible, authentic depth and integrity of the relationship” between the consumer and the brand (Campbell & Simpson-Bint, 2010 and Dahlén *et al.*, 2010: 6), could then embody the potential for brand resonance. Branded entertainment is arguably one of the more compelling brand communication efforts that meaningfully contributes to brand narrative because its inherent narrative properties aim to establish a strong emotional connection with a target audience and therefore it evokes such customer engagement (Dahlén *et al.*, 2010: 504).

Narrative originating from a brand could be considered authentic and authentic brand “stories” have the ability to create trust (Alter, 2015). “Real” authenticity is about being genuine, relevant to consumer needs, to stand for something and to be trustworthy (Nash: 2007: 20-21). Brand trust is also a vital ingredient in the establishment of brand resonance (Keller, 2001: 8 and Ha, Janda & Muthaly, 2010: 916). Narrative delivered in an authentic way by using words that a target audience can relate to allows for an emotional connection to be made with a target audience (Williams, 2013). This emotional connection contributes to the goodwill that a target audience nurtures towards a brand and therefore influences the customer-based equity of a brand (Lin, Huang & Lin, 2015: 80). A strong emotional connection advances a strong emotional relationship with a target audience that strategically builds customer-based brand equity (Keller, 2001: 7), also referred to as brand resonance.

#### **1.7.4 Resonance and branded entertainment**

**Brand resonance** is the nature of the relationship between consumers and brands, referring to the extent to which consumers are “in synch” with the brand, characterised in terms of the

intensity or the depth of the psychological bond that customers have with the brand (Keller, 2001: 15). Kevin Lane Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Model, or alternatively referred to as his Brand Resonance Pyramid (Kotler, 2015), is arguably the most comprehensive, accepted and used model that builds, measures and manages brand equity (Steenkamp, 2016: 8). Keller is a seminal author in this study and his resonance model was employed in the conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) that guided the primary research design.

Brand resonance can be achieved once the brand manages to establish proper salience, i.e. breadth and depth of awareness; firmly established points-of-parity and points-of-difference; and positive judgments and feelings that appeal to the head and the heart (Keller, 2009a: 145). Resonance in context of brand communication could enhance the potential for brand **loyalty**, enhanced **attitudinal attachment** (inherent to a strong emotional connection); a higher sense of **community** and/or greater **engagement**. Keller uses BMW's online video series titled *The Hire*, as example for application.

BMW created a series of eight internet-based short films directed by Guy Richie, Tony Scott, Ridley Scott and John Woo, called *The Hire*, made for BMW starring the likes of Madonna and Clive Owen viewed online over a million times (Worldlingo, 2007). This 2001 film series was a success: 2001 sales rose 12 percent from 2000; two million people registered on the BMW site, with more than half asking for more information via e-mail; and 94 percent of the people who saw the films recommended them to others (Atkinson, 2012). Keller argued that the series enhanced brand attachment, community and engagement with the possibility of interactive effects between different brand resonance dimensions to exist such as higher levels of attachment leading to greater engagement (Keller, 2009b: 145). In context of authentic narrative employment, the study unearthed brand resonance in all its dimensions as the potential strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment, meaning that it could be more than just an emotional connection with the target audience.

The key constructs of the study, being branded entertainment and authentic narrative, are explained next.

### **1.7.5 The authentic narrative construct in context of branded entertainment**

The researcher studied literature to explore authentic narrative in context of branded entertainment and its potential to achieve brand resonance. Overlap and repetition of characteristics of authenticity and narrative became evident in the exploration of literature. Thus, the researcher drew commonalities where authenticity was said to complement narrative and vice versa to form or conceptualise authentic narrative in context of branded entertainment. The identity and moral arguments of authenticity (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998: 178; Beverland *et al.*, 2008; Carroll & Wheaton, 2009: 1; Marra citing Grimmet and Neufield, 1994: 208, supported by Boyle, 2003: 17-21), and the narrative construct of Chatman, narrative paradigm of Fisher and Yale's Narrative Believability Scale, contributed to a proposed "authentic narrative" construct.

The authentic narrative construct delivered the following set of narrative characteristics that are deemed to be authentic in context of branded entertainment: to be brand-initiated and owned; to embody the brand's identity; to be original; to carry emotional meaning; to be sincere; and to be believable. These characteristics serve as requisites to achieve authenticity in the branded entertainment communication attempt to achieve brand resonance. Although narrative in branded entertainment can impress tactically, authentic narrative enables a strong emotional connection with a target audience and could therefore achieve brand resonance, in its simplest dimension, to strategically build a brand. Authentic narrative primarily aims to entertain more so than to do a hard sell to a target audience (in a traditional way).

### **1.7.6 The branded entertainment construct**

The literature suggests that branded entertainment is deemed to be an alternative or unconventional way to make brand contact (Woodrooffe, 2014; Duopoly, 2014: 13; Graser, 2015; Grinta, 2016), as it steps out of the realm of traditional promotional initiatives (Thomas, 2009: 2-3). Branded entertainment is not just content embedded into an existing entertainment property, or into a third party's entertainment property by means of product or brand placement or integration, or even sponsoring an entertaining event; all reasoned by some authors. The literature also suggests that these promotional efforts should rather be promotional efforts in their own right, as such proposed derivatives of branded entertainment curb its potential of brand resonance.

It is therefore suggested that branded entertainment is initiated by the brand and owned by the brand, i.e. to take a sense of ownership of the entertainment property. The literature also argues that narrative is a requisite to branded entertainment (Bhargawa, 2011). Authentic narrative is proposed as the central point of gravitas to deliver strategically significant branded entertainment, meaning to achieve brand resonance by adhering to the proposed authentic narrative characteristics as outlined in Section 1.7.5.

Taking the above into consideration, a proposed working definition is delivered – based on the literature study: **Branded entertainment is an unconventional brand-initiated and owned contact point with potential to achieve brand resonance through authentic narrative.**

This working definition guided the conceptual framework for the study (Figure 1.1). It is integral to the branded entertainment narrative characteristics deemed to be authentic so to achieve potential for brand resonance.

## **1.8 IMPORTANCE/ SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

From the literature review it is evident that branded entertainment finds itself in an exploratory stage in contemporary brand communication practice, especially in context of the fragmentation and proliferation of media channels and the challenge to break through commercial clutter. Branded entertainment is presented as a communication effort that has the ability to do so and simultaneously adhere to the increasing demands of Millennials valuing entertainment above traditional promotional efforts. Branded entertainment has the potential as an unconventional or alternative brand contact effort to break through commercial clutter, arrest attention and strategically grow customer-based brand equity by means of achieving brand resonance. However, this effort is depleted by academics and industry alike unable to find common ground on the definition and strategic significance of branded entertainment. The result is an industry in need of guidelines to create strategically significant branded entertainment.

This study proposes a definition for branded entertainment as well as a strategic direction, informed by the globally recognised brand communication decision makers whose perceptions were engaged, for authentic narrative in branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance.



In this regard, the study presents an Enriched Conceptual Framework of the Strategic Value of Authentic Narrative in Branded Entertainment that can be applied by industry practitioners in the planning and development of branded entertainment narrative for strategic success.

## **1.9 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS**

### **1.9.1 Research design**

The research design integrated the different components of the study in a coherent way to ensure that the research problem could be adequately addressed (De Vaus, 2001 and Trochim, 2006). The research problem for this study warranted an exploratory research design because no earlier studies could be referred to or relied on to obtain a deep understanding of the branded entertainment construct in context of its strategic potential and application (Michael, 2002). The exploratory design was also suitable for this study because it is used to establish an understanding of how best to proceed in studying the authentic narrative construct in context of brand resonance (Anderson, Catalano & Walker, 2002).

The study therefore aimed to create theory in the interpretivist paradigm by taking an open and exploratory stance in an environment that seemingly does not hold a shared or cohesive understanding of the nature and application of branded entertainment (Plack, 2005: 299-230 citing Guba & Lincoln, 1981). The aim was not to test a hypothesis or a theory (Haydam *et al.*, 2011: 231). The inductive reasoning process commenced with a review of literature to gain initial insight into a definition and conceptual framework which could then be further explored and enriched through primary research to develop a proposed definition and enriched conceptual framework. In this context participants were therefore not exposed to the definition or framework to assess accuracy or strategic relevance. The researcher thus moved from specific academic and industry observations to broader generalisations or theories plausible enough for hypothesis formulation and further research (Burney, 2008: 5-14). Deductive reasoning will thus enable application of the proposed definition and framework to specific situations. However, the interpretivist paradigm did allow for continuous hypothesis formulation and reformulation as data emerged and a deeper understanding was developed throughout the emergent inquiry (Plack, 2005: 299-230 citing Merriman & Associates, 2002).

A qualitative exploratory study in the interpretivist paradigm, used for this study, was well suited to explore in-depth attitudes, opinions and motivations of primary research participants (discussed in the next section) to address the research problem and to challenge and enrich the central research proposition. The interpretivist or constructivist takes an open and exploratory stance with the aim to understand the complexity of the situation as a whole (Plack, 2005: 299-230 citing Guba & Lincoln, 1981) in this dissertation being the orientation problems that branded entertainment is experiencing towards its potential for brand resonance.

## **1.9.2 Research methods**

### **1.9.2.1 Selection**

The strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment was explored through **in-depth individual and small group interviews** with globally recognised brand communication decision makers breaking new ground in the field. In-depth interviews created an environment in which participants could confidently express their thoughts on branded entertainment narrative and the industry dynamics that influence the application thereof (Milena, Dainora & Alin, 2008: 1279). This exploratory study thus relied on focused expert opinion and making sense of the phenomena of authentic narrative in branded entertainment.

The population comprised brand communication decision makers directly responsible for creating some of the world's most successful branded entertainment campaigns as measured by the world's most recognised and respected advertising awards in the category of branded entertainment. This descriptor – brand communication decision makers – was employed to describe the collective of advertising agency-side strategists and creative directors, and client-side marketers.

The field of branded entertainment only received recognition in 2012 by the Cannes Lion International Festival of Creativity and is therefore relatively new in contemporary brand-building practice against the backdrop of a fast-evolving digital communication mediascape, as mentioned before. Successful case studies are not only difficult to educe from literature but are also opinion-based without a sense of standardised campaign judgement criteria as put forward by these advertising award shows.

These award shows therefore authorise and determine the definition of category and also define creative and strategic standards for each brand communication discipline. Furthermore, winning campaigns are determined by an internationally represented jury panel that inadvertently would comprise of internationally recognised branded content and entertainment experts. That is why the sample selection was guided by identification of winning campaigns in the most coveted advertising award shows from around the world in the branded entertainment category.

The value of this study is to provide direction for brand communication decision makers to create strategically successful branded entertainment that achieves brand resonance and therefore brand communication decision makers who have created not only strategically successful but some of the world's most recognised branded entertainment campaigns had to be interviewed. Taking into consideration that branded entertainment is still orientating itself in contemporary brand communication practice, the premise was to explore the authentic narrative construct in context of brand resonance with such brand communication decision makers to guide a definition towards strategically successful branded entertainment.

These industry experts would be able to cast a reflective light on the variables that would have contributed to the success of the campaign and explore their philosophies on branded entertainment narrative in general, prompted in an inquisitive manner in the in-depth interviews. These brand communication decision makers would also be able to reflect on their failures in their branded entertainment endeavours and others that they may perceive in industry. They would be able to give their opinion on the branded entertainment construct and subsequent application for strategically sound brand-building practice that can guide industry on creating branded entertainment with the potential to resonate with target audiences.

The research design employed **purposeful or judgement sampling**; this involved a framework of variables that might influence a participant's contribution and is based on the researcher's practical knowledge of the research area, the available literature and evidence from the study itself (Marshall, 1996). In order to identify brand communication decision makers who have made significant contributions to the field of branded entertainment and who are recognised to be among the world's most reckoned, necessitated identifying those who have distinguished themselves in these award shows, even more than other winners.

Therefore, the sample only made provision for brand communication decision makers who were directly responsible for creating branded entertainment initiatives that have won Grand Prix or Gold awards in the branded entertainment category from at least two of the world's most coveted international brand communication or advertising awards shows. The advertising awards that are deemed to be the world's most recognised and respected were identified by investigating various credible sources of industry opinion as simultaneously agreed by panels of global directors and chief executive officers (CEOs) of the world's leading advertising and production companies.

The researcher would only include branded entertainment campaigns that adhered to the working definition put forward by the study. Furthermore, the campaigns needed to have shown judging criteria that did not only include creative excellence but also criteria that valued strategic campaign results. The measuring instrument was not these campaigns. The identified campaigns only served a means to identify the brand communication decision makers that participated in this study in order to explore their perceptions on the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment. The measuring instrument was therefore the perceptions of the interviewed brand communication decision makers.

### **1.9.2.2 Interview guide design**

The interview guide design was created in such a manner that it could address the research problem, being the lack of a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment and **to answer the research question: what is the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment?** The questions were open-ended in line with the in-depth interview style in the interpretative paradigm (Boyce & Neale, 2006). The main line of questioning revolved around the branded entertainment construct, its relevance and challenges in context of brand communication practice, and its potential and approach to achieve brand resonance.

### **1.9.2.3 Data collection: In-depth interviews**

The researcher interviewed 15 multi-international branded entertainment award winners across six continents by means of in-depth interviews. Fourteen of the participants were responsible for strategising and creating the identified multi-award winning international branded entertainment campaigns. Ten participants were advertising agency-side creatives;

three were advertising agency-side strategists and two were clients. The participants all hold senior positions and are thus involved in the strategic planning of the respective branded entertainment campaigns. In all instances agencies were contacted for interviews with creative directors and strategists.

One participant was interviewed based on referral by the Executive Creative Director for Asia-Pacific of the global advertising agency: Foote, Cone and Belding. This participant, based in China, is currently one of the world's highest awarded creative directors (Adobo 2017) and is regarded for consistent excellence in the field of branded content, entertainment and in general his disruptive thinking and campaigns as result of this. Thus, 14 interviews were conducted using purposeful sampling and one interview was based on referral sampling.

The expert opinion obtained by conducting in-depth interviews provided the necessary depth and applied thought to: enrich literature; achieve the research objectives; and address and give meaning to the research problem.

#### **1.9.2.4 Data analysis and interpretation**

The researcher employed content analysis involving the technique of open coding to arrive at a set of themes and subthemes emerging from the data (Neuenhof, 2002 and Gadamer, 1976 in Nieuwenhuis, 2012). An inductive approach, in line with a qualitative interpretivist approach, applied to the data analysis assisted to address the research problem and achieve the research goals (Burney, 2008: 5-14). The results were interpreted and used to enrich the conceptual framework (Figure 1.1). This could then deliver a proposed Enriched Conceptual Framework of the Strategic Value of Authentic Narrative in Branded Entertainment (Figure 6.1) that guides a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment to industry that illustrates the strategic value of authentic narrative in creating branded entertainment campaigns.

## 1.10 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

Chapters 2 and 3 present the literature study which comprised the conceptual phase of the research.

### **Chapter 2: Towards a definition for branded entertainment**

Chapter 2 introduces branded entertainment by providing a background. Its core value, potential and challenges are discussed. The concepts of narrative, authenticity and brand resonance are introduced. The chapter identifies the **lack of a cohesive understanding and application** of branded entertainment as the most important challenge facing branded entertainment. It is a problem because it erodes its core value; that is to break through clutter and connect with audiences through authentic narrative. The potential for branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance is therefore depleted.

Chapter 2 also conceptualises a working definition for branded entertainment or branded entertainment construct to inform the **lack of understanding** of branded entertainment at present. This working definition serves as a reference point to consequently suggest **application** by means of an authentic narrative construct that will deliver a set of authentic narrative characteristics conducive to brand resonance that is conceptualised in Chapter 3.

### **Chapter 3: Authentic narrative to achieve brand resonance**

Chapter 3 discusses authenticity, narrative and resonance in depth with the aim to deliver authentic narrative characteristics applicable to branded entertainment that is conducive to brand resonance. Authentic narrative and branded entertainment constitute a conceptual framework that guides the central research proposition: authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve brand resonance. This conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) informs the research design that is presented in Chapter 4.

### **Chapter 4: Research strategy and methods**

Chapter 4 introduces the research paradigm in context of the researcher's ontological and epistemological position. The research problem and purpose, goals and question and sampling procedure are presented. The reader then gains an understanding to why qualitative

research is the most suited research method to explore the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment. This is followed by the design of the procedures to collect the data by identifying high-level theme questions to inform the research goals by means of in-depth expert interviews. The data analysis procedure, being content analysis using open coding, is discussed, followed by the intended assessment of the quality and rigour of the research. The assumptions, limitations and delimitations of the study are stated followed by a final discussion on the ethical considerations of the study.

### **Chapter 5: Presentation of findings**

Chapter 5 presents the research findings based on the data analysis and interpretation conducted by the researcher. The primary key finding indicated that authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve brand resonance in all its four dimensions as per Keller's Resonance Pyramid: engagement, community, attachment and loyalty. So, the strategic value of authentic narrative lies in its ability to achieve brand resonance. Other key findings include the support of and minimal adjustment to the branded entertainment working definition that can be put forward as a definition that can constitute a cohesive understanding of branded entertainment among brand communication industry professionals and academics alike. According to the findings, all the proposed authentic narrative characteristics were confirmed with the addition of another; for the branded entertainment narrative to imbue a sense of considered craft for it to be regarded as authentic in order to maximise brand resonance potential. Lastly, the findings delivered expert advice on strategically sound branded entertainment practice supported by and in context of employing authentic narrative in creating branded entertainment as well as the important agency-client dynamic in approaching and creating branded entertainment campaigns.

### **Chapter 6: Enriched Conceptual Framework of the Strategic Value of Authentic Narrative in Branded Entertainment: discussion, recommendation and conclusion**

Chapter 6 presents a recap of the essence, focus and architecture of the study; a summary; the presentation and discussion of the enriched conceptual framework; a set of recommendations; and a conclusion to the study. The summary is in the form of an executive summary directed at brand communication decision makers to present succinct findings of the research study, identifying critical points of consideration. The enriched conceptual framework is presented with a discussion on what the framework represents, its application and value to

industry. The conclusions and implications of the study in context of the proposed definition and enriched conceptual framework in relation to the ultimate value of the study are reviewed in depth. Finally, recommendations are made to industry practitioners on a strategically focused approach to branded entertainment as well as proposing further research that can be conducted by academics and research houses or companies.

Chapter 6 reflects on how the study managed to address the research problem and in what way the research objectives were achieved. The most important finding of the study: the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment lies in its potential to achieve consumer brand resonance.

## **1.12 CONCLUSION**

Branded entertainment is experiencing orientation problems in contemporary brand communication planning and practice because of a lack of cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment among brand communication decision makers. This research study proposes that branded entertainment's identification and application reside in authentic narrative that constitutes branded entertainment with potential to achieve brand resonance. This qualitative, exploratory study in the interpretivist paradigm, unlike earlier work of branded entertainment, focuses exclusively on authentic narrative and its strategic potential to achieve brand resonance.

The literature review establishes the scope and significance of the research problem and the primary research phase engages the perceptions of multi-international award winning brand communication expert decision makers in the field of branded entertainment to enrich the research proposition, being: authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve brand resonance. The study not only delivers a definition for branded entertainment conducive to its strategic potential, i.e. brand resonance, but also presents an Enriched Conceptual Framework to the Strategic Value of Authentic Narrative in Branded Entertainment.



Next, in Chapter 2, the conceptual phase of the research commences by introducing branded entertainment and its potential and challenges, in order to propose a working definition for branded entertainment that will serve as reference point. This is followed with the exploration of authentic narrative in branded entertainment and consumer brand resonance in Chapter 3.

## CHAPTER 2

# TOWARDS A DEFINITION FOR BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this chapter is to present the proposed working definition which the researcher created for branded entertainment that inherently presents the premise for the conceptual framework that guided the central research proposition: authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve brand resonance. Chapter 2 introduces branded entertainment. To understand how branded entertainment has evolved through history is important in order to understand its positioning as a brand communication effort negotiating a highly cluttered digitally inclined media landscape today.

Branded entertainment is experiencing difficulty to orientate itself as a relatively new brand communication practice (Gilbar, 2010; Karbasfrooshan, 2011; Wiese, 2013; Meyers, 2014; Pytlik, 2014; Pereira, 2016), arguably stemming from being interpreted dissimilarly by academics and advertising, media-, brand- and marketing communication industry practitioners alike (Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015). This is a problem as practice follows principle. One can compare this problem to an industry that for argument's sake does not understand or agree on the fundamental principles of advertising or public relations, with diluted or ineffective communication efforts as result.

Chapter 2 in a nutshell presents the branded entertainment landscape which the researcher explored in order to identify these orientation challenges in context of branded entertainment's core value and strategic potential. A branded entertainment construct most conducive to overcome these challenges and maximise the potential of branded entertainment was ultimately identified and thus proposed: a definition that gives it a distinct identity in current-day communication practice. This proposed working definition then serves as a departure point for Chapter 3 that further discusses and augments the proposed definition by

conceptualising an authentic narrative construct towards a conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) that informs the design of the empirical research phase.

This study was trans-disciplinary in nature, traversing marketing, media, brand building, communication and advertising. However, the meaning of branded entertainment was explored from a brand strategy point of view.

The literature study ultimately put forward that branded entertainment most conducive to resonance is an effort that is initiated and owned by the brand so to employ an authentic narrative. The following proposed working definition is delivered by the study of literature: Branded entertainment is an unconventional brand-initiated and owned contact point with the potential to achieve brand resonance through authentic narrative. Chapter 3 will pick up from there and present in much more depth the concepts of authenticity, narrative and brand resonance.

## **2.2 BACKGROUND**

### **2.2.1 Introducing branded entertainment**

A uniform definition of branded entertainment does not exist and various attempts to define branded entertainment have been widely documented in literature (Dinkel, 2010; Valero, 2014: xiv; De Aguilera-Moyano *et al.*, 2015: 523). The various definitions to follow inform a frame of reference as point of departure in order to explore various interpretations and strategic possibilities of each school of thought in Section 2.5, which looks at branded entertainment that is the most conducive to brand resonance. Firstly, the concept of brand is discussed, as it provides the lens through which the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment is perceived.

#### ***2.2.1.1 The brand construct in context of branded entertainment***

Entertainment, in connection to branded entertainment, is any activity that is designed to provide a degree of satisfaction to a target audience by means of the fact that they want to engage with it or participate in it and therefore adds value to “modern consumers”, according to Musson (2014: 62). The definition of “brand” is probably one of the most considered,

reconsidered and enriched constructs in brand communication practice through the ages as it serves as the cornerstone for anything from philosophies in the discipline to principles of practice. For the intention of this dissertation brand should be deemed as a construct that carries meaning as branded entertainment as communication effort essentially aims to add value to its target audience's lives in some way or another, be it for its sheer entertainment value providing personal gratification or education, for instance (Spikes Asia, 2013; Wiese, 2013; Musson, 2014: 62; Weiss, 2014). In this brief review of brand, the focus shifts from traditional interpretations to a more progressive school of thought.

Kapferer (2012: 19) sees brand as a “focal point for all the positive and negative impressions created by the buyer over time as they come into contact with the brand's products, distribution channel, personnel and communication”. It then makes sense that brand occupies space in the perception of the consumer, and is what results from the totality of what the consumer takes into consideration before making a purchase decision (Pickton & Broderick 2005: 242). Both mentioned definitions reveal a relatively significant focus on a commercially-led angle on the concept of brand. South Africa's Vega School of Brand Leadership has established a progressive school of thought on the construct of brand in context of brand building that does not exclude the commercial aspect but shifts the lens slightly towards a people-centred focus (Cook, Erwin, Carmody & Enslin, 2010: 12). Vega defines brand as a construct that establishes and communicates a particular and unique meaning in order to add value and connect with people (Cook *et al.*, 2010: 12).

The reason why this is seen as a progressive definition of brand is that it takes an inclusive approach that, as mentioned, does not necessarily focus exclusively on commerce. In context of brand communication, branded entertainment is an evolution from traditional advertising that inherently and on face value may infer or intend a commercial message. Branded entertainment exists in communication space that provides value to its target audience in the form of entertainment that is not necessarily commercially led whilst simultaneously communicating a more in-depth meaning of the brand (Valero, 2014: 25). Therefore, the more progressive definition of brand put forward by Vega seems to be most suitable to this study.

Some of the challenges identified in Section 2.4 that follows, refer to a commercially-led or overt sales approach in branded entertainment depleting potential for brand resonance (Swart, 2007; Mescall, 2013; Pytlik, 2014). Therefore, a more progressive school of thought on “brand” in context of a more people or human-focused approach, something that is inherent to what constitutes the very essence of narrative (Brooks, 2005: 33), may be preferable to more commercially-led definitions in order to understand the concept of brand in branded entertainment (Anderson, 2015; Kirby, 2015; Humlan, 2015).

A brief overview of the various interpretations of branded entertainment that follows uses this criterion to take an observational stance of branded entertainment most conducive to brand resonance before going into more detail in Section 2.5, Branded entertainment most conducive to brand resonance.

### ***2.2.1.2 Branded entertainment as brand integration***

One of the earliest definitions of branded entertainment was delivered by Hudson and Hudson in 2006 (in Craig-Lees & Scott, 2008: 4), being “... branded entertainment is defined as the integration of advertising into entertainment content, whereby brands are embedded into storylines of a film, television program, or other entertainment medium. This involves co-creation and collaboration between entertainment and media and brands”. They went on to say that there is a difference between branded entertainment and product placement. Branded entertainment, according to Hudson and Hudson, is when a brand is interwoven into the storyline of an existing entertainment property, whereas with product placement the product features in the background or in a more subtle manner in the entertainment property.

Hudson and Hudson referred to branded entertainment as a new term to describe a more contemporary, sophisticated use of product placement. This definition has been supported by various other authors (Tiwsakul, Hackley & Szmigin, 2005: 98; Russell & Belch, 2005: 74; Van Reijmersdal, Neijens & Smit, 2007: 403; Wei, Fischer and Main, 2008: 35, as cited in Musson, 2010: 21; Lehu, 2009; Bhargava, 2011; Cloonen, 2011). So, branded entertainment was seen as brand or product integration or a sophisticated form of product placement. Product placement and brand or product integration are explained in full in Section 2.5.2 where it is argued that branded entertainment with the best propensity for brand resonance in context of

authentic narrative could not be sophisticated product placement or brand or product integration.

### **2.2.1.3 Branded entertainment as more than only brand integration**

In 2009, a definition of branded entertainment was delivered by O'Guinn *et al.* (2009: 612-613) that allowed for branded entertainment to include anything from a brand-generated communication effort to brand or product placement to product or brand integration. They defined branded entertainment as follows: "Branded entertainment entails the development and support of any entertainment property (e.g. TV shows, theme park, short film, movie, or video game) where a primary objective is to feature one's brand or brands in an effort to impress and connect with consumers in a unique and compelling way". This also included sponsorships of entertaining events as reasoned by O'Guinn *et al.* (2009: 613). The premise of this definition has enjoyed the support of the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity since 2012 that was the year of inception of a Branded Content and Entertainment category.

The Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity is the world's biggest and most recognised celebration of creativity in the brand communication industry (Chamikutty, 2010; Davies, 2012; Coloribus, 2013; Suggett, 2013). "Entrants to the Branded Content & Entertainment Lions category will demonstrate how a brand has successfully worked independently or in association with a content producer or publisher to develop and create or co-create entertaining and engaging content for their audience. This could be either by creating original content or programming for a brand or by naturally integrating a brand into existing formats by partnering with a publisher or media partner" (Cannes Lions, 2012). So, Cannes supported O'Guinn *et al.*'s (2009: 612) all-inclusive definition.

### **2.2.1.4 Branded entertainment as branded content**

In 2016, Cannes incorporated the Branded Content and Entertainment category into a new broader entertainment category. This category does not distinguish between branded entertainment and branded content, but merely groups all entertainment-related communication together as content; in the case of audio-visual content, for instance, "content

created for a brand, independently or in collaboration with a producer or content platform, to amplify a brand's message and engage with consumers" (Cannes Lions 2017). It seems that many industry practitioners use the terms branded content and branded entertainment interchangeably (Pulizzi, 2016). The debate on branded content versus branded entertainment in context of authentic narrative and brand resonance is explored in Section 2.5.3 to follow.

Taking the observations up to this point into consideration it seems then that branded entertainment could be understood as: a sophisticated form of product placement or brand or product integration in an existing entertainment property; that it can be a sponsorship of an entertaining event; that branded entertainment is included in branded content; that branded entertainment and branded content are so similar to each other that they can be used interchangeably; or that branded entertainment could even be a communication effort brought about independently by the brand.

#### **2.2.1.5 Branded entertainment as communication effort by the brand**

A school of thought on the branded entertainment construct seems to be emerging as some academics and industry professionals steer more in the direction of branded entertainment being exclusively a standalone communication effort (Hudson, 2010; Musson, 2014; Valero, 2014; Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015; Canter, 2016: 9). Marc Gilbar (2010) from Davie Brown Entertainment defined branded entertainment as follows: "Branded entertainment encompasses any piece of content (scripted or unscripted, comedy or drama, series or one-off) that is made with a brand's personality, positioning and marketing objectives in mind. Branded entertainment has the brand's essence baked into the core of the content idea". It seems that brand identity, being at the core of the content and assumed to be entertaining in nature, enjoys the focus in this definition.

Gilbar's definition received support from The London International Awards (LIA), reasoned by leading industry professionals to be among the top advertising award ceremonies in the world (Davies, 2012 and Suggett, 2013). The LIA recognised a branded entertainment category in 2014. It defines branded entertainment "as an entertainment-based vehicle that is funded by and complementary to a brand's marketing strategy. Branded Entertainment encompasses

any piece of content (scripted or unscripted, comedy or drama, series or a single) that is made with a brand's personality, positioning and marketing objectives in mind. Its primary intention is delivering an entertaining and engaging experience to consumers”.

Again, brand identity is the focal point being entertainment and in addition to this, provides an engaging experience. Section 2.5 explores the notion of a promotional effort by the brand that communicates the brand's identity in context of branded entertainment's strategic potential. One could at this stage infer that branded entertainment, as a relatively new discipline in contemporary brand communication practice (Emhoff, 2016 and Pereira, 2016), is evolving in the brand communication discipline towards a notion of self-initiation and self-ownership in order to communicate the brand's identity. Chapter 3 discusses the value of employing brand identity in branded entertainment's narrative and its role in establishing authenticity.

#### **2.2.1.6 Branded entertainment as an enduring entertainment experience**

Although the aim of the study was not to compare branded entertainment to traditional advertising because the focus was on the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment, it is noteworthy to mention that some authors would include the concept of time as differentiating factor of branded entertainment from traditional advertising (Ross, 2013). Burnett and Hutton (2007: 342) argued that what makes advertising different from branded entertainment is usually a combination of the amount of time spent with the brand and a richer, entertainment-based experience. Hitch and Worple (2010: 4) argued that branded entertainment does not have to be a “... sweeping epic – a great story can be told in thirty seconds; it's all about creating drama and a reason to care about how it turns out”. “A richer entertainment-based experience” could be successfully argued – and one could certainly claim that a target audience would want to engage with the branded entertainment property frequently, longer or even more intensely because of this richer, entertainment-based experience.

Mike Wiese, Director of Branded Entertainment at J Walter Thompson *New York* (2013), talks about a “sharable, enduring property that should be powered by the entertainment or utility value”. One can infer that target audiences may want to engage with the communication piece and even share the communication piece via social media, for instance, once the



entertainment experience is taken into consideration. The utility-value is attributable to the brand's intent from a sincerity point of view to entertain (opposed to advertising in a traditional way with the intent to make a sale) and to create meaning based on the brand's target audience-relevance insights (Swart, 2007; Clift, 2011; Mescall, 2013). Thus, the actual time on the clock of an entertainment property becomes irrelevant. However, being a more enduring property one may consider it pointing to a longer-term engagement-orientated communication effort with possible strategic benefits.

### **2.2.1.7 Branded entertainment and narrative**

A critical argument for branded entertainment to be defined as branded entertainment is the requisite of having a narrative. A brief discussion on narrative in Section 2.5.3 precedes a thorough analysis of the narrative concept employed in Chapter 3 that describes a set of narrative characteristics conducive to authenticity for brand resonance. Branded entertainment can only be regarded as branded entertainment if it has narrative, according to Wiese (2013, and again in 2015), Weiss (2014), Anderson (2015) and Castello (2016). Wiese (2013) asked as requisite to branded entertainment: "Does the content use a narrative structure, character development or offer an experience beyond advertising?" He explained that narrative is one of the key differentiating factors that sets branded entertainment apart from traditional advertising.

### **2.2.1.8 Branded entertainment and authentic narrative**

A Cannes juror for the Branded Content and Entertainment category in 2014, Patricia Weiss, argued that meaningful branded entertainment should make use of "powerful brand narratives" that connect brands to stories "through story". She is also one of the very few authors in literature who use the phrase: authentic narrative in context of branded entertainment, saying that the jurors "were looking for the kind of original and authentic narrative that connects and engages people". Another author that touches on authentic narrative and infers narrative to be a requisite for a branded entertainment definition is Matt Herren (2015), Digital Media Executive and owner of the Miami-based global digital media and content agency, Herren Media that delivered media and content strategies for companies like Amazon, NBC Universal, AOL and Google, among others. He stated that consumers will seek out branded entertainment that is worth their time and worth sharing; being branded entertainment that "embraces an authentic narrative" that delivers "relevant consumer experiences that are not

interruptive but engaging and valuable”, according to Herren (2015). This refers back to providing utility-value and creating meaning based on the brand’s target audience-relevant insights.

#### **2.2.1.9 Branded entertainment and resonance**

To understand branded entertainment is to understand its strategic potential. Branded entertainment has the ability to establish a deep or strong emotional connection with a target audience (Jaggi, 2009: 8; Rose, 2013; Duopoly, 2014: 4; Musson, 2014: 63; Valero, 2014: 9; Brenner, 2015). This emotional connection is the intended result gained from target audience-relevant entertainment that carries emotional meaning (Wolburg, 2008; Wiese, 2011; Czarmecki, 2012; Cohen, 2013). Making an emotional connection or constituting a sense of attitudinal attachment to a brand is but one dimension of brand resonance; the others being engagement, community and loyalty (Keller, 2001).

Branded entertainment has the ability to evoke target audience-brand engagement (Ogilvy, 2009; Dahlén *et al.*, 2010: 504; Duopoly, 2014: 7; Valero, 2014: 176), meaning that the target audience would invest their time, energy, money or other resources into the brand in a way that its more than normally expected (Keller, 2001: 15). This is possible by means of the formats in which branded entertainment presents itself that could include anything from sharing videos via social media to playing a game (Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015: 196).

The notion of creating a brand community or to constitute loyalty as result of a strategically significant branded entertainment effort seems to be effectively unexplored in literature, in particular to the directly expressed opinions of global brand communication decision makers and academics alike. In isolated instances, for example Dove’s *Real Beauty Sketches* campaign, an example discussed in Section 2.2.3, preliminary evidence suggests that community and loyalty could be achieved to an extent, in addition to emotional connection and engagement; therefore the suggestion that authentic narrative has the ability to achieve all four resonance dimensions (i.e. emotional connection, engagement, community and loyalty). The primary research aimed to extensively uncover the full strategic potential of branded entertainment by exploring all the dimensions of brand resonance in order to establish if it can achieve more than just an emotional connection or target audience engagement by employing

authentic narrative. Brand resonance as strategic potential for branded entertainment is briefly discussed in Section 2.3 before exploring it in-depth in Chapter 3.

#### **2.2.1.10 Common characteristics of the branded entertainment construct**

Branded entertainment presents itself as a communication effort that employs entertainment (or entertaining content) to create an emotional connection with a target audience and aims to evoke engagement. These two objectives constitute dimensions of brand resonance. Some authors (Mescall, 2013; Wiese, 2013; Demos, 2013; Duopoly, 2014; Marsden, 2015) say branded entertainment should provide an entertainment-based experience that provides some form of utility to a target audience, meaning that it should be of use to them. This implies that the entertainment should be relevant to the target audience. Relevant branded entertainment that carries emotional meaning and inspires engagement could then also be seen as carrying some form of durability. This means that the branded entertainment that resonates has potential to extend itself into a space where a target audience want to invest resources, be it time or energy for instance, or to immerse themselves into the brand communication in order to sustain or further its brand interaction. This could also include the target audience wanting to share the communication piece with others.

It seems that narrative could be seen as a requisite to branded entertainment. When the narrative is employed in an authentic way, i.e. is sincerely approached with entertainment in mind, is an original piece of work, embodies brand identity and carries a sense of emotional meaning and inspires action, i.e. engagement, the ability to achieve brand resonance seems higher. Many contemporary authors are starting to reason that only branded entertainment that is created by the brand, i.e. initiated and making target audience contact via communication spaces that are seemingly bought or owned by the brand, may carry the highest propensity to achieve brand resonance.

#### **2.2.1.11 Conclusion: exploring and experimenting**

In introducing branded entertainment, it became evident that branded entertainment is considered a relatively new brand communication discipline (Bernas in Ross, 2014; Pytlik, 2014; De Aguilera-Moyano *et al.*, 2015: 523) and the definition is still “vague at best” (Arhio & Raunio, 2015). Kerstin Emhoff, 2016 Jury foreman of the Branded Film Content and

Entertainment Category at the Design and Art Direction (D&AD) Awards, reasoned by leading industry professionals to be among the top advertising award ceremonies in the world (Davies, 2012 and Suggett, 2013), remarked: “There is no long history of awarded work to use as a benchmark. The positive side of this is that we are able to continually push the definition of the category into new areas, while the negative is that there isn’t a lot of outstanding work to look to for precedent of greatness”. It seems that branded entertainment is still in an experimental phase (Pereira, 2016) and Cannes changing category in an effort to refine or redefine it in 2016 is perhaps telling of an industry that is trying to orientate itself in this new discipline.

Branded entertainment’s orientation problems pose a set of challenges to be discussed in Section 2.4 as brand communication decision makers are experiencing difficulty in creating strategically significant branded entertainment. These challenges are a direct result of the disparity regarding the definition of branded entertainment as definition drives practice, thus the understanding and application of branded entertainment in contemporary brand communication practice comes under scrutiny. It is clear that the need exists to define branded entertainment in context of its potential, being brand resonance. Section 2.2.2 that follows briefly unearths branded entertainment’s evolution in context of its growing need in brand communication practice and identifies opportunities in how it can actualise as a brand communication discipline.

### **2.2.2 Branded entertainment’s growth and growing need**

This section discusses three topics: a brief history on the growth of branded entertainment in context of the marketing and communication objectives that it can achieve; a take on the growing need for branded entertainment as demanded by Millennials; and a take on the growing need for branded entertainment in relation to its effort to negotiate a highly cluttered digitally inclined media landscape at present and the opportunities that lie therein. This section frames the growth and need for branded entertainment in order to bring perspective on a multi-award winning branded entertainment example in Section 2.2.3. The example, being Dove’s *Real Beauty Sketches* campaign, is studied because it provides a springboard from where the core value and strategic potential for branded entertainment is explored in Section 2.3.

### **2.2.2.1 The growth of branded entertainment**

The earliest employment of branded entertainment can be found in films that dated from the late 1900s, mainly using brand or product integration in story lines, and during the 1930s, 40s and 50s advertisers moved on to make their own films, like the film: *A Coach for Cinderella* in 1936, among many others, where gnomes and their animals help Cinderella to attend the ball by building her a Chevrolet (Newell, Salmon & Chang, 2006 cited by Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015: 4). It seems then that brands in those days already moved from integration to creating their own entertainment in order to control the content and express its sense of identity.

The trend of creating brand-owned content continued mainly with the “soap opera”; first 1930s radio shows and later the 1950s television shows sponsored and tied back to a specific brand, typically sponsored by soap manufacturers (Allen, 1985: 96). However, they became less popular as advertisers employed a strategy of using short commercials between shows (Jefferson, 2014). Branded entertainment has again become popular post the “golden age of classic advertising” (Russell, 2007), i.e. traditional advertising, for instance the 30-second television commercial (Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015: 6), to be more sought after by advertisers because content that provides entertainment value has the ability to engage consumers in richer and more meaningful brand communications intended to improve outcomes in line with communication objectives such as brand recall, brand preference, or brand engagement (Martí, Bigné, & Hyder, 2014 as cited by Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015).

Furthermore, entertainment marketing is now also proven to achieve marketing objectives such as sales, according to a study by Hollywood Branded Inc., a leading entertainment marketing agency in Los Angeles who surveyed 1,300 brand communication decision makers in a 48 question survey on using entertainment in their marketing efforts (NASDAQ, 2015). The study found that 85 percent of participants stated that their entertainment marketing efforts increased sales, with 51 percent reporting that consumers make cognisant decisions to purchase after viewing a branded entertainment communication property such as a TV show or feature film. However, achieving such objectives may be out of reach for many brand communication decision makers without an understanding of a branded entertainment construct inherent to achieve such potential.

The growth of branded entertainment is evident in the influx of recognition by advertising awards across the globe. The Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity was among the very first in industry to introduce a Branded Content and Entertainment category in 2012, suggestive of the growing development and legitimacy of the practice (Grainge & Johnson, 2015 citing Baker, 2012), with more than 16 advertising award shows across the globe now recognising the discipline as accessed by a comprehensive online search.

It is evident that branded entertainment has again emerged in brand communication practice. The reasons for this are threefold: the recent proof that branded entertainment can deliver against marketing and communication objectives; the need for branded entertainment to break through commercial clutter, especially in the digital realm; and the demands of the Millennial Generation to receive entertainment from authentic brands. The growing need for branded entertainment to adhere to the Millennials' demands is discussed first, followed by the need for branded entertainment against the backdrop of the digital mediascape.

#### ***2.2.2.2 The growing need for branded entertainment: Millennials***

Millennials, individuals born between 1978 and 2000 (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010: 98), distrust traditional advertising (Aquino, 2012) and want to be entertained by brands, seeking out such entertainment (Philips, 2010 in Pardee, 2010; Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2011: 22; McDevitt, 2013). Millennials matter to marketers because they are very likely to experiment with brands, so a brand has the opportunity to earn their trust and loyalty over the long term (Forbes, 2012). They are also one of the largest generations in history moving into their prime spending years (Goldman Sachs Global, 2016), so brands ought to understand their receptivity of authentic narrative in branded entertainment to build such trust and loyalty.

Findings from a comprehensive study by Edelman, a leading independent global Public Relations US-based firm, confirmed that more than half of Millennials perceive value in branded entertainment as part of the consumer process (Mathieu, 2012). However, to break through commercial clutter to gain attention from this generation that highly filters information with a focus on instant gratification and personal and personalised reward seems daunting (McCrea, 2011: 35). Furthermore, entertainment that continuously engages the relatively short attention spans of Millennials also seems challenging (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2011 and

Calvert, 2010: 44). The focus should therefore be on entertainment narrative that is highly engaging and that adds value to the lives of Millennials based on target audience relevance (Pardee, 2010) even more so than for previous generations (Goneos-Malka, 2011: 173).

Brand authenticity is pivotal for brand-savvy, cynical Millennials in order to establish brand credibility and trust (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2011). Brands ought to portray themselves as sincere in their effort to entertain and should not aim to make a quick sell – in particular with Millennials because of their high sense of distrust of brands (Rohampton, 2016). Brands that want to win the trust of Millennials ought to display a sense of transparency (Calvert, 2010: 44) and deliver original narratives (McCrea, 2011: 35). Originality and sincerity, for instance, play an integral role to establish authentic narrative (Weiss, 2014). When all of the aforementioned principles have been employed in a branded entertainment effort to Millennials, consumers will more likely purchase the brand's products or make use of their services (Mathieu, 2012).

The growing need for branded entertainment is evident with a Millennial Generation that invests in authentic brands that have the ability to entertain by means of authentic narratives. According to Gasperi (2015) authentic narrative, especially in context of Millennials, should imbue the following: “unassuming, inclusive communication”; “investing in resources that add real value, by endorsing a subculture and sustaining endorsement over time”; “telling a story that is relevant and real and lives on through its audience”; and “bringing real sensory experiences to life”. Skittles "Taste the Rainbow" campaign, according to Jill Byron (2016) in an article published in AdAge, succeeded in entertaining Millennials by means of authentic narrative, in particular identifying the narrative as “unpredictable” and “irreverent”, as well as Olay, Capitol Records and Mode partnering on several behind-the-scenes videos featuring Capitol Records COO Michelle Jubelirer, yielding 10 million video views in two weeks.

Millennials, being the first digital-native generation (Prensky, 2001 cited by Meyer, 2016), grew up with full-sensory stimulus and therefore the ability to absorb information quicker and even on a more emotive, associative level than previous generations (Yarrow, 2009). The ability for brands to engage with Millennials on an emotional level by employing branded entertainment imbuing authentic narrative via digital media is only one of the ways to achieve potential



resonance (Wiese, 2011). Digital allows for many opportunities to employ authentic narrative with the potential to achieve brand resonance, as explored in the following section on the growing need for branded entertainment in the digital mediascape.

### ***2.2.2.3 The growing need for branded entertainment: the digital mediascape***

It is increasingly difficult to connect with target audiences in the digital realm because of advertising and information clutter (Bothun & Vollmer, 2016). Branded entertainment has the ability to provide targeted content that engages consumer attention in a challenging technologically advanced market place where consumers can self-determine their interaction with brands (Teixeira, 2014 and Hittner, 2016). For instance, it is difficult to engage with target audiences that eschew advertising, a luxury brought about by personal video recorders where these target audiences allow engagement on their terms (Jaffe, 2005: 47). Advertising blocking software on mobile phones or personal computers is also making it increasingly difficult to reach desired target audiences (Moses, 2016).

As technology changes the face of the media landscape, enabling consumer choice and power in the “content generation”, the line between content and advertising has blurred, with consumers not caring where content comes from, as long as it’s good, with the advertiser becoming the “facilitator” of quality content – content which entertains, informs and educates (Swart, 2007: 21). Consumers yearn to consume relevant content, being critical to what they are willing to engage with and spend time on (Bothun & Vollmer, 2016). Brands are not just “passively consumed” by consumers; consumption is rather a form of self-expression by which individuals shape themselves and the world they live in (Salzer-Mörling & Strannegård, 2002: 226). "This is a new era of co-creation, the convergence of the marketing trinity: entertainment content, media and brands" says Steven Heyer, former president and chief operating officer of Coca Cola (Brady, 2011).

Digital media begets boundless reproduction of content, consumer networking, user-generated content and amplification of media from basic entertainment and news converging to almost any digital interface (Mulhern, 2009: 85). Branded entertainment using digital channels to contact the consumer include digital television or radio, podcasting, video-casting, video games, interactive kiosks, and virtual reality experiences for instance (Kurnit, 2007;



Pereira, 2016; Martí-Parreño, Ruiz-Mafé & Scribner, 2017: 1059-60). Branded entertainment is also now more prevalent as it can make use of media convergence, i.e. having the ability to communicate with convergent consumers across digital mediums that include the aforementioned (Musson, 2014: 61).

Digitally connecting with consumers certainly has its advantages. Media-rich vehicles related to digital communication mediums, setting the stage for multimodal stimulation through which brands can explore innovative ways to engage consumers, allow consumers control over the intended point of contact – and consumers prefer to have control, especially if it can lead to interactivity between consumer and brand (Yadav & Varadarajan, 2005: 585). Such interactivity is similar to target audience engagement, being one of the four dimensions for brand resonance, the others being a sense of community, loyalty or emotional or attitudinal attachment (Keller, 2001: 8). Digital media especially allows brands to employ narratives that have the potential to achieve these dimensions of resonance due to the format and frequency of engagement that digital allows as the discussion will explain. The opportunity to establish authenticity in these narratives is also granted by digital. The dimensions of Keller's resonance allowed by digital are discussed next, followed by a brief discussion on authentic narrative and digital.

#### *2.2.2.3.1 Digital and the opportunity for engagement*

The digital realm allows brand-target audience engagement. Bates and Ferri (2010: 15) reasoned that the concept of entertainment, well distinguished from for example leisure and popular culture, entails communication via external stimuli, which reaches a generally passive audience and gives some portion of that audience a sense of pleasure. Such pleasure can evoke interest that could lead to engagement, something that a digital platform usually allows comfortably. If a particular digital platform allows for feedback or even two-way communication between the consumer and the brand or organisation, the consumer would positively characterise it as a value-added and attention-arresting experience, as reasoned by Sayre (2010: 49-63). Brands that employ narrative that is authentic in a sense of "realness" or "being real" can evoke such engagement, even long-term engagement, with the ability to build brand communities that embrace these narratives (Papachristos, 2016).

#### *2.2.2.3.2 Digital and the opportunity for forming online communities*

A brand community is based on a set of social relations among consumers that have a sense of admiration for a brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001: 412), and provides opportunity for these customers to interact with each other in order to achieve their needs (Resnick, 2001:2).

According to Woodroffe (2007:2), consumers ultimately enjoy finding products that meet their needs, finding brands that could assist in defining them and providing a sense of belonging to a particular group. Social media especially provides opportunity for content that provides fertile ground for associative needs-forming, providing a platform for community interaction and more importantly, provides opportunity for brands to interact with such communities with the ability to establish long-term relationships between the brand and its community (Morozan, Enache & Purice, 2012: 859). Long-term customer relationships build brand equity (Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner, Gremler & Bonetti, 2012: 556).

Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Pyramid identifies community as one of the four resonance dimensions (Keller, 2001: 8). Community engagement can lead to brand trust (Habibi, Laroche & Richard, 2014: 152). Brand trust is the result of successful employment of authenticity in content marketing (Bassett, 2016). So, it seems that target audience relevance could lead to brand communities and combined with authentic narrative could establish a sense of brand trust.

#### *2.2.2.3.3 Digital and the opportunity for loyalty*

Brand trust plays an important role in eliciting a sense of loyalty (Grobler, 2016). Providing relevant digital content, continuously and consistently, that empowers and engages target audiences could be awarded with loyalty (Pullizi, 2016). The logic behind this is that if you continuously and consistently provide a potential buyer with useful and interesting content, they will ultimately reward you by buying the product or service and remaining loyal to it. The digital platform enables brands to communicate their narrative via entertainment in an all-inclusive and mostly sustainable way, i.e. it allows the ability for brands to tell stories, mostly their stories, and by providing these narrative experiences in a consistently authentic way, a sense of loyalty can be evoked (Zuckerman, 2015 and Kakroo, 2016).

#### *2.2.2.3.4 Digital and the opportunity for emotional or attitudinal attachment*

Interesting narratives that make part of authentic communication have the ability to make an emotional connection with the target audience (Watts & Williams, 2013). One could reason, taking multimodality into account, that digital is just a channel and that the focus point should be the quality of the emotional connection made with a consumer via actual brand contact or the “moment of truth” as Cohen (2013) put it, also explained as moments in which the brand promise is made, delivered and ideally upheld; a term first popularised in the 1908’s by Jan Carlson, former chairman of Scandinavian Airlines Systems (SAS) (Enslin, 2017: 40). A mode might comprise of images, writing, layout, speech, or even moving images (Lutkewitte, 2013) – or a combination thereof. A medium is the substance in which meaning is realised and through which it becomes available to others that could include image, video, and text, audio and so on (Lutkewitte, 2013). The most important aspect is that modes relayed via mediums should embody a “single artefact to create meaning” for the consumer (Johnson, 2013). This meaning should carry the brand’s intent and imbue the content sought after or expected by the consumer.

Digital media allows for a rich scope of brand associations (such as user and usage imagery, brand personality, and other intangibles) relevant to a brand’s identity, communicated in a multi-sensory, entertaining fashion (Kotler & Keller, 2009: 541). This could stimulate the consumer on a heightened emotional level compared to non-digital communication, as reasoned by De Chanville (2012). Emotions embody a higher propensity to consumer-brand response and interaction (especially from a digital point of view) than other mass communication vehicles, for example static outdoor and traditional print advertising (Accenture, 2011: 17, 20). Employing narrative in content marketing that authentically carries emotional meaning and intends a sense of connection between a brand and a target audience, has the potential to establish an intimate emotional connection (Miller, 2016). Creating an emotional connection between the brand and target audience could lead to emotional or attitudinal attachment, being one of the four dimensions of resonance (Keller, 2001: 8).

#### *2.2.2.3.5 Digital and the opportunity for authentic narrative*

Digital media provides a space for brands to express their authenticity by means of narrative and more particularly, authentic narrative. Section 2.5.2 introduces an identity argument and moral argument to authenticity. The identity-based argument reasons that authentic narrative

allows communication of the brand's identity (Kotler & Keller, 2009: 541) and the moral-based argument argues a fertile ground to share value systems between brand and target audience (ReedSmith, 2010: 2-3). The notion of identity-based communication is discussed first and then followed by a brief discussion on value expression.

On identity:

The need for building and “owning” a differentiated brand identity via a brand's communication narrative is imperative for brands in a digital context as a brand usually has the opportunity to communicate in a higher frequency than non-digital media. Over time, that identity creates familiarity which in turn builds trust, especially in a highly competitive space where growing commodification and imitation are at hand (Dos Santos, 2016). Narrative that is authentic, creative and inspirational stands in line with the brand's identity, especially in terms of content marketing, as it can make for a longer lasting brand-target audience relationship (Clerck, 2014).

On values:

Since the 1990s, digital innovation has enabled consumers to choose from a myriad of communication channels in a fragmented media landscape (Van Dijk *et al.*, 2008: 554). This choice, which alludes to the scatter for consumers' attention and potential for brand interaction, becomes more evident from a consumer's point of view when the contact involves relevance to consumer problems or latent need satisfaction and possible resonance of mutual values shared between the consumer and the brand. If digital content narrative is continuously authentic in that it connects with the target audience's value system, it can make for valuable long-term customer relationships that strategically benefit a brand (Hemsley quoting Haite, 2015). Value systems directly influence digital media as it consequently allows consumers to share in the building (or harming) of brands (ReedSmith, 2010: 2-3) because consumers step into a control position. Value systems stand integral to authenticity, as briefly discussed in Section 2.5.2 to follow.

#### 2.2.2.3.6 Conclusion

As much as the digital mediascape makes it increasingly difficult to connect with consumers, it can also be used to branded entertainment's advantage. From this brief literature study, it became evident that digital allows multimodality that can be used separately or in convergence that is beneficial for a fluid, interactive integrated communication effort. Digital allows for sustainable communication efforts in terms of its frequency and impactful narratives carried by media-rich communication conveyance. This could be beneficial to evoke emotion, for instance, but more so to convey a highly nuanced brand identity that, if employed in context of relevance, can nurture trust and even brand communities and loyalty.

Brand values that align with the values of the target audience also receive fertile ground to be established with the same mentioned resonance dimensions as possible result. It is difficult to break through commercial clutter; however, authentic narrative employed in the digital realm provides the opportunity for engagement in the form of two-way communication that also makes such interaction or engagement more real, even to an extent of humanising a brand (Moore, 2015). The branded entertainment campaign example that follows next in Section 2.2.3, Dove's *Real Beauty Sketches*, not only humanised a brand via authentic narrative but also displayed dimensions of resonance. This initiative furthermore would illustrate branded entertainment's core value that is to break through commercial clutter to arrest the attention of a target audience in a meaningful way and highlight branded entertainment's strategic potential, which is discussed in Section 2.3.

#### 2.2.3 Branded entertainment by example: Dove's *Real Beauty Sketches*

*Real Beauty Sketches* was selected among the top 15 advertising campaigns of the 21st century, as nominated by Advertising Age, a leading global source of "news, intelligence and conversation for marketing and media communities" (AdAge 2015). Dove's *Real Beauty Sketches* is dealt with in this section not only to exemplify branded entertainment in practice but also to illustrate the ability of authentic narrative to achieve brand resonance. Dove is a personal care (toiletries) brand owned by Unilever. The *Real Beauty Sketches* campaign was created by Ogilvy São Paulo in 2013 for Unilever. The campaign achieved significant accolades at the Cannes Lions Festival of Creativity. The Cannes Lions was established in 1954 and as mentioned, is the world's most respected brand communication awards ceremony as overwhelmingly suggested by the opinions of some of the world's foremost

industry specialists as indicated by comprehensive research studies on the subject (Davies, 2012 and Suggett, 2013).

The definition of Branded Content and Entertainment for the purpose of Cannes Lions is “the creation of, or natural integration into, original content by a brand” (Cannes Lions, 2012: 4). Branded Content and Entertainment Lions were awarded to creative content that leveraged a single media channel, such as web video or broadcast, or that made use of multiple platforms that delivered content to audiences across various channels, including: radio, magazine, music, video, mobile, social, blogs, experiential events, among other (Cannes Lions, 2012: 4). This is important to mention in the understanding of branded entertainment as it can take on many forms. It can be a singular entertainment property but is usually delivered as part of an integrated communication campaign.

In addition to its creative criteria, the campaign’s results were also considered, i.e. how successful the campaign was for both the client and the consumer or target audience; and “the more quantifiable statistical information” could be provided the better (Cannes Lions, 2012: 5). This means that the campaign ought to have satisfied both creative and strategically-based criteria such as sales or social media activity or responses, for instance.

The campaign was awarded with 19 Lions including gold in the Branded Content and Entertainment category, as well as a Titanium Grand Prix (Cannes Lions, 2013). This award goes to “game-changers” that break new ground in branded communications, considered to be the festival’s highest honour (AdAge, 2013). In 2014, the campaign won a Creative Effectiveness Lion that honours creativity which has shown a measurable and proven impact on a client's business; creativity that affects consumer behaviour, brand equity, sales, and where identifiable, profit. This award recognises a direct correlation between creativity and effectiveness (Cannes Lions, 2014). It is evident that the *Real Beauty Sketches* campaign could be seen as an example of a strategically sound campaign that has made an impact.

### **2.2.3.1 Campaign overview**

The campaign aimed to communicate Dove's emotional value proposition of nurturing a healthy self-image by which the brand renewed their brand meaning (Wentz, 2013). The insight behind the *Real Beauty Sketches* campaign was that most women underestimate how attractive they are, affecting their self-image (Neff, 2015). According to the client brief, only four percent of women believe they are beautiful and the agency had to find a way to prove to the other 96 percent of women that they are more beautiful than they think (Welovead, 2013).

A social experiment was conducted whereby an FBI-trained sketch artist, without seeing his subject, drew a woman's portrait according to her own self-description, and afterwards according to a strangers' description of her; someone that she had just met in the waiting room. This was followed by an exhibition comparing the sketches, where all the women who were drawn could observe the comparisons between how they see themselves and how others see them. In all instances, the stranger's descriptions had shown them to be more beautiful and content than they had described themselves. The stranger's descriptions were also more accurate than their own. The message of the film was that women are more beautiful than they think with the ultimate aim being to ignite a conversation about the value of women's self-perception (Adforum, 2013).

The film was posted on a variety of social media platforms as part of an amplified viral communication effort supported by a PR campaign that included television exposure and targeted search engine optimisation. To ensure global reach, Dove uploaded the branded entertainment videos in 25 languages to 33 of its official YouTube channels, reaching customers in more than 110 countries (Reed, 2015).

### **2.2.3.2 The strategic significance**

The strategic significance in context of this study is determined by achievement of marketing and communication objectives and discussions on resonance and authentic narrative. These criteria are populated by the campaign results discussion that follows.

#### 2.2.3.2.1 Marketing objective results

Dove's sales increased from 2.5 billion United States (US) Dollars to well over 4 billion US Dollars during the campaign period (Neff, 2015). In less than a month after its launch date on 14 April 2013, *Real Beauty Sketches* gained more than 114 million views, at that point making it the most watched online video ads of all time (Tomalin, 2013). It also received 4.6 billion PR and blogger media impressions during that time (Tomalin, 2013). In 2015 it was the 5<sup>th</sup> most viewed online video ad on YouTube in the last decade (Weiss, 2015). It seems that Dove's marketing objectives may have been exceeded by the campaign based on these results.

#### 2.2.3.2.2 Communication objectives results

Social media metrics for target audience engagement are determined by the number of likes and comments with amplification measured in terms of shares (Dunham, 2014). The *Real Beauty Sketches* video was shared 3.74 million times up till 20 May 2013, becoming the third most shared online video ad of all time, achieving one share per 30 views (Tomalin, 2013). It also received over a million likes on Dove's Facebook page by June 2013 (Google Analytics, 2013), reaching one in every ten Facebook users globally, being 1.155bn people in Quarter 2 of 2013 (Statista, 2016).

Industry professionals and a Unilever brand representative referred to the different dimensions in their post campaign analysis. The intent of the campaign was to resonate and connect emotionally with consumers (Siddiqi, 2013) and it managed to elicit "intense emotional responses of 'warmth, 'happiness' and 'knowledge' from its target demographic — one of the key factors behind a video's sharing success", according to Waterhouse (2013). Dove made a deep emotional connection with women across the globe and was able to create a strong bond between millions of women and the brand, creating a powerful foundation of loyal consumers (Indermill, 2015: 15).

Robert Candelino (2011), Unilever's Marketing Director: Personal Wash (United States) that was responsible for the campaign, said the following on creating a sense of community in relation to the intent of the Dove *Beauty Sketches* campaign: "We believe that creating a rich, loyal community leads to brand affinity and results in sales". It seems that all four of the dimensions of brand resonance, i.e. emotional connection or attitudinal attachment,



engagement, a sense of community and loyalty, being the four dimensions of Keller's brand resonance (Keller, 2001: 8), were evidently intended and supposedly achieved to various extents. This is an indication that this campaign had the ability to achieve brand resonance.

### **2.2.3.3 Authentic narrative contextualised for the Dove campaign**

Chapter 3 reasons authentic narrative to give form to branded entertainment that is original, communicates the brand's identity and aligns with target audience's value system in a meaningful way, with the potential to achieve brand resonance, therefore its strategic value. Dove's *Beauty Sketches* told a story of a reflection on beauty in a three-part act: firstly the sketches as depicted by the women themselves, then the sketches by the strangers and then the reveal and self-reflection, depicting insights on self-growth towards self-love, supporting the premise of "real beauty". The expression was by means of a highly emotive narration using audio-visual to create most impact.

Credibility in the narrative is established by using an FBI-trained sketch artist and women that were not pre-briefed on any aspect of the campaign. Credibility is an essential building block for resonance (Keller, 2001: 13), to be explained in Chapter 3. The narrative was human-centric and inadvertently making the brand human as well (Adamson, 2015), calling for a humanised relationship between the target audience and brand (Dicey, 2016). One can infer that this human-orientated approach and not overtly sales-orientated approach may have been a good contributor to resonance due to authentic narrative, as reasoned in Section 2.2.1 and to be further discussed in Section 2.4 that explores the present day challenges that branded entertainment is facing.

In terms of the identity and moral argument inherent to authenticity that was mentioned in Section 2.2.2.3.5, Dove had the opportunity to distinctly express their values that are a part of a brand identity system (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000: 43-47) and used a deeply relevant target-audience insight to build a sincere narrative on. As proposed by Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan (2012: 135), the engagement of customers (or potential customers) through the Dove campaigning for "real beauty" may build trust because "individuals will feel that the company cares about them and has their best interests at heart" (cited by Celebre & Denton, 2014: 1), alluding to the moral argument. The *Real Beauty Sketches* campaign enabled Dove to

increase its differentiation and reclaim its defining attributes whilst igniting conversations about the reality of self-esteem issues and beauty in a cultural and gender-defying context (Ogilvy São Paulo, 2014). The campaign could thus tap into and challenge the value system of its target audience and engage its brand identity.

### **2.2.3.3 Conclusion**

*Real Beauty Sketches* ostensibly employed authentic narrative, and above achieving or seemingly exceeding its marketing and communication objectives, could implicate the achievement of brand resonance. The branded entertainment campaign arguably had the ability to break through commercial clutter as alternative brand contact initiative and could arrest the attention of their intended target audiences with the ability to make an emotional connection, and to evoke target audience engagement with the brand, hence its strategic significance. The next section explores the core value of branded entertainment and in context of this reflects on its strategic potential.

## **2.3 THE CORE VALUE AND STRATEGIC POTENTIAL OF BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT**

The discussion that follows commences with a perspective on branded entertainment's core value, followed by its strategic potential, leading to an example of branded entertainment: BMW's *The Hire* that exemplifies both the core value and strategic potential as highlighted by Mike Wiese and discussed by Kevin Lane Keller in context of his resonance dimensions.

### **2.3.1 The core value of branded entertainment**

The core value of branded entertainment is to break through commercial clutter and arrest the attention of an intended target audience in a meaningful way (Meyers, 2014 and Ryan, 2016). Traditional advertising may have lost its ability to arrest the attention or to connect with target audiences in a unique and compelling way (Appleyard, 2010: 18-19 and DeMers, 2016). Branded entertainment has the potential to accomplish the mentioned (Ryan, 2016) and add value to the brand experience (Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015: 10) in the form of entertainment, information or education (Morris, 2015), hence making the communication meaningful.

To revisit briefly, in order to understand the significance of this core value in context of this study, target audiences and especially Millennials, are becoming disinterested in traditional advertising not only due to advertising clutter fatigue but also feeling that traditional advertising is desperate, contrived (in context of authenticity) and forcing itself upon its target audiences (Roper, 2011: 11). Target audiences, and again especially Millennials, want to engage with brands on their own terms (Anderson, 2015). Millennials favour brand communication that imbues authenticity and transfers value instead of aiming to merely make a sale (Mescall, 2013 and Tyson, 2016), as traditional advertising's underlying but perceived intent which is seemingly to make a sale (Appleyard, 2010: 18 and Roper, 2011: 11), is increasingly falling out of favour. The growing practice of brands to create entertaining "non-salesy" content that adds value to their lives, according to Jonny Rose (2013), Head of Content at IDEO, a multi-award winning content marketing agency based in London and New York, can draw in consumers to engage with brands on their own terms.

Branded entertainment can be regarded as a non-traditional or alternative way to make brand contact due to its ability to break through commercial clutter and to arrest attention in a unique, compelling and meaningful way (Bachman, 2010). Alternative brand contact planning presents a planning philosophy that is committed to the development of unconventional and unexpected brand contact strategies that can break through commercial clutter barriers to achieve branded impact and that can communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand (Enslin, 2003: 116, 320). The ability for a brand to uniquely express its brand's identity through communication that is initiated and owned by the brand can significantly reinforce its single-minded positioning. Branded entertainment, as a relatively new communication discipline within contemporary brand-building practice against a fast-evolving digital communication mediascape, is still seen as an alternative or novel way to make brand contact where the "brand can tell its story", said Martí-Parreño *et al.* (2015: xiv).

### **2.3.2 The strategic potential of branded entertainment**

Embracing narrative in such an alternative or novel attempt to make brand contact provides opportunity for resonance as a target audience is already more respectful of the brand's alternative or novel approach and more receptive mindset due the brand's sincerity to add value (Roberts, 2012). Brand resonance is the nature of the relationship between consumers and brands, referring to the extent to which consumers are "in synch" with the brand,

characterised in terms of the intensity or the depth of the psychological bond that customers have with the brand (Keller, 2001: 15). Kevin Lane Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Pyramid or alternatively referred to as his Brand Resonance Model (Kotler, 2015), is arguably the most comprehensive, accepted and used model that builds, measures and manages brand equity (Steenkamp, 2016: 8). Keller is a seminal author in this study and his resonance model was employed in the conceptual framework that guided the primary research design, shared in Chapter 1; Figure 1.1.

Brand resonance can be achieved once the brand manages to establish proper salience, i.e. breadth and depth of awareness; firmly established points-of-parity and points-of-difference; and positive judgments and feelings that appeal to the head and the heart (Keller, 2009a: 145). Resonance in context of brand communication could enhance the potential for brand loyalty or intended brand loyalty, enhanced attitudinal attachment (inherent to a strong emotional connection); a sense of community and/or target audience engagement. Keller explained that various marketing communication activities exist that can be put into place to impact any one dimension of resonance. He also said that any marketing communication may also affect more than one dimension. Keller used BMW's online video series titled *The Hire*, deemed by him as "equity building communication" (Keller, 2009b), as example for application. Wiese (2011) called *The Hire* that launched in 2001 as the "beginning of the branded-entertainment revival"; therefore its significance as the second example that illustrates branded entertainment's potential for resonance because it is now contextualised by Keller, the seminal author of this dissertation. BMW's alternative or novel entertainment initiative and its results receive attention first and then Keller's interpretation of its potential resonance.

### **2.3.3 Kevin Lane Keller's take on BMW's *The Hire* for resonance**

BMW created a series of eight quirky, action-packed internet-based short films directed by Guy Richie, Tony Scott, Ridley Scott and John Woo, called: *The Hire*. It was made by BMW for BMW and deemed as non-traditional advertising (Odén & Larsson, 2011: 11) that broke through commercial clutter to arrest attention and deliver content through meaningful storytelling (Okupniak, 2012). It starred singer and actress Madonna and well-known British actor, Clive Owen. DeMatthia (2016), staff writer for BMW's official blog, wrote: "These films were not only great to watch, but they showcased BMWs as proper driver's cars, exciting and dynamic. They were in car chases, doing stunts and were being driven at 10/10ths by this

mysterious driver. It was no secret that BMW was trying to convey a specific message about its cars — they were meant for driving”. The brand’s slogan, Sheer Driving Pleasure, thus takes prevalence in expressing its brand identity in relation to the product features and personality based on the subtle humour and drama employed in the online videos as well.

*The Hire* film series was a success. The films were viewed more than 11 million times by end 2001 (George, 2013), reaching more than 100 million views till mid 2011 (Sunset, 2008); 2001 sales rose 12.5 percent from 2000; the following year BMW’s sales rose 17.2 percent between 2001 and 2002; two million people registered on the BMW site, with more than half asking for more information via e-mail; and 94 percent of the people who saw the films recommended them to others (Sunset, 2008 and Atkinson, 2012). It is evident that marketing objectives may have been exceeded for this campaign. In terms of resonance, Keller argued that the series enhanced brand attachment, community and engagement with the possibility of interactive effects between different brand resonance dimensions to exist, such as higher levels of attachment leading to greater engagement (Keller, 2009a: 145). He followed this argument by mentioning that for a brand to maximise brand resonance, both the intensity and activity of loyalty relationships must be increased. It is important to note that Keller mentioned all four resonance dimensions in relation to *The Hire*.

#### **2.3.4 Conclusion**

It seems that branded entertainment initiatives, successful initiatives that exceeded marketing objectives like *The Hire*, as non-traditional advertising or alternative brand contact initiatives, have the ability to break through commercial clutter and arrest attention in a meaningful way by means of value-added content, i.e. core value. It also seems that authentic narrative, depicted as original, brand-generated meaningful storytelling as per *The Hire*, has the ability to resonate with target audiences, its strategic value, according to the seminal author of this study: Kevin Lane Keller.

BMW’s *The Hire* and Unilever’s Dove *Real Beauty Sketches* maximised their potential for brand resonance by employing authentic narrative. BMW’s focus was product demonstration and Dove’s focus was primarily on brand values. These two campaigns show that different forms of narrative expressions exist: some more product-focused and others more brand-

focused. Both employed authentic narrative effectively with resonance as result. However, in lieu of branded entertainment facing orientation challenges, many content pieces fail to deliver on effectivity, engagement and a return on investment (Ebeli, 2015). Section 2.4 that follows explores the different challenges facing branded entertainment in contemporary brand communication practice, and identifies the most important challenge facing branded entertainment.

## **2.4 THE CHALLENGES BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT FACES AT PRESENT**

Branded entertainment is facing orientation challenges. The primary objective of the study was to explore the value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment in order to suggest a definition for branded entertainment that guides strategically significant branded entertainment practice. Due to the orientation challenges discussed in this section, branded entertainment marginalises its strategic potential that is to achieve brand resonance. In understanding these challenges experienced by brand communication decision makers, the research problem could be addressed, being: The lack of a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment erodes its core value, that is to break through clutter and connect with audiences through authentic narrative and thus, the potential for branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance is depleted.

From all the challenges presented, it seems that industry is working to address most challenges; however, as argued in this section, the most prevalent challenge is inauthentic, poor quality content that fails to maximise a branded entertainment initiative's potential to achieve resonance. This section explores possible reasons for the deliverance of inauthentic, poor quality content. Nonetheless, inauthentic, poor quality content stems from a misunderstanding of branded entertainment, i.e. what it is defined as in context of its core value and strategic potential.

### **2.4.1 Deliverance of inauthentic content**

In this section, it will be reasoned that inauthentic content could be the result of an overly sales-orientated approach to branded entertainment narrative because the intent in relation to the essence of branded entertainment, i.e. to entertain, could come across as being insincere and therefore deplete the potential for brand resonance. Authentic content in context of

branded entertainment is content that employs narrative in an authentic way, as reasoned in Section 2.2.1.9, i.e. when sincerely approached with entertainment in mind; an original piece of work; embodying brand identity and carrying a sense of emotional meaning that inspires action, i.e. engagement, the ability to achieve brand resonance seems higher.

To approach a target audience in a sincere manner means that brand communication decision makers ought to eschew an overtly sales-orientated approach which could be deemed as inauthentic (Meyers, 2014). Branded entertainment approached in a sales-orientated traditional advertising-like manner alienates consumers as target audiences want to experience entertainment that adds value to their lives and world experience and not an effort that comes across as a brand trying to sell them something in the traditional sense (Wiese, 2011 and Mescall, 2013). Branded entertainment that uses entertainment-based narrative that is free from contriteness, often experienced with a sales-based traditional advertising approach, could not only give the brand credibility but also more exposure as target audiences would want to engage with it and share it (Swart, 2010 and Rose, 2015). Bhargava (2011) praised branded entertainment as a strategy placing marketers and brand practitioners “ahead of the curve”, but warned with great concern that, within the context of branded entertainment: brands ought to get better at telling a story instead of merely advertising or “hawking” product benefits or service descriptions.

Hitch and Worpel (2010) went as far to say that entertainment should be placed first and foremost and the brand should step into the back seat role or be secondary to the viewer experience. Wiese (2011) warned that too often in branded entertainment, the actual entertainment value becomes secondary to “making the deal” or just being a once-off tactic within a campaign. The focus should be on longer-term strategies and building brands. The focus, he feels, should be on creating entertainment brands instead of creating branded entertainment per se. It again seems that the focus should be on the story and the entertainment rather than thrusting towards an overt “sell” as consumers want a brand to genuinely entertain and add value over the long term more so than connecting with them temporally to make a “sell”. It could thus be reasoned that perceived sincerity on the part of the brand is important, meaning that it is always in the best interest of the consumer.



The following observation by John Mescall, Executive Creative Director at ad group McCann, deserves attention. He explained that too many branded entertainment creators still allude to old school hard sell techniques in a communication space which ought to be much more subtle and immersive, and should be much more focused on creating true content (utility) and entertainment which should offer true value to the target audience – value that an audience would choose to seek out more so than being intrusive (like some forms of classic advertising) (MarketingMag, 2013). Mescall stated that there should be a very clear distinction between branded entertainment and traditional advertising, explaining that there is at present almost “no delineation” between branded entertainment and advertising. He referred to (the industry in context of) branded entertainment saying that “... we’re in this weird transitional period”, which supports Pytlik at Contagious Communications’ sentiment: branded entertainment is in a “... time of experimentation and exploration” (Pytlik, 2008: 7). Mescall also stressed the fact that the creative execution of branded entertainment should have worth beyond the commercial message, saying that if the content is just a cleverly put together “marketing message” it’s not branded entertainment; then it’s simply a good ad.

The above industry experts also expressed concern related to the creative execution of a branded entertainment property. It seems that the core characteristics emphasised by them and often ignored or misinterpreted by industry are first and foremost an interesting and entertaining story line that leaves the consumer wanting more. It is interesting to note that in terms of originality, many successful initiatives that set a benchmark, like BMW’s *The Hire* for instance, attracted many brands that imitated or followed the same idea, format or even narrative that comes across as inauthentic (George, 2013). Nevertheless, the issue of sincerity keeps surfacing; sincere in that the brand wants to add utility by means of entertainment instead of perceivably just wanting to make a sale. It also seems that this sense of sincerity may trigger longer-term and more enduring interactions with target audiences, as discussed in Section 2.2.1.6.

It is certainly not to say that advertising is insincere or that advertising could not have strategic value. It is also not to say that advertising could be seen as inauthentic. Advertising as a promotional tool always runs the risk of carrying a sales undertone and target audiences would mostly have the propensity to view it through that lens, no matter how entertaining it is (Meyers, 2016). However, in context of branded entertainment, its core value and strategic potential, a



sales-orientated approach by brand communication decision makers should make way for a brand-orientated approach that engages an authentic brand identity-based narrative (Hitch & Worple, 2010; Wiese, 2015; Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015; Bhargava, 2014; Musson, 2014). It is understandable to an extent that brand communication decision makers, especially client-side marketers, would be risk-averse by approaching branded entertainment with a sales-orientated mindset as they are familiar with traditional advertising (Ebeli, 2015), or even to mimic branded entertainment initiatives that have been successful (George, 2013) to increase chances for success.

In conclusion, these inauthentic narrative practices are somewhat comprehended in context of the challenges that brand communication decision makers are facing in contemporary branded entertainment practice, especially against the pressure experienced to enter unfamiliar territory in a discipline that is still aiming to orientate itself. Section 2.4.2 that follows explores the challenges brand communication decision makers are facing and identifies poor quality content as the other most prevalent challenge. Hence, the value of a study that addresses narrative in context of branded entertainment's strategic potential stands integral to the proposed branded entertainment definition towards sound principles in practice.

#### **2.4.2 Deliverance of poor quality content**

In this section, it is reasoned that poor quality content is evident of client-side marketers' reluctance to explore branded entertainment to its fullest potential and advertising agency-side creatives and strategists' unfamiliarity with creating entertainment and branded entertainment strategies. Poor quality content muddles any attempt at authentic narrative and diminishes the potential for brand resonance because of the quite expected negative target audience judgements and feelings on the deliverance of the branded entertainment. Poor quality content lacks meaning, trust, target audience relevance, is not compelling or does often not align with the brand proposition (Benioff in Kelly, 2013).

iMedia Connection, a leading USA-based advertising industry publication for senior digital marketers (Marcus, 2016), completed a study on branded entertainment in 2012 amongst 72 advertising leaders. The study identified a "lack of quality programming" and "brand marketers (or client-side marketers) not willing to take a chance with branded entertainment" as two

highly significant challenges facing branded entertainment. Despite client-side marketers not willing to take a chance on branded entertainment because it could still be regarded as unfamiliar territory compared to traditional advertising, the iMedia research further showed that “the lack of quality programming” is due to client-side marketers “unwilling to explore” branded entertainment, meaning explore branded entertainment to its fullest potential, allowing agencies to create narrative that entertains above any restriction posed by client-side marketers. It is interesting to note that a major contributor to client-side marketers unwilling to explore branded entertainment, according to the iMedia (2012) study, is the perception that budget is considerably more than the production of a standard commercial, for instance. One can assume that unfamiliarity with the discipline combined with taking a bigger financial risk may defer client-side marketers from undertaking a branded entertainment initiative with their agency or a production company.

Probably the most significant reason provided in the iMedia study (2012) for clients “unwilling to explore” branded entertainment was that clients “... do not recognise the strategic importance of engagement and building authenticity”. It is reasoned that brand authenticity is inherent to the branded entertainment concept and reason for being (Weiss, 2014 and Wiese, 2013) and furthermore with engagement being a dimension of resonance, one can reason that client-side markers may pass up on the opportunity to employ authentic narrative and thus the potential for resonance.

Advertising agency-side creatives and strategists who are stepping out of the role of advertisers to be storytellers or narrators, may also contribute to poor quality content with the misemployment of authentic narrative, for example not telling original stories or not resonating in finding strong enough emotional relevance to a target audience (Thielman, 2014 and Maconick, 2016). Cannes did not award a Grand Prix in the category of Branded Content and Entertainment in 2014 and 2015 due to lack of outstanding, category-defining content that is original, compelling and of strategic significance (Weiss, 2014 and Morrison, 2015). However, on 25 June 2016 a Grand Prix was again awarded in the Visual Storytelling and Branded Entertainment category (Bizcommunity, 2016). Despite better work becoming more evident, PJ Pereira, Chief Creative Officer at Pereira & O'Dell (San Francisco), Chair of the Branded Content & Branded Entertainment jury for the 2016 Clio Awards, said on 1 August 2016 about

branded entertainment: “We're still testing the waters and seeing what can be done, or can't” (Adweek, 2016).

The Clio Awards is reckoned by international advertising industry experts to be among the top ten international advertising award ceremonies (Davies, 2012 and Suggett, 2013). Pereira remarked on 2016 creative work seen at Cannes hoping that branded entertainment is gaining ground as communication practice striving for strategically-driven creative excellence; however it seems that branded entertainment is still orientating itself in contemporary brand communication practice.

Hitch and Worple (2010: 3) stated that one of the greatest mistakes brands make in the creative execution of branded entertainment is that they “... intentionally or inadvertently create disposable content”. They explained this by stating that traditional advertising is more often than not “disposable” as its singular purpose is to meet a marketing challenge. Examples of these marketing challenges would include getting someone to recognise a brand, to try a product or to buy a product. They expanded on their argument by stating that “... content in advertising is simply a delivery mechanism and whether or not that content lives on is secondary to the objective of generating the advertising result”.

They went on to say that branded entertainment is not just entertaining advertising as the opportunity should be there for consumers to participate in a long-term experience. They said that consumers will connect when content is relevant, when it makes an emotional impact and when the branded entertainment delivers tangible value such as “practical knowledge, entertainment or social currency”. The latter will make consumers “... come back for more ...and if that connection is strong enough they will bring others along with them”. The strategic value of authentic narrative is thus clearly emphasised and the intent and impact of a branded entertainment property should not be compromised by content that does not have integrity or longevity. This also reminds one of branded entertainment being an enduring entertainment experience, as discussed in Section 2.2.1.6.

In conclusion, poor quality content is seemingly prevalent because advertising agency-side creatives and strategists orientating and immersing themselves in a relatively new communication discipline find it difficult to produce original, good stories that carry a sense of emotional relevance and meaning, and more importantly inspire action, i.e. engagement. This naturally includes creating narrative that is not merely tactical, i.e. disposable, but content that has longevity, i.e. endurable content that strategically builds the brand. It is evident that lack of stand-out content and application problems in general is attributable to a lack of understanding of branded entertainment (Kiriakakis, 2014 and Olenski, 2016).

Inauthentic, poor quality content may be a result of the lack of a cohesive understanding of branded entertainment, but the question then remains: what is branded entertainment and what is it not in context of its strategic potential, being brand resonance? Section 2.5 that follows uncovers the form of branded entertainment most conducive to brand resonance and reasons towards a conceptualised space for this potential to exist in order to guide principles of good practice.

## **2.5 BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT MOST CONDUCTIVE TO BRAND RESONANCE**

Branded entertainment has been interpreted by some academics and brand communication decision makers in contemporary brand communication practice to be a sophisticated form of product placement, product or brand integration, or sponsorship (Lehu & Bressoud, 2008; Monaco, 2009; Bhargava, 2011). The critical question can be asked: do these forms of promotional initiatives maximise branded entertainment's potential for brand resonance? The difference between branded entertainment and branded content is also not clear (Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015) and these terms are used interchangeably (Pulizzi, 2016).

The problem lies herein: branded content exists of various forms of content creation that includes branded entertainment (Asmussen *et al.*, 2013: 97). In what way should branded entertainment be approached differently to other branded content entities like advertiser funded programming or branded experiences, for instance (Kirby, 2016) to achieve brand resonance? If one were to consider all the different interpretations of branded entertainment in context of branded entertainment's strategic potential: how can branded entertainment then be defined in order for it to exercise its core value and achieve its strategic potential? Also,

how would this definition address inauthentic, poor quality content in order to deliver content that has the ability to achieve brand resonance?

The definition problem can be compared to an industry that for argument's sake does not understand or agree on the fundamental principles of advertising or public relations, with diluted or ineffective communication efforts as a result, and hence initiatives that do not maximise branded entertainment's strategic potential. This section addresses these concerns and aims to understand branded entertainment's different interpretations in context of branded entertainment's strategic potential of brand resonance.

It is reasoned in this section that the degree of control or ownership taken by a brand of a branded entertainment initiative has an influence on its ability to achieve brand resonance because it could be argued that the more control a brand has or the better the ability to employ authentic narrative, i.e. original narrative that expresses a brand's identity and values, for instance, the more it can emotionally connect with a target audience and evoke engagement, for instance. So, different interpretations of branded entertainment are discussed in this section with a focus on each interpretation's ability to achieve brand resonance instead of branded entertainment's positioning as a communication effort in contemporary brand communication practice.

Section 2.5.1 explores the different meanings that branded entertainment holds at present but done in context of authenticity. So, the concept of authenticity is introduced to frame the discussion. Section 2.5.2 explores the debate: are branded entertainment and branded content the same thing? They are sometimes used interchangeably in industry vernacular. Do branded entertainment and branded content indeed differ when one looks at them through a lens of narrative? So, the narrative concept is introduced for this discussion. Section 2.5.3 is a summative discussion on branded entertainment most conducive to brand resonance. It reasons that branded entertainment should be initiated and owned by the brand, thus not be attached to a third party's undertaking, as a means to establish fertile ground for brand resonance. This is done towards conceptualising a proposed working definition for branded entertainment in Section 2.6 that will inform the exploration of the primary research phase.

### **2.5.1 Exploring different meanings of branded entertainment and introducing the concept of authenticity**

The term branded entertainment seemingly holds varied meanings among industry professionals and academics (De Aguilera-Moyano *et al.*, 2015: 533). This is of concern as the discipline is growing in importance as a means to disrupt conventional brand communication practice and break through commercial clutter, thereby nearly forcing more opportunity onto an industry that is having difficulty to understand what branded entertainment is, what it can offer and more so, how it should be approached to ensure campaign success.

One of the more profound challenges that brand communication decision makers face is differentiating between advertising and branded entertainment (Thielman, 2014), hereby surely meaning between branded entertainment and traditional advertising, but more so derivatives of advertising such as advertiser funded programming, advertainment, product or brand placement, brandcasting and product or brand integration, for instance. All mentioned terms are explained in the sections that follow. Where does the boundary lie between the mentioned forms of advertising and branded entertainment, and why is it important? It is arguably important because each one of these mentioned forms of brand communication has a different set of application criteria and has the ability to achieve different sets of marketing and/or communication objectives.

Some of these forms are inherently tactical whilst others allow for strategic brand-building success. It is therefore important to select the right type of advertising or communication effort for the right reasons, using the right approaches for whatever the outcome the brand wants to achieve. This section reasons that the authentic narrative construct proposed for this study differentiates branded entertainment from all the other forms of communication efforts mentioned, in order to achieve branded entertainment's strategic potential, that of brand resonance. The branded entertainment construct suggested ultimately comes with a distinct set of application criteria that can clearly guide an effort towards campaign success.

Recent literature suggests that some academics and industry professionals are moving away from understanding branded entertainment to be sophisticated product placement, product or brand integration or even sponsorship, for instance, that would not necessarily harbour the

maximised potential for resonance, but rather involve a brand's self-created entertainment content that communicates the brand's identity (Monaco, 2009; Gilbar, 2010; Hudson, 2010; Czarmecki, 2012; Pytlik, 2014; Musson, 2014; Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015). A discussion on the different meanings of branded entertainment follows in context of degrees of ownership and authenticity criteria to land the idea of a branded entertainment definition that provides control and ownership of the content, i.e. for the branded entertainment initiative to be brand-initiated and owned.

### **2.5.1.1 Brief introduction to the concept of authenticity**

As a brief background for authenticity and more specifically authentic narrative is discussed in more depth in Chapter 3, the following bears relevance to this section. Authenticity is defined as the quality of being authentic or of established authority for truth and correctness (Merriam-Webster, 2009). Gilmore and Pine (2007) stated that in order for brands to create authenticity, they must operate and communicate credibly, reliably, and be true to the perception of the brand. Branded entertainment enables its creators to convey a sense of brand authenticity, openness, and sincerity, and therefore create trust, which makes it more likely that consumers will purchase the brand's products (Mathieu, C. 2012). The concept of authenticity, based on the schools of thought of Descartes, Rousseau, Herder and Grimmitt, delivers an identity argument and a moral argument.

The identity argument draws on the concept of originality with the ability to communicate a sense of the author's identity and world view (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998: 178; Beverland *et al.*, 2008; Carroll & Wheaton, 2009: 1), i.e. the brand's identity in context of brand communication. This means that brands have the opportunity to comprehensively communicate their brand identity when the opportunity presents itself for the brand to generate the branded entertainment and take ownership, as the author of the narrative, instead of integrating the narrative in a non-brand owned entertainment property.

The moral argument draws on a value system that should align that of the author's and the audience's, rooted in a "conscious, collective understanding" (Marra citing Grimmet & Neufield, 1994: 208, supported by Boyle, 2003: 17-21). This simply means that the target audience must experience the brand's value system as constituted by the communication as

their own (Tampon, 2013). The collective understanding is furthermore proposed in context of “sincerity” (Clift, 2011: 8), i.e. for a brand to approach branded entertainment with the intent to add value through entertainment.

It is suggested that any given target audience would therefore mainly consider three things, given an opportunity to resonate with the brand:

- (i) Whether the communication is done in a way that is in the best interest of them, the viewer; to entertain, add value or meaningful content, and not just to satisfy a sales objective (Wiese, 2011). Although the concept of narrative will be discussed in Chapter 3, it’s worth a mention that narrative is inextricably linked to being human (Adamson, 2015) or being integral to humanness (Brooks, 2005). Additionally, as mentioned with the discussion on *Real Beauty Sketches* in Section 2.2.3.3, the narrative was found to be human-centric and inadvertently that made the brand human as well (Adamson, 2015). Therefore it could be argued that a sense of **sincerity** is as closely linked to the essence of the narrative concept as it is with the moral argument of authenticity. Nevertheless, target audiences will ultimately assess whether the brand is sincere in their communication approach.
- (ii) Whether the value system of the brand aligns with the value system of the target audience (Tampon, 2013), as the viewer will consider this in judging whether the brand entertainment in tandem with the brand’s sincerest intent is authentic; coming across as being “for real” or not. Branded entertainment, according to Lehu (2002) involves the transmission of the values of a brand and therefore constituting an emotional dimension by embodying **emotional meaning** by means of target audience relevance, which can facilitate establishing a richer relationship with the consumer: a relationship of trust, an emotion, and even though creating entertainment content, the brand adheres to its values and coexists harmoniously with the content (Tuomi, 2010 cited by De Aguilera-Moyano *et al.*, 2015: 523). Martin (2009) also linked target audience relevance to emotional meaning.
- (iii) Whether the target audience can grasp an understanding of the **brand’s identity** and world view, meaning that they would want to assess whether it is an identity and world view that they can buy into (Martínez-Jerez, 2004; Marsden, 2015; Rabe, 2016) and if so they may trust the brand (Marie, 2012: 5 and Kopoulos, 2016). However, this would only be a positive judgement given that there is also consistency with what they already



know of the brand (i.e. it's larger or overarching narrative) and what the brand is putting forward in their communication, otherwise the target audience would experience the narrative and its author, the brand, as inauthentic (Yankelovich, 2010:1).

Branded entertainment has many meanings, forms and interpretations in present day brand communication practice. The following forms are explored for the rest of this section taking branded entertainment's authenticity proposition into consideration: sponsorship; advertiser funded programming; advertising; advertainment; product or brand placement; brandcasting; and product or brand integration.

### **2.5.1.2 Sponsorship**

Sponsorship is the "full or partial financing by an advertiser of a programme, feature or event in exchange for brand or corporate awareness or association with or within that programme or event" (Muller, 1999: 414). Branded entertainment can include sponsorship, according to O'Guinn *et al.* (2009: 613), referring the USA-based NASCAR (National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing) Sprint Cup Series that is widely broadcasted on television as branded entertainment where associating brands sponsor the event and are therefore part of the branded entertainment. According to Brands Art Review (2012) the James Bond film, *Skyfall*, is the "ultimate branded entertainment" due to Bond stepping in as brand ambassador for brands such as Tom Ford, Omega, Sony, Audi, Aston Martin and Heineken and the product placement of the mentioned brands holding association power to the James Bond brand due to its sponsorship.

"Product placement is the purposeful incorporation of commercial content into non-commercial settings, that is, a product plug generated via the fusion of advertising and entertainment" (Ginosar & Levi-Faur, 2010: 467). Product placement is discussed in more depth in Section 2.5.1.6 that follows. It is evident that the entertainment property is then seen as branded entertainment because of the association with the brand or complement of brands sponsoring the entertainment or sponsoring by means of product placement, for instance.

Thinkbox, a United Kingdom (UK) based branded entertainment agency, states that branded entertainment “goes beyond sponsorship” to include a stronger emotional relationship with its target audience, with them then gaining a true understanding of the brand as result (Thinkbox, 2011: 2). Zoom Branded Entertainment, from South Africa’s Ogilvy stable, says that branded entertainment is “more powerful than sponsorship”, although it could include product placement, which in some way could contribute to a stronger or relatively more credible branded effort. A stronger emotional relationship and credibility seem to play some kind of a role in qualifying branded entertainment in a sponsorship context. However, Mark Fortner, jury member and head of innovation and branded content at Mediacom, one of the world’s leading media agencies, expressed concern that many entrants in the Cannes Lions 2015 awards in the Branded Content and Entertainment category, according to him, “just slapped a logo onto something, or made an integration just for the brand’s sake without any larger narrative or natural partnership”.

Some industry leaders reason that sponsorship in this fashion, even though it is attached to an existing entertainment property like a TV show or sports event, for instance, is sponsorship in the traditional sense and not branded entertainment, regardless of the type of association or the intensity of the entertainment (Hudson, 2010; Duopoly, 2013; Arhio & Raunio, 2015). It seems that sponsorship that can achieve credibility, establish an emotional connection, or engage a meaningful partnership between the entertainment property and the sponsor or sponsors, may be regarded as branded entertainment according to some industry practitioners. However, others reason that sponsorships in that manner should be an entertainment property that is sponsored by a brand or a number of brands, in the traditional sense. Any sponsorship should in any event be carefully approached to align with the brand and create brand association to build brand image (Barlow, 2015).

The questions that can then be asked are: does this kind of sponsorship maximise the potential for brand resonance? To what degree could a brand express its identity and values? Industry is seemingly failing to understand the degree to which such integration can achieve resonance, if any attempt can achieve resonance or to what extent a larger narrative can be established. With this sense of uncertainty, one can argue that an entertaining property sponsored by a brand is a brand-sponsored entertainment property with association power for

the brand and cannot be deemed as branded entertainment, especially in the absence of employing authentic narrative.

### **2.5.1.3 Advertiser-funded programming**

BBC's Channel 4 explains advertiser-funded programming or AFP as follows: "Advertiser Funded Programming or Branded Content as it is often referred to describe programmes that are created with direct input of a client. The client's contribution could be financial, creative or by allowing producers access to talent or events with which the client has an existing relationship" (Channel 4 Sales, 2013). It is interesting to note that Channel 4 categorises AFP as part of sponsorship. Zoom's statement is strongly supported by Thomas (2009: 2), stating that advertiser-funded programming, where advertisers partially or completely pay for television broadcast programming (defined as "... any means by which an advertiser can have a deeper relationship with programming produced beyond traditional media activity"), is "beyond sponsorship". South African-based specialised long format (infomercials and AFP) TV agency, JAVELIN explains AFP as a format created by a sponsor or advertiser around their products and offerings made to look like a normal TV programme (Javelin, 2013). This definition seems to allow brands the opportunity to create identity- and value-based content. However, none of the mentioned definitions specifically refer to entertainment per se, i.e. it could include any kind of content-related programming. If brands are merely contributing financially it could also be deemed as a sponsorship in the traditional sense of the word. So, whether it is content creation or sponsorship, one may wonder what degree of control of the narrative allows maximisation of resonance.

### **2.5.1.4 Advertising**

Advertising is any paid form of communication about a good, service, an organisation or an idea by an identified sponsor (Kerin, Hartley, Berkowitz & Rudelius, 2006: 496). Advertising is usually the most visible component of the promotion mix, which gives it legs for a wide reach and potential awareness despite its restrictive one-way communication (Hollensen, 2007: 545 and Orzan, Tita, Chivu, Oanta & Coman, 2017: 167-8). It could be reasoned that advertising, especially received via audio or audio-visual channels, bar digital systems (which allow consumers to block or skip advertising), does enforce a one-way communication, leaving viewers or listeners with less choice. This could lead to consumer resentment (Rosenfield, 2004). Branded entertainment, on the other hand, could in many instances allow for interaction

or brand engagement in some way, especially if it is transmitted in the digital realm like a viral video posted online.

Advertising's objective is to inform, persuade and remind (Kotler & Keller, 2009: 539). Advertising does not necessarily have to have a story or a narrative and in the context of it "being advertising" the viewer understands that it is ultimately still a "hard sell" in some way with the audience not necessarily receiving content that engages (Wiese, 2013). Although it is relatively difficult to establish an agreed set of campaign objectives for branded entertainment against the backdrop of a lack of cohesive understanding of branded entertainment and in context of the degree of generation and ownership of the entertainment property, some attempts have been made in literature.

Branded entertainment's objectives could for instance be brand recall, brand preference, or brand engagement (Martí, Bigné, & Hyder, 2014 as cited by Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015). With the acknowledgement of engagement, emotional connection or emotional engagement seems to be highly prevalent in literature as an objective of branded entertainment (Hitch & Worple, 2010: 3; Valero, 2014; Duopoly, 2014: 16; Whitney-Vernon, 2016). Building affinity is also an objective mentioned in literature (Musson, 2014: 119). Brand engagement and establishing an emotional connection seem to be quite prevalent as branded entertainment campaign objectives. Advertising, on the other hand, traditionally aims to inform, persuade or remind (Kotler & Keller, 2009: 539). Although some advertisements in the traditional sense may employ narrative, it is not to say that they qualify as branded entertainment because the main objective of advertising is still persuasion in order to make a sell or "close a deal" as perceived by target audiences, whereas branded entertainment primarily aims to provide added value in the form of entertainment (Adamson, 2015 and Anderson, 2015).

#### **2.5.1.5 Infomercials**

Thomas (2009: 2) alludes to the fact that infomercials, as a form of advertising, would not be similar to an AFP as advertisers "... are buying into the editorial integrity of the programme and reaching consumers by association with the programme's values". Infomercials are defined as feature-programme length commercials (between 15 and 30 minutes in duration) presented more as a talk show as a promotion (like an advertorial is for print) aiming to build

awareness of a product or service by demonstrating its use and benefits, usually including an attractive direct-response offer (Business Dictionary, date unknown).

Infomercials could but do not necessarily entertain. One can also question the authenticity if there is narrative as the aim with infomercials is clearly to make a sale or close a deal, and thus it lacks the sincerity that branded entertainment has to entertain and not necessarily make a sale or close a deal. Czarmecki (2012) supports Thomas' statement that branded entertainment is not similar to an infomercial, seen by him as only one step up from a traditional 30" or 60" advertisements and not providing advertisers the opportunity to "... tell a more robust and in-depth story ..." about the brand in an entertaining and engaging way. It could then be reasoned that an infomercial would purely be an unusually long traditional advertisement with no particular story line to entertain in a way a non-commercial entertainment property is constructed to do.

#### **2.5.1.6 Advertainment**

Advertainment is a neologism that combines advertising and entertainment, referring to promotional practices that integrate brand communications within the content of entertainment products (Russell, 2007: 3). Russell assessed advertainment against a sliding scale of product integration, with product placement as the simplest form of product integration and advertainment as the greatest form of product integration (Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015: 3). Advertainment has become more systematic and sophisticated than ever before, according to Mulcahy (2006: 44). This could be prescribed to the fact that content producers are looking in non-traditional places to source material and partners to finance and promote their programmes and to have their characters interact with real brands: products, services, people and places, according to Mulcahy (2006: 44). Examples of advertainment includes anything from the "blatant red Coca-Cola cups on American Idol's judges' table" (i.e. product placement) to Felix Baumgartner's record-breaking space jump for brand: Red Bull (Hernandez, 2013). Brands would then benefit from innovative opportunities to engage with consumers. Many advertainment initiatives may come across as sophisticated sponsorships or product placements and whether it is undoubtable that advertainment can achieve communication objectives, its potential to achieve brand resonance could not deliver in literature.

### **2.5.1.7 Product or brand placement**

Product (or brand) placement, as explained by Kaijansinkko (2003: 5, 20-22), is when a product or brand is used, featured, mentioned or seen in a movie or similar context (entertainment property) in a manner that provides the product with a positive image and role in the entertainment property. Lehu and Bressoud (2008: 1083-4) made a case for the increase and legitimate appreciation of entertainment content as producers and advertisers are looking to solve target audience fragmentation through new efficient ways of contacting and “seducing their potential customers”. They further argued that repeated brand and product exposure with heightened impact as multiple opportunities to view such entertainment are offered to the consumer (2008: 1088). Lehu and Bressoud (2008: 1083-4) described product placement as a “crossbreed technique” by which different communication techniques are combined into one, taking place in an entertainment and/or cultural environment. They continued to explain the objective of product (or brand) placement (as putting a brand and/or product into a book or movie scene where it can be read or seen and/or its name heard) is to achieve a positive effect on attitude (citing Fontaine, 2005 and Redondo, 2006) with the potential impact on brand recall (citing Brennan, Dubas & Babin, 1999 and d’Astous and Cartier, 2000) and brand image in an audience relevant context.

In addition to positive effects on brand attitude, recall and image by means of brand placement, other authors could identify more communication effects given the appropriate employment of the practice, such as brand recognition and even purchase intention (Verhellen, Dens & De Pelsmacker, 2013: 287). None of the mentioned communication effects, however, necessarily reflect any of Keller’s four dimensions of brand resonance, namely engagement, community, attachment and loyalty (Keller, 2001: 8).

There are two risks associated with product or brand placement. According to Daugherty and Gangadhatbatla (2005: 16) marketers may have a lack of control over how products are incorporated and portrayed in a storyline. This could happen if the brand or product placement is done too overtly or falsely, i.e. contrived. The brand may seem desperate and consumers may then see the brand in a negative light. Producers of entertainment properties may then also face the risk of discrediting characters or celebrities their audience “believe in”. Sometimes non-alignment between the character or celebrity and brand identity of the product

(or service) in question could occur (Nunlee, Smith & Katz, 2012: 13). Again, this would then be harmful for either or both the brand and entertainment property's reputation.

In reviewing a book on branded entertainment written by Lehu in 2007, Wolburg (2008: 66-67) mentioned that the text mainly focuses on product placement. Wolburg cites Lehu (2008: 33) stating that product placement bypasses viewer censorship. This insinuates that brand exposure could in some instances be seen as intrusive from the consumer's perspective. Martí-Parreño *et al.* (2015: 3-4) argued that branded entertainment cannot include product placement as the brand must exercise complete control over the content – “and is the owner of the content” – to be defined as branded entertainment as the control in product placement is marginalised. A potential solution to this perceived intrusiveness (and also to gain a stronger sense of content control by the brand owner) could be product (or brand) integration.

Hudson and Hudson (2006, in Craig-Lees & Scott, 2008: 4) defined branded entertainment as the integration of advertising into entertainment content, whereby brands are embedded into storylines of a film, television programme, or other entertainment medium, involving co-creation and collaboration between entertainment, media and brands. They stipulated that pure product placement is where the brand is not integrated into the plot, but plays a 'passive' role, i.e. appearing in the background and is akin to the concept of subtle or creative placements.

Branded entertainment is where the brand is integrated into the plot, according to Hudson and Hudson. They argued that making a brand intrinsic to the plot lines of existing entertainment properties distinguishes branded entertainment from the traditional use of product placement (Hudson, 2010). Martí-Parreño *et al.* (2015) stipulated that branded entertainment differs from product placement in that with branded entertainment the content is developed around the brand and funded by the marketer, whereas the level of control is less in the case of product placement. They would then define branded entertainment as “any entertainment content (e.g. films, video games, books) developed by a brand – and usually around a brand – to achieve its marketing goals” (Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015: 4).

Caraccioli-Davis (2005: 10-11) stated that there is a clear difference between branded entertainment and product placement. The aforementioned explains as follows: "... brands that are irreplaceably woven into entertaining content – across any number of contact points – and is invited by audiences as welcome components of media consumption and interaction". Product placement is explained by Caraccioli-Davis as exposure in an entertainment property with a simple visual/audio presence. She even referred to branded entertainment as "long-form branded content: Overpowering content permeating consumer consciousness". O'Guin *et al.* (2009: 613) stated that the difference between branded entertainment and product placement is that in the case of branded entertainment, the entertainment would not necessarily exist without the marketer's support. They also mentioned that marketers would mostly create the entertainment property themselves with the creative assistance of agencies and/or content producers.

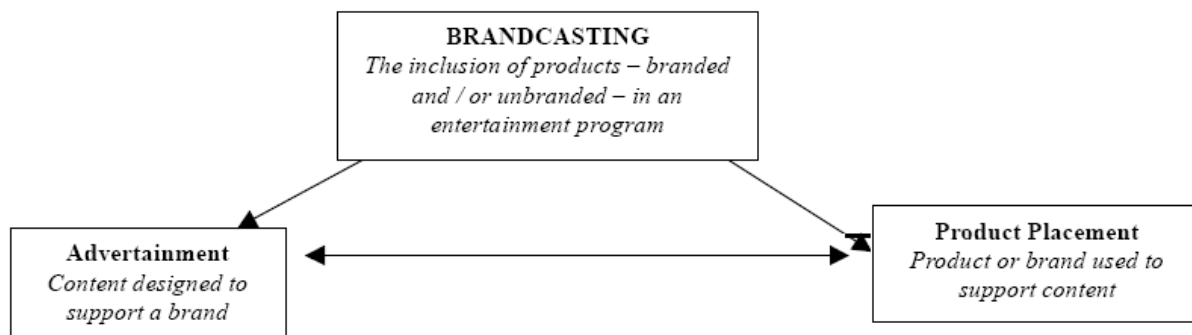
Valero (2015) in his book: "Branded Entertainment: Dealmaking Strategies & Techniques for Industry Professionals", explicitly said that branded entertainment cannot be product placement as branded entertainment seeks an emotional connection or engagement between the content and the brand that can lead to a long-term "monogamous" relationship (2015: 10), meaning exclusively between the brand and target audience without the interference of a third party, inferring brand ownership. This assimilates with two of the four dimensions of Keller's resonance, being an emotional connection or attitudinal attachment and engagement (Keller, 2001: 8). A discussion follows on brandcasting in lieu of advertainment and product placement and how it relates to branded entertainment.

#### **2.5.1.8 Brandcasting**

Scott and Craig-Lees (2006: 367) reasoned that the traditional understanding of product placement is that the programme content is developed independently of the needs of the product or brand and that advantage is taken by the brand of the existing programme content. In recent years, the authors argued, brand practitioners only started realising the strategic value of meaningful product placement. Hence, coming to the fore more prominently: advertainment (or branded entertainment, which the mentioned authors see as synonyms), is seen as programme content designed to support a brand, providing the advertiser a stronger sense of control. Thus, there would be a difference in the degree of control and ownership that the advertiser has over the entertainment creation process.



The authors then suggested the “umbrella” label: Brandcasting, explained as “the inclusion of products – branded and/ or unbranded – in an entertainment program” which could take two distinct forms: advertainment or product placement, as outlined in Figure 2.1.



**Figure 2.1: The broadcasting continuum: a basic theoretical model of broadcast processing**

Source: Scott & Craig-Lees, 2006: 367

The play on the word broadcasting is acknowledged by the authors. Brandcasting is a term that is still used very sparingly and only by some authors, mostly referring to television and/or audio-visual social media (Gillan, 2015). Branded entertainment can take on many forms, more than just broadcast media, for instance street theatre, flash mobs, books or video games (Kurnit, 2007; Grainge, 2012: 4; Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015: 4). What is recognised here is a clear distinction between the concepts of product placement and advertainment. However, it interesting to note that advertainment, according to Russell (2007: 3), includes product placement, integration and branded entertainment, as per Figure 2.2 that is discussed later in this section.

#### **2.1.5.9 Product or brand integration**

Product (or brand) integration is explained by Vogt (2012) as being similar to product placement, except that brand or product integration involves the actual integration of the brand or product into the script of the entertainment property, i.e. to write the brand or product in as part of the entertainment property’s story line. Well-cited authors on branded entertainment,

Monaco (2009: 2) and Russell (2007: 5), also described product integration as integrating the brand or product into an entertainment property's story line. This placement is paid for by the advertiser or it could be a barter agreement with the producer such as logistics facilities, for example BMW contributing 32 Mini Cooper cars to the making of a movie starring South African Oscar-winning actress, Charlize Theron: *The Italian Job* (2003), recognised among the most successful product placements in movie history (Bukspan, 2011 and Nigman, 2017). The latter is also referred to as plot placement, where media buyers accelerate the credibility and brand impact by entrenching the product or brand as a main feature in the story line of an entertainment property (Rogers, Schmitt & Vrotos, 2004). It could be argued that product or brand integration would then be very similar to plot placement, as both terms would refer to the product or brand featuring in some way as part of the actual story line of the entertainment property.

Viewer enjoyment of media vehicle versions was found to increase when brands or products were an integral part of the script, validating a sense of the individual's reality (Snoddy, 2006). A key case study of product (or brand) integration and a South African first was PEP Stores (the largest single brand clothing and homeware retailer in SA, positioned on low price) written into the script for South Africa's most watched soap opera: *Generations*. The objective was to revitalise the brand (PEP, 2008). *Generations*, as part of their story line, featured a fictitious advertising agency. This agency had to create an advertising campaign for PEP. The campaign that was created featured in the real (off TV) world, whilst the commercial was also flighted in the soap, with an actual in-store and print media campaign as support.

Research conducted by PEP revealed that the brand had become more aspirational because one of the lead (aspirational) characters had worn its clothing. PEP research also revealed that 45 percent of participants indicated that PEP offers good value for money because of its link with the soap and the recall of the new tag line at 42 percent (compared to the 26 percent recall of its previous tag line). South African newspaper, *Sowetan*, reported that the South African Broadcasting Corporation benefited financially and had such a positive response from viewers in the way the content was treated, that Mfundi Vundela, *Generations* producer, since included other brands such as Capitec Bank and Smart Gym (Tsumele: 2009). Product or brand integration clearly provided value to the PEP brand as it has shown to revitalise the brand to become more aspirational.

Results of a study conducted by Verhellen, Dens and De Pelsmacker (2016: 461) showed that the more closely a brand is connected to the plot of a film by increasing the perceived fit between the brand and the movie, the more it positively impacts on the brand attitude of the target audience. Brand-plot integration done well in film produces an assimilation effect as found by Yoon, Choi and Song (2013: 63), leading to convergence of viewers' attitudes toward the placed versus competing brands, while intrusive placement triggers the opposite effect that results in divergence of these attitudes. How brand integration is approached in a third party's entertainment property, such as a film, seems to influence the viewer's attitude towards the brand. A positive brand attitude is an unmissable building block towards brand resonance (Keller, 2001: 13, 23).

In understanding how brand integration is approached in a brand-owned entertainment property, such as advergaming (brand-created video games (Morillas & Martín, 2016: 19)) associated with television series in the instance of a study conducted by Kinard & Hartman (2013: 196), it's interesting to note that advergaming with highly integrated brand elements produce more negative attitudes than advergaming with fewer brand elements. Even in the instance of brand-owned content, it seems, brands ought to be careful how they approach their brand integration effort not to create negative attitudes. Schmidt (2017) advises that brand integration for positive brand attitude could consider the following elements: ensure a clear sense of brand, show and audience; honour the brand within the proper context; look for ways to achieve creative consensus i.e. ensure the brand's integration into the plot is organic; consider the brand's future and legacy i.e. if such an integration could potentially harm the integrity of the brand; and maintain "authenticity" to a brand's reputation.

Not all authors describe product (or brand) integration as integrating the brand featured into a story line. Biggs (2011: ii) related the term brand integration specifically to measure commercial effectiveness of advertisers creating a commercial to flight during a TV show (e.g. in an ad break), where the content of the advertisement commented or reflect on the story-line of the specific episode being flighted. She compared the results of these innovative reflective commercials to the same brand's standardised advertisement and the results of her research did not show a significant difference in the participant's attitude towards the television show, attitudes towards the product, or intent to purchase the product. The mentioned argument has been taken as the more industry-understood term, especially in context of this

study which has investigated narratives of entertainment properties for strategic brand-building practices, opposed to more tactical “innovative” advertising as explained by Biggs.

It seems that brand or product integration has the ability to influence image or credibility of the brand but literature fails to deliver on its ability to achieve brand resonance.

#### **2.5.1.10 Branded entertainment as entertainment by the brand**

Monaco (2009: 1), in describing the essence of “true” branded entertainment, mentioned that product placement is only the first “level” of influence, as more influential techniques of brand communication exist. The second “level” of branded entertainment mentioned by Monaco (2009: 2) is branded integration, a cross-promotional or “borrowed equity” opportunity, thus not actually owning any of the content. Like Vogt (2012), Monaco also explained product integration as integrating the brand into the story line of the piece of entertainment not owned or developed by the brand. This explanation is also supported by Lehu (in Wolburg, 2008: 67). The third level or highest order of influence on the consumer, as explained by Monaco (2009: 3), would be branded entertainment: a brand communication effort that complements the brand’s overall strategy. This could refer to an identity-based communication effort that would eschew mere tactical gains to maximise its ability to achieve resonance that focuses on long-term, strategic brand building.

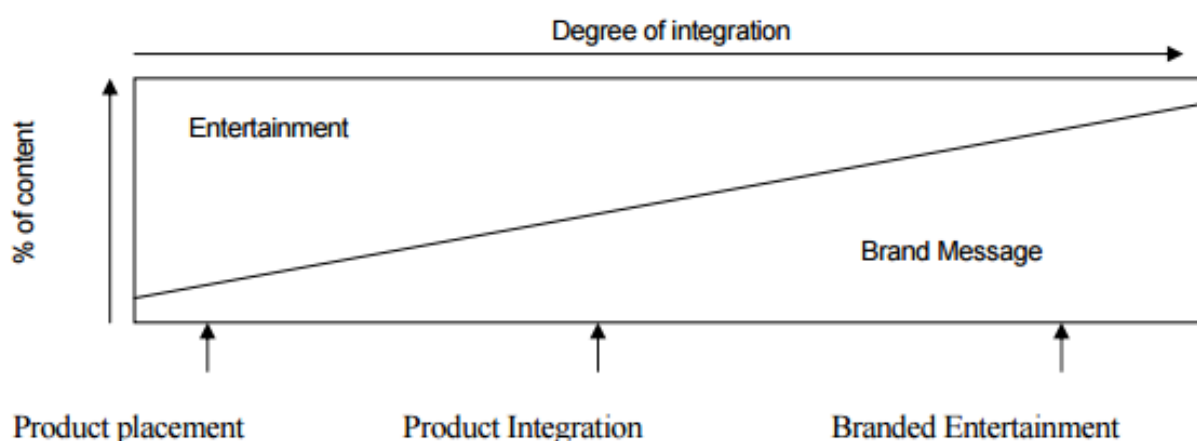
Monaco (2009: 3) continued by saying that such branded entertainment is “... created, produced and funded specifically for a brand, by a brand, for the purposes of communicating the brand strategy using the entertainment medium and owned by the brand in most cases”. Lehu in turn, remarked that “... branded entertainment should be ... an opportunity to write actual stories” (2008: 209) that integrate the brand's personality and stimulate an emotional link between the brand and the viewer (Wolburg, 2008: 67). This is evident of entertainment that is initiated by the brand and that takes ownership of the entertainment with its aim to communicate its brand identity and values via narrative in a sincere way, with the ability to at minimum create an emotional connection with its target audience.

Bhargava (2011) from Ogilvy PR agreed with Monaco and Lehu. He stated that branded entertainment in its “purest” form could only exist when the brand owns and creates the

content. He stated that product placement barely qualifies to be called branded entertainment. He also acknowledged brand integration (or brand sponsorship) as the “2<sup>nd</sup> level” of branded entertainment: positioned between product placement and true branded content creation: branded entertainment.

It could thus be inferred that the highest order of true branded entertainment, i.e. entertainment brought to a target audience by a brand, would be brand-generated branded entertainment where the brand actually takes ownership of the entertainment property and where and how it features. Zoom (2007) believed that branded entertainment allows the piece of communication to be crafted in a way that suits the brand, and integrating the brand in a relevant way. This allows the brand to take more control of the communication effort or entertainment entity, having more than just a shallow association with it.

Russell (2007: 4-6) explained branded entertainment as the type of advertainment that allows for the greatest product involvement, typically funded by the marketer or brand practitioner and co-created with entertainment producers. She continued to explain that the driving force behind content creation is the showcase of a specific product or brand. Advertainment, according to Russell, can be classified based on the degree of integration of the brand in the entertainment content as outlined in Figure 2.2 that follows.



**Figure 2.2: Advertainment typology**

Source: Russell, 2007: 5

Figure 2.2 illustrates that product placement on the one end (left) is simply where the brand or product is added to existing entertainment, with a small portion of exposure or content dedicated to the product or brand. Branded entertainment features on the other end (right) where the brand actually guides the development of the entertainment content so that the content is developed around the brand. The middle section shows product (or brand) integration: writing the brand or product in as part of a non-brand owned entertainment property's story line, with more of a balance in the content percentage between the entertainment and the brand message.

Like Monaco (2009: 2) and Russell (2007: 5), Caraccioli-Davis (2005: 10-11) also positioned product (or brand) integration in-between product placement and branded entertainment in terms of brand ownership, as “participation in a program's story, as a device to enhance plot or character interactions or to provide a sense of realism” – the last statement supporting Snoddy (2006). According to Cloonan (2011), branded entertainment and advertainment are synonyms that include product placement and brand integration. He further stated that branded entertainment's biggest reward still remains product placement in programmes, sponsorships, events and gaming. He did, however, state that branded entertainment mainly refers to the creation of entertainment that fits with the brand essence, reflecting its personality and by a brand creating and taking ownership of the entertainment property (for example a webisode), allows fit with the brand's characteristics.

Evidently, it seems that original entertaining content that is generated by a brand where the brand takes ownership of the entertainment property and where and how it is communicated, has the best ability to employ identity-based narrative. This identity-based narrative can, among other brand dimensions, communicate brand values and therefore achieve resonance dimensions that include establishing an emotional connection or attitudinal attachment and brand engagement. Furthermore, according to an exploratory study by Aguilera-Moyano, Baños-González and Ramírez-Perdiguero (2015: 533), based on in-depth interviews applied to a group of experts on the creation and distribution of branded entertainment in Spain, all participants agreed that communication in the brand's owned and earned media amplifies the effect, scope and effectiveness of branded entertainment.

### **2.5.1.11 A summative discussion on authentic, resonant branded entertainment**

There is inconsistency regarding the meaning of branded entertainment. From the discussion it is clear that, strictly speaking, branded entertainment is not sponsorship or product placement or product integration or infomercials. Although the term advertainment may include branded entertainment, clearly branded entertainment rightfully claims the space of the highest degree of brand integration in an entertainment property initiated and owned by the brand. Such advertainment or branded entertainment includes working in collaboration with the entertainment content producer and eschews from an overt persuasion or selling mentality as the editorial integrity of the entertainment property takes preference. The target audience must also want to engage with the brand in some way as more time is spent with the brand due to valuable content received.

Certain AFP, when boasting true editorial integrity as mentioned, could be dubbed as branded entertainment initiatives based on criteria such as sincerity and truly wanting to entertain the viewer in context of the brand identity. The reason for this would be to once again underline the brand identity argument, i.e. branded entertainment initiating and taking ownership of the entertainment property. Aaker (2002: 7-8) said that a brand is strategically managed by taking control, by setting forth what the brand should stand for in the eyes of the consumer and communicating that identity consistently, effectively and efficiently. He reiterated this by stating that brand leadership's central principle is driving a brand through its brand identity. The reason why brands would want to do this is explained by Moerdyk (2007: 32) who said that these kind of promotional initiatives provide a platform for companies to create a form of advertising that has intrinsic value where target audiences can choose to be exposed to the communication, "... making it infinitely more effective."

Ultimately, branded entertainment is deemed by more progressive brand communication decision makers to involve a brand's self-created entertainment content that communicates the brand's identity and values (Monaco, 2009; Gilbar, 2010; Czarmecki, 2012; Pytlik, 2014; Musson, 2014; Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015). Branded entertainment in this way can convey brand authenticity, openness, and sincerity that create a climate of trust, which makes it more likely that consumers will purchase the brand's products (Mathieu, 2012) or at least create a sense of emotional connection or attitudinal attachment and/or brand engagement. These seem to be some of the distinct communication objectives that a brand should achieve by employing authentic narrative in branded entertainment. Finally, when sound boarding brand-

initiated and owned entertainment against the three authenticity characteristics identified in the introduction of this section, it allows a **sincere** expression of **brand identity** and values by embodying **emotional meaning** in order to make an emotional connection and possibly evoke engagement for resonance.

An exploration of the understanding of branded entertainment would not be complete if not addressing the dynamics between the terms branded entertainment and branded content. Brand communication decision makers and academics alike fail to draw a distinctive difference between branded entertainment and branded content. This concern is explored in Section 2.5.2 that follows. Principle follows practice, and again one can compare this problem to an industry that for argument's sake does not understand or agree on the fundamental principles of advertising or public relations, with diluted or ineffective communication efforts as result.

### **2.5.2 The branded entertainment vs. branded content debate and introducing the concept of narrative**

Branded entertainment is reasoned in this section to be different from branded content as it employs narrative to impress more so than other forms of content aimed to only inform or educate a target audience, for instance. This is important as the approach and objectives differ among different types of content. The right focus and application could mean the difference between achieving a set of objectives or not. Employing an authentic narrative is reasoned to be a requisite for branded entertainment to be deemed as branded entertainment and not branded content, as reasoned in this section. The discussion is in the following order: an introduction to the debate, an introduction to the concept of narrative to contextualise the debate, a take of the brand communication industry on the debate followed by that of academia, and lastly some key insights and a conclusion.

#### **2.5.2.1 Introduction**

Caswell (2011) and Duopoly (2013: 5) reasoned that branded entertainment starts with the story first as target audiences favour entertainment in the form of storytelling (as part of human nature) or sensory stimulation to traditional advertising or promotional initiatives. People have always liked stories, according to De Chanville, Principal of ATKerney Paris (2012), and storytelling is an essential component of brand marketing. Weinberger and Shefi (2006: 415)



cited Bruner who argued that people are natural born story tellers with the propensity to turn each event into a story.

To again emphasise how integral a story is to branded entertainment, Wiese (2011) said that branded entertainment simply boils down to producing a story that resonates with consumers and that creates an emotional connection to the brand. He further said that one should work with premium talent and production partners that will reach the desired audience. Jonathan Mildenhall, Vice President of Global Advertising Strategy and Creative Excellence at the Coca-Cola Company, remarked that The Coca-Cola company experiences extraordinary value investing in stories that spread, generating value for the brand and their consumers, and that the stories they tell aim to provoke conversations that enables them to share in a “disproportionate share of popular culture” (Mildenhall cited by Pulizzi, 2012). Mildenhall also remarked on the idea of “dynamic storytelling”, saying that the most inspiring and creative work Coke has done by investing in dynamic storytelling is: “... the development of incremental elements of brand ideas that get dispersed systematically across multiple channels of conversation for purposes of creating a unified and coordinated brand experience,” (Long, 2012). The story should thus have the propensity to be used in an integrated campaign to evoke discourse.

### **2.5.2.2 Brief introduction of the concept of narrative**

“Content without story is just noise”, according to Wiese (2013). He stressed that the content used in branded entertainment must use narrative structure which includes character development and offers an experience that goes beyond advertising. Telling a story through narrative is imperative to engage a target audience (Dunaway quoting Snyder, 2013). This study focused on narrative and not story per se as there are two differences between narrative and a story. Narrative is “to connote the threading together of a set of events or experiences in a temporal sequence in order to make sense of them” (Lai, 2010: 72 citing Dean, 1998).

The process in which stories are made refers to the cognitive structure of a story or the result of the process (stories, tales or histories) (citing Polkinghorne, 1998). Narrative is a representation or manifestation of a specific story, rather than the story itself, i.e. more than just the story line; the way the story gets told (Mills, 2015). A story is a structured narrative and if not connected to a broader narrative is mere entertainment (Jennings, 2016). Narrative is a requisite to branded entertainment (Hitch & Worple, 2010; Bhargawa, 2011; Czarmeci, 2012; Wiese, 2013; Snyder, 2013; Weiss, 2014). The value of narrative is important in context

of Generation Y (Brenner, 2015), as argued in Section 2.2.2.2, who favour entertainment narrative that comes from brands deemed to be authentic, and inadvertently present authentic narrative in a branded entertainment initiative. Wiese (2013) said: “Branded content and entertainment should be simple: produce a content property inspired by a brand, and delight an audience with its entertainment value or usefulness”.

### **2.5.2.3 Background**

The debate between the present day interpretations of branded content and branded entertainment serves as a contextual catalyst with the purpose of enriching knowledge on what seems to be an emerging discrepancy in industry. In recent years, the terms branded content and branded entertainment have been used interchangeably and are still being used interchangeably, according to Joe Pulizzi, Founder at the United States of America based Content Marketing Institute (2016). However, there is mostly a divide in opinion to what branded content and branded entertainment entail. Some industry professionals and academics are of the opinion that branded content should be content that informs, educates, entertains and inspires (Anastas, 2015); content that is non-traditional advertising content produced directly by the brand and is delivered via paid, owned or earned channels (Mok, 2016). In contrast, branded entertainment is integrated in an existing entertainment property that can include mostly a more “sophisticated” form of product placement, brand or product integration into a third party’s entertainment or even sponsorship. Other industry opinion leaders and academics have argued the opposite.

The identity and orientation challenges in contemporary brand-building practice impact directly on the strategic efficacy of branded entertainment, or branded content for that matter, to employ the correct promotional tool for the appropriate purpose. In addition, it would certainly be beneficial for industry to “speak the same language” when attributing the correct naming convention to an industry-appropriate definition. The various takes from industry are briefly discussed next, followed by academic opinion.

### **2.5.2.4 Industry’s take on branded content vs. branded entertainment**

Different brand communication decision makers attach different meanings to branded content. Some deem it to be integrating advertising into other forms of content but refraining from an advertising mentality, meaning designed for “selling” (Lang cited by Meyers, 2014). Some say

it does not include paid advertising, sponsorship or product placement and is designed to provide consumer value such as entertainment or education with the aim of building brand consideration and affinity (Forrester Research cited by Duopoly, 2013). Others consider branded content as long-form advertising that includes a “vignette or some kind of narrative” (Rose, 2016).

Jim Kiriakakis (2014), Head of Television at Buck Productions, a prominent multi-award winning content creation house based in Canada and the USA, distinguishes branded entertainment from branded content, stating that the first-mentioned is “...inspired by a brand’s philosophy and culture, but created to be authentic, true content a network would commission”. This rings quite familiar to the notion of branded entertainment engaging an identity-based authentic narrative-led entertainment effort instead of being grouped with a larger branded content definition (Jones, 2015). There is evidently a vague understanding of branded entertainment in context of branded content.

Cynthia B. Meyers from the Carsey-Wolf Centre referred to branded entertainment as “... the strategies for integrating advertising into other forms of content are often referred to as “content marketing” and “branded content” - that is, employing “content” to be associated with a brand” (Meyers, 2014). The Canadian Media Production Association (2013) includes product placement and product placement and integration as forms of branded content. Branded entertainment is deemed as “... a particular offshoot of content marketing, ... the popular term for the increasing practice of brands creating entertaining content to capture and maintain consumer attention for prolonged periods of time” in an article in *The Guardian* by Jonny Rose, Head of Content at IDEO, one of the world’s leading content media companies (based in London and New York). He mentioned a host of examples. All of them include references to brands owning their own content.

The focus shifts to the Cannes Lions definition for guidance as it is considered the largest gathering of worldwide advertising professionals, designers, digital innovators and marketers (Chamikutty, 2010). The Cannes Lions has never indicated the exact difference between branded content and entertainment and has used the terms interchangeably when the Branded Content and Entertainment category was launched in 2012. The category descriptor

merely was that it can be content produced by the brand or naturally integrated into the entertainment of a third party (Cannes, 2012).

The Cannes Entertainment Lions was introduced in 2016, replacing the Branded Content and Entertainment Lions, because the feeling was that too many advertisements were impersonating branded content with a notion of “brand-first” instead of an “entertainment first” approach, meaning that the focus should be on entertainment rather than message-based communication (Matthews, 2016). The Cannes Entertainment Lions now only focuses on different forms of entertainment, calling it content throughout, in some cases created by the brand and in other cases integrated within a third party’s content across different mediums in different categories, for instance cinema, television, live broadcast and audio, among others, provided that it is content that entertains (Cannes, 2017). It thus seems that the Cannes Lions Entertainment only focuses on content that entertains and has specifically separated brand created and brand integrated content in order to judge entries accordingly.

The Branded Content Marketing Association (BCMA) commissioned the following definition from Oxford Brookes University and Ipsos MORI as part of the Defining Branded Content for the Digital Age’ research project: “Branded content is any content that can be associated with a brand in the eye of the beholder” (Contagious, 2014), as there is a blurring in the lines between branded content and branded entertainment. Some sources would refer to the same campaign – an original brand-created communication piece – as branded entertainment and some as branded content. For instance, Big Fuel, a respected New York-based social media agency’s founder and Creative Head, AviSavar, who was president for the inaugural Cannes jury in 2012, referred to Chipotle’s multi-award winning Going Back to the Start campaign as branded content (Contagious, 2014). Scott Schneider, Managing Partner at Agency ADHD Advertising, also a respected Chicago-based social media agency, referred to the same campaign as branded entertainment (Schneider, 2015).

Shying away from calling it either branded content or branded entertainment, the term “brand storytelling” is emerging by means of industry opinion leaders creating meaning around authentic narratives and in this way connecting with their target audience where the brand stands in support of the narrative (Anderson, 2015; Handley, 2014; Hanlon, 2016). Jonny Rose, Head of Content at IDEO referred to earlier, concurs with this. He deems branded

entertainment as “... a particular offshoot of content marketing; the popular term for the increasing practice of brands creating entertaining content to capture and maintain consumer attention for prolonged periods of time” (Rose, 2013).

It could be argued that brand storytelling stands integral to the concept of entertaining, authentic narrative created for the brand by the brand to distinguish branded entertainment from branded content. This notion is supported by Ryan (2016) who added that such content provides a brand with the ability to connect with a target audience in a unique and engaging way. Ryan cited Ogilvy stating that the benefit of branded entertainment in this way provides emotional engagement or brand engagement. These two benefits align with two of the four dimensions of brand resonance, being an emotional connection or attitudinal attachment and target audience engagement. Understanding the disparity in definition within industry, i.e. between brand communication decision makers, the focus shifts to the debate documented in academic literature.

#### **2.5.2.5 Academics' take on branded content vs. branded entertainment**

“Engaging Consumers through Branded Entertainment and Convergent Media” is the title of probably one of the most comprehensive academic studies on branded entertainment. This 2015 first-edition 12 chapter book was written by leading academic authors in the field of branded content and entertainment, compiled and co-written by Martí-Parreño, Mafé and Scribner. The result of a comprehensive literature review they conducted suggests that most authors use branded entertainment and branded content as synonyms.

Academics usually refer to branded entertainment as content that is developed around the brand and funded by the marketer, and industry refers to the latter as branded content, as per Martí-Parreño *et al.* (2015: 2). However, Martí-Parreño *et al.* are of the opinion that branded content can be applied to a broader brand strategy framework and is “not necessarily linked to entertainment”, while branded entertainment can be restricted to brand marketing communications linked to entertainment content specifically. It seems that academics lean more towards the definition of branded entertainment as an effort where the content is developed around the brand and funded by the marketer.

### **2.5.2.6 Key insights and conclusion**

The contention between the terms branded entertainment and branded content is duly noted. It seems that the main intent by industry experts and academics alike is to deliver content that entertains and eschews traditional advertising techniques. A feasible departure point is Martí-Parreño *et al.*'s (2015) and Rose's (2015) observation that entertainment by definition is a particular type of branded content and this said, as per De Aguilera-Moyano *et al.* (2015: 533), that entertainment delivered in a brand's own or earned media space can amplify the effect or connection with the target audience. It seems that an entertainment-led "storytelling" approach, generated by the brand with the brand taking propriety "ownership" of the entertainment piece or media platform, evokes the largest difference in opinion. Taking all of the mentioned into consideration, it can be reasoned that branded entertainment is a form of branded content with the main aim to entertain by means of brand identity-based, emotionally engaging narrative.

### **2.5.3 Summative discussion on branded entertainment most conducive to brand resonance**

The growth of branded entertainment is due to the need for brand communication to break through commercial clutter in a fast-evolving media landscape especially driven by digital media that mostly allows target audiences to engage with brands on their terms. It seems that advertising is becoming increasingly more unpopular; especially among a Millennial generation that prefers brand-orientated entertainment that adds value opposed to traditional advertising that may communicate an underlying sales message. In this way, brands can break through media clutter to arrest the attention of a target audience and engage with them in a meaningful way, being branded entertainment's core value, with the potential to achieve brand resonance by employing authentic narrative.

Examples provided of noticeable branded entertainment efforts that industry deemed as very successful in achieving marketing and communication objectives could identify the following dimensions of resonance as potential of branded entertainment employing authentic narrative: emotional connection or attitudinal attachment and target audience-brand engagement. The other two dimensions of resonance, being community and loyalty, were mentioned by Keller and Robert Candelino, Unilever's Marketing Director: Personal Wash, in reflecting on Dove's *Real Beauty Sketches* as intended campaign objectives. This means that brand resonance,

taking the four dimensions into account, has the potential to be achieved when employing authentic narrative.

Authentic narrative is reasoned by the study of literature to give form to branded entertainment that is original, communicates the brand's identity and aligns with the target audience's value system in a meaningful way, with the potential to achieve brand resonance, therefore its strategic value. Brand resonance is of strategic value to a brand as it builds customer-based brand equity (Keller, 2001: 7). Branded entertainment embodies the potential to achieve brand resonance. Strategically significant branded entertainment focuses on achieving brand resonance by employing authentic narrative.

There is a lack of a cohesive understanding of the branded entertainment definition. This is problematic as definition guides practice. Branded entertainment is a relatively new communication effort in contemporary industry practice and it seems that in the majority of instances category-defining, stand-out content is not being delivered. Industry acknowledges that branded entertainment is experiencing orientation problems due to disparity regarding the meaning of branded entertainment. There are increasingly more brand communication decision makers that favour content providing entertainment that adds value regarding brand-orientated advertising instead of message-orientated content. This is because the latter was identified as a practice that is still too familiar for brand practitioners, especially among client-side marketers. The natural effect of this is overly sales-orientated content opposed to a brand-orientated content that surpasses an opportunity for the brand to deliver content that is an expression of identity.

Findings in literature also suggested that advertising agency-side creatives and strategists unfamiliar with creating entertainment, opposed to the advertising that they are familiar with, may lead to deliverance of undesirable or poor quality content. This lack of understanding by brand communication decision makers undermines the strategic potential of branded entertainment, being brand resonance. Two of the four dimensions of brand resonance that were overwhelmingly repeated in literature were authentic narrative in branded entertainment's ability to establish an emotional connection or attitudinal attachment with its intended target audience.

Branded entertainment that is initiated and perceivably owned by the brand, and that delivers authentic narrative, seems to trump other branded entertainment categorisations; a sophisticated form of sponsorship; brand or product placement; or integration in the plot of an existing entertainment property, for instance.

For an industry to have cohesive understanding of the definition of branded entertainment, the exchangeable use of branded entertainment and branded content may seem unimportant. However, when a discipline is firmly establishing itself it could be condemned by academics and practitioners that exercise focused practice of the branded entertainment discipline and therefore, the use of the word “branded content” when “branded entertainment” is meant, becomes more significant. Branded entertainment is content that entertains a target audience by employing authentic narrative. This is opposed to branded content that could include branded entertainment but also includes other forms of content, for example content that educates and informs. The ultimate finding in the literature study for this section is that branded entertainment most conducive to brand resonance is brand-initiated and owned entertaining content that employs a brand-orientated authentic narrative to add value to the lives of its intended target audience in the form of entertainment, information or education. Section 2.6 that follows describes the synthesis of the literature findings used to determine a working definition for branded entertainment. This working definition served as the foundation for a conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) that informed the design of the primary research phase of this study.

## **2.6 CONCEPTUALISING A PROPOSED WORKING DEFINITION FOR BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT**

Branded entertainment is a relatively new discipline in contemporary brand communication practice and many brand practitioners are still trying to familiarise themselves with the discipline (Emhoff, 2016 and Pereira, 2016). A uniform definition of branded entertainment does not exist, even described as being “vague at best” (Arhio & Raunio, 2015), and various attempts to define branded entertainment have been widely documented in literature (Dinkel, 2010, Valero, 2014: xiv, and De Aguilera-Moyano *et al.*, 2015: 533). There is a disparity regarding the meaning of branded entertainment which leads to incoherent and often poor practice. General concern in the brand communication industry exists around branded entertainment as a relatively new communication effort in contemporary industry practice not delivering in the majority of instances category-defining, stand-out content that meaningfully



connects with a target audience (iMedia, 2012; Thielman, 2014; Weiss, 2014; Morrison, 2015; Maconick, 2016). Meaningful connection with a target audience is inherent to the brand resonance concept (Keller, 2001: 13, 20 & 25).

Literature suggests that branded entertainment is deemed to be an alternative or unconventional way to make brand contact (Woodrooffe, 2014; Duopoly, 2014: 13; Graser, 2015; Grinta, 2016), as it steps out of the realm of traditional promotional initiatives (Thomas, 2009: 2-3 and Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015: xiv). The core value of branded entertainment is to break through commercial clutter to arrest attention (Meyers, 2014 and Ryan, 2016) – something that alternative brand contact enables – and more so, to deliver content that has the ability to resonate with its intended target audiences (Keller, 2009a: 145 and Hudson, 2010). Branded entertainment is not content that is integrated in another's entertainment property but rather self-created or brand-generated entertainment content that communicates the brand's identity (Monaco, 2009; Gilbar, 2010; Czarmecki, 2012; Pytlik, 2014; Musson, 2014; Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015).

Branded entertainment is thus initiated by the brand with the contact point perceivably owned by the brand, providing the brand with the ability to employ brand- or identity-based content that adds value to the lives of its target audiences by means of entertaining narrative (Monaco, 2009; Gilbar, 2010; Czarmecki, 2012; Pytlik, 2014; Musson, 2014; Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015). It is argued in the literature that narrative is a requisite to branded entertainment (Hitch & Worple, 2010; Bhargawa, 2011; Okupniak, 2012; Wiese, 2013; Snyder, 2013; Weiss, 2014).

Authentic narrative is proposed as the central point of gravitas to deliver strategically significant branded entertainment, meaning to achieve brand resonance. Although narrative in branded entertainment can impress tactically, authentic narrative enables a strong emotional connection with a target audience and could therefore achieve brand resonance to strategically build a brand (Wolburg, 2008; Jaggi, 2009: 8; Czarmecki, 2012; Rose, 2013; Duopoly, 2014: 4; Musson, 2014: 63; Valero, 2014: 9; Brenner, 2015). Branded entertainment employing authentic narrative that resonates has the ability to be more enduring (Wiese, 2013) hence the potential for strategic brand communication due to its long-term propensities. Furthermore, it is well documented in literature that branded entertainment can evoke engagement from its target audience (Ogilvy, 2009; Dahlén *et al.*, 2010: 504; Siddiqi, 2013;

Duopoly, 2014: 7; Valero, 2014: 176). More than establishing an emotional connection or evoking engagement, the other dimensions of brand resonance, community and loyalty (Keller, 2001: 8), should be possible to achieve as indicated by Keller (2009a) and Candelino (2011).

Authentic narrative aims to entertain more so than to overtly “sell” to a target audience (in a traditional way) and by that expresses a sense of sincerity in its attempt to entertain and add value for the target audience (Swart, 2007; Mescall, 2013; Pytlik, 2014; Anderson, 2015; Kirby, 2015; Humlan, 2015). Being sincere can also be attributed to authentic narrative (Roberts, 2012 and Weiss, 2014), along with creating original work (George, 2013; Weiss, 2014; Thielman, 2014; Maconick, 2016) that communicates the brand identity (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998: 178; Beverland *et al.*, 2008; Carroll & Wheaton, 2009: 1; Gilbar, 2010; Wiese, 2013) and value system (Clift, 2011; Mescall, 2013; Tuomi, 2010 cited by De Aguilera-Moyano *et al.*, 2015: 523; ReedSmith, 2010: 2-3; Tampon, 2013; Clerck, 2014).

Taking the above into consideration, a proposed working definition was delivered by the literature study: **Branded entertainment is an unconventional brand-initiated and owned contact point with the potential to achieve brand resonance through authentic narrative.**

This working definition guided the conceptual framework for the study (Figure 1.1) that was explained in Section 1.8. Note that this definition works in tandem with the findings presented in Chapter 3. The definition therefore stands integral to the concepts of authenticity, narrative and resonance explored in Chapter 3 that also delivers the set of authentic narrative characteristics for branded entertainment conceptualised in Chapter 3. The primary research that the researcher conducted, presented in Chapters 4 and 5, further aimed to explore this definition. The definition emphasises the suggestion that the entertainment must have been initiated by the brand, i.e. the brand must have conceptualised and created the narrative and must take an all-encompassing ownership of the entertainment.

## 2.7 CONCLUSION

Evidence surfaced to imply resonance is more reachable by branded entertainment that is initiated and owned by the brand opposed to interpretations of placement, integration or sponsorship. Some of the most forward thinking industry practitioners and academics in the past few years (Valero, 2014; De Aguilera-Moyano *et al.*, 2015: 533; Selvey, 2015; Wiese, 2015; Ryan, 2016; Canter, 2016: 9) argued the latter and encouraged a branded entertainment definition along those lines.

This research study aimed to create a proposed working definition for branded entertainment that would inherently create the premise for the conceptual framework to guide the central research proposition: authentic narrative in branded entertainment has potential to achieve brand resonance. The definition directly addresses the problem of the lack of a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment among brand communication decision makers that withholds branded entertainment, a communication effort that is aiming to establish itself in contemporary brand communication practice, from achieving brand resonance i.e. its strategic potential. The problem identified became very evident in the study of literature, as presented in Chapter 2.

The ultimate aim of the study was to propose a branded entertainment definition that gives meaning to the communication effort in context of its strategic potential. Consequently a set of narrative characteristics, explored in Chapter 3, stands integral to the definition and is proposed for the communication effort to be regarded as authentic so to suggest industry application that maximises the potential for brand resonance.

The significance of the problem lies in that Generation Y or Millennials respond to brand communication that they can make a genuine emotional connection with and expect of brands to provide entertaining content in their brand communication campaigns (Calvert, 2010 and Brenner, 2015). They furthermore engage with brands on their own terms, something that branded entertainment enables and encourages (Pardee, 2010 and Van den Berg & Behrer, 2011). Not achieving the full potential to connect with Millennials becomes a problem in itself as they are one of the largest generations in history moving into their prime spending years (Goldman Sachs Global, 2016). Being digital natives, i.e. raised in a digital, media-saturated world (Prensky quoted in Meyer, 2016), the expectation is that branded entertainment will not

only deliver but will maximise the potential that the digital realm offers in terms of entertainment and achieving resonance. Chapter 3 conceptualises the authentic narrative construct in branded entertainment proposed to maximise branded entertainment's potential for resonance, i.e. its strategic value.

In conclusion, it seems that a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment entrenches its core value: to break through clutter and connect with audiences by means of authentic narrative. It also seems that authentic narrative has the potential for branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance. Furthermore, it seems that resonance is the strategic value that authentic narrative has the potential of achieving.

# CHAPTER 3

## AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE TO ACHIEVE BRAND RESONANCE

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this chapter is to present the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment. This is done in context of the literature study proposed working definition for branded entertainment delivered in Chapter 2: Branded entertainment is an unconventional brand-initiated and owned contact point with the potential to achieve brand resonance through authentic narrative.

Chapter 3 defines the concepts of authenticity, narrative and resonance, explored by the researcher – with the aim to deliver an authentic narrative construct for branded entertainment with the greatest potential for brand resonance. This construct would be integral to a set of six proposed narrative characteristics identified in this chapter, regarded as authentic, hence harbouring the potential to achieve brand resonance. The chapter furthermore provides an understanding of how these characteristics have the ability to achieve resonance in its four dimensions as per Kevin Lane Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Pyramid.

A conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) was delivered as a result of the output presented in this chapter that guides the central research proposition: authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve brand resonance. The framework, that is also a translation of the working definition, illustrates the following: if all of the six identified narrative characteristics are present in a branded entertainment communication effort, the potential exists for brand resonance in its four dimensions – given that the narrative is experienced by

a target audience as authentic. The framework also led the research strategy, as outlined in Chapter 4.

Section 2 that follows, introduces a seminal thinker on authenticity, Martin Heidegger, and familiarises one with the concept in context of branded entertainment. Section 2 also presents the leading authors on narrative that are most appropriate to brand communication practice: Chatman, Fisher and Yale, and contextualises their theories and applies their most relevant theoretical dimensions to the proposed branded entertainment definition or construct. Lastly, Section 2 suggests a set of six authentic narrative characteristics by identifying emerging patterns and overlaying authenticity and narrative theory in context of branded entertainment practice that stands integral to the working definition for branded entertainment suggested in Chapter 2.

Section 3 identifies Kevin Lane Keller as the seminal author on brand resonance and explores the various building blocks of his Brand Resonance Pyramid including the four dimensions of brand resonance, namely engagement, community, attachment and loyalty (2001: 8). The six suggested authentic narrative characteristics are then populated against their potential to achieve brand resonance in order to suggest authentic narrative's strategic ability to achieve brand resonance. This section is completed by a reference to the conceptual framework for the study: Conceptual Framework to Guide the Central Research Proposition (Figure 1.1) that was presented and discussed in Section 1.8. The chapter concludes in Section 4 with a reflection on the findings.

### **3.2 TOWARDS AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE IN BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT**

The authentic narrative construct with the potential to achieve brand resonance is conceptualised in this section. An extensive study of the literature delivered a set of six narrative characteristics. These characteristics were conceptualised by firstly identifying a repetition of characteristics of authenticity and narrative that relate to the discipline of branded entertainment in context of the working definition presented in Chapter 2. Secondly, these characteristics conceptualised by either finding commonalities or overlaying similar authenticity and narrative characteristics to present the suggested set of authentic narrative characteristics with the potential to achieve brand resonance. Thus, the researcher drew commonalities where authenticity was said to complement narrative and vice versa to form

authentic narrative in context of branded entertainment. These characteristics are then suggested to serve as requisites to achieve authenticity in the branded entertainment communication attempt to achieve brand resonance.

The identity and moral arguments of authenticity (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998: 178; Beverland *et al.*, 2008; Carroll & Wheaton, 2009: 1; Marra citing Grimmet and Neufield, 1994: 208, supported by Boyle, 2003: 17-21) and Chatman's narrative structure, Fisher's narrative paradigm and Yale's Narrative Believability Scale, all suggested to be the most applicable frameworks on narrative to the brand communication discipline, contributed to the "authentic narrative" construct. This chapter ultimately suggests that authentic narrative gives form to branded entertainment that is original, communicates the brand's identity and aligns with the target audience's value system in a meaningful way.

Section 3.2.1 explores the authenticity concept, followed by the narrative concept in Section 3.2.2, and finally in Section 3.2.3 a set of six authentic narrative characteristics most conducive to resonance in branded entertainment is conceptualised.

### **3.2.1 The authenticity concept**

This is a basic introduction to authenticity and touches on three areas of importance: the basic concept behind authenticity; the inherent need that authenticity can fulfil in contemporary brand communication practice; and how authenticity can benefit brands in brand communication and in particular branded entertainment. Thereafter, two key arguments to authenticity are identified and discussed: an identity argument and a moral argument. These arguments stand integral to authentic narrative in branded entertainment. This is then followed by an introduction of the narrative concept that follows in Section 3.2.2.

#### **3.2.1.1 The basic concept of authenticity**

Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (2016) provides a succinct and highly explorative study on the concept of authenticity. Martin Heidegger, a German philosopher and a seminal thinker in philosophical hermeneutics, identified by Stanford as probably the most seminal thinker on the most familiar conception of "authenticity", says authenticity is a neologism of *eigen*, meaning "own" or "proper" and *Eigentlichkeit* meaning "really" or "truly". Stanford suggests

authenticity to be more literally translated as “ownedness”, or “being owned”, or even “being one's own”; implying the idea of owning up to and owning what one is and does. Authenticity, at its most basic level means being genuine; not a replica, copy or imitation (Robinson, 2014: 1). In application to brand communication, Crew and Sims (1991: 163) said that authenticity is about the authority of the person who created an object as seen through the eyes of its audience. The subsequent application to the branded entertainment suggested construct would then mean that the brand has to initiate and take ownership of genuinely original entertainment and by “being one's own” communicate its brand identity in the entertainment, meaning that branded entertainment should be a brand identity-based communication effort.

### **3.2.1.2 *The need for authenticity***

Heidegger called on the need for individuals to “reclaim themselves” meaning that they could stand the risk of “losing themselves” to the conformity of society and lose their uniqueness; this will progressively make them inauthentic (Heidegger cited by Sherman, 2009: 4). One can compare this notion with the discipline of branded entertainment allowing brands to “reclaim” their identities in a cluttered media landscape by engaging a brand identity-based narrative that is sought after by target audiences, especially Millennials that value authenticity and narrative in the form of entertainment in brand communication. Fields (2009) alluded to the underlying fact that authenticity in brand communication is the key when aiming to earn the respect of Millennials as they disfavour brands that do not seem genuine in their brand communication. The communication impact that can be achieved by means of employing alternative brand contact or novel brand contact could entrench this reclaiming of self-identity and also thereby clearly differentiate them from other brands and even conventional communication practices like traditional advertising, for instance.

Heidegger further suggested that ontological anxiety, i.e. the state in which a being is aware of its possible nonbeing (a brand being seen as insignificant one could argue), would provide the courage to move out of a space of inauthenticity and can get a “grip” on their own beings (Heidegger cited by University of Minneapolis, 2006: 226), i.e. brands set to lose their differentiation to be courageous enough to approach branded entertainment as a communication discipline with a brand identity-based orientated mindset employing authentic narrative. Continuing from the brand identity orientation for branded entertainment, Crew & Sims, 1991: 163) stated that authenticity could even be seen as a “social contract” between the object (in this study the branded entertainment property) and the audience: a “socially



agreed-upon reality” that only exists for as long as the audience has confidence in the content creator. It could be argued that brands that create branded entertainment by employing an authentic narrative based on the expectation from a traditional advertising fatigued market may very well enjoy the attention and confidence of their target audience.

### **3.2.1.3 How authenticity can benefit brands**

Brand authenticity that reflects honesty and integrity has the potential to establish trust and credibility and can therefore build loyalty (Marsden, 2015 and Rabe, 2016). Brand loyalty is a dimension of resonance (Keller, 2001: 8). Wall (2016) reasoned that authenticity in a brand’s communication narrative can achieve brand trust. He also reasoned that brand trust is pivotal to achieve brand equity. To achieve customer-based brand equity, Keller (2001: 13) said that consumers may form judgements on the credibility aspect of the brand and if they feel that the brand comes across as trustworthy it could contribute to achieving resonance and therefore build brand equity. It could therefore be said that authenticity in the narrative of branded entertainment may influence target audience judgements and feelings of trust and credibility and therefore the potential for brand resonance seems greater with even the achievement of brand loyalty presenting itself as a probable achievement. Ultimately, authenticity can give brands credibility, establish trust and has ability to install a sense of loyalty as outcome.

### **3.2.1.4 An identity argument and a moral argument to authenticity**

Descartes referred to the idea of authenticity as following a moral inner voice and according to this voice individuals ought to think and act responsibly (Marra, 2009). Rousseau supported Descartes by adding that authenticity is the voice of nature within us. Before Descartes and Rousseau, identity was seen as an individual’s level of morality depicted or developed through one’s status in society (i.e. sources external to the body) (Marra, 2009). In keeping with one’s true identity, Herder took Descartes’ and Rousseau’s view and extrapolated that creativity, authenticity and originality are measures of existence (Marra, 2009), as one’s identity, according to Herder, is based on experiences and how one would interpret those experiences. Thus, this inner voice would be sculpted through the human experience. Grimmet combined the ideas of the three mentioned philosophers and stated that authenticity is “to draw on a ‘body’ of knowledge and to speak and act from those moral spaces with a confidence that is rooted in a conscious, collective understanding” (Marra citing Grimmet & Neufield, 1994: 208). This could be adapted to authentic narrative in branded entertainment, being in a creative

space, to self-produce original content, speaking one's own, with the intent to provide utility through sincerity, and simultaneously bearing relevance to the target audience's value system in order to maximise its potential for resonance.

Kernis and Goldman (2006: 294) cited Rogers (1961) and Maslow (1968), relating authenticity to self-actualisation, alluding to creativity as a concept, according to Cloninger (1993): that creativity in its approach to "living" rather than falling slave to old and restrictive behaviours i.e. to reinvent oneself. This refers to the willingness of adapting to one's environment and changing times with respect to one's essence. This stands in direct support of Heidegger and Kierkegaard's notion that one must have a keen awareness of one's own identity and of one's relationships with others and have the ability to change with circumstances by reinventing oneself as the world and relationships change in order to create a sense of "vibrancy" (Solomon & Flores, 2001). This vibrancy could be argued to mimic resonance. This infers that brands that re-invent themselves by embarking on a road of entertainment instead of applying traditional advertising may stand a greater chance to achieve resonance because target audiences would be more open to their attempt and inherently find it authentic if their intent speaks of a so-called moral inner voice.

The concepts of identity and morality seem to repeatedly surface in the teachings on authenticity by Descartes, Rousseau, Herder and Grimmitt. A more contemporary take in context of brand communication was made by Carroll and Wheaton (2009: 1) who also presented these two characteristics or interpretations of authenticity, being type authenticity and moral authenticity. A discussion on each follows next.

#### *3.2.1.4.1 Type authenticity i.e. the identity argument*

Type authenticity, as reasoned in this section, would question whether an entity is true to its associated type, category or genre. Consumers must thus have the ability to relate the product, service or even brand communication effort to something they consider relevant to its association as per their experience (or frame of reference) – or within the context in which it communicates. One could also argue that the narrative or brand as narrator must hold their own in the narrative itself, i.e. that the characters, for instance, should be coherent and stay true to their identity throughout, otherwise the communication will be considered inauthentic (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998: 178). Carroll and Wheaton (2009: 2) expanded on the "type"

authenticity to include a suggested term: “craft” authenticity. They explain it as “... whether something is made using the appropriate techniques and ingredients”. This could refer to the actual product or service communicated, but also the narrative – whether the narrative is authentically crafted. This refers to whether there is true originality in the narrative of the communication effort. Beverland (2011) also referred to craft in authenticity; however, in context of product or service quality, crafted through “love” of production, design-led innovation with elements of true uniqueness and obsession with creating meaningful connections between their products and customers. One could extrapolate this thought to narrative and how craft in narrative can contribute to authenticity.

Beverland *et al.* (2008) referred to approximate authenticity in advertising. This would look at more symbolic or abstract impressions of tradition that were created by the advertising, i.e. the “feeling” that the product has an origin or will help achieve self-authentication through connecting with a place and time – it could even be regarded as the “aura” of the product advertising or even “mystique” of the product portrayed through the communication effort. To extrapolate this to narrative in branded entertainment, one could say that the authenticity of the communication effort should evoke a “feeling” of it being original and true to the brand essence. That it should be something which can be believed.

Type authenticity resembles the identity argument, i.e. brands ought to be true to their identity in representing themselves in their communication effort and the communication itself ought to have a unique identity.

#### *3.2.1.4.2 Moral authenticity, i.e. the moral argument*

Moral authenticity would question whether “... the enactment and operation of an entity reflect sincere choices (i.e. choices true to one’s self) rather than socially accepted responses” (Carroll & Wheaton, 2009: 5). If one were to argue that promotion is “socially accepted” as something which has the aim to inform, persuade and remind audiences, it could be said that branded entertainment could be seen through a lens of content creation, providing entertainment and that the brand is sincere in its approach, not necessarily pushing sales. Sincerity of the communication again plays a role as the expectation from the audience is entertainment in lieu of meaningful content creation.

This also leads to a moral argument of questioning not just the intent (sincerity) of the brand in context of the branded entertainment initiative, but also the value-alignment, i.e. providing the consumer with a feeling that the narrative and the representative brand will assist in the target audience achieving self-authentication through connecting with personal moral values (Beverland *et al.*, 2008: 8). It is important to note that consumers interested in moral authenticity were less interested in the history or connection to time and place, but were more focused on the intent of the brand or would rather choose brands that seemed genuine in their intent. This intent could be identified as the brand being committed to traditional moral practices (Beverland *et al.*, 2008: 9). Extrapolating it to authentic narrative one could say that the intent of the communication will be assessed by the target audience on the brand's intent from a moral perspective.

#### *3.2.1.4.3 Summary and conclusion of identity and moral arguments for authenticity*

The identity argument draws on the concept of originality with the ability to communicate a sense of the author's identity and world view (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998: 178; Beverland *et al.*, 2008; Carroll & Wheaton, 2009: 1), i.e. the brand's identity in context of brand communication. The moral argument draws on a value system that should align that of the author's and the audience's, rooted in a "conscious, collective understanding" (Marra citing Grimmet and Neufield, 1994: 208, supported by Boyle, 2003: 17-21). This simply means that the target audience must experience the brand's value system as constituted by the communication as their own (Tampon, 2013). The collective understanding is furthermore proposed in context of "sincerity" (Clift, 2011: 8), i.e. for a brand to approach branded entertainment with the intent to add value through entertainment more so than to overtly "sell" in context of branded entertainment that a target audience can experience as inauthentic (Swart, 2007). Continuing from this, Marsden (2015) applied authenticity to brand and brand building by stating that authenticity is the "extent to which consumers perceive a brand to be faithful toward itself, true to its consumers, motivated by caring and responsibility, and able to support consumers in being true to themselves". Authenticity is a richer concept than only taking ownership of a branded entertainment property and brings facets that not only embrace the core value of authenticity but also guide a philosophy towards practice.

A basic introduction to the narrative concept follows. A brief examination is done of the narrative frameworks and viewpoints of three seminal thinkers, namely Walter R. Fisher, Seymour Chatman and Robert N. Yale. The most relevant extracts are then applied to the

authenticity concept in Section 3.2.3 to conceptualise a proposed authentic narrative construct with the best potential for brand resonance.

### **3.2.2 The narrative concept**

Hyvärinen (2006: 20), in unpacking a conceptual history of narrative, explained that narrative has become a debated concept over the last couple of years. This is in response to what is recurrently called the “narrative turn” in social sciences as the concept has travelled or migrated to psychology, education, social sciences, political thought and policy analysis, health research, law, theology and cognitive science – with narrative now being “everywhere” (citing Richardson, 2000). Narrative is inextricably linked to being human (Adamson, 2015). Narrative is integral to humanness: it is fundamental to comprehend human action and human selves (Brooks, 2005): “the bedrock of human events is not a mere sequence upon which narrative is imposed but a configured sequence that has a narrative character all the way down” (Burns, 1999, cited by Brooks, 2005: 4).

Weiss (2014) said the following: “The new “touch point” for brand strategy is not about media, multi-platforms, or product-oriented stories. It is about creating compelling, human stories that connect people with brands. We can never forget that at the end of the day it’s all about that one thing: human connection”. Weiss specifically referred to branded entertainment in contextualising this opinion. Human beings are essentially storytellers, according to one of the three seminal authors of narrative for this study, Walter Fisher (1989: 109), and for this study it could be reasoned that in context of the brand narrative, brands are essentially storytellers. Branded entertainment involves a strong element of storytelling.

Narrative is “to connote the threading together of a set of events or experiences in a temporal sequence in order to make sense of them” (Lai, 2010: 72 citing Dean, 1998). This refers to a process in which stories are made – even referring to the cognitive structure of a story or the result of the process (stories, tales or histories) (citing Polkinghorne, 1998). The focus of this study was on narrative and not storytelling. Narrative is a representation or manifestation of a specific story, rather than the story itself, i.e. more than just the story line; the way the story gets told (Mills, 2015). A story is a structured narrative and if not connected to a broader narrative is mere entertainment (Jennings, 2016).

This means that the narrative ought to embody the brand, i.e. its reason for being. This could also include the brand's overarching narrative; its image and summation of all the interactions stated as "tangible, authentic depth and integrity of the relationship" between the consumer and the brand (Campbell & Simpson-Bint, 2010 and Dahlén *et al.*, 2010: 6) could then embody the potential for brand resonance. Branded entertainment is arguably one of the more compelling brand communication efforts that meaningfully contributes to brand narrative because its inherent narrative properties aim to establish a strong emotional connection with a target audience and therefore evoke such customer engagement (Dahlén *et al.*, 2010: 504).

Feldman, Skoldberg, Brown and Horner (2004: 148), supported by several authors including Bruner (1990), Gee (1986), Mishler (1986) and Riessan (1993), reasoned that individuals make sense of the world and their place in the world through narrative. It is interesting that this mirrors the sentiment by Heidegger that human beings cannot exist without being part of the world and that they exist in it by making sense of their authentic being in the world (O'Connell, 2015: 11). It is also noteworthy to mention that a human-orientated approach is inherent to narrative (Adamson, 2015) and more so carries importance in branded entertainment that eschews an overt sales-orientated approach (Anderson, 2015).

Fog, Budtz and Yakaboylu (2005) are of the opinion that as product marketing has increasingly become more sophisticated and elaborate over time, so does storytelling prove to be an effective promotion and communication strategy to inform target audiences about a brand's meaning in conjunction with the related brand's product or service benefits and use. The art of narrative in brand communication is desired in an attention economy because neuroscience has taught us that human brains are stimulated by storytelling, more so than remembering data or facts (Cooke, 2014). Millennials in particular yearn for storytelling in the form of entertainment instead of the traditional promotional efforts that deliver sales-orientated messages (All, 2013).

Troy Hitch, Creative Director, and Doug Worple, Founder, of Cincinnati-based advertising and branded entertainment agency from the BBDO stable: Barefoot Proximity representing Proximity Worldwide, stated that "story" is the fundamental component to great entertainment (Hitch & Worple, 2010: 3). They demonstrated it by citing Pixar Director John Lasseter's rules on storytelling for guaranteed success: to tell a compelling story; to create memorable

characters audiences are willing to invest in; and to create a believable world that the characters can live in. The point is that narrative is so important that Lasseter developed a whole set of rules to ensure that the story base employs emotional hooks with the ability of engagement, positioning the brand in a space that is believable and to come across as being authentic.

Mike Wiese, Director of Branded Entertainment at J Walter Thompson *New York* (2013), said that “story” is a requisite to branded entertainment, arguing that “This is a category for work that traditional advertising, and its process, often can’t, or won’t make. Does the content use a narrative structure, character development or offer an experience beyond advertising? Does it become sharable, and ultimately, an enduring property powered by the entertainment or utility value?” The notion is that the narrative ought to embody characteristics with the ability to strategically build the brand and provide value by entertainment.

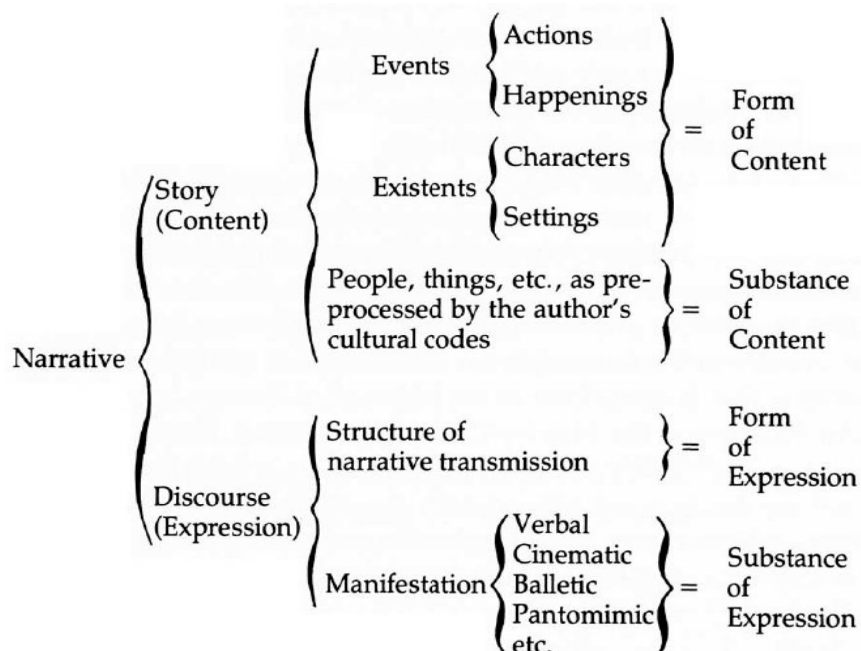
Walter Fisher and Seymour Chatman, also seminal authors on narrative for this study, are seen to be among the most respected thought leaders on narrative that is applicable to the field of brand communication, popular culture, media communications and qualitative research (Sandelowski, 1991; Berger, 1997; Phillips, 2006; Bratberg, 2011; Gardner & Herman, 2011; Wolf, 2011; Berns, 2013). Narrative structure (Chatman) and paradigm (Fisher) were regarded suitable for the purpose of this study to give guidance to the construction of narrative in branded entertainment. The third seminal author on narrative for this study is Robert Yale. He designed the narrative believability scale to measure the constructs specified in the story model (Pennington & Hastie, 1991) that determines acceptance or rejection of a given narrative in terms of its persuasive impact (Yale, 2013). Yale’s work is most applicable to authentic narrative as authenticity is inherent to something that “entitles to belief” (Winter, 2012: 146), thus judging if the narrative is believable. Chatman’s narrative structure is discussed next, followed by Fisher’s narrative paradigm, and then Yale’s Narrative Believability Scale.



### 3.2.2.1 Chatman's narrative structure

Chatman (1978: 481) argued that there are two basic components to a narrative (as outlined in Figure 3.1):

- A story, which constitutes the *content* element of the narrative (referred by Chatman as the *what*). This content comprises two elements: the *form of the content* (which consists of events (actions and happenings) and existents (the characters and settings) and the *substance of the content*, referring to people, things and so on as pre-processed by the author's cultural codes. It could be argued that the story, especially in context of the substance of the content, ought to reflect the cultural code of the brand responsible for the creation of the entertainment piece.
- A discourse, which constitutes the *expression* element of the narrative (referred by Chatman as the *how*). This element also comprises a *form* and a *substance* descriptor. The *form of expression* would refer to the structure of the narrative transmission. This could be, relating some examples to this study, a video game (where the player controls the frequency of exposure) or miniseries or 26-episode television series and so on. The *substance of expression* would refer to the manifestation of the discourse, for example verbal or cinematic or pantomimic.



**Figure 3.1: Seymour Chatman's Narrative Structure**

Source: Chatman, 1978: 481



### 3.2.2.2 Fisher's Narrative Paradigm

The Fisher Narrative Paradigm (1989: 109) suggests the following:

- (i) Human beings are essentially storytellers. In this study it could be reasoned that in context of the larger brand narrative, brands are essentially storytellers.
- (ii) Decisions are made by human beings on the basis of good reasons (opposed to scientific proof) which vary in form among communication situations, genres and media. This research's outcome is aimed at determining the decisions people make based on good reason (which could be argued to consist of a mix of cognitive and emotional influence) extracted from the specific type of branded entertainment they have been exposed to.
- (iii) The production and practice of good reasons are ruled by (or swayed by) matters of history, biography, culture and character. Brands, when creating branded entertainment should take these mentioned factors relating to the reality and context of their target audience and the world they live in into consideration when constructing an entertainment property (and could even relate it to the brand history and identity).
- (iv) The world consists of a set of stories from which we choose and hence constantly re-create our lives. One could also say that humans are continually choosing the stories that we want to keep company with and these stories are constantly changing. For this study it could be reasoned that people choose brands that intrigue them at certain points in time or certain phases in their lives which also contribute to their stories.
- (v) Narrative rationality, which views narrative as the ground of all human communication by which humans would illustrate or justify their behaviour by means of telling a credible story more so than producing evidence or constructing a logical argument, is determined by the coherence and fidelity of our stories.

Explanations of coherence and fidelity follow.

#### 3.2.2.2.1 Coherence

The principle of probability of *coherence* refers to the way in which a story "hangs together" (Griffin: 2009). This principle is important in the discussion of authenticity of narrative in branded entertainment because it provides credibility to the entertainment venture. Often one would compare the story with another story along the same lines or expect for a character to

not suddenly act out of character. Basically, the ultimate test of coherence would lie in the audience's perception of whether they can count on the characters to act in a reliable manner.

#### 3.2.2.2.2 *Fidelity*

The probability of narrative *fidelity* of Fisher's narrative paradigm consists of certain subcomponents relevant to this study (Baseler: 1995 citing Fisher 1989: 109). Fisher believes that a story has fidelity when it could serve or could be seen as a guide to the audience's actions, based on "buying into" the character's (i.e. the brand's) value system. The probability of narrative *fidelity* also states that if a story matches the audience's beliefs and experiences, they will accept it. Fidelity would determine how the story reflects or "plugs into" the background of the audience or the world as they know it and the things that they believe in (Griffin: 2009).

#### 3.2.2.3 *Yale's Narrative Believability Scale*

Yale (2012) developed the Narrative Believability Scale (NBS-22) based on Pennington and Hastie's (1991) story model to determine acceptance or rejection of a given narrative. As authenticity of the narrative of a branded entertainment piece is accessed by a target audience, the brand's intention, integrity and entertainment value are essentially assessed. Potential for brand resonance is, among other judgement criteria, dependent on finding the narrative and narrator (the brand) believable. The NBS-22 accesses four dimensions (in a Likert scale format).

The first element relevant to this study was to assess the plausibility of the story. **Plausibility** assesses whether the story is believed to be true and reasonably substantiated with facts which are true beyond reasonable doubt. The next assessment point was whether the narrative is complete, i.e. **completeness** exhibits a sound structure, determining the difficulty level in following the story line and whether the information presented in the story was consistent (Yale, 2012). This links directly with Chatman's theory on structure. The third dimension was on consistency. **Consistency** was examined by the target audience's possible contradictions in the story and whether the facts in the story agreed with each other. Furthermore, a target audience was to assess the narrative on **coverage**, i.e. determine the extent to which important information seemed to be missing from the story; if there were "holes" or "loose ends" in the story or if the viewer or reader felt that the story left them with

many questions about what actually happened because some information presented was not explained by the story. This reminds of Fisher's coherence characteristic.

Section 3.2.3 that follows conceptualises an authentic narrative construct most conducive to brand resonance, consisting of six characteristics that are based on identification of the most relevant narrative characteristics from Fisher, Chatman and Yale's work; authenticity characteristics that became evident in the discussion in Section 3.2.1; and a strong complement of additional findings on narrative practice for authenticity and resonance in present day brand communication and branded entertainment practice.

### **3.2.3 Constructing a set of authentic narrative characteristics in branded entertainment**

This section conceptualises six authentic narrative characteristics in branded entertainment with the potential to achieve brand resonance. These six characteristics were identified by an extensive study of literature on authenticity and narrative characteristics of which both were assessed in relation to branded entertainment from a philosophical and practical level. These narrative characteristics are inherent to and stand in support of the working definition for branded entertainment: Branded entertainment is an unconventional brand-initiated and owned contact point with the potential to achieve brand resonance through authentic narrative. The proposed branded entertainment narrative guided by the most relevant authenticity characteristics enriched the central research proposition, being: authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve brand resonance.

This section presents the second of the three supportive research propositions (the first being the working branded entertainment definition), being a set of narrative characteristics in branded entertainment that could constitute authentic narrative, and therefore inform application (being the third supportive research proposition). As authentic narrative is argued to be the central point of gravitas that defines branded entertainment, the set of six proposed authentic narrative characteristics discussed in this section were utilised to address the research problem, being the lack of a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment depleting branded entertainment's potential to achieve brand resonance. The authentic narrative characteristics therefore not only inform the definition but also suggest practice because application of the characteristics in a branded entertainment narrative construction should maximise the entertainment's potential for resonance.

### **3.2.3.1 Authentic branded entertainment narrative is brand-initiated and owned**

A continuation of the authenticity concept follows, however now in context of the different identified characteristics of a potential authentic narrative construct. The word *authentic*, according to the Collins English Dictionary (2009), stems from the old French (13<sup>th</sup> century) word *authentique* meaning “authoritative”. This could be interpreted as acting on good authority and stemming from a source that carries true originality, i.e. self-created. Being a piece of undisputed origin is also mentioned in the Collins English Dictionary – synonyms used are “... veritable, having the origin supported by unquestionable evidence.” A brand as author of the narrative has the opportunity to take control and establish their authority and ownership of a branded entertainment property (Monaco, 2009) via narrative that makes the effort more convincing in terms of clear association power between the narrative and their identity to establish trust (Marie, 2012: 5 and Kopoulos, 2016). The brand as author thus can express a sense of identity that could meaningfully apply in establishing target audience relevance (Crew & Sims, 1991: 163; Gubrium & Holstein, 1998; Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Beverland *et al.*, 2008; Zetler, Jameson & Naidoo, 2013).

This can only exist with the brand both initiating the entertainment and owning or perceivably taking ownership of the contact point (via owned or earned media) to express its identity in every aspect which intensifies the communication’s effect, scope and effectiveness (Bhargava, 2011 and De Aguilera-Moyano *et al.*, 2015: 533). By employing a brand identity-based narrative through propriety ownership, a brand can connect meaningfully with a target audience and therefore the potential for brand resonance is maximised (Daugherty & Gangadhatbatla, 2005: 16; Monaco, 2009: 1; Hudson, 2010; Bhargava, 2011).

Narrative originating from a brand could be considered authentic and authentic brand “stories” have the ability to create trust (Alter, 2015). “Real” authenticity is about being genuine, relevant to consumer needs, to stand for something and to be trustworthy (Nash: 2007: 20-21). Brand trust is also a vital ingredient in the establishment of brand resonance (Keller, 2001: 8 and Ha *et al.*, 2010: 916). Narrative delivered in an authentic way allows for an emotional connection to be made with a target audience and even using “real words”, i.e. words that “resonate with people at a level that goes beyond the functionality, features, and benefits of your products or services”, or words that offer a perspective or share a philosophy, using words that people will use in everyday life, can establish a desired connection or resonance with a target audience, according to Williams (2013). This emotional connection contributes to the goodwill that a

target audience nurtures towards a brand and therefore influences the customer-based equity of a brand (Lin *et al.*, 2015: 80).

A strong emotional connection advances a strong emotional relationship with a target audience that strategically builds customer-based brand equity (Keller, 2001: 7), also referred to as brand resonance. Wiese (2013) pointed out that the role of branded content narrative is crucial to establish strategically significant branded entertainment that provides utility, asking: What is the role of the brand? Wiese asked the following questions: “How does the content originate from the brand idea? Is it sustainable as a platform or property, and does it enable other marketing strategy, to ultimately build a media or entertainment brand? Does the content build a brand franchise?” It is clear that brands may have the ability to be seen as entertainment brands (or franchises, as Wiese put it) once they employ brand-initiated and owned entertainment properties as it gives them the best chance to convey utility-based narrative that is offered by the relevant brand.

Chatman’s story and discourse structures (1978: 481) bear relevance to the ownership argument. The story or content is mostly pre-processed by the author’s cultural codes, thus allowing the brand and only the brand to create stories in line with the brand identity and narrative and what the brand would like to convey with the content. This is opposed to being featured in another’s content where the ownership of creating content is either shared or compromised. The discourse or expression of the narrative allows for the form of expression to select the most suitable contact point, i.e. having control over exactly what type of brand contact point would be most suitable. And, the substance of expression allowing the brand control over how they would like to express themselves, perhaps through music (as many brands make music videos for their branded entertainment) and even showcasing nuances of their personality in the expression within the chosen substance of expression.

The control over the choice of story and discourse also features in a Fisher narrative paradigm (1989: 109) allowing decision power to the narrator, i.e. the brand, on the communication situation and genre, for instance (content and discourse), as he puts it, and media, i.e. the contact point. He further explained that the narrator, or brand, would also employ good reason for the mix of cognitive and emotional influence that the narrative would project, based on the specific type of branded entertainment a target audience would be exposed to.

The branded entertainment definition in context of authenticity attributable to the stance of authority that the brand would have over its narrative content and discourse with an intent to establish trust with its target audience could only be constructed by means of the brand initiating the entertainment and taking ownership of the brand contact point. There are strong suggestions around the proposed requisite for ownership that allows brands to express their brand identities. An exploration on the second proposed authentic narrative characteristic with potential to achieve brand resonance in conjunction with the other five proposed authentic narrative characteristics is discussed next: alignment with brand identity. The six authentic narrative characteristics proposed in this section are not presented in order of priority.

### **3.2.3.2 Authentic branded entertainment narrative embodies brand identity**

Two distinct aspects feature as part of a branded entertainment narrative's requisite to embody brand identity: brand identity as communicated in a specific branded entertainment property such as a TV series or game, and the notion that the brand identity in the entertainment property should align with the brand's overarching narrative, i.e. the image of the brand for credibility's sake. Brand identity as communicated in a specific branded entertainment property is addressed first.

The objective of a brand identity model is to create a differential from other brands, to symbolise value and meaning in a social context, and ultimately to provide a platform from which durable brand-consumer relationships are built over the long term (Kohli & Thakor, 1997 and Alreck & Settle, 1999 cited by Andersson & Otterheim, 2003: 11). David Aaker developed a brand identity planning model (Aaker, 1996: 78) mainly consisting of four dimensions:

- (i) The brand as a product, meaning its product or service associations, attributes and quality-value equation, among other.
- (ii) The brand as an organisation, meaning its attribute associations for instance its values, culture and philosophies, among other.
- (iii) The brand as a person, meaning its personality. This perspective could strengthen the brand by creating self-expressive benefits that become a vehicle by which consumers can express their own personality and this aids the relationship with the consumer (Aaker, 1996).

- (iv) The brand as a symbol, meaning anything that can express the brand like its visual imagery, metaphors and heritage. These symbols could assist to create cohesion and structure to its identity and this enables easier recognition and recall (Aaker, 1996).

Aaker (2002: 7-8) said that brands that employ an identity-based focus can actively build their customer-based brand equity. One could perhaps argue that it would be ideal for a brand to feature these dimensions in its entirety because it could influence consumers' judgements and feelings towards the brand in a more holistic way. In some instances, like BMW's *The Hire*, the product stepped into the prime position, whereas for the Dove *Real Beauty Sketches* campaign the company values were dramatised. However, it seems that of Aaker's four identity dimensions, narrative inherently allows a brand more than anything the opportunity to share its personality (Gilbar, 2010 and Tuttle, 2012). Some authors suggest that the brand should feature in the background of an entertainment piece or be more subtle (Craig-Lees & Scott, 2008: 4), while others argue that bringing the brand into the lead of the story i.e. ingraining the brand identity in a meaningful or authentic way into the narrative and even driving the narrative would maximise its potential for resonance (Lunenfield, 2009 and Olenski, 2015).

Continuing from this, a general practice principle is for the idea of the brand narrative to feature around the brand's essence (Gilbar, 2010) or core promise in a memorable way (Lusensky, 2010: 5-6). Brand essence is inevitably true to the author's (or the brand's) identity and to ultimately stand for something, all of the mentioned being inherent to authenticity author's identity and world view (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998: 178; Beverland *et al.*, 2008; Carroll & Wheaton, 2009: 1). An understanding of the mentioned expressed through the branded entertainment's narrative could establish an assimilation between the target audience and the brand leading to resonance (Martínez-Jerez, 2004; Marsden, 2015; Rabe, 2016) and inevitably driving a sense of trust (Marie, 2012: 5 and Kopoulos, 2016).

Narrative means to "make known" from the Latin word: *narratus* (Berger, 1997: 6), i.e. brands making their identity known. Fisher (1989: 109) referred to elements of brand identity, such as character, culture, history and biography being part of a brand's narrative philosophy on influencing decision-making. Being true to one's character, culture, history and biography for instance comprise one's authenticity (Burr, 1995) and would therefore influence a target



audience's decision making to engage with a brand or partake in community activity, both being elements of resonance (Keller, 2001: 8).

Lunenfield (2009) said that the brand or the product ought to play an integral role in moving the story forward and he reasoned that your brand should be tied to the hero in the narrative in some "meaningful or authentic" way, else your brand will be considered just "background noise". Lunenfield also stated that the content must be entertaining, informative, interesting and useful to the target audience whether a brand is present in the entertainment property or not. It is of importance to identify the brand's core promise, values and personality that the brand owner wants to associate with the brand, keeping in mind that the story is not the brand's biography (i.e. a history lesson), and should be memorable and easy to share (Lusensky, 2010: 5-6).

Chatman (1978) referred to the term satellites in narrative, providing texture to brand associations and attributes to position the brand in the viewer's mind. One could argue that such associations and attributes could only be judged against what the brand communicates to be true to itself, i.e. being authentic in an attempt to establish the projected associations and attributes for what the audience believe it to be true as per the identity argument of authenticity. In making full use of establishing the brand's authority of the entertainment property and making a convincing case for its brand associations and attributes in consistent application thereof, a sense of trust can be established with the target audience (Marie, 2012: 5 and Kopoulos, 2016). Trust, again, is a vital ingredient in the establishment of brand resonance (Keller, 2001: 8 and Ha *et al.*, 2010: 916). Narrative that is authentic, creative and inspirational, in line with the brand's identity, especially in terms of content marketing, can ensure a longer lasting brand-target audience relationship (Clerck, 2014) and is therefore strategic.

The second aspect: brand identity in the entertainment property to align with the brand's overarching narrative, deserves attention. Only when brands can verify their projected identity in their actions will they be considered as authentic (Yankelovich, 2010:1). Brand narrative is the story of the ideas, experiences and values that represent the tangible, authentic depth and integrity of the brand's relationship with its consumer (Campbell & Simpson-Bint, 2010). Brand



narrative is also a summation of the past, present and future expectations of a brand and a platform for creating, involving and sustaining customer engagement (Dahlén *et al.*, 2010: 6).

One could, for simplicity's sake, say that brand narrative, or the overarching brand narrative (Dahlén *et al.*, 2010: 383), is the image that a target audience buys into that should align with the brand identity expressed in the narrative of a branded entertainment property. The brand's overarching narrative and the narrative in a branded entertainment property or campaign should not be confused. There is, however, a relationship between these two concepts as a branded entertainment property does not stand alone as it could and would be judged by a target audience in relation to that audience's prior perception, emotional take or experience of that brand. If this prior perception, emotional take or experience is in misalignment with the branded entertainment narrative, the communication would be deemed as inauthentic and could harm the brand's credibility (Kantor, 2011: 15).

If alignment between the overarching brand narrative and what the branded entertainment narrative is communicating is intact, the latter can leverage the former. Brand narratives can be seen as "interlocking story arcs" that assist in changing the emotional, symbolic and social connections between a brand and its consumer (Smith, 2011: 32). It seems that brand narrative has a strong foothold in the emotional experience space. As branded entertainment mainly aims to connect with a target audience emotionally in order to achieve resonance (Williams, 2013), the overarching brand narrative is of even more relevance to establish the branded entertainment narrative as authentic (Braam, 2012: 12, citing Nandan: 2005 and Ghodeswar, 2008).

Visconti (2010: 234) stated that ongoing dialogue between customers and companies ought to commence where the company, in this engagement, would only partially control the narrative whilst welcoming a co-creation and co-construction dynamic. He cited Berthon, Holbrook, Hulbert and Pitt (2007) in referring to brand managers upholding a "multilogue" with its consumers (and all stakeholders one could infer). He added Diamond, Sherry, Muñiz, McGarth, Kozinets and Borghini (2009) in saying that brand managers should also attend to and leverage a "symphony" of new and old brand meanings in this co-creation with the customer. These kinds of brand narratives could inspire and provide content to construct a target audience-related, authentic brand narrative. Some branded entertainment efforts are

even unscripted, yet the narratives of these unscripted entertainment properties would be created with sensitivity to or even dictated by the overarching brand narrative.

From the discussion on the narrative of branded entertainment to embody the brand's identity in order to underpin a sense of authenticity, it is clear that not only should a brand, in line with the ownership principle argument, communicate its identity in the entertainment property, but should also align the narrative with the overarching brand narrative to establish a sense of credibility and trust. Credibility and trust are a direct result of brand communication experienced as authentic (Hayden, 2015). Brand credibility and trust are vital to achieve brand resonance (Keller, 2001: 8, 11 and 15).

### **3.2.3.3 *Authentic branded entertainment narrative is original***

To understand originality in the authenticity concept one could turn to the Oxford Dictionary (2013) that refers to the late Latin word *authenticus*, from the Greek *authentikos* meaning 'original, principal, genuine', a neologism of *autos*, referring to the "self" and *hentes*, referring to "being". In context of authentic narrative this would, more so than saying that the brand is true to itself, mean that the narrative in the branded entertainment ought to be original or genuine. The brand may therefore not imitate or copy another brand's branded entertainment or narrative properties in any way.

Heidegger constituted that originality in context of authenticity is the understanding of a "competent performer" (i.e. the brand) that has the ability to be a "world-transforming master" (i.e. the ability to inform and even transform knowledge, thinking and viewpoints, for instance, by providing utility) demonstrated by its capability (i.e. skill to) of using "tools or language" (in this case branded entertainment narrative) in "radically new ways" (Henschen, 2010). If this is true, then the narrative could be regarded as authentic. Original narrative could be regarded as authentic narrative (George, 2013; Weiss, 2014; Thielman, 2014; Maconick, 2016). The identity argument of authenticity draws on the concept of originality with the ability to communicate a sense of the author's identity and world view (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998: 178; Beverland *et al.*, 2008; Carroll & Wheaton, 2009: 1), i.e. the brand's identity in context of brand communication expressed in an original way.

The benefit of original narrative that aligns with brand identity provides the brand a better differentiator and could contribute to the credibility of a brand (Bauer, Freundt, Gordon, Perrey & Spillecke, 2016: 54). Credibility is an important dimension of consumer judgements in Keller's CBBE model (2001: 13). Brand narrative that does not employ originality and mimic another brand's initiative runs the risk of being seen as inauthentic and therefore could lose credibility to such an extent that consumers can even "punish" it, according to Visconti (2010: 234). Millennials could be considered to be the harshest on brands that do not exercise originality in the narrative of their marketing efforts (Pardee, 2010 and McCrea, 2011: 35) and therefore one can assume in their branded entertainment initiatives.

The Cannes Lions favours branded entertainment initiatives that have displayed originality and authenticity in their narrative (Weiss, 2014 and Morrison, 2015). Brands are also discouraged from writing "fake stories" even if "everyone knows" a story is not true or authentic for that matter (Olenski, 2015). Hanley (cited by Zottola, 2016) argued (for interest's sake) that authenticity in itself is about being human and even if narrative is for argument's sake not completely original or unique, professional content marketing is ultimately about humanising the brand and that in itself provides the brand with the credibility that it desires. It could also be argued that with original narrative the notion of originality in brand contact point should feature. This means that brands would exercise novelty and originality in their point of contact in order to break through commercial clutter and to arrest attention to engage with a target audience in an authentic way (Carroll & Wheaton, 2009; Pine & Gilmore, 2010: 4-5; Osterholm, 2013). This directly relates with the core value of branded entertainment discussed in Section 2.3.

It seems that originality in narrative plays a fundamental role in order for narrative to be considered authentic, especially for establishing a sense of credibility that in itself contributes to brand resonance. One could argue that branded entertainment being initiated and owned by the brand with the ability to express its identity via original narrative hangs together as a concept. It could also be argued that these three narrative characteristics form a sense of unity in context of the brand taking authority to express its identity. Expressing identity and doing it in an original way (or inadvertently expressing originality) stands integral to each other in context of authenticity (Anderson, 1991). A discussion of branded entertainment's ability to imbue emotional meaning in its narrative to a selected target audience follows.

### **3.2.3.4 Authentic branded entertainment narrative carries emotional meaning**

Manternach (2014) presented findings of APCO Worldwide's (the second largest independent communications consultancy in the U.S.A.) 2013 study, measuring the emotional attachment consumers have with brands. It was found that emotional attachment is the most reliable predictor of brand choice and loyalty (seen as part of resonance in Keller's resonance pyramid) and hence carries a powerful long-term (or strategic) advantage. Of significance is that authenticity is key, according to the APCO research-based model for brands, to successfully establish resonance. The other elements are alignment (consumer relevance), attachment (which is part of Keller's (2001: 8) resonance achieved), and advocacy (also part of Keller's (2001: 8) resonance achieved in the form of community and loyalty). Authenticity leading to resonance is likely when a strong emotional connection is made with the consumer – one of the key objectives of branded entertainment if not the most important (Wiese, 2011). Moore and Wurster (2007: 64) emphasised that a strong emotional connection brought about by alignment between the brand's authentic self (its identity) and the consumer's identity could achieve resonance.

Brand communicators that understand the simplicity of human nature and dynamics in context of a target audience's life engagements, needs, challenges and desires, and how the brand's core purpose can meaningfully serve to connect by simply adding value to "how people live life", should create a "moment of truth" that has potential to "truly resonate", says Enslin (2017: 41-42). The objective of imbuing emotional meaning in brand communication narrative is to establish an emotional connection with a target audience by means of target audience-relevant content, meaning the brand's identity mirrors the target audience's own sense of self (Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer & Nyffenegger, 2011: 3 citing Thompson, MacInnes & Whan Park, 2005: 3; Czarmecki, 2012; Cohen, 2013). For companies and brands to truly embrace the consumer mindset in a particular psychographic profile or community, thus truly bonding with those consumers, an "authentic understanding" with the customer should be nurtured, which in turn should embody trust (Gremmler, Gwinner & Brown, 2001: 50). Brand trust is a vital ingredient in the establishment of brand resonance (Ha *et al.*, 2010: 916).

Resonance is probably the most important building block in strategic brand building (Keller, 2001: 2) and requires relevance to the target audience's attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, motivations, world-understanding, world-view and needs to constitute an authentic understanding in narrative (Crew & Sims, 1991; Visconti, 2010: 234; Pace, Murray, Geike &

Fiore, 2011). Emotional meaning aims to establish a sense of brand attachment, defined as the bond that connects a target audience by reflecting a target audience's sense of own identity to a brand by means of affection, passion and connection (Malär *et al.*, 2011: 35). Brand attachment is a dimension of brand resonance (Keller, 2001: 8).

In order for a brand to make an emotional connection with a target audience, a collective sense of being ought to be established between the target audience and the brand, mainly based on values congruency (Anderson, 1991: 35) as expressed in the content of the narrative (Chatman, 1978: 481). Such a congruency in values can only be experienced as authentic when subjective, sensitive, and emotional values in the brand and therefore its narrative is coherent with the internal values of the target audience (Pederson, 2013: 2). In context of authenticity, this value set does not only refer to a reflection of values that a target audience really cares about but also its moral values (Marsden, 2015). Moral values in narrative play an important role in establishing fidelity on behalf of the author, i.e. the brand.

The probability of narrative fidelity also states that if a story matches the audience's beliefs and experiences, they will accept it (Baseler, 1995 citing Fisher, 1989: 109). Fidelity would also determine how the story reflects or "plugs into" the background of the audience or the world as they know it and the things that they believe in (Griffin: 2009). Symbolism expressing emotion experienced as being "real", how a target audience experiences the world that they live in and what they find meaning in can be powerful establishing authenticity, for instance a Christmas tree at the Rockefeller Centre in New York is considered "for real" because it represents many years of shared emotions and memories (Van den Bergh, 2012). This means that emotional meaning is attached. Carruthers (2012: 4) cited Jon King in context of authentic stories in that "... the most valued and shared stories are those that reveal unfulfilled needs and desires". The latter would be on the part of the consumer.

Chatman introduced the concept of kernals and satellites in narrative structure (Chatman, 1978: 53). Emotional layering could be brought about by satellites. Kernals is briefly discussed first. Kernals are major events that "... advance the plot by raising and satisfying questions ..." representing "... nodes and hinges in the structure, branching points which force a movement into one or two (or more) possible paths ..." being crucial to the story line and cannot be left out. Kernals are explored in greater depth in Section 3.2.3.6 when the authentic narrative

characteristic of believability is discussed. Satellites (Chatman: 1978: 54) can be removed from the story as they sometimes contribute more to discourse. It could be argued that satellites could provide a more textured brand association effort in a branded entertainment property as rich (and even self-indulgent, referring to the brand) visual imagery, for example, could contribute to positioning the brand in the viewer's mind.

The story could also "pause" for a while on a brand attribute or association that the brand considers more important than another brand attribute or association. Emotional layering that could be brought about by satellites, as part of discourse, to complement story evolvment, could be argued to propel accelerated brand resonance to a degree. This kind of emotional layering and emotional connection to be made with the entertainment property or initiative are certainly relevant to construct or support authentic narrative in branded entertainment (Wiese: 2011; Cohen, 2013; Czarmecki: 2012; Wolburg: 2008). Discourse of narrative, meaning its expression (Chatman, 1978: 481), can impact perceived brand authenticity if expressed in an emotionally provocative or compelling way in context of its form and substance (Rabe, 2016), with the provision that the intent to evoke emotion ought to be genuine and not just for effect (Olenski. 2015).

To come across as genuine and "for real" in creating emotional meaning, the following characteristics or combination of characteristics ought to be intact: acting or being experienced as honest, simple and human; establishing or conveying real emotions or shared emotions and memories; and presenting a form of democracy and openness in expressing the emotion, i.e. to be available to everybody (in the opinion of Boyle, 2003; Nash, 2007; Marra, 2009; Pace *et al.*, 2011; Clifton, 2013). Narrative delivered in an authentic way allows for an emotional connection to be made with a target audience and even using "real words" could provide an ability to resonate with a target audience, according to Williams (2013). This emotional connection contributes to the goodwill that a target audience nurtures towards a brand and therefore influences the customer-based equity of a brand (Lin *et al.*, 2015: 80).

Branded entertainment has the ability to establish a deep or strong emotional connection with a target audience (Jaggi, 2009: 8; Rose, 2013; Duopoly, 2014: 4; Musson, 2014: 63; Valero, 2014: 9; Brenner, 2015). Employing narrative that authentically carries emotional meaning and intends a sense of connection between a brand and a target audience has the potential to

establish an intimate emotional connection (Miller, 2016). Lehu remarked that "... branded entertainment should be ... an opportunity to write actual stories" (2008: 209) that integrate the brand's personality and stimulate an emotional link between the brand and the viewer (Wolburg, 2008: 67). Although narrative in branded entertainment can impress tactically, authentic narrative enables a strong emotional connection with a target audience and could therefore achieve brand resonance to strategically build a brand (Wolburg, 2008; Jaggi, 2009: 8; Czarmecki, 2012; Rose, 2013; Duopoly, 2014: 4; Musson, 2014: 63; Valero, 2014: 9; Brenner, 2015).

What would be regarded as inauthentic? Snow (2013) stated that inauthentic narrative is not constructed with the consumer in mind. As empathy and consumer-brand relevance plays a pivotal role in authentic branded entertainment (Nash, 2007 and Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2011), the opposite would certainly erode consumer-brand resonance. Inauthentic branded entertainment would lack a sense of true creativity, come across as contrite with an overt sell as main motivation and thus lacks credibility, making the initiative unappealing for consumers (Swart, 2007). In light of these statements, the sincerity aspect of narrative in branded entertainment to be regarded as authentic is addressed next.

### **3.2.3.5 *Authentic branded entertainment narrative is sincere***

Philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau was of the opinion that sincerity in context of authenticity is ultimately about self-actualisation and within that earns the respect of its direct society (Melzer, 1995: 15). Kernis and Goldman (2006: 294) in citing Rogers (1961) and Maslow (1968), related authenticity to self-actualisation and creativity. Creativity as a concept, according to Cloninger (1993), in context of authenticity and self-actualisation, finds its approach in "living" rather than falling "slave to old and restrictive behaviours" i.e. to reinvent oneself. Brands that therefore actualise beyond traditional advertising-driven brand communication into a space of identity-based creative work or branded entertainment narrative that delivers on utility as demanded by contemporary consumers in the form of entertainment could consequently be experienced as authentic and inadvertently sincere and therefore earn the trust and respect of target audiences. Respect, trust and a target audience feeling that the brand has their best interest at mind could lead to brand resonance (Keller, 2001: 10).



Researchers have long demonstrated that persuasion effects depend heavily on attribution of communicator sincerity (Mills & Jellison, 1967 cited by Varan, Bellman & Schweda, 2005: 170). DeLorme and Reid (1999, in Varan *et al.*, 2005: 168) maintained that consumer's capacity to defend against such implicit models increases as they become more pervasive. Such research highlights a potential backlash effect associated with such implicit models. Perhaps the key test here is whether consumers feel betrayed by the medium if the hidden commercial motives are suddenly discovered (Bhatnagar, Aksory & Malkoc, 2004 cited by Varan *et al.*, 2005: 170). It is interesting to note that target audiences are more likely to be persuaded by a brand's sincerity than a commercial sell but a target audience might equally feel, in context of branded entertainment, betrayed if the hidden commercial motives are suddenly discovered leading to narrative being experienced as insincere, lacking integrity and therefore inauthentic (Varan *et al.*, 2005: 140). Brands should be sincere in their effort to entertain and should not aim to make a quick sell; in particular with Millennials because of their high sense of distrust of brands (Rohampton, 2016). Again, brands should be sincere in entertaining with the intent to create relevant content and should even display a sense of humbleness in their narrative effort (Clift, 2011: 9) and exercise a sense of morally-based character grounded in integrity in order to be experienced as authentic (Nielsen, 2011).

Persuasion knowledge plays an integral role for audiences to assess whether the branded entertainment narrative exudes a sense of sincerity and ultimately comes across as authentic. Aytakin (2015: 8) explained that persuasion knowledge refers to the recognition and evaluation of a marketer's persuasion "goals, attempts, and tactics" by a consumer, enabling the consumer to judge the efficiency and appropriateness of these tactics, and cope with them. Negative consequences of persuasion knowledge can lead to negative responses according to Tutaj and Reijmersdal's (2012: 5), where variables such as recognition of the advertising format, understanding of persuasive intent, and ad scepticism play a role in the advertiser's intent. They have found, for instance, that consumers respond much more favourably to sponsored online content than traditional banner advertising and that ad scepticism seems to be strongly related to perceived advertising value. In relation to branded entertainment one could reason that the advertising value ultimately should entertain and add utility. If the objective of the communication is misaligned with its persuasion technique the entertainment narrative may be found to be insincere and therefore inauthentic. Brands are also motivated to be up front on disclosing sponsorship of content or entertainment as it positively influences persuasion knowledge and brand responses, even increasing brand memory (Boerman, Van Reijmersdal & Neijens, 2012: 1047).



Much has been written by academia about persuasion theory in context of branded entertainment, especially in relation to product (and brand) placement and integration (Cowley, Owne, Hang, Lewis and Auty in Shrum, 2012) to advergames (Lorenzon & Russell, 2012) and narrative transportation in fiction (Lee, Carpenter, Green, Dill and Burgess in Shrum, 2012). It seems that the dynamic between authenticity and rhetoric (essentially persuading, according to Straub, 2008: 98, or promotional, according to Schrum, 2002: 1) is applicable to branded entertainment, be it highly creative executions that employ fiction, for instance, or lesser fictitious executions, like product demonstration, for instance. The ultimate goal would be to obtain authenticity by means of carefully employed rhetoric and earn trust and credibility (Straub, 2008: 11, 98). This is very relevant to this study as Millennials have an innate sense of distrust of brands (Rohampton, 2016) and are media-savvy, so they would be able to “see through” a false persuasion attempt (Pardee, 2010).

Narrative persuasion by means of narrative transportation occurs when a target audience accepts the implied relationships or translates statements about the narrative world into beliefs about the real world (Hamby, 2014: 7) and hence in context of branded entertainment one could infer the brand and its intent to entertain. Narrative transportation, i.e. when people “lose” themselves in a story and therefore their attitudes and intentions changing to reflect that story (Green & Brock, 2000: 702), by means of highly creative, fictional, or transformational branded entertainment with intent to evoke emotion, can increase intended authenticity perceptions in context of narrative persuasion (Chen, 2015: 21). However, the sincerity proposition in context of branded entertainment still holds true for narratives that do not necessarily imbue the highest sense of creative, fiction or transformational intent, as it also holds true for formats such as product demonstration, web content, documentaries or behind-the-scenes footage, given that the narrative is compelling, informative, meaningful in context of the brand value proposition, can evoke some emotion and preferably invite discourse or sharability, even holding potential for resonance (Lunenfeld, 2009; Savitz, 2012; Wander, 2016; Minnium, 2017).

Integrity, in context of authentic brands, includes a brand that gives back to its consumers and cares about its customers (Marsden, 2015). In context of branded entertainment it would again mean that the brand provides the target audience with utility in the form of entertainment. Furthermore, it would be a brand with moral principles and imbuing a set of moral values (Marsden, 2015). The “collective understanding” concept that forms part of the moral argument

of authenticity (see Section 3.2.1.4) is furthermore proposed in context of “sincerity” because an understanding between the brand and the target audience exists that the communication is brand-focused and based on entertainment and nothing but that. Authenticity follows a moral compass: that the brand acts in sincerity and honesty (Marra, 2009). A major part of authenticity in context of sincerity is the brand also being honest with itself and not deterring from its identity and intent to truly and humbly serve its consumers (Van den Bergh, 2012). Branded entertainment in this way can convey brand authenticity, openness, and sincerity that create a climate of trust, which makes it more likely that consumers will purchase the brand's products (Mathieu, 2012).

In relation to a brand's sincerity, an audience will consider three things:

- (i) Whether the communication is done in a way that is in the best interest of the viewer (to entertain, add value or meaningful content) and not just to satisfy the brand objective of an overt “sell” (Wiese, 2011) – and if the brand tells the truth and can be trusted as result. To approach a target audience in a sincere manner means that brand communication decision makers ought to eschew from an overtly sales-orientated approach which could be regarded inauthentic (Meyers, 2014). Branded entertainment approached in a sales-orientated traditional advertising-like manner alienates consumers as target audiences want to experience entertainment that adds value to their lives and world experience and not an effort that comes across as a brand trying to sell them something by concealing their true intention (Wiese, 2011 and Mescall, 2013). This means that branded entertainment that is free from contriteness and relays entertainment-based narrative would deliver more credible and appealing brand exposure compared to traditional promotional initiatives that include a sales-orientated traditional advertising approach (Swart, 2010).
- (ii) If the brand and consumer share the same values (Tampon, 2013), as the viewer will consider this in judging whether the entertainment in tandem with the brand's intent is authentic - “for real” - or not (Liao & Ma, 2009: 91).
- (iii) If they are satisfied that what they know about the brand aligns with the brand identity communicated in the narrative. If there is no alignment, and if the consumer feels the brand is acting inconsistently with its central promise, the brand and brand communication effort may be experienced as insincere and therefore inauthentic.

Alternative, original brand contact could infer a sense of sincerity as embracing narrative in such an alternative attempt to make brand contact based on where a target audience lives and moves provides opportunity for resonance, as a target audience is already more respectful of the brand's alternative approach and with a more receptive mindset due to the brand's sincerity to add value (Roberts, 2012 and Marsden, 2015). Once arresting the attention of an intended target audience, the invitation for emotional engagement is assessed based on target audience context, meaning that a value-based assessment commences as per Fisher's narrative paradigm (Warnick, 1987: 178).

Fisher described the context-dependent values in human choice-making in relation to narrative as having "some degree of trust, a willingness to participate in the process, a belief in the desirability of the interaction, and in interest in the attainment and/or advancement of some truth". Sincerity stands integral to the principles of trust and truth and in context of brand communication the most significant brand communication is sincere, according to Ali Demos (2013), Director of Ethnographic Research at Ogilvy & Mather *New York*. A very important dimension in relation to the sincerity of a brand to provide utility by means of entertainment that Fisher (Warnick, 1987: 179) put forward, is the notion that the values experienced by the target audience in relation to the values put forward by the brand in relation to its narrative intent (to entertain) should be appropriate to the message's intent. This means that the nature of the decision that the target audience makes would directly depend on the intent of the message and whether this intent aligns with the value system of the target audience in context of the brand communication, i.e. the choice to emotionally engage based on positive reaction to sincere branded entertainment narrative that is assessed by a target audience to be authentic.

### **3.2.3.6 *Authentic branded entertainment narrative is believable***

Burnett and Hutton's (2007: 343) authenticity reasoning which asks "Is this for real?" directly influences the potential for brand resonance (Hargrave, 2011). "For realness" naturally plugs into believability (Clifton, 2013) and it is crucial that brand communication narrative is believable and must either fit with or expand on what a target audience already knows and believes about a brand, stemming from a universal truth. Believability is indeed measured against the target audience's frame of reference and what they know is true or is reasonably thought to be true. Authenticity of the narrative is important to support the voice of the brand that needs to be convincing in itself, otherwise the brand will come across as being

unconvincing and deplete potential for resonance due to lack of credibility and trust (Wall, 2016).

Aaker and Aaker (2016: 13), in evaluating authentic brand communication narrative, asked the following questions: “Is it authentic? Do the settings, characters, and challenges feel real? Or is the story likely to be perceived as phony, contrived, or a transparent selling effort? Is there substance behind the story and its message? Or does it represent wishful thinking or even deception. It can be fictional as noted at the outset. In fact, a story that is clearly fictional may actually lead to a reduction in critical thinking. A danger is to come too close to a selling effort”. It is clear that a sense of realness, believability and sincerity as per the “too close to a selling effort” all include assessment criteria. However, it seems that the setting, characters and their challenges and substance, i.e. the coherence and plausibility, all deserve attention.

Chatman, Fisher and Yale’s narrative frameworks all address the notion of narrative believability. Fisher’s narrative probability analysis includes two dimensions, i.e. assessing coherence of the narrative asks how a story “hangs together” and whether the story’s plot is free of contradictions (Warnick, 1987: 173). Chatman’s coherence analysis (Chatman, 1978: 481) assesses the content on the one hand, i.e. the form of the content (which comprises events, actions and happenings) and existents (the characters and settings); and the substance of the content (referring to people, things and so on as pre-processed by the author’s cultural codes) on the other. Another beneficial element of Chatman’s work is the focus on the role of kernals. Satellites were discussed in Section 3.2.3.4. Kernals are major events that “... advance the plot by raising and satisfying questions ...” representing “... nodes and hinges in the structure, branching points which force a movement into one or two (or more) possible paths ...” being crucial to the story line and cannot be left out. Without kernals a story will lose its logic and even meaning.

This is imperative for the plausibility of the narrative and if the story is seen as authentic or not – being “for real” or not, as it has a direct influence on the credibility of the story (and narrator) and trust held by the audience relating to the communication initiative and hence the brand. Chatman (1978: 53) suggested that narrative should not only have logical connections. Again; without kernals the story will lose its logic and even meaning. This is imperative for the plausibility of the narrative and if the story is seen as authentic or not – being “for real” or not,

as it has a direct influence on the credibility of the story (and narrator) and trust held by the audience relating to the communication initiative and hence the brand. Satellites are not as critical to the narrative as "... their function is that of filling in, elaborating, completing the kernel, again because discourse is not equivalent to story. They may precede or follow the kernels, even at a distance" (Chatman: 1978: 54).

Yale (2012) assessed believability in terms of plausibility. Plausibility assesses whether the story is believed to be true and reasonably substantiated with facts which are true beyond reasonable doubt. This reminds strongly of an authenticity characteristic of truth although suspended disbelief comes into play – and that resonance will not be achieved if the narrative is not believed to be plausible. Perceived plausibility is directly linked to the credibility and trustworthiness of the narrative (Canter, Nicol and Benneworth, 2003: 10).

The next assessment point is whether the narrative has "completeness" and exhibits a sound structure, which reminds of Chatman's structural analysis, determining the difficulty level in following the story line and whether the information presented in the story was consistent (Yale, 2012), as inconsistency reminds of Fisher's contradictions theory. Consistency will be examined by the target audience for possible contradictions in the story and whether the facts in the story agreed with each other. Furthermore, a target audience will determine the extent to which important information seems to be missing from the story; if there are "holes" or "loose ends" in the story or if the viewer or reader feels that the story has left them with questions about what actually happened because some information presented was not explained by the story. This reminds of Chatman's coherence characteristic – something that is also integral to authenticity as an incoherent narrative would not achieve consumer-brand resonance.

For branded entertainment narrative to be considered believable, the author or brand needs to come across as being "for real" and convincing and the narrative structure that includes for instance the story's coherence, kernels and plausibility criteria should to be intact.

### **3.2.3.7 Conclusion**

Six characteristics are suggested to be prevalent in branded entertainment narrative in order to be authentic and therefore maximise the potential for a branded entertainment initiative to

achieve brand resonance. These six characteristics are that the narrative ought to be brand-initiated and owned; it should embody the brand's identity; it should be original; it must carry emotional meaning for a target audience; it should be sincere; and must be believable. These six characteristics stand in support of the branded entertainment working definition: Branded entertainment is an unconventional brand-initiated and owned contact point with the potential to achieve brand resonance through authentic narrative. Although the notion of "brand-initiated and owned" is included in the six authentic narrative characteristics, in context of what branded entertainment is, and is not, is justified to qualify and even emphasise the notion that branded entertainment is a stand-alone, brand identity-based communication effort that employs authentic narrative. This sentiment also deserves support from the identity argument for authenticity discussed in Section 3.2.1.4.

These six characteristics could serve as guide to application of the branded entertainment definition or could serve as criteria for assessing a branded entertainment initiative in order to strategically steer its potential. The central research proposition is: Authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve brand resonance, meaning that this study proposes that the value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment is strategic, i.e. it provides branded entertainment with the potential to achieve brand resonance; and as reasoned – brand resonance builds a brand strategically. An exploration of the concept of brand resonance follows, followed by an [authentic narrative - brand resonance] alignment exercise (Table 3.1), in order to suggest that authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve brand resonance. The central research proposition in relation to the branded entertainment working definition and suggested authentic narrative characteristics then contributes to the conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) used for the primary research phase.

### **3.3 THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE IN BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT**

Brand resonance is suggested in this section to be the strategic value that authentic narrative in branded entertainment holds. Various definitions of brand resonance exist. Raut and Brito (2014: 7) collected various definitions of brand resonance:

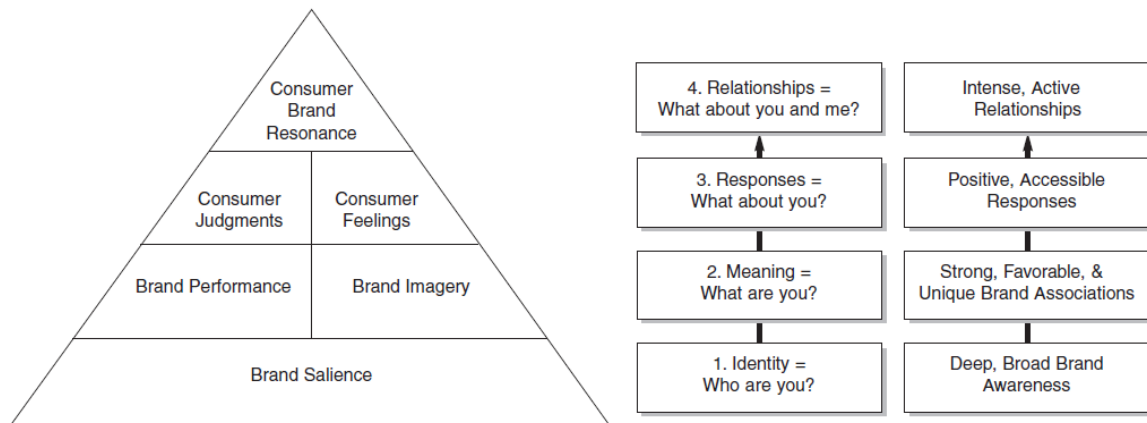
- “Brand resonance is the extent to which a consumer develops strong behavioural, psychological, and social bonds with the brands s/he consumes” (Rindfleisch, Wong & Burroughs, 2005).
- “Brand resonance refers to the nature of the relationship that the consumer has with the brand” (Bourbab & Boukill, 2008).
- “Brand resonance can be defined as how well you connect with your customer both formally and casually. Creating resonance with your brand means your message has to permeate consumers’ minds and lives” (Stratfold, 2012).

Kevin Lane Keller’s definition was included: “Brand resonance refers to the nature of the relationship that customers have with the brand and the extent to which they feel that they are “in synch” with the brands” (Keller, 2001 and 2008). Raut and Brito (2014: 7) concluded that all the mentioned definitions refer to the extent of the relationship and level of attachment that a customer has with its brand of preference.

Kevin Lane Keller’s Customer-Based Brand Equity Model or alternatively referred to as the Brand Resonance Pyramid is arguably the most comprehensive, accepted and used model that builds, measures and manages brand equity (Steenkamp, 2016: 8). Keller’s definition would be in accordance with that of the other definitions as the brand resonance concept originated with Keller in 1993 (Raut & Brito, 2014: 9).

It is duly noted that brands build up brand resonance over time (Kumar, 2006 in Raut & Brito, 2014: 5). However, due to branded entertainment’s impact value as a result of its alternative brand contact nature and more so narrative impact (Ryan, 2016) and that fact that it is proposed to have durability as a communication effort as reasoned in Section 2.2.1.6, it is proposed that a branded entertainment initiative that embodies authentic narrative has the potential to achieve resonance, especially in terms of emotional connection or attitudinal attachment, engagement or basically community or loyalty intent. Keller continued by stating that brand resonance is characterised by the intensity or depth of the psychological bond that consumers have with the brand, combined with the level of activity engendered by this loyalty, i.e. the extent to which customers seek out brand information, events, other loyal customers and so on. The Keller framework pitches brand resonance as the final stage, after brand awareness, brand associations and consumer-brand judgements have been achieved (which

includes evaluating their sense of brand trust), as reaching a higher degree of brand equity. Kevin Lane Keller's Consumer-Brand Equity Pyramid or Resonance Model follows (Figure 3.1).



**Figure 3.2: Kevin Lane Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Pyramid**

**Source:** Keller, K. 2001: 7

### 3.3.1 The brand resonance concept

This study has been based on the assumption, as derived from Kevin Lane Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Model, that authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve brand resonance. It is suggested that when consumers have experienced the narrative in the entertainment to be authentic (i.e. brand-initiated and owned; it should embody the brand's identity; it should be original; it must carry emotional meaning for a target audience; it should be sincere; and must be believable), such resonance may occur that strategically builds that brand according to Keller (2001: 4). What follows are interpretive observations and could be assessed quantitatively in further research.

Resonance could be achieved given that the narrative in branded entertainment property can establish salience (level one on Keller's pyramid) by means of its identity, i.e. that authentic narrative enables identity-based communication established by means of brand-initiated and owned, identity focused and even original narrative that is a translation of the brand's essence and associations in the author, i.e. the brand's creative expression.



The narrative also must have the ability to provide meaning to the brand (level two on Keller's pyramid), i.e. establish emotional meaning via target audience relevance and expectations from the narrative by means of strong, favourable and unique associations that again translates back to its identity. The narrative would then be assessed by the target audience (level three on Keller's pyramid) in terms of its authentic narrative hypothetically accumulated on levels one and two, especially regarding its sincerity and believability. This positive brand association should lead to favourable consumer judgements on the brand (for example on brand quality, credibility, meaning, consideration and/ or superiority) and favourable consumer feelings (for example warmth, excitement, social approval and/ or self-respect) (Keller, 2001: 18-19).

A positive response based on consumer judgements and feelings (or emotional connection for that matter) is necessary to create brand resonance, which includes having a psychological bond or in being in sync with the brand (Keller, 2001: 17). The expectation from the brand, as a result of the narrative being experienced as authentic by the target audience, is a sense of relationship with the target audience by means of engagement, attitudinal attachment that could translate into brand advocacy (Keller, 2001: 6), a yearning of the target audience to belong to a brand community or even intended loyalty. Trust and credibility are inherent to this resonance model, especially by means of establishing brand meaning (Keller, 2001: 9-10) and the target audience's responses (Keller, 2001: 13-14). Visconti (2010: 236) supported this notion by suggesting that trust and connectivity ought to be inherent to and a possible result of authentic narrative. An exploration of brand resonance models follow not only to enrich the brand resonance concept in context of authentic narrative in branded entertainment but also in context of brand resonance's strategic potential, i.e. to build customer-based brand equity.

A variety of brand equity models have been developed over the years. Wood (2000: 662) explained that brand equity has taken on many meanings in industry as accountants would refer to the total value of a brand as a separable asset, to be indicated in a balance sheet (or statement of financial position) as something which could be sold as its ownership lies with the brand (thus, a company-orientated definition). This notion was supported by Farquhar, Han and Ijiri (1991), Simon and Sullivan (1993), Kapferer (1997) and Doyle (2001b), as cited by Guzmán (2005: 13). Wood (2000: 662) continued to say that marketers would refer to the relationship nurtured between customer and brand, being the measure of the strength of the

customer's attachment to the brand based on a description of the associations and beliefs the customer has about the brand (therefore, a customer-orientated definition).

The customer-perspective principle has been supported by Keller (1993), Shocker, Srivastava and Rueckert (1994) and Chen (2001), as cited by Guzmán (2005: 13). To resolve this confusion, Wood cited Feldwick (1996) explaining that the accountant's definition actually refers to the brand's value (i.e. *brand value*, and not brand equity). This means that, when referring to brand equity from a customer perspective, in context of resonance, the brand's value is not addressed directly in terms of the authentic narrative proposition but rather building brand from a strategic perspective through communication, thus benefitting the brand over the long term that may affect the brand value. Building a strong brand has indeed been shown to provide plentiful financial rewards to brands and has become a key priority for many organisations (Raut & Brito, 2014: 6).

Lippencott, an international brand strategy and design firm, simply says that brands ought to tell authentic stories to create meaningful and inspiring brand experiences and that brand identity expressed through these stories should also be authentic and inspire a target audience's belief in the brand purpose for strategic brand building (Lippencott, 2013: 1). It is interesting to note, mentioning strategic brand building, that Lippencott, using a sample base of more than 1 000 USA-based brands in a 2013 study, found the following: brands that tell stories that make an emotional connection with the consumer saw a 22 percent increase in cumulative shareholder value over a period of five years (amongst the top third of brands measured), whereas brands that do not employ storytelling for emotional connection saw a five percent decrease in cumulative shareholder value over a period of five years (amongst the bottom third of brands measured) (Lippencott, 2013: 3).

Although this study was explorative in nature and does not draw a correlation between narrative and shareholder value, it does regard the result as significant. Shareholder value incorporates brand equity (sources) and thus the notion of brand resonance. The importance of storytelling by brands in making an emotional connection with consumers is reinforced and thus the need to explore the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment is underscored.

To ensure that the strongest level of emotional connection (brand resonance) is made with consumers, this study proposes that branded entertainment narrative, when authentic, will support achieving consumer-brand resonance and thus strategic brand building.

Customer-based brand equity definitions stem from a variety of authors since the 1980s – Leuthesser from the Marketing Science Institute (1988); Swait, Erdem, Louviere and Dubelaar (1993); Lassar, Mittal and Sharma (1995) and so on. Keller's take on consumer-brand resonance is aligned with Kamakura and Russell's (1993) definition that reinforces brand equity as a measure of strong, favourable and unique brand associations (Keller, 2001: 7). Keller also focused on memory in his definition (on customer-based brand equity), stating that the long-term memory of a consumer with the brand is linked to a full set of brand associations as the consumer gains brand knowledge through the (differentiated) marketing efforts of the brand (Keller, 1993). Fayrene and Lee (2011: 35) extracted a common denominator in a major sample of models which is the utilisation of one or more of the Aaker models (Keller, 1993; Motameni & Shahrokhi, 1998; Yoo & Donthu, 2001; Bendixen, Bukasa & Abratt, 2003; Kim, Kim & An, 2003) and therefore they reasoned that customer-based brand equity is an asset of four dimensions: brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty.

According to O'Cass and Grace (2004: 257), Aaker's and Keller's brand equity models seem to be two of the most prominent among other models that exist (for instance Bailey and Schechter (1994), Grossman (1994) and Kapferer (1992), cited by Steenkamp (2016: 41). Aaker (1991) explained consumer-based brand equity as the value consumers associate with a brand, as reflected in the dimensions of the four mentioned attributes and also other brand assets (such as patents, intellectual property rights and, relations with trade partners – all focused on gaining a stronger competitive advantage).

Aaker explained that every brand retains a certain amount of brand equity, explained as the assets or liabilities associated with the brand that either add to or subtract from the value that the product or service provides (Aaker, 1991). It seems that Aaker's definition embodies a strong sense of brand value attributes whereas Keller has concentrated more on the resonance consumers feel. Keller's model does in effect incorporate the basic four dimensions of the Aaker model, i.e. awareness (Keller's salience), brand associations (Keller's brand performance and imagery), perceived quality (Keller's consumer judgements and feelings)

and brand loyalty (which is included as part of Keller's consumer-brand resonance) (Keller, 1991: 7). Given that Keller's model succeeded and incorporated many elements from Aaker's highly regarded brand equity model, together with a strong sense of credibility therefore established, Keller's model would be more applicable to authentic narrative in branded entertainment and the emotional responses that it inherently aims to achieve.

Keller's model also follows sequential or developmental relationships between its different dimensions, whereas Aaker's model doesn't (Ruževičiūtė & Ruževičius, 2010: 720) and this could be of importance in order to employ further research in understanding how branded entertainment may impact or influence these dimensions as it steers towards resonance. Keller indeed provided a very detailed analysis on the descriptors of each of the building blocks of his model and that provides rich scope for quantitative intricacies in further research to establish a sense of a validity of this study's central research proposition. Also, for example, as mentioned in Section 2.3 when alluding to BMW's *The Hire*, Keller argued that the series enhanced brand attachment, community and engagement with the possibility of interactive effects between different brand resonance dimensions to exist such as higher levels of attachment leading to greater engagement (Keller, 2009a: 145), for instance. He followed this argument by mentioning that for a brand to maximise brand resonance, both the intensity and activity of loyalty relationships must be increased.

Another reason why the Keller framework was a more applicable model to use for this study is because loyalty is argued to be the highest order resonance and positioned as the most valuable building block in determining equity (Keller, 2001: 8). Fayrene and Lee (2001: 39) explained that loyalty is a core dimension of brand equity, with Aaker (1991: 39) defining loyalty as the attachment that a customer has to a brand. Aaker (1991: 15) included the following three dimensions to loyalty: reduced marketing costs, attracting new customers, and loyalty allowing time for the brand to respond to competitive threats. Keller (2001: 15) included loyalty as one of the dimensions of resonance, accompanied by the consumer need or want for engagement, the consumer wanting to be part of or feeling that they are part of a brand community and the consumer feeling a sense of attachment to the brand.

It seems that Aaker's model, despite including the attachment element to loyalty, has a strong company focus on loyalty, whereas Keller expresses resonance (which includes loyalty) much

more from a consumer point of view; and reiterates that resonance is a combination of the "... psychological bond that consumers have with a brand" stemming from an emotional connection felt with the brand as well as "... the level of activity engendered by this loyalty i.e. repeat purchases, the extent to which customers seek out brand information" and so on (Keller, 1991: 15). Again, for this study resonance was explored from the emotional connection angle as well as from the intent on the behavioural angle as recommended further research could be conducted on loyalty behaviour. A strong dimension of authentic narrative in branded entertainment is to have an emotional connection with the brand as result (Wolburg, 2008; Wiese, 2011; Czarniecki, 2012; Cohen, 2013) which supports resonance as the chosen strategic brand builder.

Inês Risques (2013: 10-11) validated Keller's model to be "... the most comprehensive brand equity model available in literature" according to Kuhn, Alpert and Pope (2008), with several academic peers, which include Atligan *et al.* (2005), Netemeyer *et al.* (2004), Yoo and Donthu (2001) and Kuhn *et al.* (2008) studying, validating and referencing Keller's model. To further support Keller's stance by means of alignment: Richter (2004), as part of the Conceptual Strategic Framework developed for the advertising agency Ogilvy, positioned brand resonance within the "emotional or personality" appeal phase as part of making the brand promise to consumers, which comes after establishing a functional offer to the consumer and even before reaching the brand delivery stage (experience and soul-connection). Knapp's statement (cited by Ghodeswar, 2008: 5) of a brand's promise comprising both the functional and emotional benefits, setting a certain expectation to perform against in future, underpins Richter's methodology. Resonance has a direct link with the ability to respond to or solve certain consumer needs.

However, a study of literature reveals that they all refer to Kevin Lane Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Model, or Brand Resonance Pyramid, as the source of inspiration. The models confirm Keller's (2009: 145) view that brand resonance involves the following three areas properly developed as an ascending series of steps (Keller, 2009: 143):

- (i) Proper salience and breadth and depth of awareness;
- (ii) Well established points-of parity and points of difference;
- (iii) Positive judgements and feelings by customers that appeal to the head and the heart.

### **3.3.1.1 Description of Kevin Lane Keller's brand resonance**

As indicated, the fourth level of Keller's brand resonance model (Keller, 2001: 15-16) can only be assessed once the previous three levels have been present to such an extent that vivid and uniquely positive consumer responses to the brand would readily come to mind when prompted. Brand resonance involves intense, active relationships between the brand and customer and is broken down into four categories (Keller 2001: 15):

- (i) Behavioural loyalty: referring to repeat purchases and the amount, or share, of category volume attributed to the brand.
- (ii) Attitudinal attachment: Keller clearly stated that behavioural loyalty is necessary but not sufficient for resonance to occur as some customers may buy out of necessity (if, for example, it's the only brand being stocked or available) and not because of a strong personal attachment towards the brand. It could be reasoned that customers would then go *beyond* harbouring a purely positive attitude towards the brand to viewing the brand as something really special in a broader context, going so far as to say that they "love" the brand, perhaps describing the brand as one of their favourite passions or even describing it as a "little pleasure" they look forward to and so on.
- (iii) Sense of community: the meaning of the brand is accentuated or underpinned by harvesting a sense of community, i.e. identifying with the brand within affiliation or kinship, amongst others, also sharing exceptionally strong attitudinal attachment to the brand. These connections may include fellow brand users or even employees or representatives of the company. Consumers would sometimes experience a very close bond with specific brands and share it with others or most likely a community of like-minded people.
- (iv) Active engagement: the strongest affirmation of brand loyalty occurs when customers willingly want to invest their time, energy, money or other resources into the brand beyond those expended during purchase or consumption of the brand. Examples of active engagement could include the following actions:
  - (a) Joining a club centred on the brand.
  - (b) Wanting to receive regular updates from the brand.
  - (c) Exchanging correspondence with other brand users.
  - (d) Exchanging correspondence with formal or informal representatives of the brand.

- (e) Online engagement like visiting of brand-related websites or participating in chat rooms or even indicating a “like” on FaceBook without an incentive attached.
- (f) Various ways exist in which the customer without remuneration or incentives by the brand, becomes an evangelist or ambassador on behalf of the brand, communicating positively about the brand to “win other customers over” to engage with the brand on some level. This should not be confused with evangelist marketing practice, explained by the Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA) as: “Cultivating evangelists, advocates, or volunteers who are encouraged to take a leadership role in actively spreading the word on your behalf,” as the latter usually involves an incentive by the brand of some sort.

Brand relationships, as explained by Keller (2014: 365), could be characterised by two dimensions:

- (i) Intensity, referring to the strength of the attitudinal attachment and the sense of community, i.e. how deeply the loyalty towards the brand is felt.
- (ii) Activity, referring to the actual frequency of purchase or engagement with the brand on some level.

Although intensity and activity were not the focus of this exploratory study, it is worth mentioning that authentic narrative in branded entertainment could evoke a more or lesser intensified reaction from a target audience. It is proposed that campaigns like the Dove *Beauty Sketches* evoked highly intense brand relationships because of the strength of the attachment based on a profound target audience relevant insight. One could also reason that the target audience that bought into the entertainment piece would feel a sense of community based on shared values and the conviction that it evoked to conduct campaign-relevant discourse with like-minded individuals.

BMW's *The Hire*, in terms of activity, resulted in a 12.5 percent sales increase year on year (2001 from 2000); the following year BMW's sales rose 17.2 percent between 2001 and 2002; two million people registered on the BMW site, with more than half asking for more information



via e-mail; and 94 percent of the people who saw the films recommended them to others (Sunset, 2008 and Atkinson, 2012). As this exploratory study focussed on authentic narrative's ability to achieve resonance, it is of value to understand intensity and activity in context of brand relationships in further research.

In conclusion, Keller defined resonance as: "the nature of the relationship that consumers have with the brand and the extent to which they feel that they are in synch with the brand" (Keller, 2001: 15). This study is based on the assumption, as derived from Kevin Lane Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Model that the link between authentic narrative in branded entertainment and consumer-brand resonance lies in strong, favourable and unique brand associations (brand performance and imagery). When consumers have experienced the narrative in the entertainment to be authentic (i.e. original, genuine, empathetic, trustworthy, representative of the values of the brand and so on), positive brand association should commence.

This positive brand association should lead to favourable consumer judgements on the brand (for example on brand quality, credibility, meaning, consideration and/ or superiority) and consumer feelings (for example warmth, excitement, social approval and/ or self-respect). This positive response and consumer feelings (or emotional connection) are necessary to create brand resonance, which includes having a psychological bond or personal attachment with the brand. This could come about by displaying brand loyalty, or perhaps having the need to belong to a brand-consumer community, or even brand advocacy.

### **3.3.2 Authentic narrative to achieve brand resonance**

Six narrative characteristics have been proposed to establish authenticity in order to maximise the potential for a branded entertainment piece to achieve brand resonance. This central research proposition in relation to an exploratory study in the interpretative paradigm (see Section 4.3.2 in the next chapter for a detailed discussion) allows for certain inferences on how these narrative characteristics could relate to relevant resonance dimensions as per Kevin Lane Keller's resonance model as expressed in Table 3.1 that follows. The reason for being of this table is to explore the common value of the properties, i.e. characteristics of authentic narrative and Keller's brand resonance.



**Table 3.1: Authentic narrative's requisites for resonance**

<b>Authentic narrative characteristics</b>	<b>Resonance characteristics as per Keller</b>
<p><b>1. Brand-initiated and owned</b></p> <p>Branded entertainment is "... created, produced and funded specifically for a brand, by a brand ...", thus the entertainment property is initiated by the brand with the brand taking ownership of the communication piece in relation to its contact point (Chatman, 1978: 481; Monaco, 2009; Gilbar, 2010; Czarmecki, 2012; Pytlik, 2014; Musson, 2014 and Martí-Parreño <i>et al.</i>, 2015). Narrative follows. As per the branded entertainment working definition proposed in Chapter 2: Branded entertainment is an unconventional brand-initiated and owned contact point with the potential to achieve brand resonance through authentic narrative.</p>	<p>Resonance cannot be accomplished without communicating a brand's identity, meaning and then evoking positive responses to the branded entertainment piece (and therefore the brand) that leads to a relationship between the target audience or consumer and the brand (Keller, 2001: 7).</p>
<p><b>2. Embodies brand identity</b></p> <p>Narrative needs to express and be true to the brand's identity, i.e. identity expressed in the entertainment piece (Fisher, 1989: 109; Daugherty &amp; Gangadharbatla, 2005: 16; Monaco, 2009: 1; Hudson, 2010; Hitch &amp; Worple, 2010 and Bhargava, 2011 &amp; 2014; Musson, 2014 and Wiese, 2015) and aligned to the brand's overarching narrative for credibility (Yankelovich, 2010: 1 and Kantor, 2011: 15).</p>	<p>Achieving the right brand identity involves creating <i>brand salience</i>, which is Keller's foundational building block in achieving resonance as it (Keller, 2001: 8-9) comprises the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Influences the formation and strength of brand associations that make up the brand image, giving the brand meaning.</li> <li>(ii) Assists with category identification and the needs the brand can satisfy.</li> <li>(iii) Influences the likelihood that the brand will be seriously considered.</li> </ul> <p>Achieving the right brand identity involves projecting <i>imagery</i> that will be favoured by the consumer. Consumers will only know if the branded</p>

	<p>entertainment is aligned with the overarching brand narrative if they have knowledge of the brand prior to their branded entertainment communication exposure. A building block to reaching resonance is brand knowledge (Keller 2009: 143). In marketing communication the two most important components of brand knowledge are brand awareness and brand image. Keller reasoned that if in the consumer's memory, linked to what they know about the brand (awareness in recognising the brand) and perceive about the brand (its image held), there is disconnect between brand knowledge and the marketing communication, it could harm the credibility of the communication and erode resonance (Keller, 2009: 144).</p>
<p><b>3. Original</b></p> <p>Narrative ought to be original in concept (George, 2013; Weiss, 2014; Thielman, 2014 and Maconick, 2016) so that it can exemplify a creative expression aligned to the author's (i.e. brand's) identity and world view (Gubrium &amp; Holstein, 1998: 178; Beverland <i>et al.</i>, 2008 and Carroll &amp; Wheaton, 2009: 1). Again the brand contact point of the narrative needs to be original as an alternative or novel means of making impact (Pine &amp; Gilmore., 2010: 4-5 and Osterholm, 2013).</p>	<p>As branded entertainment is an effort by the brand to create meaning through its projected <i>performance and imagery</i>; strong, favourable and <b>unique</b> brand associations need to be present otherwise resonance cannot be achieved (Keller, 2001: 17). One could reason that these unique associations should be part of uniqueness and originality in the narrative as it reflects on the integrity of the brand. Keller (2001: 13) also stated that for a brand to be credible it needs to imbue a sense of innovation. This can relate to the narrative as well as the point of contact.</p> <p>Keller (2009: 146) stated that from a perspective of reaching resonance, marketers should be media-neutral (meaning picking the best mediums) for reaching the target audience without any preconceived biases, i.e. before an agency or media planner starts thinking about creative</p>

	<p>(Summerfield, 2003), and should evaluate all the different possible communication options to effectively (and efficiently) make contact with consumers. That in itself should be considered an authentic way to ensure the brand's contact point has a sense of originality.</p>
<p><b>4. Carries emotional meaning</b></p> <p>Narrative should imbue target audience-relevant content that embraces its mindset in context of a particular psychographic profile or community, thus truly bonding with those consumers on an emotional level by showing an authentic understanding of the target audience (Fisher, 1989: 109; Gremler <i>et al.</i>, 2001: 50; Thompson <i>et al.</i>, 2005: 3, Visconti, 2010: 234; Pace <i>et al.</i>, 2011; Czarmecki, 2012 and Cohen, 2013; Pederson, 2013: 2; Marsden, 2015).</p>	<p>This is probably one of the more achievable outcomes related to resonance as consumers will respond in an emotional way to the brand imagery projected (Keller, 2001: 14), for example feeling a sense of fun, warmth, excitement, security, social approval or even self-respect. This relates to the creation of positive consumer feelings. Keller stated that the first three mentioned are experiential and immediate in level of intensity (which could be brought about by the branded entertainment) and the latter three are more private and enduring – and increase in level of gravity. This may refer to the long-term effect of the emotional connection which is relevant to strategic brand building.</p> <p>Part of Keller's brand performance criteria in achieving resonance is empathy – stating that the brand should come across as having the consumer's interests in mind; also that the brand is caring and seen as trusting (Keller, 2001: 10). Furthermore – as part of brand imagery for the brand to understand the target audience's profiles, personality and experiences (Keller, 2001: 8). Merz (2014) reasoned that resonance will not be achieved without understanding the target audience's "... view, values, beliefs, needs and desires". Relevance to consumers and their needs is a key ingredient of authenticity (Robbins, Colligan</p>

	<p>&amp; Hall, 2009: 5). Localisms, for example, and using vernacular in brand communication could assist in establishing resonance (Leech, 2009; Patterson, 2011; Van den Bergh, 2012; Pace <i>et al.</i>, 2011).</p> <p>Keller (2001: 8) clearly stated that resonance is unlikely if the brand's values and the target consumer's values do not align – even alluding to consumers seeing this as a sense of self-respect (Keller, 2014: 14). Merz (2014) also stated that the target audience must be able to see themselves in the brand identity portrayed through its messages. Value system alignment would most probably speak to consumer <i>judgements and feelings</i>.</p>
<p><b>5. Sincere</b></p> <p>Narrative should be in the best interest of the target audience, i.e. in context of branded entertainment to offer utility by means of entertainment (Roberts, 2012; Wiese, 2013 and Marsden, 2015). This means that the narrative intent should reflect the message intent (Warnick, 1987: 179, citing Fisher). Narrative intent needs to come across as genuine and “for real” (Liao, 2009: 91 and Hargrave, 2011) with the following characteristics or combination of characteristics in tact: (a) acting or being experienced in the following way: honest, simple and human (Hanley cited by Zottola, 2016); (b) real emotions or shared emotions and memories (Williams, 2015); (c) democracy and openness – availability to everybody (Boyle, 2003; Nash, 2007; Marra, 2009; Pace <i>et al.</i>, 2011 and Clifton, 2013);</p>	<p>Keller did not mention being “for real” in his brand resonance model. Yet other authors have mentioned the “being human” aspect in connecting meaningfully with customers and thus achieving resonance. Exceptional authenticity that achieves resonance was explained by Gilmore and Pine (2012: 18) as a brand demonstrating human care done with feeling and being genuine in shaping the offering (in this case the narrative) to the unique or unusual preferences of the target audience. Being “for real” in relation to authenticity that resonates with a target audience was well explained by Botterill (2007: 119) where Reebok in its communication narrative resonated with its target audience when using hip-hop as “... its roots lay in black musical cultures ... and it calls forth the creative expression of the audience members”. This could express one or more of the four mentioned ways in which realness can be expressed.</p>

and (d) respectful towards people, their values (Tampon, 2013) and their environment (Van den Bergh, 2012). “Realness” affirms a “being human” aspect (Brooks, 2005). Furthermore, sincerity can establish brand trust (Demos, 2013).

Sincerity is experienced as part of a brand’s personality as research has shown that relationships and the intimacy of a relationship with a consumer is influenced by the sincerity of the brand (Aaker, Fournier & Brasel, 2004: 2). Although sincerity and being perceived as honest and wholesome are part of Keller’s brand personality-dimensions by the brand putting forward *meaning* (Keller, 2001: 12), it could be reasoned that consumers would not feel comfortable or put their trust in a brand in context of branded entertainment that does not provide them with richer, more contextual information with the intent to truly entertain. Furthermore – Keller (2001: 13) mentioned that for the narrative to be experienced as credible, it should be sensitive to the best interest of the customer – i.e. in branded entertainment to eschew from a sales mentality. Sincerity speaks to *judgements and feelings* relating to cognitive experiences regarding relevance and emotional relevance.

To achieve resonance, Keller (2001: 13) reckoned that consumers may form judgements on the credibility aspect of the brand if the brand comes across as competent and dependable (i.e. trustworthy). Interestingly enough – resonance will also not be achieved if the consumer does not find the brand credible enough to spend time with the brand as the brand should actually be liked by the consumer. As the brand is represented by the branded entertainment, it can be translated to the narrative. Credibility and trustworthiness speak to judgements and feelings.

<p><b>6. Believable</b></p> <p>Narrative needs to be coherent, plausible and the story, i.e. content, meaningful (Chatman, 1978: 481; Warnick, 1987: 173; Fisher, 1989: 109;; Griffin: 2009 and Yale, 2012). This directly influences the narrative to be found credible and trustworthy and consequently the author or brand that provides the entertainment (Canter <i>et al.</i>, 2003: 10, Yale, 2012 and Wall, 2016).</p>	<p>A major part of coming across as believable is coherence – not only in the narrative but also relating the brand to its appropriate category, type and genre (Yale, 2012). Keller only referred to association made with the brand based on the category identification (2001: 8) – and one could allude to style and design as part of brand performance in context of narrative being plausible and consistent with the narrative’s category, type and genre. To achieve resonance, Keller (2001: 13) said that consumers may form judgements on the credibility aspect of the brand if the brand comes across as competent and dependable (i.e. trustworthy). Interestingly enough, resonance will also not be achieved if the consumer does not find the brand credible enough to spend time with the brand as the brand should be actually liked by the consumer. As the brand is represented by the branded entertainment it can be translated to the narrative. Credibility and trustworthiness speak to judgements and feelings.</p>
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The six proposed authentic narrative characteristics in branded entertainment seem to demonstrate the ability to achieve resonance as various dimensions and requisites for resonance as per Keller’s resonance model propose various suggested linkages. More importantly: there seems to be a relationship between authentic narrative characteristics and dimensions of brand resonance. There is no evidence for, and it cannot be stated that one of the proposed characteristics is more important than another. Based on the exploratory findings from Sections 3.2.3.1 to 3.2.3.2, there also seem to be aspects of one characteristic’s ability to intersect or influence another’s.

The suggested relationship that embodies the central research proposition: authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve brand resonance, is represented visually in the form of a conceptual framework, and titled: Conceptual Framework to Guide the Central

Research Proposition presented and discussed in Section 1.8 (Figure 1.1). This framework informed the primary research strategy and methods.

### **3.4 CONCLUSION**

Chapter 3 aimed to establish how authentic narrative harvests the potential to achieve brand resonance in context of the proposed working definition for branded entertainment that was delivered in Chapter 2. This chapter addressed the concepts of authenticity and narrative and aimed to identify characteristics to be present in the narrative of branded entertainment in order to embody an authentic narrative construct. Six authentic narrative characteristics were identified: that is for branded entertainment narrative to be brand-initiated and owned, to embody the brand's identity, to be original, to carry emotional meaning for a target audience, to be sincere, and to be believable – in order to be regarded as authentic.

The concept of brand resonance was explored, identifying Kevin Lane Keller as seminal author, in order to finally explore inclinations for a relationship between the dimensions of resonance and the six authentic narrative characteristics. It seems that the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the ability to achieve brand resonance, reflecting the central research proposition and primary research objective which was to explore and potentially enrich the central research proposition. This proposition was further explored in the primary research phase. The proposed working definition and authentic narrative characteristics reflect two of the three secondary research objectives (the third being practice principles) and were also explored in the primary research phase of the study as they complement and support the central research proposition as depicted in the conceptual framework, outlined in Section 1.8 (refer to Figure 1.1).

The research problem, being the lack of a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment eroding its strategic potential i.e. brand resonance, is addressed by means of the proposed working definition (being a lack of understanding) and six narrative characteristics for authenticity (proposed for application). The research problem has been addressed in the literature study of Chapters 2 and 3 and is further explored in the primary research phase. Chapter 4 presents the research strategy and methods by which the primary research was conducted.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **THE RESEARCH STRATEGY AND METHODS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 4 discusses the research strategy used to explore the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment, using the most appropriate methods. Research is an original contribution to the existing stock of knowledge in pursuit of the truth (Kothari, 1990: 1). This search for knowledge is done through systematic methods through study, observation, comparison and experimentation, to find solutions to problems. This study aimed to make sense of branded entertainment, a relatively new brand communication discipline. The reason for this is that the study intends to make an original contribution to contextualise existing knowledge on branded entertainment and to provide direction conducive to branded entertainment practice that can deliver strategic brand-building results. The research design integrated the different components of the study in a coherent way to ensure that the research problem was adequately addressed (De Vaus, 2001 and Trochim, 2006). It made sense to use the exploratory design for this study because it was used to establish an understanding of how best to proceed in studying the authentic narrative construct in context of brand resonance (Anderson, Catalano & Walker, 2002).

Chapter 2 presented the branded entertainment construct or proposed working definition used to serve as a departure point to the exploratory study. The central research proposition, suggested in Chapter 3, was: Authentic narrative in branded entertainment has potential to achieve brand resonance, meaning that this study proposes that the value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment is strategic i.e. it provides branded entertainment with the potential to achieve brand resonance; and as reasoned - brand resonance builds a brand strategically. The central research proposition for this study exists because literature provided some but not extensive insight to constitute or support such a proposition, hence the need for primary research. Chapter 2 also suggested six narrative characteristics for a branded entertainment piece to be regarded as authentic in order to potentially constitute resonance. These narrative characteristics are for branded entertainment narrative to be brand-initiated and owned, to embody the brand's identity, to be original, to carry emotional meaning for a



target audience, to be sincere, and to be believable. These suggested characteristics were also explored further in the primary research phase.

The primary purpose of this chapter is to present the research strategy and methods which the researcher assessed with the aim to find the most viable means of informing the central research proposition in context of the proposed definition and authentic narrative characteristics to address the research problem. In addition, for the benefit of brand communication decision makers, who should find this study of immediate value because of the research problem, due to the exploratory nature of the study, it made sense for the researcher to provide insights on strategically sound branded entertainment practice, specifically in context of the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment.

The study presents a conceptual framework of constructs that clarify characteristics and relationships between characteristics in a non-determinist way in order to encourage theory development that is useful in practice (Jabareen, 2009: 51, 57; Nalzar, 2012: 6, 9-10). The framework takes an interpretivist approach to understand the dynamics between authentic narrative that consists of proposed characteristics overlaying authenticity and narrative and brand resonance, as per Kevin Lane Keller's Brand Resonance Model. This model can be deemed theoretical but in context of this study it served as a guide to understand the phenomenon and potential strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment. The conceptual framework is presented and discussed in full in Section 1.8 (refer to Figure 1.1).

Chapter 4 ultimately presents the researcher's ontological and epistemological position and applies Zikmund and Babin's (2010: 57) marketing research process stepwise. This process includes the research objectives, research design, sample size and sample frame used for the study. The discussion on the collection of data includes the interview guide design. The marketing research process is then further discussed by explaining the data analysis method and principles followed on the reporting of the data. The research quality and vigour, assumptions, lineation and delineation are then addressed, followed by the consideration of the code of conduct and ethics, to conclude the chapter.

## **4.2 PROVIDING CONTEXT TO A REFLECTIVE RESEARCH DESIGN STRATEGY WITH APPLICATION**

A thorough understanding of the iterative nature of this body of work is in order to contextualise the research strategy and design. The conceptual phase of the research commenced in Chapters 2 and 3 and delivered secondary data, being data that were collected, interpreted and analysed in advance of the primary research phase (Remler & van Ryzin, 2015: 8; Babbie, 2010: 288 as cited by Steenkamp, 2016: 105) in order to identify the research problem and set the research objectives by means of an inductive research approach (Burney, 2008: 5-14). Sources prior to 2014 refer. A conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) was delivered that informed the qualitative research design in order to guide the interviews that obtained expert opinion or the views of the participants. This was done in order to understand the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment in the interpretivist paradigm; ultimately to explore and enrich the central research proposition, being that authentic narrative in branded entertainment has ability to achieve brand resonance.

The initial sample selection commenced in 2013 and identified brand communication decision makers who met the sample selection criteria or frame as explained in Section 4.5.3.3, with the first interviews commencing in 2014. By the end of 2014 the researcher had depleted all the options in the sample pool. The minimum contribution by the expert participants was not sufficient to adhere to practice principles on doctorate level (see discussion in Section 4.5.3.2) and subsequently the same sample criteria that was based on purposeful or judgemental sampling (see Section 4.4.3.1) was applied to 2014 and further to 2015 brand communication or advertising award wins that identified a subsequent set of globally recognised brand communication decision makers for their meaningful contribution to the field of branded entertainment. The remaining interviews were conducted in 2015 with only the referral interview (again Section 4.5.3.3) commencing in 2016. The official data analysis was conducted in 2016. The interview guide was consistently applied during the primary research phase, interview by interview to deliver coherent, valid and trustworthy data focused on the research problem that was confirmed. The researcher kept track of literature as the interviews progressed and up to the point of submission in July 2017.

Maxwell (2008: 2015) cited Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) by stating that in a qualitative study, “research design should be a reflexive process operating through every stage of a project”. Maxwell’s approach informed the construction of this study’s research design as the

methods employed to address the research objectives and propositions were applied in a systemic, reflective and practical way with constant cognisance of the research problem, the conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) produced through the study of literature and the research methods employed to drive meaningful exploration in the area of interest: the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment.

In conclusion, authentic narrative in branded entertainment is a relatively new field with a strong complement of opinions on a brand communication tool that is ill-defined. Industry experts in the field who have accomplished success in the field would serve as valuable contributors to provide a sense of validation and enrichment of the conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) to be put forward as result of the study.

### **4.3 THE RESEARCH PARADIGM**

Maxwell (2008: 224) explained that paradigms refer to a set of general philosophical assumptions mainly about the nature of the world and how we understand or make sense of it. Guba and Lincoln (1994:105) defined a research paradigm as "... a basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator". The paradigmatic stance of this study used the established paradigm of phenomenology in the hermeneutic tradition. Phenomenology and its application to this study is discussed next, followed by hermeneutics and its application to the study. These discussions are then followed by their application to the interpretivist paradigm as the research strategy and methods are constructed in the interpretivist paradigm. Three theoretical positions, dependent upon particular assumptions in determining research strategy and methods according to Kurki and Wight (2009: 15), being ontology (theory of being), epistemology (theory of knowledge) and methodology (theory of method) in the interpretivist paradigm are then discussed with application. Finally, this section concludes with a discussion on research discourse or type of reasoning, being deduction in the interpretative paradigm.

#### **4.3.1 Phenomenology in the hermeneutic tradition in context of the study**

Phenomenology is a meta-science and phenomenologists restrict themselves to a description of the conditions of the possibility of world- and self-directedness, referred to as non-objectifying meta-science (Schwarz & Wiltsche, 2005). Kurki and Wight (2009: 15) explained that meta-theory explores the underlying assumptions of all theory. It also attempts to understand the

consequences of such assumptions on the act of theorising and practice of empirical research. They further explained that it is impossible to embark on research in any subject field in social sciences in the absence of a set of commitments embedded with positions on the philosophy of social science. Thus, meta-theory directs the way in which people theorise and thus, “see” the world. Phenomenology is therefore referred to as the science of phenomena and is a philosophical movement taking its rise from Husserl (1859 – 1938) who mainly directed attention to the inner world of human experience and how it translates to the external, public world (Weininger, 1999).

Authentic narrative in branded entertainment is a phenomenon that has been identified to impact on the inner world, or feelings and judgements (Keller, 2001: 28-29), of a target audience in order to translate to an external stance of resonance that can be enquired upon in lieu of affecting or building the relationship between the brand and target audience (Keller, 2001: 20) and behaviour, for example engagement, joining a community, or loyalty in purchasing behaviour (Keller, 2001: 20-21). This would inadvertently address the research problem, being the phenomenon of a lack of understanding (the inner world dimension) and application (the external world dimension) of branded entertainment withholding it from achieving its strategic potential, reasoning that authentic narrative holds strategic value and therefore can maximise its strategic potential, being resonance.

Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (1991: 27) explained that the phenomenological paradigm’s basic beliefs view the world as socially constructed with the observer being part of what is being observed. They further explained that with the phenomenological paradigm the researcher should focus on meaning and aim to understand what is happening by constructing theories and models from data. This study aimed to create meaning around the main proposed leverage point for branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance, being authentic narrative.

Hermeneutics is the art of understanding and the theory of interpretation, well known in social science as a qualitative method for interpreting meaning (Christopher, Richardson & Christopher, 2000: 1). The objective of this research was to make meaning from the authentic narrative phenomenon by employing a qualitative method for adequate interpretation to seek such meaning.

This study is breaking new ground on the subject of branded entertainment as it aimed to define branded entertainment and establish the value of authentic narrative, hence a qualitative, interpretative approach was most suitable.

#### **4.3.2 The interpretivist paradigm in context of the study**

The interpretivist paradigm is influenced by hermeneutics and phenomenology (Mack, 2010: 7). The interpretivist or constructivist takes an open and exploratory stance with the aim of understanding the complexity of the situation as a whole (Plack, 2005: 299-230 citing Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Continuous hypotheses are formulated and reformulated as data emerge and deeper understanding is developed throughout the emergent inquiry using “idiographic statements, multiple realities, and complex interactions ... recorded through “thick descriptions” using words, phrases, non-verbal descriptors and the like” (Plack, 2005: 299-230 citing Merriman & Associates, 2002). Although the researcher could make sense of the branded entertainment construct and formulate a proposed definition, continuous discoveries on and around key concepts of authentic narrative, resonance and best practice principles helped to craft and recraft the definition and more importantly, the researcher could assess which contributors towards “branded entertainment that can achieve consumer-brand resonance” carried more importance than others.

Interpretivists see the researcher and what is being researched as inseparable, i.e. what is observed is bound up with the researcher’s life experiences with the aim of trying to make sense of the world whereas positivism sees the researcher removed from what is being researched with the objective reality existing outside the human mind (Maree, 2012: 59; Lor, 2011: 4 citing Weber (2004) following Sandberg). The researcher stands in the field of brand communication as a brand strategist. He aimed to make sense of the phenomenon of authentic narrative in branded entertainment and how it relates to resonance for strategic brand building. The researcher has a strong contextual understanding of the field and therefore he tried to make sense of the branded entertainment construct and its strategic potential.

Kurki and Wight (2009: 15) outlined ontology (theory of being), epistemology (theory of knowledge) and methodology (theory of method) all being theoretical positions that are

dependent upon particular assumptions. Each of these theoretical positions will now be discussed in context of the interpretivist paradigm with application to this study.

#### **4.3.2.1 *Ontological dimension of interpretivism applied***

Ontology, according to Kurki and Wight (2009: 15), is the theory of being, i.e. what is the world made of and what objects do we study? Also, seeing the world in terms of different object domains. Lor (2011: 5-6) cited Pickard (2010) in outlining the metatheory (the way in which people theorise i.e. “see” the world) of interpretivism from the ontological dimension as being set in the belief of multiple realities that cannot exist outside the social contexts that create them. The ontological assumptions of interpretivists are therefore that “... social reality is reality is seen by multiple people and these multiple people interpret events differently leaving multiple perspectives of an incident”; interpretivist’s main tenet is that the research can never be objectively observed from the outside; they should rather be observed from inside through the direct experience of the people (Mack, 2010: 8).

For branded entertainment as a relatively new brand communication effort in contemporary marketing management practice based on the challenges of a fast evolving and soon to be digitally saturated media landscape and the Millennial generation’s demands, the problem of definition and application could only be explored and addressed by brand communication decision makers who have successfully dealt with branded entertainment based on direct experience.

Although successful case studies with quantitative results exist and could be studied, the research problem could not be sufficiently addressed as the philosophies, knowledge and application of branded entertainment that had the ability to create resonance would maximise exploration of the authentic narrative phenomenon extrapolated by their different perspectives to enrich the branded entertainment discussion and to achieve the research objectives. The primary research in the study can thus provide information from the “inside”, i.e. the perceptions of accomplished brand communication decision makers who are experienced to make sense of the intricacies of branded entertainment narrative and its strategic potential. This directly contributed to inform and enrich the research propositions. Furthermore, this industry professional experience aimed to provide best practice principles with the ability to address the central research proposition.

#### **4.3.2.2 Epistemological dimension of interpretivism applied**

Epistemology, according to Kurki and Wight (2009: 15), is the theory of knowledge, i.e. how do we come to have knowledge of the world? – accepting or rejecting particular knowledge claims. Lor (2011: 5-6) cited Pickard (2010) in outlining the metatheory of interpretivism from the epistemological dimension as indicating a subjectivist approach where the results of the investigation are a product of interaction between the subject and the investigator – what can be known is thus a result of the interaction based on an empathetic understanding. The knowledge shared between the researcher and brand communication decision makers responsible for achieving resonant branded entertainment is based on shared knowledge that is not only in the field of brand communication but also in the branded entertainment discipline, as the researcher has been active in managerial positions in the marketing and communication industry for more than 15 years, mainly in advertising and brand strategy planning and management. He was involved in project managing branded entertainment television programmes and their related campaigns for national and satellite television in South Africa that served as inspiration to undertake this study.

Axiology refers to the basic beliefs that affect the way to investigate reality; it's concerned with the ethics, encompassing the roles of values in the research and the researcher's stance in relation to the subject studied (Wahyuni, 2012: 69-70). The axiological assumption related to interpretivism dictates that the research is value bound and that the researcher is part of what is being researched to the extent that the research and the researcher cannot be separated and so the researcher will be subjective (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill: 2007, Guba & Lincoln: 2005, and Hallebone & Priest: 2009 in Wahyuni, 2012: 70).

Although the researcher took an insider approach to the investigation (in context of studying social phenomena, i.e. resonance as result of authentic storytelling), he conducted the research by engaging the perspectives of global brand communication decision makers with no leading context referring to the central research proposition stipulated in any of the interviews. His experience allowed him to make a viable assumption, shared by industry stalwarts and specialists in branded entertainment: that authentic narrative in branded entertainment needs attention from an industry point of view as the research problem directs the concern with the participants seeming to have overcome the problem. However, the starting point is: **authentic narrative** is identified as a significant or central characteristic in branded entertainment for success, i.e. consumer-brand resonance.

It could therefore be assumed that the knowledge shared between the researcher and participants was on par and that the knowledge relayed to the brand communication industry as result of this study would follow the same principle, especially with respect to the integrity of the study and the bona fide stance of attributing meaningful guidance to industry in order to address the research problem. The objectivity of the researcher and subjectivity of the participants are indeed major contributors to the study as each participant's reality is different. The study aimed to find assimilations and patterns of philosophy, knowledge and application to branded entertainment narrative conducive to resonance.

#### ***4.3.2.3 Methodological dimension of interpretivism applied***

Methodology, according to Kurki and Wight (2009: 15), is the theory of methods, i.e. what methods do we use to unearth data and evidence? – choosing particular methods of study. Lor (2011: 5-6) cited Pickard (2010) in outlining the metatheory of interpretivism from the methodological dimension as dictating empathic interaction of the investigator with the object of the investigation. Each construction of reality therefore has to be and was investigated and interpreted by the investigator in its own right. Interactions with the participants, i.e. the brand communication decision makers in this study, were based on free-flow discussions to provide opportunity for the subjects to express personal opinions with relevant prompts from the instigator whilst controlling boundaries and respecting opinion throughout the process.

The method most suitable for this study was therefore in-depth interviews because these industry experts would be able to cast a reflective light on the variables that would have contributed to the success of their respective branded entertainment campaigns and provide the ability to explore their philosophies on branded entertainment narrative in general, prompted in an inquisitive manner in the in-depth interviews. These brand communication decision makers would also be able to reflect on their failures on their branded entertainment endeavours and others that they may perceive in industry. They would be able to give their opinion on the branded entertainment construct and subsequent application for strategically sound brand-building practice that can guide industry on creating branded entertainment with the potential to resonate with target audiences.

The method that this study employed was qualitative research. Qualitative research exists in the interpretivist paradigm (Haydam, Slabbert & Uken, 2011: 231) and follows an unstructured



and exploratory research design, which provides insights into and understanding of the problem at hand (Malhotra, 2002: 112), being the absence of a clear definition of branded entertainment and consequently, a set of challenges that erode the strategic potential of branded entertainment. Qualitative research is suitable to this study as the research objective is to develop an understanding of the authentic narrative phenomenon in great detail and in much depth (Zikmund, Babin, Carr & Griffen, 2009: 133).

This study was exploratory in nature because it aimed to understand and further knowledge on the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment. Qualitative research seeks to explore phenomena by use of a more flexible, iterative style of eliciting and categorising responses to questions, whereas quantitative research seeks to confirm hypotheses about phenomena using instruments with a more “rigid style of eliciting and categorising responses to questions” (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey, 2005: 3). Furthermore, qualitative research aims to describe variation to make sense of relationships, to describe individual experiences and group norms, whereas quantitative research aims to quantify variation and to predict causal relationships in order to describe characteristics in a population (Mack *et al.*, 2005: 3). This study explored the phenomenon of authentic narrative observed in branded entertainment to establish whether authentic narrative is believed by brand decision makers to achieve resonance (variation in responses) and to establish authentic narrative characteristics by means of qualitative research that could in future research be tested quantitatively to quantify variation in target audience responses.

Another major difference between qualitative research and quantitative research regarding the research design in relation to this study is that qualitative research allows for flexibility as it is iterative, as discussed in Section 4.5.5; for example data collection and research questions are adjusted to what is learnt and the addition or exclusion of wording would depend on participants’ responses (Mack *et al.*, 2005: 3). This reminds strongly of Maxwell’s (2008: 214-216) reflective model of research design consisting of an interaction between research goals, the conceptual framework (Figure 1.1), methods employed and validity.

Qualitative research furthermore seeks to describe and come to terms with meaning and not frequency of certain phenomena – it always involves some kind of direct encounter with the world and is mainly concerned with the way people construct, interpret and give meaning to

their experiences (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002: 199). This study involved direct encounters with industry professionals that are arguably the most qualified to engage in meaningful conversation on branded entertainment narrative. The researcher aimed to understand how these industry professionals construct, interpret and make meaning of their experiences related to branded entertainment, its planning and practice.

#### **4.3.3 The research discourse: induction in the interpretivist paradigm**

Burney (2008: 5-14) explained that in research, two broad methods of reasoning exist: an inductive and a deductive approach. The deductive research approach starts with a theory, inferring a hypothesis or set of hypotheses. Through observation, a confirmation follows logically from premises based on available facts; thus a definite conclusion either rejects or does not reject the hypothesis or hypotheses based on concise reasons given (which is in absolute correspondence with the real world). Hence it works from the general to the more specific. This study could not test theory (Haydam *et al.*, 2011: 231) as it was creating theory in the interpretivist paradigm, i.e. aiming to define the branded entertainment discipline and proposing an authentic narrative construct with the potential for resonance by taking an open and exploratory stance with the aim of understanding the complexity of the lack of a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment on its strategic potential (Plack, 2005: 299-230 citing Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

Inductive reasoning, in contrast to deductive reasoning, moves from specific observations to broader generalisations or theories through pattern recognition and would therefore include a degree of uncertainty with a tentative explanation that is plausible enough for hypothesis formulation for further research (Burney, 2008: 5-14). However, the interpretivist paradigm in the current study allowed for continuous hypothesis formulation and reformulation as data emerged and a deeper understanding was developed throughout the emergent inquiry (Plack, 2005: 299-230 citing Merriman & Associates, 2002). The literature reviews provided in Chapters 2 and 3 discussed all interpretations, dimensions and applications of branded entertainment that the researcher had explored with the aim to address the research problem.

A tentative explanation or identification of a common denominator with the potential to achieve resonance, being a suggested authentic narrative construct that was formulated, reformulated and refined as data emerged in the secondary research process, could be suggested as being

significant to address the research problem in order to lead into further exploration by means of the primary research phase of this study. Only when the primary research conducted among suitable brand communication decision makers could enrich the authentic narrative proposition and could give a sense of recognition to the central research proposition – that authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve brand resonance – could a hypothesis based on this be formulated for further research that would then employ deductive reasoning.

The study of inductive reasoning is generally carried out in the field of informal logic or critical thinking and aims to find meaning or to make sense of what is observed. The research question would be more open-ended than reasoning used in deduction and would also be more process orientated (where deduction would be more outcome-orientated). The research question, being: How can branded entertainment achieve its strategic potential, being brand resonance? – could only be answered by a process-orientated approach. The process followed in the conceptual phase of this study in Chapters 2 and 3 suggested a branded entertainment construct and authentic narrative construct. It is generally accepted that qualitative research would make use of induction using narrative description and constant comparison as analysis techniques opposed to quantitative research that uses deduction with numerical estimation and statistical inference in analysis.

This study therefore followed an inductive approach where the researcher started with specific observations in the field of branded entertainment, starting with the current debate around the concept and construct and then moving on to derive a suggested working definition as departure point for the study, based on current academic theory taking industry influencer opinions in mind. The researcher could propose what branded entertainment is not and could identify that the latter may be reasons for branded entertainment mostly not reaching resonance for a variety of reasons. However, the reason that could be derived as the most critical pointed to authentic narrative.

Pattern cognition could also establish influencing factors that challenge authentic narrative, for instance the perception of brand communication decision makers, inexperience of branded entertainment creators and media channel influences. With some degree of uncertainty the

researcher could make a broader generalisation around authentic narrative's ability to achieve brand resonance only to be enriched in the primary research phase.

General descriptors that reflect the core characteristics of this study were identified. These are briefly discussed and applied next.

#### 4.4 CORE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

This was an **empirical** or applied qualitative study in the interpretivist paradigm. Interpretive researchers use qualitative research methodologies to investigate, interpret and describe social realities (Tubey, Rotich & Bengat, 2015: 225, citing Bassey, 1995; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000: 446). Qualitative research refers to a broad class of empirical procedures designed to describe and interpret the experiences of research participants in a context-specific setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 5). The qualitative approach is indeed empirical in that it involves the collection, analysis and interpretation of observations or data for that matter (Ponterotto, 2005: 128). This study's aim was to describe and interpret the perspectives of brand communication decision makers on authentic narrative in branded entertainment by collecting data via in-depth interviews, analysing primary, textual data by means of open coding analysis (discussed in Section 4.5.5) and interpreting the data in order to establish a set of findings and recommendations.

The research was also **basic**, meaning that it did not aim to directly solve a "real-life" organisational problem or directly inform managerial decision-making, but rather to acquire new knowledge of the underlying foundation of phenomena (Saunders *et al.*, 2007: 5-8). The strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment was identified and explored by this study to contribute to the current knowledge on branded entertainment in order to inform brand communication decision makers globally about its understanding and suggested practice principles in relation to its strategic potential (resonance) when planning and creating a branded entertainment initiative.

This was an **exploratory study** as the researcher aimed to provide a basic and preliminary understanding of branded entertainment narrative with the potential to achieve resonance on which little is known and to assist in the formulation of research questions and objectives for

further studies. Explorative research by nature is usually done in the qualitative (or interpretivist) paradigm as it involves an open and flexible approach aimed at ensuring comprehension of the phenomenon and to generate new insights; the research design also evolves as the researcher learns more about the issue under investigation (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 79).

Exploratory research therefore aims to obtain information from insightful sources with experience in the field of the study rather than sourcing information from a cross-section of the population (Enslin, 2003: 145). This study engaged sources, i.e. brand communication decision makers with experience in brand communication planning on a global scale, to ensure general principles are extracted that would be beneficial to the brand communication industry as a whole. The study was also non-experimental and has not exhibited control over the studied variables as the goal was to understand with the focus being rich and “thick” descriptions that are process and context driven (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005: 217-218).

#### **4.5      MARKETING RESEARCH**

In conducting marketing research, defined as the “application of the scientific method in searching for the truth about marketing phenomena” (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 5), this scientific method is based on systematic observation, logical explanation, prediction, openness and scepticism (Steenkamp, 2016: 95 citing Remler & van Ryzin, 2015: 13). This section discloses the scientific method employed to find the truth about authentic narrative and its strategic value in branded entertainment based on systematic observation, logical explanation, prediction, openness and scepticism. This is based on a key observation as per the study of literature in Chapters 2 and 3, namely the increasing importance of authentic narrative in branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance in strategic brand building.

It ought to be remembered that, according to Cooper and Schindler (1998: 135), only a fraction of the knowledge in a field or industry is put into writing. It was therefore imperative that the secondary research in this study be extended to a primary research study to explore the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment. The inductive process of reasoning was therefore extended to a primary research study with the aim to produce findings that could put forward guidelines to craft hypotheses that can be empirically tested in future. It must be stated clearly that the above statement merely exists as a proposition or suggestion and not as a conjectural statement. This study did not aim to produce inferences proclaiming

to be absolute but rather findings that can aid in the formulation of hypotheses advancing research and hence deductive reasoning to be tested to represent proof.

Chapter 3 concluded by referring back to the conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) of the customer evaluation process in assessing authenticity in the narrative of branded entertainment to better understand its strategic value in building brands. A review and synthesis of literature on Chatman, Fisher and Yales's narrative paradigms and structures, leading authors on brand authenticity and theories of Keller assisted to present this conceptual framework that informed the design of the research strategy and method, discussed next, that commenced with producing the objectives for the study.

#### **4.5.1 Defining the research objectives**

The research question for this study was: How can branded entertainment achieve its strategic potential, being brand resonance? Brand resonance is strategic in nature, i.e. it can build brands strategically. As a result of preliminary research, it was identified that branded entertainment's potential is brand resonance if branded entertainment imbues authentic narrative and is defined as follows (proposed as a working definition to explore in the primary research phase): Branded entertainment is an unconventional brand-initiated and owned contact point with the potential to achieve brand resonance through authentic narrative. The requisite for branded entertainment conducive to resonance is to have narrative.

The study of literature suggests that authentic narrative gives form to branded entertainment that is original, communicates the brand's identity and aligns with the target audience's value system in a meaningful way. It is proposed that if branded entertainment narrative adheres to the following six qualities or characteristics, that are inherent to the suggested authentic narrative construct for branded entertainment, it could maximise branded entertainment's potential for resonance: for the branded entertainment narrative to be brand-initiated and owned; to embody the brand's identity; to be original; to carry emotional meaning for a target audience (that includes aligning with the target audience's value system in a meaningful way); to be sincere; and to be believable – in order to be deemed authentic.

The primary research explored the presence and depth of these characteristics to assess if they are sufficient to create authentic narrative in branded entertainment to provide the potential for brand resonance. This research is primarily aimed to equip brand communication decision makers with the necessary thinking, philosophies and suggested application criteria to create strategically significant branded entertainment conducive to brand resonance. Therefore, best practice principles that support the employment of authentic narrative in branded entertainment would be conducive to stronger research output.

Based on preliminary research, the problem statement and research objectives were finalised. The research objectives are goals that should be achieved, or the deliverables of the research (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 58). This research study was empirical; therefore, the research problem had to be stated, which is the lack of a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment erodes its core value, that is to break through clutter and connect with audiences through authentic narrative and thus, the potential for branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance is depleted.

The main aim of this study was indeed to explore the strategic value of authenticity in the narrative of branded entertainment. It is of concern, as Mathieu (2012) argued that brand communication decision makers are mostly unfamiliar with authentic narrative's potential to achieve brand resonance, i.e. industry doesn't fully understand the unique concept of branded entertainment and its interrelatedness to "authenticity, openness, and sincerity" to a create "climate of trust" as it is "more likely that consumers will purchase the brand's products". The researcher's position after exposure to various theories uncovered in the literature review that have bearing on the problem (Sanchez in Globio, 2010) delivered the following proposition: Authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve brand resonance.

The **primary research objective** was to explore and potentially enrich the central research proposition. The central research proposition is: Authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve brand resonance, meaning that this study proposes that the value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment is strategic, i.e. it provides branded entertainment with the potential to achieve brand resonance; and as reasoned – brand resonance builds a brand strategically. The central research proposition for this study exists because literature provided some but not extensive insight to constitute or support such a

proposition, hence the need for primary research. The research questions should very specifically address what the researcher aims to learn or understand by conducting the study (Maxwell, 2008: 216). It also asks which questions the research will attempt to answer and how the set of questions are related to one another.

The research questions should have a very clear relationship with the goals of the study and should be informed by what is already known about the phenomena being studied and the theoretical models and concepts that can be applied to these phenomena (Maxwell, 2008: 217). The goal of the study should also be informed by current theory and knowledge, while the decisions about what theory and knowledge are relevant would depend on the goal and question. To reiterate the research question in context of the central research proposition and primary research objective: How can branded entertainment achieve its strategic potential, being brand resonance?

Subsequently, **three secondary research objectives** (and research questions) emerged:

- (1) To explore and refine a branded entertainment working definition in order to present a proposed definition as one of the key outputs of the study; the question being: What do global brand communication decision makers understand branded entertainment to be and entail?
- (2) To explore and enrich a proposed set of narrative characteristics in branded entertainment that could constitute authentic narrative; the question being: Which characteristics in the narrative of branded entertainment would brand communication decision makers deem to hold the most strategic value; and what are the strategic deliverables of those narrative characteristics?
- (3) To obtain an understanding of best practice principles to guide brand communication decision makers on creating branded entertainment with potential for brand resonance; the question being: What is best industry practice on strategically significant branded entertainment? This objective stands integral to goals one and two. The experts interviewed in this study uncovered best industry practice principles in context of the authentic narrative proposition. It could be beneficial to brand communication decision makers to take these insights into consideration when approaching a branded entertainment campaign. This is especially of significance in



addressing the orientation problems experienced by industry at present on the branded entertainment discipline in the field of brand communication.

The study ultimately aimed to deliver the following three key outputs:

1. A proposed definition of branded entertainment, given the findings of this study on the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment.
2. An Enriched Conceptual Framework of the Strategic Value of Authentic Narrative in Branded Entertainment (that stands integral to the proposed branded entertainment definition and includes the authentic narrative characteristics with the potential to achieve brand resonance).
3. Insights for brand communication decision makers on strategically sound branded entertainment practice.

#### **4.5.2 Planning a research design**

Research design follows the identification of the research problem and setting of research objectives. Research design is the overall plan for connecting the conceptual research problems (outlined in Section 4.4.1) to empirical research so that the research design articulates what data is required, what methods are going to be used to collect and analyse this data, and how all of this is going to answer the research question (stated in Section 4.4.1), according to Van Wyk (2012: 4). Van Wyk further explained that exploratory research is most useful and the most appropriate research design for those projects that are addressing a subject about which there are high levels of uncertainty and ignorance about the subject, and when the problem is not very well understood.

This study planned to directly address the subject of branded entertainment in relation to the high levels of uncertainty about its definition and application for strategic success in brand-building practice. It also identified and addressed the lack of understanding generally surrounding the implementation of narrative and more specifically, authentic narrative. The research problem is evident of a relatively new brand communication discipline in the contemporary brand practice context where understanding seems to take on various meanings with subsequent application problems that prohibit branded entertainment from achieving its strategic brand-building potential.

The research design includes sources of information, techniques and sampling (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 64). The research objectives necessitated an exploratory research study in order to provide a sense of direction on strategically significant branded entertainment planning and practice with a qualitative research approach being the most applicable as the authentic narrative phenomenon is complex and comprises many dimensions; hence the identification of six proposed characteristics that as a collective can maximise the potential for resonance. The qualitative research tactic is the undertaking of basic qualitative research where the design is generally based on a social constructivism perspective, meaning that human development is socially situated and knowledge is constructed through interaction with others (McKinley, 2015: 184).

This research aimed to develop the branded entertainment discipline that is ultimately understood, developed and employed by brand communication industry practitioners in a socially constructed sphere in relation to its interaction with another. Therefore, this research engaged perspectives of globally recognised brand communication decision makers to explore the phenomenon of authentic narrative in the interpretivist paradigm. A basic qualitative research design approach includes (Biddix, 2016) that research problems become research questions based on prior research experience (outlined in Section 4.4.1); sample sizes can be relatively small – even as small as one (outlined in Section 4.4.3); data collection involves interview, observation, and/or archival (content) data (outlined in Section 4.4.4); and interpretation is based on a combination of researcher perspective and data collected (outlined in Chapter 6).

The research design of this study employed phenomenology (identified and applied in Section 4.3.1) where a way of looking at the phenomenon from an individual's point of view is understood by assessing the reactions, perceptions, and feelings of an individual or group of individuals (i.e. the brand communication decision makers chosen to participate in this study) and therefore it necessitated lengthy in-depth interviews (Biddix, 2016).

Open-ended questions were used to elicit participants' perceptions on the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment. The interview data was analysed by means of content analysis. The present study's research philosophy, strategy and methods are summarised in APPENDIX 4.

### **4.5.3 Planning a sample**

Sampling “involves any procedure that draws conclusions based on measurements of a portion of the population” (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 65). The population for this would be globally recognised brand communication decision makers that have proven strategic and creative skill in the branded entertainment discipline. However, it must be noted that qualitative methods usually make use of small samples and therefore findings may not be generalisable to the population; so because the result is dependent on the researcher’s interpretation, the result is not meant to generalise (Zikmund *et al.*, 2009: 142) and therefore the identification of a population for the particular study may present itself to be superfluous when taking this opinion into consideration.

The sample made provision for simply the best way to obtain the information needed to address the research problem and explore the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment. So, the sample for this purpose was to be brand communication decision makers that were directly responsible for creating branded entertainment campaigns that have won at least gold at no less than two internationally acclaimed brand communication or advertising award shows, i.e. recognised to be among the best in the world. This section comprehensively discusses the sampling strategy by means of the sampling technique, sample size and selection frame.

#### **4.5.3.1 The sampling technique**

The sampling context for this qualitative study was sampling for meaning, which occurs “... in relation to individuals as representatives of experiential types”, according to Luborsky and Rubinstein (1995: 96). They explained the goal as the interpretation or illustration of a particular type of meaning or experience, such as personal experience from individuals, elicited through verbal descriptions and narrations. The study aimed to engage the perspective of globally recognised brand communication decision makers for the meaning they would attach to the authentic narrative phenomenon in context of its strategic potential, being resonance. Units of analysis of a study refer to the entities about which the researcher wishes to draw conclusions (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2004: 37). The units of analysis would therefore be the individuals (these globally recognised brand communication decision makers) that share their views and experiences by means of verbal, in-depth interviews directly with the researcher who conducted these interviews. The context of the sampling procedure was

ultimately to obtain expert opinion from brand communication decision makers as the study was concerned with best practice in branded entertainment.

The reason why best practice was employed for this study is because the experts interviewed in this study uncovered best industry practice principles in context of the authentic narrative proposition and therefore other brand communication decision makers can learn from it. It could therefore be beneficial to brand communication decision makers globally to take these insights into consideration when approaching a branded entertainment campaign. This is especially of significance in addressing the orientation problems experienced by industry at present on the branded entertainment discipline in the field of brand communication. Krakovsky (2004) is of the opinion that in research one must take care not to only look at successes only but also to take failure into account for a valid observation.

Failure is useful in learning as it sheds light on potential and real problems whilst stimulating the search for new strategies or approaches more so than reinforcing existing ones (Diwas, Staats & Gino, 2012 citing Baum & Dahlin, 2007; Chuang & Baum, 2003). Scott Donaton, editor of *Advertising Age*, stated in 2009 that branded entertainment in its exploration phase will deliver many failures and industry must permit itself to fail before succeeding. The brand communication decision makers who were interviewed have succeeded but have presumably also failed before and therefore it was possible to learn from their failures in addition to a discussion mainly geared towards discussing their successes.

This study employed purposeful or judgement sampling, explained by Marshall (1996: 523) as a technique where the researcher actively selects the most productive sample in order to answer the research question: How can branded entertainment achieve its strategic potential, being brand resonance? This involves a set of variables that might influence a participant's contribution and is based on the researcher's practical knowledge of the research area, the available literature and evidence from the study itself.

The study looked to the perspectives of globally recognised brand communication decision makers because it is proposed that brand communication decision makers globally, that this study ultimately aimed towards, would be most keen to learn from the best in the world based on the internationally recognised success in branded entertainment of the chosen participants.

This study is not country or continent specific as authentic narrative as a meta-concept aims to identify patterns and nuances from a neutral, universally employable stance by means of rational deduction in order to presume best principle and practice, thereby conceptualising a more generic than specific stance on addressing the research problem. This stands in line with an exploratory study in the interpretivist paradigm that aims to create knowledge on a specific phenomenon being authentic narrative in branded entertainment. It can be mentioned that the researcher aimed at representation of six continents to adhere to a global study proposition, again with the aim to observe commonalities rather than differences.

Branded entertainment is planned by advertising agency-side strategists, creatives and client-side marketers. These individuals are ultimately responsible for making the final decision on the communication strategy and creative execution. Media planners and production houses would usually be in supportive capacity. The ultimate responsibility for the performance of a campaign resides with the three mentioned parties. All of the three mentioned parties have decision making power or high level influencing power on strategic decisions made to create brand communication that builds a brand. One could argue that in context of authentic narrative in branded entertainment, a strategic creative approach ought to be employed in order to create narrative that is regarded as authentic in order to maximise the strategic potential of a branded entertainment's initiative.

Advertising agency-side strategists and clients are usually known to do the strategic planning of a branded entertainment campaign but are integral to creative work, thus be involved with or in influential capacity of the creative that is strategically significant and therefore inextricably part of the creative process. In the researcher's experience and view, based on his established career in marketing and advertising that stands integral to the purposeful or judgement sampling philosophy, Creative Directors, especially in established and often large advertising agencies that usually excel in creative work based on advertising award show accolades, most probably imbue high-level strategic qualities and could be seen on senior level as strategic planners in their own right. At the least they would be privy to and part of the strategic planning process that includes strategic parameters.

This study focused on strategic planning in the field of brand communication that stands in the marketing management field in business administration and management. Authentic narrative

in branded entertainment for strategic success is creatively inclined as it employs the art of narrative that is focused on humanness (Brooks, 2005) to maximise branded entertainment's strategic potential, i.e. brand resonance. Therefore, the perspectives of Creative Directors on senior level who have achieved success, based on strategic thinking, were considered to be viable participants for extracting data as the advertising agency-side strategic planners and client-side marketers in creating and ensuring the employment of authentic narrative in branded entertainment. Even more so, they would imbue first-hand knowledge of narrative inherently based on the nature of their profession. The three parties, advertising agency-side strategists and creatives and client-side marketers, work as a tightly knit team in creating branded entertainment and in discussing the strategic success, and even in the absence of one or more of the parties not being part of the interview, they would refer to the initiative in context of their mutual effort but still retaining individual perceptions.

Dynamics between the parties were not the intent of the study but could inform the secondary research objective of insights of brand communication decision makers on strategically sound branded entertainment practice, if and only if the discussion was proactively addressed by the participants. The intent was to obtain the perspectives of brand communication decision makers as individuals on the authentic narrative construct in order to obtain data free of contriteness or influence. However, if participants preferred to conduct the interview with one or more of the other parties involved, one could reason that in the spirit of the successful nature of the identified branded entertainment initiative, void of potential conflict on an subject matter that is purely exploratory in nature that is inherently not controversial or may cause any kind of divide among the participants, that they would still be free to voice their individual opinions. The researcher allowed and encouraged the interviewees, being senior brand communication decision makers, to voice their opinion justly and in the good spirit of enriching the field of knowledge in order to address the research problem.

#### **4.5.3.2 *The sample size***

Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007: 242) said that sample sizes in qualitative research should not be too large as it will then be difficult to extract thick, rich data. The authors, citing Sandelowski (1995), also reasoned that the sample size should not be so small that it is difficult to achieve data saturation (citing Flick, 1998 and Morse, 1995), theoretical saturation (citing Strauss and Corbin, 1990), or informational redundancy (citing Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Baker and Edwards from Middlesex University and Rosalind Edwards from the University of Southampton (2012)

wrote an extensive paper for the National Centre for Research Methods and the Economic & Social Research Council after interviewing 14 renowned social scientists and reflecting on the work of another five respected voices in early career research. The paper asked the critical question on how many qualitative interviews is enough? The general observation is that the question has no reasonable answer as it all depends on whether the researcher can convince the reasonable sceptic (Baker, S. & Edwards: 15).

The participants for this research study, who are among the best in the world across six continents, are all brand communication practitioners that stand in practice, are responsible for globally recognised branded entertainment success, and are all responsible for benchmark, well-known industry campaigns. These individuals are a relatively scarce resource to secure an interview with; however, based on the exceptional quality of their knowledge on the subject and quality of their feedback, the number arguably did not need to exceed 12 interviews. This reasoning is based on the work of Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) referring to the **number of participants** and Mason (2012: 29) referring to the **quality of the participants**.

Charmaz (2012: 21) cited Guest *et al.* (2006) who argued that **12 interviews suffice** for most researchers when they aim to discern themes concerning common views and experiences among relatively homogenous people. This was affirmed by Ragin (2012: 34). In context of the primary research objective, and although from different occupational denominations, it could be reasoned that all of the participants had a common denominator: having a profound understanding of branded entertainment and more so a profound first hand understanding of narrative conducive to strategic planning and executional success. Adler and Adler (2012: 8) suggested that a sample pool of 12 for undergraduate studies and a slight extension (but still less than 20) for postgraduate studies. **The number of participants that the researcher could secure for this study was a total of 15.**

Mason (2012: 29) argued that the quality of the interview is imperative as thorough and true in-depth interviews could be few but insightful enough to properly answer the research question. The researcher argues that this is the case in this research study based on thick, rich data obtained in even the first few interviews as the quality of the interview was led by a simple, clear and focused set of interview questions that adhered to research standards and

dynamics in conducting in-depth interviews, as suggested by Kvale (1996: 30-31, 133-135 and 148-149), in order to achieve the primary research objective that was to explore and potentially enrich the central research proposition: Authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve brand resonance.

#### **4.5.3.3 *The selection frame***

The selection frame for the present study primarily included branded entertainment initiatives that managed to receive the highest accolades at the world's highest acclaimed international advertising award shows. The frame was explained comprehensively in Section 4.4.3: these best practice initiatives could identify the brand communication decision makers (also explained in Section 4.4.3.1) directly responsible for the work that had won.

The advertising award shows that qualified for the sample pool had to be among the world's most acclaimed award shows, according to the global brand communication industry, that were judged by a panel of international judges. The reason for this is that the study aimed to avoid country specific work and an internationally based judging panel ensured that only the highest standards were upheld in the spirit of recognising and awarding outstanding work. For all intents and purposes, this work could be regarded as the best in the world in the branded entertainment category – according to the unbiased and diverse opinions of highly regarded judges in the international brand communication community. Again, the study aims to inform the global brand communication decision makers of the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment.

The selection frame furthermore applied the proposed working definition: Branded entertainment is an unconventional brand-initiated and owned contact point with the potential to achieve brand resonance through authentic narrative; based on the reasoning followed in Chapter 2 for branded entertainment campaigns that were initiated and owned by the brand by engaging a brand identity-based narrative with the intention to present utility to a target audience in the form of entertainment. In this way, the primary research would consequently have the ability to explore the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment as a key focus area and not necessarily enter an extensive debate that is primarily focused on where branded entertainment is positioned in the brand communication sphere. It was also



important to ensure that the quality of the entry was identified and upheld by means of triangulation in the following way:

- At least a Grand Prix, meaning top honours, or Gold at one internationally acclaimed, i.e. highest rated award show, specifically in the branded entertainment category;
- As well as at least Gold at another award show that is preferably international but could be multi-continental with an international judging panel that awarded the same piece of creative work.

It was preferable that at least one of the two awards included a win at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity, the largest and regarded as the most coveted brand communication award show in the world (Davies, 2012, Coloribus, 2013 and Suggett, 2013).

It was of importance for the strategic nature and integrity of the study that the international shows' award entry criteria referred to the strategy, strategic planning, strategic thinking or strategic significance of the study in some way with possible inclusion of results in relation to the initiative's marketing and/or communication objectives; this involves more than just assessing the creative excellence of the work entered. In the selection, only pieces of creative work and not campaign categories or integrated campaign categories were identified as the focus of the study was on the branded entertainment's narrative properties only. If participants were to contribute knowledge in relation to the campaign created that bore any relevance to the authentic narrative phenomenon, it was to be included in the research results as the nature of exploratory, qualitative research is to assess context and contributors to a body of knowledge that can contribute to the final output.

The list of the most recognised or esteemed international or global brand communication industry awards (Davies, 2012; Suggett, 2013; Advertising Age, 2014 and 2015; Levitan, 2016; The Web Marketing Association, 2016) with a branded entertainment category during the two years of expert interviews, 2014 to 2015, are the (1) Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity; (2) Design and Art Direction Awards (D&AD); (3) The One Show; (4) The CLIO Awards; (5) The London International Awards; (6) Dubai Lynx International Festival of Creativity; (7) The Webby Awards; (8) Festival of Media Global Awards; (9) The New York Festivals International Advertising Awards; and (10) The ANDY Awards. A description of each award is outlined in APPENDIX 1. The validity of the sources for selection follows:

- Davies, 2012: A panel of nine international advertising industry experts (mostly global directors and CEOs of the world's leading advertising and production companies) agreed on the ranking of their top international award shows (Davies, 2012). The panel rated the sample-relevant awards (i.e. those with a branded entertainment category) in the following chronological order: 1st place/top rank: Cannes Lions; 2nd place: D&AD; The One Show; 8th place: CLIO Awards; London International Awards.
- Suggett, 2013: London-based Creative Director with more than 20 years of experience in agency groups such as TBWA and currently Starz Entertainment, a Lionsgate company.
- Advertising Age (2014 and 2015), leading global source of news, intelligence and conversation for marketing and media communities.
- Levitan (2016), industry veteran that was Saatchi & Saatchi Advertising Worldwide's North American and European Business Development Director among many other commendable career highlights.
- The Web Marketing Association (WMA), founded in 1997, is a North American organisation, staffed by volunteers that are made up by internet marketing, online advertising, PR, and top website design professionals who share an interest in improving the quality of online advertising, internet marketing, and website promotion.

The unit of analysis comprised the views of the participants i.e. the multi-award winning brand communication decision makers selected for their effort in creating benchmark branded entertainment. The actual sample consisted of 14 interviews based on purposeful or judgement sampling. There was a 15<sup>th</sup> interview that came about by the Executive Creative Director Asia Pacific at Foote, Cone and Belding International who recommended a multi-award winning creative who is internationally recognised for his innovative thinking, alternative brand contact initiatives and entertainment-based approach to advertising (Campaign Brief Asia, 2016), reckoned by Mok as an expert in branded entertainment that proved to be the case. His name is Aste Gutiérrez and his career, accomplishments and relevance to the study are available in APPENDIX 2.

The sampling technique employed would have then been participant-driven sampling; however it was not anticipated because the recommendation was proactively made by Mok. In relation to hard-to-reach populations that was the case with the primary research of this study due to the difficulty in reaching very high-profile individuals across many continents, the

spontaneous participant-driven recommendation was welcomed and added highly valuable data (Heckathorn, 1997 cited by Handcock & Gile, 2011: 3).

#### **4.5.4 Collecting the data**

Data was collected by means of interviews that were conducted to explore the perceptions of globally recognised brand communication decision makers on the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment. Interviews is the preferred way in which to collect data as part of a qualitative study in the interpretivist paradigm that aims to provide a “deeper” understanding of social phenomena, i.e. authentic narrative, than could have been obtained otherwise (for instance through questionnaires). This is because interviews are most appropriate where little is known about a phenomenon, i.e. authentic narrative and therefore detailed insight are required from individual participants (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008).

The norm is usually to collect data by means of in-depth one-on-one interviews (Milena *et al.*, 2008: 1279). However, in-depth small group interviews of two to three people were also included in three instances where participants operated as a creative or account team, with the provision that they would enrich the data if the relationship was not conflicting in nature. They also enabled the interviewees to feel they can share information freely and constructively and have the ability to collectively contribute to address the research objectives (Boyce & Neale, 2006: 3 and Harvey, 2017). This was the case with all participants interviewed in a small group setting in order to deliver a richer data set in the interest of knowledge creation (see explanation in Section 4.4.3.1).

The small group interviews were an exception because only three of the 11 interviews included two or three participants, with the remainder all being in-depth one-on-one interviews. In all cases of the small group interviews, the participant that was initially targeted wanted to grant the interview on condition that their partner or partners involved in the identified branded entertainment initiative could participate in the interview as per agreement between them prior to accepting the interview request.

Refer to APPENDIX 3 for an example of a letter requesting an interview. Despite the difficulty level in securing interviews with these highly sought after experts on an international scale, the requests were granted. In review, the dynamic between the small-group participants enriched the data and it was complemented by a natural extension of healthy and ultimately constructive dynamics between the different participants representing different industry disciplines and sometimes different viewpoints that in turn made a significant contribution to the study's output.

Guided interviews were conducted that followed a general interview approach. This involved a basic check-list to ensure that all research objectives were covered, that the research question was answered and that the research problem was adequately addressed (Berry, 1999). The interviewer was thus free to explore, probe and ask questions deemed of value to the topic of interest. This type of interview approach is useful for eliciting information about specific topics as it allows for in-depth probing while permitting the interviewer to keep the interview within the parameters traced out by the aim of the study (Wenden, 1982 quoted by Berry, 1999). The interview guide follows in the next section: Section 4.5.4.1.

However, to ensure that all relevant themes were addressed, a semi-structured approach was followed by compiling a discussion guide which assisted the researcher to compile a list of seven questions or rather topics of discussion (refer to Section 4.5.4.1) to be addressed during the in-depth research process. During this process, all questions were not necessarily asked if the information had been covered or addressed during the discussion (Fox, 2006: 6; Kajornboon, 2005: 6). This method often results in fewer questions actually being asked that in turn mimics the same procedure followed by in-depth interview principles, i.e. asking fewer questions and receiving longer answers (Hancock, 1998: 13-14, Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 23).

Before commencing with the interviews, the researcher took serious note of Curry, Nembhard and Bradley's (2009: 1445) guidance in conducting in-depth interviews, i.e. gathering the data. They advised that in addition to the established questions, the interviewer ought to prompt and probe to clarify concepts, elicit detail, and extend the narrative by compiling a discussion guide to be used flexibly especially when aiming to define the branded entertainment and understand the authentic narrative constructs. The researcher also made a concerted effort to establish rapport with participants, to use the discussion guide flexibly, and to use probes and follow-up

questions to draw responses as this was complementary to the exploratory nature of this qualitative study.

The skill of passive listening and the use of neutral, non-judgmental language in encouraging participants to speak in detail were upheld at all times. However, Curry *et al.* (2009: 1445) advised that to unearth the authentic narrative phenomenon, interviewers must maintain control of the data gathering through “vigilant attention” to the purpose of the interview, asking the right questions to obtain relevant information, and giving appropriate verbal and nonverbal feedback.

The researcher also strictly adhered to the advice of Leedy and Ormrod (2010: 149-152, cited in Steenkamp, 2016: 107) who offered guidelines to conduct a productive interview. These guidelines are the following:

- Prepare questions in advance to guide the conversation;
- Keep participants’ cultural differences in mind by understanding that they are representative of different countries and continents;
- Ensure that participants are representative of the population by aiming for the study being global to have representation from participants across the world;
- Conduct the interviews in a suitable location to limit interruptions by means of Skype;
- Obtain informed consent;
- Establish and maintain rapport;
- Focus on the actual rather than the hypothetical during the interview;
- Do not put words in the participants’ mouths;
- Record responses verbatim;
- Do not show surprise, agreement or disapproval of participants’ feedback; and
- Remember that responses may be perceptions and not facts.

The in-depth interviews created a space where the study’s participants felt more confident, more relaxed and encouraged to express their thoughts on branded entertainment narrative and industry dynamics (Milena *et al.*, 2008: 1279). This exploratory study relied on expert opinion in making sense of the studied phenomena. Guion, Diehl and McDonald (2011: 2-3) cited Kvale (1996) in outlining seven stages of conducting in-depth interviews. The following state how these seven stages were applied during the research:

- (i) Thematising: The purpose of the interview was clarified as follows: to explore the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment by obtaining the perspectives of globally recognised brand communication decision makers.
- (ii) Designing: The interview guide was designed to answer the research questions. The interview guide can be seen in Section 4.5.4.1. The guide was created to maintain consistency across the interviews with the different participants and to stay on track during the interview process. Each interview guide had a face sheet (see Figure 4.1) that recorded the date, time and place of the interview. The interviewer had the questions printed and had a notepad in which to write down comments and interpretations during and post the interview, in addition to doing audio-recordings of the interviews with the aim to capture data, thoughts and feelings about the interview.
- (iii) Interviewing: After introductions, the researcher explained the purpose of the study to put the participants at ease. The interviewer only disclosed the fact that the study was on branded entertainment, with the following main areas covered: (a) to make sense of the branded entertainment concept; (b) to understand industry perception; and (c) to understand how brand communication decision makers can create a strategically significant branded entertainment campaign. Any more information, the researcher felt, would “guide” participants too much and spoil spontaneous responses, i.e. participants were given the opportunity to identify the authentic narrative phenomenon and its characteristics without influence and bias. Permission was requested from the participants to record the interview. Ten participants were recorded via Skype because of the geographical distances. The other five participants were based in South Africa and allowed for face-to-face interviews because the researcher is based in South Africa and could conduct the interviews in Johannesburg and Cape Town. Skype offered a “novel” interview method, enabling as Sullivan (2012) puts it, a visible “impression management process” to collect qualitative data across seven countries i.e. The United States of America, The Republic of China, Germany, Sweden, Egypt, Brasilia and New Zealand (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013; Janghorban, Roudsari & Taghipour 2014). The researcher found that participants embraced the Skype interview experience as they seemed as comfortable via video-call as they would have face-to-face. Some researchers argue that the relative anonymity of online interactions may even increase the authenticity of arguments compared with face-to-face interviews (Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimons, 2002; Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006). Again, the researcher guided the participants through the conversation in such a manner that all important issues on the interview guide were covered. No leading

questions were asked and the researcher refrained from interrupting participants during their line of reasoning.

- (iv) **Transcribing:** Transcribing involves creating a verbatim text of the interview by writing out each question and response using the audio recording. The researcher made use of a professional transcriber who delivered each transcription within two days of the interview. This allowed the researcher to go through the interview again via audio and text and to make notes and draw preliminary inferences. The researcher could also make notes to compare the latest interview with previous ones to create a sense of synthesis so that no momentum was lost. The interviews were conducted over a period of two years. Securing interviews with globally recognised brand decision makers who are among the most recognised and celebrated experts on branded entertainment was challenging. The majority of interviews were secured with a two-week frame of notice. Although three of the interviews were rescheduled by participants due to pressing work schedules, all participants engaged in full in the actual interview. The average duration of an interview was three quarters of an hour (some half an hour and some an hour long). In four instances, participants engaged in discussion for an extended period of over an hour. The full set of 11 interview sessions that included 15 participants produced rich data for analysis.
- (v) **Analysing:** Analysing involved re-reading interview transcripts to identify themes emerging from the participants' answers using topics and questions posed to organise the analysis, thus synthesising answers to proposed questions. The researcher identified a brief motivation data analysis method considered to be the most suitable for the research conducted. This is outlined in Section 4.5.5.
- (vi) **Verifying:** This step involved checking the credibility of information by means of multiple perspectives (that also included the literature review) to interpret a single set of information and to determine areas of agreement and disagreement (Guion *et al.*, 2011: 1). This is discussed in Chapter 5.
- (vii) **Reporting:** The research results, findings and insights are reported on in Chapters 5 and 6 of this study and the final dissertation will be made available to all participants in the study. The results and findings are presented in context of the research propositions and objectives with a view to a proposed definition for branded entertainment and an Enriched Conceptual Framework of the Strategic Value of Authentic Narrative in Branded Entertainment as informed by the study.



Data was collected from ten advertising agency-side creatives, three advertising agency-side strategists and two client-side marketers. This means that two thirds of the 15 participants were senior creatives and one third was senior strategists because senior client-side marketers can be reckoned as strategists, and based on their seniority (all were on director level) have a firm grasp, just like advertising agency-side strategists, on the creative process in relation to strategy and campaign deliverables. This ratio was a comfortable fit with a study that aimed to explore the narrative in branded entertainment because narrative is ultimately a creative process that should be constructed with strategy in mind.

As reasoned in Section 4.4.3.1, senior creatives carry as much weight strategically as they do creatively based on their level of expertise and even more so in context of this study's selection frame. Interviews that included more than one participant were as follows: one interview engaged the opinions of a Copy Writer and Art Director team that could deliver a rich, diversified and lucrative data set; one interview had the Creative Director and client together in the interview that in addition to all research objectives could provide a fresh take on how authentic narrative in branded entertainment also influenced the brand on client-side; and one interview had the three denominations in the interview which provided a 360 degree view, i.e. set of individual takes and team-driven takes on the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment. The interview guide design is explained next and then followed by a discussion on the analysis of the collected data.

#### **4.5.4.1 *The interview guide design***

The interview guide aimed to extract data from the participants in order to address the research objectives and the research problem. Inherently it also aimed to enrich the research propositions and provide sufficient evidence to design an enriched conceptual framework of the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment as an eventual output of this research study. A brief revisit by means of a summary of the research problem, research propositions and research objectives is available in the form of a table, see APPENDIX 4.

The interview guide started by addressing the first part of the research problem at hand, being the lack of a cohesive understanding of branded entertainment. It simultaneously aimed to open discussion to the branded entertainment construct or proposed working definition, being that **branded entertainment is an unconventional brand-initiated and owned contact**



**point with the potential to achieve brand resonance through authentic narrative.** It inadvertently aimed to explore and refine a branded entertainment working definition in order to present a proposed definition as one of the key outputs of the study (being the first supportive research objective). The first two questions opened the interview with the subject at hand in order to gain a foothold for any questions to follow that would ultimately address, challenge or enrich the definition. The following questions opened the interview:

**1. What is branded entertainment?** (Control questions: (1) What are the characteristics of branded entertainment? (2) Where lies the ownership of a branded entertainment initiative? (3) In what way could the use of narrative be seen as a requisite to branded entertainment?).

**2. To what extent is branded entertainment seen as unconventional?** (Control question: How is branded entertainment seen to be different from traditional advertising?). This question was relevant because it assessed the perception that industry has on its impact, the originality of its approach and novelty in employing narrative in the form of entertainment that is a different approach from traditional advertising, also by means of its alternative brand contact objective and possible alternative brand contact point. The intent of this question was also to assess whether branded entertainment is becoming the norm (especially for a Generation Y or Millennial market and in context of a fast evolving digital brand communication landscape).

The focus then shifted to the core value of branded entertainment, proposed by the study of literature to break through clutter and connect with audiences through authentic narrative. This could be seen as a follow-up question for Question 2; however, it was in the interest of the study to explore any other core value elements the participants deemed to be prevalent from their perspective:

**3. What is the core value of branded entertainment?** (Participants may have proactively referred to brand resonance. If not, question 4 that followed asked the question directly).

The primary research objective: To explore and potentially enrich the central research proposition, being: Authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve consumer brand resonance then moves into a central focus point. The participants was firstly prompted to identify branded entertainment's strategic potential in context of its narrative or content (often used in industry to describe "any content that can be associated with a brand in the eye of the beholder" as per a commissioned definition from the Oxford Brookes University and Ipsos MORI by the Branded Content Marketing Association (BCMA) based in the United States of America, 2014):

#### **4. What can the content or narrative in branded entertainment ultimately achieve?**

The second supportive research objective, being: To explore and enrich a proposed set of narrative characteristics in branded entertainment that could constitute authentic narrative, being for branded entertainment narrative to be brand-initiated and owned, to embody the brand's identity, to be original, to carry emotional meaning for a target audience, to be sincere, and to be believable – in order to be deemed authentic, was then addressed:

#### **5. Mention and discuss all characteristics that ought to be present to achieve what you had mentioned branded entertainment can achieve?**

(The researcher encouraged comprehensive dialogue on this section in order to unearth as much data on this subject as possible, since it was ultimately the crux of the research).

Another dimension of the research problem was then addressed, being the application of branded entertainment practice in relation to its narrative practice and the main stressors on branded entertainment withholding from its potential:

**6. What withholds branded entertainment from achieving its potential?** (Prompts if needed: (1) In your opinion, in what way is branded entertainment currently succeeding or not succeeding? (2) Which factors addressing narrative practice may withhold branded entertainment from its potential? (3) What human factors may withhold branded entertainment from its potential?)

The guide concluded with a view on insights of other brand communication decision makers on strategically sound branded entertainment practice and specifically to the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance, being the third research objective:

**7. Can you give any advice on sound branded entertainment practice?** (Control questions if time allows: (1) Any advice on narrative practice to achieve its potential? This is typically a repeat question that resembles or could refer to Questions 5 and 6 with the hope of adding more information; (2) Any advice on agency-client relationships? (3) Any advice on strategy-creative inter-agency dynamic? (4) Any advice on inter-creative team and the creative process dynamic? (5) Any advice on the mindset in which branded entertainment should be approached?).

Note that the words: authentic narrative, or phrase: authentic narrative, do not get asked directly as it would be leading the participants. The word “authentic” carries many meanings in the minds of many different people. Many of the participants used the word in context of narrative; however, the characteristics that the study of literature could identify posed to be of a greater interest, and most importantly whether the authentic narrative construct in the view of the participants could achieve the brand communication initiative’s strategic potential, being resonance; or at least the mentioned dimensions of resonance as identified in the literature study by reference of Keller’s resonance model.

#### **4.5.5 Analysing the data**

A brief literature study on the process of analysing data was employed first so that the researcher could familiarise himself with the theory available on scientifically sound analysis procedures of a qualitative, exploratory study in the interpretivist paradigm. This study follows. The brief literature study was then followed by the application used by the researcher, taking the literature study suggestions and steps into consideration.

Qualitative data analysis was defined by Bogdan and Biklen (2003: 110) as “working with the data, organising them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesising them, and searching for patterns”. The aim is thus to discover patterns, concepts, themes and meanings. The researcher aimed to find similarities between the responses from different participants to identify patterns in the research (Seidman, 2006: 51-52 cited in Steenkamp, 2016: 112). Qualitative data analysis is also an ongoing process and iterative (non-linear), implying that data collection, processing, analysis and reporting are intertwined and not just a number of successive steps (Nieuwenhuis in Maree, 2012: 99-100).

The data obtained from the expert interviews on authentic narrative delivered more than 100 pages (single spacing). The data was analysed by means of content analysis. Content analysis is a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories so that trends and patterns can be examined (Stemler, 2001: 1), i.e. a systematic approach to analyse qualitative data which firstly identifies and then summarises message content (Neuenhof, 2002 in Nieuwenhuis, 2012) from transcripts of interviews. Gadamer (1976 in Nieuwenhuis, 2012) explained that analysing textual data in the hermeneutic tradition is based on the idea of a hermeneutic circle.

This means that the researcher makes sense of the text through argument and logic in a way where the text is understood as a whole and its parts are interpreted in such a way that descriptions are navigated by anticipated explanations, asserting that this movement of understanding "... is constantly from the whole to the part and back to the whole" (Gadamer, 1976: 117). Again, it was analysed in a reflective way in accordance with Maxwell's (2008: 2015) suggestion.

The researcher coded and classified the data – or as referred to by some authors, categorised and indexed the data (Hancock, 1998: 17). Coding represents the operations by which data is broken down, conceptualised and put back together in new ways – the central process from which theory is built from data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990: 57). Open coding was done by the researcher. The process of **open coding** involves reading the first few transcripts of the interviews in detail, summarising the content of short sections of text ("units of meaning") in a few words, on a line-by-line bases (Hancock, Ockleford and Windridge, 2009: 27).

Creswell (2003: 185-190) suggested five steps in qualitative research analysis have were taken into consideration for this study:

- (i) Organise and prepare the data for analysis. Interviews are to be transcribed.
- (ii) All the data should be read so that a general sense of the information can be reflected on in order to obtain overall meaning. In this stage the ideas, tone of the ideas, impression of the overall depth, credibility and use of information should become evident.
- (iii) The detailed analysis commences with a coding process where material is organised into chunks or segments of text before bringing information to the meaning (Rossman & Ralls, 1998 in Creswell, 2003). The process involves taking text data, segmenting sentences or paragraphs into categories, and labelling those categories with a term. Tesch (1990, in Creswell, 2003) recommended using the following eight steps in the analysis for qualitative data; steps that the researcher of this study employed:
  - (1) The researcher needs to carefully read through all the transcriptions and to make notes of ideas that come to mind in order to get a sense of the whole.

- (2) The researcher needs to select one interview – the most interesting or valuable one – and read it to try to find *meaning* in the information, writing down thoughts that come to mind.
- (3) After going through the transcripts, the researcher should arrange similar topics in groups by forming columns labelled major topics, unique topics, and leftovers.
- (4) The researcher then needs to abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate segment of the text. The researcher then observes the organisation of data to check if new categories or codes have emerged.
- (5) The researcher will then find the most descriptive wording for the topics and convert them into categories. The aim is to reduce the total list of categories by grouping topics together that relate to each other. Lines drawn between the categories should indicate interrelationships of categories.
- (6) Each category is then abbreviated with coding arranged alphabetically.
- (7) The data material belonging to each category should be put together in one place and a preliminary analysis has to follow.
- (8) Recoding of the data should then be done, if necessary.

The above eight steps ensure a systematic analysis of textual data. Creswell (2003: 186) encouraged qualitative researchers to analyse their data for material that can address the following: Codes on topics that readers would expect to find, based on common sense or past literature; codes that are surprising and not anticipated with commencement of the study; codes that are unusual and in themselves of conceptual interest to readers; codes that address a larger theoretical perspective in the research.

- (iv) The coding process can be used to generate a description of the setting or people as well as the themes or categories for analysis. This could add layers for a more complex analysis.
- (v) The use of visuals or figures or tables reporting the themes and descriptions is strongly suggested if warranted.
- (vi) Interpretation means that the researcher makes meaning from the data.

Creswell cited Lincoln and Gube (1985) when capturing the essence of this idea as “lessons learned”. It should be realised that the latter would very likely imbue the lens through which the researcher sees the world which is influenced by their culture, history and experiences. It could also be meaning derived from a comparison of primary research findings with the literature study or recognised existing theories. The interpretation could also suggest new questions that needed to be asked, raised by the data and analysis that the researcher had not foreseen earlier in the study.

The researcher in essence followed the approach proposed by Elo and Kyngäs (2007: 110) to organise and report on data obtained in the primary research phase of this study. The analysis of data thus firstly involved: **(1) open coding and then coding sheets; (2) grouping data; (3) categorisation; (4) abstraction; and (5) creating a conceptual system.** The latter was systematically applied to the content analysis process.

**(1) Open coding:** the researcher familiarised himself with the content by making notes and headings in the text whilst reading it. The material was read through a number of times and a number of headings or categories were written down in the margins to describe as many aspects of the content as possible.

The headings were collected from the margins onto **coding sheets** and categories were generated. After the open coding process, the researcher grouped the lists of categories under higher order headings with the aim to **(2) group data** in such a way that it reduced the number of **(3) categories** by collapsing those that are similar and dissimilar into broader higher order categories. It must be noted that the researcher kept the following in mind (Dey, 1993 as cited by Elo & Kyngäs. 2007): creating the categories was not simply bringing together observations that are similar or related, but instead data was looked at as having a “belonging” to a particular group and this implied that a comparison was made between this data and other observations that did not belong to the same category. The purpose of creating categories was to provide a means of describing the phenomenon, to increase understanding and to generate knowledge (Cavanagh, 1997 as cited by Elo & Kyngäs. 2007). The researcher formulated the categories or themes by inductive content analysis and through sound interpretation to what belonged in the same category and why. Although different types of analysis could have been employed, such as narrative analysis, text analysis, discourse analysis, critical discourse

analysis or conversation analysis, the most appropriate was thematic analysis. This was because a sample representing participants over six continents using rather diverse phrasing and nuances in meaning, and discussing and exploring a rather wide topic that seemingly spreads itself across many fields of interest with many interrelated concepts intact, thematic analysis could link the various concepts and opinions of the participants and compare these with the data that has been gathered at different times during the interviews over a course of two years (Alhojailan, 2012: 40).

Robson (1993), Burnard (1996), Polit and Beck (2004) as cited in Elo and Kyngäs (2007) described the formulation of **(4) abstraction** as a *general description of the research topic* through generating categories with each category name using content-characteristic words. Subcategories with similar events and incidents were grouped together as categories and categories were grouped as main categories. *A general description of the research topic* involved the proposition that there is strategic value in authentic narrative in branded entertainment. This phenomenon was explored against the context of globally recognised brand communication decision-makers' approach to branded entertainment.

The following categories (by the use of content-characteristics words) relating to the research topic and objectives naturally emerged: (1) the branded entertainment concept or construct; (2) the value of branded entertainment; (3) the view or perception of globally recognised brand communication decision makers; (4) authentic narrative as a concept; and (5) the strategic value of authentic narrative. These five categories served as a natural guideline that was kept in mind when grouping and synthesising data that supported the themes and subthemes that emerged. The following section explains the content analysis process from a practical point of view, followed by the **(5) conceptual system**.

The interviews were all carried from the original transcriptions that were done in an MS Word document to an MS Excel spreadsheet for coding and easy reference. The researcher found that MS Excel offered ease of use and a very strong sense of data control that eventually allowed more controlled and more meaningful data interpretation. A lack of singular keywords posed to be a challenge, for example to encode a software programme like Atlas.ti (in which the researcher was trained). This was firstly because participants used a vast variety of industry vernacular spanning different cultures and continents; secondly, with English being



their second or even third language, significant interpretation was necessary; and thirdly, meaning expressed by means of different words in different contexts to refer to the same thing in relation to the fairly academic term of “authentic narrative”, was awkward. These aspects were all challenging in effective keyword capturing. The researcher received approval from his supervisors on the method used and the method was approved in two consecutive PhD colloquiums at the USB.

The transcribed interviews were coded per participant response. Refer to Figure 4.1 (next).

	A	B
1		<u>PhD interviews</u>
2		
3		TRANSCRIPTION: THE BEAUTY INSIDE
4		COUNTRY: USA
5		LOCATION: SAN FRANCISCO
6		INTERVIEW DONE: VIA SKYPE
7		DATE: 21 OCTOBER 2014
8		AGENCY: PEREIRA O'DELL
9		CLIENT: TOSHIBA & INTEL
10		INTERVIEWEE:
11	IM1	Jaime: EXECUTIVE CREATIVE DIRECTOR
12	IJ1	Duration: 37.35 minutes
13		CODING
14		I = INTEL
15		M = Marthinus
16		J = Jaime
17		1, 2, 3 ... INTERVIEWEES' SEQUENTIAL NUMBER OF COMMENT IN THE INTERVIEW.
18		
19	IM1	Good afternoon. [Doing introduction.] I want to start off by congratulating you on The Beauty Inside. One of the things that is important for me – firstly, I looked at the concept of brand entertainment and really tried to get to grips with - what exactly it is. There is a lot of different perspectives and interpretations on it and also with regards to degree of ownership that the brand takes in creating the content. I would like to look at what industry's take is on branded entertainment; but the study goes quite deeply into the creative ... in the sense that; how do you create the content? What are the rules of the game? How do you get it right for people not to feel that you are perhaps advertising to them or whatever? I want to chat a bit about that today.
20	IJ1	What I can talk about – stuff I have done in my philosophy and stuff like that.
21	IM2	We can refer to Intel Inside. That is pretty much kind of the idea as well. If that is good (with you) ... Can we shoot? My first question – what would you make of branded entertainment? How would you explain it to someone in your own words?
		I think the word storytelling is often over-used, but I think it is telling a great story that the brand or product is at the heart of. The centre of it somehow; (that the brand) is a character in that story. I don't think it is just product placement.
		KFC THE VILLAGE VOICE TOSHIBA & INTEL DEUTSCHE TELECOM VOLVO TRUCKS HOT WHEELS MOBI

**Figure 4.1: Example of the study’s data capturing method**

The researcher worked through the interview line by line to capture responses. A number of themes emerged and were grouped together. The researcher captured all data in a spreadsheet with the aim to observe preliminary saturation of data. Colour coding was used to show whether the comment was made by a creative, a strategist or client to indicate possible difference in opinion and also areas where creatives had more to say (proportionately) on a



particular subject than strategists and vice versa. This assisted with the synthesis and nuances emerging from the data. Figure 4.2 is an extract of the first raw data analysis from the Excel capture sheet.

	Creative	Strategist	Client									
1												
2												
3												
4												
5	<b>The concept of branded entertainment</b>											
6	KFC	Voice	Intel	D Telec	Volvo	Hwheel	Mobinil	MINI	CT Tourism	Coke	Gutiérrez	
7	KIS3	VK7	IJ2	DE13	VA1	HD16&17	MA3	SJ5	CD16	CDR12	A12	
8								SJ5	CD16	CDR5	A9	
9									CD43		A7	
10	KLM10		IJ2							CDR11	A12	
11	KLT17		IJ2					SJ3				
12			IJ2		VB2							
13	KLM1									CDR2	A10	
14	KIS15	VK24			VA1			SJ8	CMA1	CDR11		
15	KIS8	VK14	IJ3&7		VB7&14	HD6	MA2	SJ2	CD2			
16			IJ2									
17				DE5						CDR5		
18	KIS9	VK24					MA11	SJ4	CMA1			
19		VK13&14										
20									CMA1		A7	

**Figure 4.2: Example of the study’s first raw data analysis**

Because the researcher used a free flow technique to capture the data, some duplication occurred in the original or rough or raw data analysis. Weller and Romney (1988, in Ryan and Bernard, 2000: 770) indicated that the free-flow technique of data capturing is typically elicited in less structured data collection such as unstructured or semi-structured interviewing in in-depth interviews. A total of 434 observations were captured in the process.

The researcher then combined duplications (which made for richer content in most instances), merged similar statements and subsequently condensed data into groupings that either repeated or emerged anew. The aim of this was to process the data responsibly in order to deliver succinct results.

The researcher then re-visited all statements from the interview and populated the spreadsheet with direct quote references in order to substantiate facts and also to find possible agreements or disagreements between what had been said by creatives, strategists and clients. This also helped to see which areas of the research would fall more naturally with

expression from creatives or strategists. The researcher also populated relevant data with findings from the literature study in order to understand how the data either contributed to the literature study or disagreed with some of the statements derived from the literature study.

The primary aim was to find saturation of data in order to enrich the research propositions. Figure 4.3 below, showing the refined and final data analysis for obtaining and interpreting findings, is an extract of the reworked data capture sheet that entailed a more condensed 119 observations. These observations contributed to the data interpretation to deliver research findings. The red dots are all quotes inserted. The latter process prompted the researcher to work through the interviews again for creating synthesis of the data.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
1	Themes and analysis: ROUND 2, more refined	Cr = Creative; St = Strategist; Cl = Client											
2			KFC	Vvoice	Intel	DTelec	Volvo	Hwheel	Mobilil	MINI	CTTourism	Coke	Gutiérrez
3	Literature study revealed	IN PINK											
4	New information/ added insights	IN YELLOW											
5	1. THE CONCEPT AND IMPORTANCE OF BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT												
6		Unconventional/ novel/ alternative way to make brand contact.	Cr	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr
7		Brand initiated and owned; reflects the brand's identity as the brand has got its own story to tell.	Cr	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr
8		Branded entertainment must be consistent with its overarching brand identity.	Cr	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr
9		Original in concept and delivers unique, compelling and meaningful content.	Cr	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr
10		Consists of content with narrative.	Cr	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr
11		It is not traditional advertising.	Cr	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr
12		It is not a hard sell.	Cr	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr
13		It is not product or brand placement.	Cr	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr
14		Brand or product integration is not branded entertainment.	Cr	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr
15		It could include brand or product integration, but there are qualifiers.	Cr	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr
16		It could include sponsorship, but there are qualifiers.	Cr	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr
17		There is a blur between what branded content and branded entertainment is. It does not matter. As long as your reach people.	Cr	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr
18		Call it what you will. As long as it meets the business/ marketing objective.	Cr	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr
19		Branded entertainment follows the big idea; not the other way around.	Cr	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr
20		There is no restriction on format.	Cr	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr
21		Branded e = branded e only when it spreads on social media, really.	Cr	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	St	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr

Figure 4.3: Example of the study's refined and final data analysis

The raw data analysis brought 18 categories to the fore that after refinement delivered six themes with some carrying subthemes. A category is the primary product of an analytical process, i.e. grouping that is imposed on coded segments so to reduce the number of different pieces of data in an analysis by means of a descriptive identity (Fox, 2014 and Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen & Snelgrove, 2016: 102). Data analysis is predominantly used at the beginning of the theme development process to classify findings (Vaismoradi *et al.*, 2016: 102). A theme is a higher-level of categorisation, usually used to identify a major element (perhaps one of four of five) of the entire content analysis of the texts (Fox, 2014). The six

themes that the data produced are discussed and applied in Chapter 5, which presents the primary research phase's findings.

#### **4.5.6 Formulating the conclusions and preparing the report**

This step includes interpreting and communicating the research results, describing the implications and drawing conclusions (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 66-67, cited in Steenkamp, 2016: 110). According to Henning, van Rensburg and Smit (2004: 106), the questions that should be asked during this stage of the process are:

- What are the relationships in meaning between all these categories or themes?
- What do they say together?
- What do they say about each other?
- What is missing?
- How do they address the research question(s)?
- How do these categories (together) link with what I already know about the topic?
- What has been foreground in the analysis?
- What has moved to the background?
- What additional data gathering and/or analysis have to be completed?"

Conclusions reflected employment of the categories and ultimately themes to address each research objective in order to give a highly textured view on the central research proposition, being that authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve brand resonance. New knowledge was ultimately produced by systematically (step-wise) and systemically (viewing the research intent as a whole) assimilating interview data with theoretical data, or the empirical with the theoretical, and by presenting an enriched conceptual framework of the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment (Henning *et al.*, 2004: 108).

Although the research is qualitative in nature, an indication of the number of participants upholding a certain opinion was warranted. The following sliding scale was employed:

- A few = 2-4 participants out of the 15
- Some = 5-7 participants out of the 15
- Many = 8-10 participants out of the 15
- Most = 11 or more participants out of the 15

This scale assisted in understanding data occurrences that potentially carried more weight in context of other dimensions in the data.

#### **4.6 ASSESSING THE RESEARCH QUALITY AND VIGOUR**

Bless, Higson-Smith and Sithole (2013: 220) asserted that the quality of qualitative research is evaluated through its trustworthiness, on the basis of credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability. They explained the listed terms as follows (Bless *et al.*, 2013: 236-238):

- (i) Credibility corresponds to the concept of internal validity as it seeks to convince that the findings depict the truth of reality under study. By employing actual branded entertainment initiatives to the selection frame of globally recognised industry practitioners that are active in the field of brand communication and by continuously quoting their actual phrases and references in the findings, the researcher feels that he could depict the truth of the reality of the study, especially in context of a real-world research problem that was recognised by the participants. The researcher has not met or worked with any of the participants, and thus avoided influencing sample opinion prior to or during interviews. The researcher could also not have informed participants of his opinion before the interviews commenced. This was to secure free will and honest feedback from the participants in the matter. Trust in the research participants, being the people responsible for strategically creating the branded entertainment initiative serving as a leverage point for discussion, sits in the view of globally recognised brand decision makers based on creative work that achieved brand resonance.
- (ii) Dependability demands a thoroughly explained and precisely followed research strategy that would include exactly how data was collected, recorded, coded and analysed so that the reader can see it as fact dependable. Sections 4.4.4 and 4.4.5 explain the latter, diligently following recommendations by well-respected seminal

authors in the field, for instance Zikmund and Babin, Creswell, Mouton, Henning and Lincoln and Guba, among others.

- (iii) Transferability corresponds to the concept of external validity since it refers to the extent to which the results apply to other, similar situations relating to information to the researcher's person, the context in which the data was collected, the type of relationship between the researcher and the participants. The study will have high transferability when the reader understands the context from which the findings emerge and furthermore could imagine several other contexts where such findings might be meaningful. The stance of understanding and application on the authentic narrative phenomena is universal in nature and not bound by country, continent, genre or campaign-specific theory. It is therefore easily transferable, i.e. deemed to be easily understood by any global brand communication decision maker as the data has been ultimately produced by global brand communication decision makers relayed via a researcher who is experienced in the field of brand communication and understands the contextual nature of the discussions had.
- (iv) Confirmability requires that other researchers must have the ability to obtain similar findings by following the same process given a similar context. Social science depends upon the possibility of new studies repeating, elaborating and even challenging or defeating old studies. The research method employed for an exploratory study of this nature with the research aims intact relating to the construct of this specific research subject would undeniably deliver the same results at this point in time. The last mentioned infers that for such a rapidly changing field that is relatively new in context of contemporary brand communication practices, may deliver more "evolved" results in the next 10 years or so as industry learns more lessons in the field by employing authentic narrative more readily and with brevity. It is therefore imagined that a similar study would have been carried out in a similar way due to the research strategy and methods explained in Sections 4.3 to 4.5 that is argued to be the in the best interest of addressing the research objective in a meaningful way.

## **4.7 ASSUMPTIONS, LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS**

### **4.7.1 Assumptions related to this study**

The researcher remained mindful of the following assumptions throughout the implementation of the research design and the analysis of data (Simon, 2011: 1):

- (i) Branded entertainment is as per the literature study in Chapter 2 identified as an emerging field in brand building. Literature on authentic narrative in branded entertainment is limited compared to established promotional tools or initiatives. The researcher has continuously familiarised himself with new contributions to the field and has not found any study that addresses the specific research proposition and objectives and therefore assumes that an exploratory study of this kind has not been conducted.
- (ii) It was assumed that the industry experts would be able to share their knowledge on branded entertainment freely, not compromising the competitive positioning of the client or brand concerned. Thus, the trustworthiness of the results is ultimately dependent on the assumption that the participants provided honest and reliable feedback.

#### **4.7.2 Limitation of this study**

The most forthcoming limitation encountered in the study, that was out of the researcher's control and could have but is believed not to have affected the credibility of the interviews, was geographically based (Simon, 2001: 1). The author is based in South Africa. However, access to branded entertainment experts from across the globe was possible via Skype, which was used effectively. However, interviews and analysing finer nuances of communication codes such as body language for example could be challenging. This was overcome by listening to pauses, tone and especially the emphasis placed on key concepts or arguments the participants wanted to bring across through repetition or elaborate case study explanations.

#### **4.7.3 Delimitations of this study**

Delimitations or delineations are those characteristics to be noted as they limit the scope and define the boundaries of the study (Simon, 2001: 1). Delimitations or delineations are in the researcher's control. It was discussed in Section 1.6.1.

### **4.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethics is explained by Cooper and Schindler (2008: 34) as the "... norms or standards of behaviour that guide moral choices about our behaviour and our relationships with other". Research ethics relates to questions about how the research topic and design were formulated

and clarified, how to gain access, collect data, process and store the data, analyse the data and write up the findings in a moral and responsible way (Saunders *et al.*, 2007: 184). The research topic and design were formulated and clarified according to the principles of a set of credible academic authors that complemented the interpretative paradigm in relation to the research problem that was established by means of a thorough and unbiased literature review.

Access was gained to participants that suited the stringiest sample that aimed to obtain the most relevant data. They were approached and treated in accordance with ethical principles outlined by both the USB and the code of marketing and social research of the Southern African Research Association (SAMRA), available from [www.samra.co.za](http://www.samra.co.za) that includes explicit issues about informed consent, and confidentiality. The following brief discussion is done in terms of the principles of research according to the mentioned documents.

Participants were aware that they were participating in research in the best interest of knowledge creation for global brand communication decision makers and were encouraged to refrain from sharing specific, confidential competitive information or overtly compromising relationship dynamics that would evidently harm any relationship with clients or colleagues. If information surfaced that could have such compromising effects, the researcher mentioned that he would omit reference to any specific participant in reporting such information although it would have been taken into consideration with the data analysis phase. For this reason, and to ensure complete confidentiality, the interviews and data analysis are available on request to only the assessors of this dissertation.

All participants expressed a clear understanding of the ultimate objective of the study and understood that a face-to-face interview would be the only way to conduct the interview. One of the participants approached was willing to partake in a survey-format only interview but the researcher declined the interview in the best interest of consistency and more so in the best interest of the research, i.e. of the integrity of an exploratory study dynamic. Participation was voluntary, did not include vulnerable members of the community and participants were aware that they could withdraw from the research at any stage. Two participants requested to view the transcriptions to ensure that what they had said was captured correctly. The USB's letter of ethical clearance was also sent to participants prior to the commencement of the interview. The ethical clearance by the USB is available in APPENDIX 5.

## 4.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter comprehensively covered the research strategy and methods that underpin this study on the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment. Zikmund and Babin's (2001: 57) marketing research process was discussed and each question that was included in the interview guide was discussed to make its conceptual purpose clear.

This study was an exploratory study as the researcher aimed to provide a basic and preliminary understanding of a topic where there is no cohesive understanding in the global brand communication industry at present, also taking into consideration that little knowledge exists when comparing branded entertainment with more established brand communication disciplines. This research was situated in an interpretivist paradigm that is influenced by hermeneutics and phenomenology (Mack, 2010: 7), taking an open and exploratory stance to understanding the complexity of branded entertainment and the strategic value that authentic narrative has to play in achieving brand resonance in context of the perspectives of globally recognised brand communication decision makers (Plack, 2005: 299-230 citing Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

Chapter 4 has discussed the research design which was established to be conducive to the comprehension of the authentic narrative phenomenon and to generate new insights. The research design also evolved as the researcher aimed to learn more about the different takes on the research problem (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 79). The target group for this research comprised brand communication industry decision makers recognised for excellence in their creative achievement in branded entertainment. The reason for this was that this study aimed to explore the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment and gain insight into best practice in creating branded entertainment – and specifically to contribute to strategic brand building.

In-depth interviews were conducted with industry experts to address the research problem and allow for extensive exploration of the central proposition. In-depth interviews create a space where participants usually feel more confident, more relaxed and encouraged to express their deepest thoughts about a certain subject, which is not necessarily the case with focus groups (Milena *et al.*, 2008: 1279). This exploratory study relied profoundly on focused expert opinion for making sense of the studied phenomena. The trustworthiness in the



research process involves a well-reasoned and academically sound research design and relevant industry experience on the part of the researcher.

The researcher selected the sample pool responsibly with a sound, just and unbiased selection method and was not familiar with any of the participants who participated in the study. The data analysis procedure was content analysis, i.e. analysing textual data in the hermeneutic tradition using open or fine coding. This ensured that richly layered and thick, textured information obtained from exploratory qualitative research assisted to make sense of the research question. Guidance and requisites from the University of Stellenbosch Ethical Committee and from the code of marketing and social research of the Southern African Research Association (SAMRA) were followed closely to ensure ethical research.

It is regarded that the theoretical and real world analysis and assessment of the research steps and methods presented in Chapter 4 provide a research methodology that is appropriate and meaningful. The practical execution of this study, analysis of data, research results and the interpretation thereof are presented in Chapter 5 as it presents the empirical findings together with direct quotations from the participants to justify the conclusions and sub-conclusions that have been drawn.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The primary research findings are presented in this chapter. The data analysis technique of open coding for this empirical or applied qualitative study in the interpretivist paradigm, following Creswell's (2003: 185-190) five steps (see Section 4.4.5), delivered a set of six themes that are discussed as the findings of the primary research phase. This is done with reflection of the literature review or conceptual research phase by means of induction (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007: 110), taking into account Maxwell's (2008: 2015) reflective design in conducting qualitative research to address the research problem, being that the lack of a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment erodes its core value, that is to break through clutter and connect with audiences through authentic narrative and thus, the potential for branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance is depleted.

The findings ultimately address the primary research objective which was to explore and potentially enrich the central research proposition. The central research proposition is that authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve brand resonance; meaning that this study proposes that the value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment is strategic, i.e. it provides branded entertainment with the potential to achieve brand resonance; and as reasoned – brand resonance builds a brand strategically.

The qualitative primary research's one-on-one and small group in-depth interviews (see Section 4.5.4 for motivation) enabled the researcher to effectively explore the central as well as the supportive/integral research propositions (see APPENDIX 4) to achieve the related primary and supporting goals in real world terms (also APPENDIX 4). The opinions, attitudes and motivations of the creative directors, strategists and in some instances clients, that were directly responsible for creating the multi-award winning branded entertainment campaigns i.e. the globally recognised branded entertainment decision makers, were probed to lead to the meaningful enrichment of the research propositions and goals. Refer to APPENDIX 5 for a detailed outline of the final sample, i.e. the 15 global brand communication decision makers

who were interviewed. APPENDIX 6 further justifies the sample selection by means of listing all the wins at all the brand communication or advertising award shows where the selected participants have won. Insightful and meaningful research results were produced to ultimately present an Enriched Conceptual Framework of the Strategic Value of Authentic Narrative in Branded Entertainment (see Chapter 6, Figure 6.1).

Chapter 5 commences with the identification of the themes and subthemes that have emerged from the data. Six themes are presented and each theme and its subthemes are discussed, firstly by a reference to literature to frame the discussion, and then reporting on the findings, to ultimately:

- enrich knowledge on branded entertainment as a brand communication discipline;
- unearth the authentic narrative phenomenon in branded entertainment and its potential for brand resonance;
- suggest branded entertainment practice principles that would be beneficial for brand communication decision makers to familiarise themselves with in practising branded entertainment of strategic significance.

Chapter 5 ends with presenting a final definition for branded entertainment based on the primary research findings. Before commencing with this chapter, it would be in the best interest of the reader to familiarise themselves with the branded entertainment initiatives or campaigns that the participants were responsible for delivering. This is recommended because the participants refer to the campaigns sporadically in the findings and having context may aid a more contextualised understanding of the finding at hand. In addition to the campaign reviews, the campaign results are also reported for each campaign as participants have also referred to these results in some of the findings. The campaign reviews and results are available in APPENDIX 8. With the introduction of each participant in the findings discussion, their name, the company and position at the date of the interview are relayed. Refer to APPENDIX 9 for a visual account of these industry experts.

Herewith a reminder of the sliding scale (discussed in Section 4.5.6) in the reporting of the findings based on the data analysis:

- A few = 2-4 participants out of the 15
- Some = 5-7 participants out of the 15
- Many = 8-10 participants out of the 15
- Most = 11 or more participants out of the 15

## 5.2 IDENTIFYING THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

The themes and subthemes that emerged from the data analysis according to the process followed, as discussed in Section 4.5.5, delivered six themes, each with their own subthemes. Table 5.1 outlines the themes and subthemes and also loosely attributes the themes to areas covered by means of the interview guide that was presented in Section 4.5.4.1.

**Table 5.1: Themes and subthemes delivered by the data analysis**

THEME	SUBTHEMES	INTERVIEW GUIDE
1. The concept of branded entertainment	1.1 Exploring the branded entertainment definition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1.1 On being an unconventional point of contact</li> <li>1.1.2 On being brand-initiated and owned               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1.2.1 On product or brand placement</li> <li>1.1.2.2 On brand or product integration</li> <li>1.1.2.3 On sponsorship</li> </ul> </li> <li>1.1.3 On having narrative as a requisite</li> </ul> 1.2 Supportive philosophies on branded entertainment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.2.1 The consideration to use branded entertainment</li> <li>1.2.2 Branded entertainment is not traditional advertising</li> <li>1.2.3 Branded entertainment is not a hard sell</li> <li>1.2.4 The suggested role or positioning of brand or product in branded entertainment</li> <li>1.2.5 Comments on the format of branded entertainment</li> <li>1.2.6 Media channel strategy to support the branded entertainment initiative</li> </ul>	Q1. What is branded entertainment? Q2. To what extent is branded entertainment seen as unconventional?

2. Branded entertainment's value in brand communication	<p>2.1 Branded entertainment becoming more strategically important in brand communication</p> <p>2.1.1 The fragmentation of media channels</p> <p>2.1.2 The importance of social media</p> <p>2.1.3 Expectations from a younger generation</p> <p>2.1.4 Expectations from current consumers</p> <p>2.2 Possible benefits of employing branded entertainment</p>	Q3. What is the core value of branded entertainment?
3. Brand communication decision makers' perspectives of branded entertainment	<p>3.1 Branded entertainment becoming more recognised</p> <p>3.2 Reluctance factors to consider branded entertainment</p> <p>3.2.1 Lack of reliable metrics</p> <p>3.2.2 Timing restrictions</p> <p>3.2.3 Budget restrictions</p> <p>3.2.4 Poor quality content</p> <p>3.2.4.1 Client-side marketers</p> <p>3.2.4.2 Advertising agency-side strategists and creatives</p> <p>3.3 Agency-client dynamics in approaching branded entertainment</p> <p>3.3.1 General advice on dealing with client reluctance to consider branded entertainment</p> <p>3.3.2 Building healthy client-agency relationships</p>	<p>Q6. What withholds branded entertainment from achieving its potential?</p> <p>Q7. Can you give any advice on sound branded entertainment practice?</p>
4. Authentic narrative characteristics identified and explored	<p>4.1 Brand generated</p> <p>4.2 Brand identity</p> <p>4.3 Originality</p> <p>4.4 Emotional meaning</p> <p>4.5 Sincerity</p> <p>4.6 Believable</p> <p>4.7 Considered craft</p>	Q5. Mention and discuss all characteristics that ought to be present to achieve what you had mentioned branded entertainment can achieve? (Referring to Q4 below)

		Q7 also relevant.
5. Resonance: the strategic value of authentic narrative	5.1 Emotional connection 5.2 Engagement 5.3 Community 5.4 Loyalty 5.5 Potential for media value 5.6. Longer-term brand leverage potential	Q4. What can the content or narrative in branded entertainment ultimately achieve? Q7 also relevant.
6. The importance of compelling narrative	6.1 On creating compelling narrative 6.2 Compelling narrative in support of authentic narrative to achieve resonance	Q4. What can the content or narrative in branded entertainment ultimately achieve? Q7 also relevant.

Each theme explored also follows the next set of touchstones:

- **Addressing.** This identifies the research objective(s) and research proposition(s) appropriate to the theme. Refer to APPENDIX 4 that provides a summary of the research objectives and propositions in table format. The ultimate aim is to address the research problem: The lack of a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment erodes its core value, that is to break through clutter and connect with audiences through authentic narrative and thus, the potential for branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance is depleted.
- **Findings.** This section discusses key findings from the primary research data.
- **Summary of the findings.** At the end of each theme the findings are summarised in order to be interpreted by means of insights and recommendations delivered in Chapter 6.

### 5.3 FINDINGS ON THE DEFINITION OF BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT – THEME 1

#### 5.3.1 Addressing

**Theme 1** explores the concept of branded entertainment in two parts:

- **Subtheme 1 (1.1 in Table 5.1)** explores the literature-study proposed branded entertainment definition, being that branded entertainment is an unconventional brand-

initiated and owned contact point with the potential to achieve brand resonance through authentic narrative. Aiming to define branded entertainment addresses the first of the three supportive research objectives, being to explore and refine a branded entertainment working definition in order to present a proposed definition as one of the key outputs of the study. Although the definition stands as a whole, three parts are addressed in this subtheme as the authentic narrative and resonance findings are focused on in Themes 4 and 5 respectively. The three parts are, branded entertainment:

1.1 **Being an unconventional point of brand contact (1.1.1 in Table 5.1)** because it relates to the proposed core value of branded entertainment that is to break through commercial clutter in order to connect with audiences.

1.2 **Being brand-initiated and owned (1.1.2 in Table 5.1)** because it relates to the proposition that branded entertainment is not **product placement (1.1.2.1 in Table 5.1)**, **product or brand integration (1.1.2.2 in Table 5.1)** and not **sponsorship (1.1.2.3 in Table 5.1)** and that it needs to stand on its own in order to deliver authentic narrative. Although being brand-initiated and owned is proposed to be integral to authentic narrative, this characteristic is deemed to be of such importance in defining branded entertainment, that it deserves to be emphasised so to position branded entertainment in relation to what it is and what it is not. This is important because it influences branded entertainment's ability to employ authentic narrative in order to maximise a branded entertainment's effort to achieve resonance, as proposed by the study of literature in the conceptual phase of this research. This section in this subtheme looks at the notion of branded entertainment being brand-initiated and owned from an introductory perspective in relation to placing it in contemporary brand communication practice through a lens of identity-and-value based narrative for resonance. Theme 4: Authentic narrative characteristics identified and explored, will continue the discussion and explore the notion of brand initiation and ownership in more depth.

1.3 **Having narrative as a requisite (1.1.3 in Table 5.1)** because without narrative branded entertainment may not have the ability to communicate the brand's identity, to align with the target audience's value system in a meaningful way and to ultimately add utility in the form of entertainment in a spirit of sincerity.

- **Subtheme 2 (1.2 in Table 5.1)** provides complementary sets of reasoning or philosophies that provide context and support for the proposed definition and approach to branded entertainment:

2.1 **The consideration to use branded entertainment (1.2.1 in Table 5.1)**

2.2 **Branded entertainment is not traditional advertising (1.2.2 in Table 5.1)**

2.3 **Branded entertainment is not a hard sell (1.2.3 in Table 5.1)**

2.4 **The suggested role or positioning of brand or product in a branded entertainment initiative (1.2.4 in Table 5.1)**

2.5 **Comments on the format of branded entertainment (1.2.5 in Table 5.1)**

2.6 **Media channel strategy to support the branded entertainment initiative (1.2.6 in Table 5.1)**

The **interview guide questions** that relate to Theme 1 are as follows:

- What is branded entertainment?
- To what extent is branded entertainment seen as unconventional?

### **5.3.2 Findings**

#### **5.3.2.1 Subtheme 1: Exploring the literature-study proposed branded entertainment definition**

Refers to Subtheme 1.1 in Table 5.1:

The study of literature in Chapter 2 produced a suggested definition for branded entertainment: **Branded entertainment is an unconventional brand-initiated and owned contact point with the potential to achieve brand resonance through authentic narrative.**

##### *5.3.2.1.1 On branded entertainment being an unconventional point of brand contact*

Refers to Subtheme 1.1.1 in Table 5.1:

Branded entertainment could be seen as a relatively new communication discipline within contemporary brand-building practice and could still be seen as an unconventional or novel way to make brand contact (Martí-Parreño et al., 2015: xiv and Ryan, 2016). This is because branded entertainment steps out of the realm of traditional promotional initiatives (Bhargawa, 2011; Woodrooffe, 2014; Duopoly, 2014: 13; Graser, 2015; Ryan, 2016; Grinta, 2016; DeMers, 2016). Enslin (2003: 116, 320) referred to unconventional brand contact as a way to make contact with a target audience in a novel way by breaking through commercial clutter and



arresting attention, and therefore aiming to achieve branded impact in order to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.

Most of the participants deem branded entertainment as an unconventional point of brand contact. Ricardo John, Chief Creative Officer at J. Walter Thompson *São Paulo*, remarked that the Coca-Cola Dolby Cinema Experience: “Coke Thirst” campaign was “certainly very different” to what Coke has been doing for years and would therefore qualify as unconventional brand contact. It seems that a brand doing something out of the ordinary, i.e. creating entertainment that surprises and delights, is considered by John as unconventional. One can also infer that it steps away or differentiates itself from traditional advertising. Aste Gutiérrez, co-Head of Creative at FRED & FARID Shanghai, concurred by using the entertainment factor or simply having entertainment at the heart of the communication effort as integral to the brand contact to be experienced as unconventional, meaning that the mere fact that there is entertainment at the core of the branded entertainment effort is enough for it to be regarded as unconventional.

He said that branded entertainment is “... breaking out of every single thing that has been created already. The idea of all we need to do is create something that entertains people”. With this statement, he emphasised that branded entertainment is not only a unique way to communicate but also steps away or differentiates itself from traditional advertising. The casual way in which he referred to the simplicity of what branded entertainment is and should achieve sounds almost obvious (to him). One could say that Gutiérrez encourages brands to simply focus on the entertainment factor as it is at present thought to be unconventional enough.

A few participants indicated that they think branded entertainment does not make for an unconventional contact point. One qualifying argument is the consideration whether it is possibly becoming the norm. Dean Paradise, Senior Copy Writer for Ogilvy *Cape Town*, and Amr Darwish, Managing Director at Leo Burnett *Cairo*, believe that branded entertainment is not that new in contemporary brand-building practice anymore and could be seen as mid-way in becoming norm. Jaime Robinson, Vice President and Executive Creative Director for Pereira & O’Dell *San Francisco*, speculated that it is indeed becoming the norm and measures the emergence of branded entertainment against the number of increasing entries in the

branded entertainment and content categories at advertising award shows. But, despite of it being a bit like the 'wild, wild west' out there, she said it is steadily being more considered. However, she ended off by saying that “it is still (perhaps) an alternative way at present but not so for long.” One can also presume that Robinson sees it is about mid-way there with a higher degree of certainty.

James Mok, Executive Creative Director for Foote, Cone & Belding *Asia Pacific* based in Auckland, asserted that to see branded entertainment as an unconventional point of brand contact is irrelevant because non-traditional broadcast or media work has been done “forever”. One cannot dispute this fact due to the classic soap opera already defying norm from the 1950s. One can also use *Ally McBeal* (television series from the late 90s to the early 2000s) as example, where *Cosmopolitan Magazine* commercials commented on the script from the segment that preceded the ad break. A profoundly valid point that Mok made is that the introduction of digital just brought branded entertainment into the spotlight with more formats or platforms to deliver content. Kieran Antill, Managing Partner and Executive Creative Director for Leo Burnett *New York*, also alluded to digital in saying that the digital landscape compelled brands to naturally embrace the platforms from a point of necessity and therefore it cannot be seen as unconventional from that perspective.

Taking into consideration that some of the experts made very valid points to argue the exclusion of the word “unconventional” in the definition and also taking into consideration that this study intends to deliver a proposed definition to industry that should be applicable in the next few years to come, the inclusion of the word “unconventional” seems superfluous.

#### *5.3.2.1.2 On branded entertainment being a brand-initiated and owned contact point*

Refers to Subtheme 1.1.2 in Table 5.1:

Disparity among branded entertainment’s form of communication exists as confirmed in the literature review in Chapter 2. When branded entertainment is viewed for its strategic potential, being brand resonance, clarity of the form that branded entertainment takes, or rather the type of brand contact it ought to position itself to be becomes clear. In order for branded entertainment to achieve its resonance potential, it cannot take the form of product or brand placement (Caraccioli-Davis, 2005: 10-11; Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015: 3-4 and Valero, 2015: 10), or the form of product or brand integration into another’s entertainment property (Monaco,

2009: 1 and Vogt, 2012), or even sponsorship, where the sponsorship of an entertaining event, for instance, is seen as branded entertainment (Hudson, 2010; Thinkbox, 2011: 2; Duopoly, 2013 and Arhio & Raunio, 2015).

Branded entertainment, according to Monaco (2009: 3), is "... created, produced and funded specifically for a brand, by a brand, for the purposes of communicating the brand strategy using the entertainment medium and owned by the brand in most cases". Furthermore, the ownership proposition is extended to the ability for brands to communicate their singular brand positioning and their identity and values (Monaco, 2009; Gilbar, 2010; Bhargava, 2011; Czarmecki, 2012; Pytlik, 2014; Musson, 2014; Martí-Parreño et al., 2015). It is further argued that branded entertainment in this way can convey brand authenticity that could increase the likelihood of consumers to "purchase the brand's products", according to Mathieu (2012). The ability to take ownership of the communication property also stands in reference to and respects the overarching brand narrative in its communication attempt (Dahlén *et al.*, 2010: 6; Campbell & Simpson-Bint, 2010; Yankelovich, 2010:1).

Many participants in this study supported the notion that branded entertainment should ideally be initiated and owned by the brand. Three indicated the proposition in absolute terms, i.e. that it is not branded entertainment if the brand does not initiate and own the communication platform. Highlights from the discussion with participants in support of branded entertainment being ideally brand-initiated and owned are discussed next, followed by highlights from the discussion with participants that have a more open view towards ownership.

In understanding that branded entertainment should ideally be brand-initiated and owned, Robinson alluded to the fact that the brand somehow has to be either a central character or an activator for the content more so than just doing product placement, for instance. One can infer that Robinson would ideally see the brand to initiate the content and take a very strong sense of ownership of the content in whatever entertainment property it exists. McInnes referred to a brand's ability to gain credibility when an identity-based narrative is engaged by taking ownership and reflecting what the brand stands for via the entertainment piece.

This infers that credibility for a brand may lie in the fact that branded entertainment is brand-initiated and owned because its identity is overtly reflected in the narrative. John remarked

that a brand's purpose is imperative to a branded entertainment effort otherwise it robs the brand from the potential to create meaningful entertainment. He illustrated this by example: Red Bull initiates and owns their brand communication efforts that are completely entertainment based. He said: "Red Bull happens to sell energy. They sell entertainment. They do diving competitions, fly-acrobatic competitions. They sponsor F1. They have TV channels; so, branded entertainment is in its core. Every time you see an event of Red Bull you immediately, unconsciously understand that that is what its brand purpose is".

This means that ideally a brand should initiate and own its entertainment property for maximum impact to communicate its identity and by doing so continuously could become an entertainment-based brand, reinforcing its overarching brand narrative. Gutiérrez referred to Red Bull stepping into this space, providing ongoing branded entertainment as an "entertainment franchise", continuously building its customer equity as a now high equity brand. Paradise concurred with John in saying that although branded entertainment could be deemed as a "broad topic", the most important principle should stand: that the brand must create it with the intention to deliver a clear message for the brand, "... whatever that message is". He said that it would be better if the brand can take ownership of the platform. One can assume that promotional tools like product placement or sponsorships curb the brand's potential to dramatise the brand's purpose and to relay a clear message for the brand to emotionally resonate with a target audience.

It seems from the review of literature that the ability for a brand to initiate a branded entertainment effort and to take ownership thereof has the following effects:

- The brand is seen as the spill around which the entertainment turns by taking credit for its initiation and activation. A brand as author of the narrative has the opportunity to take control and establish its authority and ownership of a branded entertainment property (Monaco, 2009) via narrative that makes the effort more convincing in terms of clear association power between the narrative and its identity to establish trust (Marie, 2012: 5 and Kopoulos, 2016).
- The brand is provided with a sense of credibility in relaying its own true identity opposed to being integrated in another's. Keller (2001: 13) said that consumers may form judgements on the credibility aspect of the brand and if they feel that the brand comes across as trustworthy it could contribute to achieving resonance and therefore build brand equity.

- The brand gets a stronger foothold to dramatise its purpose in line with its brand identity.
- The brand has opportunity to continuously reinforce its identity and therefore its overarching brand narrative and in that way build equity. Only when brands can verify their projected identity in their actions will they be considered as authentic (Yankelovich, 2010:1).
- The brand is granted a platform to clearly communicate its message.

The researcher, in alignment with the study's interpretative paradigm, wants to contextualise the discussion to follow:

- (i) The difference between "initiating" a branded entertainment effort and "owning" it lies in the following: "initiating" supports the notion that the brand should approach the initiative proactively and not re-actively. A brand that strategically plans its engagements would actively steer strategy where brands in some instances just react to an offer of a sponsorship. The latter puts them on "the back foot" of really taking ownership.
- (ii) The participants seemed to support the brand always "initiating" the effort to drive a sense or intent of control. However, it must be noted before approaching a variety of "ownership"-orientated promotional tools in the discussion to follow, that the ideal is to take initiative and have ownership as it is integral to strategically drive authentic narrative to achieve brand resonance. In the discussion that follows, each promotional tool is discussed with certain conditions that are in the best interest of the brand before it can be seen as branded entertainment; otherwise one can argue that it is just normal sponsorship, brand/product integration or product placement.

Three promotional tools are presented next. They are product placement, product/brand integration, and sponsorship and its relation to branded entertainment, in the opinion of the participants.

#### 5.3.2.1.2.1 *Product or brand placement*

Refers to Subtheme 1.1.2.1 in Table 5.1:

The literature study has pointed out that product and brand placement are not branded entertainment, mostly due to the absence of brand-ownership (Caraccioli-Davis, 2005: 10-11; Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015: 3-4 and Valero, 2015: 10). The discussion starts with Robinson as a strong discerning voice. Robinson referred to the role of product placement as merely a reminder of the brand not adding any value to what the brand offers "... or what it can do to your life". The following participants felt that branded entertainment can be product placement, given certain qualifiers. They are John, Gutierrez and Mok.

John said that product placement would have difficulty to connect with the target audience in an emotional way. He said that the brand should play a natural role in the content, should contribute to the content and that product placement can be regarded as branded entertainment only if the brand is in the "right hands" and if it can "leverage the content in a higher way". A good yard stick, he argued, is to see whether the audience has experienced the product placement as product placement or not, meaning that the way it is done is critical in context of its credibility. He reiterated his opinion by stating that brands, if placing their products or brands in another's entertainment property, should be "keen" and "very focused" to "... get inside the content in the most natural way".

Gutiérrez denoted that product placement could be regarded as branded entertainment to some extent. However, he said that it is a poor attempt at branded entertainment as it often lacks irony. This means irony in the sense that any good creative effort that is driven by a brand's creative message usually has a tension point that makes for good entertainment and with product placement this tension point lacks in form, intent and creative output. It seemed that Mok would be in agreement with this opinion.

John said it could be but there are definite qualifiers, whereas Gutiérrez and Mok agreed but indicated that it is not ideal. So for the purposes of the study, it was apparent that product placement should ideally not be deemed as a form of branded entertainment.

### 5.3.2.1.2.2 *Brand or product integration*

Refers to Subtheme 1.1.2.2 in Table 5.1:

Literature argued that brand or product integration cannot be deemed as branded entertainment (Monaco, 2009: 1 and Vogt, 2012). Five of the participants indicated that they think that branded entertainment can include brand or product integration: John, Gutiérrez, Mok, Antill and Dr Gordon Euchler, Strategic Planning Director for DDB Tribal *Berlin*. Antill stated that branded entertainment can include brand or product integration, but there are qualifiers. Antill alluded to the fact that it is only acceptable if the brand has a very strong reason for being based on the integral belief system of the characters – and that the brand comes across as completely believable as part of the story line based on sound judgement.

Antill argued that the car James Bond drives in every movie has actually become an institution of some sort and could almost be seen as an integral character to the story. Euchler is against product placement being seen as branded entertainment but indicated that product or brand integration can be deemed as branded entertainment because the brand has more of a role to play, i.e. carries more gravitas in the communication piece.

Five opposed to three participants were in favour of product or brand integration (considered as branded entertainment) than product placement. It is almost as if authenticity plays a larger role with integration. It allows a brand the following:

- A stronger sense of being in the entertainment, thus earning a more rightful place (compared to product placement) that carries a stronger sense of believability;
- An alignment with the value system of the characters (which says something about the value system of the brand); and
- More control over the narrative as the brand has a larger role to play (compared to product placement).

However, the participants who indicated that brand or product integration can be deemed as branded entertainment were in the minority. It seems that context plays a pivotal role in correctly applying an identity-based initiative by divulging an effort into a third party's entertainment property with requisites that take skill and finesse to succeed in order to obtain credibility in the most controllable or even absolute terms. None of the participants alluded to the strategic value or potential of brand or product integration.

### 5.3.2.1.2.3 Sponsorship

Refers to Subtheme 1.1.2.3 in Table 5.1:

The literature argued that sponsorship cannot be deemed as branded entertainment (Hudson, 2010; Thinkbox, 2011: 2; Duopoly, 2013 and Arhio & Raunio, 2015). Some participants indicated that sponsorship could be seen as branded entertainment given certain provisions. Antill seemed to be in agreement with O'Guinn *et al.*'s (2009: 612-613) take on branded entertainment (refer to section 2.5.1.1) in that it could include sponsorship of a real live event of some sort as it contributes to the target audience's experience of the brand. O'Guinn *et al.* (2009: 613) referred to sponsorship at the NASCAR rally as an example and Antill took it a step further in saying that the half time show at the American Super Bowl could be seen as branded entertainment as it is a space within an entertainment property where the brand could be deemed as sponsor but not in the traditional sense of the word as it initiates and owns its entertainment content in that moment in time.

Mok seemed to be in agreement with Antill with the provision that mere logo-branding could never be deemed as branded entertainment. He also referred to football sponsorship to present his argument. Although a football team entertains, it can never be translated to the sponsoring brand that entertains. He said that if such a sponsorship includes elements of the brand's intention to connect with more substance in tact (relaying brand values, brand purpose *et al.*), to connect on a more meaningful level via the sponsorship, and entertains or provides relevant content in some way whilst doing it, it could be deemed as branded entertainment. Matthew Pullen, Senior Art Director at Ogilvy *Johannesburg*, referred to a live event sponsorship as qualifying as branded entertainment, although he added that it is very subjective. He used the example of Rocking the Daisies, a South African rock music festival. He said that a sponsorship can only be seen as branded entertainment if the brand is experienced in such a way that there is association by virtue for the intended target audience meaning. However, he added that he does not think that sponsorship is a very good example or use of branded entertainment.

The participants all referred proactively to an actual real live event having the propensity to qualify as branded entertainment. It seems that sponsorships can only be deemed as branded entertainment if the following aspects are true or present:



- The brand connects with the target audience in a meaningful way, relaying its brand values, brand purpose and brand message;
- The brand provides content or entertainment of sort.

Furthermore, the notion of ownership is challenged because sponsorship of a half time show, for instance, can be deemed as branded entertainment because the brand can take “ownership” of an entertainment space during a particular time.

To conclude, the area of a brand taking ownership of the entertainment property is subject to different opinions. Marginally more participants agreed with brand or product integration that could be branded entertainment based on certain qualifiers compared to product placement or sponsorship. This is because the brand has a bigger chance to influence the narrative and some sense of ownership is better than none, given that it is done in a credible way. Nevertheless, none of the participants gave an absolute affirmative to sponsorship, product placement or brand/product integration. There were always qualifiers. Many participants support the notion that branded entertainment should ideally be initiated and owned by the brand with three supporting the proposition in absolute terms.

#### *5.3.2.1.3 On narrative being a requisite to branded entertainment*

Refers to Subtheme 1.1.3 in Table 5.1:

A key requisite for branded entertainment is that it must have narrative (Hitch & Worple, 2010; Wiese, 2011; Snyder, 2013; Czarmecki, 2012; Lehu, 2008; Wiese, 2013). Many of the participants proactively indicated that narrative is a requisite or the backbone of branded entertainment which shows satisfactory support. Damien Eley, Founding Partner and Creative Director: *Mistress Los Angeles*, denoted that branded entertainment must have narrative and in his opinion it is more imperative to communicate via storytelling than ever before. In explaining this he referred to digital providing the ability for normal ads to be flighted in long form (meaning that it goes beyond a one minute or even 90 second commercial, usually 2-3 minutes in length).

He said that there is a distinction between the two. Traditional advertising does not extend to branded entertainment merely by length. There needs to be a clear narrative, approached

from a sincere way to entertain more than to deliver a commercial message. Robinson branded entertainment as “entertainment that is truly entertaining, fantastic story telling that happens to have a brand as a character”. Gutiérrez stated with conviction that more than just having narrative, the idea behind the story ought to show insight and enticement to the extent that target audiences would be so intrigued that they would be “willing to watch”, more so than with brands merely delivering content as part of a marketing message.

It therefore seems that not only should branded entertainment engage an identity-based narrative but it should also distinguish itself from other types of content delivery in order to satisfy demand for content that entertains more than just delivering the brand’s marketing message. Last mentioned in context of branded entertainment could come across as insincere and therefore could harm the delivery of entertaining content that was supposed to intrigue a target audience. The data delivered a satisfactory return that branded entertainment is defined by employing narrative as a primary requisite in order to satisfy its main aim of entertaining a target audience.

The preliminary findings that address three components of the proposed branded entertainment definition were the following:

- The term “unconventional” could be omitted from the definition as some participants reckoned that it is in the process of becoming norm.
- Branded entertainment should ideally be brand-initiated and take perceived ownership of an entertainment property, although not necessarily in “real terms” – meaning that it cannot “own” the half time show at a sports event, for instance, but that it can feature in a space in time that allows full perceived ownership.
- Branded entertainment must have narrative as a requisite to be defined as branded entertainment.
- It is interesting to note that Eley referred to delivering a clear narrative, approached from a sincere way, to entertain more than to deliver a commercial message. The sense of sincerity is considered to be indicative of authenticity in a branded entertainment attempt (Varan *et al.*, 2005: 140; Wiese, 2011 and Demos, 2013).

Subtheme 2 follows next and provides complementary sets of reasoning that provide context and support for the proposed definition and approach to branded entertainment by delivering

findings on: the consideration to use branded entertainment; branded entertainment not being traditional advertising; branded entertainment not being a hard sell; the suggested role or positioning of brand or product in a branded entertainment initiative; comments on the format of branded entertainment; media channel strategy to support the branded entertainment initiative; and the difference between branded entertainment and branded content.

### ***5.3.2.2 Subtheme 2: Complementary sets of reasoning and philosophies that provide context and support for the proposed definition and approach to branded entertainment***

Refers to Subtheme 1.2 in Table 5.1

The branded entertainment definition does not stand in isolation to the research problem but rather integral to it because it embodies the context that supports and crafts the definition. Industry discourse on branded entertainment is rife and intriguing at present and in respect to a qualitative, exploratory study the research aimed to understand not only the problem at hand but also, integral to the problem, the authentic narrative phenomenon by means of insight and understanding in great detail and in much depth (Malhotra, 2002: 112 and Zikmund, Babin, Carr & Griffen, 2009: 133). This study aims to contribute to the discourse prevalent in industry and among academics by providing insights and direction on branded entertainment conducive to its potential, being brand resonance. A reporting of the findings on complementary sets of reasoning that provide context and support for the proposed definition and approach to branded entertainment therefore follows.

#### ***5.3.2.2.1 The consideration to use branded entertainment***

Refers to Subtheme 1.2.1 in Table 5.1:

The following data was not delivered by the literature study. Three points of argument constituted the findings for consideration:

- (i) Many participants argued that a brand communication decision maker should not choose branded entertainment just for the sake of it. The starting point to any brand challenge is that a business objective is addressed. If branded entertainment is the correct way of addressing that business objective then it should be considered. Lauren Turnbull, Senior Brand Manager CSI & Sponsorships for KFC in *Johannesburg*, repeatedly focused the discussion on the business objective; that

it should be achieved or that the challenge should be resolved in a “media agnostic” way. She said that they, as KFC’s client-side marketers, were open to whatever the best resolve would be. In the case of Add Hope, it was the best resolve. Antill urges client-based marketers to eschew from dictating the advertising tool and brand touch point or media channel to be used. He supports the notion of a media agnostic approach that will reach the business challenge. Eley put it further in place by saying that brand decision makers should critically ask why the brand is producing content in the first place and if it is really the best way to solve the business problem. A key business objective that Eley’s Hot Wheels for Real campaign had to solve was to increase its appeal to adults to buy Hot Wheels for their kids, according to the participant. The resolve was to mimic the actual toy features and sets in the real world by breaking two world records. This appealed not only to kids but also to adults, creating a sense of nostalgia and excitement. Björn Engström, Creative Director and Senior Partner at Forsman & Bodenfors *Gothenburg*, explained the argument as follows: “We don’t think so much about concepts like – now we are going to do branded entertainment or advertising or PR. We are more interested to do something that people will like to look at”.

- (ii) Darwish warned against making use of a branded entertainment campaign merely because a competitor has done it because it has a larger likelihood to be seen as a ‘me-too’. This may impact on the goodwill that consumers may have towards the brand.
- (iii) Another interesting angle was highlighted by Gutiérrez. In questioning the consideration to use branded entertainment, he referred to the notion of not being concerned with what it is and what it is not; as long as it satisfies building brand equity. He used Red Bull to illustrate because he considers them a success in this regard. He attributes Red Bull’s success to not “drawing the line” between “branded entertainment” and “everything else they are doing” as Gutiérrez deems seemingly all that they do as “real entertainment”. He continues: “They open and start about things the same way a proper entertainment channel would think about it. They open a TV channel. They approach celebs. They create interesting stories. Not like what is the big brand architecture thing here. How does this help manage our portfolio? They don’t get too ‘marketing’ about it. They don’t get too rigorous in that sense”, he denotes.

In summary, the participants warned against the contact point or promotional initiative preceding the business objective that needs to be achieved; using branded entertainment just to chase the trend or to consider branded entertainment merely because a competitor is using it; and an even more radical eschewing from consideration to use branded entertainment or not – that brand communication decision makers should rather be concerned with a brand equity-focused view in building brand if an entertainment proposition would be the most satisfactory way to build the brand. This goes far beyond just achieving a business objective for a specific initiative or campaign. The participants ultimately advised an approach from a media neutral point of view that will grow brand equity and from a viewpoint that one also wants to create something that would be gripping, free from labelling it branded entertainment as such. In context of creating a definition for branded entertainment one can infer that an open or (insert term examiner used) stance to contact point and channel selection ought to be adhered to when planning a branded entertainment initiative and that branded entertainment would be identified as a discipline based on its potential for resonance if that is what the campaign objective calls for.

#### *5.3.2.2.2 Branded entertainment is not traditional advertising*

Refers to Subtheme 1.2.2 in Table 5.1:

The literature reasoned that branded entertainment is not traditional advertising as the objectives are not the same and the treatment differs (Thomas, 2009: 2-3; Caswell, 2011 and Duopoly, 2013:5). The latter was satisfyingly supported in the primary research as the majority of the participants supported the reasoning around this. Three highlights of the discussion deserve attention:

- (i) Darwish opened the debate by stating that branded entertainment should not be dealt with in the same way as one deals with TV commercials as it "... is somehow different and that is why it is called branded entertainment. It is not a TV commercial". He furthered his argument in saying that it is strictly an entertaining way that captures consumers' minds versus "spoon feeding" the benefits of the products without "really grabbing the attention" of the consumer. He thus inferred that branded entertainment could arrest the attention more than traditional advertising necessarily would. One could add Rose's (2013) notion that branded entertainment could maintain consumer attention for prolonged periods of time compared to traditional advertising. Paradise supported these notions and added that if one looks at branded entertainment advertising award wins in the past, the

most successful branded entertainment was set out to entertain people in “smart” and “subtle” ways. He juxtaposed it against ads that may want to entertain by means of humour, for example, but that it still came across as content aimed at a commercial message or with the undertone of a commercial message. He continued by saying that the entertainment value is to satisfy the objective to evoke engagement more so than just creating a piece of advertising. He thus inferred that a key objective of branded entertainment is to provide enjoyment and evoke engagement where traditional advertising does not necessarily have that capability.

- (ii) Eley indicated that traditional advertising may have the propensity to lack trust or may feel like one is being manipulated. He indicated that the objective of branded entertainment should address strategic brand or business challenges in a rather “effortless” way. This re-affirms Roper’s (2011: 11) sentiment that traditional advertising may come across as desperate.
- (iii) A significant contribution was made by John, in saying: “For me that has been – branded entertainment is every bit of advertising that you do that does not look like regular advertising and that establishes emotional connection between the audience and most important the content that you place in it”. John clearly differentiated between branded entertainment and traditional advertising in claiming that a higher emotional connection with branded entertainment opposed to traditional advertising, in his opinion, may be the deciding factor.
- (iv) Robinson brought an interesting notion to the table. She reasoned that if people love the story and buy into the concept, and even if one authentically integrates product features, they will have a very strong recall of product features. Robinson continued by saying that this can even be seen as opposed to advertising product features. People would then thank the brand for delivering its message in a compelling way rather than advertising to them.

It seems from the primary research findings that branded entertainment differs from traditional advertising in that it has a higher propensity to arrest the attention of the target audience in a way that does not seem desperate and can pride itself on making a stronger emotional connection than traditional advertising may do. Establishing an emotional connection with a target audience is a dimension of resonance (Keller, 2001: 8). Branded entertainment could also be aimed at engaging a target audience more than just advertising to them in the

traditional sense. Establishing engagement with a target audience is also a dimension of resonance (Keller, 2001: 8).

Although the advertiser's message may also want to entertain, it is done against the backdrop of a commercial message, whereas branded entertainment entertains in a sincere way. To add the secondary research's key outtake: traditional advertising offers a commercial message (to inform, persuade and remind, according to Kotler and Keller, 2009: 539), whereas branded entertainment adds value, for example to entertain, or even inform and/or educate in an entertaining way (Morris, 2015; Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015: 10 and Ryan, 2016). The key finding from the primary research is that branded entertainment is not and cannot be the same as traditional advertising.

#### 5.3.2.2.3 *Branded entertainment is not a hard sell*

Refers to Subtheme 1.2.3 in Table 5.1:

Most participants stated that branded entertainment is not a hard sell. To start the discussion and provide context, the opinion of John Mescall, Executive Creative Director at international advertising group McCann, comes in handy (as mentioned in the literature review). He explained that too many branded entertainment creators still allude to old school hard sell techniques used in traditional advertising whereas more subtle and immersive brand-integration should be used to offer utility, i.e. content that is non-intrusive. Some qualitative insights from three participants need mention.

Mok remarked that "... We don't want our brand all over this. We don't want to listen to a hard sell for money". Turnbull concurred by saying that branded entertainment has its role in relation to what needs to be achieved. She said that if a hard sell is necessary, then other vehicles ought to be explored; but if one tries to build a story or engage with a target audience on a deeper, human level, then branded entertainment is the correct vehicle to use. Irene Steyger, Senior Copywriter at Ogilvy *Johannesburg*, supported Turnbull when she said that the brand should be inherent to what is being communicated and above all, it must never come across as a hard sell as it is integral to the intent of branded entertainment opposed to the intent of traditional advertising.

#### 5.3.2.2.4 *The suggested role or positioning of brand or product*

Refers to Subtheme 1.2.4 in Table 5.1:

The literature proposed two angles. The first is that the role of the brand should be relatively subtle; however, it should play an integral role in moving the story forward (Lunenfield, 2009), and the second as per the example of *The Hire* (see Section 3.3.1), sees the brand or rather, product, step into the lead role. This means that context allows the role or positioning of the brand or product given that it should be entertaining. This section embraces a set of findings by means of expert opinion to enrich the discussion. The first interpretation is alluded to first and then the second notion is discussed.

Steyger reasoned that the brand should be treated delicately and should be intertwined in the story line without being “in your face”. She stated that the creators must be sensitive to the branding and treat it in a way that complements the narrative and does not detract from it. Steyger’s comment must be understood in context of the dramatisation of KFC’s Add Hope campaign objective. The Add Hope campaign aimed to create awareness and show where the money goes that KFC patrons donate upon purchase to relieve hunger in South Africa. Normally the request for donation is done via traditional advertising but KFC decided to do it via rich narrative to connect in an emotional way. Steyger indicated that branded entertainment is more subtle than advertising as the focus is more on the story created compared to advertising. But this is not always the case. There was no product sold in the KFC’s communication campaign, and that is why Steyger could affirm more subtle brand integration. Regarding product integration, the viewpoints of some participants differ by applying product-appropriate thinking.

Paradise referred to the product being inserted in an “incidental” way but still actively playing a role. Gutiérrez reckoned that the best content puts product “... right in centre; it doesn’t tuck it away”. Robinson reasoned that, when warranted, a brand should “never be shy to say who is bringing you the entertainment”. She further argued that people are already in the right frame of mind when they choose to engage with branded entertainment. Cognisance should be paid to the fact that advertising is often an uninvited piece of communication. To interpret Robinson’s opinion: a target audience, when in the right frame of mind, is more receptive to the brand or product taking centre stage and thus does not mind the brand or product being there as they invite the communication because it will add value in the form of entertainment,



for example. Robinson's campaign, *The Beauty Inside*, is briefly described for context before interpreting with a brief discussion.

Toshiba dramatised Intel as being "the beauty inside". The story showed the protagonist waking up in a different body every day, yet retaining "the beauty inside" (the metaphor for Intel inside a Toshiba computer). The story took an unfortunate turn in events when the protagonist fell in love one day, trying to convince the object of his affection that he is still the same person. The challenge was simple: how can he have a relationship when he is always different on the outside? The Toshiba Ultrabook laptop was a key instrument throughout as it captured the "body" in which the he, protagonist was every day (to keep record). The Toshiba Ultrabook Laptop played an integral role or rather could be seen as a central character in the narrative as the tension point is unlocked when the object of the protagonist's affection discovered the laptop with daily video diaries. Then she believed.

The target audience was another character in the story; they were involved in the making of the six-part series as their faces and acting were captured and used in the film. *The Beauty Inside* integrated the product in such a way that it seems natural and served as a key character, unlocking the tension point in the story. Thus, the laptop played into the favour of the protagonist or actualised the viewer's desire for the protagonist to succeed. This means that the target audience sees the product as integral to the resolve which nurtures affection for the product or the brand as it emotionally connected them with the product or brand through the narrative.

In summary, it seems that the brand ought to have a natural fit in the story line and should ideally be the reason for the narrative to be driven forward in order to establish an identity-driven narrative. Robinson's opinion of context stands out in the findings as she feels that when a target audience is in the right frame of mind they would not mind for the brand to feature very prominently in the narrative. One could assume that the notion of sincerity is prevalent, being a proposed characteristic of authenticity as per the discussion that follows in Theme 4.5.

#### 5.3.2.2.5 Comments on the format of branded entertainment

Literature says that branded entertainment can be a TV show, theme park, short film, movie, or video game (O'Guinn *et al.*, 2009: 612-613), or experiences like music concerts, outdoors and extreme sport activities and events linked to social networking (Fields, 2009). The relevance of the format discussion is important as branded entertainment allows the brand to transcend media channels and contact points that allow the narrative reach and a sense of fluidity in context of establishing themselves as an entertainment brand, if one takes Red Bull as an example. It gives the brand the freedom to connect with the consumer in the most appropriate contact point that will deliver content to make meaningful impact. This is one of the major advantages of using branded entertainment and the possibilities ought to be explored for reference purposes. The participants affirmed or added to the knowledge on this subject. Most participants proactively referred to the format that branded entertainment can take which means that the participants felt that it is worth mentioning.

Antill took a step back from current branded entertainment to say that guerrilla and ambient initiatives seeded what branded entertainment has become. Guerrilla marketing and ambient have not been mentioned in the literature study and therefore a brief explanation and contextualisation of Antill's comment follow.

Guerrilla marketing is a dense and highly debated discipline in brand promotion as it is constantly evolving as alternative brand contact evolves. A very brief context is provided herewith to explain what Kieran meant by saying this. Klepek (2014: 79) cited Hutter and Hoffman (2011) who stated that guerrilla marketing is an umbrella term for unconventional advertising campaigns with the aim of drawing the attention of a large number recipients to the advertising message at relatively little cost by evoking the surprise effect and the diffusion effect. At the inception of publicity stunts such as flash mobs, defined as the gathering of citizens in a public space for a limited time to perform expressive or symbolic acts (Claycomb, 2013: 387), the aim was to create leverage for an amplified viral brand contact strategy as result. In these instances, real world initiatives translated to digital spread of the communication message. The starting point was entertainment. Ambient media is described as placing ads on unusual items or in unusual places where a target audience wouldn't normally see an ad (Lum, 2012).

This kind of advertising was classically placed outdoors but it has subsequently taken a foothold in digital media. Just to explain: WOMMA defines viral marketing as “creating entertaining or informative messages that are designed to be passed along in an exponential fashion, often electronically or by e-mail”. The active and willing participation of consumers is pivotal to the concept of viral marketing as it attempts to engage the consumer in brand driven activities, happenings and events. Viral marketing campaigns work when they ensure an envisioned outcome for a brand; they thus equip the electronic connectivity of individuals to ensure marketing messages are referred from one person to another (Quirk, 2012: 239). Miller (2009) explained the concept as follows: “Once a consumer has engaged with a brand of their own volition, the virus is absorbed into the system, and, much like a physical virus stands a chance of replicating itself in people who have contact with the carrier”. Organic viral campaigns “grow with little or no input from the marketer”, whereas amplified viral campaigns “have been strategically planned, have defined goals for the brand being marketed, and usually have a distinct method of passing on the message (that can be tracked and quantified by the marketer)” (Quirk, 2012: 240).

Antill thus referred to brand contact that is in its essence unconventional. This supports the notion that branded entertainment, as translation of that is deemed as unconventional. The intent of guerrilla and even ambient is to have some form of entertainment or added value content attached; it is original, brand-initiated and owned, compelling brand contact that has people talking or sharing via viral channels like social media. One could thus say that branded entertainment started from the ground up in terms of contemporary branded entertainment practice. It is now that advertisers have the ability to move across formats because essentially guerrilla and ambient worked, with the proof in word of mouth and viral success. Antill said that activations for instance, usually in a closed environment for documentation purposes, have legs to virally travel and could be a major contributor to a successful branded entertainment campaign.

Engström briefly remarked on format, in the sense that most online branded entertainment initiatives provide the luxury of time, meaning that a normal TV ad is usually 30 seconds or up to one minute. Online branded entertainment, for instance, can be much longer and will hold the attention of the target audience for a longer duration (compared to a normal advertisement) if the entertainment is compelling. So, one could say that time should not dictate a fascinating and well-planned branded entertainment property. Eley contributed valuably on this sentiment

as he said that a branded entertainment piece can certainly be 60 seconds or shorter. He said that it's not about the time as the content allows for the narrative to be different to traditional advertising: "The classic formula with the pack shot at the back of the commercial". He said that the focus is on content, otherwise it would just be normal advertising.

John touched on branded entertainment providing the ability of taking ownership of a property that serves the brand and allows a more immersive experience. He referred to the iTunes festival that takes the form of a music concert "... but it is integral for what the brand stands for; that music should be democratised". Dean said that branded entertainment can be a game, a digital site, a video, a TV ad or radio ad, as long as it dramatises the purpose of the brand. He mentioned The Lego Movie as his number one example as it did exactly that. Gutiérrez concluded this discussion by saying: "What entertainment allows you to do is to create anything that entertains people. That can be so liberating. Suddenly you are not even limited by the categories".

Branded entertainment is reshaping the media industry, largely driven by freedom of branded entertainment's flexible format. It is interesting to note that one can spend more time with a branded entertainment initiative to enable content submersion or be entertained in short-format. The latter, due to meaningful narrative, can be experienced as branded entertainment and not as traditional advertising. Nevertheless, with its origin in guerrilla and ambient, the purpose is to be somewhat unconventional with the intent to create talk-ability and hopefully share-ability that makes for engagement.

#### *5.3.2.2.6 Media channel strategy to support the branded entertainment initiative*

Refers to Subtheme 1.2.6 in Table 5.1:

When reviewing the literature, the researcher did not explore media channel strategy because the focus for the study was primarily on branded entertainment narrative of a singular property, for instance a film or game or music video. However, branded entertainment contact in terms of an integrated brand communication effort cannot be ignored, based on the primary research findings as most participants proactively identified media channel strategy in support of a branded entertainment initiative to play a significant role in its success. The philosophies of some of the participants are discussed next, followed by specific advice the participants

provided to craft a media channel strategy to improve campaign reach and possible target audience engagement.

The philosophies of four participants deserve attention because they reiterate the importance of having a well-planned contact strategy. Paradise said that by just having your contact point in the right space already helps for the target audience to want to engage with your brand. If that space is where consumers interact with other consumers it is “already a win”. Some campaigns have even allowed the target audience to participate in the storytelling: The Beauty Inside (Toshiba and Intel); New York Writes Itself (The Village Voice Newspaper); and Move On (Deutsche Telecom) (see APPENDIX 8).

The Volvo Trucks campaign surprised with their contact point, as the primary target audience was mainly truck or fleet owners and truck drivers. So, it was mainly a business-to-business campaign. However, they identified all stakeholders, which included the families of the truck drivers and anyone that is affected by the safety and precision engineering of Volvo Trucks to build trust and entrench their brand proposition of safety, according to Annika Viberud, Director Strategic Brand & Marketing Communications: Volvo Trucks in Gothenburg. They selected a very “public” touch point: the internet, allowing their campaign to go viral as it captured the imagination of more than just the primary target audience.

Turnbull advised that if a brand uses different media channels and contact points within a channel (she refers to them collectively as “mediums”), the brand must make sure that they all come together to tell a single story. Mok encourages brands to be cognisant of “where the branded entertainment moves” to be aligned to the consumer’s behaviour and decision-making process at the point of contact that supports Paradise’s notion.

Turnbull expanded on the communication in the support media driving the target audience by saying that a brand should craft a “very fine strategy” in the how or the manner in which the brand presents the story when driving the target audience to the primary content piece. She also mentioned that this supports creating a better story for the brand. The researcher argues that this may point to the contribution of the overarching brand narrative when taken into consideration.

A brief discussion follows on findings from participants who provided specific advice to craft a media channel strategy to improve campaign reach and possible target audience engagement. Most participants also recommend a variety of media channels and sometimes also promotional tools to support and drive the target audience to the primary contact point. Turnbull cautioned that a brand cannot “randomly” put something on YouTube and have nothing to drive the target audience to “watch it”. One should in many instances use paid-for media channels if one wants to push an online initiative to be noticed and become viral (if the entertainment value is satisfactory or exceeds expectation). Turnbull also feels very strongly about the power of PR (public relations) and how it ultimately should add value to the campaign or even be the key promotional tool to assist in achieving the campaign objectives. Viberud explained that PR was top of mind from the beginning in planning the campaign. She explained that it is very rare that online campaigns go viral without the support of other promotional tools, especially PR. The way to ensure success is to plan how one would “feed” the PR community in an entertaining and engaging way so that they can help to spread the word. Darwish said they used PR, below-the-line media and social media to drive the target audience to their entertainment property. So, a combination of various relevant brand communication contact points seems apt to drive audiences to the branded entertainment initiative.

In summary, it is apparent that a well-planned media channel strategy can not only maximise the branded entertainment’s exposure but also evoke engagement if the contact point(s) are aligned and complementary to each other, allow for interaction, and based on a profound audience insight can ignite engagement. Thus, one can reason that the potential for engagement for resonance (Keller, 2001: 8) could be increased by mere choice of contact point. Although a combination of promotional tools could be used to drive potential target audiences to engage with a branded entertainment piece, it seems that PR is the most commendable promotional tool to drive and support a branded entertainment initiative.

### **5.3.3 Summary of the findings**

Theme 1 had two subthemes. The first subtheme explored the literature-study proposed definition and the second subtheme explored complementary sets of reasoning that provide context and support for the proposed definition and approach to branded entertainment.

A brief summary of subtheme 1 follows. The literature-proposed branded entertainment definition, being that branded entertainment is an unconventional brand-initiated and owned contact point with the potential to achieve brand resonance through authentic narrative, was explored only in three parts because specific findings relating to authentic narrative and resonance are discussed in Themes 4 and 5 respectively. The first part alluded to the unconventionality of branded entertainment. The findings suggest that branded entertainment is becoming the norm and therefore the notion of unconventionality is recommended to be omitted from the final proposed definition.

The second part explored the notion that branded entertainment should be brand-initiated and owned. The findings suggest in favour of being brand-initiated but suggest that perceived ownership is enough to engage an identity-based narrative in order to carry a sense of brand-credibility. Findings also suggest that although the brand should ideally take ownership of the property, it can only include product placement, brand or product integration or sponsorship (based on only a few participants' feedback) if the brand has the ability to engage an identity-based narrative as well as have a profound creative influence to link the entertainment and the brand to maximise its potential for resonance. Continuous employment of brand-initiated and owned entertainment that communicates the brand's identity reinforces the overarching brand narrative and in that way builds equity. Most of the participants also proactively indicated that narrative is a requisite or the backbone of branded entertainment which shows satisfactory support.

A brief summary of subtheme 2 follows. The consideration to use branded entertainment should stem from a business objective suitability perspective and not because it is the fashionable thing to do or even to mimic competitors as it will come across as inauthentic. Branded entertainment is not traditional advertising nor is it a hard sell as its primary objective is to provide enjoyment by means of entertainment with the ability to emotionally connect with a target audience, to evoke engagement, done in a sincere way to entertain opposed to an overt sales mentality or commercially-led message.

The context, in which the brand or product features, i.e. its role in the narrative, is dependent on being experienced as a "natural fit" and being an enabler or driver that propels the narrative forward. This said, it becomes irrelevant whether the brand or product features subtly or

prominently as the target audience is in the right frame of mind in receiving entertainment. Branded entertainment can come in many formats with ideally a format or space that target audiences can engage with the brand somehow. A few of the participants recommended a well-strategised media channel strategy to support and drive the branded entertainment initiative with PR recommended as a very suitable tool. The difference between branded entertainment and branded content seems to be a space of many debates and various opinions on ownership have been raised. An interpretive discussion on the matter is presented in Chapter 6.

The interview guide questions that relate to Theme 1 are as follows:

- What is branded entertainment?
- To what extent is branded entertainment seen as unconventional?

The definition of branded entertainment cannot exist without authentic narrative and its propensity to achieve consumer brand resonance, of which the attitude and engagement outcomes measured as highly satisfactory. For these reasons, the brand ought to play a central role in the narrative to change or to nurture attitudes about the brand to such an extent that the target audience would want to engage with the author, i.e. the brand. The brand does not have to be subtly interwoven in the narrative. Many initiatives put the brand overtly forward in the narrative with the role of protagonist or enabler to solve a problem. In these instances the target audience knows that the brand is bringing the entertainment and they would be more open to engage with the content opposed to feeling that the brand is either pushed down on them (as possibly in the case with traditional advertising) or is too subtle and they are then “surprised” by the brand featuring in the content which could come across as insincere.

With Theme 1 showing a sense of preliminary support for the proposed branded entertainment definition (to be continued in Themes 4 and 5), the core value of branded entertainment is addressed next as it plays a crucial part in the problem statement: the lack of a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment erodes its core value, that is to break through clutter and connect with audiences through authentic narrative and thus, the potential for branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance is depleted. The study is void of meaning if branded entertainment is not growing in strategic importance in building brand and



if it is not seen to hold a set of perceivable benefits to brand communication decision makers. Theme 2 presents these points of interest.

## 5.4 BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT'S VALUE IN BRAND COMMUNICATION – THEME 2

### 5.4.1 Addressing

**Theme 2** explores the value that branded entertainment holds in brand communication in two parts:

- **Subtheme 1 (2.1 in Table 5.1)** explores the notion that branded entertainment is becoming more strategically important in brand communication:
  - 1.1 **The fragmentation of media channels (2.1.1 in Table 5.1)**
  - 1.2 **The importance of social media (2.1.2 in Table 5.1)**
  - 1.3 **Expectations from a younger generation (2.1.3 in Table 5.1)**
  - 1.4 **Expectations from current consumers (2.1.4 in Table 5.1)**
- **Subtheme 2 (2.2 in Table 5.1)** aims to identify the possible benefits of employing branded entertainment.

This theme is important because it essentially addresses a vital part of the research problem being the lack of a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment eroding its core value, which is to break through clutter and connect with audiences through authentic narrative and thus, the potential for branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance is depleted. By exploring the reasons why brand communication decision makers would want to employ branded entertainment and what they aim to achieve by branded entertainment is an important foundation for assessing whether the proposed core value holds truth based on their perceptions and more so if brand communication decision makers would identify brand resonance as the potential for branded entertainment.

The **interview guide question** that relates to Theme 2 is: What is the core value of branded entertainment?

## 5.4.2 Findings

### 5.4.2.1 *Subtheme 1: Branded entertainment becoming more strategically important in brand communication*

Refers to Subtheme 2.1 in Table 5.1:

Literature suggests that perhaps the most important core value of branded entertainment is its ability to break through commercial clutter and arrest the target audience's attention in a meaningful way (Sayre, 2010; Meyers, 2014; Ryan, 2016; Bothun & Vollmer, 2016); and form an emotional connection that can build brand affinity in a stronger way (Cohen, 2013). The demand for branded entertainment has increased among Millennials, especially regarding an exponential increase in digital media engagement to an extent that brands cannot ignore building these relationships for the long term (Pardee, 2010; Goneos-Malka, 2011: 173), benefitting most when authentic narrative is employed (Papachristos, 2016).

Findings from a comprehensive study by Edelman, a leading independent global Public Relations US-based firm, confirmed that more than half of Millennials perceive value in branded entertainment as part of the consumer process (Mathieu, 2012). The digital realm, especially regarding social media, easily allows for people to create brand communities and community engagement can lead to brand trust (Habibi *et al.*, 2014: 152). The digital realm, especially regarding social media, easily allows for people to create brand communities and community engagement can lead to brand trust (Habibi *et al.*, 2014: 152). Brand trust is the result of successful employment of authenticity in content marketing (Bassett, 2016).

The findings that emerged, covered four areas of interest: the fragmentation of media channels; the importance of social media; the expectation from a younger generation; and expectations from current consumers.

#### 5.4.2.1.1 *The fragmentation of media channels*

Refers to Subtheme 2.1.1 in Table 5.1:

More than half of the participants proactively referred to the fragmentation and also the exponential increase or proliferation of media channels forcing brand communication decision makers to consider branded entertainment, with an emphasis on digital, as a smart way or to consider alternative brand contact points to entertain, in order to break through commercial

clutter and arrest attention. Mok said that the correct viewpoint is to ask how brands can now become “in demand”, relating this to consumers choosing them instead of the brand choosing consumers. “The roles have reversed”, he explained in his discussion on digital media and how digital media is now being accessed on demand and the influx of real-time media that is increasing the complexity for brands to make effective contact with target audiences. He completed his train of thought by saying: “Really, branded content and entertainment is the advertising mediums of today”.

Antill said these media challenges are the reason why branded entertainment exists in the first place, as it is a viable solution to the aforementioned challenges. Robinson remarked that the power of traditional television is “becoming a little bit more questionable” as online blurs the line between advertising and entertainment. This prompts brand decision makers to become more open to experimenting with alternative ways to connect with consumers. Engström, in context of this discussion, agreed with this as he said that brand decision makers “realise they can’t just keep going on doing the same things as before”.

From the discussion, it seems that the fragmentation of media channels leaves brand communication decision makers no choice but to embrace digital and other innovative points of brand contact in order to invite target audiences to engage with brands based on the value that entertainment provides them with.

#### *5.4.2.1.2 The importance of social media*

Refers to Subtheme 2.1.2 in Table 5.1:

Nearly half of the participants remarked on the increasing importance of social media being a key driver for the need for branded entertainment compared to traditional advertising. McInnes remarked that social media definitely creates a platform for more branded entertainment to come through the ranks with Turnbull continuing the thought in saying that social media is a key channel for branded entertainment to really drive exposure and engagement. Paradise pointed to social media as a leverage point for brand decision makers to consider branded entertainment.

Engström and Gutiérrez said that they feel that social media is a must when creating a branded entertainment campaign in order for it to spread virally. Gutierrez made a refreshing statement in saying that a branded entertainment property only becomes branded entertainment when it spreads on social media, given that it was the brand's intent. Antill said that "the explosion of the internet" led to a myriad of channels and clients want to be in those channels but don't know how to, one being social media. Viberud directed attention to the fact that digital allows for measuring results (more so than most media channels) and therefore is bending industry to be more favourable towards branded entertainment.

It seems that social media definitely plays a prominent role in not just the consideration of using branded entertainment but also its ability for spreading virally and thereby maximising exposure, and also that it could serve as a measurable, impactful channel to consider in using branded entertainment. However, successful use of branded entertainment on social media still seems to be out of reach for many brand communication decision makers.

#### *5.4.2.1.3 Expectations from a younger generation*

Refers to Subtheme 2.1.3 in Table 5.1:

Only John proactively referred to a younger generation that expects entertainment from brands instead of traditional advertising. He referred to Generation Z, saying that they "... don't follow the rules which advertising is being written for. They don't respect channels. They watch what they want, when they want". He said that they have no regard for advertising as they are "... a pure entertainment generation". He continued, in his valuable contribution, by saying that branded entertainment is a "necessity" and with Generation Z it is "the rule, not the exception". He added that they do not care for advertising and want entertainment. The only way that brands will survive, he said, is if brands fit into the content that they consume. He is of the opinion that branded entertainment should be the rule and not the exception when communicating to Generation Z. "You cannot reach them in a way we used to reach people for 80 years. The change has been too fast and too dramatic". He concluded that brands must continuously embrace change.

It is interesting to note that John did not refer to Generation Y or Millennials but instead referred to Generation Z, also known as the Post-Millennials and born mid-1990s to early 2000s (Tulgan, 2013: 1). It seems that he thinks beyond the current generation that is stepping into

its main spending years (Goldman Sachs Global, 2016) and perhaps concerns himself with brands having to familiarise themselves at present with branded entertainment and how to negotiate the media landscape to gear up for a future generation that will soon consume or are already consuming brands that have made an impression on them growing up.

#### *5.4.2.1.4 Expectations from current consumers*

Refers to Subtheme 2.1.4 in Table 5.1:

Most participants alluded to the expectation of current consumers or target audiences in general yearning for entertainment to provide a sense of utility and therefore brands can use the opportunity to grow equity. The discussion around this opened on a lighter note with Gutiérrez jokingly saying that he thinks that people have an allergy to marketing, especially now that brands are in a digital era where there is an opportunity for entertainment to take the lead.

Paradise pointed out that consumers are a lot more brand- and advertising savvy in the sense that they know a brand will put out an advertisement to convince consumers to buy something, whereas branded entertainment has the ability to get consumers to “like the brand” if they are well entertained. Pullen latched onto Paradise’s discussion in saying that currently branded entertainment is provided by brands one would never have thought would produce “fresh and relevant content”; and sometimes even content that is out of character for the brand as they know they need to adapt to a new way of presenting themselves in the digital realm. Pullen indicated that those brands understand that they need to produce content and entertainment that is more shareable even though it is “...something against their brand convention and also against the category”.

His comment implies that branded entertainment can even allow a sense of disruption or disruptive behaviour – something that has the ability to break through commercial clutter and arrest attention. This also means that consumers’ expectations are driving new advertising behaviour from brands that inherently present the opportunity to grow goodwill and perhaps even build on the overarching brand narrative by presenting some different nuances of a brand. An interesting observation from Engström was that he contextualised the need for branded entertainment relative to country and/or culture. He remarked that some developing countries, for instance, or some cultures, are still content with traditional advertising that

educates them on brand benefits as they are often not as sceptical of traditional advertising as others. This perhaps infers that branded entertainment is not as imminent on the demand list for everyone because generalisations are often risky to make.

In conclusion of Subtheme 1, it seems that branded entertainment's core value is to break through commercial clutter to arrest attention in a meaningful way.

Brands today do not really have a choice to consider branded entertainment (compared to traditional advertising) as the fragmented and prolific media landscape with on demand digital consumption is significantly higher than in the past and will continue to grow at a very high speed. It also seems that it is becoming strategically more important for brands as it allows the brand to display a more nuanced brand profile geared towards even more differentiation but also provides them with much needed consumer engagement. Social media is a must as part of an integrated campaign and a critical success factor is the amount of consumer shares. It is interesting to note that none of the participants referred to creating communities via social media; however, it was indicated that it evokes a greater chance of engagement. Furthermore, brands have to move to branded entertainment gradually as a younger generation (Generation Z) would expect brands to communicate with them via entertainment and content creation.

#### **5.4.2.2 Subtheme 2: The possible benefits of using branded entertainment**

Refers to Subtheme 2.2 in Table 5.1:

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 suggests that branded entertainment is becoming of more strategic importance to brands because content that provides entertainment value has not only proven to increase the achievement of marketing objectives such as sales beyond satisfaction (NASDAQ, 2015), but it also has the ability to improve communication objectives such as brand recall, brand preference, or brand engagement (Martí *et al.*, 2014 as cited by Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015). Literature further contributed the following: branded entertainment has the ability to: not only target specific audiences but also have larger reach (via viral) if the content adds value (Kunz, Elsässer & Santomier, 2016). It can connect with a target audience in a unique way (Appleyard, 2010) via targeted, high-quality content (iMedia, 2012) that entertains, informs and educates (Swart, 2007).

Participants in the study contributed to the following literature, that branded entertainment has the ability to achieve the following:

- Create a platform where consumers can spend more time with the brand (Burnett & Hutton, 2007: 342). A few participants concurred with this. Styger and Robinson remarked that branded entertainment enables the brand to tell a more engaging story because the brand has more time with the viewer to communicate the brand message. Mok added to this by saying that brand communication decision makers are thus challenged to create branded entertainment that presents a brand worth spending time with.
- Make for a richer brand experience (Burnett & Hutton, 2007: 342) because of the entertainment factor. Mok, Paradise and John also mentioned this. To this point: John expressed the innate ability for a brand to address a target audience's brand perception where a richer brand experience could be the result. He said that craft and impact play important roles in this.
- Provide the consumer with the liberty to seek out the brand which in turn puts the brand in a more favourable place in consumers' minds as the brand communication is not pushed onto them (Mescal, 2013). A few participants concurred with this. Mok, for instance, said that this in turn also enables the brand to evoke engagement with the brand that is fundamental to a rich connection with the target audience.

Branded entertainment is arguably one of the more compelling brand communication efforts that meaningfully contribute to brand narrative because its inherent narrative properties aim to establish a strong emotional connection with a target audience and therefore evoke such customer engagement (Dahlén *et al.*, 2010: 504). The findings show that branded entertainment can create interaction and engagement with the target audience (some of the participants). Turnbull for example, remarked that branded entertainment provides the opportunity to engage with the target audience on a deeper level, gather target audience intelligence and even content because of its high propensity to invite target audience engagement.

The following findings contribute to this bank of knowledge, not necessarily delivered in the study of literature. Branded entertainment has the ability to achieve the following:

- Do more than briefed or planned. Darwish indicated that the original brief was to promote a proprietary Mobinil app; "... then over a couple of months it escalated into

promoting the use of mobile internet in general". Eley alluded to the success of the New York Writes Itself campaign where the initial concept was quite small; to gather New Yorker's stories to enhance a local online magazine, but the overwhelming reaction led to an exhibition of the stories and an off-Broadway play.

- Contribute to or polish the image of the brand. Darwish specifically referred to Mobinil winning back one million lost customers after their successful branded entertainment campaign as the initiative provided an opportunity for the brand to resurrect itself and create a more favourable image.
- Create talk-ability around the brand (more than half of the participants). Turnbull remarked that "the media" (for PR purposes) was more interested in the campaign as it had a story to tell. Darwish commented on the richness and depth of discussions on the brand as The Mobinil campaign created "PR frenzy" compared to traditional advertising that they have done in the past; notably for the campaign's high level of engagement based on the campaign results. Gutiérrez stated that he feels passionate about talk-ability as it is indicative of the originality of the piece as it could be an indicator that the brand has "truly created something new".
- Inspire people to take action or change their behaviour more so than traditional advertising alone can do (a few participants). Mok, for example, mentioned that entertainment in this way has the propensity to be a more effective behaviour changer than possibly traditional advertising would have. The campaign Mok referred to is the Driving Dogs campaign where SPCA dogs learnt to drive. The reaction was overwhelming and the message of SPCA dogs not necessarily emotionally handicapped, less intelligent or being dangerous defied that myth. He believes that branded entertainment had a much more powerful effect through the use of narrative than another traditional advertising campaign would have had.
- Help the brand to stand out from competing brands (some participants). This is because competing brands most likely make use of traditional advertising or promotional techniques. Darwish shared that the response to the Mobinil campaign was overwhelming as the music video they created uniting a nation was "a very far cry" from traditional competitor advertising or what they have ever done in the past.
- Be an extraordinary way to create brand awareness (Darwish and Mok).
- Add value to the brand as it delivers a richer brand assets perception in the minds of consumers (Eley and Darwish) and it evokes positive feelings towards the brand (Robinson).



- Create additional revenue streams. Darwish referred to the songs used in the music videos created for Mobinil that are downloadable on iTunes.
- Lead to internal pride and attracting the right talent. Viberud (client, Volvo Trucks) pointed out that the Volvo trucks campaign inspired and motivated staff, grew internal pride and resulted in an influx of engineers wanting to work for Volvo trucks. Darwish explained that: "... all the employees in the company are asking the head of marketing – what are you going to do next? What is the next song?"
- Increases product consideration. Annika Viberud indicated that purchase consideration amongst non-Volvo truck owners (Europe) reached 30 percent due to the campaign; saying that "I have rarely seen anything like this before in my whole career (dating) back to the 70s".
- Open sales talk from a business-to-business perspective (Viberud).
- Attract new clients from an advertising agency perspective (Robinson).

Responses that complemented the setting of business objectives or benefit to business included opening sales talk or attracting new clients or good talent to work at the company, to create additional revenue streams, and even increase in the internal pride of employees if the initiative received traction or success. Responses that complemented the setting of communication objectives included being an extraordinary way to create brand awareness, boost image, increase stand-out or differentiation, provide a richer brand experience where, for instance, the consumer can engage, interact and even spend more time with the brand, and hopefully lead to word of mouth.

Furthermore, branded entertainment initiatives that seem to have resonated can advance branded entertainment effort into more spaces than initially planned. Probably two of the most important outtakes from the findings could be that branded entertainment that seemed to have resonated can either increase product consideration or inspire people to take action or change their behaviour or share and talk about their arguably richer brand engagement experience due to higher emotional connection or sense of engagement.

### **5.4.3 Summary of the findings**

Theme 2 had two subthemes. The first subtheme explored the notion that branded entertainment is becoming strategically more important in brand communication and the

second subtheme explored the benefits of employing branded entertainment. The reason why these subthemes matter in relation to authentic narrative in branded entertainment is that the first theme aimed to assess whether branded entertainment's core value is to break through commercial clutter and arrest attention in a meaningful way. This is important because it is proposed that meaningful engagement relies on authentic narrative to achieve resonance and without this meaningful engagement through authentic narrative this core value is depleted. The reason why subtheme 2 is of importance for this study is to understand what brand communication decision makers believe branded entertainment can achieve. If one can determine that branded entertainment can deliver substantial value from a business and communication perspective and ultimately resonance, not only is the strategic potential of branded entertainment established but so is the value of the study in terms of application to achieve these value outcomes justified.

A brief summary of subtheme 1 follows. The scale and the depth of the research problem become evident in the sense of fundamental requirement to adhere to demand in context of a fragmented and proliferated mediascape. Target audiences, in particular Generations Y and Z, choose to engage with brands that entertain them. Therefore brands that can connect by means of competent contact planning, showing skill in negotiating an especially difficult digital mediascape whilst mastering the art of authentic narrative, arguably have the best chance to evoke an emotional connection or engagement. Social media expertise and the ability to create online viral sensations seem to take the reins in the opinions of the participants. The employment of PR also seemed to come highly recommended in order to drive and support branded entertainment properties.

A brief summary of subtheme 2 follows. Branded entertainment has the potential to achieve as many marketing and communication objectives as traditional advertising can. Some differentiating factors may be that branded entertainment could offer a richer brand experience, allowing target audiences to either spend more time with the brand or have a higher level of engagement that may increase the possibility of making an emotional connection or active engagement. It was interesting to note that branded entertainment offers some good potential to change behaviour, to increase purchase intent or talk – or share ability that essentially constitutes dimensions of loyalty or intended loyalty behaviour. This is in keeping with Keller's (2001: 2) explanation that loyalty behaviour includes the act of interacting

with the brand (or intended interaction in context of this study) as well as sharing experiences with others.

With Theme 2's findings showing support of the core value of branded entertainment being to break through commercial clutter to arrest attention in a meaningful way, the focus now shifts to Theme 3 aiming to understand that if branded entertainment has so much value and can offer so much in achieving a host of marketing and communication objectives, what then stands in the way of achieving these objectives and more so, why would some brand communication decision makers not consider branded entertainment? So, next the perspectives of brand communication decision makers in this context are presented.

## **5.5 BRAND COMMUNICATION DECISION MAKERS' PERSPECTIVES OF BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT – THEME 3**

### **5.5.1 Addressing**

**Theme 3** explores the perspectives that brand communication decision makers have of branded entertainment. The subthemes that emerged from the findings point to three areas of interest:

- **Subtheme 1 (3.1 in Table 5.1)** investigates the notion of branded entertainment becoming more recognised or considered in general by brand communication decision makers in promotional practice.
- **Subtheme 2 (3.2 in Table 5.1)** aims to identify and describe the reluctance factors for brand communication decision makers to consider branded entertainment:
  - 2.1 Lack of reliable metrics (3.2.1 in Table 5.1)**
  - 2.2 Timing restrictions (3.2.2 in Table 5.1)**
  - 2.3 Budget restrictions (3.2.3 in Table 5.1)**
  - 2.4 Poor quality content (3.2.4 in Table 5.1)**
- **Subtheme 3 (3.3 in Table 5.1)** explores the more evident approaches to branded entertainment relating to client-agency dynamics and practice:
  - 3.1 General advice on dealing with client reluctance to consider branded entertainment (3.3.1 in Table 5.1)**
  - 3.2 Building healthy client-agency relationships (3.3.2 in Table 5.1)**

In any field of discipline it is important to understand context. Theme 2 could establish that branded entertainment as a promotional effort is becoming strategically more important in brand building. However, to what extent is it becoming more recognised in the brand-building community? Being relatively new in contemporary brand communication practice, except for fear of failure, what are the reasons why branded entertainment might still not be considered? A very important finding in Subtheme 2 relates to reasons for many strategically insignificant narrative attempts that deplete potential for resonance. This discussion is important as it provides reason for the introduction of authentic narrative. Authentic narrative characteristics are explored in Theme 4.

Finally the question gets asked: what are the agency-client dynamics in approaching branded entertainment, i.e. more evident approaches and practice principles to branded entertainment that may or may not maximise branded entertainment's strategic potential? The last mentioned addresses the third supportive objective of the study, being to obtain an understanding of best practice principles to guide brand communication decision makers on creating branded entertainment with potential for brand resonance.

The **interview guide questions** that relate to Theme 3 are as follows:

- What withholds branded entertainment from achieving its potential?
- Can you give any advice on sound branded entertainment practice?

## **5.5.2 Findings**

### ***5.5.2.1 Subtheme 1: Branded entertainment becoming more recognised***

Refers to Subtheme 3.1 in Table 5.1:

Subtheme 1 deals with the recognition of branded entertainment by global brand communication decision makers. It differs from the previous theme looking at the growing importance of branded entertainment as a discipline. This is driven by forces in industry, i.e. more a push than a pull. The pull refers to the tendency for global brand communication decision makers to consider and embrace branded entertainment opposed to be pushed into it in reaction to industry demand. This subtheme is a requisite for the other subthemes because if no recognition is prevalent, the approach to branded entertainment by global brand communication decision makers will be superfluous.

It is interesting to note that already in 2012, a study conducted by the Association of National Advertisers in the USA found that nearly two-thirds of client-side marketers aimed to make branded entertainment a common marketing strategy for many companies (ANA, 2012). The study found that the top three reasons why client-side marketers are finding it beneficial are: (1) The ability to make a stronger emotional connection with the consumer (78 percent); (2) The ability to align their brand with relevant content (75 percent); and (3) The ability to build brand affinity with a desired target group or demographic (73 percent). This indicates that in the United States of America brand communication decision makers (client side) have already recognised the strategic value that branded entertainment is capable of.

The majority of the participants stated that branded entertainment is becoming more recognised by global brand communication decision makers. Robinson said that branded entertainment is becoming more accepted as clients are more open to it compared to two to three years ago. One attributing factor is the notion that most were in a comfort zone, using the same traditional promotional tools that they have come to be familiar with. Yet, according to Robinson, trepidation around branded entertainment is being replaced by a type of positive anticipation and the excitement around creating something different and new. Engström concurred and said that many brand decision makers are looking for new ways to go to market.

Steyger attributed the industry recognition of branded entertainment to brands and agencies now starting to proactively look for non-traditional solutions to business problems. McInnes reckoned, from an industry point of view, that branded entertainment was “off the table” and not something that one would easily present to clients. The success that Steyger and McInnes had with the KFC Add Hope campaign attracted many new clients approaching Ogilvy, they said. The Journey of Hope case study is being used in many boardrooms by other agencies to educate clients on the possibilities of branded entertainment, according to client, Turnbull.

Darwish predicted that branded entertainment is likely to be the “hero of the future”. He remarked that “If you do something successfully for the first time and it is really alternative, you are sure that the way of doing will be copied, which in turn is a complement. So, it encourages a different way of communicating and engaging with consumers”. He confirmed this by saying that industry is discovering the future of advertising in general. Paradise said

that branded content and entertainment are already the advertising mediums of today. John said that it is certainly becoming more recognised, adding the following: “Yes, definitely. Well, they are much more aware of the fact that they need to advertise their purpose, their motivations in a different way. By that being said, this doesn’t necessarily mean they know how to do it or they are asking us how to do it. They still do it in the wrong way mostly”.

There was a very positive response to the question: In what way is branded entertainment becoming more recognised in brand communication? The participant responses show that most brand communication decision makers are stuck in their old ways but are becoming more open towards branded entertainment and even excited as it seems like a new way to market. It almost seems that clients are driving the notion to use branded entertainment as they are looking for help because they feel that they are not skilled to approach it correctly. It also seems that clients need education of some sort from industry and agencies need case study referral to an approach for maximised campaign results. However, literature did indicate that client side-marketers do understand that it can offer them value. John’s remark of advertisers not approaching branded entertainment in the right way leads the conversation toward Subtheme 2 that follows.

#### **5.5.2.2 Subtheme 2: Reluctance factors to consider branded entertainment**

Refers to Subtheme 3.2 in Table 5.1:

The literature study has identified that branded entertainment seems to be regarded by many brand communication decision-makers as an unfamiliar form of brand communication; hence they are not willing to take a chance. The iMedia Communications survey (2012) surveyed 72 agency leaders on their thoughts on branded entertainment (explained in Section 2.4.2). The following core challenges were pinpointed:

- (i) Timing restrictions (as branded entertainment is considered to take a much longer time to produce and turn around compared to other brand communication initiatives).
- (ii) Budget restrictions (as clients are convinced that branded entertainment is an expensive exercise that requires big budget).
- (iii) Poor quality content. This could be due to two factors. Firstly it would seem that some client-side marketers approach branded entertainment with an overtly sales-orientated mindset (Swart, 2010, supported by Wiese, 2011 and Mescall, 2013) that means that

the actual entertainment value becomes secondary to a commercial message (Swart, 2007; Hitch *et al.*, 2010; Bhargava; 2011, Graser, 2012; Mescall, 2013, Pytlik; 2014 and Musson; 2014). The second factor alludes to the lack of creative resources, meaning that agencies do not have the creative capacity to create strategically significant branded entertainment because they are too familiar with an advertising-lead approach (Thielman, 2014; Weiss, 2014; Morrison, 2015 and Maconick, 2016). That includes Hitch *et al.*'s (2010: 3) notion of brands creating "disposable content", meaning it possibly lacks durability (see Section 2.2.1.6) and possibly denies opportunities such as engagement and a sense of emotional connection that is strategic in nature.

Findings on the mentioned four areas of interest regarding the reluctance of brand communication decision makers to consider branded entertainment are discussed.

#### *5.5.2.2.1 Lack of reliable metrics*

Refers to Subtheme 3.2.1 in Table 5.1

Although metrics was seen as important and mentioned by Turnbull, Eley, Euchler, Antill and Mok, it was not from a perspective of clients not wanting to do branded entertainment because of that.

#### *5.5.2.2.2 Timing restrictions*

Refers to Subtheme 3.2.2 in Table 5.1:

In terms of the time that it takes to produce a branded entertainment piece, only Eley, Robinson and Antill raised the issue of time as they felt that it does take time to craft a successful branded entertainment piece. However they also linked it to budget and time going hand in hand, putting pressure on creatives to produce successful work with often low budgets in the minimum amount of time. The same participants also referred incisively to agencies struggling to galvanise their efforts due to budget (or even perceived budget) and time restrictions that withhold potential; especially regarding continuous brand communication that must go out. From this, the researcher can infer that client-side marketers do not necessarily want to dedicate all their resources to one project, i.e. spend a disproportionate amount of money on one effort that is in a fairly new field that seems like a high risk investment.

### 5.5.2.2.3 Budget restrictions

Refers to Subtheme 3.2.3 in Table 5.1:

Many of the participants mentioned budget as a factor that results in branded entertainment not being considered. Paradise opened the budget discussion in saying that clients are reluctant to experiment when their advertising spend is cut as they would rather invest in tried and trusted traditional media with tried and tested metrics and analytics. Pullen supported Paradise by saying: "... and when the budgets are getting halved – when every single penny is getting counted, they (some client-side marketers) want to know whatever they are putting into a project they can physically see a return in investment coming out". Antill, Robinson, Mok and Pullen also indicated a sense of sympathy for client-side marketers as they understand it is not always easy to allocate traditional media budget to branded entertainment.

Antill said that the entertainment value and production value are not necessarily related. If one sketches the context correctly one can even be "... forgiven for shooting it on a cell (mobile) phone". It was interesting to note that Leo Burnett *New York* (where Kieran was the Executive Creative Director) came to the party with the budget by getting involved in keeping costs to a minimum by not indulging in expensive story boards and so on. Antill and Leo Burnett employees even built the set themselves to save cost. More agencies realise that they are not necessarily going to receive large budgets for branded entertainment initiatives.

Paradise referred to South African production budgets compared to some major brands in for example the USA where Hollywood A-list celebrities are used in quite a few branded entertainment initiatives. He said that this would compel South African brands to "... think smarter about the way you approach branded entertainment". He added that agencies should never use the excuse of budget to create stand-out work, especially when digital media allows a brand to do much more than in the past.

Pullen supported Antill and Paradise by saying that smaller budgets can do as good a job of branded entertainment as a big budget when the concept is viable. Pullen referred to the TNT campaign: A Dramatic Surprise on Quiet Square (O'Neill, 2012). It was an ambient activation in Belgium and received 23 million online views in under a week. Pullen referred to the relatively low production value compared to the PR exposure that the campaign had as result. He pointed out the strong, original idea carrying an amplified and abnormally higher-than-



anticipated media exposure. Literature reasoned that a viable branded entertainment solution should be tailored to suit the branded entertainment challenge and that quality programming should never be compromised because of perceived budget restrictions (Miles, 2012). The primary research findings seem to support this notion in saying that a smaller budget is as rule of thumb not necessarily an excuse for not producing a good branded entertainment initiative and especially if one can use digital to either drive or amplify a campaign. Budget implications for the digital channel follow next.

The relatively lower cost of digital media channels such as social media makes it more affordable in relation to traditional media and therefore brand communication decision makers may put money into "... a great bit of content and let the media be cheaper", according to Antill. Mok said that it should be an "obligation" that clients invest in good creative as it is ultimately the content that is being consumed and that should entertain to the best of its ability. Paradise and Pullen both agreed with Mok, Engström, Robinson and Eley by supporting a relatively "high" production value in exchange for a lower cost on flying the initiatives via digital media and using digital media as the main (and sometimes only) channel for contact.

It seems that branded entertainment dictates an advertising budget to be split between a higher production cost and a lower media channel cost as good online campaigns will get strong reach via viral if the entertainment value is high.

#### *5.5.2.2.4 Poor quality content*

Refers to Subtheme 3.2.4 in Table 5.1:

This theme posed to be of great importance to the study as it provides findings that directly substantiate the research problem of the lack of a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment eroding its core value, that is to break through clutter and connect with audiences through authentic narrative and thus, the potential for branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance is depleted.

Poor, misaligned, and even reasoned inauthentic branded entertainment content that mostly does not resonate, was found to be mainly due to the approaches by either client-side marketers, agencies or sometimes both. The discussion that follows provides evidence of

practice principles that eschew from strategically sound employment of authentic narrative that provides undesirable results for business or communication objectives. Approaches by client-side marketers are addressed first, followed by approaches by advertising agency-side strategists and creatives.

#### 5.5.2.2.4.1 Poor quality content: client-side marketers

Refers to Subtheme 3.2.4.1 in Table 5.1:

The notion of poor quality content due to a commercially-led mindset became evident in the findings. A brief extract from literature is firstly brought forward to create a contextual backdrop to the findings that follow the review. Literature has shown that the branded entertainment that is approached with commercially-led or an overtly sales-orientated mindset that could resemble that of some traditional advertising approaches can alienate consumers. This is because consumers' frame of mind when choosing to engage with branded entertainment is to add value to their world and not to receive a commercial message (Swart, 2010, supported by Wiese, 2011 and Mescall, 2013).

Literature has reasoned that brand communication decision makers often fail to take the risk into the untreated waters and fall back on what they are familiar with (iMedia 2010) and that actual entertainment value becomes secondary to a commercial message (Swart, 2007; Hitch & Worpel, 2010; Bhargava; 2011, Mescall; 2013, Pytlik; 2014, Musson; 2014); or it is made out to be a once-off tactic within the campaign (Wiese, 2015; Kiriakakis, 2104 and Martí-Parreño *et al.*, 2015) depleting it from its strategic brand-building potential. Brand communication decision makers often do not let go of control so that audiences can discover the content themselves instead of the brand forcing it down on them (Graser, 2012).

John Mescall, Executive Creative Director at ad group McCann, explained that too much branded entertainment still alludes to old school hard sell techniques in a communication space which ought to be much more subtle and immersive. He also said that there should be a very clear distinction between branded entertainment and traditional advertising, explaining that there is almost "no delineation" between branded entertainment and advertising (MarketingMag, 2013). Cope (2013) said that many brands still struggle to produce content that does not explicitly aim to sell their products. He commented that "If it does, chances are

consumer interest in your content will suffer – and so will its chances of ever achieving its marketing purpose”.

It seems that when branded entertainment is approached with an overtly sales-orientated mindset, it could alienate consumers and have the opposite effect because it is proposed that the inauthentic narrative withholds the potential for brand resonance. Brands must get better at telling stories and should refrain from 'hawking' products, said Bhargava (2011). According to the literature, a human-orientated approach is inherent to narrative (Adamson, 2015) and more so, it is important in branded entertainment that avoids using an overt sales-orientated approach (Anderson, 2015).

Many of the participants indicated that branded entertainment in general industry practice is sometimes approached with a commercially-led mindset and therefore the quality of the content is compromised. It is important to state that participants were prompted to refer to their perspectives of industry in general. Eley said that he thinks industry has not looked at the difference between branded entertainment and traditional advertising for a long time. In his opinion, many clients still regard branded entertainment to be the same as traditional advertising. He then remarked quite unpretentiously that now more than ever before people don't like advertising and they don't trust advertising. Therefore the problem has merit.

Darwish indicated that he thinks a client is uncertain about how to react as it is not traditional advertising. He said it "... depends on the client and it depends on the brand and the product". He further said that some clients simply want to push the brand too much (meaning in circumstances when it should not be so necessary). An interesting notion brought to the table by Darwish is that many of Leo Burnett *Cairo's* clients and prospective clients have seen the Mobinil campaign and know what is possible and are encouraged to do the same. A valuable contribution was made by Paradise and Pullen from Ogilvy *Cape Town*.

Paradise referred to industry clients in general being too serious about having to sell their product in a promotional piece. They also take their brand so seriously that it robs the communication piece of the potential to emotionally connect with the target audience and thus misses the mark of achieving the intended resonance. He added that one must keep in mind that consumers will interpret messages the way that they want to interpret them and that there

is a very thin line between traditional advertising and branded entertainment in that context. Pullen latched onto Paradise's plea by saying "Authenticity is so important in what you do".

John alluded to clients' one-dimensional view of approaching branded entertainment. He said that some clients only want to show or push their brand or product or message onto an audience instead of delivering the message that they would like to or expect to see. He added the following: "Clients need to be more open to give up some pre-concepts they have about advertising their brands. If they manage to let this go, let this obsession of speaking in a very marketing way about their products, they can manage to do this. So it is about creative freedom. It is important". Gutiérrez vividly expressed that branded entertainment is very much approached like a "traditional piece of content", or "commercials".

He also said that clients approach branded entertainment from an "advantage" point of view, i.e. a competitive advantage. Clients see that brands like Red Bull make very successful use of branded entertainment – a type of "keeping up with the Joneses effect". Darwish also referred to this. Gutiérrez mentioned that it can dilute the effort as not only the channels but sometimes the format also is copied and that a "copy of a copy of a copy" usually misses the mark or impact.

John advised that clients feel more assured once one can present them with a successful branded entertainment case study (usually done for other clients). He remarked that clients have a natural tendency to go with what they are familiar with and that they are inherently risk adverse. He urged clients to refrain from giving in due to preconceived ideas and to be more "open" and to trust the agency more. The majority of the participants referred to the notion of branded entertainment often approached with an overtly sales-orientated, traditional advertising or marketing, or commercial-orientated mindset that curbs the potential for compelling, strategically significant narrative to surface.

One of the most outstanding contributions to this study is certainly Mok contextualising the concepts of a "hard sell" and entertaining branded content. He argued that clients' perceptions could be that a human-centred message in branded entertainment excludes a commercial-centred message. He said it is a big point of contention as clients feel that branded entertainment would not be able to push the benefits of the product or service, or to ask for

the sell. He also said the two are not mutually exclusive and that there is a place for a commercial message, per se, and branded entertainment and depending on context, branded entertainment can accommodate or even drive a commercial message; however, it should be treated with sensitivity and caution.

#### 5.5.2.2.4.2 Poor quality content: advertising agency-side strategists and creatives

Refers to Subtheme 3.2.4.2 in Table 5.1:

Literature pointed to agencies often not being familiar with the branded entertainment discipline and lacking creative resources to create a successful campaign (iMedia 2010; Graser, 2012). Advertising agency-side creatives and strategists who are stepping out of the role of advertisers to be storytellers or narrators, may also contribute to poor quality content with the misemployment of authentic narrative, for example not telling original stories or not resonating in finding strong enough emotional relevance to a target audience (Thielman, 2014 and Maconick, 2016).

The participants mentioned that, because branded entertainment is a relatively new advertising discipline, many agencies struggle to create good branded entertainment content. John said that lack of creative resources is prevalent in industry. He acknowledged that with more branded entertainment initiatives coming to the fore, it becomes evident that many creatives (in industry) need to do better. He referred to “the next audience” (assuming Generation Z), which will be much more critical not only about brands, but also that brands must show competence in crafting branded entertainment, “... much more competent than what we are doing now”. He added: “Not that we are doing bad. The good examples are great. The bad examples should be better”. Eley and Antill, for instance, argued that good creative branded entertainment is not easy to produce. They mentioned that branded entertainment requires an extraordinary amount of effort and many creatives must learn how to approach and master the medium of entertainment and the sensitivity on how the content will be consumed.

Mok warned against agencies merely moving their messages from broadcast media to interactive media or digital. He said that the content should be “deeply wound into what makes the company or the product or the brand very useful to people’s lives and I think we need a

deeper understanding of what it is that consumers are looking for and that content is a piece of communication to help facilitate the connection between that brand and the consumers". He reiterated that the agencies that "miss the mark" are those that do not understand the relevance that the given brand should play in the target audience's lives as that is the starting point of creating good branded entertainment. Paradise supported Mok in saying that he sees many agencies produce branded entertainment where the idea of a story preceded the audience-relevant insight that is also true to the purpose of the brand. He believes that in this case "... people will see through you". One can assume that this could refer to a perceived sense of inauthenticity. Furthermore, Darwish and Paradise said that originality and the yearning to be a true stand-out and category leading initiative escapes many agencies as they want to play it safe.

The findings confirm the two mentioned factors that cause poor quality content. The first is the client-side marketers' overtly sales-orientated approach which supposedly is to minimise risk and which ultimately curbs enthusiasm or marginalises creative potential. The second is that many agencies are struggling to produce good quality, strategically significant branded entertainment work from a creative perspective, mostly because mastering the art of narrative is new and difficult to many. It seems that approaches vary from disregarding target audience relevance by focusing on the entertainment first, perhaps in an effort to impress or a risk-adverse approach in creating unoriginal, timid narrative that neither entertains nor resonates. Target audience relevance by means of emotional meaning in the narrative, as well as originality, seems to curb the potential for resonance. These two characteristics are proposed to feature as part of authentic narrative that is further explored in Theme 4. Moreover, some factors that also seem to deliver entertainment that is neither compelling nor strategically significant are brand communication decision makers who want to play it safe to protect reputation (on both client and agency side), budget and time pressures.

### **5.5.2.3 Subtheme 3: Agency-client dynamics in approaching branded entertainment**

Refers to Subtheme 3.3 in Table 5.1:

The primary research identified other points of discussion (bar creative challenges and budget issues) related to the reluctance of brand communication decision makers to consider branded entertainment; and expert advice on the nature of agency-client relationships on handling the embarkation of branded entertainment together. This expert advice on what literature could

not deliver was probably one of the most valuable discoveries during this exploratory study. The first part deals with how an agency should “sell” and deal with client reluctance and the second part deals with the importance of agency-client relationships, particularly concerning the value of agency-client trust.

It is of importance to note that the viewpoints that the advertising agency-side communication decision makers refer to in these findings were directed by the interviewer as general observations in industry and not to their respective clients directly as it would be breach of ethical conduct to report on any findings relating to the last mentioned. This was made clear by the interviewer to the participants during the course of the interview, i.e. if there were to be any direct references to their clients that would taint any relationships, those references were omitted from the findings to ensure ethical and good conduct.

#### *5.5.2.3.1 General advice on dealing with client reluctance to consider branded entertainment*

The discussion that follows is directed by findings of mostly individual participants. The first point of concern that agencies express allude to the practice of brands booking media plans that mainly consist of traditional media channels in advance for a promotional year in order to qualify for discounts on media rates. Provision is rarely made for alternative brand contact initiatives, especially on a larger scale. This is to the detriment of an agency wanting to suggest branded entertainment as an ideal contact solution to a brief received during the course of that promotional year, for instance. The participants that raised the concern referred to the “by default” exclusion of branded entertainment as an option to explore. In addition, traditional media, especially television in relation to its reach, is still considered a “safer bet” than online branded entertainment initiatives for instance, and it will take a substantial amount of convincing to change that perception. It seems that general non-consideration and risk avoiding behaviour is mostly prevalent among clients.

Continuing the thought on risk-aversion: Paradise referred to an interesting industry observation in saying that younger clients are ironically enough inclined to be more risk-averse as they are not willing to “stick their necks out to fail”, i.e. risk their reputation. Gutierrez continuously referred to “me too” brands, mostly driven by clients’ risk-adverse behaviour that fails in its sense of authenticity. He said: “The challenge is to sell originality! So many clients just want to keep up with the Joneses and do not want to take the risk of creating something

completely new and original". Darwish alluded to the same standpoint in brands not just copying the idea but also as the touch point of communication. Both Dean and Mok supported this notion.

However, Viberud, a very experienced client, explained that it is a challenge within in the organisation to convince the internal team "why they are doing what they are doing" and that "it is the right thing to do" if they were to consider branded entertainment. Respect should also be paid to a brave client as brand communication decision makers (client) must often convince their internal teams on the business side to approve a branded entertainment campaign. Viberud, client of the Volvo Experiments campaign, supported this notion. She said that once she had everyone's "blessings" it was much easier to commence with the project. Part of the convincing process should not only be on the branded entertainment property (be it a web series, for instance), but also on other campaign elements that will support the property, for example PR and other channels. Yet, as mentioned previously, she said that the largest part of the convincing process is to convince the internal team that what they are doing and why they are doing it is the right thing.

A finding surfaced which was in contrast to agencies trying to convince clients about branded entertainment. John and Antill warned against the notion that it seems to be prevalent in industry that many clients want to do branded entertainment to rise up to demand, but they lack the appropriate motivation on why they would like to do so. Often it is for the wrong purpose or something that is not suitable to the business challenge; and sometimes not suitable for the target audience they want to attract. The truth in motivation plays a pivotal role, according to John. "If you want to play this game you need to have a purpose, a clear purpose, that your audience, that your customer already understands you this way". It is important that the audience experience your branded entertainment initiative as something that you are doing that can be seen as "natural" to the brand. It seems that agencies sometimes do have reservations about branded entertainment even if clients are keen. One could argue that strategic thought from the agency's side is prevalent and not just to undertake a branded entertainment initiative for the sake of it. Eley said: "You can't just push something. You have to think about how you are going to end up being consumed. That is 100% about integrity", that means that the integrity of the agency is always at stake, especially when it comes to their client.



Many participants provided advice on “selling” the idea of branded entertainment to their clients who were initially somewhat reluctant to consider it. Turnbull (client; KFC) stated that the agency must be good enough to sell an idea that matters; an idea that meets the requirements of what the client is looking for in terms of brand building – branded entertainment or not. Euchler remarked that branded entertainment is certainly not the norm and his advice was that agencies should not try to talk to clients about categories or definitions but merely talk about solutions to clients’ problems. He emphasised that the discussion should rather be about solutions and not educating clients on promotional tools or “categories”. Turnbull indicated very strong support of this notion. Viberud (client; Volvo Trucks) remarked that there should be allowance for initial internal debate to “... knock something into shape that is otherwise quite difficult to knock into shape”.

She further reasoned that openness, collaboration and a sense of co-accountability make for a favourable and mature approach. Engström (agency; Volvo Trucks) added to this by saying that the ability to work with a client in an informal way initially makes the convincing easier; even to include the client in the creative process may pose to be a solution to get more than the client’s buy-in, to really “get the client on board”. Darwish supported Engström with a notion that a partnership with a client “... is crucial”. He did however say that sometimes it takes a bit of convincing over a period of time as the campaign planning evolves. Darwish advised (in general) that if a client likes a simple, good idea, one must “... let them like it without spoiling it”.

The task of convincing clients may sometimes be a difficult one. John said that many clients in industry don’t grasp the connection between the brand motivation and content motivation. This means that agencies spend a lot of time trying to explain it to their client. He reckoned that brands that are “more mature” are generally more developed on this notion. However, the largest brands, he said one should also keep in mind, have the most to lose if the brand fails, hence they take a larger risk. He also stated that industry in general is in a process of “making mistakes” in its quest to make “legit branded content”. He added that now is the time for branded entertainment content creators to find the correct partners in order to do so. It can be inferred that he alluded not only to clients but also to media partners, producers and co-brands in context of Coca Cola doing a collaborative venture with Dolby as in the case of his award-winning Coca Cola Thirst campaign that made out part of the sample pool in this study.

It seems from the discussion that the agency must have the ability to sell an idea that matters, free of promotional categories or industry definitions that may preoccupy clients' perceptions. An open and collaborative approach with co-accountability drives favourable ground for agency and client to team up in creating branded entertainment that will resonate. The agency must prompt and invite internal debate as it is a healthy process to follow. A good, simple idea goes a long way with clients and the agency must have the ability for clients to "fall in love" with the idea, despite any evident constraints or preconceptions. Agencies that have control over marrying campaign purpose with content purpose in the context of entertainment should have the ability to show the connection between brand motivations (usually in a commercial message first intent) to a content motivation first (that respects target audience receptivity). Agencies also should be able to convince clients that they have the correct "partners" to do so; be it producers or entertainment specialists as the agency usually relies on the skills of the latter mentioned to create successful work. A key, and probably the biggest warning against agencies' ability to sell and partner with clients is to both aim for truly original content and not to merely copy other initiatives out of fear of success. Originality is integral to authentic narrative, as further explored in Theme 4.

#### *5.5.2.3.2 Building healthy client-agency relationships based on trust when approaching branded entertainment*

Many of the participants said that client-agency trust plays a definite role in the success of branded entertainment that seemingly goes hand-in-hand with a mutual respect between agencies and their clients being brave in their approach to branded entertainment. Pullen observed that he has seen agencies having difficulty to convince a client about a "... new sort of medium" (branded entertainment) when they haven't had success in that. He affirmed that trust plays a pivotal role in sailing "uncharted waters" with clients riding on creative integrity only and case studies to rely on to sell the work. In his opinion, "... we are not quite there in terms of the trust thing". The "we" refers to brand communication decision makers; but most likely clients in context of his discussion.

Robinson shared the relationship between her and her client as an example of one built on trust. The client's brief to the agency simply involved the instruction to produce creative concepts that satisfy them but also to blow them away (in Robinson's words). The agency shared five unorthodox ideas. The client reverted by saying that the ideas "scare" them, but that maybe it is a good thing. They said that they "are not sure about this, but we are open to

doing something completely innovative". Once deciding on the approved direction, the client dared the following, the buying into The Beauty Inside campaign idea: "Let us go for it. Let us challenge ourselves to do something that we have never seen before". Euchler shared a similar experience where the brief included the notion to "make the brand famous" and, as in Robinson's case, it allowed the agency a more apparent creative licence. A rhetorical question could be asked: are brands with large budgets less risk adverse? One asks the question because in the latter mentioned cases, large production budgets allowed room for experimentation. However, and assuming for a moment that larger brands have the larger budgets generally speaking; getting back to John's statement: larger brands have more to lose if a branded entertainment fails. So, it seems like large brands with large budgets have to deal with a double edged sword when assessing risk in context of experimentation.

Darwish reckoned that once a brand has experienced branded entertainment success, the agency will be prone to trust the brand more for future endeavours in the branded entertainment sphere. McInnes referred to an agency doing a branded entertainment initiative for the first time and not wanting to lose the trust of their client. The KFC team (South Africa) indicated that they had done a previous alternative brand contact exercise with Ogilvy *Johannesburg* and it gave them more courage to embark on a similar journey. McInnes (strategist) of the KFC team remarked that "We got lucky as well, because we have a brave client". Engstrom pushed the notion of needing a brave client. Antill argued that a client should not consider being brave or not being brave, if branded entertainment effort is the "right thing to do" to reach the business objective. When the last-mentioned is true it is not difficult to "... get them to take the leap of faith".

John advised that clients feel more assured once one can present them with a successful branded entertainment case study (usually done for other clients). Gutierrez, on the other hand, stated that clients nowadays have a good idea of what good branded entertainment looks like. This can be inferred from the fact that Gutierrez depicted China as a country abundant with branded entertainment. However, this can also be a negative in the sense that some clients even want to dictate the creative (on a campaign) because they are familiar with the advertising tool. He said that it is a "scary place" and that it takes a "... special kind of client to trust the agency to be experts". Gutierrez also advised that a good Account Manager or Account Director who builds up a trust relationship with the client i.e. "... that gets close to the client", can win ground. However, he added that data still provides the largest trust factor.

Lauren McInnes, Group Account Director at Ogilvy *Johannesburg* on KFC, stated that a very strong team with favourable team dynamics and sound understanding among team members plays a major role to create good branded entertainment. Client Lauren Turnbull and James Mok said that one of the attributes to achieving success was a solid team based on a trust relationship. The sentiment of the client being brave has been discussed. Some of the participants indicated that the agency should be brave. Jaime Robinson said that the agency not only won the trust of the client over time as they have proven themselves to be successful at innovation, but that they also gained more confidence as they were doing more and more branded entertainment campaigns. She added that bravery on the side of client and agency is mutually conducive to good work: “So much of it is listening and us not being scared and them (the client) not being scared. Let us just join hands and jump all together. We landed. So it is good.”

It seems that agency-client trust plays an important role in deciding to do branded entertainment. A client only seems as brave as the extent to which an agency has the confidence to present a solution to a business problem, free of any prior agenda, i.e. to use branded entertainment even though it may not be the right solution. This can damage trust. Trust often seems to be built on historical reputation. However, it may just be that if the client actively involves themselves in the creative process with the agency, if that is the kind of relationship that the agency and their client have, it could be beneficial not only to achieve the business objective but also a branded entertainment effort that has the potential to achieve brand resonance.

### **5.5.3 Summary of the findings**

Theme 3 had three subthemes. The first subtheme explored perspectives on branded entertainment in terms of its level of recognition in industry; subtheme 2 explored the factors contributing to the reluctance of brand communication decision makers to consider branded entertainment; and subtheme 3 looked at approaches to branded entertainment in context of agency-client dynamics. A brief summary of each subtheme and its most relevant discussion points follows.

Branded entertainment is evidently becoming more recognised by brand communication decision makers on a global scale as a discipline with potential for brand resonance. However, various factors inhibit consideration; the first being a perceived lack of reliable metrics despite some metric models already developed. The second and third factors point to time and budget respectively. A key finding here is that client-side marketers in general do not necessarily want to dedicate too much resource in terms of time and budget to a branded entertainment initiative that is seen by most as a relatively high risk investment. Branded entertainment could be regarded as high risk because of the unfamiliarity of the practice pertaining to the lack of cohesive understanding of the discipline. Findings suggest that the perception that branded entertainment takes abnormally long and that costs are exuberantly more than the average traditional advertising venture, is not necessarily true.

The most pertinent and elaborate finding relating to branded entertainment narrative exists in the identification of poor quality content by most participants. It seems that a fair amount of client-side marketers still approach branded entertainment with an overtly sales-orientated mindset that could taint any authentic narrative intent because of either falling back on familiar commercial-centred practice or minimising risk of accountability or of results for that matter due to the state of uncertainty and exploration that branded entertainment is currently in. This kind of approach lacks authenticity in the sense that it is not sincere towards a target audience.

Poor quality content in context of establishing brand resonance could also be due to advertising agency-side strategists and creatives not yet mastering the skill of compelling narrative delivery in entertaining content. This is mainly because in most instances it seems challenging to unlearn advertising-driven thinking and application. Brevity appears to play a pivotal role in deciding to undertake a branded entertainment project, especially in relation to the courage it takes to create original work that pushes boundaries. Client and agency need to be an aligned team in order to create strategically significant branded entertainment. Trust is identified as a central denominator for agency-client relationships in creating branded entertainment for success.

Due to the perceptions of brand communication decision makers of the state and approach of branded entertainment in contemporary brand communication practice, especially for content that does not maximise branded entertainment's potential by means of inauthentic

approaches, Theme 4 continues the train of thought by exploring the authentic narrative concept with the aim to enrich the set of proposed authentic narrative characteristics.

## 5.6 AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE CHARACTERISTICS IDENTIFIED AND EXPLORED – THEME 4

### 5.6.1 Addressing

**Theme 4** identifies and explores the characteristics in branded entertainment narrative that must be prevalent for the branded entertainment to be experienced as authentic. The subthemes that emerged from the findings delivered seven areas of interest:

- **Subtheme 1 (4.1 in Table 5.1)** points to branded entertainment narrative to be *generated by a brand*.
- **Subtheme 2 (4.2 in Table 5.1)** looks at the identity-based argument of branded entertainment, i.e. that narrative ought to embody the *brand's identity*.
- **Subtheme 3 (4.3 in Table 5.1)** investigates the notion of branded entertainment narrative to be *original*.
- **Subtheme 4 (4.4 in Table 5.1)** explores branded entertainment narrative to carry *emotional meaning*.
- **Subtheme 5 (4.5 in Table 5.1)** aims to make sense of the *sincerity* aspect of branded entertainment narrative, i.e. to be sincere towards its target audience.
- **Subtheme 6 (4.6 in Table 5.1)** prescribes for branded entertainment narrative to be *believable* to be regarded as authentic.
- **Subtheme 7 (4.7 in Table 5.1)** contributes another characteristic to the literature-identified set of authentic narrative characteristics, being for the narrative to display a sense of considered *craft* in order for it to be experienced by a target audience as authentic.

Theme 4 instigates the authentic narrative construct as argued in Section 3.2 where it is suggested not only to give form to the proposed definition but also to serve as the central point of gravitas to deliver branded entertainment with the potential to achieve resonance. In other words: employing authentic narrative in a branded entertainment effort could be the unlocker to brand resonance and henceforth maximising potential for resonance which is strategic in building brands, therefore authentic narrative's strategic value. The mentioned articulates the central research proposition: Authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to

achieve consumer brand resonance. An integral research proposition to the study, in addition to the proposed definition, is the six suggested authentic narrative characteristics; that is for branded entertainment narrative to be brand-initiated and owned, to embody the brand's identity, to be original, to carry emotional meaning for a target audience, to be sincere, and to be believable – in order to be deemed authentic.

The supportive research goal for the study that gives reason for being of this theme would then be to explore and enrich the proposed set of narrative characteristics in branded entertainment that could constitute authentic narrative. As a natural extension, this theme would inherently aim to provide insights to brand communication decision makers on strategically sound branded entertainment practice and specifically the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance, which is another supportive research goal to the study.

The **interview guide questions** that relate to Theme 4 are as follows:

- Mention and discuss all characteristics that ought to be present to achieve what you mentioned branded entertainment can achieve? (The latter refers to dimensions of resonance participants identified in a previous question.)
- Can you give any advice on sound branded entertainment practice?

## **5.6.2 Findings**

### **5.6.2.1 Subtheme 1: Narrative to be brand generated**

Refers to Subtheme 4.1 in Table 5.1:

Section 5.3.2.1.2 presented findings that suggest that branded entertainment should be initiated by a brand and take perceived ownership of the entertainment and presumably the contact point. However, the term “brand-initiated and owned” was somewhat challenged in the findings. The primary research resulted in the following: as long as the narrative is generated by the brand and the brand as author seen to be in complete control of the entertainment, it does not matter in which entertainment property or on which media channel it features, it will still be considered branded entertainment and the narrative as being generated by a brand would be considered authentic. This subtheme argues that the narrative of the branded entertainment should be generated by the brand.

Crew (1991) said that authentic work is the creation of the author or creator of the work, i.e. taking ownership of the work. The literature suggested that in order for branded entertainment to be considered authentic, it should have the ability to take control of and establish its authority (Monaco, 2009) via narrative that makes the effort more convincing in terms of clear association power between the narrative and their identity to establish trust (Marie, 2012: 5 and Kopoulos, 2016). Narrative originating from a brand could be regarded as authentic and authentic brand “stories” have the ability to create trust (Alter, 2015). Brand trust is also a vital ingredient in the establishment of brand resonance (Keller, 2001: 8 and Ha *et al.*, 2010: 916).

Many of the participants indicated that they think the narrative in branded entertainment should be generated by the brand for it to be deemed authentic. A noteworthy quote from Robinson was that she said that a sense of ownership can give you the ability to control your narrative to such an extent that you can “... get an audience member to choose to spend time with your brand and to choose to engage with your brand in a way that they are letting your brand tell a story”. This means that narrative generated by the brand regarded as authentic can get a target audience to buy into the brand and the “story” it consequently tells, with the probability that more time would be spent via engagement, for instance, which in effect is a dimension of resonance (Keller, 2001: 8). The support of brand generation of narrative mostly stands integral to the notion of brand identity prevalent in narrative for being authentic. This idea is discussed in the second finding that follows.

#### **5.6.2.2 Subtheme 2: Narrative to embody the brand’s identity**

Refers to Subtheme 4.2 in Table 5.1:

According to literature, narrative that is true to the brand’s identity and that aligns with the brand’s overarching brand narrative could be regarded as authentic. Narrative inherently exists to make something known (Berger, 1997: 6) and in relation to Fisher’s paradigm (1989: 109), the author’s identity is expressed by means of character, culture, history and biography which form part of the brand’s narrative philosophy on influencing decision-making. Being true to one’s character, culture, history and biography, for instance, comprises one’s authenticity (Burr, 1995). Different events within narrative (satellites and kernels as per Chatman, 1978) should align with the brand’s identity in order to create authentic narrative. In making full use of establishing the brand’s authority of the entertainment property and making a convincing case for its brand associations and attributes in consistent application thereof, a sense of trust



can be established with the target audience (Marie, 2012: 5 and Kopoulos, 2016). Trust, again, is a vital ingredient in the establishment of brand resonance (Keller, 2001: 8 and Ha *et al.*, 2010: 916). Narrative that is authentic, creative and inspirational stands in line with the brand's identity, especially in terms of content marketing, as it can make for a longer lasting brand-target audience relationship (Clerck, 2014) therefore being strategic.

Euchler asserted that strategically sound branded entertainment narrative starts with the brand's essence and then the aim is to dramatise that essence. Eley reckoned that narrative should be built on the truth, saying: "So, we always look at the inside – the truth that comes from the product or the business". Dean went as far as to say that the narrative should be built on the true values that the brand tries to convey and it would come across as dishonest if the brand conveys something different from what they stand for.

In relation to the brand's identity to be aligned with the brand's overarching narrative in order for the narrative to be authentic, Yankelovich (2010: 1) stated that only when brands can verify their projected identity in their actions will they be considered as authentic. Otherwise, according to Kantor (2011: 15), the narrative would be regarded as inauthentic and may influence the target audience's take on the brand's credibility. Brand credibility and trust are vital to achieve brand resonance (Keller, 2001: 8, 11 and 15).

Most of the participants proactively identified branded entertainment narrative to be brand-identity aligned in order for the branded entertainment to be considered authentic. This delivered a highly satisfactory return, meaning that this narrative characteristic can be reckoned as one of the more important narrative characteristics for authenticity. Some highlights from the findings in the own words of the participants follow.

Gutierrez said that an authentic branded entertainment piece should "... make clear what your brand stands for and what you actually do in much richer ways" and that it "informs everything". This was strongly supported by Engström who said that he feels that the brand's identity should be "deeply integrated" into the narrative: "That is authenticity. That what the brand stands for and what it has done in the past and some property that it is associated with. I think those are just fundamental things". Robinson added that the "theme of the brand" should be firmly in the narrative otherwise the brand will "waste its money". Pullen said the idea of the

narrative ought to be central to the brand. He further said that if the idea is central to the brand “people are going to engage with it ... Authenticity is so important in what you do”. It seems that Pullen links, very much like Robinson on narrative to be brand generated as discussed in Subtheme 1, engagement as a possible benefit; again being a dimension of resonance (Keller, 2001: 8). Robinson and Antill said the brand should be at the heart of the story. Eley said that: “... we will start building a narrative based on a truth. So, we always look at the inside – the truth that comes from the product or the business”.

Some participants also indicated that the identity of the brand in the narrative should align with the brand’s overall identity to be considered authentic. John said that it must feel that your target audience should “... already understand you this way” meaning that the brand identity in the narrative ought to reflect what the target audience already knows about the brand. Paradise referred to a Dove branded entertainment piece (the Dove *Real Beauty Sketches* campaign) that he felt was in line with the overarching brand narrative and because of that the target audience could believe that it provided a higher sense of emotional attachment to the brand and that they can trust the brand. Again, brand credibility and trust are vital to achieve brand resonance (Keller, 2001: 8, 11 and 15).

Findings therefore suggest that embodying a brand’s identity in the narrative of a branded entertainment property is vital to its authenticity. In addition, the brand identity communicated in the narrative must also align with the overarching brand narrative to evoke a sense of trust and credibility that is important to achieve resonance. It also seems that the trust and credibility that a clear brand identity in the narrative offers may evoke engagement and even provide a better possibility for emotional attachment with the brand. Engagement and emotional attachment are two dimensions of resonance (Keller, 2001: 8).

### **5.6.2.3 Subtheme 3: Narrative to be original**

Refers to Subtheme 4.3 in Table 5.1:

According to the literature, narrative needs to be original in order to be authentic (Cloninger, 1993; Carroll *et al.*, 2009 and Pine *et al.*, 2010; George, 2013; Weiss, 2014; Thielman, 2014 and Maconick, 2016). The benefit of original narrative that aligns with brand identity is that it provides the brand a better differentiator and could contribute to the credibility of a brand

(Bauer *et al.*, 2016: 54). Credibility is an important dimension of consumer judgements in Keller's CBBE model (2001: 13).

Many of participants indicated that branded entertainment narrative ought to be original. In Paradise's opinion, an original idea must be the "genesis" of a branded entertainment initiative. Robinson and Darwish are of the opinion that the branded entertainment ought to be something that has not been seen before. Darwish said: "Being completely original can create a phenomenon never seen before and set a trend in industry". He mentioned the *Dumb Ways to Die* campaign (see APPENDIX 10 for case study); an Australian public service announcement campaign by Metro Trains in Melbourne to promote rail safety that has been the most awarded campaign in recent years created by McCann Melbourne (McCann, n.d.). The campaign video went viral through sharing and social media starting in November 2012 and had contingency – different versions, music videos and even a computer game (McCann, n.d.). The emotional connection felt for the campaign, share-ability and interaction provided the brand and hence campaign with the ability to be extended with new or more versions (McCann, n.d.).

Paradise also remarked that a client may feel safe mimicking the idea of an existing successful branded entertainment case study. He said that he is firmly against it as it will not work because it is inauthentic and will therefore lose any emotional connection. Darwish was in agreement with this and remarked that many brands have copied their original idea but their successes were few and far between. The notion of the Always Together music videos for a telecommunication brand (Mobinil; see APPENDIX 8 for campaign summary) without the brand even featuring in the branded entertainment was completely original and experienced as such. Darwish said that this original approach "... created affinity with the brand to an extent that they (their client) were shocked". He said that it is never as powerful if the narrative has been built on someone else's idea.

It seems that a copy of someone else's work or their idea is considered to be inauthentic and can therefore not be experienced as credible. To reiterate this point, Darwish warned against copying competitors to stay up to date, saying: "That leads them to not just copy what the other brands are doing, but copy the very same touch points; copy the very same formats

which are why a lot of the branded isn't particularly that good, because it is a copy of a copy of a copy of a copy".

It therefore seems that authentic narrative should ideally come from a place of complete originality that can drive an affinity or an emotional attachment toward the brand as well as engagement when warranted. Emotional attachment and engagement are dimensions of brand resonance (Keller, 2001: 11). A copy, therefore, of someone else's idea would be regarded as inauthentic and deplete the potential for brand resonance.

#### **5.6.2.4 Subtheme 4: Narrative to carry emotional meaning**

Refers to Subtheme 4.4 in Table 5.1:

According to the literature, authentic branded entertainment narrative should embody emotional meaning in order to establish an emotional connection with a target audience (Wiese, 2011; Cohen, 2013; Czarmecki, 2012 and Wolburg, 2008). Moore and Wurster (2007: 64) emphasised that a strong emotional connection brought about by alignment between the brand's authentic self (its identity) and the consumer's identity could achieve resonance. This means that target-audience relevance plays a very important role in branded entertainment because the brand has the opportunity to connect with the audience on an emotional level because of the utility value that branded entertainment offers through entertainment (Jaggi, 2009: 8; Rose, 2013; Duopoly, 2014: 4; Musson, 2014: 63; Valero, 2014: 9; Brenner, 2015; Miller, 2016).

Literature has shown that authentic narrative in branded entertainment should be relevant to the target audience's attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, motivations, world-understanding and world-view and that it needs to create meaning and make an emotional connection (Crew *et al.*, 1991; Pace *et al.*, 2011; Visconti, 2010: 236, Nash, 2007, Gremler *et al.*, 2001; Gubrium *et al.*, 1998; Baseler: 1995 citing Fisher 1989: 109). This emotional connection contributes to the goodwill that a target audience nurtures towards a brand and therefore influences the customer-based equity of a brand (Lin *et al.*, 2015: 80).

Most of the participants proactively identified branded entertainment narrative to carry emotional meaning in order for that branded entertainment to be regarded as authentic. This

delivered a highly satisfactory return, meaning that this narrative characteristic can be reckoned as one of the more important narrative characteristics for authenticity. Some highlights from the findings in the own words of the participants follow. As a prelude to the discussion, Eley stated that he encourages brand communication decision makers to be sensitive to how target audiences would consume the narrative and according to Darwish this could only be done once the brand can exercise strong insights on its intended target audience.

Darwish believes that branded entertainment has the ability to resonate emotionally with a target audience more than traditional advertising can do. He said that success in branded entertainment is to build emotion into the “core” of the narrative and then the brand will succeed at something that “... will talk to people’s hearts”. In saying this he was referring to the campaign Leo Burnett *Cairo* created for Mobinil (see APPENDIX 8 for campaign review) where a music video that united the Egyptian nation after political unrest could establish a sense of community and win back the loyalty of about a million subscribers that had been lost previously. John showed full support of Darwish, by saying that “...branded entertainment is every bit of advertising that you do that does not look like regular advertising and that establishes emotional connection between the audience and, most important, the content that you place in it”. Paradise said that a successful branded entertainment narrative constitutes an emotional effect on the target audience, for example joy, sadness or anger. In his opinion, the intent of emotional effect is critical to the success of branded entertainment narrative. It seems that branded entertainment has the ability to make an emotional connection and an emotional connection that leads to attitudinal attachment is one of the dimensions of brand resonance (Keller, 2001: 8).

Narrative that carries emotional meaning to embody authenticity, as stipulated in the literature review, relates to establishing target audience relevance. Mok said that branded entertainment narrative allows the opportunity to communicate a “deeper understanding of what it is that consumers are looking for” in relation to the way in which the brand or the product can contribute to their lives. John backed this notion as he believes that the narrative in branded entertainment allows for establishing “an emotional connection between the product and the content in the way that the audience likes to see it”. It is apparent that branded entertainment narrative creates opportunity to establish a deeper link between the brand and what a target audience considers to be important to them.

Steyger contended that “the best ideas are insightful ideas. That is where great ideas come from”. She added that target audience insight based on a human truth is pivotal to the narrative whether it is a fictitious or what she calls “authentic story” (most likely referring to reality entertainment like the Journey of Hope that she narrated as copywriter). Steyger also said that authenticity mostly lies in a character that people can relate to as it humanises the brand. She said: “I think it allows for a credible, authentic story telling”.

Literature has also highlighted some points of interest reflecting authenticity and target audience relevance, such as the following:

- **Using “real” words** (Clift, 2011 & Carruthers, 2012). Steyger said that for the narrative to resonate with the target audience is to “speak their language” (in the figurative sense of the word): “It comes back to speaking to consumers in their language. You become top of mind. So when they resonate with you, they have a connection to you and then you are (on) the top of their mind and that means they will buy your product, eat your food and visit you”.
- **Using narratives that reveal unfulfilled needs and desires** (Carruthers citing King, 2012). Eley, Creative Director for the Hot Wheels for Real campaign (see APPENDIX 8 for campaign review), indicated that the initiative actualised many boys’ childhood dream of racing or seeing a car race on the tracks provided in real life. This campaign, as mentioned before, was aimed at boys and grown-ups (evoking a sense of nostalgia) through provocative real-life stunts mimicking the actual designs of the toy cars and tracks.
- Or even when applicable, **local experiences** (or localisms) (Patterson, 2011; Van den Bergh, 2012; Pace *et al.*, 2011). This narrative technique has been identified by Antill to be useful “where people share experiences” which was a driving force in the narrative technique employed in New York Writes Itself campaign (where it all centred on New York and people’s stories that live in New York; see APPENDIX 8 for campaign review). Highly relatable narrative was employed that was driven by a call for active engagement. It is interesting to note that Pullen, Paradise, Darwish and Steyger all agreed that it is necessary to encourage target audience participation in this local context or even when something like a shared value exists.

Volvo Trucks Experiments (see APPENDIX 8 for campaign review) had a remarkable consumer insight that steered away from only aiming its brand communication to businesses (as it should have been a business-to-business/B2B advertising effort). Instead, they aimed their brand communication to B2B companies and others, for example the families of the truck drivers. Volvo's insight, as stated by Viberud, relied on the following: to demonstrate safety as it is as important for businesses as it is for the truckers' families to know that they are safe. Volvo Trucks took to social media. This fresh angle on relating to target audiences more than just to a B2B target market awarded Volvo with millions of shares on social media, indicating positive engagement.

Further to Volvo Trucks Experiments, Engström said that a key focus is the target audience and that it is preferable to approach the narrative from the target audience's perspective and not necessarily the brand's perspective. If that was the case, Engström inferred that the campaign would have indeed been and remained a B2B campaign. The interest for Forsman & Bodenfors and client Volvo Trucks was to create communication that "that people will like to look at". Mok seems to be in agreement with Engström and adds: "Branded entertainment is only as powerful as it is insightful and relevant to the audience".

Mok, who was responsible for creating Driving Dogs (see APPENDIX 8 for campaign review), continued this train of thought by saying that FCB Auckland's departure was a proven insight that people view shelter dogs "regardless as second class or not as an animal". This is inherently based on a truth and the narrative was built on this truth, according to Mok. They delighted the viewer and shifted perception by getting the target audience to question their own belief system as they taught shelter dogs to drive a MINI in a most entertaining manner by building emotional meaning into the narrative.

Narrative that resonates with the target audience displays an alignment between the author's (moral) values and the (moral) values of the target audience, according to Beverland *et al.* (2008). Keller (2014) stated that resonance is unlikely to be achieved if the brand's values and the target consumer's values do not align. There is also much to say for the integrity of a brand in relation to its values or beliefs and how it translates into the narrative. Antill said "... if you tell people that this is your belief and your company lives up to that – you have nothing to hide and it should be authentic, genuine and amazing".

Mok opened the argument by saying that a competitive advantage can be achieved through branded entertainment that can make a connection between the values of the brand and the value-system of the target-audience. He said that values are an affirmation of self that goes very deep and that can create affinity for the brand (or emotional attachment). He added, however, that this can not necessarily lead to a commercial relationship with the target audience.

Robinson shared the progressive thinking behind Toshiba & Intel's *The Beauty Inside* campaign. The brand took a chance as it moved into a space that was different and challenging; a space where one can align with the consumer in a meaningful way. The Beauty Inside's narrative challenged people's sense of identity and maturity levels regarding identity. This campaign resonated deeply with the target audience – to such an extent that they could act out the role of the lead character via video blog, defined as “a record of your thoughts, opinions, or experiences that you film and publish on the internet” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2017), with quite emotional performances. Because the lead character's appearance kept changing, multiple fans were chosen to play him, and auditions continued until the project ended. Robinson qualified: “It is okay to talk – the beauty inside – talk about some truths about identity and gender identity and race and age and all those things”. She continued by saying that it pushed the target audience into a space of discomfort which could have put the concept and the brand's intent at risk. Robinson said that they were surprised by the overwhelming response. The attitudinal attachment and level of engagement exceeded all expectation.

Pullen and Paradise said that incongruence of the portrayed value system of the narrator (the brand) and the narrative will feel like a dishonest attempt from the brand. Paradise shared his conviction: that a connection in brand-consumer values creates strong brand affinity. Pullen supported Paradise in saying that if an advertiser tries to convince a target audience of something that is not truthful and not in line with the value system of the brand, the target audience is not going to believe the brand. Darwish also contributed meaningfully to the target audience value system notion: “The brand did not feature in the commercial at all. It shows the belief system of the brand to create resonance”.

The findings suggest that branded entertainment narrative that can show a values-alignment between the brand and the target-audience is likely to create an attitudinal attachment to the



brand (and resonance for that matter) because the narrative is regarded as authentic. The findings further suggest that branded entertainment narrative that carries emotional meaning is especially prone to a stance of authenticity in the brand's communication effort and therefore nurtures the potential to establish an emotional connection and to evoke target audience engagement. It seems that the possibility also may exist to establish or sway a sense of loyalty from consumers. Emotional attachment, engagement and loyalty are dimensions of brand resonance (Keller, 2001: 11).

#### **5.6.2.5 Subtheme 5: Narrative to be sincere**

Refers to Subtheme 4.5 in Table 5.1:

Branded entertainment narrative ought to be in the best interest of the target audience by genuinely offering utility by means of entertainment (Roberts, 2012; Wiese, 2013; Marsden, 2015). Brands need to portray themselves as sincere in their effort to entertain and should not aim to make a quick sell; in particular with Millennials because of their high sense of distrust of brands (Rohampton, 2016). Fisher (in Warnick, 1987: 179) put forward that narrative intent ought to match message intent whilst the values of the audience in relation to their expectation should be honoured. The narrative intent should come across as being genuine and "for real" (Liao, 2009: 91 and Hargrave, 2011) with the following characteristics or combination of characteristics in tact: acting or being experienced in the following way: honest, simple and human (Hanley cited by Zottola, 2016); relaying real emotions or shared emotions and memories (Williams, 2015); acting in a way that portrays democracy and openness – availability to everybody (Boyle, 2003; Nash, 2007; Marra, 2009; Pace *et al.*, 2011; Clifton, 2013); and be respectful towards people, their values (Tampon, 2013) and their environment (Van den Bergh, 2012). "Realness" affirms a "being human" aspect (Brooks, 2005). Furthermore, sincerity can establish brand trust (Demos, 2013). Trust is vital to achieve brand resonance (Keller, 2001: 13).

Most of the participants proactively identified branded entertainment narrative to be sincere in order for the branded entertainment to be regarded as authentic. This delivered a highly satisfactory return, meaning that this narrative characteristic can be reckoned as one of the more important narrative characteristics for authenticity. Some highlights from the findings in the own words of the participants follow.

In context of the notion of sincerity, Eley said: “Being true to the customer is the guiding light”; meaning that you have their best interest at heart. Eley feels strongly that over and above creating something of a high entertainment value, the brand should come across as being honest to want to entertain and not the feeling that there is a sinister motive behind the entertainment. Darwish simply added: “It is being decent - to come across as decent”. He agreed with Eley in saying that the brand should be passionate about building a content strategy and that sincerity will follow. Darwish concurred by saying that one must have passion for the project and believe in the project. It seems that branded entertainment requires possibly more or potentially a deeper sense of passion due to the intensity of the exercise, possibly more so than other promotional tools.

Antill, Paradise and Pullen warned against putting forward just what the brand wants to get across. It is necessary to have a careful combination between the brand’s message and the entertainment. Antill said it is about cautiously finding the parallel or intersection between the two; otherwise the communication effort may seem insincere in context of branded entertainment opposed to traditional advertising. Robinson and Engström mentioned that if the brand or product seamlessly fits into the entertainment in such a way that it complements the entertainment, the audience will not find it insincere and will have a bigger propensity to emotionally attach to the brand.

John also said that he feels emotional attachment is possible when the narrative expresses a sense of sincerity. He focused on the notion that a brand that is considered as honest and comes across as “natural” has a better chance to evoke attitudinal attachment. The narrative, according to John, should provide truth to the motivation why the brand is creating the entertainment and will only come across as being genuine if the motivation is experienced as honest and respectful. He added that that sense of “naturalness” or simplicity makes the narrative authentic. Darwish agreed with the latter.

Continuing the discussion on the way the brand features in the content, being experienced as the entertainment is sincere or insincere, Robinson is of opinion that “People want to know who is bringing this. Otherwise it may come across that you are being disingenuous ... They do not want to be slipped or snuck in”. The narrative in Robinson’s *The Beauty Inside* – the idea of the story – was quite farfetched, i.e. to wake up in a different body every day (see

APPENDIX 8 for campaign review). The intent of the story was to show that although one may look different on the outside (like the different Toshiba computers that have Intel inside) it is the inside that counts i.e. the beauty inside. To convince the target audience that it was “for real” took a fine attempt, i.e. for people to buy into the story, according to Robinson. However, it came across as being plausible through the art of authentic narrative; to similarly come across as authentically “poetic” in the case of the Coke Thirst campaign, according to John (see APPENDIX 8 for campaign summary).

Pullen said that “power” is “... to be trusted, being authentic”. He linked trust to authenticity. Mok asserted that “integrity is absolutely crucial” and there has to be a level of honesty in the branded entertainment effort. He stated that consumers favour a brand that is “honest with them and entertains them”. He continued by saying that most don’t like advertising to invade their life and they’d rather trust a brand that is honest with them and that entertains them. Paradise supported this argument and pointed out that an invasive brand cannot be trusted. Trust seems to play a significant role in favouring a brand. That suggests a potential attitudinal attachment with the brand – because trust is provided, the brand is perceived as being honest. Mok concluded the discussion on sincerity by saying: “We don’t want our brand all over this. We don’t want to listen to a hard sell for money”. Mok is well aware that client-side marketers ultimately want to “push the benefits” of their products, not being allowed to “ask for the sale”. But he said that there is a “time and place for a commercial message” and if the brand wants to create content that the target audience would want to spend time with, the content needs to be entertaining and not disappoint a target audience’s expectation of utility by entertainment. In addition, because the narrative comes across as being sincere, the “sale” may consequently happen.

It seems that branded entertainment narrative need to be sincere towards a target audience and come across as being genuine/ "for real" due to honesty, simplicity and humanness. The findings suggest that the actual narrative and the narrator play major roles in achieving this and that the roles are allowed to sometimes get blurred. The combination of the two can create emotional connection or attitudinal attachment to the brand. An emotional connection or attitudinal attachment is one of the dimensions of brand resonance (Keller, 2001: 11). It comes across in the findings that a brand should stand in support of the narrative to be experienced as sincere and therefore either a hard sell approach or concealing a sell in the name of narrative could be experienced as insincere towards to utility expectation of a target audience.

If a brand is up-front regarding its intent to entertain the audience would be in the right frame of mind to understand that the entertainment would use some form of persuasion to ultimately make a sale. In context of authentic narrative audiences would be receptive to this as the honesty of the brand is being valued.

#### **5.6.2.6 Subtheme 6: Narrative to be believable**

Refers to Subtheme 4.6 in Table 5.1:

Narrative coherence refers to how the story “hangs together” and any inconsistencies may influence the believability (Yale, 2012), thus putting authenticity at risk (Snowden, 2012). This means, for instance, that we can count on the characters within a certain category, type and genre to act in a reliable manner (Fisher, 1984). The narrative essentially has to be coherent and plausible and the story, i.e. the content, has to be meaningful (Chatman, 1978: 481; Warnick, 1987: 173; Fisher, 1989: 109; Griffin: 2009; Yale, 2012). This directly influences the narrative to be found credible and trustworthy and consequently the author or brand that provides the entertainment (Canter *et al.*, 2003: 10, Yale, 2012; Wall, 2016). Authentic narrative is therefore credible and trustworthy (Visconti, 2010: 234; Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Gremler *et al.*, 2001; Chatman, 1978). Keller (2001) said that resonance cannot exist without finding the brand credible and trustworthy.

None of the participants referred to coherence specifically. However, the sense of plausibility, believability and most importantly, for the narrative to come across as “genuine”, seem to have played a significant role in the various branded entertainment initiatives as indicated by most of the participants. Eley, when describing the creative process for *Mistress Los Angeles’ Hot Wheels for Real* (see APPENDIX 8 for the campaign review), explained that the realness of the narrative was based on two important findings in their primary research. Firstly, that the cars in the entertainment were based on Mattel cars that were engineered based on real cars; and secondly they studied ways in which kids play with the cars and aimed to mimic this in the narrative, as according to Eley’s own words: “So we wrote a narrative based on this – we imagined there was a place that bought these two concepts together and we got Hot Wheels for Real”. In addition the series employed a veteran stunt driver to facilitate the series and groom contestants to break a world record by completing a double-loop, based on the double-loop toy product, something that escaped him in his career. This also contributed to the believability of the narrative or integrity of the initiative, according to Eley.

The KFC Add Hope campaign (see APPENDIX 8 for campaign review) followed an extreme athlete on a six-week cross country journey to demonstrate the struggle of what happens to the human body when starving or fed. Steyger, the Copy Writer on the project, said that a human interest story is always one that stands in good stead if you look at “very” authentic narrative and Turnbull, the client, mentioned that in the best interest of the initiative coming across as credible it needed to tell a “real” story based on the reality of hunger and by means of an athlete that really struggled in this documented journey. Antill referred to the Volvo Trucks Experiments campaign (see APPENDIX 8 for campaign review) in saying that the narrative came across as being believable because the narrative dramatises the most important feature that Volvo is positioned on: safety. Target audiences know this for a fact and therefore the experiments could not come across as rigged. This was confirmed by Engström, Creative Director for the Volvo Trucks Experiments. Paradise also proactively referred to the Volvo Trucks Experiments campaign by saying that the narrative does not “try that hard” opposed to “try too hard to do something cool”; that Volvo set out to do a dramatisation of its precision by means of safety; and that “they set something out to do and they did it”, meaning it is simple, honest and believable.

Darwish also remarked that the narrative in the Mobinil Always Together campaign (see APPENDIX 8 for campaign review) was believable as the songs not only spoke to solidarity and relationship that could translate back to the brand, but that each music video came across as being “real” based on the representation of various recognisable cultures, languages and religions presented in a way that was plausible enough to relate back to the brand and its motivational intent. Gutiérrez emphasised that the motivation in narrative ought to be plausible, that is for the brand’s motivation and a character or storyline’s motivation to be in sync. Only then would the narrative be experienced as believable and authentic. These remarks by Gutiérrez were supported by John.

Pullen also agreed with Gutiérrez and John in saying that when the idea of the narrative is not only central to the brand and only if what the narrative conveys is truthful and the intercept is intact, will it be “believable” and will “people” “engage with it”. He linked authenticity directly to the believability of the narrative.

In addition to the literature finding that authentic narrative ought to be believable from a coherence and plausibility point of view, participants suggested that the narrative ought to come across as being “real”. Therefore, above the brand’s intent and motivation for the narrative, it should be something that is of “truth” and not something that is engineered to impress without substance and that the central character in the narrative ought to align with the motivation or intent of the brand for the branded entertainment. Only then would it be found to have integrity and to be credible and trustworthy, and will it propel a target audience to engagement. Engagement is a dimension of brand resonance (Keller, 2001: 11).

#### **5.6.2.7 Subtheme 7: Narrative to imbue a sense of considered craft to be regarded as authentic**

Refers to Subtheme 4.7 in Table 5.1:

Craft in authenticity in context of branded entertainment narrative did not deliver sufficient results in the study of literature to be put forward as an initially suggested authentic narrative characteristic. However, some of the participants suggested craft as a characteristic that could indeed contribute to the authenticity of branded entertainment narrative to maximise its potential for resonance. In the identity argument for authenticity, Carroll *et al.* (2009: 2) added to the “type” authenticity argument, as discussed in Section 3.2.1.4.1, to include a suggested term: “craft” authenticity. They described it as “... whether something is made using the appropriate techniques and ingredients”. This could refer to the actual product or service communicated, but also the narrative – whether the narrative is authentically crafted. This could refer to whether there is true originality and effort in the narrative of the communication effort. Beverland (2011) also referred to craft in authenticity; however, in context of product or service quality, crafted through “love” of production, design-led innovation with elements of true uniqueness and obsession with creating meaningful connections between their products and customers. One could extrapolate this thought to narrative and how craft in narrative can contribute to authenticity.

The primary research findings strongly suggest that craft or a sense of considered craft is a contributing factor to maximise potential for brand resonance that is deeply grounded in authenticity: creative consideration in craft, i.e. that the narrative must come across as highly considered and crafted in a way that speaks of authenticity. The budget discussion in Section 5.5.2.2.3 infers that authentic narrative in the context of craft is not necessarily budget-

dependent. The discussion that follows points out highlights or value contributions to the richness of the findings that surfaced from the consideration and craft insight.

Robinson stated that the craft and consideration that was involved with The Beauty Inside campaign (see APPENDIX 8 for campaign review) contributed to the integrity of the narrative. She reckoned that it also contributed to the quality of the work and that the careful and considered way in which the story was told influenced the level of believability of the narrative as the brand adhered to the level of storytelling that non-branded entertainment employs, i.e. entertainment pieces like movies, for instance, to “play in that field”. This would have a higher chance to resonate with the target audience, in Robinson’s opinion.

Robinson’s statement obviously appealed to Pullen as he also referred to the context of the entertainment property relating to the target audience’s expectation. He said: “The unfortunate truth is that consumers consume things they have knowledge of and measure creative against what they know related to context, for example if one watches a movie, one immediately compares it to the production value of a previous movie watched”. John alluded to the fact that craft should not be separate from the idea and that craft is integral to branded entertainment to achieve attitudinal attachment. More so, considered craft impacts directly on the credibility of the brand, related to being an author that takes pride in its original work, according to John. This was also strongly supported by Antill and Engström. Eley advised that time needs to be devoted to crafting as creative integrity is integral to target audience perception of the brand; very much what Robinson referred to.

A few participants highlighted the notion of time and effort in creating narrative that is compelling and well-crafted. Time and effort play a key role in constructing and crafting a successful branded entertainment initiative. Both the New York Writes Itself and Volvo Trucks Experiments campaign took more than a year to mature, starting out with strategy, and being “trial and error” to get to craft the creative concept to perfection, according to the relevant participants.

It seems that consideration and craft of branded entertainment narrative speak to “type” authenticity, love of production, and pride in the brand’s original work as “author” of the entertainment. This means that the brand not only satisfies expectation but it also provides

the opportunity to show integrity and to contribute to a positive perception of a brand that may lead a sense of affinity. Affinity, one can reason, is integral to an emotional connection or attitudinal attachment that is a dimension of brand resonance (Keller, 2001: 11).

### **5.6.3 Summary of the findings**

Theme 4 explored characteristics in the narrative of branded entertainment that would maximise the potential for brand resonance due to a target audience that experiences the narrative to be authentic in nature. Seven characteristics surfaced: for the narrative to be brand generated, to embody brand identity, to be original, to carry emotional meaning, to be sincere, to be believable, and to imbue a sense of considered craft, to be regarded as authentic. In all instances, such authenticity contributed to a sense of credibility and trust in the brand, both being vital to achieve brand resonance (Keller, 2001: 13). Also, in all instances, findings suggest that some or more of the four dimensions of brand resonance could seemingly relate to authentic narrative, being attitudinal attachment due to an emotional connection, engagement, a sense of community or a sense of loyalty or even behavioural loyalty (Keller, 2001: 8).

From the seven authentic narrative characteristics that Theme 4 explored, three seemed to surface significantly more than others due to overwhelming support from participants, as in these instances most of the participants contributed to the importance, as follows:

- (i) For the narrative to embody brand identity, standing in direct support of the identity argument for authenticity, as discussed in Section 3.2.1.4.1.
- (ii) For the narrative to carry emotional meaning, standing in direct support of narrative concept in context of authenticity, as discussed in Section 3.2.2.
- (iii) For the narrative to be sincere towards its target audience with intent to add utility by means of entertainment, standing in direct support of the moral argument for authenticity, as discussed in Section 3.2.2.2.

The findings of Theme 4 also provide guidelines to brand communication decision makers on practical principles in creating branded entertainment that is strategically significant, i.e. that has the ability to achieve brand resonance by employment of the identified authentic narrative characteristics. Theme 5 that follows explores the four dimensions of brand resonance, being



attitudinal attachment, engagement, community and loyalty in more depth to understand the real effects that authentic narrative in branded entertainment can achieve.

## 5.7 RESONANCE: THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE – THEME 5

### 5.7.1 Addressing

**Theme 5** identifies and explores the dimensions of brand resonance, proposed to be the strategic potential of branded entertainment on condition that it employs authentic narrative. The subthemes that emerged from the findings delivered on the four dimensions of resonance identified by Kevin Lane Keller (2001: 11):

- **Subtheme 1 (5.1 in Table 5.1)** speaks to attitudinal attachment, brought about by branded entertainment that makes an *emotional connection* with a target audience, as reasoned in Section 3.3.1.
- **Subtheme 2 (5.2 in Table 5.1)** looks at *engagement* that strategically significant branded entertainment can evoke with a target audience.
- **Subtheme 3 (5.3 in Table 5.1)** investigates the notion of nurturing a sense of *brand community* as result of a branded entertainment initiative that achieved resonance.
- **Subtheme 4 (5.4 in Table 5.1)** explores the notion of *loyalty* or intended loyalty, also discussed in Section 3.3.1, that could be a result of branded entertainment that resonated with an intended target audience.
- **Subtheme 5 (5.5 in Table 5.1)** illustrates how resonant branded entertainment could travel in the mediascape, i.e. generating exponential PR and media value, referring to the power that authentic narrative may imbue.
- **Subtheme 6 (5.6 in Table 5.1)** points to the potential for resonant branded entertainment to become entertainment brands or entertainment franchises, i.e. its longer-term brand leverage potential.

Theme 5 provides more depth to the findings delivered in Theme 4 that explored authentic characteristics in relation to its potential for resonance. Theme 5 ultimately enriches the central research proposition, being that authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve consumer brand resonance, by giving context to what constitutes resonance, i.e. what brand communication decision makers can strive for or plan for in their branded entertainment endeavours. Theme 5 does not duplicate the findings from Theme 4 where it

was already shown that the central research proposition was supported by the primary research findings. In the best interest of this study and brand communication decision makers that may find this study of immediate value, the results from the sample campaigns would be taken into consideration with analysis criteria that points to resonance.

Theme 5, in relation to a qualitative, exploratory research study, takes the liberty to deviate from the research instrument, being data from the expert interviews and to contextualise it in some instances with the sample campaign narratives and campaign results. The reason for this is that the sample campaigns and their results were recognised to achieve resonance not only as indicated by the participants in the research findings already presented up to this point, but also from an objective viewpoint as per campaign reports. These campaigns were among the most recognised in the world by various complements of international judging panels and a discussion of the findings based on the campaigns that the participants were responsible for could positively serve the value and ultimate output of this study. Therefore, in most instances in the discussion in Theme 5 to follow, comments from the participants are employed to enrich a specified brand resonance dimension and in other instances either campaign narratives or campaign results will assist in leading the discussion.

The **interview guide questions** that relate to Theme 5 are as follows:

- What can the content or narrative in branded entertainment ultimately achieve?
- Can you give any advice on sound branded entertainment practice? (in order to achieve the mentioned objectives)

### **5.7.2 Findings**

Before commencing with the findings for this theme a statement made by Robinson seems to be appropriate as introduction. Robinson took branded entertainment back to the essence of storytelling and said that branded entertainment that “simply tells a great story” should succeed in its communication effort. Robinson’s statement infers that branded entertainment, opposed to other promotional efforts that do not employ the art of narrative, in its natural mode of storytelling, is already in a stronger position for resonance, comparatively speaking.

### **5.6.2.1 Subtheme 1: Authentic narrative for an emotional connection**

Refers to Subtheme 5.1 in Table 5.1:

The majority of the participants identified the potential of authentic branded entertainment narrative to constitute an emotional connection with a target audience, therefore initiating a sense of attitudinal attachment. This delivered a highly satisfactory return, meaning that this resonance dimension can be reckoned to be one of the more possible resonance dimensions, if not the most possible. This is based on a very high saturation of the data on *emotional connection*, to be achieved by arguably most branded entertainment initiatives that employ authentic narrative. It seems from the findings that when an emotional connection is in place, the possibility for engagement to follow seems most possible.

To create resonance (Keller 2001: 15), a strong emotional connection or attitudinal attachment is necessary. Customers must go beyond simply having a positive attitude to view the brand as being something special in a broader context. For example, customers with a great deal of attitudinal attachment to a brand may state that they “love” the brand, describe it as one of their favourite possessions, or view it as a “little pleasure” that they look forward to.

Contextual participant input to open and enrich the discussion on emotional connection/attitudinal attachment precede the linkages that can be drawn between authentic narrative and this dimension. True to the nature of qualitative research, the input from selected participants informs this requisite. Darwish is of the opinion that more than emotional meaning in the narrative constitutes an emotional connection; narrative that deeply resonates with a target audience in this way can change perception. The Mobinil Always Together campaign (see APPENDIX 8 for campaign review) managed to not only change a target audience’s perception of a brand but also to provide a sense of higher understanding, in this instance, of a brand that is aiming to unite a nation, serving a much higher purpose and therefore igniting a deep sense of attitudinal attachment to a brand. Mok asserted the same.

On the MINI Driving Dogs campaign, the change in perception of shelter dogs, respect for the integrity of the initiative, cognisance of the higher purpose and endearment experienced for the dogs who learnt to drive a MINI, made for a strong emotional connection to the SPCA brand and by inference a positive attitude to MINI which made the initiative possible. Robinson said that Intel & Toshiba’s The Beauty Inside (see APPENDIX 8 for campaign review)

challenged people's belief systems, especially in terms of identity issues that "may trouble them" and the deeply emotional portrayal of these issues made for a very strong emotional connection with the target audience. The fact that Toshiba & Intel, electronics brands, could take a higher ground and address a broader psychological subject maximised the potential for a sense of attitudinal attachment. The engagement with the narrative by the target audience was brought about by a deep sense of emotional connection, according to Robinson.

Paradise commented on the notion delivered by literature of the narrative delivering something special in a broader context. He pointed out: "It is going back to the whole power thing. It is not power in terms of the take of the world power. It is power to be believed in". An emotional connection from his point of view is that the brand builds up a notion of something that people can relate to and more importantly, believe in. An interesting mention by Robinson and Eley warrants some attention. Eley said that if a branded entertainment initiative is compelling enough to warrant some interest, the following may ring true: "Thank you for having courage and create something and innovate something new". Robinson said: "People will thank the brand for delivering it in a compelling way rather than advertising to them". That may arguably lead to emotional connection and presenting ground for attitudinal attachment.

It thus seems that a branded entertainment piece that employs narrative that speaks to an emotionally-led purpose (for instance Toshiba & Intel's *The Beauty Inside*), especially in relation to its entertainment value, may contribute to the brand seen as special in a broader context. It seems that attitude can also be strongly influenced by authentic narrative, especially when a target audience's value system is either constructively challenged or rewarded. Finally, it seems that the authentic narrative characteristic of imbuing emotional meaning may be the strongest predictor of making an emotional connection with a target audience.

#### **5.6.2.2 Subtheme 2: Authentic narrative for evoking engagement**

Refers to Subtheme 5.2 in Table 5.1:

Perhaps the strongest affirmation of brand resonance in relation to branded entertainment occurs when customers are willing to invest time, energy, money, or other resources into the brand beyond those expended during purchase or consumption of the brand (Keller, 2001: 15-16). For example, customers may choose to join a club centred on a brand, receive updates, and exchange correspondence with other brand users or formal or informal

representatives of the brand itself. They may choose to visit brand-related websites, participate in chat rooms, and so forth. In this case, customers themselves become brand evangelists and ambassadors on behalf of the brand, communicate about the brand, and strengthen the brand ties of others. Strong attitudinal attachment or sense of community is typically necessary for active engagement with the brand to occur (Keller, 2001: 16).

Most of the participants identified the potential of authentic branded entertainment narrative to evoke target audience engagement with a brand. This delivered a highly satisfactory return, meaning that this resonance dimension can be reckoned to be one of the more possible resonance dimensions to be achieved by arguably most branded entertainment initiatives that employ authentic narrative. Contextual participant input to open and enrich the discussion around target audience-brand engagement precede the linkages that can be drawn between authentic narrative and this dimension.

Participants mostly referred to co-creation and nurturing social media engagement related to the campaigns. Turnbull compared the principles and channels of traditional advertising to branded entertainment to understand its strategic imperatives. If the objective is to do a hard sell, she said, traditional advertising could suit mostly using traditional channels. However, if the brand tries to build a coherent story and wants to engage with the target audience on a “deeper level”, branded entertainment would suit using the appropriate channels to allow for such engagement. Turnbull remarked that KFC is in the business of resonance with their target audience to ensure “they come back and interact with our brand”. This is off the back from saying that a brand must bring ideas to life that are entertaining, “because you want them (the target audience) to relate, engage and interact with that (the branded entertainment piece)”.

Mok said that they have now realised that “engagement and participation is fundamental to a rich connection (with the target audience)”. Robinson’s opinion stands strong: “So, I think the strategic benefit for a client would be – the mandate to create something that was of a higher quality – that was a better piece for them and the result of that is that you get an audience member to choose to spend time with your brand and to choose to engage with your brand in a way that they are letting your brand tell a story”. Steyger asked a very pertinent question: “How do you create content that consumers will take into their own hands and either talk about the brand or want to do promotion for the brand on their behalf without asking them to?”

Engagement also indicates that action has been taken by the target audience and the following are a few examples from the campaign results that all exceeded set campaign targets:

- KFC's The Journey of Hope: Donations peaked at R12m for the year – which means six million meals in the next year (2012). KFC did not provide the previous years' figures, but they were substantially more than ever reached in any campaign they have done, according to Turnbull.
- Cape Town Tourism's Send Your Facebook Profile to Cape Town: Over 350 000 people engaged. Those who signed up to the campaign could tailor a one of a kind five day holiday in Cape Town and watch the digital journey unfold as if there were travelling there in person.
- The Village Voice's New York Writes Itself: Over two million unique visits to the site and 20 percent increase in traffic to the villagevoice.com.
- Toshiba & Intel's The Beauty Inside: Over 74 million views worldwide; 94 000+ Facebook likes with 14 million interactions and 8 000+ Twitter followers.
- Mattel's Hot Wheels for Real: Ten million views of the stunt; 1.7 billion impressions in 48 hours; the world record film had five million views.
- SPCA & MINI's Driving Dogs: Estimated viewing audience of 200 million.
- Volvo Trucks' Live Experiments: Ten million views; and eight million shares online
- Deutsche Telecom's Move On: 9,480 applications were made to be part of the movie; from this 400 people or their submissions became part of the movie; and over one million people watched the whole film.
- Mobinil's Always Together: 3,304,454 views on YouTube on the launch day – within a few days, eight million views; and one million ringtones and call tones of the song downloaded.

It is clear that a branded entertainment campaign that resonates with a target audience can evoke high levels of engagement. Two of the campaigns experienced success in terms of audience engagement. Various spoofs of the Volvo Trucks Experiments campaigns have been made by fans and they generated over 50 million views on YouTube. The Beauty Inside was so successful that a Korean version of the film has been made. Something that could be mentioned in terms of audience engagement is including the idea of making the audience part of the narrative process, like The Beauty Inside, New York Writes Itself and Move On, for example. (See APPENDIX 8 for all campaign reviews). Involving the target audience in the creation of the content proves to be very desirable in creating authentic narrative, according

to a few of the participants. Steyger advised the following: “People are more positive towards brands that allows them to be part of the process or allows them to receive information without the brand forcing the communication upon them”. Eley forewarned that in the planning process one should be highly cognisant of the manner in which the content will be consumed as it shapes the structure and plausibility of the narrative.

It seems that in planning a branded entertainment initiative, provision should be made for engagement to be possible as well as to plan avenues or platforms on which target audiences can engage. The evidence according to the sample campaigns seems overwhelming for the possibility of engagement on provision and with the assumption that the campaigns employed authentic narrative, noted that all of the campaigns fitted the proposed branded entertainment definition delivered by the primary research findings.

### **5.6.2.3 Subtheme 3: Authentic narrative for a sense of community**

Refers to Subtheme 5.3 in Table 5.1:

Keller (2001: 15) said that identification with a brand community may reflect an important social phenomenon whereby customers feel a kinship or affiliation with other people associated with the brand. These connections may involve fellow brand users or customers or, instead, employees or representatives of the company.

The participants did not proactively and pertinently refer to community as a stand-alone resonance requisite. However, most of the sample campaigns could instigate a sense of community or may as well have been planned to bring about brand communities as a result of employing authentic narrative to maximise its chance of resonance. A few examples follow. In all instances: refer to APPENDIX 8 for campaign reviews.

- The Village Voice’s New York Writes Itself: New Yorkers contributed stories about their lives and experiences in the city. The best stories were curated and were shared in an exhibition. The stories were also told in an off-Broadway play. The initiative brought about a strong sense of community, not only as New Yorkers but also by seeing The Village Voice as the catalyst or platform for this community. By employing authentic narrative in their branded entertainment initiative, The Village Voice could create a sense of community around the brand.

- Toshiba & Intel's The Beauty Inside: The target audience actively contributed to the narrative to an extent that they actually starred in this web-film series, sharing intimate identity-based issues. Subsequently, a strong online community was formed around a brand that created a platform for social sharing with a profound sense of intimacy around the sensitive subject and subsequently the brand.
- Deutsche Telecom's Move On: This web-film series also allowed their target audience to contribute to the narrative and by that created a community of people that felt that they had co-created the entertainment and arguably felt a sense of community around the brand.
- Mattel's Hot Wheels for Real: Hot Wheels (the model cars) was brought to life not only via a reality show web series with a major social media following, but also at real life car stunt performance gatherings where a community of like-minded stunt car enthusiasts could enjoy the product's "brought to real life" premise. The intention of the narrative employed in this branded entertainment initiative also tapped into childhood memories and created a sense of nostalgia around the brand which further contributed to an intended sense of community.
- Mobinil's Always Together: The purpose was to create a sense of community and unity across Egypt. The brand stepped into the role of uniting a nation and therefore actively could establish resonance by means of forming a community around the brand.
- Cape Town Tourism's Send Your Facebook Profile to Cape Town: The narrative intended to engage circles of friends to fall in love with Cape Town as it not only showed major tourist attractions, but also went into the alternative nuances of what Cape Town has to offer, making it more intimate. The intention was to create a community of people that intimately feel a sense of association with Cape Town.

It seems that authentic narrative may have the ability to create a sense of community around a brand, especially when choosing to engage with the brand based on experiencing an emotional connection. Often the intention is not just for the sake of creating a community among the target audience based on a commonly relatable cause, place of interest, passion or psychological assimilation, i.e. common denominator, but also to have the ability to, by means of authentic narrative, relate it back to the brand.

The brand then receives strong, unique and favourable association power, according to Keller (2001: 17), where the brand is seen as the platform or catalyst by which this common



denominator has been addressed, transferring that resonance onto the brand. It was interesting to note in the findings, that Volvo Trucks employees, according to Viberud, experienced a high level of internal pride because of their branded entertainment campaign. One could arguably say that internal brand communities may also be a result of a branded entertainment campaign that had employed authentic narrative.

#### **5.6.2.4 Subtheme 4: Authentic narrative for intended (or behavioural) loyalty**

Refers to Subtheme 5.4 in Table 5.1:

Keller (2001: 2) denoted that with “true” brand resonance, customers express a high degree of loyalty to the brand and therefore actively seek means to interact with the brand and share their experiences with others. It is noteworthy in lieu of the findings and in relation to the sample campaigns that loyalty in a communication context may be due to resonance from self-concept connection, commitment or nostalgic attachment, behavioural interdependence, love or passion, intimacy, and brand partner quality (Fournier: 1998). Relating these concepts back to the sample campaigns is dealt with in Chapter 6.

Intended loyalty or behavioural loyalty was only indicated by one recipient, Darwish, on the Mobinil Always Together campaign (see APPENDIX 8 for campaign review). Darwish indicated that there was a clear migration back to the brand as about one million previous customers re-joined the brand again, because of the branded entertainment campaign that employed authentic narrative, which was ranked high especially in having emotional meaning and believability. No other participants proactively and pertinently referred to loyalty as a resonance dimension. However, some of the sample campaign results may provide an indication of action taken by target audiences or intended loyalty behaviour:

- Toshiba & Intel’s The Beauty Inside: 12 percent increase in brand preference and 11.9 percent increase in purchase consideration.
- Cape Town Tourism’s Send Your Facebook Profile to Cape Town: Table Mountain received its highest number of visitors in 83 years; tourist numbers were up by four percent – bookings for the following year up by 118 percent.
- SPCA & MINI’s Driving Dogs: 590 percent increase in New Zealand (NZ) adoption interests and increased interest around the world including US & UK.
- Volvo Trucks’ Live Experiments: 46 percent increase in consideration among truck buyers.

It seems that authentic narrative in branded entertainment may encourage target audiences to actively seek ways to interact with a brand by means of expressing interest in the brand, create brand preference or increase purchase consideration. These may in a communication context be seen as establishing an intended sense of loyalty. However, when assessing the primary research data only evidence seems thin in establishing behavioural brand loyalty as result of employing authentic narrative in branded entertainment given that only one participant pro-actively referred to such an outcome in context of resonance.

#### **5.6.2.5 Subtheme 5: Resonance and its potential for generating exponential media value**

Refers to Subtheme 5.5 in Table 5.1:

Resonant branded entertainment campaigns that have employed authentic narrative have the ability to mostly generate extraordinary amounts of media value that was not necessarily paid for by the brands. This means that if a branded entertainment initiative resonates with a target audience the media communications industry takes note. It must be highlighted that PR offers probably one of the largest returns on investment vehicles and as per the findings in Section 5.3.2.1.6, branded entertainment should receive the support of other promotional tools such as PR and for example traditional advertising to drive an audience to the branded entertainment piece. Here follows examples of some of the media results from some of the sample campaigns (all results can be viewed on APPENDIX 8):

- KFC's The Journey of Hope: R7 million in earned media with an ROI of 1:34.
- Cape Town Tourism's Send your Facebook Profile to Cape Town: Over R350 000 worth of PR.
- The Village Voice's New York Writes Itself: Over 24 million media impressions and 52 editorial articles outside the Village Voice newspaper.
- Toshiba and Intel's The Beauty Inside: Press coverage of 525 articles worldwide.
- Mattel's Hot Wheels for Real: 3 million media impressions.
- SPCA & MINI's Driving Dogs: 493 media articles generated during the campaign; and earned exposure NZ \$15 million (spent NZ \$30 000).
- Volvo Trucks' Live Experiments: Earned media value of \$170 million.
- Deutsche Telecom's Move On: Free media airing of \$680 000.

It seems that the return on investment and often free media exposure could reach exponential heights if resonant branded entertainment that employs authentic narrative takes to the media communication industry.

#### ***5.6.2.6 Subtheme 6: Resonance and its potential to build longer-term brand leverage potential***

Refers to Subtheme 5.6 in Table 5.1:

Brands that have resonated with their target audiences, most likely by employing authentic narrative in their branded entertainment, open themselves up to the chance of becoming an entertainment brand and, if consistently applied, an iconic entertainment brand. Thus, resonant branded entertainment could leverage or fast-track a brand into an entertainment space to build customer-based brand equity by employing a longer-term entertainment strategy. Literature has not sufficiently delivered on this finding. A few of the participants identified the potential for brands to become entertainment-based brands as part of their communication strategy.

Brands that could benefit from branded entertainment should strongly consider a properly planned branded entertainment strategy, said Eley, i.e. a “type of big extension” of their branded entertainment initiative. Gutiérrez, picked up on this thought, remarking that brands that apply such strategies have the potential to become “entertainment franchises” due to the nature of branded entertainment being engrained in all their brand communication activity. This is a complete strategic outlook on how the brand can maximise its engagement with its target audience, he says. Gutiérrez provided the example of Nike. He explained that in everything they do, from the apps (i.e. applications) they provide that are built to be relevant for years, to for example the yearly grassroots upliftment initiatives under young football players to get them to professional level via a web series; Nike’s success in becoming a branded entertainment “franchise” lies in the fact that they create “real utility” and in their consistency of application. As an example of this, Gutiérrez and John referred to Red Bull because Red Bull, according to them, has committed to be an entertainment brand that holds strong strategic potential.

John repeatedly referred to Red Bull and to all their activities with branded entertainment being at its core. He reasoned that the combination of all of their brand communication activities,

from publicity stunts to Red Bull which created events to sponsorships and so on, ultimately make them an entertainment brand. An entertainment brand that consistently employs identity-based narrative builds an authentic brand to be “admired”, according to John, and subsequently builds customer-based brand equity that can be “admired”. It would almost seem, in Red Bull’s case, that these entertainment initiatives come “naturally” to the brand, he said, with the potential to create a sense of legacy for the brand. He warned, however, that with such success, imitators in category could surface. These brands, according to John, would have to work smartly not to come across as inauthentic in their intent to also become an entertainment brand.

Longer-term branded entertainment strategies allow innovation and experimentation in their entertainment ventures as target audiences are more open to it based on the goodwill they have towards the brand and the expectation of more entertainment-based initiatives to constantly add utility and value to their lives, according to John. Gutiérrez referred to the same thought of innovation, saying that “Suddenly the flood gates are super open”. Eley supported the latter and reiterated the importance of consistency in a branded entertainment strategy: “I think again if you are consistent and you are honest and if you are passionate about building that content strategy, you can be as successful as any other one out there”. He also reiterated the point of consistency in the following manner: “... again if you are consistent, if you work hard enough and you invest in that consistent kind of voice and that consistency became a strategy you can end up doing anything”. This notion supports the notion on innovation that Gutiérrez and John put forward.

It seems that once a brand reaches resonance the potential exists to become an entertainment brand or “entertainment franchise”, in Eley’s words. A consistently applied longer-term branded entertainment strategy that employs identity-based narrative can establish a sense of brand authenticity, which according to the findings could grow goodwill and consequently customer-based brand equity. This kind of strategy is open to branded entertainment innovation and creative experimentation because target audiences are more open towards these brands with the expectation of constant utility through entertainment.

### 5.7.3 Summary of the findings

Theme 5 identified and explored the dimensions of brand resonance. The findings could confirm the four dimensions of resonance, or rather the potential for resonance, as per Kevin Lane Keller's brand resonance model, being attitudinal attachment brought about by an emotional connection, engagement, a sense of community or intended loyalty, brought about by authentic narrative in branded entertainment. The two dimensions that delivered the strongest results, identifying themselves as resonance dimensions that were more likely to achieve by employing authentic narrative in a branded entertainment initiative, were an emotional connection attachment and engagement between a target audience and brand. The most meaningful predictor of attitudinal attachment seems to be imbuing emotional meaning in branded entertainment narrative that speaks to a higher order emotionally-led purpose, contributing to a brand as special in a broader context.

This directly influences target audience attitudes towards a brand for the positive, and with an emotional connection in place it seems that engagement is more possible. In terms of engagement, brands should consider purposeful engagement facilitation when planning an initiative as the chance of engagement could be quite possible following resonant entertainment. Involving target audiences in creating branded entertainment narrative could create powerful and memorable branded entertainment ventures that could further increase the potential for resonance.

A brief analysis of the sample campaigns delivered satisfactory results that community can be achieved where relevant by employing authentic narrative in branded entertainment. The sample analysis method was also employed for understanding the loyalty dimension, bar Darwish that could indicate a definite change in loyalty for the Mobinil brand in the Always Together campaign. The findings indicated that authentic narrative in branded entertainment may encourage target audiences to actively seek means to interact with the brand by means of expressing interest in a brand from a commercial stance, creating brand preference or an increase in purchase consideration. In a communication effort, the mentioned was argued to establish an intended sense of loyalty.

Two more subthemes emerged. The first was the exponential effect of resonance on the free media value that a brand could receive. This has a very favourable effect on media investment

for brands, especially when PR value spikes exponentially, which is frequently the case, ensuring maximised exposure. The second subtheme speaks to branded entertainment resonance's ability to provide the opportunity for brands to become entertainment brands or entertainment "franchises". This means that brands can create many entertainment entities and offerings across a wide spectrum of brand touch points by means of innovation and experimentation in their branded entertainment ventures that may further intensify resonance for longer-term strategic brand-building success. If consistently employed over time, the brand comes across as authentic and by satisfying target audience demand for utility by entertainment over the long term, such a brand can be greatly rewarded.

Theme 6 that follows presents the notion that authentic narrative in isolation cannot necessarily achieve brand resonance as it needs to be compelling as well in order to maximise a branded entertainment initiative's effort towards brand resonance.

## **5.8 THE IMPORTANCE OF COMPELLING NARRATIVE - THEME 6**

### **5.8.1 Addressing**

**Theme 6** presents a set of findings on the value of compelling narrative in branded entertainment. This study focused on the strategic value of authentic narrative. Findings suggest that without authentic narrative the potential for brand resonance would be depleted. Findings presented in Themes 4 and 5 support the central research proposition: authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve resonance. Theme 1 could provide support for the literature study delivered working definition with recommended omission of the word "unconventional". The phrase "brand-initiated and owned" was also challenged. Theme 4, Subtheme 1 suggested that in line with the authentic narrative characteristic of being "brand generated", that "brand-initiated and owned" is recommended to be replaced by the word "brand generated" as branded entertainment does not have to be brand owned in all circumstances: as long as the brand gives that perception to claim a sense of authenticity by means of identity-based narrative.

Theme 6 makes a valuable contribution to the study because its tendency to lean towards further exploration of the branded entertainment working definition in order to present a proposed definition as one of the key outputs of the study was indeed justified. Furthermore,

the findings of Theme 6 can also contribute to the supportive research objective: to provide insights to brand communication decision makers on strategically sound branded entertainment practice and specifically the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance. Theme 6 consists of two subthemes:

- **Subtheme 1 (6.1 in Table 5.1)** provides valuable guidance from the highly experienced industry specialists interviewed **on creating compelling narrative**. In light of the contribution of the study to industry and further to its potential for immediate application, sound practice principles and advice about narrative creation, especially in context of authentic narrative creation, warrants the findings to be presented.
- **Subtheme 2 (6.2 in Table 5.1)** presents findings which suggest that, with authentic narrative seen as the central point of gravitas which would be depleted without the potential for brand resonance, compelling narrative or to make authentic narrative compelling can increase branded entertainment narrative's potential for resonance. It may as well then be that the inclusion of the word "compelling" in support of, or as descriptor of authentic narrative, could be tabled for discussion in Chapter 6.

The **interview guide questions** that relate to Theme 6 are as follows:

- What can the content or narrative in branded entertainment ultimately achieve?
- Can you give any advice on sound branded entertainment practice? (in order to achieve the mentioned objectives)

## 5.8.2 Findings

### 5.8.2.1 Subtheme 1: On creating compelling narrative

Refers to Subtheme 6.1 in Table 5.1:

The notion of creating entertainment that is compelling has been presented in literature. O'Guinn *et al.* (2009: 612-613), Bachman (2010), Weiss (2014) and Morrison (2015) said that branded entertainment's main objective is to impress a target audience (and connect with them) in a way that is unique and compelling. Weiss (2014) ploughed the notion even deeper into the narrative space by saying that branded entertainment should ultimately be about "creating compelling, human stories that connect people with brands".

Dahlén *et al.* (2010: 504) also reasoned that branded entertainment is arguably one of the more compelling brand communication efforts that has the potential to emotionally connect with a target audience and invite engagement. Emotional connection and engagement are resonance dimensions. Therefore, one could for argument's sake assume that compelling narrative must be a contributor to resonance. To recap on Pixar Director John Lasseter's rules on storytelling for guaranteed success: to tell a compelling story; to create memorable characters audiences are willing to invest in; and create a believable world that the characters can live in.

This subtheme presents findings delivered on the participants' philosophy to, and advice on creating compelling narrative. What follows are reports on various points of interaction synergised to create a relatively condensed discussion. Most of the participants referred to the fact that branded entertainment should be compelling in order to provide utility through entertainment as compelling narrative stands integral to the concept of entertainment.

As brief introduction: Turnbull, Paradise, Robinson and Eley pointed to the fact that branded entertainment should tell "great" or compelling stories. Turnbull said that uninteresting content will lead to poor reaction from a target audience towards the entertainment piece and could affect brand message recall. Paradise stated that humour goes a long way. However, he mentioned that one should not disregard content that is "peculiar" and that leads to "intrigue", referring to the Volvo Trucks Experiments campaign.

Pullen warned advertising agency-side creatives against "putting concept before brand" because such an attempt may come across as inauthentic and could erode identity-based narrative. He warned that creatives "fall in love" with an idea to steer narrative before they have first considered the brand message. He added: "People will see straight through you".

There are different types of content, as discussed in Section 2.5.2, but Gutiérrez highlighted that a brand must be able to entertain more than "just providing content". This speaks to the fact that branded entertainment is a particular type of content that is intended to entertain in order to establish an emotional connection. A strong concept or metaphor is a significant contributor to the success of branded entertainment narrative, according to Gutiérrez. Once you have the audience's buy-in on the metaphor and once they feel that an emotion is attached



to it, product features and whatever commercial intent the brand may have will be easier to show as you already have the audience's buy-in. Mok added to this thinking by denoting that the narrative ought to be constructed in such a way to fuel drama around a simple concept.

The importance of simplicity of the concept was reiterated by Mok. That is without even seeing the entertainment piece, according to him. He referred to FCB Auckland's Driving Dogs campaign: quite simply where the SPCA taught dogs to drive MINI's. With just mentioning the concept and how it links to the brand, an influx of interest must already be evoked.

The concept of Driving Dogs was simple and allowed for intrigue. Paradise also referred to the level of intrigue in concept being a deciding factor for compelling branded entertainment narrative. Darwish argues: "To be honest, the simpler the idea of the concept itself or branded entertainment itself, the easier it is for the viewer and for the producer or agency or the advertisers" to create compelling, memorable entertainment. A complicated concept holds the risk of confusion or target audience complacency, he confirmed.

Gutiérrez said that showing something universal is integral to the success of the narrative and that the "mass factor" plays a role in the success of a branded entertainment piece. He said: "... it doesn't really make sense to not have the ambition of being seen and being experienced by as many people as possible". A universal truth thus can make content go further or "travel" virally, for instance, ensuring mass appeal.

It seems that entertainment value in branded entertainment lies in a simple, unique and provocative idea that is aligned to brand identity, i.e. the starting point, to create meaningful, compelling narrative. Narrative based on a universal concept, or interpretively a human truth, portrayed in a compelling way by means of intrigue or drama, seems to be a strong suggested principle for increasing potential for resonance.

### **5.8.2.1 Subtheme 2: On compelling authentic narrative for resonance**

Refers to Subtheme 6.2 in Table 5.1:

Findings suggest that authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve resonance. Findings also suggest that compelling authentic narrative may increase the potential for branded entertainment to achieve resonance. More than half of the participants could attribute compelling authentic narrative to positive target audience judgements and feelings, as per Keller's Resonance Pyramid or Model (2001: 13-14). Positive judgements and feelings are in reaction to brand performance and imagery, i.e. meaning put forward by the brand in branded entertainment narrative. The brand hopes for positive, accessible responses towards resonance. Refer to Figure 3.2 that presents Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Pyramid, to see a visual representation on meaning and responses towards resonance. A discussion on the findings follows.

Since the beginning of time, people have loved people who tell stories, according to Robinson. "Everybody loves someone that reads to them and cares about them" and if a brand can tell a story that is interesting enough one would generally tend to like the storyteller, according to Robinson; the storyteller being the brand. The authentic narrative characteristic of sincerity seems to surface with Robin's statement (refer to Theme 4, Subtheme 5 for findings discussion on sincerity). Likeability is also at play, i.e. "How much do you like this brand?" (Keller, 2001: 28). Likeability is a criterion for positive judgement towards the brand and Keller attributes the idea of credibility to achieving resonance (Keller, 2001: 28) based on the fact that the story seems interesting enough to like the storyteller, the brand. In terms of loving the storyteller, inference to emotional attachment, a resonance dimension, seems to be applicable, i.e. "I really love this brand" (Keller, 2001: 29). In this particular scenario, it seems that compelling authentic narrative based on its likability criterion may constitute a measure of emotional attachment.

Robinson further said that the audience wants the storyteller to succeed: "You sit down at a comedy show and you are ready to laugh, because you know someone is there trying to make you laugh and you love that person and you want them to succeed. You want them to make you laugh". Robinson pulled it through to a brand: if a brand is perceived by the audience to be "brave enough" to tell stories that is a "bit more heartfelt" and worth the audience's time, "... you love that brand even more". A number of authentic narrative characteristics could be

applicable to narrative in live comedy especially in context of a positive, inviting mindset, most likely being the expectation for originality, to find some emotional meaning, and to enjoy the sharp witted craft (refer to Theme 4, Subthemes 3, 4 and 7 for findings discussion on originality, emotional meaning and craft).

One could say that having a positive feeling towards the brand is enough evidence for potential resonance; “Does this brand give me a feeling of fun?”, “Does this brand give me a feeling of excitement?”, or “Does this brand give me a feeling of warmth?” (Keller, 2001: 29) could be all attributable to Robinson’s example. In this particular scenario, it seems that compelling authentic narrative based on its likability criterion may constitute a measure of emotional attachment. One could also reason that target audiences that respect brands for being brave enough to tell stories may talk to Keller’s credibility criterion, asking: “How much do you respect the brand?” (Keller, 2001: 28). Again, in terms of loving the storyteller, inference to emotional attachment, a resonance dimension, seems to be applicable, i.e. “I really love this brand” (Keller, 2001: 29).

Robinson denoted: “I see it as entertainment that is truly entertaining; fantastic story telling that happens to have a brand as a character”. Eley concurred with this. He said that the brand should be the “genesis” of the story and “the heart of the story” and if the story is told well, the audience will embrace the brand or even the product in the story line. Reference to first mentioned certainly finds accord with the authentic narrative characteristics of being brand generated and imbuing brand identity (refer to Theme 4, Subthemes 1 and 2 for findings discussion on brand generation of narrative and imbuing brand identity in the narrative). “If the story is told well” could arguably also refer to the authentic narrative characteristics of believability and craft (refer to Theme 4, Subthemes 6 and 7 for findings discussion on believability and craft in narrative). If the story is told well could refer to the quality of the story, being a judgement criterion towards resonance, asking the question: “What is your overall opinion of this brand?” (Keller, 2001: 28). Embracing the brand could possibly, more than emotional attachment, being a resonance dimension (Keller, 2001: 29), refer to engagement, which is also a resonance dimension (Keller, 2001: 30).

Some more noteworthy contributions deserve brief attention. Turnbull referred to the KFC Add Hope campaign where they had managed to create compelling narrative in saying that they

“needed to do it in an interesting way”, with Steyger saying: “Our story was always a heartfelt, emotional, authentic story” and “We agonised over everything. It needed to be beautiful. A beautiful idea and beautifully done”. KFC wanted to create awareness and managed to drive donations, i.e. engagement by means of employing authentic narrative, according to Turnbull the KFC participants. McInnes, also in the KFC interview, said that the narrative had to be credible and show a sense of sincerity.

Darwish referred to the Always Together Mobinil campaign as being “pure entertainment” that had the direct intention to evoke emotion by providing emotional meaning in the narrative and driving credibility for the brand, so much so that it shifted loyalty. Pullen, in referring to Engström and Viberud’s Volvo Trucks Live Experiments campaign, continuously referred to the compelling nature of the narrative, but in context of the narrative’s authenticity, especially believability of the narrative in the case of Live Experiments. Paradise and Pullen concluded this discussion with a finding related to compelling authentic narrative’s ability to draw an audience by offering something that the audience is willing to watch, to convey emotional meaning, sincerity and believability in order to evoke engagement.

Findings suggest that authentic narrative that is compelling has a greater potential to resonate with a target audience. It seems that compelling authentic narrative has the ability to evoke positive judgements and feelings, i.e. responses from a target audience that is the only way to achieve resonance. Findings indeed advocate compelling authentic narrative’s potential for resonance.

### **5.8.3 Summary of the findings**

Theme 6 consisted of two subthemes as it presented the notion of compelling narrative and the possibility for an even increased potential for resonance if the authentic narrative is compelling. General advice from participants was to create compelling narrative by means of a simple, unique and provocative idea that constitutes intrigue or drama (“compelling drama” as Mok put it), that most importantly speaks of the brand’s identity and embodies emotional meaning. However, compelling narrative by itself would not necessarily achieve resonance because it lacks the foundation of authentic narrative. It seems like an especially dangerous playground, according to Pullen and Paradise, as compelling narrative merely for entertainment’s sake is highly likely to miss its strategic mark, i.e. to resonate. Findings do

however suggest that authentic narrative is the backbone or central point of gravitas which without the very definition of branded entertainment would not be able to exist.

However, findings suggest that participants could draw comparisons between compelling authentic narrative and resonance. This is due to target audience responses to branded entertainment performance and imagery, i.e. the meaning that the entertainment provides. If the responses by the target audience on a branded entertainment initiative are positive, thus having positive judgements and feelings towards the narrative, resonance is possible, arguably more possible than by just employing narrative that is authentic.

## **5.9 SUMMATIVE REFLECTION OF THE FINDINGS AND PRESENTING A FINAL DEFINITION FOR BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT**

Theme 1 explored the concept of branded entertainment and evolved the literature study proposed working definition for branded entertainment, being: Branded entertainment is an unconventional brand-initiated and owned contact point with the potential to achieve brand resonance through authentic narrative. Findings suggest that the word “unconventional” ought to be omitted as several participants feel that it is in the process of becoming norm and that the word will soon be regarded as superfluous. Furthermore, the notion of branded entertainment being a brand-initiated and owned contact point made way for a communication effort that is brand generated.

This is because of two reasons. The first is that some participants expressed concern about the ownership of a contact point and prompted that a perceived ownership ought to be enough in inferring brand generation of the narrative. The second reason is that branded entertainment, if not an unconventional contact point, could embrace its rightful function of being a brand communication effort that communicates to a target audience by means of authentic narrative.

Themes 4 and 5, being the proposed authentic narrative characteristics and resonance dimensions respectively, supported the central research proposition in that authentic narrative has the potential to achieve resonance. Theme 6 revolved around a key finding: to maximise the potential for resonance, authentic narrative must preferably be compelling, i.e. provide a

sense of meaning and intrigue in support of authentic narrative in order to evoke positive judgements and feelings towards brand resonance. Taking all of the mentioned into consideration, the final branded entertainment definition as one of the key outputs of this study is the following:

**Branded entertainment is a communication effort that employs compelling authentic narrative to achieve brand resonance.**

Findings presented in Theme 2 confirmed the core value of branded entertainment, which is its ability to break through commercial clutter and arrest the attention of a target audience in a meaningful way. Branded entertainment is becoming strategically more important in brand communication as the scale and the depth of the research problem became evident in the sense of the fundamental requirement to adhere to demand in context of a fragmented and proliferated (mostly digital) mediascape. In addition, target audiences, in particular Generations Y and Z, choose to engage with brands that entertain them and branded entertainment has the ability to step up to the challenge and through compelling authentic narrative resonate with the mentioned markets. Another benefit that branded entertainment can deliver is that of a richer brand experience, allowing target audiences to either spend more time with the brand or have a higher level of engagement that may increase the possibility for making an emotional connection or active engagement.

Findings presented in Theme 3 could confirm that brand communication decision makers on a global scale are recognising branded entertainment as a discipline with potential for brand resonance. The various factors that have been identified to inhibit consideration were the perceived lack of reliable metrics, time and budget. Branded entertainment could be considered a high risk because of the unfamiliarity of the practice pertaining to the lack of cohesive understanding of the discipline. The research problem resurfaced, being the lack of a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment eroding its core value, which is to break through clutter and connect with audiences through authentic narrative and thus, the potential for branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance is depleted.

The problem was justified as brand communication decision makers could point to client-side marketers still approaching branded entertainment with a commercial mindset or overtly sales-orientated approach to minimise risk and advertising agency-side strategists and creatives not

yet mastering the skill of compelling authentic narrative delivery in entertaining content because to unlearn advertising-driven thinking and application seems challenging in most instances. Furthermore, brevity and trust have been identified as denominators for branded entertainment for success.

Findings presented in Theme 4 could confirm the six literature study delivered authentic narrative characteristics: for branded entertainment narrative to be **generated by the brand**, to **embody the brand's identity**; be **original**; **carry emotional meaning**; to be **sincere**; and to be **believable**. Another characteristic surfaced and that is for branded entertainment narrative to be regarded as authentic, it needs to project a sense of consideration to craft. In all instances, such authenticity contributed to a sense of credibility and trust in the brand, both being vital to achieve brand resonance.

Findings also suggested that one or more of the four dimensions of brand resonance are directly relatable to authentic narrative. **Three of the authentic narrative characteristics seemed to have surfaced more than others** due to overwhelming support from participants where in these instances most of the participants contributed to its importance, being: **for the narrative to embody brand identity**, standing in direct support of the identity argument for authenticity, **for the narrative to carry emotional meaning**, standing in direct support of the narrative concept in context of authenticity, and **for the narrative to be sincere towards its target audience** with the intent to add utility by means of entertainment.

The dynamic between authentic narrative and the four Keller resonance dimensions became evident in the findings outlined in Theme 5. It could show that branded entertainment initiatives that employ authentic narrative had the ability to achieve dimensions of resonance, i.e. emotional connection or attitudinal attachment, engagement, community and/or potential loyalty. The **two dimensions of attitudinal attachment and engagement seemed to receive the strongest support from participants**, i.e. these two dimensions seemed to be the most achievable resonance dimensions by employing compelling authentic narrative and could serve as the most viable projected outcome for a branded entertainment initiative, followed by community. The primary research data did not indicate brand loyalty as a direct outcome of employing an authentic branded entertainment narrative. Only one participant; Darwish, referred to loyalty as potential result of engaging an authentic narrative in branded

entertainment (refer again to Section 5.4.2.2 for discussion). It is warranted to mention that sample pool campaign results could show an indication that authentic narrative may indeed achieve brand loyalty (Section 5.6.2.4 refers).

The power of resonance on media communications became quite noticeable in the data as resonant branded entertainment has the ability to receive exponential media coverage that could exceed returns on media investment beyond expectation. A vital finding, also on the power of resonance, identified branded entertainment initiatives that have the ability to build the brand from strength to strength as an entertainment-based brand or “entertainment franchise” (as referred to by Gutiérrez and Mike Wiese in Section 3.2.3.1) to accelerate building customer-based brand equity. Iconic brands mentioned in this discussion were Red Bull and Nike, being entertainment centred in all their endeavours. This means that a resonant branded entertainment effort increases the potential for a brand to become a much loved entertainment brand as target audience expectation may as well be utility by entertainment over the long term.

Findings presented in Theme 6 provided advice from brand communication decision makers on creating compelling narrative by means of a simple, unique and provocative idea that constitutes intrigue or drama, that most importantly speaks of the brand’s identity and embodies emotional meaning; in addition, they also delivered data arguing the importance of making authentic narrative compelling, as discussed earlier in the conclusion.

All three of the study’s research objectives were explored based on the study of literature and the findings (see APPEXDIX 5 for a summary of the research problem, propositions and objectives). The central proposition could be confirmed, a branded entertainment definition has been put forward, the set of authentic narrative characteristics were confirmed and enriched, and the participants could provide invaluable strategically sound advice on branded entertainment practice, specifically to compelling authentic narrative in branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance. The study’s research problem was therefore addressed with the deliverance of the branded entertainment definition and subsequent research practice principles.



## 5.10 CONCLUSION

Chapter 5 presented the primary research findings. The data analysis technique of open coding for this empirical or applied qualitative study in the interpretivist paradigm, following Creswell's (2003: 185-190) five steps (see Section 4.4.5), delivered a set of six themes that were discussed as the findings of the primary research phase. This was done with reflection of the literature review or conceptual research phase by means of induction (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007: 110), taking into account Maxwell's (2008: 2015) reflective design in conducting qualitative research to address the research problem, being the lack of a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment eroding its core value, that is to break through clutter and connect with audiences through authentic narrative and thus, the potential for branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance is depleted.

The findings ultimately addressed the primary research objective, which was to explore and potentially enrich the central research proposition. The central research proposition is that authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve brand resonance. This means that this study proposes that the value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment is strategic, i.e. it provides branded entertainment with the potential to achieve brand resonance; and as reasoned, brand resonance builds a brand strategically.

Chapter 6 that follows presents an Enriched Conceptual Framework of the Strategic Value of Authentic Narrative in Branded Entertainment as result of the primary research findings, based on the final branded entertainment definition. Chapter 6 furthermore provides a summary and conclusions to the study, discusses the implications of the study by means of highlighting its projected impact on industry and the meaning it provides in relation to the identified research problem. Recommendations of application are provided for brand communication decision makers and practitioners that actively stand in industry. Recommendations are also made for further academic research to enrich and extend the scope and depth of this study.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 6 commences with a brief reflection and reinforcement of the essence, focus and architecture of the study. An executive summary of the study is then presented in order to provide the primary target reader of the study, being brand communication decision makers that stand in brand communication practice, a concise account of the findings of the study. This is followed by a presentation and discussion of the Enriched Conceptual Framework of the Strategic Value of Authentic Narrative in Branded Entertainment. Finally, conclusions are made and the implications of this study are identified and discussed. Chapter 6 concludes with a set of recommendations of best branded entertainment practice, recommendations for further research and a reflection on the limitations of the study.

#### **6.2 THE ESSENCE AND FOCUS OF THE STUDY**

The study essentially explored the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment. The study has inherently explored branded entertainment narrative and has delivered a construct in the form of a branded entertainment definition that directly impacts on the strategic value that authentic narrative in branded entertainment can achieve; being brand resonance. Brand resonance strategically builds brands, according to Kevin Lane Keller (2001: 7), the seminal author of the study. The Enriched Conceptual Framework of the Strategic Value of Authentic Narrative in Branded Entertainment (Figure 6.1) together with the proposed industry definition of branded entertainment are the key outputs of the study as they make sense of the authentic narrative phenomenon that the study explored and conceptualised in context of the practice of branded entertainment. The framework employs an adjusted version of Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Pyramid (or Resonance Model), adjusted for the purpose of branded entertainment communication to deliver practical direction for brand communication decision makers to plan and create branded entertainment initiatives.

The focus of the study was on the perception of globally recognised brand communication decision makers, in particular their viewpoint on the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment. This was particularly valuable to address the research problem, being the lack of a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment that erodes its core value; that is to break through commercial clutter and connect with audiences through authentic narrative; and as result depleting the potential for branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance.

These brand communication decision makers, who are all globally recognised branded entertainment experts proved to have been the most viable source of knowledge to address the research problem and enrich the central research proposition This is because they were identified as experts in branded entertainment by qualification of being directly responsible for creating branded entertainment that has been awarded with:

- At least a Grand Prix, meaning top honours, or Gold at one internationally acclaimed, i.e. highest rated award show, specifically in the branded entertainment category;
- As well as at least Gold at another award show that is preferably international but could be multi-continental with an international judging panel that awarded the same piece of creative work.

The strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment was explored on two levels: firstly, through an investigation of literature and thereafter through qualitative exploratory primary research that engaged the perspectives of the participants, i.e. the brand communication decision makers who have been recognised internationally for creating industry-benchmark branded entertainment campaigns by having multiple wins at various of the world's top advertising award shows. The architecture of the study is addressed next.

### **6.3 ARCHITECTURE OF THE STUDY**

The architecture of this study is comprised of six chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the reason for the study and the milestones to address the research problem and enrich the central research proposition. Chapter 2 explored branded entertainment's current state and the various interpretations that exist around it. The chapter concluded with a proposed working definition for branded entertainment. The importance of this was three-fold. Evidence already

surfaced to imply resonance is more reachable by branded entertainment that is initiated and owned by the brand opposed to interpretations of placement, integration or sponsorship. Secondly, some of the most forward thinkers in the past two years argued the latter and encouraged a branded entertainment definition among those lines. Thirdly, the study needed a base definition to steer further exploration of the proposed authentic narrative phenomenon that was identified towards a conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) to guide the central research proposition, and the research strategy and design.

Chapter 3 focused on three concepts: authenticity, narrative and customer-based brand resonance in order to (1) propose an authentic narrative construct for branded entertainment, and (2) to make a case for authentic narrative's potential to achieve resonance. Chapter 4 explained the research strategy and methods. Qualitative exploratory research in the interpretivist paradigm by following Zikmund and Babin's (2010: 57) marketing research stages was presented. Content analysis by means of open coding was motivated, taking Creswell's suggested five steps (2003: 185-190) in qualitative research analysis into consideration. The sample design, interview guide, assumptions, limitations, delimitations and ethical considerations were also presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 presented the findings of the study according to six themes that emerged from the data (see Table 5.1). The findings could address all the research objectives, and address the research problem by providing a final proposed definition for branded entertainment and an enriched conceptual framework that is based on the definition to offer immediate guidance to brand communication decision makers globally to create strategically significant branded entertainment as per the definition. The framework is universally applicable.

#### **6.4 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS FOR GLOBAL BRAND COMMUNICATION DECISION MAKERS**

The study concerned itself with branded entertainment, a highly sought after communication discipline with the ability to negotiate a complex mediascape with the opportunity to harness influencing power around the brand's value set and purpose, and equally adhere to the demands of Millennials for authentic, entertainment-based brand communication. However, in contemporary brand-building practice, branded entertainment is still relatively new and in a time of exploration and orientation with many initiatives on a global scale falling by the wayside. Branded entertainment is still in the process of finding its feet. Despite better work

becoming more evident, PJ Pereira, CCO at Pereira & O'Dell *San Francisco*, chair of the Branded Content & Branded Entertainment jury for the 2016 Clio Awards, said the following on 1 August 2016 about branded entertainment: "We're still testing the waters and seeing what can be done, or can't."

A few benchmark-setting case studies currently exist (see APPENDIX 8 for examples relating to this study) along with brands often mentioned by the participants that created branded entertainment franchises, such as Red Bull and Nike, following the inception of a branded entertainment category at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity in 2012. They manage to show that branded entertainment can achieve strategic brand-building success by means of brand resonance that has the ability, according to the primary research findings, to establish an emotional connection, evoke target audience engagement, and establish a sense of community and even intended loyalty.

The study has shown that the problem ultimately lies with how branded entertainment defines itself. Branded entertainment seemingly holds varied meanings. One can compare this problem to an industry that, for argument's sake, does not understand or agree on the fundamental principles of advertising or public relations, with diluted or ineffective communication efforts as a result. A clear lack of a cohesive industry understanding, and hence application, according to the review of literature and primary research findings, was proposed to deplete branded entertainment from its core value which is to break through commercial clutter, and to withhold it from its potential to achieve resonance.

The study has shown that various opinions exist on whether branded entertainment can be a sophisticated form of product placement, product/brand integration or sponsorship of an entertaining show or event. The findings suggest that these practices or promotional tools should stay promotional tools in their own right as even the most sophisticated way of positioning product or brand in this way could still withhold the brand from its strategic potential. This is because its most impactful value lies in a brand-generated narrative expressing a fuller nuanced brand identity aligned proposition. It is not to say that a brand cannot partner with another entity to deliver entertainment, as long as the perception of ownership translates.

Branded entertainment is therefore a particular offshoot of content marketing in a broader branded content sphere that exclusively aims to entertain by means of human or brand-centred narrative. This infers that it should refrain from a primarily commercially-led mindset or sales message-driven communication.

The study could identify the creative nature of compelling authentic narrative as the central point of gravitas in creating strategically significant branded entertainment, essentially imbuing the essence of a proposed industry definition:

**Branded entertainment is a communication effort that employs a compelling authentic narrative to achieve brand resonance.**

Authentic narrative for resonance, according to the findings, consists of the following characteristics that should stand as a firmly united set:

- (1) Generated by a brand with its (2) identity at the heart of it
- (3) Carry emotional meaning by means of a deep, purposeful understanding of its target audience and their belief and value system, with the opportunity to align it with that of the brand
- (4) Sincere towards a target audience that expects utility value from content that entertains
- (5) Original with high (6) consideration to craft
- (7) Believable by narrative plausibility, coherence, fidelity, and genuineness.

A few expert opinions may guide and inspire to create strategically significant branded entertainment meaning that it enables resonance towards building the brand strategically. Fifteen of the world's leading brand communication decision makers across six continents who have all achieved the highest honours in branded entertainment at internationally acclaimed award shows were interviewed in depth. Refer to APPENDIX 9 for a visual account of these industry experts. All of the interviewed brand communication decision makers/industry professionals have been directly responsible for planning and/or creating the campaigns that qualified for the sample; the campaigns have won multiple Grand Prix and Gold awards in the branded entertainment and/or content category, that worked out to be mainly at Cannes, the

CLIO's, the One Show awards, the WEBBY's, and in two isolated cases at Dubai Lynx and the Media Global Awards. It was of importance for the strategic nature and integrity of the study that the international shows' award entry criteria referred to the strategy, strategic planning, strategic thinking or strategic significance of the study in some way with possible inclusion of results in relation to the initiative's marketing and/or communication objectives; this involves more than just assessing the creative excellence of the work entered.

A brief integrated discussion of the identified authentic narrative characteristics and some of the experts' opinions and perspectives are presented next.

#### **Authentic branded entertainment:**

- **Is generated by the brand and embodies a clear brand identity**

Dr Gordon Euchler, Strategic Planning Director for DDB Tribal *Berlin*, asserted that strategically sound branded entertainment narrative starts with the brand's essence and then the aim is to dramatise that essence. The voice, character, value set and propositions of the brand, and the author constitute an unyielding sense of authenticity in branded entertainment narrative. Björn Engström, situated at Forsman & Bodenfors *Gothenburg*, and one of the creative leads for Volvo Truck's famous Live Test Series (will we ever forget that epic Jeanne Claude van Damme split?), stated unequivocally that the brand's identity ought to be "deeply integrated" into the narrative, i.e. to sit at the heart of the narrative. He continued by saying: "That is authenticity; that what the brand stands for, what it has done in the past and some property that it is associated with in the present. I think those are just fundamental things", referring to constructing a viable narrative for branded entertainment.

Branded entertainment narrative must always be built on a truth, and that truth comes from the brand, said Kieran Antill, now Executive Creative Director for JWT *Melbourne*. Matthew Pullen, now Senior Art Director at RPA *Santa Monica*, stands firm in his belief that the idea of a branded entertainment piece should be central to the brand and if so, target audiences would be more prone to want to engage with the brand. He added that in branded entertainment, "authenticity is so important in what you do".

- **Carries emotional meaning**

James Mok, Executive Creative Director for FCB Asia Pacific based in *Auckland*, is of the opinion that entertainment narratives that allow the opportunity to communicate a “deeper understanding of what it is that consumers are looking for” in relation to the way in which the brand or the product can contribute to their lives, makes for powerful emotional connections. Ricardo John, Chief Creative Officer at JWT *São Paulo*, backed this notion as he believes that the narrative in branded entertainment allows for establishing “an emotional connection between the product and the content in the way that the audience likes to see it”. To make the narrative compelling, according to Amr Darwish, Managing Director at Leo Burnett *Cairo*, resonant branded entertainment builds emotion into the “core” of the narrative and then the brand will succeed at something that “... will talk to people’s hearts”.

A strong emotional connection can be brought about by aligning the brand’s authentic self and that of the target audience. It could be presentative in the form of the protagonist that symbolises the brand. Irene Steyger, Senior Copywriter at Ogilvy *Johannesburg*, said that authenticity mostly lies in a character that people can relate to as it humanises the brand. She said: “I think it allows for a credible, authentic story telling”.

The research findings have shown that narrative carrying a deep sense of emotional meaning to a target audience should evoke engagement, can create a sense of community with likeminded brand believers and even establish intended loyalty by means of expressing interest in a brand, brand preference or increased purchase consideration. Or even behavioural loyalty. The most powerful connection lies in a brand that really gets to grips with a target audience’s set of beliefs, attitudes, motivations and values.

- **Is sincere towards the target audience**

One can almost sense the preoccupation of brand approaching branded entertainment with a commercially-led mindset (to make a sale) instead of leading with a human-centric narrative that is sincere towards its target audience; a target audience that expects utility in the form of content that entertains. Despite any attempt to make the narrative compelling, chances are good that insincere branded entertainment may come across as contrived and fail at landing a sense of authenticity. Over and above creating a high entertainment value, a brand should come across as being honest in genuinely wanting to entertain, i.e. it should not feel that there



is a “sinister motive” behind the entertainment, said Damien Eley, ECD and Founding Partner at *Mistress Los Angeles*. He added by saying: “Being true to the customer is the guiding light”.

Many branded entertainment planners and creators believe that the brand should be cautiously and delicately interwoven into the narrative as a general rule of thumb. But that does not have to be the case, according to Jaime Robinson, now co-Founder and COO at New York-based Joan Creative. A target audience that is in the right mindset to receive a highly engaging branded entertainment piece would applaud the brand responsible, inviting the brand into the content. Robinson and Engström agreed that if the brand or product seamlessly fits into the entertainment in such a way that it complements the entertainment, the audience will not find it insincere and would very likely connect with the brand.

- **Is original with a high consideration to craft**

Originality is a non-negotiable. It should be the “genesis” of a good idea and any branded entertainment initiative, believes Dean Paradise, now Creative Director/Copywriter at FCB *Chicago*. Too many branded entertainment initiatives try to copy the recipe of benchmark case studies due to risk aversion, seriously harming the credibility of a brand. On the bright side, Amr Darwish, Managing Director at Leo Burnett *Cairo*, said that “Being completely original can create a phenomenon never seen before and set a trend in industry”, referring to the run-away success of Metro Trains Melbourne’s *Dumb Ways to Die* (see APPENDIX 10 for case study) that stepped into the role of a multi-disciplinary, long-term focused entertainment brand.

Red Bull and Nike also stand strong in this regard, being brands that can almost be reckoned as entertainment franchises built on original, compelling, enduring identity-based narratives. The integrity that supports the originality proposition leaves fertile ground for a careful consideration to craft, showing a sense of “love” for the production and inadvertently bestowing authenticity status on the author.

- **Believable**

A coherent narrative with a sense of fidelity and genuineness has proven to be the potter of plausibility. Motivation also plays a role. Aste Gutiérrez, now Creative Director for Nike Regional at BBH Asia Pacific *Singapore*, stated that the motivation in the narrative ought to be plausible, that is for the brand’s motivation and a character or storyline’s motivation to be

in sync. Pullen is of the opinion that branded entertainment would only be considered believable when brand centricity intercepts authentically with narrative truth whereby a high propensity for target audience engagement could be evoked. Credible, brand identity-based narrative delivered in a sincere way is, according to Lauren McInnes, now Business Unit Director at Ogilvy *Johannesburg*, the most evident way to deliver branded entertainment for resonance.

In conclusion: The experts of the study could ultimately provide thick, rich data that guides advertising agency-side creatives and strategists, and client-side marketers, to create compelling, authentic, strategically significant branded entertainment. This includes anything from hands-on creative approaches, strategic planning tools, advice on overcoming creative and resource challenges to agency-client dynamics, with the most poignant contributions made by the two client-marketers' interviews: Annika Viberud, Director Strategic Brand & Marketing Communications: Volvo Trucks in Gothenburg, *Sweden*, and Lauren Turnbull, Senior Brand Manager CSI & Sponsorships: KFC in Johannesburg, *South Africa*. The perspectives that they and all the other advertising agency-side specialists offered are universally applicable and invaluable to define and grow a discipline that is still finding its feet in a global context.

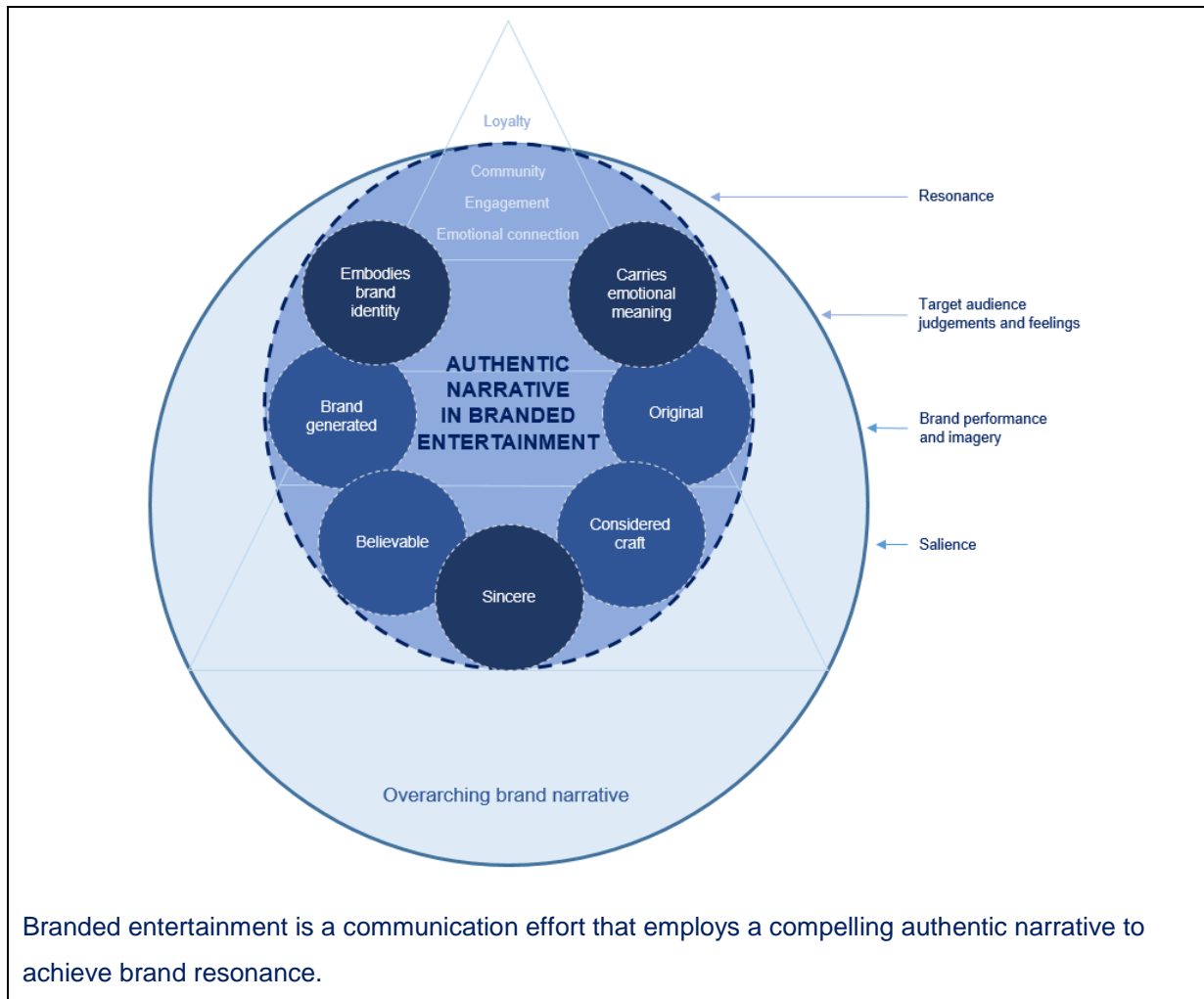
This study brings direct value to brand communication decision makers to strategically plan and creatively execute successful branded entertainment campaigns; campaigns that can establish authentic depth in their relationships with consumers, built on trust and integrity. It is recommended that brand communication decision makers familiarise themselves with the Enriched Conceptual Framework of the Strategic Value of Authentic Narrative in Branded Entertainment that follows (Figure 6.1) as well as the description thereof.

## **6.5 ENRICHED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE IN BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT**

The study of literature presented a conceptual framework of constructs (Figure 1.1) that aimed to clarify characteristics and relationships between characteristics in a non-determinist way in order to encourage theory development that is useful in practice (Jabareen, 2009: 51, 57; Nalzar, 2012: 6, 9-10). The framework took an interpretivist approach to understand the dynamics between authentic narrative that consists of proposed characteristics overlaying

authenticity and narrative and brand resonance, as per Kevin Lane Keller's Customer-Based Brand Resonance Model. The primary research findings could enrich the framework in order to deliver an enriched conceptual framework that directly speaks to the most pivotal constructs in the study, being the authentic narrative and branded entertainment constructs.

Figure 6.1 shows an Enriched Conceptual Framework of the Strategic Value of Authentic Narrative in Branded Entertainment that is a visual representation of the central research proposition that could be substantiated by the primary research findings; the central research proposition being: authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve resonance. It is enriched because it attributes the research findings to the Conceptual Framework to Guide the Central Research Proposition presented and discussed in Section 1.8 (Figure 1.1). The enriched framework aims to answer the research question: What is the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment? This framework serves as a guide to understand the authentic narrative phenomenon and potential strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment, specifically to the research design. The Enriched Conceptual Framework of the Strategic Value of Authentic Narrative in Branded Entertainment follows in Figure 6.1 below, with an explanation of its construction and intent.



**Figure 6.1: Enriched Conceptual Framework of the Strategic Value of Authentic Narrative in Branded Entertainment**

It is the finding of this study that the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment is its potential to achieve brand resonance. The Enriched Conceptual Framework of the Strategic Value of Authentic Narrative in Branded Entertainment expresses the definition of branded entertainment and the key finding of this study:

**Branded entertainment is a communication effort that employs a compelling authentic narrative to achieve brand resonance.**

A description or concise explanation of how the framework functions follows.

In short; the Enriched Conceptual Framework of the Strategic Value of Authentic Narrative in Branded Entertainment represents the potential of an authentic branded entertainment narrative to achieve brand resonance with respect to the brand's overarching brand narrative. **Authentic narrative** is suggested to consist of seven characteristics: a **brand-generated** narrative with **embodiment of brand identity, believability, sincerity, a considered craft, originality** and **carrying emotional meaning**. Authentic narrative influences meaningful **salience**, especially in relation to the brand's **overarching narrative**, the portrayal of **brand performance and imagery**, and the provoking of positive target audience **judgements and feelings**. The ability to innately achieve three resonance dimensions is enforced: an **emotional connection** with a target audience; target audience-brand **engagement** and creating a sense of brand **community**. Although the primary research data could not overtly propose that **loyalty** is a possible outcome, bar the reference by Darwish on the Mobinil *Always Together* loyalty migration (Section 5.4.2.2 refers), sample pool campaign results could show an indication that authentic narrative may achieve brand loyalty (Section 5.6.2.4 refers). However, for the purpose of the framework, loyalty is indicated as a possibility and a more apt inclusion would be desirable following further research (Section 6.7.2 that follows refers).

The strategic value of the authentic narrative construct in branded entertainment was the focal point of the study. "Compelling" authentic narrative surfaced with weight in the primary research findings and earned a space in the definition as findings suggested that an authentic narrative in branded entertainment, without it being compelling would potentially marginalise potential for resonance. However, enough data from the primary research results of this study for visual representation in such a framework seems wanting. The "compelling" proposition for authentic narrative would also be suggested for exploration in further research (Section 6.7.2 refers) to further enrich the framework with adequate, purposeful data.

A comprehensive discussion of the different aspects of the framework follows.

### Overarching brand narrative

Brand narrative, or overarching brand narrative (Dahlén *et al.*, 2010: 6), is the summation of what a target audience knows about the brand and the experiences had with the brand. This has an influence of the target audience's perception of the brand and influences their assessment of the branded entertainment. It is critical that the overarching brand narrative and narrative in the branded entertainment aligns as this directly impacts the level of resonance.

### Authentic narrative in branded entertainment

To create a branded entertainment narrative that a target audience will deem authentic involves a cohesive representation of seven distinct narrative characteristics. The following three narrative characteristics are flagged as critical to master in order to achieve brand resonance. The intensity of their application may offer a significant impact on maximising the potential for resonance. They also serve to differentiate branded entertainment from other brand communication efforts that do not employ of entertainment. Authentic narrative in branded entertainment above all:

- **Embodies brand identity:** It is essential to make full use of the brand's authority, what it stands for and what it does; richly integrated into all nuances of the narrative. It is also necessary to make a convincing case for strong, unique and favourable brand associations with a consistent application thereof.
- **Is sincere:** Target audiences that choose to engage with brands expect utility or value through entertainment that eschews a commercially-led intent, demeanour or sales message.
- **Carries emotional meaning:** Narrative that can evoke emotion by reflecting a target audience's attitudes, beliefs, motivations, values and behaviours in accordance with that of the brand would carry a sense of authentic meaning.

Four other narrative characteristics for authenticity that should also be all present; for the branded entertainment narrative to be:

- **Brand generated:** Only narrative that is initiated, created and owned by the brand qualifies. Target audiences want to know who the author of the narrative is. The brand can partner with a third party as long as the perception of ownership remains.

- **Original:** The genesis of credible branded entertainment is originality in order to exemplify a creative expression aligned to the author's identity and world view. It should never be a copy.
- **Believable:** Plausible, coherent and trustworthy narrative that comes across as being "for real" qualifies. This is inherently influenced by the brand narrative. The communication dramatisations of the various value propositions also relate.
- **Considered craft:** Narrative craft imbues authenticity. It is necessary to use appropriate techniques and ingredients, show craft of production and pride in the work.

All seven characteristics work together and have an influence on each other. Authentic narrative ultimately serves as a central point of gravitas or sits at the heart of branded entertainment with potential to achieve resonance. The brand resonance dimensions that authentic narrative draw on are:

### **Brand salience and then brand performance and imagery**

Brand salience speaks to the share of mind that the narrative aimed to create. The narrative must create a depth of awareness and breadth of awareness, meaning that a target audience must also understand when and in which way the brand can add value to their lives, whether it is in the rational or emotional sphere, or both. This is done by presenting or inferring the performance of the brand in the narration; be it by product and/or service or experience, and a set of imagery delivered that attempts to meet customer's psychological or social needs in coherence with their value system and beliefs as per the brand's identity. Brand salience, performance and imagery are naturally influenced by the brand narrative as target audiences will aim to see harmony or dissonance between the narrative and their perception of the brand.

### **Target audience judgements and feelings**

Response of the target audience to the narrative as assimilated in their thinking and feeling comes into play. Judgement depends on brand quality, credibility, consideration and superiority presented by the narrative. Feelings – mild or intense, positive or negative, depend on whether warmth, fun, excitement, or a sense of security, social approval or self-respect were delivered by the narrative. However, these judgements are profoundly influenced by experiencing the narrative to be authentic and assessing whether the narrative was also enticing enough to warrant resonance. Again, the influence of brand narrative cannot be

ignored. However, it may just be that a highly favourable authentic narrative may either enhance a positive brand perception or sway a negative one to the positive.

## Resonance

Brand resonance is a state in which a target audience would feel a synchronicity with a brand based on the intensity or depth of the psychological bond that was evoked by exposure to the branded entertainment as well as the brand narrative. Brand resonance builds brands strategically. Highly favourable target audience response to a compelling authentic narrative may lead to resonance, which exists of four dimensions: emotional connection, engagement, community and loyalty, in that order. The first two: emotional connection and engagement can be flagged as the two most achievable results, followed by a sense of community.

To note again: the achievement of loyalty did not notably feature in the primary research findings except for an isolated incident (see Section 5.6.2.4 for a discussion of the findings on loyalty). However, taking Keller's brand resonance model into consideration and bringing the sample pool campaign results into consideration, enough of an indication to loyalty is warranted to feature in the framework given that it currently stands outside the allocated authentic narrative space with the hope that further research may include this resonance dimension with more surety.

Herewith a reflection on the four dimensions of resonance and their meaning in and contribution to the enriched framework:

- **Emotional connection:** Being the most likely result of resonant branded entertainment, this dimension is to be achieved first in order for the others to follow. Target audiences may harbour anything from a deeply positive feeling towards the brand to viewing the brand as something really special in a broader context, and even go so far as to say that they may love the brand. Some basic indicators may be that they hit the like or love button, or share it, or spend ample time on their website or watch a whole film, often repeatedly, instead of opting out sooner, download an additional feature, game or application, or spread the brand's message.
- **Engagement:** Engagement refers to target audiences investing their time, energy, money or other resources into the brand. For example: interact with the brand or strike



up a conversation, pay to download related content, go to festivals or exhibitions that are extensions of the branded entertainment. They could contribute to, or participate in, creating narrative of future entertainment ventures with the brand, or create their own interpretations or spin-offs of the narrative and share it with the brand or the public.

- **Community:** Experiencing affiliation or kinship with others that also emotionally connect and engage with the brand; feeling a sense of esteem in belonging to a collective of likeminded people. This may be due to their outtake of the branded entertainment message that could be values based, for instance; or stand in admiration of a product, service or brand experience and self-express so to associate. It could include exchanging correspondence with others, joining a club, requesting regular updates from the brand or creating or being part of a movement.
- **Loyalty:** Intended or behavioural loyalty. The narrative may have swayed a target audience to feel a stronger psychological bond with the brand, more so with other brands, intending or pledging preferred choice for purchase, or potential or renewed commitment. The narrative may have also intensified loyalty behaviour that could result in anything from brand switching to repeat purchase behaviour.

Complementary to the enriched framework a discussion on customer expectation, brand potential and branded entertainment franchise deserves attention. A branded entertainment communication initiative that employed a compelling authentic narrative that has managed to achieve resonance awakens customer expectation for more entertainment by the brand. Often with first-time success where consumers become open to further entertainment, and having more confidence in mastering the art and discipline of branded entertainment, the potential opens up to repeat success. The opportunity also arises to competitively position the brand as an entertainment brand with the possibility to create an entertainment franchise.

An entertainment franchise is a set of multiple, repeated and innovative entertainment initiatives undertaken by a brand over the long term. It could extend to various platforms and interactive spaces that could even extend to extra revenue streams. Red Bull, for instance, puts its brand proposition of passion for high-energy performance towards multiple communication and activation spaces, centred on extreme sports entertainment. As for Nike, the lines have become blurred between all their entertainment initiatives, product launches and merchandise. Many branded entertainment initiatives extended to more or further

versions, with anything from songs and games to download, to the hosting of events and even exhibitions, to creating a full-length feature film, for instance.

In conclusion, The Enriched Conceptual Framework of the Strategic Value of Authentic Narrative in Branded Entertainment serves as a guideline in branded entertainment planning specific to a branded entertainment initiative. It exemplifies the employment of narrative that directs a communication effort that gives form to branded entertainment that is original, communicates the brand's identity and aligns with the target audience's value system in a meaningful way. The framework represents the proposed definition delivered by the study's findings: Branded entertainment is a communication effort that employs compelling authentic narrative to achieve brand resonance. Authentic narrative has the potential to achieve resonance and therefore the framework could be of immediate, practical value to a brand communication industry in need of a shared understanding of branded entertainment. Recommendations for brand communication decision makers to apply the framework and the context in which branded entertainment as a brand communication discipline should be approached from a practical level is discussed in Section 6.7.1.

## 6.6 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The discussion that follows in this section and the discussion in Section 6.7.1 titled: *Recommendations for brand communication decision makers* show how the research problem and objectives of the study were addressed:

- Research problem: The lack of a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment erodes its core value, that is to break through clutter and connect with audiences through authentic narrative and thus, the potential for branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance is depleted.
- Primary research objective: To explore and potentially enrich the central research proposition: Authentic narrative in branded entertainment has the potential to achieve consumer brand resonance.
- Secondary research objective 1: To explore and refine a branded entertainment working definition in order to present a proposed definition as one of the key outputs of the study.
- Secondary research objective 2: To explore and enrich a proposed set of narrative characteristics in branded entertainment that could constitute authentic narrative.

- Secondary research objective 3: To provide insights to brand communication decision makers on strategically sound branded entertainment practice and specifically the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance.

The study set out to explore the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment. The strategic value was found to be brand resonance. Resonance is the effect of authentic narrative carrying a deep sense of emotional meaning to a target audience with the ability to evoke engagement, create a sense of community with likeminded customers or consumers and even establish intended loyalty by means of expressing interest in a brand, brand preference or increased purchase consideration. The study has shown that establishing an emotional connection and evoking engagement are probably the most viable outcomes of authentic narrative. These aspects along with community and loyalty to build brands in the long term, hence it being strategic in value. However, some authors could allude to aspects of what branded entertainment could achieve, including some of the resonance dimensions mentioned, and this study could deliver a fuller nuanced profile of exactly what authentic narrative is capable of by means of engaging the perspectives of globally recognised brand communication decision makers.

Authentic narrative is proposed to give form to branded entertainment that is original, that communicates the brand's identity and aligns with the target audience's value system in a meaningful way. Authentic narrative as a construct of seven very distinct characteristics could be identified and delivered as a cohesive set with its own proposed inter-dynamics. The emphasis on this set of narrative characteristics for authenticity sits on the requirement that the narrative ought to embody brand identity; that it is sincere towards its target audience and does what branded entertainment is set out to do: entertain and not advertise in the traditional sense of the word; and that it should carry emotional meaning.

The other characteristics include brand generation, originality, believability and relaying a sense of considered craft. These characteristics are proposed to guide advertising agency-side strategists, creatives and client-side marketers, all being brand communication decision makers, in terms of initiating, planning and executing branded entertainment. The authentic narrative construct specific to the branded entertainment communication discipline, proposed

to be the ultimate foundation on which strategically significant branded entertainment is built, has not yet been delivered in literature and it is of belief that the surfacing of this phenomenon in context of its research contribution would inspire and guide industry practitioners to build strategically significant branded entertainment.

The study carries significant meaning in an industry that is realising that traditional advertising has to evolve to entertainment, making full use of the opportunities the digital mediascape offers. The research presented in the study will provide brands on a global scale the ability to step up to the challenge and present entertainment that a Millennial generation immediately demands, thus setting them apart from competitors that either still use traditional advertising or aim to produce entertainment with disappointing results. These disappointing results are due to many factors, for instance the mindset in which branded entertainment is approached that is not conducive to resonance, the skills and capabilities of agencies and production houses to create strategically significant branded entertainment and other challenges, like time, budget and metrics; all addressed in the research.

Probably most important of all, the study could deliver a definition for branded entertainment. Various definitions of branded entertainment exist with very trying perplexities spanning extremes in explanations and interpretations. This directly affects practice, and not for the better because many campaigns on a global scale fail to deliver on marketing and communication objectives. This study contributed to the theoretical body of knowledge by specifying what branded entertainment is and what it is not. More so, it could set the playing ground and provide a purposeful benchmark for a discipline that is having difficulty orientating itself in contemporary brand-building practice. It could give guidance on how to achieve successful branded entertainment campaigns. It was ultimately pivotal to put a stake in the ground and offer the brand communication profession a proposed and convincing, well-argued and essentially provable definition for this relatively new discipline in context of qualitative research in the interpretivist paradigm by a researcher active in the field.

The most valuable contribution is arguably this: the art of entertainment offers the ability to connect with a target audience through authentic narrative and possibly challenge their beliefs and get them to reflect on their values system. Narrative is inextricably linked to being human (Adamson, 2015). Narrative is integral to humanness: it is fundamental to comprehend human

action and human selves (Brooks, 2005): “the bedrock of human events is not a mere sequence upon which narrative is imposed but a configured sequence that has a narrative character all the way down” (Burns, 1999, cited by Brooks, 2005: p. 4).

Target audiences respond to brands that have the ability to self-actualise in a space where perceivable commercially-led business entities become human and therefore deeply relatable; where they stand for something and have the ability to express those beliefs in a medium, being entertainment that is non-threatening and speaks the language of the consumer in a true and just way. This more fluid way of communication is a space of human-based engagement where issues, subjects of conversation and inspiration actualise. This can be seen for example in SPCA & MINI’s *Driving Dogs* (see APPENDIX 8.9), challenging people’s beliefs that rescue dogs do not have the cognitive and emotional potential of non-rescue dogs. In Mobinil’s *Always Together* (see APPENDIX 8.4), the people of Egypt were united by means of highly emotive music after its historical political unrest that had divided a nation. The branded entertainment piece made Egyptians aware that although there are many different cultures, languages and beliefs, all comprise humans living and contributing to an entity that is greater than the individual, being their country; and that it is necessary to move on and live as a nation in peace despite all denominations. Another example is Toshiba & Intel’s *The Beauty Inside* (see APPENDIX 8.2), which is a communication effort that worked hard to create a believable story by employing a highly emotive narrative expression of “beauty comes from the inside” (the creative expression of Intel inside Toshiba computers) challenging beliefs about self-identity and prejudice towards others that are not the same, presenting the concept of love and self-love as the catalyst for the essence of what it means to be human.

Some of the sample campaigns employed the classic art of storytelling in context of narrative, for example KFC’s *The Journey of Hope* (see APPENDIX 8.5), Deutsche Telekom’s *Move On* (see APPENDIX 8.6), and The Village Voice’s *New York Writes Itself* (see APPENDIX 8.3). Others focused more on narrative expressing all of the seven authentic narrative characteristics for authenticity to achieve resonance. These campaigns mainly employed compelling authentic narrative in the form of product demonstration, still employing a very strong brand identity-based narrative. A brief discussion follows.

As discussed in Section 3.2.2, the branded entertainment construct employs narrative and not necessarily storytelling. There are branded entertainment initiatives part of this very sample pool that employ narrative but not necessarily storytelling, as in the case of Coca Cola's *Thirst: A Dolby Sound Experience* (see APPEDIX 9.10). Narrative is a representation or manifestation of a specific story, rather than the story itself, i.e. more than just the story line, it is the way the story gets told (Mills, 2015). The way the Coca Cola initiative expresses the profoundly unique brand association with the classic swish and carbonated liquid pouring ice sound moving into a highly immersive two dimensional audio-visual medium in a profoundly compelling and entertaining way, furthers its consistent venture towards entrenching associations with the product in a way that is original, believable with a very high consideration to craft, carrying emotional meaning as it evokes all associations related to the product and more so the overarching brand narrative in a way that triggers memories and the power of assimilation. Although the venture is done with Dolby, a partner that stands in support of a brand-generated initiative where perceived ownership ultimately resides with Coca Cola, the expression of identity is solid. The piece is also highly sincere, not being approached with a commercial mindset at all, focusing exclusively on the sheer entertainment.

The same could be said for product demonstrations, for instance Volvo Trucks' *Live Test Series* (see APPENDIX 8.7), over-dramatising its safety proposition in context of precision; Mattel's *Hot Wheels for Real* (see APPENDIX 8.1) showing that its toy cars were based on the exact design of real racing cars and that all tracks in a toy set are possible in real life; and Cape Town Tourism's *Send Your Facebook Profile to Cape Town* (see APPENDIX 8.8), providing a highly immersive experience by "telling the story of Cape Town" by means of all facets of her brand identity, image translations, the alternative experiences she offers and most important of all: the nooks and crannies in her cultures and places that are not classic tourist destinations, making the narrative profoundly authentic.

Although the study did not focus on the creative nature of compelling narrative, it is important to note, as specially indicated by the participants, that a simple, unique and highly intriguing concept already imbues the calling power for interest and inadvertently creates pulling power, especially taking into consideration that when it comes to branded entertainment, audiences choose the entertainment, i.e. should come to the brand and not the other way around. Table 6.1 provides a take on why each of the sample campaigns had pulling power.

**Table 6.1: Campaign concepts that make for compelling narrative**

<b>Campaign</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Concept driving narrative</b>
KFC <i>Journey of Hope</i>	To tell South African KFC customers where their R2 coins go when they voluntarily donate in-store to child hunger upon purchase.	Get a celebrity extreme adventurer and follow him documentary style as he cycles 4,100 kilometres from Cape Town to Johannesburg by starving himself to identify himself with the cause.
Cape Town Tourism <i>Send Your Facebook Profile to Cape Town</i>	To increase tourism to Cape Town during the festive season.	Get people from across the globe to take a week-long virtual holiday in Cape Town in a way that others actually think that they are in Cape Town. Share personalised individual Facebook posts that showcase the beautiful city and all that there is to see and do. Motivation to sign up: win a trip to Cape Town.
The Village Voice <i>New York Writes Itself</i>	To increase advertising in The Village Voice (free online New York newspaper).	Get New Yorkers to write about their life experiences in the city of New York. Take the best stories and exhibit them in an art gallery and then develop it into an on-stage play.
Toshiba and Intel <i>The Beauty Inside</i>	To increase sales of Toshiba computers with Intel inside.	Get people from across the globe to act out the role (and contribute to the visual diary kept on a Toshiba computer) of a person that wakes up in a different body every day to dramatise Intel – the beauty inside Toshiba computers. The plot: he falls in love.
Mattel's Hot Wheels <i>Hot Wheels for Real</i>	To increase sales of Hot Wheels amongst adults.	Get stunt drivers to perform the same stunts that children would act out with Hot Wheels cars in the real world, attempting to break two world records.

SPCA & MINI (cars) <i>Driving Dogs</i>	To polish the image of rescue dogs not being all 'damaged'.	Get dogs to drive MINI cars.
Volvo Trucks <i>Volvo Trucks Live Tests</i>	To familiarise all stakeholders with the features of a new series of Volvo Trucks to associate Volvo's brand essence of safety.	<p>Get the CEO of Volvo Trucks to stand on top of a truck dangling high over the ocean from a hook from the new Volvo <i>FMX to dramatise its robustness.</i></p> <p>Get a Volvo Trucks technician to have a truck drive over only his head sticking from the ground <i>to dramatise its 300mm ground clearance.</i></p> <p>Get a hamster to steer a Volvo truck from the bottom of a quarry to the top with only a tempting carrot to guide his movement in order <i>to dramatise the truck's precision steering.</i></p> <p>Get a Volvo truck to be chased by bulls alongside runners as it proceeds through the narrow Pamplona streets (used for the annual running of the bulls in Spain) <i>to demonstrate its manoeuvrability.</i></p> <p>Get Jeanne Claude van Damme (famous action hero actor) to do the splits between two Volvo trucks reversing <i>to demonstrate precision.</i></p>
Deutsche Telecom <i>Move on</i>	To entrench Deutsche Telecom's brand essence of "Life is for Sharing"	Get people from across Europe to co-create an action packed true full-length Hollywood quality movie.



Mobinil  <i>Always Together</i>	To bring Egypt together as a nation after political turmoil	Create songs and music videos in all Egyptian languages and across cultures to unite a nation. Something that seemed impossible to do.
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The findings suggested that entertainment value in branded entertainment lies in a simple, unique and provocative idea that is aligned to brand identity, i.e. the starting point, to create meaningful, compelling narrative. Narrative based on a universal concept, or interpretively a human truth, portrayed in a compelling way by means of intrigue or drama, seems to be a strong suggested principle for increasing potential for resonance. A highlight in this regard is Mok denoting that the narrative ought to be constructed in a way to fuel drama around a simple concept. When it comes to a client-side marketer buying into the concept the findings also suggested that a good, simple idea goes a long way with clients and the agency must have the ability for clients to “fall in love” with the idea, despite any evident constraints or preconceptions.

In conclusion, the potential for brand resonance is marginalised even though branded entertainment could present a compelling concept in whatever form the brand wants to express a message and in whichever form the content presents a story with an identity-based authentic narrative expression or entertaining narrative expression around the product itself that stands strongly in a space that presents the brand’s essence or positioning, without making the narrative authentic by employing all of the seven characteristics of authentic narrative.

**The ultimate finding of this study is the following:**

Creating branded entertainment in line with the proposed definition of branded entertainment, being **Branded entertainment is a communication effort that employs a compelling authentic narrative to achieve brand resonance**, brand communication decision makers could have a cohesive understanding and consequently application that activates branded entertainment’s core value, which is to break through commercial clutter and maximise its potential as an alternative form of brand contact in order to connect with audiences through authentic narrative, maximising the potential for brand resonance that builds a brand strategically.

This finding contributes to theoretical knowledge in the academic discipline of business management, and more specifically, marketing and the subject of brand building and strategy, by proposing a definition for branded entertainment. In addition: the seven authentic narrative characteristics identified contribute to the discipline or field of brand building and brand strategy by suggesting a benchmark construct for building authentic branded entertainment narrative and evaluating its ability to come across or be experienced by a target audience as authentic in order to resonate. Lastly, from a practical contribution perspective, the findings of this study provided insights to brand communication decision makers on strategically sound branded entertainment practice and specifically the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance, setting standards on best industry practice to achieve strategically significant branded entertainment.

## **6.7 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The recommendations consist of two parts. The first part is recommendations to brand communication decision makers, followed by recommendations to academics and research houses or companies for further research.

### **6.7.1 Recommendations for brand communication decision makers**

Zero-based planning for any brand communication initiative is pivotal in contemporary brand communication planning. This means that the marketing objectives and communication objectives ought to be the starting point without predisposing a contact point or media plan. This means that contact planning is driven by objectives and thorough target audience analysis understanding in what way the campaign message would have the strongest impact.

Some initiatives are tactical in nature and others are strategic. Strategic initiatives usually involve the aim to build brand equity; initiatives that are focused on the long term. Building an emotional connection between the brand and target audience for an intended attitudinal attachment is usually appropriate for long term relationships. Initiatives focused on the long term could also aim to evoke active engagement between the brand and its target audience provided that the brand has mechanisms in place to initiate and uphold such initial and henceforth ongoing engagement. Long term relationship building could also be to establish a sense of brand community, again with cognisance to mechanisms to uphold and sustain a

community by facilitating some forms of engagement or to drive loyalty. Loyalty in context of brand building for long term success could be established in the form of intended loyalty by means of expressing interest in a brand, brand preference or increased purchase consideration, all being classic communication effects that a brand communication initiative could aim to achieve, and all being measurable. The four mentioned outcomes: an emotional connection, engagement, community building and loyalty are dimensions of brand resonance hence the strategic potential of employing authentic narrative in a branded entertainment initiative.

The findings have suggested that brands should not create branded entertainment just for the sake of creating branded entertainment; feeling that they should because it is perceived to be where advertising is heading, or because competitors have necessarily been successful in their branded entertainment ventures. Branded entertainment should be the best means to achieve a set of business, marketing, brand building or communication objectives. If branded entertainment is the best contact point to engage meaningful potential relations with a target audience based on their needs profile and the aimed for dimensions of resonance could be achieved by means of branded entertainment, it could be applicable to follow a branded entertainment strategy.

Creatives ought to be careful not to create entertainment that is not brand identity-based. The art of entertainment should be mastered without alluding to or the adjustment of a traditional advertising-based skillset and experience-based context, without the pressure of a sometimes commercially-led approach. Client-side marketers should understand the power of narrative in brand communication and understand that it is human-based, something that is inherent to narrative. It must also be understood that narrative could include a story line but it is not necessarily desirable or possible; narrative looks at the expression of a brand that is ultimately and sincerely in the discipline of entertainment, being a vehicle to achieve brand resonance, being something that not all promotional tools or other promotional efforts are capable of. The support of more traditional tools likes advertising or PR could be very beneficial to drive an audience to a branded entertainment piece, given that what they will find is providing a target audience utility in the form of entertainment and without any motive of not offering compelling authentic narrative to entertain.

The aim should be to engage a target audience by offering emotional meaning that is original, believable, sincere, and displays considered craft, meaning that the brand has taken care and pride in the narrative in order to offer the best entertainment possible. Budget does not have to play a major role in this. It is ultimately about expressing the best entertainment with the resources possible – even if the piece is shot on a cellular or mobile phone, for instance. However, a brand must still have the ability to express a fully nuanced brand identity by means of narrative by being brand generated. This means that the origin of the idea must be with the brand, the planning of the campaign ought to reside with the brand and the brand should initiate the communication, even if it is done with a partner that provides the ability for a narrative to be carried and campaign message to be expressed. As long as the ownership is perceived to be that of the brand, the target audience can attribute all its resonance intent to that specific brand.

If a target audience finds the entertainment piece compelling, or if the idea of the property, which can be anything from a film to a TV series to a game or music video, is compelling, an audience could be drawn. The employment of digital or a digital component is recommended as the audio-visual medium can emphasise emotional expression, invite engagement (be it an entity that could go viral, for instance) or facilitate the perception or actualisation of a brand community. It can be mentioned at this point that an emotional connection with a target audience and engagement could be the two most achievable resonance dimensions and could even be planned for as potential results.

However, it does not matter how compelling an idea is, if the narrative that imbues the idea is not experienced as authentic the potential for resonance is marginalised. From all the authentic narrative characteristics that should all be present in planning and creating authentic narrative, brand identity expression, sincerity towards the target audience to entertain and not advertise in the traditional sense of the word and to carry emotional meaning, being a deep sense of understanding of a target audience in order to authentically relate to them, is crucial for resonance.

That said, the other four characteristics of authentic narrative, being brand generated (brought to the target audience by the author being the brand), original, believable and showing a sense of pride and sincerity toward the target audience by means of craft, all constitute authentic

narrative for resonance. All of these characteristics of authentic narrative must be present to achieve brand resonance.

It is highly recommended that agency strategic planners and creatives work closely together to ensure that the entertainment is “on brand” and relatable to the finer nuances of target audience attitudes, behaviours, motivators and beliefs; that the entertainment is completely original and does not aim to mimic that of competitors; and that the narrative is sincere towards the target audience, believable in the eyes of the target audience and that it ultimately emphasises the brand’s essence, positioning and contributes positively to the overarching brand narrative.

To use the Enriched Conceptual Framework of the Strategic Value of Authentic Narrative (Figure 6.1), branded entertainment should be seen as systemic in nature where seven characteristics of authentic narrative should work in cohesion and as an integrated whole with the building blocks of resonance, being brand salience and the brand imagery and performance. When the narrative is authentic and could build the salience and create strong, favourable and unique brand associations, a target audience could have positive, accessible responses to a branded entertainment narrative, with the potential to achieve resonance. It is of importance that such a communication effort ought to be compelling in nature too in order to maximise potential for resonance in an entertainment context.

The relationship between agency and client-side marketers is of the essence for branded entertainment to succeed. Clients ought to be familiarised with branded entertainment and its strategic potential. The findings suggest that clients should work actively with the agency to share responsibility and to create entertainment that is in the best interest of the brand and in line with the discipline by eschewing from an overtly sales or commercially-led mindset. Based on the principles of mutual trust, brevity and passion, with an understanding that branded entertainment usually requires hard work, continuous improvement and an egoless environment to create compelling authentic narrative, on agency and client’s side, makes for branded entertainment that can achieve resonance, the ultimate reward in the art and science of brand building.

The findings have also suggested that once a brand achieves resonance by means of a branded entertainment initiative, target audiences would be more open to receive entertainment in the form of compelling authentic narrative. This creates opportunity for brands to continuously employ branded entertainment to the extent that it can position itself as an entertainment brand or entertainment franchise.

There are many different kinds of branded content. Branded entertainment is a very specific kind of content that exclusively entertains with the intent to achieve resonance. Branded entertainment is not a sophisticated form of product or brand placement, product or brand integration; nor is it sponsorship of entertaining programmes or events, no matter in which creative way it is approached. The mentioned communication disciplines or promotional tools are tools in their own right and the assumption is that brands ought to approach them with getting the best out of the initiatives for whatever the communication objects are. It is proposed that there is only one kind of branded entertainment, the kind that is a brand-generated communication effort that employs a compelling authentic narrative that has the potential to achieve brand resonance. The strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment is therefore brand resonance that ultimately builds customer-based brand equity for long-term business success.

### **6.7.2 Recommendations for further research**

This section briefly outlines the recommendations for further research by academics and research houses or companies on the communication discipline that is branded entertainment.

- (i) The Enriched Conceptual Framework of the Strategic Value of Authentic Narrative in Branded Entertainment does not focus on the art of making the narrative compelling because the focus of the study was on the strategic value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment. Primary research findings have surfaced indicating that authentic narrative needs the support of the narrative to be compelling in order to maximise the potential for resonance. It is therefore recommended that dimensions of creating compelling narrative be built into the framework in order to enrich it with guidelines and attributes to the creative art of compelling narrative for immediate value of brand communication decision makers and creative teams in advertising agencies and production houses alike. It will also

- provide guidance criteria to client-side marketers to assess creative skill and its employment in branded entertainment.
- (ii) The framework highlighted the following three authentic narrative characteristics as prominent and most valuable in any branded entertainment venture that employs authentic narrative: for the branded entertainment to be **identity-based**; to be **sincere** towards the target audience's need to be entertained opposed to being advertised to in the traditional sense of the word, so that the audience is not disappointed when choosing a branded entertainment initiative for its entertainment value; and for the initiative **to carry emotional meaning**, thus to be profoundly relevant to the target audience. If the impact of these three characteristics could be investigated in how they influence the two most viable dimensions of resonance as result of authentic narrative in branded entertainment, being an **emotional connection** and **engagement**, measured against different kinds of narratives – from the art of classic storytelling to product demonstration, for instance, – guidance to brand communication decision makers would become even more tangible.
  - (iii) The primary research data did not indicate brand loyalty as a direct outcome of employing an authentic branded entertainment narrative. Only one participant; Darwish, referred to loyalty as potential result of engaging an authentic narrative in branded entertainment (see Section 5.4.2.2), therefore earning it a provisional space in the enriched conceptual framework, however excluded from the visually proposed authentic narrative construct. It is warranted to mention that sample pool campaign results could show an indication that authentic narrative may indeed achieve brand loyalty (Section 5.6.2.4 refers). Further research to loyalty as reaction to a compelling, authentic narrative, be in it likelihood or type, for instance intended loyalty or behavioural loyalty, or subsequent behaviour such as word-of-mouth or brand evangelism, could contribute valuable knowledge to academics and brand practitioners alike.
  - (iv) Opportunity exists for the Enriched Conceptual Framework of the Strategic Value of Authentic Narrative in Branded Entertainment to be applied to a specific continent, country or market segment. The authentic narrative proposition in the framework can consequently be enriched by means of relevance as it is imagined that applicability and congruity with culture, subculture, attitudes, behaviours, motivators or need states could establish authenticity (Robbins *et al.*, 2009: 5). Localisms, for example, as mentioned by; Patterson, 2011; Van den Bergh, 2012;

and Pace *et al.*, 2011, and using vernacular for instance, named by Leech, 2009; in brand communication, could further assist in establishing resonance by means of authentic narrative.

- (v) Participant Ricardo John distinctly referred to a younger generation; Generation Z that expects entertainment from brands instead of traditional advertising. Generation Z is born in the 1990's and raised in the 2000's (Tulgan, 2013: 1) and is the first generation who has grown up in the middle of an era of developed information technology (Cruz, 2016: 22). This study found valuable information on the relevance of authenticity in brand communication and more specifically on the importance of authentic narrative in branded entertainment for Generation Y or Millennials. Further research on the impact of authentic narrative in branded entertainment on brand resonance for Generation Z is highly recommended, especially in lieu of developing technology, changing social media dynamics and the escalation of more sophisticated branded entertainment that will come through the ranks in the near future, demanding ever increasing attention from this generation.
- (vi) Participant Annika Viberud remarked that the Volvo Trucks' *Live Test Series* had a powerful impact on internal pride among employees. Viberud also denoted: "It is easier to attract new engineers now thanks to this campaign. We get more people wanting to work for Volvo". From a human resource and internal brand building perspective the effect of branded entertainment that managed to achieve high levels of resonance seems positive and it may be feasible to understand the impact and dynamics thereof. Perhaps more so one could also suggest that a greater number of companies may want to consider using branded entertainment internally to connect in a meaningful way with its personnel and other internal stakeholders. The dynamics of employing an authentic narrative in branded entertainment for internal audiences to achieve brand resonance internally may be a study of value.
- (vii) Opportunity exists to test the complete model or parts of the model by means of quantitative research.

## 6.8 THE LIMITATIONS OF PRESENT STUDY

Limitations are inherent to any research study. Researcher subjectivity is ineradicably written into the qualitative research paradigm and individual biases of participants would in all instances have been unavoidable. However, given the exceptional quality of the participants,



although select, rich and highly nuanced data contributed to a well-rounded set of involved data findings, something that was only to the benefit to the study and its contribution. The study did not limit itself to country or continent due to its universal theme with the only real limitation being geography in that the researcher could not conduct all the interviews in person. However, the nature of the subject is not sensitive and by account of words, phrasing, tone and manner more so than body language per se, data was confidently unaffected and the desired quality of results were delivered.

Limitations relating to the external validity and representativeness of the sample certainly exists, especially in relation to participants not necessarily opposing branded entertainment and its need as a communication discipline. The present study is envisaged to create fertile ground for debate and provides leverage for continuing knowledge in the fast evolving discipline of branded entertainment that is continuously proving itself to play a major part in the field of brand building strategy of the future.

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## **APPENDICES**



## **APPENDIX 1: AWARD SHOWS DESCRIPTORS**

### **1.1 Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity**

The Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity (French based) is "... the world's biggest celebration of creativity in communications. As the most prestigious international creative communications awards, more than 28 000 entries from all over the world are showcased and judged at the Festival" (Coloribus, 2013). The Cannes Awards were found in 1946 (Festival de Cannes, 2013) and annually draws over 9 000 delegates from 90 countries attending workshops, exhibitions, screenings, master classes and high-profile seminars by industry leaders being a global meeting place for advertisers, advertising and communication professionals (Coloribus, 2013). The Branded Content and Entertainment Lions category only came into being in 2012.

### **1.2 Design and Art Direction Awards**

Design and Art Direction (D&AD) is a British educational charity which exists to promote excellence in international design and advertising, based in London, with its first awards held in 1962 (D&AD, 2010). The annual D&AD Awards are highly respected and is regarded as a major event in design and advertising with black pencils handed out to represent a gold award in a variety of categories. "Widely considered one of the most prestigious and difficult-to-win awards in design and advertising, D&AD celebrates the finest creativity each year across a diverse range of disciplines" (The Telegraph, 2014).

### **1.3 One Show**

The One Show is a premier international advertising award show since 2008 (held in Los Angeles annually), setting "... the industry standard for creative advertising in print, television, radio, outdoor, innovative marketing, integrated branding and branded content. Each year, work is judged by an international jury of award-winning art directors, copywriters and creative directors" (One Show, 2013). The relevant category for this research is the One Show Entertainment category which states that they are the longest running award show of its kind to exclusively recognise the intersection between entertainment and brands, stating that it honours work that goes beyond traditional product placement but also looks at strategy and the creative thought process that inspires brand messages whilst producing content that is

truly entertaining. This specific category is judged by a diverse jury from the entertainment, production and advertising industries.

#### **1.4 CLIO Awards**

The CLIO Awards (USA based) "... is the world's most recognized international awards competition for advertising, design, interactive and communication. CLIO maintains its original commitment to celebrate and reward creative excellence, while continuing to evolve with the industry to acknowledge the most current, breakthrough work" (CLIO Awards, 2013). The CLIO was found in 1959 and annually receives more than 10 000 entries of which 65 percent come from outside the United States of America. The judges comprise top "creatives" from around the world (113 experts from 62 countries) described as "... individuals whose own work epitomizes the vanguard in their respective fields, thus ensuring that each juror has a profound understanding of the global market's ever-evolving dynamics and industry innovations" (CLIO Awards, 2013). The judging process is rigorous with less than three percent of entries receiving a statue and less than one percent receiving the coveted Gold CLIO.

#### **1.5 London International Awards**

The London International Awards, founded in 1985, is a global competition, recognising creativity and the power of ideas in all forms for example advertising, branded content, design and production (LIA, 2013). The jury consist of nearly 100 top "creative" from agencies, production companies, design houses and technology companies from around the world.

#### **1.6 Dubai Lynx International Festival of Creativity**

The annual Dubai Lynx Festival of International Creativity is the Middle East and North Africa's annual event for the advertising and communication industry to learn from peers, be inspired, to network and to celebrate creative excellence (Dubai Lynx, 2013). The work is adjudicated by international juries and has been going since 2006.

#### **1.7 Webby Awards**

The Webby Awards, found in 1996 and presented by the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences, is the leading international award honouring excellence on the Internet

(Webbyawards, 2013) with the 2013 ceremony hosted in New York. Judges consist of a large selection of international relevant experts. More than 11 000 entries were received in 2012 from more than 60 countries. The awards cater for two honours in each category: The Webby Award, which is awarded by the official judging panel and The Webby People's Voice Award, which consist of votes from the people via the Internet.

### **1.8 Festival of Media Global Awards**

THE BRAVES award for Best Branded Entertainment which recognises the best entertainment for factual branded video content produced for a brand that was launched in 2012, has been integrated into the Festival of Media Global Awards (Bizcommunity, 2013). Held in Switzerland in 2013 and hosted by C Squared Holdings (London), more than 700 delegates described as a "... truly international senior audience ..." attends the event, representing over 40 countries from across the globe.

### **1.9 New York Festivals International Advertising Awards**

The New York Festivals International Advertising Awards was founded in 1957 and is held annually to acknowledge international excellence in advertising and marketing effectiveness with a jury consisting of more than 400 of the world's most respected, award-winning creative directors and executive creative directors – two rounds of judging commences online in over 70 countries (NYF, 2013). The New York Festival's World's Best Advertising includes an executive press conference, keynote speakers, creative panel discussions, networking events and exhibits of shortlisted work.

### **1.10 ANDY Awards**

Founded in 1964, the ANDYs (as part of the Advertising Club of New York) honour global creativity in advertising, and recognise the contributions of individuals and companies who continually innovate, experiment and inspire with novel approaches to communication. Judged by a hand-selected jury of globally renowned creative leaders, awards are given to both single entries and campaign executions, distinguished by product, service or technique category (ANDY Awards, 2016).

## APPENDIX 2: ASTE GUTIÉRREZ BIO

Aste Gutiérrez was recommended for his strategic creative skill in branded entertainment by James Mok, Executive Creative Director Asia Pacific at FCB International. Mok served on many juries at advertising award shows across the globe, for instance in 2015 he was the AWARD jury chairman for Branded Content & Entertainment at the Australian Writers & Art Directors club. The biog of Gutiérrez that follows is a compilation of his bio on his website, his LinkedIn profile and a write-up on Campaign Brief Asia.

Gutiérrez (2017) is Regional Creative Director for Nike at BBH. Before BBH, Gutiérrez co-headed creative at Fred Farid in the Shanghai office that, under Gutiérrez's guidance, won AdAge's "International Agency of the Year 2016". For this Gutiérrez was inducted to Campaign-Asia's "Digital A-List". In 2013 Esquire Magazine honoured him as one of 14 "Best and Brightest" based on his influencing power in "changing our environment, circumstances, and our minds for the better" based on the strategically significant work that he has lead. He has lead the creative for many high equity brands for instance Budweiser, Canon, HP, Porsche, P&G, Lego, Audi, Nestle, Amazon Kindle, Evian, North Face and Absolut, among others.

Gutiérrez has won at almost all international advertising award shows including a Cannes Grand Prix; D&AD Yellow + White Pencil; and Grand Clio. Many of his wins include branded entertainment-based work.

### APPENDIX 3: REQUEST FOR INTERVIEW EXAMPLE



19 June 2014

Dear Jaime,

I am in the final research phase of my PhD thesis at the South African top ranked *University of Stellenbosch Business School* based just outside of Cape Town.

My study is on branded entertainment.

The sample for this study has been selected through inductive funnelling of branded entertainment initiatives that scored top honours at industry recognised international awards in 2013. The Beauty Inside campaign that won last year at the CLIO's, Cannes and Webby Awards (that I am aware of) qualified for the sample pool of my study.

I would like an interview with you and Pete Fishman.

If you would allow - kindly let me know what date and time will best suit you and Pete to conduct a 45-minute (max) Skype interview? Your insight and experience is imperative to the success of this research project and your time and input will be dearly appreciated.

Naturally I will share the final research results with you.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marthinus J.C. van Loggerenberg'.

Marthinus J.C. van Loggerenberg  
+27 82 885 8014/ +27 21 461 8089  
[marthinus@vegascchool.com](mailto:marthinus@vegascchool.com)



**APPENDIX 4: SUMMARY OF RESEARCH PROBLEM, PROPOSITIONS AND OBJECTIVES IN TABLE FORMAT****Research problem**

The lack of a cohesive understanding and application of branded entertainment erodes its core value, that is to break through clutter and connect with audiences through authentic narrative and thus, the potential for branded entertainment to achieve brand resonance is depleted.

	<b>Proposition</b>	<b>Objective</b>
<b>Central</b>	Authentic narrative in branded entertainment has potential to achieve consumer brand resonance.	To explore and potentially enrich the central research proposition.
<b>Integral research propositions &amp; supportive objectives</b>	1. Branded entertainment is an unconventional brand-initiated and owned contact point with potential to achieve brand resonance through authentic narrative.	1. To explore and refine a branded entertainment working definition in order to present a proposed definition as one of the key outputs of the study.
	2. Six authentic narrative characteristics were identified; that is for branded entertainment narrative to be brand-initiated and owned, to embody the brand's identity, to be original, to carry emotional meaning for a target audience, to be sincere, and to be believable – in order to be deemed authentic.	2. To explore and enrich a proposed set of narrative characteristics in branded entertainment that could constitute authentic narrative; and
		3. To obtain an understanding of best practice principles to guide brand communication decision makers on creating branded entertainment with potential for brand resonance.

## APPENDIX 5: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



*Marthinus Van Loggerenberg Approved letter*

4 June 2014

Dear Marthinus

**Re: Ethical screening application: Marthinus Van Loggerenberg (BD027/Approved)**

**Research title:** The strategic role and value of authentic narrative in branded entertainment to achieve consumer-brand resonance

**Supervisor:** Dr Carla Enslin

The Departmental Ethics Screening Committee of the University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB DESC) reviewed your application for the above-mentioned research. The research as set out in the application has been approved. We draw your attention to the following:

- Research is classified as low risk, but adhere to the principles of informed consent and voluntary participation as you have spelled out in the documents accompanying your application.

We would like to point out that you, as researcher, are obliged to maintain the ethical integrity of your research, adhere to the ethical guidelines of Stellenbosch University, and remain within the scope of your research proposal and supporting evidence as submitted to the USB DESC. Should any aspect of your research change from the information as presented to the USB DESC, which could have an effect on the possibility of harm to any research subject, you are under the obligation to report it immediately to your supervisor. Should there be any uncertainty in this regard, you have to consult with the USB DESC.

2/...

University of Stellenbosch Business School

Address: PO Box 610 Bellville 7535 Carl Cronjé Drive Bellville 7530

Tel: +27 (0)21 918 4111 Fax: +27 (0)21 918 4468

Email: [usbcom@usb.ac.za](mailto:usbcom@usb.ac.za) Website: [www.usb.ac.za](http://www.usb.ac.za)



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- 2 -

We wish you success with your research, and trust that it will make a positive contribution to the quest for knowledge at the USB and Stellenbosch University.

Sincerely



**Prof Basil C. Leonard**

Chair: USB Departmental Ethics Screening Committee  
021 918 4250

Please note: Should any research subject, participating organisation, or person affected by this research have any query about the research, they should feel free to contact any of the following:

Researcher : [marthinus@vegaschool.com](mailto:marthinus@vegaschool.com); 021 461 8089  
Supervisor : [carla@vegaschool.com](mailto:carla@vegaschool.com)  
USB DESC Chair : [Basil.Leonard@usb.ac.za](mailto:Basil.Leonard@usb.ac.za)

.. \marthinus@vegaschool.com



**APPENDIX 6: DETAILED ACCOUNT OF SAMPLE – SECURED INTERVIEWS****The sample selection criteria** (as per Section 4.5.3.3):

- At least a Grand Prix, meaning top honours, or Gold at one internationally acclaimed i.e. highest rated award show specifically in the branded entertainment category: (1) Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity; (2) Design and Art Direction Awards (D&AD); (3) The One Show; (4) The CLIO Awards; (5) The London International Awards; (6) Dubai Lynx International Festival of Creativity; (7) The Webby Awards; (8) Festival of Media Global Awards; (9) The New York Festivals International Advertising Awards or (10) The ANDY Awards.
- As well as at least Gold at another award show that is preferably international but could be multi-continental with also an international judging panel (as requisite) that awarded the same piece of creative work.

<b>Awards (minimum)</b>	<b>Campaign</b>	<b>Agency</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Note: the vast majority have won at many more award festivals.			<i>Note: Job titles are as per time of interview conducted.</i>
	<b>North America:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cannes Lions GRAND PRIX</li> <li>CLIO GOLD</li> </ul>	Intel & Toshiba's <i>The Beauty Inside</i>	Pereira & O'Dell <i>San Francisco</i>	Vice President & Executive Creative Director: <b>(1) Jaime Robinson</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cannes Lions GOLD</li> <li>CLIO GOLD</li> </ul>	Mattel Inc's <i>Hot Wheels for Real</i>	<i>Mistress Los Angeles</i>	Founding Partner & Creative Director: <b>(2) Damien Eley</b>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cannes Lions GOLD</li> <li>• CLIO GOLD</li> </ul>	Village Voice Newspaper's <i>New York Writes Itself</i>	Leo Burnett <i>New York</i>	Managing Partner & Executive Creative Director: <b>(3) Kieran Antill</b>
<b>South America:</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cannes Lions GOLD</li> <li>• The Wave (Latin America's largest advertising festival) GRAND PRIX</li> </ul>	Coca Cola's <i>Coke Thirst Dolby Sound Experience</i>	J Walter Thompson <i>São Paulo</i>	Chief Creative Officer: <b>(4) Ricardo John</b>
<b>Europe:</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cannes Lions GRAND PRIX</li> <li>• One Show BEST IN SHOW &amp; GOLD in Branded Entertainment category</li> </ul>	Volvo Truck's <i>Live Test Series</i>	Forsman & Bodenfors <i>Gothenburg</i>	Creative Director & Senior Partner: <b>(5) Björn Engström</b>  Director Strategic Brand & Marketing Communications at Volvo Trucks: <b>(6) Annika Viberud</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Webby Awards GOLD</li> <li>• ADC Annual Awards (the oldest continuously running industry award show in the world; Part of the One Club for Creativity) GOLD</li> </ul>	Deutsche Telekom's <i>Keep Moving</i>	DDB Tribal <i>Berlin</i>	Strategic Planning Director: <b>(7) Dr Gordon Euchler</b>
<b>Oceania:</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cannes Lions GOLD</li> <li>• One Show GOLD</li> </ul>	SPCA & MINI's <i>Driving Dogs</i>	FCB <i>Auckland</i>	Asia Pacific Executive Creative Director: <b>(8) James Mok</b>

	<b>Africa:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dubai Lynx GRAND PRIX</li> <li>• Mena Cristals (reward the best advertising creations of the North African and Middle Eastern countries) GOLD</li> </ul>	Mobinil's <i>Dayman Maabaad/ Always Together</i>	Leo Burnett <i>Cairo</i>	Managing Director: <b>(9) Amr Darwish</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media Global Awards GOLD</li> <li>• IPRA (International Public Relations Association's communications awards) GOLD</li> </ul> <p>Worth mentioning: GOLD at Africa's highly esteemed PRISM awards.</p>	KFC's <i>Journey of Hope</i>	Ogilvy <i>Johannesburg</i>	Group Account Director: <b>(10) Lauren McInnes</b>  Senior Copy Writer: <b>(11) Irene Styger</b>  KFC Senior Brand Manager for Sponsorships and CSI: <b>(12) Lauren Turnbull</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cannes Lions GOLD</li> <li>• Loerie Awards GOLD (Largest gathering of brand communication industry in Africa and the Middle East)</li> </ul>	Cape Town Tourism's <i>Send Your Facebook Profile to Cape Town</i>	Ogilvy <i>Cape Town</i>	Senior Art Director: <b>(13) Dean Paradise</b>  & Senior Copywriter: <b>(14) Matthew Pullen</b>

*The full award list per campaign is available - APPENDIX 7.*

**Asia:** Co-Head of Creative at Fred & Farid, *Shanghai:* **(15) Aste Gutiérrez**, See biography of Aste - **APPENDIX 2**

## APPENDIX 7

### AWARDS LISTS FOR SAMPLE CAMPAIGNS

#### 7.1 MATTEL'S HOT WHEELS FOR REAL 2013

- D&AD: Nomination - In Book (Equivalent to Silver)
- Andy Awards: Gold - Branded Content
- Cannes: 2 x Silver - Promo and Activation; Gold - Branded Content & Entertainment; Titanium - Finalist
- One Show: Gold x 2, Silver, Bronze x 2 - Branded Content & Entertainment
- Clio Awards: Gold x 2 - Content and Contact; Gold - Branded Content; Gold & Bronze - Integrated
- London International Awards: Bronze: Branded Content & Entertainment

#### 7.2 TOSHIBA INTEL'S THE BEAUTY INSIDE 2013

- Cannes Lions: Grand Prix - Film; Grand Prix - Branded Content & Entertainment; Gold – Branded Content & Entertainment; Silver – Branded Content and Entertainment; Gold – Best Copywriting; Bronze – Direct, Other Consumer Products; Silver – Cyber, Best Video; Silver – Cyber, Community Applications; Silver - Promo & Activation, Durable Goods; Shortlist – Titanium; Shortlist - Cyber, Viral Marketing; Shortlist - Cyber, Interactive Video; Shortlist - Promo & Activation; Best Integrated Campaign Led by Promotion & Activation; Shortlist - PR, Technology & Manufacturing; Shortlist - PR, Best Use of Social Media; Grand Prix – Cyber
- Daytime Emmy Award
- Clio Awards: Gold - Branded Entertainment & Content; Film: Online campaign
- Webby: Winner - Branded Entertainment Scripted and Drama; Branded Entertainment Long Form
- One Show Entertainment: Gold - Craft/Technique, Best Direction; Gold - Craft/Technique, Best Writing; Silver Pencil - Non-Broadcast; Silver Pencil - Branded Content, Online; Silver Pencil - Long Form, Series/Episodes; Interactive Bronze Pencil - Best Use of Social Media/Facebook
- Facebook Studio Awards: Silver

- D&AD: In-Book
- Art Directors Club Gold Award - Online Content: Podcast/ Web Series; Gold Award - Craft: Content/Copywriting; Silver Award - Online Content: Nonbroadcast Media
- Creative Review - Annual In-Book
- ANDY Gold Award - Branded Content; Gold Award - Consumer Generated Content
- SXSW Interactive Winner - Film/TV
- Digiday Winner - Best Consumer Video Campaign
- One Screen Festival Winner - Branded Content 2012
- AdAge Viral Video Chart #1 (Sept. 19, 12, & Aug. 9) 2012
- FWA Site of the Day
- Creativity Magazine - Creativity Pick of the Day

### **7.3 THE VILLAGE VOICE'S NEW YORK WRITES ITSELF CAMPAIGN 2013**

- Cannes Lions: Gold - Branded Content and Entertainment / Best user of Integration of user generated content; Bronze – Direct Lions Ambient Media (Large Scale); Bronze – PR Lions Best Use of Social Media; Bronze – Experiential Marketing
- ACIP Next Awards: Next Experiential
- 92nd Annual Art Directors Club (ADC) Awards: Merit Award
- Clio Awards: Gold – Branded Entertainment & Content Live Events
- D&AD: In-Book Branding; Brand Experience & Environments
- London International Advertising Awards: Bronze – Non-traditional; Live Events – Beyond Advertising
- London International Advertising Awards: Silver – Best Integrated Campaign 2012
- The Kinsale Shark Awards: Bronze – Ambient Live Event; Best Campaign – using 3 or more different media types; Bronze – Integrated 2012
- One Show Awards 2013: Gold – One Show Experiential Entertainment Experiential; Single Merit – One Show Branded Transformation
- Mena Cristal Awards: Silver (Sapphire) – Brand entertainment and Contents Best Use / Integration of User-Generated Content
- Addy Awards: Judges Choice – Non –Traditional Campaign

#### **7.4 MOBINIL'S ALWAYS TOGETHER 2013**

- Dubai Lynx Awards: Grand Prix - Branded Content & Entertainment; Gold – Branded Content & Entertainment; Silver - Branded Content & Entertainment; Bronze - Film Craft
- Mena Digital Awards: Bronze – Best Integrated Media Campaign
- Mena Cristal Awards: Gold – 2014 PR Cristal Services; Silver (Sapphire) – Best use of Cultural Campaign; Bronze (Emerald) – Corporate Social Health Care 2014
- Mena EFFIE: Bronze – Best Youth Marketing Campaign

#### **7.5 KFC's ADD HOPE 2013**

- PRISM Awards: Gold – CSR PR Campaign Category; Gold – PR Campaign of the Year Category
- Global Festival of Media: Gold – Braves Category, Best Branded Entertainment
- Cannes Lions: Bronze – Media (Best Live Event/Stunt)
- Roger Garlick Awards: Grand Prix – Media
- IPRA (International Public Relations Awards): Gold – CSI Category
- London International Awards: Bronze – Non-Traditional Public Service/Welfare Category

#### **7.6 MOBINIL'S MOVE ON 2013**

- Annual Multimedia Awards: Gold.
- ADC: Gold; Silver; 2 x Shortlist.
- Webbys: Gold; Silver; 2 x Shortlist.
- Spotlight: Silver.
- One Show: Silver.
- Euro Effie: Bronze.
- New Media Awards: Shortlist.
- New York Festival: 6 x Shortlist.
- Cannes Lions: Shortlist.
- AME: Finalist (2014)

**7.7 VOLVO TRUCKS' LIVE TEST SERIES 2013****TÄVLING****NOMINERINGAR/KATEGORI****GULDÄGGET**

Digitalt/Live Test Series  
 Film/The Epic Split  
 Hantverk (Film/ljud)/The Epic Split  
 Integrerat/LIVE TEST SERIES INTEGRATED CAMPAIGN  
 Volvo Latsvagnar

**ADCNY (Art Directors  
 Club of New York)**

INT/WEBSITE/CAMPAIGN SITE: THE CHASE 360°  
 INT/ONLINE CONTENT/ORIGINAL WEB COMMERCIALS: THE  
 HOOK  
 INT/ONLINE CONTENT/ORIGINAL WEB COMMERCIALS: THE  
 TECHNICIAN  
 INT/ONLINE CONTENT/ORIGINAL WEB COMMERCIALS: THE  
 HAMSTER  
 INT/ONLINE CONTENT/NONBROADCAST MEDIA: THE EPIC  
 SPLIT  
 ADV/BROADCAST CRAFT/ART DIRECTION: THE EPIC SPLIT  
 ADVERTISING/BROADCAST CRAFT/DIRECTION: THE EPIC  
 SPLIT  
 ADV/BROADCAST CRAFT/CINEMATOGRAPHY: THE EPIC  
 SPLIT  
 INT/ONLINE CONTENT/ORIGINAL WEB COMMERCIALS: THE  
 EPIC SPLIT  
 INTERACTIVE, CRAFT, ART DIRECTION: THE EPIC SPLIT  
 MOTION/NONE/DIRECTION: THE EPIC SPLIT  
 INT/ONLINE CONTENT/NONBROADCAST MEDIA: LIVE TEST  
 SERIES  
 INT/ONLINE CONTENT/ORIGINAL WEB COMMERCIALS:  
 LIVE TEST SERIES  
 ADVERTISING/NON BROADCAST: THE EPIC SPLIT  
 ADVERTISING, INTEGRATED, INTEGRATED: LIVE TEST  
 SERIES

ADVERTISING  
INTERACTIVE  
LIVE TEST SERIES  
VOLVO TRUCKS  
FOLKE FILM

**ONE SHOW**

Interactive, Short Form/Single: THE HOOK  
Interactive, Short Form/Single: THE TECHNICIAN  
Interactive, Short Form/Single: THE HAMSTER  
Interactive, Short Form/Single: THE CHASE  
Interactive, Short Form/Single: THE EPIC SPLIT  
Integrated Branding, Campaign: Online: Live Test Series  
Integrated Campaign  
Film, Non-Broadcast: Online: The Epic Split  
Film, Video Craft: Direction: The Epic Split  
Integrated Branding: Consumer Campaign: Live Test Series  
Integrated Campaign  
Non-Broadcast: Online: The Hamster  
Non-Broadcast: Online: The Technician  
BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT, Online: Short-Form: The Epic Split  
BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT, Craft / Technique: Best Direction: The Epic Split  
BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT, Craft / Technique: Best Editing: The Chase  
The Epic Split  
Forsman & Bodenfors  
Volvo Trucks

**D&AD**

Digital Marketing / Online Branded Films: THE EPIC SPLIT  
TV & Cinema Advertising: THE EPIC SPLIT  
Integrated & Earned Media: Live Test Series Integrated Campaign  
Digital Marketing / Online Branded Films: THE HOOK  
Digital Marketing / Online Branded Films: Live Test Series



Digital Marketing / Online Branded Films: Live Test Series  
Digital Agency, Forsman & Bodenfors

Branded Entertainment, The Epic Split - Products & Services,  
**NYF (New York Festivals)** Automotive

Branded Entertainment, Live Test Series - Products & Services,  
Automotive

Branded Entertainment, The Epic Split - Craft, Cinematography  
Digital, The Epic Split - Viral

Digital, The Epic Split - Craft, Copywriting

Film, The Epic Split - Automotive

Film, The Epic Split - Automotive

Film, The Epic Split - Automotive

Film, Live Test Series - Automotive

Film, The Epic Split - Online, Use of medium

Film, Live Test Series - Online, Use of medium

Film, The Epic Split - Craft, Cinematography

Film, The Epic Split - Craft, Direction

Film, The Epic Split - Craft, Copywriting

Integrated, Live Test Series & The Chase 360°

Integrated, Live Test Series & The Chase 360°

Integrated, Live Test Series - Branded entertainment

Integrated, Live Test Series & The Chase 360°

Volvo Trucks - Global Brand of the Year 2014

**ANDY Awards**

Television: Live Test Series (Automotive)

Web Advertising: The Chase (Editing)

Web Advertising: The Epic Split (Best use of celebrity)

Web Advertising: The Epic Split (Direction)

Web Advertising: The Epic Split (Music - Best use of Existing)

Web Advertising: The Epic Split (Cinematography)

Web Film: The Epic Split (Automotive)

Interactive: The Technician (Automotive)

<b>Festival of Media Global</b>	<p>Best Content Creation Award: The Epic Split</p> <p>Best Content Creation Award: Live Test Series</p> <p>Best Digitally Integrated Campaign: Live Test Series + The Chase 360°</p> <p>Best Entertainment Platform: Live Test Series</p> <p>Best Event/Experiential Campaign: Live Test Series</p> <p>Best Use of Content: The Epic Split</p>
<b>AICP</b> (Association of Independent Commercial Producers)	<p>AICP SHOW, The Art &amp; Technique of the American Commercial</p> <p>Direction: The Epic Split</p> <p>Visual Style: The Epic Split</p> <p>Licensed Soundtrack or Arrangement: The Epic Split</p> <p>Advertising Excellence/ Single Commercial: The Epic Split</p> <p>AICP NEXT AWARDS</p> <p>NEXT Integrated Campaign: Live Test Series Integrated Campaign</p> <p>NEXT Viral/ Web Film: The Epic Split</p>
<b>EPICA 2013</b>	<p>TVC: Live Test Series</p> <p>TVC: Live Test Series</p> <p>INT: The Epic Split</p> <p>PR: Live Test Series</p> <p>TVC: The Epic Split</p> <p>INT: Live Test Series</p> <p>BC: The Chase 360</p> <p>INT: The Chase 360</p>
<b>EUROBEST 2013</b>	<p>Branded Content &amp; Entertainment: Live Test Series</p> <p>Branded Content &amp; Entertainment: Live Test Series</p> <p>Interactive: The Chase 360°</p> <p>Interactive: The Chase 360°</p> <p>Interactive: The Chase</p> <p>Interactive: The Chase</p> <p>Interactive: The Chase 360°</p>

Interactive: The Chase 360°

Interactive: The Hamster

Interactive: The Hook

### **Creative Review**

Film: The Epic Split

### **CRESTA**

The Epic Split, Television

The Epic Split, Craft Television

Live Test Series & The Chase 360°, Integrated Campaigns

The Epic Split, Branded Entertainment

Live Test Series, Television

The Technician, Television

### **Webby Awards**

The Epic Split, Branded Entertainment Short Form

The Epic Split, Branded Entertainment Short Form

The Epic Split, Viral Marketing

The Epic Split, Online Commercials

Live test series, Branded Content

### **Cannes Lions 2014**

"The epic split", FILM/Internet Film

"Live test series", CYBER/Engagement Platform

"Live test series integrated campaign", TITANIUM & INTEGRATED

"The epic split", FILM CRAFT/ Direction

"Live test series & The chase 360°", CYBER/Automotive Products & Services

"Live test series integrated campaign", CYBER/Integrated Multi-Platform Campaign

"The epic split", CYBER/Webisodes/Series

"Live test series", PR/Integrated Campaign led by PR

"Live test series", PROMO & ACTIVATION/Online Advertising in a Promotional Campaign

"Live test series", DIRECT/Cars & Automotive Services

"The epic split", FILM CRAFT/Script

"The epic split", FILM CRAFT/Use of Music

"The epic split", FILM CRAFT/Casting

"Live test series", MEDIA/Use of Branded Content & Sponsorship

"Live test series", MEDIA/Cars & Automotive Services

"The epic split", PR/Celebrity Endorsement

"The epic split", FILM CRAFT/Cinematography

"The chase 360°", CYBER/Use of Video

"The chase 360°", CYBER/Website

### **LIA (London International Awards)**

Live Test Series, Integration Award Notification

Live Test Series (Branded Content), TV/Cinema/Online Film Award Notification

The Epic Split (Direction), TV/Cinema/Online Film Award Notification

The Technician (Automotive), TV/Cinema/Online Film Award Notification

The Technician, The Hook, The Hamster, The Chase, The Epic Split (Campaign), TV/Cinema/Online Film Award Notification

The Epic Split (Cinematography), TV/Cinema/Online Film Award Notification

The Chase 360°, Digital Award Notification

### **Clio Awards**

Live Test Series, Content & Contact

The Epic Split, Film/Short form

The Epic Split, Film/Music-Licensed

The Epic Split, Film/Branded Entertainment & Content

Live Test Series, Brand Development/Public Relations

Live Test Series, Product Launch/Public Relations

The Epic Split, Direction, Film Technique

Live Test Series, Integrated Campaign, Branded Entertainment & Content

The Chase 360, Digital Social

The Hamster, Short form, Film

The Epic Split, Cinematography, Film Technique

Live Test Series, Integrated Campaign, Integrated

<b>Shark Awards</b>	<p>The Epic Split, Automotive, Film</p> <p>The Epic Split, Automotive, Film</p> <p>The Epic Split, Best casting, Film Craft</p> <p>The Epic Split, Best direction, Film Craft</p> <p>The Epic Split, Best script, Film Craft</p> <p>The Epic Split, Best use of music, Film Craft</p> <p>The Chase 360, Interactive online experience, Digital</p> <p>The Chase 360, Websites, Digital</p> <p>The Chase 360, Use of video content, Digital Craft</p> <p>Live Test Series, Integrated</p> <p>The Chase, Automotive, Film</p> <p>The Epic Split, Best cinematography, Film Craft</p>
<b>Ad Stars</b>	<p>THE CHASE 360, Film</p>
<b>Campaign Big Awards</b>	<p>The Epic Split, Film, Automotive</p> <p>Live Test Series, Film Campaign, Automotive</p> <p>The Epic Split, Interactive, Automotive</p> <p>Live Test Series, Interactive Campaign, Automotive</p> <p>Live Test Series Integrated Campaign, Multimedia Campaign, Automotive</p>
<b>EUROBEST 2014</b>	<p>THE EPIC SPLIT, Branded Content &amp; Entertainment, FICTION: SERIES OR FILM</p> <p>THE EPIC SPLIT, Film Craft, DIRECTION</p> <p>THE EPIC SPLIT, Film Craft, CINEMATOGRAPHY</p> <p>THE EPIC SPLIT, Film Craft, SCRIPT</p> <p>THE EPIC SPLIT, Film Craft, USE OF MUSIC</p> <p>THE EPIC SPLIT, Film, INTERNET FILM</p>
<b>Epica 2014</b>	<p>Casino, Film, Public Interest</p>
<b>Cannes Lions 2015</b>	<p>Live Test Series, Creative Effectiveness</p>

**Eurobest 2015**

Live Test Series, Creative Effectiveness

**7.8 CAPE TOWN TOURISM'S SEND YOUR FACEBOOK PROFILE TO CAPE TOWN 2013**

- Cannes Lions: Gold - Branded Content & Entertainment; Shortlist – Cyber; Shortlist: Direct
- Creative Circle: Ad of the Year - Digital
- Loerie Awards (South African advertising awards) – Best Digital Campaign
- Clio Awards: Shortlist – Digital
- Assegai: Gold - Multiple Channel Campaign Award; Silver - Branded Content
- Bookmark Awards: Gold - Best Social Media Campaign; Silver - Branded Content
- Best of Ogilvy
- WPPed Cream - Integrated Winner
- Bestadsontv - Best Interactive
- SMITTY Awards - Best Overall Use of Social Media

**7.9 SPCA & MINI'S DRIVING DOGS 2014**

- Cannes Lions: Gold – Direct – Charities; Silver – Direct – Social Media & Viral Marketing; Silver – PR – Charity/Not For Profit; Silver – Promo Activation – Best Use of Experiential; Silver – Promo Activation – Charities; Bronze – Cyber – Viral marketing; Bronze – Outdoor – Stunts & Live Advertising; Bronze – PR – Best Integrated Campaign led by PR; Shortlist – Branded Content – Best Use of Experiential Events; Shortlist – Cyber – Video; Shortlist – Grand Prix for Good; Shortlist – Titanium/Integrated
- D&AD: In Book – Integrated – Earned Media; In Book – Outdoor – Ambient; In Book – Digital – Integrated Campaigns; In Book – Branding – Experience and Environments
- The One Show: Gold – Integrated Consumer Campaign; Gold – Custom Content Entertainment; Silver – Short Form Entertainment; Finalist – Brand Transformation; Finalist – Collateral Promotional Items
- Clio Awards: Gold – Content & Contact; Gold – PR Public Service & Charity; Bronze – Direct – Mixed Media
- New York Festival - Gold – Digital Viral Video; Silver – Public Service Collateral/Direct Marketing; Bronze – Branded Entertainment; Bronze – Creative Marketing Effectiveness; Shortlist – Best Use of Low Budget

- Webby Awards: Honoree – Integrated Campaigns
- Spikes Asia: Grand Prix – PR – Best Use of Live Events; Gold – PR – Best Use of Media Relations; Gold – Digital – Community Applications; Gold – Outdoor – Stunts & Live Advertising; Gold – Branded Content – Best Integrated; Bronze – Direct – Best Digital Platforms; Shortlist – Integrated; Shortlist – PR – Best Integrated Led by PR
- London International Awards: Gold – Digital – Public Service; Gold – Non-Traditional Branded Content
- AWARD (Australian Writers & Art Directors): Gold – Branded Content – Campaign; Gold – Direct – Integrated Solutions; Gold – Digital – Online Shared Film; Silver – Integrated Campaign; Silver – Integrated Campaign led by PR; Silver – Promo & Experiential – Best Use; Silver – Promo & Experiential – Sponsorship; Silver – Media – Integrated Campaign; Silver – Digital – Social Media
- John Caples Direct Marketing Awards: Best In Show; Gold – Integrated Campaign; Silver – Promo & Activation
- Adstars: Grand Prix – Public Service Advertising; Gold – Branded Content; Gold – Integrated; Gold – Outdoor; Gold – Promotion
- Festival of Media Global Awards: Campaign of the Year; Gold – Best Use of Content; Highly Commended – Best Communications Strategy; Finalist – Best Experiential/Event; Finalist – Public Service
- Festival of Media Asia Pacific Awards; Finalist – Best Communications Strategy; Finalist – Best Event or Experiential Campaign; Finalist – Best Use of Content; Finalist – The Public Service Award
- PR Week Awards Asia: Winner – Campaign of the Year; Winner – Promotional Activity of the Year; Winner – Non-Profit Campaign of the Year; Certificate of Excellence – Best Use of Social in PR
- Ad Age Creativity Award Report
  - #5 Most Awarded Direct Marketing Campaign in the World
  - #6 Most Awarded Public Relations Campaign in the World
- AXIS Awards: Grand Axis – Best In Show; Grand Prix – Direct/PR/Experiential; Gold – Integrated Axis; Gold – Guerrilla Advertising; Gold – Direct Campaign; Gold – PR/Experiential Campaign; Gold – Branded Content; Gold – Viral; Gold – Long Form Content; Silver – TV Campaign
- CAANZ Media Awards: Gold – Earned or Owned Media; Gold – Best Use Of Branded Content; Finalist – Consumer Durables; Finalist – Event/Activation/Sponsorship;

Finalist – Best Smart Media; Finalist – Communication Strategy; Finalist – Most Effective

- PRINZ Public Relations Awards: Gold – Marketing Communications – PR Led
- Yahoo! NZ Digital Strategy Award: Quarter 4 2012/2013 Winner; Overall 2012/2013 Winner

#### **7.10 COCA COLA'S THIRST DOLBY SOUND EXPERIENCE 2015**

- Cannes Lions: Gold – Branded Content & Entertainment
- The Wave (Latin America's Advertising Festival): Grand Prix.



## APPENDIX 8

### CAMPAIGN REVIEWS AND RESULTS

#### 8.1 Mattel's Hot Wheels: Hot Wheels For Real

This campaign saw the brand Hot Wheels step away from traditional advertising and demonstrate the brand attributes through a story. The story is part fiction using a heroic stunt veteran known as "The Head" (who could not complete a famous Hot Wheels stunt in the past) comes back in 2012 to challenge a new team of stunt drivers to demonstrate impossible tasks and stunts using Hot Wheels products such as cars, monster trucks and motorbikes from Hot Wheels toy collection of toys by bringing them to life in an action packed story that ran over 11 episodes and distributed to 204 countries.

Whilst the fictional story ran for kids, real live, documented testing began on a stunt that would be truly bring the product known as the "Double Dare Snare" story racing loop to life with a live stunt demonstration. A media deal was struck with popular sporting channels and live extreme sports event "The X-Games" the Hot Wheels teams were played up against each other in the run up to the event and the live event on social media and then live coverage demonstrated a fictional brand narrative coming to life on live television and breaking a world record. A second world record stunt was performed under the guidance of "the head" and the introduction of a famous world-racing driver showing the team pull a famous corkscrew jump which set off another World Record.

Hot Wheels transformed its brand from been a toy brand for kids to an entertainment brand with a wider audience, more engagement and stepping away from traditional advertising and instead worked on a campaign that brought the actual products to life and allowed the audience to indulge in the action packed stunts bringing in a more adult audience.

**Results:**

- 10 million views of the stunt
- 1.7 billion impressions in 48 hours
- The world record film had 5 million views
- Award by Google as one of the top pieces of virtual marketing for 2012
- 11 episodes, 2 world records, 204 countries
- 67 million views
- 3 billion media impressions

Source: Mistress, 2013

**8.2 Toshiba & Intel: The Beauty Inside**

The Beauty Inside - Toshiba dramatised Intel being “the beauty inside”. The story showed the protagonist (Alex) waking up in a different body every day, yet retaining “the beauty inside” (the metaphor for Intel inside a Toshiba computer). The story took an unfortunate turn in events when the protagonist fell in love one day, trying to convince the object of his affection that he is still the same person. The challenge was simple: how can he have a relationship when he is always different on the outside? The Toshiba Ultrabook laptop was a key instrument throughout as it captured the “body” in which the protagonist was every day (to keep record). The computer was also carried with the protagonist wherever he went. The target audience was involved in the making of the 6-part movie as it is their faces and acting that was captured and used in the film.”

The interactive campaign allowed people to become a part of the story, resulting in a personal and relatable story. Sharing information online and being able to capture it via a digital diary proves that the product has a meaningful use and demonstrates how it creates interaction. A modern product that is suitable for capturing modern digital needs with a personal and meaningful connection.

**Results:**

- 70 million views / 26 million interactions
- 97% approval on YouTube

- 66% increase in brand perception for Intel and 40% for Toshiba and 300% sales increase total.
- Once the project concluded, Alex had more than one hundred faces combined from video and picture entries.

Source: Abbott, Hindmarsh & Robinson, 2014

### **8.3 The Village Voice: New York Writes Itself**

The Village Voice campaign was created with the aim to prove their position as the real, uncensored voice of New York as well as re-establishing the brand as the go-to source of Arts and Culture. The mission was to capture the raw, entertaining, uncensored voices of New York through curated stories told by New Yorkers. New York Writes Itself ([newyorkwritesitself.com](http://newyorkwritesitself.com)) provided a simple online platform for New Yorkers to write and share moments that they experienced which made a constant “script” online of collective moments that were captured.

Taking it one step further and tying in the campaign with the arts and cultural community, the curated digital stories were brought to life by working with the best letter press artists, giving words online a more visual representation through an art exhibition transforming the stories into “voices”. The popular crowd sourced content pieces were so successful they now have a monthly feature in the Village voice Newspaper, a success off Broadway play: “8 Million Protagonists”, and a comedy show.

The campaign ensured storytelling could be transformed into a visual and verbal production both on and offline, provoking people’s imaginations and giving a unique, unpolished look at New York City. The submissions online provide a unique way for people to share content and be a part of a narrative whilst the art exhibition and play create different dimensions to the stories and bring them to life – in a world of short bursts of information this campaign ensured a long lived script and story that forms a part of daily lives ensuring the Village Voice is the go to hub of local information.

**Results:**

- 24 million media impressions
- 52 articles editorial articles outside the Village Voice
- Over 2 million unique visits unique visits to the site
- 9 minutes (time spent per visitor on the site)
- 51 media impressions (off Broadway show)
- 84 editorial articles (off Broadway show)
- 20% increase in traffic to the villagevoice.com (off Broadway show)

Source: Leo Burnett *New York*, 2012

**8.4 Mobinil: Always Together**

Mobinil is the first telecom operator in Egypt and its mission is “To enrich peoples’ lives” and bring Egyptians closer together. The campaign worked off the newly overthrown Egyptian regime and needed to unite people after the success of the revolution and remind them what it means to stand together.

The campaign used music to reach out and show strength in diversity. Local underground Egyptian musicians were invited to take part in an underground song. Egypt has diverse cultural traditions that needed to be unified. Months of preparation resulted in a unified song “Always Together” which was launched on YouTube, attracted a large media following and engaged political parties who praised the song. The song became so popular it was made into spoofs, played at important occasions such as weddings, graduations and parties, which promote unity and positive experiences.

Mobinil reminded Egyptians that it was a brand for the people and believed in unity through diversity after the country was subjected to major political turmoil. The result was a unified front with a sense of pride that the song created almost making it a cultural anthem.

**Results:**

- 3,304,454 views on YouTube on the launch day - within a few days 8 million views meant the video topped popstars

- 1 million ringtones and call tones of the song downloaded
- Provided Mobinil with free media airing – equivalent to \$680k

Source: Leo Burnett *Cairo*, 2013

### **8.5 KFC: Journey of Hope**

The KFC Journey of Hope uses a local South African extreme athlete to tell a story. The story appears to start with a tone that will show the athlete doing what he does best; extreme sports, but this time there is a twist, he will be cycling across South Africa and starving himself. The athlete aims to document and create awareness around a major problem: the crippling effects of hunger on South Africa's children. A six week cross country journey sets the tone for the athlete who will have to survive on half the calories his body needed. The journey he takes spells out a powerful word "Hope" serving as a reminder that a solution for child hunger does exist. This honest, documentary style story allows people to interact with the athlete and creates empathy that drives action.

People can help by donating R2 through an in-store KFC initiative as part of their CSI. One point two million people watched the extreme athlete demonstrate the struggle of what happens to the human body when starving or fed. Through his travels he visits five provinces and eats what the children at various charities ate. Interactive campaign tweets could provide him with more calories but he chooses to follow strictly what the children ate to highlight their plight. Athlete is happy when he eats just one simple meal in a day. The use of the athlete in the campaign who is assumed to be "only strong" helps facilitate the reality that starvation has no matter who the person is and how internally it is much harder for children and their development.

The campaign provided insight into a struggle many take for granted or are subconsciously aware of and might not know how to help. Educating through awareness and documenting the journey of the athlete as well as seeing, learning and understand what children do eat (one meal) and the effects that one meal has (a positive effect) means that people are driven to create action instead of just focusing on the devastating effects of starvation, a positive, hopeful and seemingly small contribution provides a solution that has a huge impact allowing people to truly engage and participate in creating active change on a long term journey of hope.

Results:

- The Journey of Hope generated R7m in earned media
- An ROI of 1:34
- Donations peaked at R12m for the year – which means 6m meals in the next year (2012)

Source: Organ, 2012

### **8.6 Deutsche Telekom: Move On**

Deutsche Telekom created a pan European mobile Internet campaign to prove that the brand could deliver on its promise “Life is for sharing” is more than a claim. “Move On” is the first road movie developed in cooperation with users. With a famous actor and director the Telecoms Company calls on users from 11 countries to help influence the movie.

A campaign with several different elements is created to interact with users. The activation offers a mobile app and campaign platform where users can choose from hundreds of opportunities to take part in the film. Every aspect requires selection from props, characters and even extra’s in order to build the film. Traditional adverts also open up the advert for product communication. Ten thousand contributions to the film are made from 11 countries. A final selection is made from winning entries and the film crew starts filming across Europe. At the same time fans can watch the behind the scenes making of a large-scale movie/shoot. Six weeks, 8,000 km’s and 400 winning entries; “Move on” is released online in 8 episodes and screened as a full-length movie.

Move On captivated film fanatics and demonstrated how a brand promise can be delivered through its mobile internet products and the total engagement of using a top actor and director to truly immerse themselves in a film entirely created by users and innovatively capturing the promise that “life is for sharing” in its most honest form.

Results:

- 9,480 applications were made to be part of the movie
- From this, 400 people or their submissions became part of the movie

- Prior to the release of the feature film, the Move On website has generated 5,5 million page impressions
- Over 1 million people watch the whole film
- Over 3 million watch all of the content
- Film gains a slot on German TV's Christmas program
- Massive media coverage throughout campaign

Source: MediaCom, 2012

### **8.7 Volvo Trucks: Live Test Series**

In a series of different scenarios Volvo puts five new truck models to the test so that they can demonstrate new features, which prove to be relevant to the core target group: truck drivers. Each series highlights a new Volvo truck feature in a unique and unexpected way. The first showing the CEO of Volvo Trucks to stand on top of a truck dangling high over the ocean from a hook from the new Volvo FMX to dramatise its robustness. The second was to get a Volvo Trucks technician to have a truck drive over only his head sticking from the ground to dramatise its 300mm ground clearance. The third: get a hamster to steer a Volvo truck from the bottom of a quarry to the top with only a tempting carrot to guide his movement in order to dramatise the truck's precision steering. The fourth test: Volvo truck to be chased by bulls alongside runners as it proceeds through the narrow Pamplona streets (used for the annual running of the bulls in Spain) to demonstrate its manoeuvrability. This was turned into an interactive viewing experience with users invited to tune into 28 cameras to watch the event unfold live for different angles and behind the scene footage.

With the live tests taking place, adverts appeared digitally and in the *Trucking Press Magazine* which also discusses the new features and in-depth interviews the engineers. Each test aimed to increase the fan base in order to build up for the grand finale; an advert with Jeanne Claude van Damme (famous action hero actor) to do the splits between two Volvo trucks reversing to demonstrate precision.

The campaign helped familiarise stakeholders with the features of the Volvo Trucks and provided a sense of honest security and by demonstrating the actual testing in innovative ways showed the brand is thinking deeper about its target audience. The overall essence of the brand is reiterated by demonstrating safety and the association is of an approachable nature.

**Results:**

- More than 100 million views on YouTube (final advert)
- 8 million shares online
- Over 20 000 editorials
- Thousands of spoof views adding an extra 50 million views
- All in all generating an earned media value of \$170m
- The Volvo Trucks fan base grew on YouTube by 1,870%, 1,375% on Facebook
- 46% increase in consideration among truck buyers

Source: Lane, 2014

**8.8 Cape Town Tourism: Send Your Facebook Profile to Cape Town**

Cape Town Tourism's *Send your Facebook Profile to Cape Town* campaign looks at Cape Town through a digital campaign that aims to show tourists the unexpected side of Cape Town, small communities and attractions that cannot be found on a map or traditionally online but have a lot to offer and who could benefit from tourists dollars and pounds.

Instead of sending people to these places in the traditional sense, the campaign sends the next best thing to you in "physical form" it sends your Facebook profile. Those who signed up to the campaign could tailor a one of a kind five day holiday in Cape Town and watch the digital journey unfold as if there were travelling there in person. Upon the "Facebook profile" arriving in Cape Town they were provided with personalised content on their Facebook page daily thus creating an experience as if they were really there. The campaign shot 150 Point-of-View videos and provided 400 authentic first person status updates. The Facebook profile took on a life like persona in a digital space, which meant participants could experience something new and exciting daily as opposed to the traditional side of Cape Town.

Taking it beyond digital, participants received actual physical gifts from the places they visited. A few lucky winners took it a step further by getting the opportunity to visit Cape Town and experience their specially tailored holiday first hand.

The campaign provided participants with a unique digital experience that showed a non-traditional side of Cape Town and created a visual experience based on a new adventure that



they could create. With so much choice for travel now days, learning more about a place and what it offers, means the campaign showed unique places and provided new tourism trade in smaller communities which ultimately has a knock-on effect that sees the positives of increased tourism.

#### Results:

- Over 350k people engaged
- Over 580k impressions
- Over 41k monthly visits
- Over 29k unique visitors
- Over R350k worth of PR
- Table Mountain received its highest 83 years
- Tourist numbers up by 4% and bookings for the following year up by 118%

Source: Smith, 2012

### **8.9 SPCA & MINI: Driving Dogs**

Driving Dogs demonstrated how perception could be changed. Rescue dogs at the SPCA New Zealand are perceived as damaged goods. The campaign aims to highlight the animals in a unique way – ultimately how smart they can be by driving a Mini car on live TV. The campaign focuses on three different rescue dogs that go through eight weeks of intensive training with a dog trainer and a customised mini car to help them learn how to drive. A week before the live broadcast news stations broke the news posing the question “Can you teach a dog to drive?” The campaign was tracked on Facebook and Twitter allowing fans to follow the progress of the three dogs. The live broadcast demonstrated the dogs each having a turn to drive the custom Mini around a racetrack. The three dogs all found happy homes as well as all the dogs at the Auckland SPCA.

The objective of the campaign successfully changes the perception of how rescue dogs are viewed “as damaged goods” and portrays them in a positive and uplifting light – people were educated on the dog’s ability and what time, effort and training can create for a dog and an organisation like SPCA. Mini plays a subtle, but vital role in the ad by working with a fellow

brand (SPCA) in an unconventional way and showing its more emotive side by tailoring and customizing a car to do more than create driving pleasure but rather to create positive change.

Results:

- Exposed to over one billion people worldwide
- News media coverage in over 70 countries
- Over 100 million reached on Twitter and over 10m YouTube views
- 493 media articles generated during the campaign
- Earned exposure NZ \$15m (spent NZ \$30k)
- 590% increase in NZ adoption interests and increased interest around the world including US & UK

Source: Cream, 2012

### **8.10 Coca Cola: Thirst: A Dolby Sound Experience**

This campaign saw the collaboration of two huge brands: Coca Cola and Dolby. Dolby is known for its revolutionary sound in movies trailers that truly elects an experience. In order to celebrate Coca Cola's 100-year anniversary Dolby wanted to bring the pleasure involved in drinking a Coca Cola to the people through a sensory experience. The star in the "movie trailer" is a simplistic and iconic contour Coke bottle and the journey is of a tradition that never changes and is cemented within the brand – pouring an ice cold Coca Cola. Combined with the visual of the perfect Coca Cola moment that creates suspense and interest, the sound is magnified with the latest Dolby technology to create a combined experience. The experience takes a visual turn and puts viewers in the sensory experience and sensation of being "inside" the Coke bottle and the short but satisfying journey it takes to being poured from its iconic bottle to its final fizzy moment.

Two iconic brands (Coca Cola and Dolby) gave movie goers an experience that forms a reminder and sensory explosion that exciting viewers and gave them a memory jolt of how a Coca Cola being poured sounds; looked and virtually felt by giving viewers a chance to watch a simplistic action (drinking Coke) be translated in a sensory and intrinsic experience. Trailer Launched in over 1,135 cinemas across Brazil. Source: Participant Ricardo John, 2016.

## **APPENDIX 9**

### **VISUAL ACCOUNT OF PARTICIPANTS**

Note: Job description as per date of interview

# Participant 1

Jaime Robinson  
Vice President &  
Executive Creative Director  
**Pereira & O'Dell San Francisco**



*Intel &  
Toshiba*  
**The  
Beauty  
Inside**

Case study:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qyMQIMeSCVY>

## Participant 2

Damien Eley

Founding Partner & Creative Director

Mistress Los Angeles



*Mattel  
Hot  
Wheels  
for Real*



Case study:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a\\_CsgNUnYOW](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_CsgNUnYOW)

## Participant 3

Kieran Antill

Managing Partner &  
Executive Creative Director

Leo Burnett New York



*The  
Village  
Voice*  
**New  
York  
Writes  
Itself**



Case study:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXq0VdKirJA>



# Participant 4

Ricardo John

Chief Creative Officer

J. Walter Thompson Sao Paulo



*Coca Cola*  
**Coke**  
**Thirst**  
**Sound**  
**Experience**  
*by Dolby*

Case study:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBWoV\\_voSrM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBWoV_voSrM)

# Participant 5

Björn Engström

Creative Director & Senior Partner

Forsman & Bodenfors Gothenburg



*Volvo  
Trucks*  
**Live Test  
Series**

Case study:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dMiKvLbYPPE>



# Participant 6

Annika Viberud

Director Strategic Brand &  
Marketing Communications

**Volvo Trucks**



*Volvo  
Trucks*  
**Live Test  
Series**

Case study:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dMiKvLbYPPE>

# Participant 7

Dr Gordon Euchler  
Strategic Planning Director  
**DDB Tribal Berlin**

*Deutsche  
Telecom  
Move On*



Case study:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h tn HaRV2as>

## Participant 8

James Mok

Executive Creative Director Asia-Pacific

**Foote, Cone and Belding Auckland**



Case study:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4pD3AGjmLww>

# Participant 9

Amr Darwish  
Managing Director  
Leo Burnett Cairo



**DAYMAN MAABAAD / ALWAYS TOGETHER**

AT A TIME OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UNREST, EGYPTIANS WERE STANDING OPPOSITE ONE ANOTHER.

WE DESPERATELY NEEDED TO UNITE FOR THE SAKE OF EGYPT. WE FELT A RESPONSIBILITY TO REMIND THEM OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE TOGETHER.

WE INVITED LOCAL UNDERGROUND TALENTS FROM ALL OVER EGYPT TO PARTICIPATE IN AN EPIC SONG.

always together mobinil



والسوق بلطغان

ONLINE



OUTDOOR



PRINT



*Mobinil*  
**Always  
Together**

Case study:  
<https://www.coloribus.com/adsarchive/casestudy/mobinil-dayman-maabaad-always-together-16876505/>



# Participant 10

Lauren McInnes  
Group Account Director  
Ogilvy Johannesburg



*KFC*  
**Journey of  
Hope**

Case study:  
[https://www.youtube.com/  
watch?v=d-S7SuxfeOg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-S7SuxfeOg)

# Participant 11

Irene Steyger

Senior Copywriter

Ogilvy Johannesburg



**KFC**  
**Journey of**  
**Hope**

Case study:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-S7SuxfeOg>

# Participant 12

Lauren Turnbull  
Senior Brand Manager  
CSI & Sponsorships, KFC



*KFC*  
**Journey of  
Hope**

Case study:  
[https://www.youtube.com/  
watch?v=d-S7SuxfeOg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-S7SuxfeOg)

# Participant 13

Dean Paradise  
Creative Group Head  
Ogilvy Cape Town



*Cape Town  
Tourism*  
**Send Your  
Facebook  
Profile to  
Cape Town**

Case study:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hp7fnKqWxc0>



# Participant 14

Matthew Pullen  
Senior Art Director  
Ogilvy Cape Town



*Cape Town  
Tourism*  
**Send Your  
Facebook  
Profile to  
Cape Town**

Case study:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hp7fnKqWxc0>

## Participant 15

Aste Gutiérrez

Creative Director

**Fred & Farid's Shanghai**

Gutiérrez has won at almost all international advertising award shows including a Cannes Grand Prix; D&AD Yellow + White Pencil; and Grand Clio. Many of his wins include branded entertainment-based work.



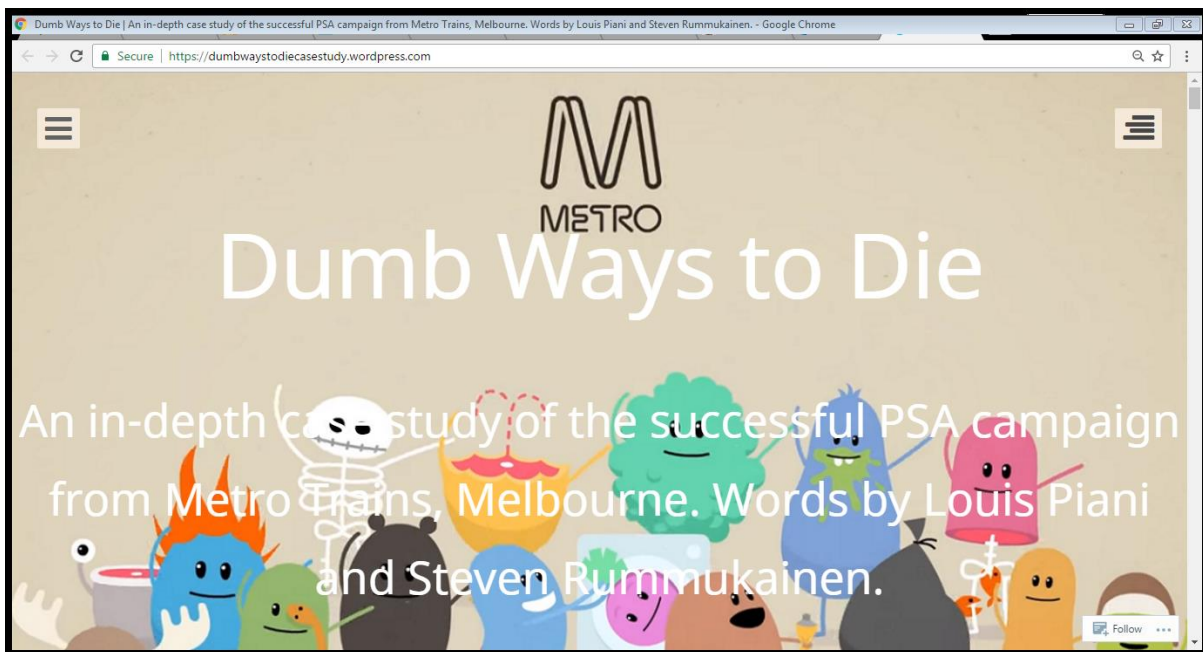
Referred  
by  
James  
Mok

## APPENDIX 10

### METRO TRAINS MELBOURNE'S DUMB WAYS TO DIE CASE WRITE-UP

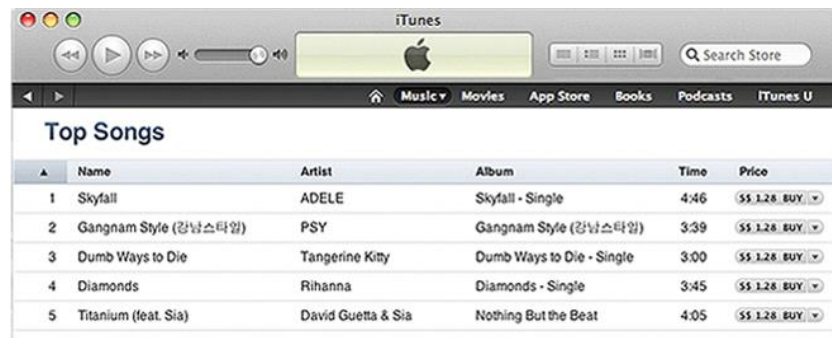
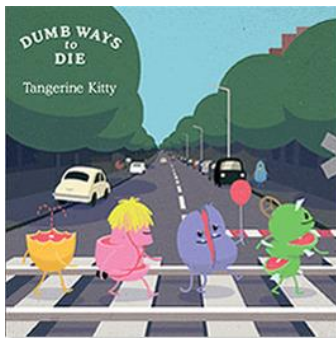
Published: 24 February 2016

By: Piani, L. & Rummukkainen, S.



#### PROJECT OVERVIEW

Dumb Ways to Die initially began as a simple, light-hearted song to raise awareness for public train safety. The concept was to make train hazards a 'dumb way to die', putting a comedic spin on safety to better target a younger audience. Within a week, the video reached over 20 million views on YouTube and gained national news coverage. The song soon became available on iTunes, where it consistently reached top billboard charts in major countries.



A dedicated Tumblr page also accompanied the campaign which pushed the PSA to go viral. It became the Internet's most shared video in 2012. Radio advertising also played a role in spreading the message, which was so successful radio stations started playing the song for free. As the song gained so much attention and momentum, the PSA was further expanded to include train station/public posters and billboards, a children's book and a website where people could 'make the pledge' to be safe around train stations.

Nearly all aspects of the campaign pushed people towards the website where they could push the button and make the pledge to train safety. This was implemented to try and actively change people's behaviour, rather than stop at a public message. The campaign also included user participation through a smart phone app.

The campaign was wildly successful. Various covers were produced by different artists and the song was used in school as an effective method for teaching safety. But more importantly, following the campaign, Metro Trains found a 21% reduction in train station incidents (Brand News, 2013). While it is hard to attribute this result directly to the campaign, it is a positive statistic that does help argue that the campaign has been effective.

## STORYTELLING

In recent years, many digital and advertising experts have debated the question of how to create a truly great viral campaign. A great part of a successful campaign is the story it tells, and the method/s used to communicate this narrative. Often campaigns can fall short due to

a weak, cliché or overused narrative. Dumb Ways to Die countered this by releasing shareable content that was cute, funny and most importantly, had entertainment value.



The first step for McCann Melbourne and Metro Trains was to produce and record a music video entitled 'Dumb Ways To Die'. The video featured a cute song with morbidly 'funny' cartoon characters dying in ridiculous ways. It ended with a reference to the main point: railway safety. Therefore, the narrative effectively is that there are many 'dumb', easily avoidable ways to die, and being hit by a train is one of these.

Following this, McCann Melbourne continued to release additional content on multiple platforms (which is explained in more detail in the next section). Each separate platform told the same story and had the same characters, while creating their own individual charm by using the strengths of their respective platform. The narrative is intriguing due to the way it deals with the usually sombre topic of death. It presents it in a light hearted, comedic manner, making one laugh at the hilarity of all the different 'dumb ways to die'. Certainly, traditional



public safety announcement models have all too often focused on shocking the viewers, and over time this has become predictable to the point where many people would simply ignore it. In stark contrast, *Dumb Ways to Die* tells the story in a much more entertaining, light hearted way, yet still communicating the same message of train safety. This is both unique and original, and also makes it more 'shareable' due to its entertainment value.

## **PLATFORMS**

As mentioned earlier, *Dumb Ways to Die* utilised various platforms to great effect. Much of its success can be attributed to the fact that each platform has been used to their maximum potential. Let's explore some of the ways McCann Melbourne and Metro Trains achieved this.

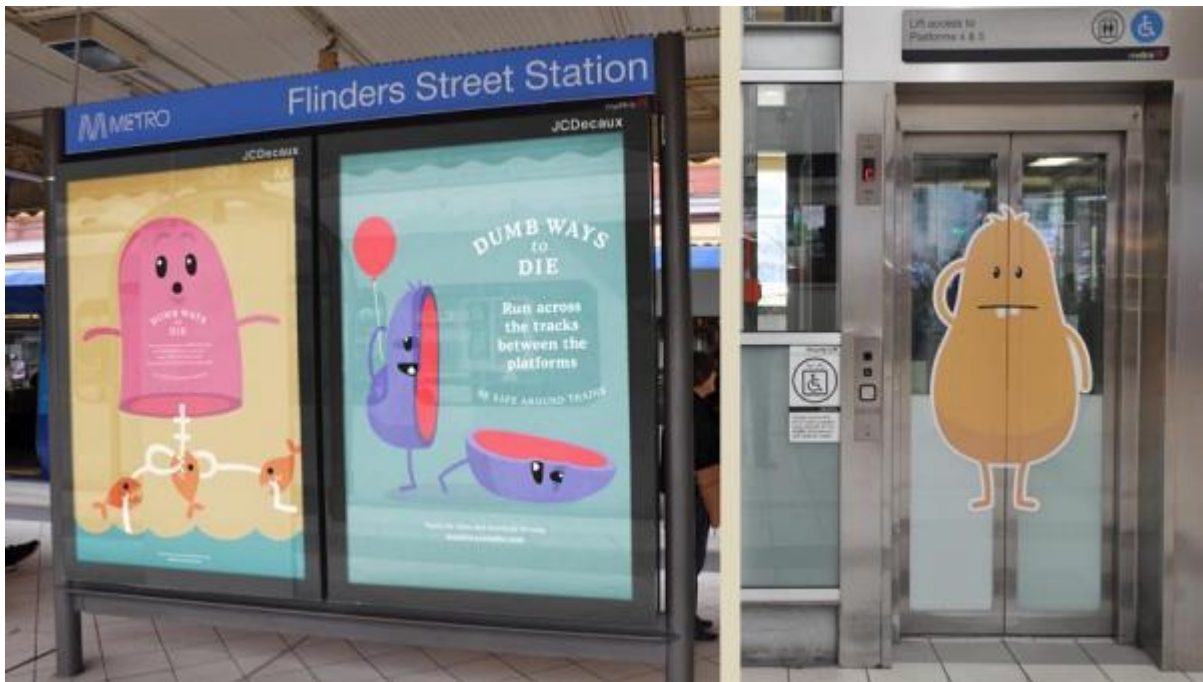
The release of the original *Dumb Ways to Die* song was carefully planned to maximise the impact that particular medium could have. The song was upbeat and catchy, with comedic lyrics that add humour without forgetting the message behind the song. In addition, the music video is both entertaining and engaging to watch, with funny cartoon characters and bright, colourful animations. The culmination of all this results in a well polished piece that is both engaging to watch as a video – such as on YouTube, where it has enjoyed great success with 123+ million views (*DumbWays2Die*, 2012) – and is pleasurable to listen to as a song.

As mentioned earlier, the song tells a story. This story has been adapted perfectly into a smart phone game. The *Dumb Ways to Die* smart phone game allows users to try and save the cartoon characters from their 'dumb deaths', increasing the difficulty as the user keeps playing. Once their three lives have expired, the game is over and can be played again to try and reach a new high score. The game is made very well, engaging the viewer by getting them to tap, swipe and rub the screen – or even blow into the microphone! All the while, the game is still telling the same story – to be safe around trains and avoid an easily preventable death or injury.



The Tumblr page also allows the audience to interact with the campaign, as many Tumblr users enjoy reblogging and sharing posts. Like the smart phone game, this allows consumers to create and enjoy their own experience with Dumb Ways to Die.

Finally, the children's story book and posters communicate the same message to their respective audiences. This is one of Dumb Ways to Die's biggest strengths as a public awareness campaign; the fact that so many audiences can all receive the same message. The cherry on the top is the fact that every platform encourages the viewer to visit the Metro Trains website and 'take the pledge'. The pledge is a declaration that one makes to be safe around trains.



## TARGET AUDIENCE

Clearly, the campaign was designed to target as wide a range of people as possible. Traditionally, safety announcements are quite grim and shocking, to instill some amount of fear and caution in the public. However, this PSA took a completely different route and created a humorous, friendly campaign so the message was not lost on a younger generation.



With the campaign's use of Tumblr pages, YouTube videos, smart phone games and children's books, the message was able to reach a much younger generation in a significantly more engaging way than other traditional PSA's.

Smart phone usage has grown massively in recent years and ensuring media works across smaller screens is essential today. Smart phones are typically used by the younger generation of adults, so it is important to have effective media on these devices to better gain the attention of the younger demographic. To tackle this, Dumb Ways to Die created its own smart phone game, which also gave users prompts to 'make the pledge'.

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### **Smartphone Ownership Highest Among Young Adults, Those With High Income/Education Levels**

*% of U.S. adults in each group who own  
a smartphone*

<b>All adults</b>	<b>64%</b>
Male	66
Female	63
18-29	85
30-49	79
50-64	54
65+	27
White, non-Hispanic	61
Black, non-Hispanic	70
Hispanic	71
HS grad or less	52
Some college	69
College+	78
Less than \$30,000/yr	50
\$30,000-\$49,999	71
\$50,000-\$74,999	72
\$75,000 or more	84
Urban	68
Suburban	66
Rural	52

Combined analysis of Pew Research Center surveys conducted December 4-7 and 18-21, 2014.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**

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The campaigns' song was also made available on iTunes, further strengthening its place on smart phone devices.

In the table above, this particular study concludes that smart phone ownership is actually dominated by young adults. 85% of 18-29 year olds in the US owned a smartphone at the time of the survey. This reinforces the idea that in order to target a young generation, smart phone compatibility is essential.

Dumb Ways to Die also had (and still has) an accompanying Tumblr page where users were able to like and share various images depicting the cartoon characters dying in hilarious ways. This strategy helped incorporate a more 'instant' type of audience, where users can simply view an image and immediately be involved with the campaign. Posting on Tumblr also helped reach its target demographic much easier, as many young people use Tumblr frequently and are inclined to reblog (share) material they like, helping spread the campaign.

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### Demographics of Tumblr

*Among internet users, the % who use Tumblr*

	Internet users
Total	10%
Men	10
Women	11
White, Non-Hispanic	9
Black, Non-Hispanic (n=94)	15
Hispanic (n=99)	15
18-29	20
30-49	11
50-64	5
65+	2
High school grad or less	10
Some college	13
College+	9
Less than \$30,000/yr	16
\$30,000-\$49,999	8
\$50,000-\$74,999 (n=98)	4
\$75,000+	11
Urban	16
Suburban	8
Rural	3

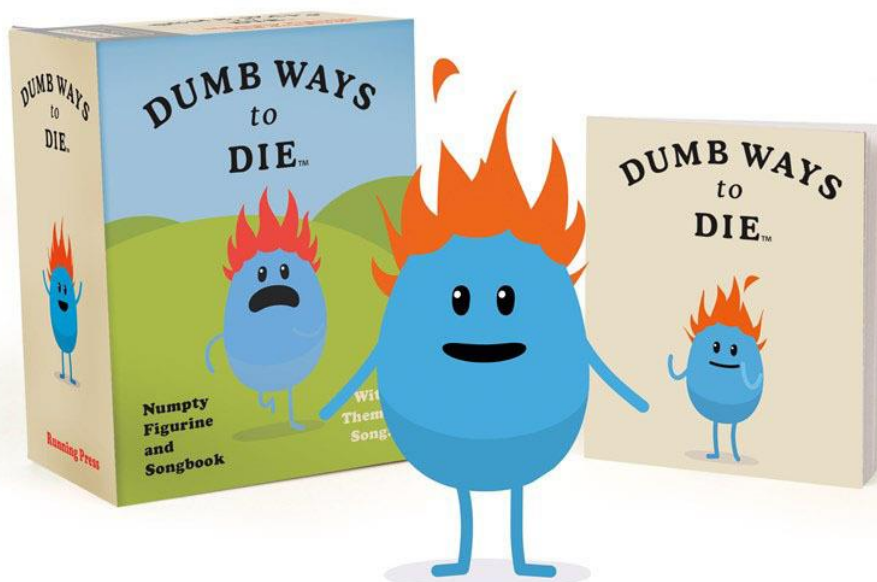
Source: Pew Research Center, March 17-April 12, 2015.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

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As can be seen in another study from PEW Research Center, the 18-29 demographic represents the most dominate age group that use Tumblr. This is another example of McCann Melbourne and Metro Trains successfully using a medium that younger audiences frequently engage with.

Dumb Ways to Die also later released a children's book, with the same concept of the Tumblr page. It simply depicted various scenes of the cartoon characters dying in dumb ways. This physical release incorporated a much younger audience, but an important one nonetheless.



## ANALYSIS

In many ways, the (almost unprecedented for its sector) success of Dumb Ways to Die is fascinating to examine. John Mescall, executive creative director at McCann Melbourne (the agency who created the Dumb Ways to Die campaign), said this about the model they used: "Firstly, we decided to not adopt an advertising model, but a content model. Both the client and the agency were very determined to make the content good enough to compete against the things you would otherwise pay for. It had to be 'a good ad'. If you're making content you

have to ask yourself honestly the question: would I pay to own this? If you are making content you have to make it as good as the stuff that people are buying on iTunes” (Roper, 2014).

This model clearly worked, with over 60 million dollars of revenue coming in from the various forms of media created by McCann Melbourne and Metro Trains. However, one of their biggest strokes of genius was allowing the users to create their own content. In fact, Metro Trains facilitated this and effectively encouraged people to share and remix the content; a dedicated Tumblr site was set up to get the content ‘out there’. By not censoring or speaking out against user made content or remixes, any average person could join in and participate themselves. The fact that Metro Trains sat back and simply rode the wave is a major reason that the campaign was able to bloom into the successful franchise it is now.



The fact is, Dumb Ways to Die has now become a franchise that rivals others such as Angry Birds. While the campaign’s success could be attributed to luck – as getting something to go ‘viral’ usually involves a degree of luck – the creators have also been very clever. For example, Emily Lubitz, the vocalist for the song, was specifically chosen as her voice would appeal to overseas markets such as USA and England (Roper, 2014). Additionally, the animations contain references to North American culture, such as grizzly bears, rattlesnakes, moose’s and psycho killers. This was done intentionally as the Internet removes geographical barriers, so in order for something to go viral, it must appeal to worldwide audiences. This is

especially important considering that Australia is, relatively speaking, a very small sector of the English speaking community. John Mescall said himself:

“The easiest way for us to get a 12 year-old in Melbourne to get interested in something from Melbourne is to make it globally popular. It used to be ‘Think global, act local.’ That’s no longer true; we need to think and act global” (Roper, 2014).



Another intriguing aspect of Dumb Ways to Die is how the different platforms and content combine to create a whole that is worth more than the sum of its parts. This idea was identified by Jenkins (2008) as being used in The Matrix film series and creates an immersive experience for the viewer. Jenkins identifies this as a distinguishing feature of trans media productions. In the case of Dumb Ways to Die, this is achieved by utilising the different platforms to their potential and thus giving them each their own uniqueness. For example, the song is easy to sing along to – even a karaoke version is available – and allows people to participate in that way. On the other hand, the smart phone game allows a user to enter the world of Dumb Ways to Die and help save characters from their grisly deaths. Finally, the real world posters in train stations bring the message of Dumb Ways to Die into a real world situation, where the colourful cartoon catches the eye of a bystander and reminds them to be safe around trains. In a separate paper, Jenkins (2007) also talks about synergy; where a cross media producer should strive “to spread its brand or expand its franchises across as many different media platforms as possible”. Dumb Ways to Die has obviously done this by continually expanding to more platforms. This is similar to a theory that Hayes (2006) regards

as being essential in modern cross media productions; “bath the audience in a sea of your original inextricably linked content across continents of devices, let them find their own path to live their own story”.

Hayes’s theory is evident in Dumb Ways to Die; namely in the way that the audience can create their own experience by working their way through the various content, such as the game, plush toys, karaoke song or even remixing/creating their own content. Hayes also explained that cross media productions can be qualified on different levels, depending on how well they link the platforms and content together. Dumb Ways to Die displays the ‘bridges’ level (level 3.0) – the way that the different platforms link to each other and point to each other. However, the campaign shows more traits that relate to Hayes’s ‘extras’ level (level 2.0); where one piece of content is originally created, and as it experiences success, other content is released through separate platforms to build upon the original piece. In the case of Dumb Ways to Die, the original work is the song, while the other content has followed since then.

In Jenkin’s (2007) analysis of trans-media, he states the audience’s ability to create their own content and drive their own story. People’s reaction to Dumb Ways to Die was very positive and people were able to create their own versions and covers. This meant people were more personally invested in the whole story of Dumb Ways to Die and audience members were able to explore more content that was related to the original message.

Readers, thus, have a strong incentive to continue to elaborate on these story elements, working them over through their speculations, until they take on a life of their own (Jenkins, 2007).

In summary then, it is clear that McCann Melbourne and Metro Trains have been very intentional about how to give Dumb Ways to Die the best possible chance they could at succeeding as a public safety campaign. The fact that it has changed from a PSA into a franchise that has its own place in popular culture is a testament to its success. By creating high quality, immersive, original material across a range of mediums, McCann and Metro have created an international phenomenon that doesn’t look like stopping any time soon.

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